

## SIP and VoIP

What is SIP?

What's a Control Channel?

History of Signaling Channels

Signaling and VoIP

Complexity

Basic SIP

Architecture

Simple SIP Calling

Alice Calls Bob

Firewalls and NATs

SIP URIs

Multiple Proxies

Attacking SIP

Defenses

Complex Scenarios

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- Session Initiation Protocol
- Control channel for Voice over IP
- (Other control channel protocols exist, notably H.323 and Skype's, but we'll focus on SIP)

# What's a Control Channel?

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- A control channel — known in the telephone world as a *signaling channel* — does call setup
- It locates the other end point, determines if it's available, asks the endpoint to alert the called party, passes back status to the caller, etc.
- Even in a pure IP world, we need a signaling channel; when connecting to the PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network), it's essential

# History of Signaling Channels

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- Telephone signaling was once done “in-band” — that is, the pulses or tones were sent over the same circuit as would later be used to carry the voice traffic for that call
- “Blue boxes” — telephone fraud devices — worked by simulating some of the control tones used to set up free calls
- The solution was to move signaling to a separate, “out-of-band” data network, known today as CCIS (Common Channel Interoffice Signaling)
- Out-of-band signaling is *more* efficient; it allows easy creation of fancier services

# Signaling and VoIP

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## Complex Scenarios

- Why can't we just call a domain name or IP address?
- Many endpoints don't have stable, easily-memorized domain names
- IP addresses change frequently, especially for dial-up and hotspot users
- There are other complexities

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Complex Scenarios

- PSTN interconnection: very many endpoints have just a few IP addresses
- Besides, someone has to pay for the PSTN interconnection
- Firewalls
- Network address translators (NATs)
- Mapping between “phone number” and IP address
- Business arrangements between telephone companies
- Unreachable hosts
- Fancy phone features

# Basic SIP Architecture

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- SIP endpoints speak IP
- Ideally, the actual conversation would be end-to-end, from one SIP phone to the other
- Each node can use a SIP proxy for call setup

# Simple SIP Calling

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- Signaling and VoIP
- Complexity
- Basic SIP Architecture

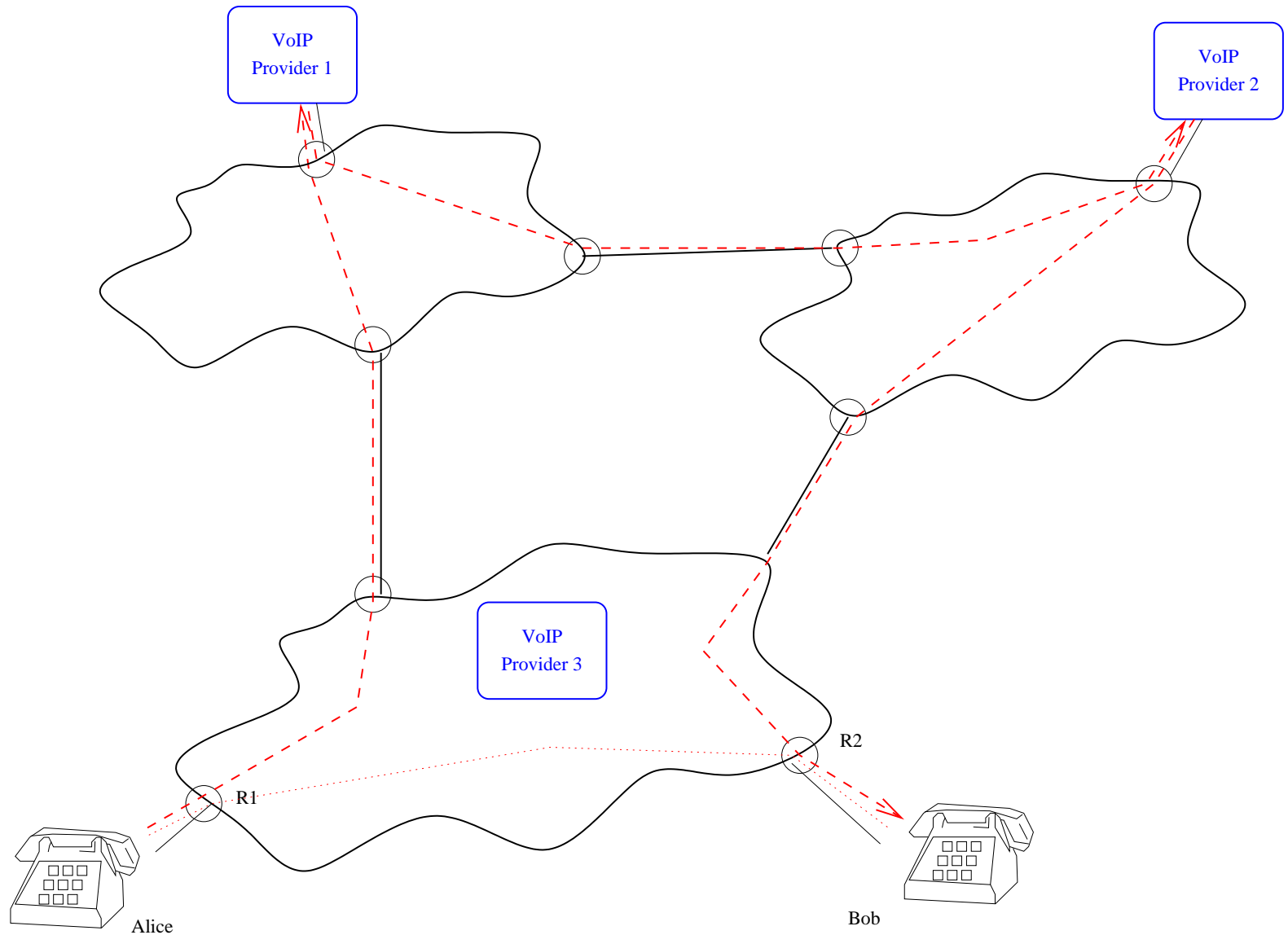
Simple SIP Calling

- Alice Calls Bob
- Firewalls and NATs
- SIP URIs
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# Alice Calls Bob

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- Alice uses VoIP Provider 1 (VP1) as her proxy; Bob uses VoIP Provider 2 (VP2) as his
- To call Bob, Alice sends a *SIP URI* to VP1 via TCP
- VP1 determines that the URI points to VP2, so the calls setup request is relayed there via TCP
- VP2 tells Bob about the call via TCP; if he wants to, he can accept it
- Notification is sent back to Alice via VP1
- Alice establishes a direct UDP data connection to Bob for the voice traffic

# Firewalls and NATs

- If Alice or Bob are behind firewalls or NATs, they may not be able to set up end-to-end data connections
- In that case, the data traffic for one or both parties will also flow through the proxy

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## Complex Scenarios

- How is a SIP URI converted to a SIP proxy address?
- What about ordinary telephone numbers?
- tel: URIs are used for ordinary phone numbers
- All SIP URIs are converted by means of DNS magic: NAPTR records
- (For this class, the details aren't important — the essential point is that by means of repeated, complex DNS lookups, any SIP URI is converted to an IP address)

# Multiple Proxies

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- Sometimes, VP1 will talk to VP3 which will route the call to VP2
- VP1 and VP2 don't know (or trust) each other; they only know VP3 (and VP4 and VP5 and ...)
- How can they establish a trust relationship? What if money is involved? Can VP2 believe that VP1 will pay?

SIP and VoIP

**Attacking SIP**

The Usual Questions

Information at Risk

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Caller/Called Party  
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Legal Eavesdropping  
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# The Usual Questions

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- What are we trying to protect?
- Against whom?

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- Voice content itself
- Caller and called party for each connection
- Billing information

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- Confidentiality is the main concern
- Is VoIP easier to wiretap than traditional phone service?
- *Only* the endpoints should see that information; can be encrypted through proxies
- Relatively hard to spoof a voice in real-time, so authenticity is not a major concern



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- Of great interest to many parties — traffic analysis
- Useful even after the call (you can't intercept a call after it's over; you can look at who talked)
- Must be kept confidential — but proxies need to see it, to route the call
- Must be authentic, or the call could be misrouted maliciously

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- Derived in part from caller/called party information
- May have other information from call routing process
- As before, must be confidential — but there's no need for other parties to see any of it
- Integrity failures can lead to billing errors, in either direction
- (Often a major privacy concern after the fact)

# Eavesdropping on a Call

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- How can someone eavesdrop on a SIP call?
- Many ways, including things like listening at a WiFi hotspot
- We'll discuss other ways later in the semester
- For now, let's just assume it's possible

# Legal Eavesdropping on a Call

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- Simplest approach: listen on some link
- Which link is best for targeting a given person?
- Easiest: their access link
- What if they're mobile? Hard — they could be coming from anywhere
- Do you have the physical ability to listen on the VoIP provider's links? What if the VoIP provider is in a distant, unfriendly country?

# Registration Hijacking

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- An attacker can try to register with VP2 as Bob
- If the attacker succeeds, all calls destined for Bob will be routed to the attacker

# Tearing Down Sessions

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- Another false registration attack: tear down calls
- This is a violation of availability

# Abusing the DNS

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Complex Scenarios

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- Call routing is partially controlled by the DNS
- Is it possible to corrupt the DNS answers?
- Under certain circumstances, it's not that hard to do (more details later in the semester)
- By creating fake DNS entries, it's possible to reroute the call to go via an intercept station

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Complex Scenarios

- Again, link eavesdropping and DNS attacks are straightforward
- The task is easier here; proxies (usually) don't move around
- VoIP providers are high-value targets, since they process many calls



# Hacking the Proxies

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Complex Scenarios

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- Is it possible to hack the VoIP proxy servers?
- Sure — why not?
- Conventional phone switches can be (and some are) hacked, but there's a big difference: the attacker can speak a much more complex protocol to a SIP switch than to a PSTN switch, which means they're more vulnerable
- It's hard to do too much damage with just a few touch-tones!
- Aside: fancier services are easier to hack, on both kinds of telephone systems

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- It's hard to hide IP addresses
- The legitimate recipient sees the sender's source IP address; this leaks location data
- Routing the voice traffic via a proxy can thus be a privacy feature

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Complex Scenarios

- Similar in nature to old-style ones
- SIP billing systems are more likely to be Internet-connected
- Must use strong defenses and firewalls to protect them

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Protecting SIP

Alice to VP1

Using IPsec

Proxy to Proxy

Traffic

End-to-End

Signaling Traffic

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Alice to VP1

Using IPsec

Proxy to Proxy  
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Complex Scenarios

- As usual, we'll use crypto to guard against eavesdropping
- The details, though, are tricky

# Alice to VP1

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Alice to VP1

Using IPsec

Proxy to Proxy  
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Complex Scenarios

- Alice has a trust relationship with her proxy
- Authentication is relatively easy
- Usually, TLS is used to protect the TCP session to the proxy
- Alice *must* verify VP1's certificate
- Alice can use passwords or client-side certificates to authenticate herself

# Using IPsec

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Alice to VP1

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Complex Scenarios

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- IPsec is normally difficult to use to protect specific services
- However, if there is an organizational SIP gateway, it might be possible to protect all traffic from the organization to the gateway

# Proxy to Proxy Traffic

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Complex Scenarios

- VP1 may not have a trust relationship with VP2
- How can VP1 get VP2's certificate?
- More precisely, how can VP1 validate it, if they don't share a trust anchor?
- This applies regardless of what security protocol is used (though TLS is the norm)



# End-to-End Signaling Traffic

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Complex Scenarios

- Some signaling traffic must be secure end-to-end
- Example: Bob needs to know, authoritatively, that it's Alice who has called him
- However, the intermediate nodes need to see this
- Solution: digitally sign the data (using S/MIME), but don't encrypt it

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Complex Scenarios

- How do Alice and Bob get a shared key for voice traffic encryption?
- Alice uses S/MIME to send Bob an encrypted traffic key
- But — how does Alice get Bob's certificate?
- There is no general PKI for SIP users
- True end-to-end confidentiality can only happen by prearrangement
- (This statement is more generally true...)

SIP and VoIP

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**Complex Scenarios**

Complex Features

Scenario: A

Secretary

The First Attempt

Oops!

Solution

CallerID

Phone Network

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# Complex Scenarios

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- As always, complexity causes problems
- The specific issue here is complex trust patterns
- Let's look at some extra features and see how they cause trouble

# Scenario: A Secretary

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- Alice tries to call Carol; she reaches Bob, Carol's secretary
- Bob decides the call is worthy of Carol's attention, and wishes to transfer the call to Carol
- Bob's phone sends Alice's phone a message saying "Call Carol, you're authorized"
- Carol's phone has to verify that Bob authorized it

# The First Attempt

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- Bob prepares an *authenticated identity body* (AIB) with his name and the time
- He sends that to Alice along with Carol's SIP URI
- Alice presents the AIB to Carol
- What's wrong?

# Oops!

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- Nothing linked the AIB to this referral
- Alice can give the AIB to someone else
- At least there's a timestamp to protect against replays

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- The AIB sent by Bob needs to include Alice's identity
- Carol's phone needs to check the certificate used in Alice's call setup message, to verify that it's really from Alice
- In particular, Alice's identity in the AIB must match the identity in the certificate



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- Suppose the SIP call is being relayed to the PSTN
- Where does the CallerID information come from?
- Can it be spoofed?

# Phone Network Design

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- The phone network was based on trust — only “real” telephone companies had phone switches
- No authentication was done on information from other switches, including CallerID
- Today, anyone can run a phone switch...

# CallerID and VoIP

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- Run Asterisk, an open source PBX program, on some machine
- Get a leased line to a VoIP-to-PSTN gateway company
- Configure Asterisk to send whatever information you want...
- This abuse is happening now; see [http://www.boston.com/news/globe/magazine/articles/2006/09/24/phony\\_identification/](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/magazine/articles/2006/09/24/phony_identification/)

# The State of Practice

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- Most vendors don't implement the fancy crypto
- VoIP is thus not as secure as it could be (but Skype does do a lot of crypto)
- Beyond that, SIP phones tend to boot themselves over the network — is that connection secure?
- NIST recommends great care in using VoIP — see <http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/nistpubs/800-58/SP800-58-final.pdf>