Overview

The Cisco NX-OS software supports security features that can protect your network against degradation or failure and also against data loss or compromise resulting from intentional attacks and from unintended but damaging mistakes by well-meaning network users.

This chapter includes the following sections:

Licensing requirements

To operate Cisco NX-OS, you must obtain and install appropriate licenses according to the features and platform requirements.

- Base (Essential) and add-on licenses are available for different feature sets.
- Licenses may be permanent, temporary, or evaluation, depending on product and purchase option.

- Advanced features require additional feature licenses beyond the base license.
- Licenses are applied and managed through the device command-line interface (CLI).

For detailed information on license types and installation instructions, see the *Cisco NX-OS Licensing Guide* and the *Cisco NX-OS Licensing Options Guide*.

Supported platforms

The Nexus Switch Platform Support Matrix lists:

- Supported Cisco Nexus 9000 and 3000 switch models
- NX-OS software release versions

For the full platform-feature mapping, see the Nexus Switch Platform Support Matrix.

Authentication, Authorization, and Accounting

Authentication, authorization, and accounting (AAA) is an architectural framework for configuring a set of three independent security functions in a consistent, modular manner.

Authentication
Provides the method of identifying users, including login and password dialog, challenge and response, messaging support, and, depending on the security protocol that you select, encryption. Authentication is the way a user is identified prior to being allowed access to the network and network services. You configure AAA authentication by defining a named list of authentication methods and then applying that list to various interfaces.

Authorization
Provides the method for remote access control, including one-time authorization or authorization for each service, per-user account list and profile, user group support, and support of IP, IPX, ARA, and Telnet.

Remote security servers, such as RADIUS and TACACS+, authorize users for specific rights by associating attribute-value (AV) pairs, which define those rights, with the appropriate user. AAA authorization works by assembling a set of attributes that describe what the user is authorized to perform. These attributes are compared with the information contained in a database for a given user, and the result is returned to AAA to determine the user's actual capabilities and restrictions.

Accounting
Provides the method for collecting and sending security server information used for billing, auditing, and reporting, such as user identities, start and stop times, executed commands (such as PPP), number of packets, and number of bytes. Accounting enables you to track the services that users are accessing, as well as the amount of network resources that they are consuming.

Note You can configure authentication outside of AAA. However, you must configure AAA if you want to use RADIUS or TACACS+, or if you want to configure a backup authentication method.

For more information, see the Configuring AAA chapter.

RADIUS and TACACS+ Security Protocols

AAA uses security protocols to administer its security functions. If your router or access server is acting as a network access server, AAA is the means through which you establish communication between your network access server and your RADIUS or TACACS+ security server.

The chapters in this guide describe how to configure the following security server protocols:

RADIUS
A distributed client/server system implemented through AAA that secures networks against unauthorized access. In the Cisco implementation, RADIUS clients run on Cisco routers and send authentication requests to a central RADIUS server that contains all user authentication and network service access information.

TACACS+
A security application implemented through AAA that provides a centralized validation of users who are attempting to gain access to a router or network access server. TACACS+ services are maintained in a database on a TACACS+ daemon running, typically, on a UNIX or Windows NT workstation. TACACS+ provides for separate and modular authentication, authorization, and accounting facilities.

For more information, see the Configuring TACACS+ chapter and the Configuring RADIUS chapter.

LDAP

The Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) provides centralized validation of users attempting to gain access to a Cisco NX-OS device. LDAP allows a single access control server (the LDAP daemon) to provide authentication and authorization independently.

For more information, see the Configuring LDAP chapter.

SSH and Telnet

You can use the Secure Shell (SSH) server to enable an SSH client to make a secure, encrypted connection to a Cisco NX-OS device. SSH uses strong encryption for authentication. The SSH server in the Cisco NX-OS software can interoperate with publicly and commercially available SSH clients.

The SSH client in the Cisco NX-OS software works with publicly and commercially available SSH servers.

The Telnet protocol enables TCP/IP connections to a host. Telnet allows a user at one site to establish a TCP connection to a login server at another site and then passes the keystrokes from one device to the other. Telnet can accept either an IP address or a domain name as the remote device address.

For more information, see the Configuring SSH and Telnet chapter.

User Accounts and Roles

You can create and manage user accounts and assign roles that limit access to operations on the Cisco NX-OS device. Role-based access control (RBAC) allows you to define the rules for an assign role that restrict the authorization that the user has to access management operations.

For more information, see the Configuring User Accounts and RBAC chapter.

IP ACLs

IP ACLs are ordered sets of rules that you can use to filter traffic based on IPv4 information in the Layer 3 header of packets. Each rule specifies a set of conditions that a packet must satisfy to match the rule. When the Cisco NX-OS software determines that an IP ACL applies to a packet, it tests the packet against the conditions of all rules. The first match determines whether a packet is permitted or denied, or if there is no match, the Cisco NX-OS software applies the applicable default rule. The Cisco NX-OS software continues processing packets that are permitted and drops packets that are denied.

For more information, see the Configure IP ACLs chapter.

MAC ACLs

MAC ACLs are ACLs that filter traffic using the information in the Layer 2 header of each packet. Each rule specifies a set of conditions that a packet must satisfy to match the rule. When the Cisco NX-OS software determines that a MAC ACL applies to a packet, it tests the packet against the conditions of all rules. The first match determines whether a packet is permitted or denied, or if there is no match, the Cisco NX-OS software applies the applicable default rule. The Cisco NX-OS software continues processing packets that are permitted and drops packets that are denied.

VACLs

A VLAN ACL (VACL) is one application of an IP ACL or MAC ACL. You can configure VACLs to apply to all packets that are routed into or out of a VLAN or are bridged within a VLAN. VACLs are strictly for security packet filtering and for redirecting traffic to specific physical interfaces. VACLs are not defined by direction (ingress or egress).

For more information, see the Configuring VLAN ACLs chapter.

DHCP Snooping

DHCP snooping acts like a firewall between untrusted hosts and trusted DHCP servers. DHCP snooping performs the following activities:

- Validates DHCP messages received from untrusted sources and filters out invalid messages.
- Builds and maintains the DHCP snooping binding database, which contains information about untrusted hosts with leased IP addresses.
- Uses the DHCP snooping binding database to validate subsequent requests from untrusted hosts.

Dynamic ARP inspection (DAI) and IP Source Guard (IPSG) also use information stored in the DHCP snooping binding database.

Dynamic ARP Inspection

Dynamic ARP inspection (DAI) ensures that only valid ARP requests and responses are relayed. When DAI is enabled and properly configured, a Cisco NX-OS device performs these activities:

- Intercepts all ARP requests and responses on untrusted ports.
- Verifies that each of these intercepted packets has a valid IP-to-MAC address binding before updating the local ARP cache or before forwarding the packet to the appropriate destination.
- Drops invalid ARP packets.

DAI can determine the validity of an ARP packet based on valid IP-to-MAC address bindings stored in a DHCP snooping binding database. This database can also contain static entries that you create. If the ARP packet is received on a trusted interface, the device forwards the packet without any checks. On untrusted interfaces, the device forwards the packet only if it is valid.

IP Source Guard

IP Source Guard is a per-interface traffic filter that permits IP traffic only when the IP address and MAC address of each packet matches one of two sources of IP and MAC address bindings:

- Entries in the DHCP snooping binding table.
- Static IP source entries that you configure.

Filtering on trusted IP and MAC address bindings helps prevent attacks that rely on spoofing the IP address of a valid host. To circumvent IP Source Guard, an attacker would have to spoof both the IP address and the MAC address of a valid host.

Password Encryption

The Advanced Encryption Standard (AES) password encryption feature stores all existing and newly created clear-text passwords for supported applications (currently RADIUS and TACACS+) in the strong and reversible type-6 encrypted format. A primary encryption key is used to encrypt and decrypt the passwords. You can also use this feature to convert all existing weakly encrypted passwords to type-6 encrypted passwords.

For more information, see the Configuring Password Encryption chapter.

Keychain Management

Keychain management allows you to create and maintain keychains, which are sequences of keys (sometimes called shared secrets). You can use keychains with features that secure communications with other devices by using key-based authentication. The device allows you to configure multiple keychains.

Some routing protocols that support key-based authentication can use a keychain to implement a hitless key rollover for authentication.

For more information, see the Configuring Keychain Management chapter.

Control Plane Policing

The Cisco NX-OS device provides control plane policing to prevent denial-of-service (DoS) attacks from impacting performance. The supervisor module of the Cisco NX-OS device has both the management plane and control plane and is critical to the operation of the network. Any disruption to the supervisor module would result in serious network outages. Excessive traffic to the supervisor module could overload it and slow down the performance of the entire Cisco NX-OS device. Attacks on the supervisor module can be of various types such as, denial-of-service (DoS) attacks that generate IP traffic streams to the control plane at a very high rate. These attacks result in the control plane spending a large amount of time in handling these packets, which makes the control plane unable to process genuine traffic.

For more information, see the Configure Control Plane Policing chapter.

Rate Limits

Rate limits can prevent redirected packets for egress exceptions from overwhelming the supervisor module on a Cisco NX-OS device.

For more information, see the Configuring Rate Limits chapter.

Software Image

The Cisco NX-OS software consists of one NXOS software image.

Virtual Device Contexts

Cisco NX-OS can segment operating system and hardware resources into virtual device contexts (VDCs) that emulate virtual devices. The Cisco Nexus 9000 Series switches currently do not support multiple VDCs. All switch resources are managed in the default VDC.

SGT Tagged Packet

Beginning with Cisco NX-OS Release 10.2(2)F, the Cisco Nexus 9300-FX/FX2/FX3/GX platform switches can be used as a L2 or L3 transit device to forward a SGT tagged packet. Cisco NX-OS N9K can pass the packet without stripping or altering the SGT.

Beginning with Cisco NX-OS Release 10.3(3)F, SGT forwarding is supported on Cisco Nexus 9500 switches with N9K-X97160YC-EX line card.

Note NX-OS N9K does not do any SGT enforcement. It also does not generate or rewrite SGT/DGT info in the packets. Packets are received and transmitted out with the same tags.

TLS Protocol Support

The Transport Layer Security (TLS) protocol is a cryptographic protocol designed to provide secure communication over a computer network.

Beginning with Cisco NX-OS Release 10.4(3)F, Cisco Nexus application supports Transport Layer Security (TLS) version 1.3 by default.

The following applications supports TLSv1.3 for faster and secure communication:

- NX-API: For more details, see NX-API Management Commands.
- gNMI: For more details, see gNMI - Management Interface.
- Secure syslog: For more details, see Configuring System Message Logging.
- RadSec: For more details, see Guidelines and Limitations for RadSec.
- Copy utilities (HTTPS option): For more details, see Using the Device File Systems, Directories, and Files.
- Callhome: For more details, see Configuring Smart Call Home.
- Smart Licensing: For more details, see Smart Licensing Using Policy.
- 802.1x: For more details, see 802.1X Guidelines and Limitations.
- gRPC agent: For more details, see gRPC Agent.
- LDAP: For more details, see Guidelines and Limitations for LDAP.