Making the Linux TCP stack more extensible with eBPF

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Supporting new TCP option

The standard way to extend TCP

But implementation?

requires kernel changes
Supporting new TCP option is hard

True for just experiment

More with deployment: upstreaming patches?
Stand on the shoulders of giants...

Based on TCP-BPF by Lawrence Brakmo

TCP-BPF (since 4.13) already has:

- Hooks at different phases of a TCP connection
  or when connection state changes
- Read & write to many fields of tcp_sock
- Indirect access with bpf_getsockopt, bpf_setsockopt
- ...

Add new option: 2 steps

TCP Layer

TCP_write_xmit() → tcp_transmit_skb() → tcp_options_write() → ...

IP Layer

tcp_send_ack() → ...

tcp_retransmit() → ...

BPF VM

adjust tcp_options_size → write new option

One more thing: update current MSS
Parse new option

IP Layer

- ip_rcv()

TCP layer

- tcp_v4_rcv()
- tcp_v6_rcv()
- tcp_parse_options()

... (pass new option)

TCP-BPF program processes new option

BPF VM
Overhead

Disable hooks by default

Benchmark:

on local host
ttrigger on every packet
Overhead: Goodput

Disable hooks by default

Benchmark:

- on local host
- trigger on every packet
Overhead: RTT
Use cases
User Timeout Option

TCP User Timeout (UTO):

max time waiting for the ACK of transmitted data
before resetting the connection

RFC 5482: TCP option to announce/request this value
Congestion Control Request Option

Receiver requests the sender to use a desired CC algorithm for the connection

E.g.: Clients specify the preference for low-latency traffic
Initial CWND option

When the receivers know more about the network bottleneck.
Delayed ACK Option

Motivation: Too many ACKs or too few ACKs is not good.

→ The need to know remote’s ACK delay strategy
    … or to request the desired configuration

This option carries two values:
   Delack timeout: relatively as a fraction of RTT
   Segs count: Number of received segs before sending an ACK
What about the middleboxes?

RFC 6994: “Shared Use of Experimental TCP Options” (PROPOSED STANDARD)

Network operators “should” support (or fix it otherwise)
### Code Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use case</th>
<th>Kernel changes</th>
<th>BPF program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TCP Option framework</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use case: TCP User Timeout</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use case: Congestion Control</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use case: Initial Window</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use case: Delayed ACK</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Caveats

- Option size <= 4 Bytes, extensible to 16 Bytes
- Decouple from cgroup-v2?
Making the Linux TCP stack more extensible with eBPF
Making the Linux **MPTCP** stack more extensible with eBPF
Path Manager

Which path to create/remove? Which address to announce?

→ Should be controlled by application / user
Supporting user-defined Path Managers (PM)

Netlink-based PM framework

+ **Available** in mptcp-trunk branch (out-of-tree)
+ Control plane in *uspace*
+ **Clean** separation

Issues:

- Under high load, netlink messages **may be lost**
- Need **separated facilities** to support:
  - set/getsockopt (e.g. access subflow-level info)
  - TCP state change notification
  - policy to refuse the establishment of a subflow
What if eBPF-based approach

+ Performance
+ Built-in support for TCP state tracking
+ Easy to apply custom policy on subflow establishment
- Restricted by current eBPF limits
- Less layering separation?
- BPF program can be called from different contexts → Locking is trickier
Our prototype

To track events: New TCP-BPF callbacks

To store local/remote addresses and subflows: BPF maps

To open a subflow: helper function
New TCP-BPF callbacks to track events

- MPTCP Session created
- MPTCP Session established
- MPTCP Session closed (e.g. fallback to regular TCP)
- Subflow established
- Subflow closed
- Remote IP address added/removed
Open subflows

via helper function mptcp_open_subflow()

- (meta_sk, srcIP+port, dstIP+port) as input
- if a field of tuple is unset: use existing or kernel-assigned IP/port

But usually, we are in softirq context: cannot open subflow directly

→ Schedule a workqueue instead

→ subflow is actually opened later
Examples

Two minimal PMs were implemented as BPF programs:

ndiffports PM: $\sim20$ LoCs

fullmesh PM: $\sim200$ LoCs
Open issues

Handle events of local IP address changed:
Need to send events to each BPF program in each cgroup

Open subflows: more than one work in workqueue?

Remove subflows: (already done automatically in kernel when receiving a REMOVE_ADDR option)

Dual-stack support: would be similar to bpf_bind()?

Multiple PMs? e.g. each PM per netns
Wrap up

More details in our paper

Git repository: https://github.com/hoang-tranviet/tcp-options-bpf

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Backup slides