

Real-Time Cyberattack Detection with Offline and Online Learning^{*}

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Abstract. This paper presents several novel algorithms for real-time cyberattack detection using the Auto-Associative Deep Random Neural Network, which were developed in the HORIZON 2020 IoTAC Project. Some of these algorithms require offline learning, while others require the algorithm to learn during its normal operation while it is also testing the flow of incoming traffic to detect possible attacks. Most of the methods we present are designed to be used at a single node, while one specific method collects data from multiple network ports to detect and monitor the spread of a Botnet. The evaluation of the accuracy of all the methods is carried out with real attack traces. These novel methods are also compared with other state-of-the-art approaches, showing that they offer better or equal performance, at lower computational learning and shorter detection times as compared to the existing approaches.

Keywords: Attack detection · Cybersecurity · Internet of Things (IoT) · Auto-Associative Random Neural Network · Random Neural Network

1 Introduction

As the application areas of the Internet expand, and the number of IoT devices increases rapidly, 52 % of the devices deployed in the IoT devices are expected [14] to be of low-cost and have low-maintenance, and typically perform a single task at a time. This sector of the IoT is often known as the “Massive IoT” which is largely composed of devices which cannot run complex real-time attack detection or prevention algorithms. Thus the IoT and the Internet as a whole are becoming increasingly vulnerable to cyberattacks [18, 31, 48].

Another industry report [3] states that 70 % of IoT devices are vulnerable to attacks, such as common Denial of Service (DoS) or Distributed Denial of Service attacks (DDoS) [15]. According to some sources these represent 20 % of

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all attacks [8], in which attackers or malicious devices send numerous meaningless requests to prevent the targeted devices from carrying out their normally required activities. In addition, many of these attacks can inject malware [11, 13], as with Botnets which cause the victim to become an attacker that in turn generates a flood of traffic against other IP addresses and servers. A major example is the 2016 massive Mirai Botnet attack targeted Domain Name System (DNS) provider Dyn [33], compromising numerous websites and servers of leading companies [9, 25]. Botnets also have other undesirable effects, such as increasing the power consumption and memory occupancy of the devices [46]. Thus in detecting and countering a cyberattack, it is important to identify not the malicious packets, and also the other compromised IP addresses which themselves become attackers against IoT networks.

1.1 Related Work

Over recent years, much work has studied the characteristics of Botnet attacks [6], and analyzed the characteristics of attack traffic flows [28]. The source code of such attacks was examined in [41] while in [33] their capabilities and impact are studied. Some authors [5] also suggest using blockchains to protect IoT devices.

Other work has used different machine learning methods to detect Botnet attacks including k-Nearest Neighbours (KNN), Support Vector Machines (SVM), Decision Trees (DT) and Multi-Layer Perceptrons (MLP). Thus the work in [45] compares the performance of classification models and Neural Networks (NNs), and in [30] NNs are used to detect Mirai Botnet attacks against Software Defined Networks. While the work in [43] uses a deep MLP, in [42] NNs and Naive Bayesian networks (NB) were used with a sequential architecture, and in [47] Botnets are detected via a sparse representation framework. To detect Botnet attacks using deep learning, in [34] text recognition is carried out with a bidirectional Long-Short-Term Memory (LSTM). Furthermore in [32] a Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) is combined with a feature transformation, while the work in [39] cascaded a CNN with a LSTM. In [26] Classification and Regression Trees (CART) were used, while in [7] DTs, Gradient Boosting and Random Forest were considered, and in [40] Logistic Regression was used.

In [29] an optimization-based method scans the number of destination ports in the headers of selected IoT packets to detect Bots infected by Mirai. Others [12] developed a traffic analysis technique based on evidence theory in order to detect compromised devices selecting the rarest features from the set of traffic features including number of reconnections, transport layer protocol, and source/destination ports. In [38], federated learning and language analysis is used to detect malicious devices using pre-identified individual device types, and in [4] compromised gateways that monitor the downlink channels in an IoT network are detected. In [44] compromised mobile devices are detected taking into account their location, classifying locations and their possible changes as unusual behavior.

In earlier work, a Random Neural Network gradient descent learning technique [?, ?] had been used to detect SYN type DoS attacks [16]. However the

approaches discussed in this paper are based on a more elaborate machine learning model, the Auto-Associative Dense Random Neural Network (AADRNN), that was first developed in [10] using a Deep and Dense Random Neural Network [19, 23]. In addition, it uses an original characterization of network traffic proposed in [36] to detect various types of attacks.

2 Contributions of the Present Paper

This paper presents novel Attack Detection (AD) algorithms that were developed within the IoTAC Project funded by the Horizon2020 Programme, based on Auto-Associative version of the Deep Random Neural Network (AADRNN). The three sets of results we present show the ability of this AD learning approach to detect Botnet attacks with online learning, as well as to simultaneously detect different types of attacks, and its ability to identify compromised IoT devices.

The main advantage of this approach is the use of an auto-associative network (namely, the AADRNN), that only needs to learn from the legitimate network traffic, without needing to learn from the different types of attacks that may occur, and then generalizes what it has learned only from normal traffic to differentiate between benign and malicious packets so as to identify compromised devices. Thus:

1. Training of the proposed algorithms does not require attack traffic data, which saves considerably on the time needed to collect it to create it artificially, and also on the algorithms' learning times.
2. It follows that a give AADRNN after training with normal data can accurately detect various types of attacks.
3. The proposed AD can be trained in parallel to its real-time operation (when it provides detection results) using the ongoing legitimate network traffic.

3 IoTAC's Attack Detector Algorithms

IoTAC's AD has been designed to recognize traffic patterns through specially defined metrics and is trained with normal traffic to create an Auto-Association Dense RNN (called AADRNN). Thus, this AD can recognize malicious traffic even if the characteristics of an attack are unknown and no pre-collected attack data is available.

Figure 1 displays the component diagram of AD including the subcomponents, APIs, external databases, and user interfaces. As shown in this figure, the AD component is comprised of four subcomponents: Metrics Extraction, AD Initialization, AADRNN Attack Detection, and AADRNN Training.

3.1 AD Initialization

At the first use of the AD module, parameter initialization is required for the methods utilized in AD, such as Metric Extraction and AADRNN. To this end,

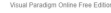


Fig. 1. Component diagram of AD

the AD Initialization subcomponent is developed to set the parameters of AD as predefined values. It also calculates the initial values of scaling factors used to normalize the metric values through historical normal traffic for a fixed length time window.

3.2 Metric Extraction

First, the Metric Extraction subcomponent calculates three metrics proposed in [36] to capture the footprints of the Mirai Botnet attack on the network traffic:

1. The total size of the latest packets,
2. The average inter-transmission times of the latest packets,
3. The total number of packets that are transmitted in a constant-length time window.

These metrics are specifically defined to represent network traffic in a way that the differences between attack and normal traffic become more visible while they can be calculated using only the header information of the traffic packets. Therefore, these metrics can be easily calculated without the need for any sensitive or device-specific information, thus preventing AD from making biased decisions, remaining anonymous regarding packet content and communicating devices, and suitable for real-time operation on lightweight systems.

3.3 AADRNN Attack Detection

The AADRNN Attack Detection subcomponent uses a trained AADRNN and a simple decision-making algorithm. Based on the extracted metrics, the AADRNN

in this subcomponent predicts the expected metric values for the normal operation of the network. That is, AADRNN provides the metric values expected to be obtained if all packets are benign. The decision-making algorithm considers these expected metric values as a baseline for actual metric values expecting to observe a significant difference between them for malicious packet transmission. Accordingly, this simple algorithm calculates the weighted average of the absolute differences between the expected and actual metric values and applies a threshold to the mean.

3.4 AADRNN Training

The AADRNN model of AD is trained incrementally in parallel to the real-time operation of AD through ADT API using only normal traffic to learn its metrics. To this end, we have developed an incremental semi-supervised training procedure [37] based on a reconstruction problem [19]. Specifically, our incremental training algorithm stores historical normal traffic for fixed-length time windows and updates the connection weights of the AADRNN for this traffic at the end of each window. During this incremental training, the connection weights of this model are updated to reconstruct the metrics of normal traffic from a noise-added version of these metrics. In this way, we have obtained an auto-associative network that is able to retrieve normal metrics from any metrics (which might be for either normal or malicious traffic) provided as input. Using an auto-associative network with the proposed metrics provides the following benefits for the AD module:

1. Since the defined traffic metrics are calculated using only the high-level (anonymous) packet information, the AD module does not use and does not require knowledge of network architecture or device specifications.
2. The AD module has the ability to react to malicious activities only by learning the traffic patterns during the normal operation of the IoT network. Therefore,
 - (a) it does not require data on "attack traffic" for training,
 - (b) it has no bias for any particular type of attack, and
 - (c) a single AD can detect several types of attacks simultaneously.

4 AADRNN-based Algorithm Detects Several Types of Cyberattacks

The AADRNN-based design of AD provides an opportunity to adapt its usage for detecting different types of attacks in various environments. Thus we have extended the design of the AADRNN attack detector for usage in three areas:

- Botnet Attack Detection with Online Learning,
- Simultaneous Detection of Different Attack Types, and
- Compromised IoT Device Identification.

For each of these uses, the method i.e., AADRNN remains the same, while the traffic metrics and the decision-making algorithm are adapted to each use.

4.1 Botnet Attack Detection with Online Learning

The original design of the AD module is targeting the Botnet attack detection. Thus, this module with AADRNN and the proposed traffic metrics was evaluated, as it is, for the detection of the Mirai Botnet attack [36, 37] on a publicly available Kitsune dataset [2, 35]. This dataset contains 764,137 transmissions including both normal and attack traffic packets. The evaluation results displayed in Figure 2 have shown that the incremental online learning property of AD is highly successful with a low false alarm rate as it adapts to the changes in normal traffic over time.

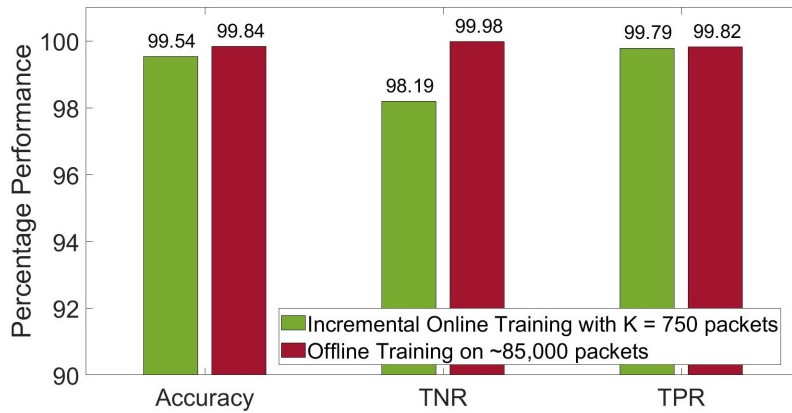


Fig. 2. Performance comparison of AADRNN based AD under Incremental Online Training against Offline Training

Table 1 compares the performance of AADRNN-based AD with that of the state-of-the-art ML methods. The numerical results in this table show the high success of our AD and its superior performance against other ML methods. In detail, we see that our AD based on AADRNN achieves 99.82 % true positive and 99.98 % true negative rates.

4.2 Simultaneous Detection of Different Attack Types

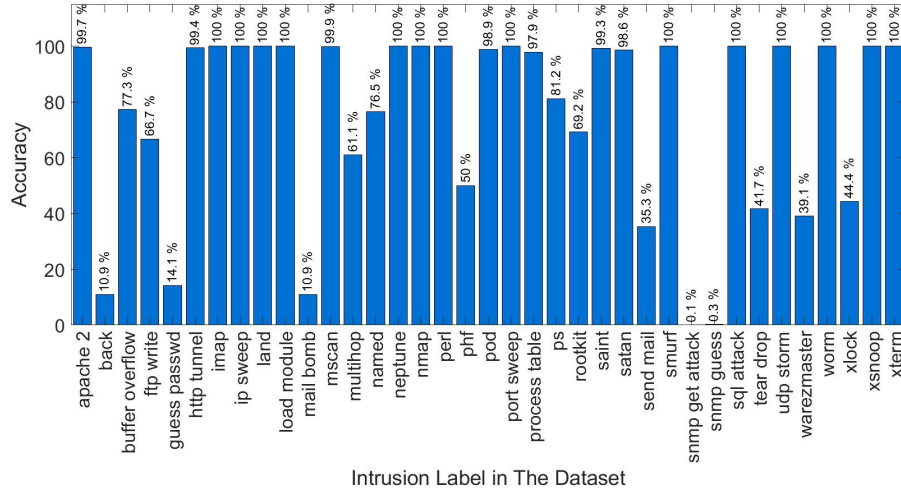
The AD module was further implemented to detect various types of attacks simultaneously [21]. To this end, two main revisions have been performed on the design of AD. First, the Metric Extraction module was exchanged with a preprocessing algorithm to apply min-max normalization on any input features provided by the developer (or in a dataset). Then, the decision-making algorithm was enhanced replacing the decision threshold with a statistical whisker which is calculated using the training data. Since extensive threshold selection often provides higher performance for the dataset than the actual test data,

Table 1. COMPARISON OF DIFFERENT ML METHODS IN AD MODULE

ML Methods	Accuracy	TPR	FNR	TNR	FPR
AADRNN	99.84	99.82	0.18	99.98	0.02
KNN	99.79	99.79	0.21	99.75	0.25
Lasso	99.78	99.75	0.25	99.95	0.05
Simple Thresholding	93.18	93.09	6.94	93.63	6.37

data-driven threshold determination, e.g. whisker-valued threshold, eliminates extensive threshold selection.

During the performance evaluation of the AD module to simultaneously detect multiple types of attacks, the KDD Cup'99 data set [1] was used. Our AD was trained using only the benign samples in the smaller training set (which is equal to 97,278 samples) and evaluated using all samples in the test set (which is equal to 311,029 samples). As the numerical test results on KDD Cup'99 data set in Figure 3 show, the prediction accuracy of the AD module is above 98 % for 21 out of 37 attack types.

**Fig. 3.** Performance of the AD module for each attack type in the KDD Cup'99 dataset

4.3 Compromised IoT Device Identification

The AD methods were also extended to identify the compromised IoT devices during DDoS attacks, and especially Botnet attacks [22]. In this way, the AD module may enable the gateway to blacklist devices affected by malware or take preventive actions against the spread of the attack. To this end, the defined traffic metrics were extended to analyze received and transmitted traffic separately resulting in 6 different metrics. An independent detector was utilized for each existing IP address in the considered IoT network, where each detector was sequentially trained over time. Also, the output of AD was revised to obtain the infection level of the device under consideration.

During the evaluation of the performance of the AADRNN based AD, we have used various types of DDoS attacks provided in three different datasets: Kitsune [2], MedBioT [24], and Bot-IoT [27]. The results in Figure 4 show that the extended version of the AD module is able to successfully identify compromised devices in the course of various types of DoS and DDoS attacks.

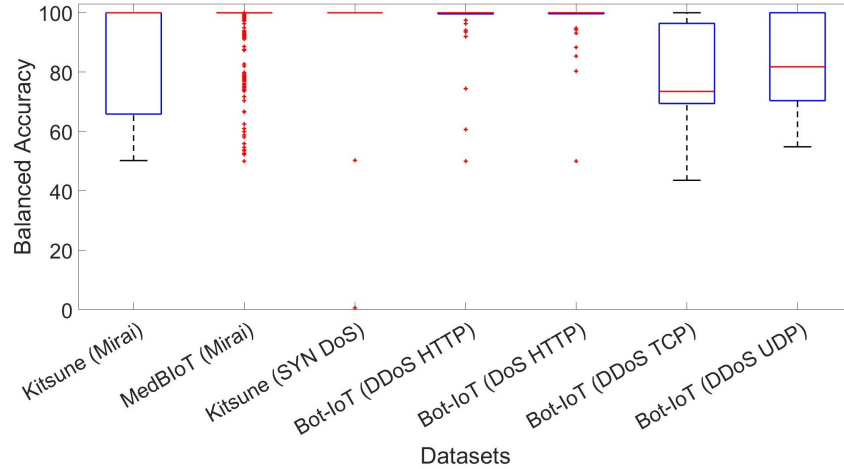


Fig. 4. Performance of AD for compromised IoT device identification on Kitsune, Med-BIoT, and Bot-IoT data sets

5 Conclusions

This paper has reviewed the algorithms developed in the IoTAC project, based on an AADRNN using original network traffic metrics, to detect cyberattacks in real-time with both offline and online learning. Experimental results are summarized, and show that these algorithms are able to **accurately**:

1. Detect Botnet attacks with periodically activated incremental learning concurrently with real-time attack detection,
2. Detect different types of cyberattacks simultaneously using a single AADRNN that is trained offline on normal non-attack traffic, and
3. Identify compromised IoT devices during an ongoing cyberattack.

Since the AADRNN is auto-associative, it learns communication patterns for normal (non-attack) network traffic, and differentiates malicious from benign packets (or normal and compromised devices) without prior learning of malicious traffic. Using the publicly available Kitsune, MedBioT, BotIoT, and KDD'99 data sets, the three AADRNN based algorithms have been evaluated, and it was observed that all three lead to a high detection accuracy for various types of DoS and DDoS attacks.

Future research will examine methods for post-processing of the algorithms' output to attempt to further reduce false alarms by an order of magnitude, from the output data of AD algorithms. Another useful direction can be to investigate dynamic system management techniques, such as those investigated in [17, 20], to mitigate the consequences of cyberattacks using dynamic traffic management for specific IoT systems.

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