eBPF Based Container Networking

A Network Performance Comparison

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Figure 1: Microservices and Containers\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1}https://www.slideshare.net/Docker/cilium-network-and-application-security-with-bpf-and-xdp-thomas-graf-covalent-io
Iptables:

- $ iptables -A INPUT -p tcp -s 10.0.0.23 -dport 80 -m conntrack –ctstate NEW -j ACCEPT
Research goal:

- Evaluate the usability of Cilium as a packet filtering system in a container (Microservices) infrastructure.
Research Questions

• What throughput and latency we get in the case of using Cilium’s eBPF program and Linux’s Iptables as packet filter?
• What effect does the number of security policies have on the throughput and latency in both cases?
• Is there a turn point in performance when increasing the number of security policies?
Background
Docker Networking

- Endpoints (Container eth0)
- Virtual Ethernet devices (veth)
- Bridge on the host (docker0)

1 Figure: https://success.docker.com/Architecture/DockerReferenceArchitecture
Docker Networking - Communication

- Endpoints (Container eth0)
- Virtual Ethernet devices (veth)
- Bridge on the host (docker0)

Packet filtering:
- On container
Docker Networking - Communication

**Components:**
- Endpoints (Container eth0)
- Virtual Ethernet devices (veth)
- Bridge on the host (docker0)

**Packet filtering:**
- On container
- On the bridge
Iptables - Performance penalty?

- Uses chains with rules
- Each chain contains 0 or more rules
- Top down approach
- Checks until match is found
- So placement is important

Figure: http://www.iptables.info/en/structure-of-iptables.html
What is Cilium?

- Opensource project
- Adds a layer on top of the existing container environment (Docker)
- To improve container networking and policy enforcement
- No Iptables / bridges
- Relies on eBPF programs
eBPF is used to extend the functionality of the kernel at runtime.

- It’s effectively a small kernel based machine
  - 10 64bit registers
  - 512 byte stack
  - Data structures are known as maps

- Has a verifier to ensure the program is safe
  - No loops, max 4k instructions, no more then 64 maps.
Figure 2: eBPF Overview

https://www.slideshare.net/Docker/cilium-bpf-xdp-for-containers-66969823
extended Berkley Packet Filter - Functionality

1. Rewrite packet content
2. Extend/trim packet size
3. Redirect to other netdevices
4. Enforce policies
5. On the fly program generation
Figure 3: eBPF with Cilium\(^4\)

\(^4\)https://www.slideshare.net/Docker/cilium-bpf-xdp-for-containers-66969823
Figure 4: Cilium Policy Using Json
Approach
Approach - Docker environment
Approach - Cilium environment
Performed tests on two scenarios:

- Localhost
- And Multi-host

For each scenario we are interested in:

- The throughput and latency with no additional policies/rules.
- The change in performance whenever we start to increase the number of policies/rules.
Approach - Experiments

- Using Iperf3 to send a TCP_STREAM
- Using Netperf to send a TCP_RR (Request Response)
- Every test runs 1 minute. Every test is performed 10 times to determine the variation
- Every test runs with 0, 1, 5, 10, 25, 50, 100, and 200 policies
Results
Results - Throughput Localhost

Figure 5: Throughput - localhost (Higher is better)

- Cilium’s eBPF approach outperforms the IPtable approach.
- Number of Cilium policies does not affect the throughput.
- Number of no matching Iptables rules greatly affect the throughput.
Results - Latency Localhost

**Figure 6:** TCP Latency - localhost (Lower is better)

- Same observation as the throughput
- Cilium’s eBPF approach has a lower latency
Results - Throughput Remote Containers

Figure 7: TCP Throughput - Remote Host (Higher is better)

- Different observation than on Localhost
- Cilium’s eBPF seems to perform less
- Iptables show no performs penalty until 1000 policies
Results - Latency Remote Containers

Figure 8: TCP Latency - Remote Host (Lower is better)

- Same observation as the remote throughput
- Cilium’s eBPF approach has a higher latency
Conclusion
Conclusion

Overall:

1. Cilium seems like a promising project.
2. We can define L3, L4, and L7 policies

Performance wise:

1. The performance is not influenced by number of policies.
2. Cilium shows to perform better in the situation of local containers.
3. Room for improvements for multi-host environments
Open issues & Future work

- Test the VXLAN overlay overhead used by Docker and Cilium
- Do Kernel traces to get a better understanding of which path packets take in the kernel.
- Optimize both approaches to see what the best possible throughput and latency can be reached for each approach.
- Test Cilium using XDP to offload the system.
Thank you for your attention,
Questions?