Improving Xen security through domain-zero disaggregation

Derek Murray
University of Cambridge Computer Laboratory

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Outline

- What is disaggregation?
- What did we do?
- How does this affect you?
Motivation

- Hypervisors are supposed to be secure...
- ...but Xen requires us to trust Dom0
- This results in a huge Trusted Computing Base
  - The hypervisor
  - The Dom0 kernel
    - Everything running as root in Dom0 user-space
- Why?
  - xc_map_foreign_range
What is disaggregation?

- Starts with a large, trusted piece of software
- Identify the components that require privileges
- Define a narrow interface between those components and the untrusted applications
- Move the trusted components to another domain
- Case study: the domain builder
Disaggregation - Before

- Currently, the privcmd driver allows user-space tools to make privileged hypercalls
- Any code which can use privcmd must be trusted
  - Including anything that links against libxc
Disaggregation - After

- Remove the privcmd driver from Dom0
- Only change is to libxc: user APIs unchanged
- Now we must trust only the hypervisor, DomB and the Dom0 kernel
How is it implemented?

- Based on a port of libxc to MiniOS
- DomB booted alongside Dom0
- Inter-Domain Communication, based on DICE
- File system calls proxied to Dom0
- Minor changes to user-space tools
Minor changes?

- Several tools use direct foreign mappings
  - Console, XenStore
- Want to retain functionality but control sharing
Solution: gntdev

- Obvious solution is to use grant tables
- Only kernel can map grant references
  - blktpap maps these pages to user-space
- gntdev generalises this approach
xc_gnttab API

- libxc bindings for the gntdev driver
  - xc_gnttab_open
  - xc_gnttab_close
  - xc_gnttab_map_grant_ref
  - xc_gnttab_map_grantRefs
  - xc_gnttab_munmap
Porting to gntdev

- "Magic pages"
  - Use grant references instead of MFNs
- xc_map_foreign_range
  - Use xc_gnttab_map_grant_ref(s)
A request

- When you write new tools that use shared memory
  - Use grants instead of MFNs
  - Use `xc_gnttab_*` instead of `xc_map_foreign_range`
  - Email me if you need help!
    - Derek.Murray@cl.cam.ac.uk
Future work

- Refine and submit to xen-unstable
- HVM support
- Save/restore/migration support
- XSM integration
- gntdev
  - Granting from user-space
  - Solaris support
Conclusions

- Existing architecture places all of Dom0 in TCB
- Disaggregation eliminates Dom0 user-space from TCB
- gntdev is the way forward for user-space tools