                            Minimal ESP
                    draft-ietf-lwig-minimal-esp-06

Abstract

   This document describes a minimal implementation of the IP
   Encapsulation Security Payload (ESP) defined in RFC 4303. Its
   purpose is to enable implementation of ESP with a minimal set of
   options to remain compatible with ESP as described in RFC 4303. A
   minimal version of ESP is not intended to become a replacement of the
   RFC 4303 ESP. Instead, a minimal implementation is expected to be
   optimized for constrained environment while remaining interoperable
   with implementations of RFC 4303 ESP. Some constraints include
   limiting the number of flash writes, handling frequent wakeup / sleep
   states, limiting wakeup time, or reducing the use of random
   generation.

   This document does not update or modify RFC 4303, but provides a
   compact description of how to implement the minimal version of the
   protocol. RFC 4303 remains the authoritative description.

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1. Introduction

   ESP [RFC4303] is part of the IPsec protocol suite [RFC4301]. IPsec
   is used to provide confidentiality, data origin authentication,
   connectionless integrity, an anti-replay service (a form of partial
   sequence integrity) and limited traffic flow confidentiality (TFC)
   padding.

   Figure 1 describes an ESP Packet. Currently ESP is implemented in
   the kernel of major multipurpose Operating Systems (OS). The ESP and
   IPsec suite is usually implemented in a complete way to fit multiple

purpose usage of these OS. However, completeness of the IPsec suite
as well as multipurpose scope of these OS is often performed at the
expense of resources, or performance. As a result, constrained
devices are likely to have their own implementation of ESP optimized
and adapted to their specificities such as limiting the number of

flash writes (for each packet or across wake time), handling frequent
wakeup and sleep state, limiting wakeup time, or reducing the use of
random generation. With the adoption of IPsec by IoT devices with
minimal IKEv2 [RFC7815] and ESP Header Compression (EHC) with
[I-D.mglt-ipsecme-diet-esp] or
[I-D.mglt-ipsecme-ikev2-diet-esp-extension], it becomes crucial that
ESP implementation designed for constrained devices remains inter-
operable with the standard ESP implementation to avoid a fragmented
usage of ESP. This document describes the minimal properties an ESP
implementation needs to meet to remain interoperable with [RFC4303]
ESP. In addition, this document also provides a set of options to
implement these properties under certain constrained environments.
This document does not update or modify RFC 4303, but provides a
compact description of how to implement the minimal version of the
protocol. RFC 4303 remains the authoritative description.

For each field of the ESP packet represented in Figure 1 this
document provides recommendations and guidance for minimal
implementations. The primary purpose of Minimal ESP is to remain
interoperable with other nodes implementing RFC 4303 ESP, while
limiting the standard complexity of the implementation.

```
 0                   1                   2                   3
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+ ----
|               Security Parameters Index (SPI)                 | ^Int.
+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+ |Cov-
|                      Sequence Number                          | |ered
+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+ | ----
|                    Payload Data* (variable)                   | |   ^
~                                                               ~ |   |
|                                                               | |Conf.
+               +-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+ |Cov-
|               |         Padding (0-255 bytes)                 | |ered*
+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+               +-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+ |   |
|                               | Pad Length    | Next Header   | v   v
```

```
       +-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+ ------
       |          Integrity Check Value-ICV   (variable)          |
       ~                                                           ~
       |                                                           |
       +-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+-+
```

                    Figure 1: ESP Packet Description

2. Security Parameter Index (SPI) (32 bit)

   According to the [RFC4303], the SPI is a mandatory 32 bits field and
   is not allowed to be removed.

   The SPI has a local significance to index the Security Association
   (SA). From [RFC4301] section 4.1, nodes supporting only unicast
   communications can index their SA only using the SPI. On the other
   hand, nodes supporting multicast communications must also use the IP
   addresses and thus SA lookup needs to be performed using the longest
   match.

   For nodes supporting only unicast communications, it is recommended
   to index SA with the SPI only. The index may be based on the full 32
   bits of SPI or a subset of these bits. Some other local constraints
   on the node may require a combination of the SPI as well as other
   parameters to index the SA.

   Values 0-255 must not be used. As per section 2.1 of [RFC4303],
   values 1-255 are reserved and 0 is only allowed to be used internally
   and it must not be sent on the wire.

   [RFC4303] does not require the SPI to be randomly generated over 32
   bits. However, this is the recommended way to generate SPIs as it
   provides some privacy benefits and avoids, for example, correlation
   between ESP communications. To randomly generate a 32 bit SPI, the
   node generates a random 32 bit valueand checks it does not fall in
   the 0-255 range. If the SPI has an acceptable value, it is used to
   index the inbound session, otherwise the SPI is re-generated until an
   acceptable value is found.

   However, some constrained nodes may be less concerned by the privacy
   properties associated to SPIs randomly generated. Examples of such
   nodes might include sensors looking to reduce their code complexity,

in which case the use of a predictive function to generate the SPI
might be preferred over the generation and handling of random values.
An example of such predictable function may consider the combination
of a fixed value and the memory address of the SAD structure. For
every incoming packet, the node will be able to point the SAD
structure directly from the SPI value. This avoids having a separate
and additional binding between SPI and SAD entries that is involved
for every incoming packet.

2.1. Considerations over SPI generation

SPI that are not randomly generated over 32 bits may lead to privacy
and security concerns. As a result, the use of alternative designs
requires careful security and privacy reviews. This section provides
some considerations upon the adoption of alternative designs.

Note that SPI value is used only for inbound traffic, as such the SPI
negotiated with IKEv2 [RFC7296] or [RFC7815] by a peer, is the value
used by the remote peer when it sends traffic. As SPI is only used

for inbound traffic by the peer, this allows each peer to manage the
set of SPIs used for its inbound traffic. Similarly, the privacy
concerns associated with the generation of nonrandom SPI is also
limited to the incoming traffic.

When alternate designs are considered, it is likely that the number
of possible SPIs will be limited. This limit should both consider
the number of inbound SAs - possibly per IP addresses - as well as
the ability for the node to rekey. SPI can typically be used to
implement a key update with the SPI indicating the key is being used.
For example, a SPI might be encoded with the Security Association
Database (SAD) entry on a subset of bytes (for example 3 bytes),
while the remaining byte indicates the rekey index.

The use of a smaller number of SPIs across communications comes with
privacy and security concerns. Typically some specific values or
subset of SPI values may reveal the models or manufacturer of the
node implementing ESP. This may raise some privacy issues as an
observer is likely to be able to determine the constrained devices of
the network. In some cases, these nodes may host a very limited
number of applications - typically a single application - in which
case the SPI would provide some information related to the

application of the user. In addition, the device or application may
be associated with some vulnerabilities, in which case specific SPI
values may be used by an attacker to discover vulnerabilities.

While the use of randomly generated SPIs may reduce the leakage or
privacy of security related information by ESP itself, these
information may also be leaked otherwise and a privacy analysis
should consider at least the type of information as well the traffic
pattern. Typically, temperature sensors, wind sensors, used outdoors
do not leak privacy sensitive information and mosty of its traffic is
expected to be outbound traffic. When used indoors, a sensor that
reports every minute an encrypted status of the door (closed or
opened) leaks truly little privacy sensitive information outside the
local network.

3. Sequence Number(SN) (32 bit)

According to [RFC4303], the Sequence Number (SN) is a mandatory 32
bits field in the packet.

The SN is set by the sender so the receiver can implement anti-replay
protection. The SN is derived from any strictly increasing function
that guarantees: if packet B is sent after packet A, then SN of
packet B is strictly greater than the SN of packet A.

Some constrained devices may establish communication with specific
devices, like a specific gateway, or nodes similar to them. As a
result, the sender may know whereas the receiver implements anti-
replay protection or not. Even though the sender may know the
receiver does not implement anti-replay protection, the sender must
implement an always increasing function to generate the SN.

Usually, SN is generated by incrementing a counter for each packet
sent. A constrained device may avoid maintaining this context and
use another source that is known to always increase. Typically,
constrained nodes using 802.15.4 Time Slotted Channel Hopping (TSCH),
whose communication is heavily dependent on time, can take advantage
of their clock to generate the SN. A lot of IoT devices are in a
sleep state most of the time wake up and are only awake to perform a
specific operation before going back to sleep. They do have separate

hardware that allows them to wake up after a certain timeout, and
most likely also timers that start running when the device was booted
up, so they might have a concept of time with certain granularity.
This requires to store any information in a stable storage - such as
flash memory - that can be restored across sleeps. Storing
information associated with the SA such as SN requires some read and
writing operation on a stable storage after each packet is sent as
opposed to SPI or keys that are only written at the creation of the
SA. Such operations are likely to wear out the flash, and slow down
the system greatly, as writing to flash is not as fast as reading.
Their internal clocks/timers might not be very accurate, but they
should be enough to know that each time they wake up their time is
greater than what it was last time they woke up. Using time for SN
would guarantee a strictly increasing function and avoid storing any
additional values or context related to the SN. When the use of a
clock is considered, one should take care that packets associated
with a given SA are not sent with the same time value. Note however
that standard receivers are generally configured with incrementing
counters and, if not appropriately configured, the use of a
significantly larger SN may result in the packet out of the
receiver's windows and that packet being discarded.

For inbound traffic, it is recommended that any receiver provides
anti-replay protection, and the size of the window depends on the
ability of the network to deliver packets out of order. As a result,
in an environment where out of order packets is not possible the
window size can be set to one. However, while recommended, there are
no requirements to implement an anti-replay protection mechanism
implemented by IPsec. Similarly to the SN the implementation of anti
replay protection may require the device to write the received SN for
every packet, which may in some cases come with the same drawbacks as
those exposed for SN. As a result, some implementations may drop a
non required anti replay protection especially when the necessary

resource involved overcomes the benefit of the mechanism. These
resources need also to balance that absence of anti-replay mechanism,
may lead to unnecessary integrity check operations that might be
significantly more expensive as well. A typical example might
consider an IoT device such as a temperature sensor that is sending a
temperature every 60 seconds, and that receives an acknowledgment
from the receiver. In such cases, the ability to spoof and replay an
acknowledgement is of limited interest and may not justify the

implementation of an anti replay mechanism. Receiving peers may also
implement their own anti-replay mechanism. Typically, when the
sending peer is using SN based on time, anti-replay may be
implemented by discarding any packets that present a SN whose value
is too much in the past. Note that such mechanisms may consider
clock drifting in various ways in addition to acceptable delay
induced by the network to avoid the anti replay windows rejecting
legitimate packets. When a packet is received at a regular time
interval, some variant of time based mechanisms may not even use the
value of the SN, but instead only consider the receiving time of the
packet.

SN can be encoded over 32 bits or 64 bits - known as Extended
Sequence Number (ESN). As per [RFC4303], the support of ESN is not
mandatory. The determination of the use of ESN is based on the
largest possible value a SN can take over a session. When SN is
incremented for each packet, the number of packets sent over the
lifetime of a session may be considered. However, when the SN is
incremented differently - such as when time is used - the maximum
value SN needs to be considered instead. Note that the limit of
messages being sent is primarily determined by the security
associated with the key rather than the SN. The security of all data
protected under a given key decreases slightly with each message and
a node must ensure the limit is not reached - even though the SN
would permit it. Estimation of the maximum number of packets to be
sent by a node is always challenging and as such should be considered
cautiously as nodes could be online for much more time than expected.
Even for constrained devices, it is recommended to implement some
rekey mechanisms (see Section 9).

4. Padding

   The purpose of padding is to respect the 32 bit alignment of ESP or
   block size expected by an encryption transform - such as AES-CBC for
   example. ESP must have at least one padding byte Pad Length that
   indicates the padding length. ESP padding bytes are generated by a
   succession of unsigned bytes starting with 1, 2, 3 with the last byte
   set to Pad Length, where Pad Length designates the length of the
   padding bytes.

   Checking the padding structure is not mandatory, so the constrained

device may not proceed to such checks, however, in order to interoperate with existing ESP implementations, it must build the padding bytes as recommended by ESP.

In some situation the padding bytes may take a fixed value. This would typically be the case when the Data Payload is of fix size.

ESP [RFC4303] also provides Traffic Flow Confidentiality (TFC) as a way to perform padding to hide traffic characteristics, which differs from respecting a 32 bit alignment. TFC is not mandatory and must be negotiated with the SA management protocol. TFC has not yet being widely adopted for standard ESP traffic. One possible reason is that it requires to shape the traffic according to one traffic pattern that needs to be maintained. This is likely to require extra processing as well as providing a "well recognized" traffic shape which could end up being counterproductive. As such, it is NOT recommended that minimal ESP implementation supports TFC.

As a result, TFC cannot be enabled with minimal ESP, and communication protection that were relying on TFC will be more sensitive to traffic shaping. This could expose the application as well as the devices used to a passive monitoring attacker. Such information could be used by the attacker in case a vulnerability is disclosed on the specific device. In addition, some application use - such as health applications - may also reveal important privacy oriented information.

Some constrained nodes that have limited battery lifetime may also prefer avoiding sending extra padding bytes. However, the same nodes may also be very specific to an application and device. As a result, they are also likely to be the main target for traffic shaping. In most cases, the payload carried by these nodes is quite small, and the standard padding mechanism may also be used as an alternative to TFC, with a sufficient tradeoff between the require energy to send additional payload and the exposure to traffic shaping attacks. In addition, the information leaked by the traffic shaping may also be addressed by the application level. For example, it is preferred to have a sensor sending some information at regular time interval, rather than when a specific event is happening. Typically, a sensor monitoring the temperature, or a door is expected to send regularly the information - i.e. the temperature of the room or whether the door is closed or open) instead of only sending the information when the temperature has raised or when the door is being opened.

5. Next Header (8 bit)

   According to [RFC4303], the Next Header is a mandatory 8 bits field
   in the packet. Next header specifies the data contained in the
   payload as well as dummy packet, i.e. packets with the Next Header
   with a value 59 meaning "no next header". In addition, the Next
   Header may also carry an indication on how to process the packet
   [I-D.nikander-esp-beet-mode].

   The ability to generate and receive dummy packets is required by
   [RFC4303]. For interoperability, a minimal ESP implementation must
   discard dummy packets without indicating an error. Note that such
   recommendation only applies for nodes receiving packets, and that
   nodes designed to only send data may not implement this capability.

   As the generation of dummy packets is subject to local management and
   based on a per-SA basis, a minimal ESP implementation may not
   generate such dummy packet. More especially, in constrained
   environment sending dummy packets may have too much impact on the
   device lifetime, and so may be avoided. On the other hand,
   constrained nodes may be dedicated to specific applications, in which
   case, traffic pattern may expose the application or the type of node.
   For these nodes, not sending dummy packet may have some privacy
   implication that needs to be measured. However, for the same reasons
   exposed in Section 4 traffic shaping at the IPsec layer may also
   introduce some traffic pattern, and on constrained devices the
   application is probably the most appropriated layer to limit the risk
   of leaking information by traffic shaping.

   In some cases, devices are dedicated to a single application or a
   single transport protocol, in which case, the Next Header has a fixed
   value.

   Specific processing indications have not been standardized yet
   [I-D.nikander-esp-beet-mode] and is expected to result from an
   agreement between the peers. As a result, it should not be part of a
   minimal implementation of ESP.

6. ICV

   The ICV depends on the cryptographic suite used. Currently [RFC8221]
   only recommends cryptographic suites with an ICV which makes the ICV
   a mandatory field.

   As detailed in [RFC8221] authentication or authenticated encryption
   are recommended and as such the ICV field must be present with a size

different from zero. It length is defined by the security
recommendations only.

7. Cryptographic Suites

The cryptographic suites implemented are an important component of
ESP. The recommended algorithms to use are expected to evolve over
time and implementers should follow the recommendations provided by
[RFC8221] and updates.

This section lists some of the criteria that may be considered. The
list is not expected to be exhaustive and may also evolve overtime.
As a result, the list is provided as informational:

1. Security: Security is the criteria that should be considered
    first for the selection of encryption algorithm transform. The
    security of encryption algorithm transforms is expected to evolve
    over time, and it is of primary importance to follow up-to-date
    security guidance and recommendations. The chosen encryption
    algorithm must not be known vulnerable or weak (see [RFC8221] for
    outdated ciphers). ESP can be used to authenticate only or to
    encrypt the communication. In the latter case, authenticated
    encryption must always be considered [RFC8221].

2. Resilience to nonce re-use: Some transforms -including AES-GCM -
    are very sensitive to nonce collision with a given key. While
    the generation of the nonce may prevent such collision during a
    session, the mechanisms are unlikely to provide such protection
    across reboot. This causes an issue for devices that are
    configured with a key. When the key is likely to be re-used
    across reboots, it is recommended to consider algorithms that are
    nonce misuse resistant such as, for example, AES-SIV [RFC5297],
    AES-GCM-SIV [RFC8452] or Deoxys-II [DeoxysII]. Note however that
    currently none of them has yet been defined for ESP.

3. Interoperability: Interoperability considers the encryption
    algorithm transforms shared with the other nodes. Note that it
    is not because an encryption algorithm transform is widely
    deployed that it is secured. As a result, security should not be
    weakened for interoperability. [RFC8221] and successors consider
    the life cycle of encryption algorithm transforms sufficiently
    long to provide interoperability. Constrained devices may have

limited interoperability requirements which makes possible to
reduces the number of encryption algorithm transforms to
implement.

4. Power Consumption and Cipher Suite Complexity: Complexity of the
   encryption algorithm transform or the energy associated with it
   are especially considered when devices have limited resources or
   are using some batteries, in which case the battery determines
   the life of the device. The choice of a cryptographic function

may consider re-using specific libraries or to take advantage of
hardware acceleration provided by the device. For example, if
the device benefits from AES hardware modules and uses AES-CTR,
it may prefer AUTH_AES-XCBC for its authentication. In addition,
some devices may also embed radio modules with hardware
acceleration for AES-CCM, in which case, this mode may be
preferred.

5. Power Consumption and Bandwidth Consumption: Similarly to the
   encryption algorithm transform complexity, reducing the payload
   sent, may significantly reduce the energy consumption of the
   device. As a result, encryption algorithm transforms with low
   overhead may be considered. To reduce the overall payload size
   one may, for example:

   1. Use of counter-based ciphers without fixed block length (e.g.
      AES-CTR, or ChaCha20-Poly1305).

   2. Use of ciphers with capability of using implicit IVs
      [RFC8750].

   3. Use of ciphers recommended for IoT [RFC8221].

   4. Avoid Padding by sending payload data which are aligned to
      the cipher block length - 2 for the ESP trailer.

8. IANA Considerations

   There are no IANA consideration for this document.

9. Security Considerations

Security considerations are those of [RFC4303]. In addition, this
document provided security recommendations and guidance over the
implementation choices for each field.

The security of a communication provided by ESP is closely related to
the security associated with the management of that key. This
usually includes mechanisms to prevent a nonce from repeating, for
example. When a node is provisioned with a session key that is used
across reboot, the implementer must ensure that the mechanisms put in
place remain valid across reboot as well.

It is recommended to use ESP in conjunction with key management
protocols such as for example IKEv2 [RFC7296] or minimal IKEv2
[RFC7815]. Such mechanisms are responsible for negotiating fresh
session keys as well as prevent a session key being use beyond its
lifetime. When such mechanisms cannot be implemented and the session

key is, for example, provisioned, the nodes must ensure that keys are
not used beyond their lifetime and that the appropriate use of the
key remains across reboots - e.g. conditions on counters and nonces
remains valid.

When a node generates its key or when random value such as nonces are
generated, the random generation must follow [RFC4086]. In addition
[SP-800-90A-Rev-1] provides appropriated guidance to build random
generators based on deterministic random functions.

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optimizations. Thomas Peyrin Eric Thormarker and Scott Fluhrer
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misuse.

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