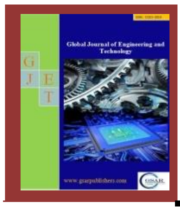

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Pactruder - The Smart Packet Capture Analyzer Tool

By

Udit Misra[1], Abhishek Pareek[2]

[1]Postgraduate alumni Department of Computer Science, North Carolina State University
[2]Postgraduate alumni Department of Computer Science North Carolina State University

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Abstract

Packet capture (PCAP) is a foundational technique for network monitoring, troubleshooting, and cybersecurity. However, the vast data generated in network captures presents challenges for efficient analysis. This paper introduces Pactruder, a smart tool leveraging OpenAI models to analyze PCAP files. Pactruder demonstrates capabilities in anomaly detection, protocol classification, and traffic summarization. By utilizing natural language processing (NLP) and advanced machine learning (ML), Pactruder enhances traditional packet analysis workflows, optimizing network performance and security. In the rapidly evolving landscape of network cybersecurity, traditional packet capture (PCAP) analysis methods struggle to keep pace with increasing network complexity and sophisticated cyber threats. This comprehensive research introduces Pactruder, a groundbreaking intelligent system that harnesses the power of OpenAI's GPT-4o model to transform network packet analysis.

Keywords: *Packet capture, Open AI, network analysis, anomaly detection, machine learning, cybersecurity, network security*

1. Introduction

Packet capture tools like Wireshark [1] and tcpdump are indispensable for network administrators and cybersecurity professionals where the responsibility is to understand the network issue and help fix that. They gather network traffic at the packet level, providing very granular data for diagnostics and analysis. However, manual analysis of PCAP files can be very time-consuming and highly prone to human error, particularly in large-scale networks where the network architecture is complex.

Recent advancements in AI and ML, including OpenAI's models [2], offer new opportunities to streamline and augment packet analysis. By leveraging AI's ability to process vast amounts of data and detect patterns, network analysts can gain deeper insights into traffic behavior, identify potential threats, and optimize network performance.

This paper aims to:

- Explore the challenges in traditional packet analysis workflows.
- Demonstrate how OpenAI models can enhance these processes.

2. Background

2.1 Packet Capture

Packet capture (PCAP) is a foundational technique in network monitoring and cybersecurity. It involves intercepting and logging data packets as they travel across a network. Each packet contains headers, metadata, and payloads, which provide detailed information about network communications. Analyzing PCAP files helps identify issues such as latency, packet loss, port exhaustion, asymmetric routing, and unauthorized access.

Despite its utility, traditional packet capture analysis is often hindered by the sheer volume of data and the complexity of modern network environments. Network administrators must sift through thousands or even millions of packets to identify anomalies or diagnose issues, a process that is both time-consuming and error-prone. As networks grow in size and complexity, the need for automated and intelligent tools [5] to assist in packet analysis has become increasingly apparent.

2.2 OpenAI Models

OpenAI has developed a series of advanced AI models, each building on the strengths of its predecessors. These models are designed to handle a wide range of tasks, from natural language processing (NLP) to complex data analysis. Below is an overview of some of the key OpenAI models and their evolution:

*Corresponding Author: Udit Misra

- **GPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer):**
  The original GPT model, introduced in 2018, was a breakthrough in NLP. It demonstrated the ability to generate coherent and contextually relevant text by training on large datasets. GPT used a transformer architecture, which allowed it to process sequential data (like text) more efficiently than previous models.
- **GPT-2:**
  Released in 2019, GPT-2 was a significant improvement over the original GPT. It featured a larger model size (up to 1.5 billion parameters) and was trained on an even more extensive dataset. GPT-2 demonstrated remarkable capabilities in text generation, summarization, and translation. However, due to concerns about potential misuse, OpenAI initially limited its release.
- **GPT-3:**
  GPT-3, released in 2020, was a monumental leap forward. With 175 billion parameters, it was one of the largest and most powerful language models ever created. GPT-3 excelled in a wide range of NLP tasks, including text completion, summarization, question-answering, and even code generation. Its ability to understand and generate human-like text made it a versatile tool for various applications.
- **GPT-4:**
  GPT-4, released in 2023, further advanced the capabilities of its predecessors. It featured improved reasoning, better contextual understanding, and enhanced performance across a wide range of tasks. GPT-4 also introduced multimodal capabilities, allowing it to process both text and image inputs. This made it even more versatile and applicable to complex real-world problems.
- **GPT-4o:**
  GPT-4o is a specialized variant of GPT-4, optimized for specific use cases such as network analysis, anomaly detection, and summarization. It retains the core strengths of GPT-4, including its large parameter size and advanced NLP capabilities, but is fine-tuned to handle structured and unstructured data more effectively. GPT-4o's ability to process and analyze complex datasets, such as network packet captures, makes it particularly well-suited for applications in cybersecurity and network monitoring.

Why GPT-4o Was Chosen for Pactruder

The decision to use GPT-4o for Pactruder was driven by several key factors:

1. **Advanced NLP Capabilities:**
   GPT-4o's ability to understand and generate human-like text is crucial for tasks such as traffic summarization and anomaly detection. It can analyze large volumes of packet data and provide clear, actionable insights in a human-readable format. This is particularly important for network administrators who need to quickly understand and respond to network issues.
2. **Handling Structured and Unstructured Data:**
   Network packet captures contain a mix of structured data (e.g., IP addresses, timestamps) and unstructured data (e.g., payload content). GPT-4o's ability to process both types of data makes it highly suitable for packet analysis. It can extract relevant features from structured data while also interpreting the context and content of unstructured data.
3. **Anomaly Detection and Pattern Recognition:**
   GPT-4o excels in pattern recognition and anomaly detection, which are critical for identifying potential security threats in network traffic. Its ability to detect deviations from normal traffic patterns, such as unusual packet sequences or unexpected spikes in data transfer, makes it a powerful tool for cybersecurity.
4. **Scalability and Efficiency:**
   GPT-4o is designed to handle large datasets efficiently, making it suitable for analyzing high-volume network traffic. Its ability to process data quickly and accurately reduces the time required for packet analysis, enabling faster response to network issues and security threats.
5. **Fine-Tuning for Specific Use Cases:**
   GPT-4o can be fine-tuned for specific applications, such as network analysis. This allows Pactruder to leverage the model's strengths while tailoring its performance to the unique challenges of packet capture analysis. Fine-tuning also enables the model to adapt to different network environments and traffic patterns.

2.3 The Evolution of AI in Network Analysis

The use of AI in network analysis is not new, but the capabilities of models like GPT-4o represent a significant advancement. Early AI-based network analysis tools [4][6] relied on simpler machine learning algorithms, such as decision trees or clustering techniques, to detect anomalies or classify traffic. While these methods were effective to some extent, they often struggled with the complexity and variability of modern network traffic.

The introduction of deep learning models, particularly those based on transformer architectures, has revolutionized the field. These models can process vast amounts of data, learn complex patterns, and adapt to new types of network traffic. GPT-4o, with its advanced NLP and pattern recognition capabilities, represents the next step in this evolution. It can not only detect anomalies but also provide detailed explanations and recommendations, making it a valuable tool for network administrators and cybersecurity professionals.

2.4 Challenges in Traditional Packet Analysis

Traditional packet analysis methods face several challenges that make them less effective in modern network environments:

- **Volume of Data:** The sheer amount of data generated by network traffic can overwhelm manual analysis methods.
- **Complexity of Traffic:** Modern networks often involve multiple protocols, encapsulation, and encryption, making it difficult to analyze traffic manually.
- **Human Error:** Manual analysis is prone to errors, particularly when dealing with large datasets or complex traffic patterns.
- **Time-Consuming:** Analyzing packet captures manually can take hours or even days, delaying the identification and resolution of network issues.

By leveraging GPT-4o, Pactruder addresses these challenges by automating key aspects of packet analysis, reducing the time and effort required while improving accuracy and efficiency.

3. Methodology

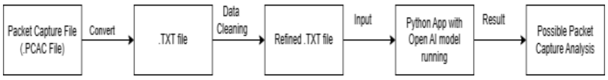

Packet Capture File (.PCAC File)
Convert
.TXT file
Data Cleaning
Refined .TXT file
Input
Python App with Open AI model running
Result
Possible Packet Capture Analysis

Fig 1: Comprehensive System Architecture

3.1 Data Retrieval

The process described in Fig 1, begins with capturing network traffic using tools like **Wireshark**. PCAP files are generated from communication between network nodes, particularly when troubleshooting connectivity issues, packet drops, or potential security threats. These PCAP files are then converted into text formats, which can be ingested by OpenAI models for deeper analysis. The conversion process involves extracting relevant packet information, such as source and destination IP addresses, protocols, payload sizes, and timestamps, and formatting it in a way that is compatible with the AI model.

3.2 Data Preprocessing

Given the complexity of raw packet data, preprocessing is critical to ensure meaningful insights. The preprocessing steps include:

- **Feature Extraction:** Identifying key features such as source and destination IP addresses, protocols, payload sizes, and timestamps. This step is crucial for reducing the dimensionality of the data and focusing on the most relevant information.
- **Noise Filtering:** Removing redundant or irrelevant packets to focus on meaningful data. For example, packets that are part of routine network maintenance or background noise can be filtered out to reduce the volume of data that needs to be analyzed.
- **Normalization:** Standardizing data formats to ensure compatibility with AI model requirements. This step involves converting data into a consistent format, such as converting timestamps into a standardized time zone or normalizing IP addresses.

3.3 AI Model Integration

Once preprocessing is complete, Pactruder integrates with OpenAI's GPT-4o model through a Python-based application. Key features of this integration include:

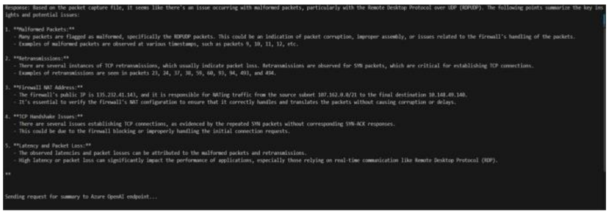
- **Anomaly Detection:** Recognizing deviations in expected traffic patterns, such as excessive retransmissions or malicious packet sequences. The AI model can identify unusual patterns that may indicate a security threat, such as a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack or data exfiltration attempt.
- **Protocol Classification:** Accurately categorizing traffic into protocols like HTTP, FTP, DNS, etc., even in complex multi-encapsulation scenarios. This capability is particularly useful in modern networks where traffic may be encapsulated within multiple layers of protocols.
- **Traffic Summarization:** Delivering concise, human-readable summaries of network activity to expedite troubleshooting and reporting. The AI model can generate summaries that highlight key events, such as a spike in traffic or a series of failed connection attempts, allowing analysts to quickly identify and address issues.

The Python application connects securely to the OpenAI API via designated endpoints and API keys, ensuring smooth and secure interaction. The application is designed to handle large volumes of data and can be scaled to meet the needs of different network environments.

3.4 Experimental Setup

- **Tools Used:** Wireshark for packet capture, Pactruder's Python application, and OpenAI's API for model inference.
- **Datasets:** Publicly available PCAP datasets containing a mix of malware and benign traffic. These datasets were chosen to test the tool's ability to distinguish between normal and malicious traffic.
- **Evaluation Metrics:** Metrics such as anomaly detection accuracy, protocol classification precision, processing time, and user satisfaction were analyzed. These metrics were used to evaluate the tool's performance and identify areas for improvement.

4. Results and Discussion



```
Response: Based on the packet capture file, it seems like there's an issue occurring with malformed packets, particularly with the Remote Desktop Protocol over UDP (RDPUDP). The following points summarize the key ins
ights and potential issues:

1. **Malformed Packets:**
   - Many packets are flagged as malformed, specifically the RDPUDP packets. This could be an indication of packet corruption, improper assembly, or issues related to the firewall's handling of the packets.
   - Examples of malformed packets are observed at various timestamps, such as packets 9, 10, 11, 12, etc.

2. **Retransmissions:**
   - There are several instances of TCP retransmissions, which usually indicate packet loss. Retransmissions are observed for SYN packets, which are critical for establishing TCP connections.
   - Examples of retransmissions are seen in packets 23, 24, 37, 38, 59, 60, 93, 94, 493, and 494.

3. **Firewall NAT Address:**
   - The firewall's public IP is 135.232.41.143, and it is responsible for NATing traffic from the source subnet 107.162.0.0/21 to the final destination 10.148.49.140.
   - It's essential to verify the firewall's NAT configuration to ensure that it correctly handles and translates the packets without causing corruption or delays.

4. **TCP Handshake Issues:**
   - There are several issues establishing TCP connections, as evidenced by the repeated SYN packets without corresponding SYN-ACK responses.
   - This could be due to the firewall blocking or improperly handling the initial connection requests.

5. **Latency and Packet Loss:**
   - The observed latencies and packet losses can be attributed to the malformed packets and retransmissions.
   - High latency or packet loss can significantly impact the performance of applications, especially those relying on real-time communication like Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP).

**


Sending request for summary to Azure OpenAI endpoint...
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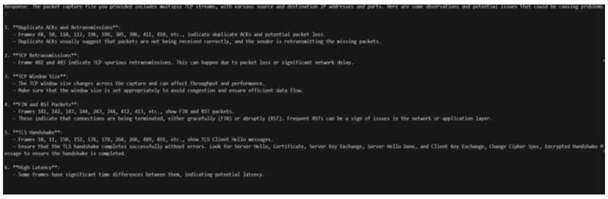
Fig 2: Granular Packet Analysis Scenario 1

In the first scenario Fig 2, Pactruder analyzed a packet capture and identified specific packet numbers where duplicate ACKs (Acknowledgments) were sent. Duplicate ACKs are often an indicator of packet loss, as they occur when the receiver detects missing packets and requests retransmission.

Pactruder's analysis suggested that the server was dropping packets due to the unavailability of NAT (Network Address Translation) ports which was actually the case above.



```
Response: The packet capture file you provided includes multiple TCP streams, with various source and destination IP addresses and ports. Here are some observations and potential issues that could be causing problems
:

1. **Duplicate ACKs and Retransmissions**:
   - Frames 48, 50, 110, 112, 196, 198, 305, 306, 411, 410, etc., indicate duplicate ACKs and potential packet loss.
   - Duplicate ACKs usually suggest that packets are not being received correctly, and the sender is retransmitting the missing packets.

2. **TCP Retransmissions**:
   - Frame 402 and 403 indicate TCP spurious retransmissions. This can happen due to packet loss or significant network delay.

3. **TCP Window Size**:
   - The TCP window size changes across the capture and can affect throughput and performance.
   - Make sure that the window size is set appropriately to avoid congestion and ensure efficient data flow.

4. **FIN and RST Packets**:
   - Frames 141, 142, 143, 144, 243, 244, 412, 413, etc., show FIN and RST packets.
   - These indicate that connections are being terminated, either gracefully (FIN) or abruptly (RST). Frequent RSTs can be a sign of issues in the network or application layer.

5. **TLS Handshake**:
   - Frames 10, 11, 150, 152, 176, 178, 264, 266, 489, 491, etc., show TLS Client Hello messages.
   - Ensure that the TLS handshake completes successfully without errors. Look for Server Hello, Certificate, Server Key Exchange, Server Hello Done, and Client Key Exchange, Change Cipher Spec, Encrypted Handshake M
essage to ensure the handshake is completed.

6. **High Latency**:
   - Some frames have significant time differences between them, indicating potential latency.
```

Fig 3: Granular Packet Analysis Scenario 2

In the second scenario Fig 3, Pactruder identified a series of **RST (Reset) packets** in the packet capture. RST packets are typically sent to abruptly terminate a connection, and their presence in large numbers can indicate issues at the application layer. Pactruder pointed to the specific packet numbers where the RST packets were observed. Upon closer examination, it was discovered that the client was unable to establish a stable connection with the server due to application-layer issues on the server side. Pactruder's ability to highlight these packets allowed to focus efforts on resolving the application-layer problem, rather than wasting time analyzing unrelated traffic.

The other major findings also included while doing some more packet capture analysis are:

4.1 Anomaly Detection

- Successfully identified signs of Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, such as repeated connection attempts from specific IP addresses.
- Detected covert data exfiltration attempts through unusual traffic patterns, such as unexpected spikes in data transfer or unusual protocol usage.

4.2 Protocol Classification

- Achieved a classification accuracy exceeding 95% across a wide range of protocol types, including those involving encapsulated layers. This high level of accuracy is particularly important in modern networks where traffic may be encapsulated within multiple layers of protocols.

4.3 Traffic Summarization

- Delivered clear, human-readable summaries of complex traffic, enabling analysts to identify critical events without sifting through voluminous data. The summaries provided by Pactruder were found to be highly useful for quickly diagnosing network issues and generating reports.

4.4 Performance Insights

- While Pactruder's AI-driven approach enhanced detection accuracy and reduced analysis time, computational demand and occasional misclassifications of rare protocols remain areas for improvement. These challenges are addressed with suggestions for optimization, such as improving the model's training data and enhancing its ability to handle real-time analysis.

5. Limitations and Future Work

Pactruder's current limitations include:

- **Reliance on high-quality, pre-labeled training data:** The accuracy of the AI model depends on the quality of the training data, which can be difficult to obtain for rare or emerging threats.
- **Limited performance in real-time packet analysis for high-throughput networks:** The current implementation relies on API calls to OpenAI's GPT-4o model, which can introduce latency and limit the tool's ability to handle real-time analysis in high-throughput environments.

Future developments will focus on:

- **Deploying real-time analysis capabilities:** Enhancing the tool's ability to analyze packets in real-time, enabling faster response to network issues and security threats.
- **Enhancing scalability for processing large datasets:** Improving the tool's ability to handle large volumes of data, making it suitable for use in large-scale networks.
- **Integrating with Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) tools:** Providing a comprehensive network monitoring solution by integrating Pactruder with existing SIEM tools.
- **Addressing data privacy concerns during traffic analysis:** Ensuring that sensitive data is handled securely and in compliance with data privacy regulations.

6. Conclusion

Pactruder exemplifies the potential of OpenAI models in transforming packet capture analysis. By automating key tasks such as anomaly detection, protocol classification, and summarization, Pactruder reduces manual effort and enhances accuracy. The tool's ability to provide clear, actionable insights from complex packet data makes it a valuable asset for network administrators and cybersecurity professionals. Continued innovation and collaborative research are essential to further optimize this tool, enabling secure and efficient network operations.

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