

regext
Internet-Draft
Intended status: Standards Track
Expires: July 14, 2017

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Third Party DNS operator to Registrars/Registries Protocol
draft-ietf-regext-dnsoperator-to-rrr-protocol-02.txt

Abstract

There are several problems that arise in the standard Registrant/Registrar/Registry model when the operator of a zone is neither the Registrant nor the Registrar for the delegation. Historically the issues have been minor, and limited to difficulty guiding the Registrant through the initial changes to the NS records for the delegation. As this is usually a one time activity when the operator first takes charge of the zone it has not been treated as a serious issue.

When the domain hand uses DNSSEC it necessary to make regular (sometimes annual) changes to the delegation, updating DS record(s) in order to track KSK rollover. Under the current model this is prone to delays and errors, as the Registrant must participate in updates to DS records.

This document describes a simple protocol that allows a third party DNS operator to update DS and NS records for a delegation, in a trusted manner, without involving the Registrant for each operation. This same protocol can be used by Registrants.

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Internet-Draft

3-DNS-RRR

January 2017

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Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Notional Conventions	4
2.1.	Definitions	4
2.2.	RFC2119 Keywords	4
3.	Process Overview	4
3.1.	Identifying the Registrar	4
3.2.	Establishing a Chain of Trust	5
3.3.	Maintaining the Chain of Trust	5
3.4.	Other Delegation Maintenance	5
3.5.	Acceptance Processing	5
4.	API Definition	6
4.1.	Authentication	7
4.2.	RESTful Resources	7
4.2.1.	CDS resource	7
4.2.2.	Token resource	9
4.3.	Customized Error Messages	10
5.	Security considerations	10
6.	IANA Actions	10
7.	Internationalization Considerations	11
8.	References	11
8.1.	Normative References	11

8.2.	Informative References	11
Appendix A.	Document History	12
A.1.	regext Version 02	12
A.2.	regext Version 02 not pushed	12
A.3.	regext Version 01	12

A.4.	regext Version 00	13
A.5.	Version 03	13
A.6.	Version 02	13
A.7.	Version 01	13
A.8.	Version 00	13
	Authors' Addresses	13

[1.](#) Introduction

After a domain has been registered, one of three parties will maintain the DNS zone loaded on the "primary" DNS servers: the Registrant, the Registrar, or a third party DNS operator. DNS registration systems were originally designed around making registrations easy and fast, however after registration the complexity of making changes to the delegation differs for each of these parties. The Registrar can make changes directly in the Registry systems through some API (typically EPP [[RFC5730](#)]). The Registrant is typically limited to using a web interface supplied by the Registrar. A third party DNS Operator must to go through the Registrant to update any delegation information.

In this last case, the operator must contact and engage the Registrant in updating NS and DS records for the delegation. New information must be communicated to the Registrant, who must submit that information to the Registrar. Typically this involves cutting and pasting between email and a web interface, which is error prone. Furthermore, involving Registrants in this way does not scale for even moderately sized DNS operators. Tracking thousands (or millions) of changes sent to customers, and following up if those changes are not submitted to the Registrar, or are submitted with errors, is itself expensive and error prone.

The current system does not work well, as there are many types of failures that have been reported at all levels in the registration model. The failures result in either the inability to use DNSSEC or in validation failures that cause the domain to become unavailable to

users behind validating resolvers.

The goal of this document is to create a protocol for establishing a secure chain of trust that involves parties not in the traditional Registrant/Registrar/Registry (RRR) model, and to reduce the friction in maintaining DNSSEC secured delegations in these cases. It describes a REST-based [[RFC6690](#)] protocol which can be used to establish DNSSEC initial trust (to enable or bootstrap DNSSEC), and to trigger maintenance of delegation records such as DS, NS, and glue records.

[2.](#) Notional Conventions

[2.1.](#) Definitions

For the purposes of this draft, a third-party DNS Operator is any DNS Operator responsible for a zone, where the operator is neither the Registrant nor the Registrar of record for the delegation.

Uses of "child" and "parent" refer to the relationship between DNS zone operators. In this document, unless otherwise noted, the child is the third-party DNS operator and the parent is the Registry.

Uses of the words "Registrar" or "Registration Entity" in this document may also be applied to Resellers or to Registries that engage in registration activities directly with Registrants. Unless otherwise noted, they are used to refer to the entity which has a direct business relationship with the Registrant.

[2.2.](#) [RFC2119](#) Keywords

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in [[RFC2119](#)].

[3.](#) Process Overview

[3.1.](#) Identifying the Registrar

As of publication of this document, there has never been a

standardized or widely deployed method for easily and scalably identifying the Registrar for a particular registration.

At this time, WHOIS [[RFC3912](#)] is the only widely deployed protocol to carry such information, but WHOIS responses are unstructured text, and each implementor can lay out its text responses differently. In addition, Registries may include referrals in this unstructured text to the WHOIS interfaces of their Registrars, and those Registrar WHOIS interface in turn have their own layouts. This presents a text parsing problem which is infeasible to solve.

RDAP, the successor to WHOIS, described in [[RFC7480](#)], solves the problems of unstructured responses, and a consistently implemented referral system, however at this time RDAP has yet to be deployed at most Registries.

With no current mechanism in place to scalably discover the Registrar for a particular registration, the problem of automatic discovery of the base URL of the API is considered out of scope of this document.

The authors recommend standardization of an RDAP extension to obtain this information from the Registry.

[3.2.](#) Establishing a Chain of Trust

After signing the zone, the child operator needs to upload the DS record(s) to the parent. The child can signal its desire to have DNSSEC validation enabled by publishing one of the special DNS records CDS and/or CDNSKEY as defined in [[RFC7344](#)] and [[I-D.ietf-dnsop-maintain-ds](#)].

[RFC Editor: The above I-D reference should be replaced with the correct RFC number upon publication.]

In the case of an insecure delegation, the Registrar will normally not be scanning the child zone for CDS/CDNSKEY records. The child operator can use this protocol to notify the Registrar to begin such a scan.

Once the Registrar sees these records it SHOULD start acceptance processing.

[3.3.](#) Maintaining the Chain of Trust

Once the secure chain of trust is established, the Registrar SHOULD regularly check the child zone for CDS/CDNSKEY record changes. The Registrar SHOULD also accept signals via this protocol to immediately check the child zone for CDS/CDNSKEY records.

Server implementations of this protocol MAY include rate limiting to protect their systems and the systems of child operators from abuse.

Each parent operator and Registrar is responsible for developing, implementing, and communicating their DNSSEC maintenance policies.

[3.4.](#) Other Delegation Maintenance

[Not yet defined]

[3.5.](#) Acceptance Processing

The Registrar, upon receiving a signal or detecting through polling that the child desires to have its delegation updated, SHOULD run a series of tests to ensure that updating the parent zone will not create or exacerbate any problems with the child zone. The basic tests SHOULD include:

- o checking that the child zone is properly signed as per the Registrar and parent DNSSEC policy
- o if updating the DS record, checking that the child CDS RRset references a KSK which is present in the child DNSKEY RRset and signs the CDS RRset
- o ensuring all name servers in the apex NS RRset of the child zone agree on the apex NS RRset and CDS RRset contents

The Registrar SHOULD NOT make any changes to the DS RRset if the child name servers do not agree on the CDS/CDNSKEY content.

[NOTE: Do we need a new section in the DPS for the CDS management policy [[RFC6841](#)]?)

Registrars MAY require compliance with additional tests, particularly in the case of establishing a new chain of trust, such as:

- o checking that all child name servers to respond with a consistent CDS/CDNSKEY RRset for a number of queries over an extended period of time to minimise the possibility of an attacker spoofing responses
- o requiring the child name servers to respond with identical CDS/CDNSKEY RRsets over TCP
- o ensuring zone delegation best practices (for examples, see [\[I-D.wallstrom-dnsop-dns-delegation-requirements\]](#))
- o requiring the child operator to prove they can add data to the zone (for example, by publishing a particular token)

4. API Definition

This protocol is partially synchronous, meaning the server can elect to hold connections open until operations have completed, or it can return a status code indicating that it has received a request, and close the connection. It is up to the child to monitor the parent for completion of the operation, and issue possible follow-up calls to the Registrar.

Clients may be denied access to change the DS records for domains that are Registry Locked (HTTP Status code 401). Registry Lock is a mechanism provided by certain Registries or Registrars that prevents domain hijacking by ensuring no attributes of the domain are changeable, and no transfer or deletion transactions can be processed against the domain name without manual intervention.

4.1. Authentication

The API does not impose any unique server authentication requirements. The server authentication provided by TLS fully addresses the needs of this protocol. The API MUST be provided over TLS-protected transport (e.g., HTTPS) or VPN.

Client authentication is considered out of scope of this document.

The publication of CDS/CDNSKEY records in the child zone is an indication that the child operator intends to perform DS-record-updating activities (add/delete) in the parent zone. Since this protocol is simply a signal to the Registrar that they should examine the child zone for such intentions, additional authentication of the client making the request is considered unnecessary.

Registrars MAY implement their own policy to protect access to the API, such as with IP whitelisting, client TLS certificates, etc.. Registrars SHOULD take steps to ensure that a lack of additional authentication does not open up a denial of service mechanism against the systems of the Registrar, the Registry, or the child operator.

[4.2.](#) RESTful Resources

In the following text, "{domain}" is the child zone to be operated on.

[4.2.1.](#) CDS resource

Path: /domains/{domain}/cds

[4.2.1.1.](#) Establishing Initial Trust (Enabling DNSSEC)

[4.2.1.1.1.](#) Request

Syntax: POST /domains/{domain}/cds

Request that an initial set of DS records based on the CDS record in the child zone be inserted into the Registry and the parent zone upon the successful completion of the request. If there are multiple CDS records in the CDS RRset, multiple DS records will be added.

[4.2.1.1.2.](#) Response

- o HTTP Status code 201 indicates a success.
- o HTTP Status code 400 indicates a failure due to validation.
- o HTTP Status code 401 indicates an unauthorized resource access.

- o HTTP Status code 403 indicates a failure due to an invalid

challenge token.

- o HTTP Status code 404 indicates the domain does not exist.
- o HTTP Status code 409 indicates the delegation already has a DS RRset.
- o HTTP Status code 429 indicates the client has been rate-limited.
- o HTTP Status code 500 indicates a failure due to unforeseeable reasons.

This request is for setting up initial trust in the delegation. The Registrar SHOULD return a status code 409 if it already has a DS RRset for the child zone.

Upon receipt of a 403 response the child operator SHOULD issue a POST for the "token" resource to fetch a challenge token to insert into the zone.

[4.2.1.2.](#) Removing DS Records

[4.2.1.2.1.](#) Request

Syntax: DELETE /domains/{domain}/cds

Request that the Registrar check for a null CDS or CDNSKEY record in the child zone, indicating a request that the entire DS RRset be removed. This will make the delegation insecure.

[4.2.1.2.2.](#) Response

- o HTTP Status code 200 indicates a success.
- o HTTP Status code 400 indicates a failure due to validation.
- o HTTP Status code 401 indicates an unauthorized resource access.
- o HTTP Status code 404 indicates the domain does not exist.
- o HTTP Status code 412 indicates the parent does not have a DS RRset
- o HTTP Status code 429 indicates the client has been rate-limited.
- o HTTP Status code 500 indicates a failure due to unforeseeable reasons.

[4.2.1.3.](#) Modifying DS Records

[4.2.1.3.1.](#) Request

Syntax: PUT /domains/{domain}/cds

Request that the Registrar modify the DS RRset based on the CDS/CDNSKEY available in the child zone. As a result of this request the Registrar SHOULD add or delete DS records as indicated by the CDS/CDNSKEY RRset, but MUST NOT delete the entire DS RRset.

[4.2.1.3.2.](#) Response

- o HTTP Status code 200 indicates a success.
- o HTTP Status code 400 indicates a failure due to validation.
- o HTTP Status code 401 indicates an unauthorized resource access.
- o HTTP Status code 404 indicates the domain does not exist.
- o HTTP Status code 412 indicates the parent does not have a DS RRset
- o HTTP Status code 429 indicates the client has been rate-limited.
- o HTTP Status code 500 indicates a failure due to unforeseeable reasons.

[4.2.2.](#) Token resource

Path: /domains/{domain}/token

[4.2.2.1.](#) Establish Initial Trust with Challenge

[4.2.2.1.1.](#) Request

Syntax: POST /domains/{domain}/token

The DNSSEC policy of the Registrar may require proof that the DNS Operator is in control of the domain. The token API call returns a random token to be included as a TXT record for the _delegate.@ domain name (where @ is the apex of the child zone) prior establishing the DNSSEC initial trust. This is an additional trust control mechanism to establish the initial chain of trust.

Once the child operator has received a token, it SHOULD be inserted

in the zone and the operator SHOULD proceed with a POST of the cds resource.

Note that the `_delegate` TXT record is publicly available and not a secret token.

[4.2.2.1.2](#). Response

- o HTTP Status code 200 indicates a success. A token is included in the body of the response, as a valid TXT record
- o HTTP Status code 404 indicates the domain does not exist.
- o HTTP Status code 500 indicates a failure due to unforeseeable reasons.

[4.3](#). Customized Error Messages

Registrars MAY provide a customized error message in the response body in addition to the HTTP status code defined in the previous section. This response MAY include an identifying number/string that can be used to track the request.

[5](#). Security considerations

When zones are properly provisioned, and delegations follow standards and best practices (e.g.

[\[I-D.wallstrom-dnsop-dns-delegation-requirements\]](#)), the Registrar or Registry can trust the DNS information it receives from multiple child name servers, over time, and/or over TCP to establish the initial chain of trust.

In addition, the Registrar or Registry can require the DNS Operator to prove they control the zone by requiring the child operator to navigate additional hurdles, such as adding a challenge token to the zone.

This protocol should increase the adoption of DNSSEC, enabling more zones to become validated thus overall the security gain outweighs the possible drawbacks.

Registrants and DNS Operators always have the option to establish the

chain of trust in band via the standard Registrant/Registrar/Registry model.

6. IANA Actions

This document has no actions for IANA

Latour, et al.

Expires July 14, 2017

[Page 10]

Internet-Draft

3-DNS-RRR

January 2017

7. Internationalization Considerations

This protocol is designed for machine to machine communications. Clients and servers should use punycode [[RFC3492](#)] when operating on internationalized domain names.

8. References

8.1. Normative References

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8.2. Informative References

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Latour, et al.

Expires July 14, 2017

[Page 11]

Internet-Draft

3-DNS-RRR

January 2017

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[Appendix A](#). Document History

[A.1](#). regext Version 02

- o simplify abstract
- o move all justification text to Intro
- o added HTTP response codes for rate limiting (429), missing DS RRsets (412)
- o expanded on Internationalization Considerations
- o corrected informative/normative document references

- o clarify parent/Registrar references in the draft
- o general spelling/grammar/style cleanup

[A.2.](#) regex Version 02 not pushed

- o Clarified based on comments and questions from early implementors (JL)
- o Text edits and clarifications.

[A.3.](#) regex Version 01

- o Rewrote Abstract and Intro (MP)
- o Introduced code 401 when changes are not allowed
- o Text edits and clarifications.

[A.4.](#) regex Version 00

- o Working group document same as 03, just track changed to standard

[A.5.](#) Version 03

- o Clarified based on comments and questions from early implementors

[A.6.](#) Version 02

- o Reflected comments on mailing lists

[A.7.](#) Version 01

- o This version adds a full REST definition this is based on suggestions from Jakob Schlyter.

[A.8.](#) Version 00

- o First rough version

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