My new Backup solution with Burp

I have long used an rsync wrapper script I had written which collected backups from all of my servers and stored them locally, then another rsync wrapper was used to rsync the latest backup to an offsite location.

While this solution works great against accidental data-loss, it can be pretty useless and even an additional risk when it comes to data loss due to malicious software or hackers. As a matter of fact, with my old system, the backup server needed access to all the files it should back up, in other words, if an attacker (person or software) gained access to the backup server, they would have automatically also gained access to all the data that was being backed up.

my new solution is now based on Burp, a solid and proven open source **B**ack**U**p and **R**estore **P**rogram :) with the right configuration, Burp can operate so that a hacker could neither destroy the original data after taking control over the backup server, nor could the attacker render the backup useless after hacking one of the backed-up machines. I took it a step further and added an offsite backup which gain stores multiple versions of the original backups and also there, gaining control over the remote backup server does not allow to delete original backups and gaining control over the backup server does not allow to delete offsite backups.

Server preparation

the following setup was done on an ubuntu server, similar things need to be considered on other distributions.

in order to only expose what's necessary, it is always a good idea to enable some kind of firewall on the server. In my case i use “ufw” which is very simple to use:

allow ssh access

```
ufw add ssh
```

allow burp server access

```
ufw add 4971/tcp
```

this is needed for our offsite-backup sftp server

```
ufw add 2022
```

finally enable the firewall

```
ufw enable
```

install burp:

```
apt update
apt install burp
```

add the user to run burp with:

```
useradd -r burp
nano /etc/passwd
```

change login shell to `/usr/sbin/nologin`

fix permissions of config files and dirs

```
chown -R burp.burp /backup /etc/burp
touch /var/run/burp.server.pid
chown burp.burp /var/run/burp.server.pid
nano /etc/burp/burp-server.conf
```

of course mount your backup target storage

Burp configuration

In order to achieve the above mentioned security level, one needs to set a few config options correctly, both on the burp server as well as on the client

Server Side

in `burp-server.conf` make sure the follwing settings are as listed here:

```
hardlinked_archive = 1
```

this minimizes post-backup work on the backup server and it is necessary for my offsite-backup solution

```
client_can_delete = 0
```

without this option, an attacker could delete all backups of a host after taking control over the host itself. With this option enabled, the attacker can only see that there are backups, but they can't delete them.

```
user=burp
group=burp
```

user to run as, otherwise burp runs as root which is an unecessary security risk

```
client_can_force_backup = 0
```

without this option, a hacker could force enough backups to kick all valid old backups out of retention after destroying you data. so you would be left with a backup server full of nonesense. Worst case an attacker could change the client config to only backup an almost empty directory, in which case a backup is done very quickly. like that, it doesnt' take long to create enough new backups that all your old ones are destroyed by the backup rotation mechanism. If this option is set to 0 however, a backup can only start if it is due according to the schedule which is defined on the server.

```
compression = zlib0
```

nowadays, storage is way too cheap to use zlib compression. per default, burp compresses all your data on the backup server to save space. the problem with this is, that if you have a lot of data, it takes extremely long to do that, and if you only have little data, it doesn't really save you much.

to configure new clients, a new config file needs to be created for each client in the `clientconfdir` directory. in these files, you should define at least a safe password to authenticate the client. you could use pwgen to do that in a one-liner such as:

```
echo "password = $(pwgen -s 35 1)" | tee /etc/burp/clientconfdir/newclient1
```

this password is needed for the client to be configured. once this is done, you won't have to type or use it ever gain unless you need to restore an entire client machine after a catastrophic failure or hardware change.

client side config

on the burp client (the machine that is being backed up) there are also a few imortant settings:

```
encryption_password
```

set this to a very long and safe password and **note the password down**. Store it in a place where you can find it again should you ever need to perform a full restore of a server. This password is not stored on the server, so if you lose it and your burp client is gone, your backup is completely useless as you can't restore it! So really, make sure you don't lose this password but at the same time **don't save it on the server or anywhere lese where you backup data may reside**. If you stored this on the server, an attacker with control over your backup server could restore a backup of another server and eventually extract security credentials or other data that could help them to gain access to the other machine as well.

```
server_can_restore=0
```

with this set to 1, an attacker could potentially push data to the client by forcing a restore of a tampered backup or they could simply erase data by restoring an old version of certain files. we don't want that!

first start

start burp on the backup server

```
systemctl enable --now burp
```

in case it won't start and shows an error with the CA generation,stop the service, then delete

```
/etc/burp/CA
/etc/burp/CA-client
/etc/burp/ssl*
```

and try again.

try to connect from the backup client

```
burp -a l -v
```

if that was successful, add a cron job that runs burp every 20 minutes or so. this does not mean that your data is being backed up every 20 minutes, it means that the burp client will ask the burp server every 20 minutes if it is time to start a new backup or continue with a halted one. the actual schedule is defined on the server side (in the server config or clientconf files).

```
0,20,40 * * * * /usr/sbin/burp -a t -q 1200 >>/var/log/burp-client 2>&1
```

setup a backup report script

i wrote a script to send reports on a daily basis listing all backups and their age. since burp does not run a backup of all machines at once, but rather lets the client machines start a new backup whenever it is due, we have to create a backup report independent of any running jobs at a fixed time of the day (or week). I personally like systems that also send an email when things are good. this assures that you will get the alert if one is needed.

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