

Workgroup: ohai  
Internet-Draft:  
draft-schwartz-ohai-consistency-doublecheck-01  
Published: 28 June 2022  
Intended Status: Standards Track  
Expires: 30 December 2022  
A            B. M. Schwartz  
             uGoogle LLC  
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## Key Consistency for Oblivious HTTP by Double-Checking

### Abstract

The assurances provided by Oblivious HTTP depend on the client's ability to verify that it is using the same Request Resource and KeyConfig as many other users. This specification defines a protocol to enable this verification.

### About This Document

This note is to be removed before publishing as an RFC.

Status information for this document may be found at <https://datatracker.ietf.org/doc/draft-schwartz-ohai-consistency-doublecheck/>.

Source for this draft and an issue tracker can be found at <https://github.com/bemasc/access-services>.

### Status of This Memo

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## 1. Introduction

Oblivious HTTP [[I-D.ietf-ohai-ohhttp](#)] presumes at least three parties to each exchange: the client, the proxy, and the target (formally, the Oblivious Request Resource). When used properly, Oblivious HTTP enables the client to send requests to the target in such a way that the target cannot tell whether two requests came from the same client and the proxy cannot see the contents of the requests.

Oblivious HTTP's threat model assumes that at least one of the proxy and the target is acting properly, i.e. complying with the protocol and keeping certain information confidential. If either proxy or target misbehaves, the only effect must be a denial of service.

In order for these security guarantees to hold, several preconditions must be met:

1. The client must be one of many users who might be using the proxy. Otherwise, use of the proxy reveals the user's identity to the target.

2. The client must hold an authentic KeyConfig for the target. Otherwise, they could be speaking to the proxy, impersonating the target.
3. All users of this proxy must be equally likely to use this URI and KeyConfig for this target, regardless of their prior activity. Otherwise, the encrypted request identifies the user to the target.
4. (optional) The target must not learn the IP addresses of the clients, collectively. Otherwise, the target might be able to deanonymize requests by correlating them with external information about the clients.

This specification defines behaviors for the client, proxy, and target that achieve preconditions 2-4. (This specification does not address precondition 1.)

This draft is an instantiation of the "Single Proxy Discovery" architecture for key consistency, defined in [Section 4.2](#) of [[I-D.wood-key-consistency](#)].

## 2. Conventions and Definitions

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "NOT RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in BCP 14 [[RFC2119](#)] [[RFC8174](#)] when, and only when, they appear in all capitals, as shown here.

## 3. Overview

In the Key Consistency Double-Check procedure, the Client emits two HTTP GET requests: one to the Proxy, and one through the Proxy to the Target. The Proxy will forward the first request to the Target if the response is not in cache.

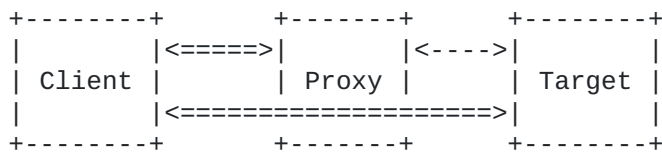


Figure 1: Overview of Key-Consistency Double-Check

The proxy caches the response, ensuring that all clients share it during its freshness lifetime. The client checks this against the authenticated response from the Target, preventing forgeries.

## 4. Requirements

### 4.1. Oblivious Request Resource

The Oblivious Request Resource **MUST** publish an Access Description [[I-D.schwartz-masque-access-descriptions](#)] containing the "ohhttp.request" key, e.g.:

```

{
  "ohttp": {
    "request": {
      "uri": "https://example.com/ohttp/",
      "key": "(KeyConfig in Base64)"
    }
  }
}

```

This resource **MUST** be available over HTTP/3 [RFC9114], so that it can be accessed via the proxy's CONNECT-UDP service (see [Section 4.2](#)).

The Oblivious Request Resource **MUST** include a "strong validator" ETag ([Section 2](#) of [RFC7232]) in any response to a GET request for this access description, and **MUST** support the "If-Match" HTTP request header ([Section 3](#) of [RFC7232]). The response **MUST** indicate "Cache-Control: public, no-transform, s-maxage=..., immutable" [RFC9111][RFC8246]. For efficiency reasons, the max age **SHOULD** be at least 60 seconds, and preferably much longer.

If this Access Description changes, and the resource receives a request whose "If-Match" header identifies a previously served version that has not yet expired, it **MUST** return a success response containing the previous version. This response **MAY** indicate "Cache-Control: private".

#### 4.2. Oblivious Proxy

The Oblivious Proxy **MUST** publish an Access Description that includes the "ohttp.proxy" and "udp" keys, indicating support for CONNECT-UDP [I-D.ietf-masque-connect-udp]. It **SHOULD** also contain the "dns" key, indicating support for DNS over HTTPS [RFC8484], to enable the use of HTTPS records [SVCB] with CONNECT-UDP.

```

{
  "dns": {
    "template": "https://doh.example.com/dns-query{?dns}",
  },
  "udp": {
    "template":
      "https://proxy.example.org/masque{?target_host,target_port}"
  },
  "ohttp": {
    "proxy": {
      "template": "https://proxy.example.org/ohttp{?request_uri}"
    }
  }
}

```

Figure 2: Example Proxy Access Description

The Oblivious Proxy Resources **MUST** allow use of the GET method to retrieve small JSON responses, and **SHOULD** make ample cache space available in order to avoid eviction of Access Descriptions. The

proxy **SHOULD** share cache state among all clients, to ensure that they use the same Access Descriptions for each Oblivious Request Resource. If the cache must be partitioned for architectural or performance reasons, operators **SHOULD** keep the number of users in each partition as large as possible.

Oblivious Proxies **MUST** preserve the ETag response header on cached responses, and **MUST** add an Age header ([RFC9111], [Section 5.1](#)) to all proxied responses. Oblivious Proxies **MUST** respect the "Cache-Control: immutable" directive, and **MUST NOT** revalidate fresh immutable cache entries in response to any incoming requests. (Note that this is different from the general recommendation in [Section 2.1](#) of [RFC8246]). Oblivious Proxies also **MUST NOT** accept PUSH\_PROMISE frames from the target.

Proxies **SHOULD** employ defenses against malicious attempts to fill the cache. Some possible defenses include:

- \*Rate-limiting each client's use of GET requests.

- \*Prioritizing preservation of cache entries that have been served to many clients, if eviction is required.

Oblivious Proxies that are not intended for general-purpose proxy usage **MAY** impose strict transfer limits or rate limits on HTTP CONNECT and CONNECT-UDP usage.

If the proxy offers a DNS over HTTPS resolver, it **MUST NOT** enable EDNS Client Subnet support [[RFC7871](#)].

### 4.3. Client

The Client is assumed to know an "https" URI of an Oblivious Request Resource's Access Description. To use that Request Resource, it **MUST** perform the following "double-check" procedure:

1. Send a GET request to the Oblivious Proxy's template (ohttp.proxy.template) with request\_uri set to the Access Description URI.
2. Record the response (A).
3. Check that response A's "Cache-Control" values indicates "public" and "immutable".
4. Establish a CONNECT-UDP tunnel through the proxy to the Access Description URI's origin.
5. Fetch the Access Description URI through this tunnel, using a GET request with "If-Match" set to response A's ETag.
6. Record the response (B).
7. Check that responses A and B were successful and the contents are identical, otherwise fail.

This procedure ensures that the Access Description is authentic and will be shared by all users of this proxy. Once response A or B

expires, the client **MUST** refresh it before continuing to use this Access Description, and **MUST** repeat the "double-check" process if either response changes.

Clients **MUST** perform each fetch to the origin (step 4) as a fully isolated request. Any state related to this origin (e.g. cached DNS records, CONNECT-UDP tunnels, QUIC transport state, TLS session tickets, HTTP cookies) **MUST NOT** be shared with prior or subsequent requests.

## 5. Example: Oblivious DoH

In this example, the client has been configured with an Oblivious DoH server and an Oblivious Proxy. The Oblivious DoH server is identified by an Access Description at "https://doh.example.com/config.json" with the following contents:

```
{
  "dns": {
    "template": "https://doh.example.com/dns-query{?dns}",
  },
  "ohttp": {
    "request": {
      "uri": "https://example.com/ohttp/",
      "key": "(KeyConfig in Base64)"
    }
  }
}
```

The Oblivious Proxy is identified as "proxy.example.org", which implies an Access Description at "https://proxy.example.org/.well-known/access-services". This resource's contents are:

```
{
  "dns": {
    "template": "https://proxy.example.org/dns-query{?dns}",
  },
  "udp": {
    "template":
      "https://proxy.example.org/masque{?target_host,target_port}"
  },
  "ohttp": {
    "proxy": {
      "template": "https://proxy.example.org/ohttp{?request_uri}"
    }
  }
}
```

The following exchanges then occur between the client and the proxy:

```
HEADERS
:method = GET
:scheme = https
:authority = proxy.example.org
:path = /ohttp?request_uri=https%3A%2F%2Fdoh.example.com%2Fconfig.json
accept: application/json
```

```
HEADERS
:status = 200
cache-control: public, immutable, \
    no-transform, s-maxage=86400
age: 80000
etag: ABCD1234
content-type: application/json
[Access Description contents here]
```

```
HEADERS
:method = CONNECT
:protocol = connect-udp
:scheme = https
:authority = proxy.example.org
:path = /masque?target_host=doh.example.com,target_port=443
capsule-protocol = ?1
```

```
HEADERS
:status = 200
capsule-protocol = ?1
```

The client now has a CONNECT-UDP tunnel to doh.example.com, over which it performs the following GET request using HTTP/3:

```
HEADERS
:method = GET
:scheme = https
:authority = doh.example.com
:path = /config.json
if-match = ABCD1234
```

```
HEADERS
:status = 200
cache-control: public, immutable, \
    no-transform, s-maxage=86400
etag: ABCD1234
content-type: application/json
[Access Description contents here]
```

Having successfully fetched the Access Description from both locations, the client confirms that:

- \*The responses are identical.

- \*The cache-control response from the proxy contained the "public" and "immutable" directives.

The client can now use the KeyConfig in this Access Description to reach the Oblivious DoH server, by forming Binary HTTP requests for "https://doh.example.com/dns-query" and delivering the encapsulated requests to "https://example.com/ohttp/" via the proxy.

## 6. Performance Implications

### 6.1. Latency

Suppose that the client-proxy Round-Trip Time (RTT) is  $A$ , and the proxy-target RTT is  $B$ . Suppose additionally that the client has a persistent connection to the proxy that is already running. Then the procedure described in [Section 4.3](#) requires:

\* $A$  for the GET request to the proxy

- $B$  if the requested Access Description is not in cache

- $B$  if the proxy does not have a TLS session ticket for the target

\* $A$  for the CONNECT-UDP request to the proxy

\* $A + B$  for the QUIC handshake to the target

\* $A + B$  for the GET request to the target

This is a total of  $4A + 4B$  in the worst case. However, clients can reduce the latency by issuing the requests to the proxy in parallel, and by using CONNECT-UDP's "false start" support. The target can also optimize performance, by issuing long-lived TLS session tickets. With these optimizations, the expected total time is  $2A + 2B$ .

This procedure only needs to be repeated if the Access Description has expired. Access Descriptions do not need to change frequently, so a cache lifetime of 1 day may be suitable. Clients **MAY** perform this procedure in advance of an expiration to avoid a delay.

### 6.2. Thundering Herds

All clients of the same proxy and target will have locally cached Access Descriptions with the same expiration time. When this entry expires, all active clients will send refresh GET requests to the proxy at their next request. Proxies **SHOULD** use "request coalescing" to avoid duplicate cache-refresh requests to the target.

If the Access Description has changed, these clients will initiate GET requests through the proxy to the target to double-check the new contents. Proxies and targets **MAY** use an HTTP 503 response with a "Retry-After" header to manage load spikes.

## 7. Security Considerations

### 7.1. In scope

#### 7.1.1. Forgery

A malicious proxy could attempt to learn the contents of the oblivious request by forging an Access Description containing its own KeyConfig. This is prevented by the client's requirement that the KeyConfig be served to it by the configured origin over HTTPS ([Section 4.3](#)).



### 7.1.2. Deanonymization

A malicious target could attempt to link multiple Oblivious HTTP requests together by issuing each user a unique, persistent KeyConfig. This attack is prevented by the client's requirement that the KeyConfig be fresh according to the proxy's cache ([Section 4.3](#)).

A malicious target could attempt to rotate its entry in the proxy's cache in several ways:

- \*Using HTTP PUSH\_PROMISE frames. This attack is prevented by disabling PUSH\_PROMISE at the proxy ([Section 4.2](#)).

- \*By also acting as a client and sending requests designed to replace the Access Description in the cache before it expires:

- By sending GET requests with a "Cache-Control: no-cache" or similar directive. This is prevented by the response's "Cache-Control: public, immutable" directives, which are verified by the client ([Section 4.3](#)), and by the proxy's obligation to respect these directives strictly ([Section 4.2](#)).

- By filling the cache with new entries, causing its previous Access Description to be evicted. [Section 4.2](#) describes some possible mitigations.

A malicious target could attempt to link different requests for the Access Description, in order to link the Oblivious HTTP requests that follow shortly after. This is prevented by fully isolating each request ([Section 4.3](#)), and by disabling EDNS Client Subnet ([Section 4.2](#)).

### 7.1.3. Abusive traffic

A malicious client could use the proxy to send abusive traffic to any destination on the internet. Abuse concerns can be mitigated by imposing a rate limit at the proxy ([Section 4.2](#)).

## 7.2. Out of scope

This specification assumes that the client starts with identities of the proxy and target that are authentic and widely shared. If these identities are inauthentic, or are unique to the user, then the security goals of this specification are not achieved.

This specification assumes that at most a small fraction of clients are acting on behalf of a malicious target. If a large fraction of the clients are malicious, they could conspire to flood the proxy cache with entries that seem popular, leading to rapid eviction of the malicious target's Access Descriptions. Similar concerns apply if a malicious target can compel naive clients to fetch a very large number of Access Descriptions.

## 8. IANA Considerations

No IANA action is requested.

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## Acknowledgments

TODO acknowledge.

## Author's Address

Benjamin M. Schwartz  
Google LLC

Email: [bemasc@google.com](mailto:bemasc@google.com)