

TCP Maintenance and Minor Extensions
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TCP RST Diagnostic Payload
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Abstract

This document specifies a diagnostic payload format returned in TCP RST segments. Such payloads are used to share with an endpoint the reasons for which a TCP connection has been reset. Sharing this information is meant to ease diagnostic and troubleshooting.

This specification builds on provisions that are already present in RFC 9293 "Transmission Control Protocol (TCP)". As such, this document does not require any change to RFC 9293.

Discussion Venues

This note is to be removed before publishing as an RFC.

Discussion of this document takes place on the TCP Maintenance and Minor Extensions mailing list (tcpm@ietf.org), which is archived at <https://mailarchive.ietf.org/arch/browse/tcpm/>.

Source for this draft and an issue tracker can be found at <https://github.com/boucadair/draft-boucadair-tcpm-rst-diagnostic-payload>.

Status of This Memo

This Internet-Draft is submitted in full conformance with the provisions of BCP 78 and BCP 79.

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1. Introduction

A TCP connection [RFC9293] can be reset by a peer for various reasons, e.g., received data does not correspond to an active connection. Also, a TCP connection can be reset by an on-path service function (e.g., Carrier Grade NAT (CGN) [RFC6888], NAT64 [RFC6146], or firewall) for several reasons. Typically, a Network Address Translator (NAT) function can generate an RST segment to notify an endpoint upon the expiry of the lifetime of the corresponding mapping entry or because an RST segment was received from a peer (Section 2.2 of [RFC7857]).

A TCP connection can also be closed by a user or an application at any time. However, the peer that receives an RST segment does not have any hint about the reason that led to terminating the connection. Likewise, the application that relies upon such a TCP connection may not easily identify the reason for the connection closure. Troubleshooting such events at the remote side of the connection that receives the RST segment may not be trivial.

This document fills this void by specifying a format of the diagnostic payload that is returned in an RST segment. Returning such data is consistent with the provision in Section 3.5.3 of [RFC9293] for RST segments, especially:

```
| "TCP implementations SHOULD allow a received RST segment to  
| include data (SHLD-2)."
```

This document does not change the conditions under which an RST segment is generated (Section 3.5.2 of [RFC9293]).

The generic procedure for processing an RST segment is specified in Section 3.5.3 of [RFC9293]. Only the deviations from that procedure to insert and validate a diagnostic payload is provided in Section 3. Section 4 provides a set of examples to illustrate the use of TCP RST diagnostic payloads.

This document specifies the format and the overall approach to ease maintaining the list of codes while allowing for adding new codes as needed in the future and accommodating any existing vendor-specific codes. An initial version of error codes is available in Table 2. However, the authoritative source to retrieve the full list of error codes is the IANA-maintained registry (Section 5.1).

Investigation based on some major CGN vendors revealed that RSTs with data are not discarded and are translated according to any matching mapping entry. Moreover, implementation and experimental validation in Linux are detailed in Appendix A.

2. Conventions and Definitions

The key words "MUST", "MUST NOT", "REQUIRED", "SHALL", "SHALL NOT", "SHOULD", "SHOULD NOT", "RECOMMENDED", "NOT RECOMMENDED", "MAY", and "OPTIONAL" in this document are to be interpreted as described in BCP 14 [RFC2119] [RFC8174] when, and only when, they appear in all capitals, as shown here.

This document makes use of the terms defined in Section 4 of [RFC9293].

SEG.LEN is defined in Section 3.3.1 of [RFC9293].

3. RST Diagnostic Payload

The format of the RST diagnostic payload is shown in Figure 1.

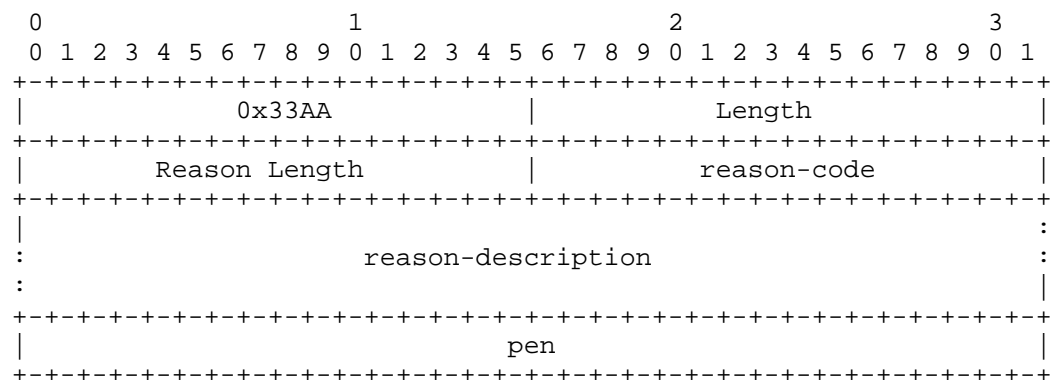


Figure 1: Structure of the RST Diagnostic Payload

The RST diagnostic payload comprises a magic cookie that is used to unambiguously identify an RST payload that follows this specification. It MUST be set to 0x33AA.

The descriptions of other fields shown in Figure 1 are as follows:

Length: Indicates the total length, in octets, of the diagnostic payload that follows.

Reason Length: Indicates the length, in octets, of the reason-description field.

If set to a non-null zero, this means that the reason code is not present.

reason-code: This field, if present, takes a value from an available registry such as the "TCP Failure Causes" registry (Section 5.1). Value 0 is reserved and MUST NOT be used.

reason-description: Includes a brief description of the reset reason encoded as UTF-8 [RFC3629].

This parameter MUST NOT be included if a reason code is supplied; Reason Length MUST be set to 0 for such a case.

This parameter is useful only for reset reasons that are not yet registered or for application-specific reset reasons.

pen: Includes a Private Enterprise Number (PEN) [Private-Enterprise-Numbers].

This parameter MAY be included when the reason code is not taken from the IANA-maintained registry (Section 5.1), but from a vendor-specific registry. That is, if the "pen" parameter is present, then the reason code refers to the registry of the entity specified by the "pen" parameter.

The "pen" parameter MUST be omitted if a reason code refers to the IANA-maintained registry (Section 5.1).

The presence of this field is inferred from the values of Length and Reason Length fields. Specifically, 'Length' MUST be set to "'Reason Length' + 4" if no reason-code is supplied or "8" if a reason code is present.

At least one of "reason-code" and "reason-description" parameters MUST be included in an RST diagnostic payload.

If $\text{SEG.LEN} > \text{Length} + 4$, the receiver processes the diagnostic payload but ignores the rest of the data in the segment payload. If $\text{SEG.LEN} < \text{Length} + 4$, the segment is considered as malformed RST.

Malformed RST diagnostic payload messages that include the magic cookie MUST be silently ignored by the receiver.

A peer that receives a valid diagnostic payload may pass the reset reason information to the local application in addition to the information (MUST-12) described in Section 3.6 of [RFC9293]. That information may also be logged locally, unless a local policy specifies otherwise. How the information is passed to an application and how it is stored locally is implementation-specific.

4. Some Examples

Figure 2 depicts an example of an RST diagnostic payload that is generated to inform the peer that the TCP connection is reset because an ACK was received from that peer while the connection is still in the LISTEN state (Section 3.10.7.2 of [RFC9293]).

```

      0                   1                   2                   3
      0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|                                     |                                     |
|               0x33AA               |               0x04               |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|               0x00               |               0x02               |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+

```

Figure 2: Example of an RST Diagnostic Payload with Reason Code

An RST diagnostic payload may also be sent by an on-path service function. For example, the following diagnostic payload is returned by a NAT function upon expiry of the mapping entry to which the TCP connection is bound (Figure 3).

```

      0                   1                   2                   3
      0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|                                     |                                     |
|               0x33AA               |               0x04               |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|               0x00               |               0x08               |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+

```

Figure 3: Example of an RST Diagnostic Payload to Report Connection Timeout

Figure 4 illustrates an RST diagnostic payload that is returned by a peer that resets a TCP connection for a reason code 1234 defined by a vendor with the private enterprise number 32473.

```

      0                   1                   2                   3
      0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 1
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|               0x33AA               |               0x08               |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|               0x00               |               0x4DE               |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
|                                     |               0x7D9               |
+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+

```

Figure 4: Example of an RST Diagnostic Payload to Report Vendor-Specific Reason Code

Figure 4 uses the Enterprise Number 32473 defined for documentation use [RFC5612].

5. IANA Considerations

5.1. New Registry for TCP Failure Causes

This document requests IANA to create a new registry entitled "TCP Failure Causes" under the "Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) Parameters" registry group [IANA-TCP].

Values are taken from the 1-65535 range.

The assignment policy for this registry is "Expert Review" (Section 4.5 of [RFC8126]).

The designated experts may approve registration once they checked that the new requested code is not covered by an existing code and if the provided reasoning to register the new code is acceptable. A registration request may supply a pointer to a specification where that code is defined. However, a registration may be accepted even if no permanent and readily available public specification is available.

The registry is initially populated with the values listed in Table 1.

Value	Description	Specification (if available)
0	Reserved	[ThisDocument]
1	Illegal Option	Section 3.1 of [RFC9293]
2	Desynchronized state	Section 3.5.1 of [RFC9293]
3	New data is received after CLOSE is called	Sections 3.6.1 and 3.10.7.1 of [RFC9293]
4	ABORT Process	Section 3.10.5 of [RFC9293]

5	Unexpected ACK received by non-synchronized state connection	Section 3.10.7 of [RFC9293]
6	Unexpected SYN in the window	Section 3.10.7 of [RFC9293]
7	Unexpected security compartment	Appendix A.1 of [RFC9293]
8	Malformed Message	[ThisDocument]
9	Not Authorized	[ThisDocument]
10	Resource Exceeded	[ThisDocument]
11	Network Failure	[ThisDocument]
12	Reset received from the peer	[ThisDocument]
13	Destination Unreachable	[ThisDocument]
14	Connection Timeout	[ThisDocument]
15	Too much outstanding data	Section 3.6 of [RFC8684]
16	Unacceptable performance	Section 3.6 of [RFC8684]
17	Middlebox interference	Section 3.6 of [RFC8684]

Table 1: Initial TCP Failure Causes

Note that codes in the 8-14 range can be used by service functions (Carrier Grade NAT (CGN), firewall, proxy, etc.).

6. Operational Considerations

6.1. Multiple RSTs

Per Section 3.6 of [RFC9293], one or more RST segments can be sent to reset a connection.

Sending more RST segments to reset a connection can be used to mitigate deployment contexts where some on-path devices may discard RSTs with payload data.

Whether a TCP endpoint elects to send more than one RST with only a subset of them that include the diagnostic payload is implementation-specific.

6.2. Manageability

TCP server implementations should support the following parameters:

- * A parameter to control the activation of the RST diagnostic.
- * A parameter to accept/discard RSTs with diagnostic payload other than reason cause (i.e., accept or deny RSTs with reason-description).
- * A parameter to set a maximum length of acceptable reason-description, when enabled.
- * A parameter to control whether "empty" RSTs are also sent together with RST with diagnostic payload.
- * A rate-limit of RST with diagnostic payload.
- * Counters to track sent/received RSTs with diagnostic payload.
- * Counters to track received invalid RSTs with diagnostic payload.

7. Security Considerations

[RFC9293] discusses TCP-related security considerations. In particular, RST-specific attacks and their mitigations are discussed in Section 3.10.7.3 of [RFC9293].

In addition to these considerations, it is RECOMMENDED to control the size of acceptable diagnostic payload and keep it as brief as possible. The RECOMMENDED acceptable maximum size of the RST diagnostic payload is 255 octets.

Also, it is RECOMMENDED to avoid leaking privacy-related information as part of the diagnostic payload (e.g., including a description such as "user X resets explicitly the connection" is not recommended). The "reason-description" string, when present, MUST NOT include any private information that an observer would not otherwise have access to.

The presence of vendor-specific reason codes (Section 3) may be used to fingerprint hosts. Such a concern does not apply if the reason codes are taken from the IANA-maintained registry. Implementers are, thus, encouraged to register new codes within IANA instead of maintaining specific registries.

The reason description, when present, MUST NOT be displayed to end users but is intended to be consumed by applications. Such a description may carry a malicious message to mislead the end-user.

8. References

8.1. Normative References

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- [RFC8126] Cotton, M., Leiba, B., and T. Narten, "Guidelines for Writing an IANA Considerations Section in RFCs", BCP 26, RFC 8126, DOI 10.17487/RFC8126, June 2017, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc8126>>.
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- [RFC8684] Ford, A., Raiciu, C., Handley, M., Bonaventure, O., and C. Paasch, "TCP Extensions for Multipath Operation with Multiple Addresses", RFC 8684, DOI 10.17487/RFC8684, March 2020, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc8684>>.
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8.2. Informative References

- [IANA-TCP] "Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) Parameters", <<https://www.iana.org/assignments/tcp-parameters/tcp-parameters.xhtml#>>.

[Private-Enterprise-Numbers]

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[RFC5612] Eronen, P. and D. Harrington, "Enterprise Number for Documentation Use", RFC 5612, DOI 10.17487/RFC5612, August 2009, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc5612>>.

[RFC6146] Bagnulo, M., Matthews, P., and I. van Beijnum, "Stateful NAT64: Network Address and Protocol Translation from IPv6 Clients to IPv4 Servers", RFC 6146, DOI 10.17487/RFC6146, April 2011, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc6146>>.

[RFC6888] Perreault, S., Ed., Yamagata, I., Miyakawa, S., Nakagawa, A., and H. Ashida, "Common Requirements for Carrier-Grade NATs (CGNs)", BCP 127, RFC 6888, DOI 10.17487/RFC6888, April 2013, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc6888>>.

[RFC7252] Shelby, Z., Hartke, K., and C. Bormann, "The Constrained Application Protocol (CoAP)", RFC 7252, DOI 10.17487/RFC7252, June 2014, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc7252>>.

[RFC7857] Penno, R., Perreault, S., Boucadair, M., Ed., Sivakumar, S., and K. Naito, "Updates to Network Address Translation (NAT) Behavioral Requirements", BCP 127, RFC 7857, DOI 10.17487/RFC7857, April 2016, <<https://www.rfc-editor.org/rfc/rfc7857>>.

Appendix A. Implementation and Experimental Validation in Linux

Questions and concerns have been raised regarding whether RST with payload affects the normal termination of flows across different software platforms, operating systems, middleboxes, etc. Even though Section 3.5.3 of [RFC9293] explicitly allows this behavior, a full implementation is needed to widely verify if unexpected cases can happen in the real world.

The overall design in Linux is to pre-allocate a large enough zeroed buffer, put a reset reason code in the first byte and sent it out to verify whether the RST with payload can be possibly declined by any equipment in between two sides and the other side successfully parses the RST with payload.

A.1. Implementation

The following implementation is accomplished on top of Linux 6.16:

***Payload Attachment*:** Allocate a 1000-byte data payload attached to all generated RST packets.

***Reason Code Encoding*:** The first byte of the payload is used to store a predefined reset reason code that is listed in include/net/rstreason.h file, while the remainder of the payload is zero-padded. The reason code is generated by the existing mechanism called TCP reset reasons (<https://git.kernel.org/pub/scm/linux/kernel/git/torvalds/linux.git/commit/?id=d5115a55ffb52>).

***Handling of Reset Types*:** The implementation distinguishes between the two primary reset scenarios in tcp_send_active_reset() and tcp_v4_send_reset() respectively:

- * For an **Active Reset**, initiated proactively by the local system, the payload is placed in the linear area of the socket buffer (sk_buff).
- * For a **Passive Reset**, sent in response to an unexpected or invalid incoming packet, the payload is stored in the non-linear (paged) area of the sk_buff.

Complete patch is shown in Figure 5.

```
diff --git a/include/net/tcp.h b/include/net/tcp.h
index b3815d104340..0b32257774c8 100644
--- a/include/net/tcp.h
+++ b/include/net/tcp.h
@@ -62,6 +62,7 @@ void tcp_time_wait(struct sock *sk, int state, int timeo);
#define MAX_TCP_OPTION_SPACE 40
#define TCP_MIN_SND_MSS 48
#define TCP_MIN_GSO_SIZE (TCP_MIN_SND_MSS - MAX_TCP_OPTION_SPACE)
+#define PAYLOAD_LEN 1000

/*
 * Never offer a window over 32767 without using window scaling. Some
diff --git a/net/ipv4/tcp_ipv4.c b/net/ipv4/tcp_ipv4.c
index 84d3d556ed80..49250e6bd6a1 100644
--- a/net/ipv4/tcp_ipv4.c
+++ b/net/ipv4/tcp_ipv4.c
@@ -741,6 +741,7 @@ static bool tcp_v4_ao_sign_reset(const struct sock *sk, struct sk_buff *skb,
static void tcp_v4_send_reset(const struct sock *sk, struct sk_buff *skb,
                             enum sk_rst_reason reason)
{
+    u32 len = sizeof(struct tcphdr) + REPLY_OPTIONS_LEN + PAYLOAD_LEN;
    const struct tcphdr *th = tcp_hdr(skb);
    struct {
```

```

        struct tcphdr th;
@@ -757,6 +758,7 @@ static void tcp_v4_send_reset(const struct sock *sk, struct sk_buff *
skb,
    #endif
        u64 transmit_time = 0;
        struct sock *ctl_sk;
+
        char buffer[len];
        struct net *net;
        u32 txhash = 0;

@@ -786,7 +788,8 @@ static void tcp_v4_send_reset(const struct sock *sk, struct sk_buff *
skb,
    }

    memset(&arg, 0, sizeof(arg));
-
    arg.iov[0].iov_base = (unsigned char *)&rep;
+
    memset(&buffer, 0, len);
+
    arg.iov[0].iov_base = (unsigned char *)buffer;
    arg.iov[0].iov_len = sizeof(rep.th);

    net = sk ? sock_net(sk) : skb_dst_dev_net_rcu(skb);
@@ -911,6 +914,10 @@ static void tcp_v4_send_reset(const struct sock *sk, struct sk_buff
*skb,
        ctl_sk->sk_mark = 0;
        ctl_sk->sk_priority = 0;
    }
+
    memcpy(buffer, (char *)&rep, arg.iov[0].iov_len);
+
    /* put rst reason into the first byte in payload */
+
    buffer[arg.iov[0].iov_len] = reason;
+
    arg.iov[0].iov_len += PAYLOAD_LEN;
    ip_send_unicast_reply(ctl_sk, sk,
                        skb, &TCP_SKB_CB(skb)->header.h4.opt,
                        ip_hdr(skb)->saddr, ip_hdr(skb)->daddr,
diff --git a/net/ipv4/tcp_output.c b/net/ipv4/tcp_output.c
index b616776e3354..c07dd009a0de 100644
--- a/net/ipv4/tcp_output.c
+++ b/net/ipv4/tcp_output.c
@@ -3628,12 +3628,14 @@ void tcp_send_fin(struct sock *sk)
void tcp_send_active_reset(struct sock *sk, gfp_t priority,
                        enum sk_rst_reason reason)
{
+
    u32 len = MAX_TCP_HEADER + PAYLOAD_LEN;
+
    char payload[PAYLOAD_LEN];
    struct sk_buff *skb;

    TCP_INC_STATS(sock_net(sk), TCP_MIB_OUTRSTS);

    /* NOTE: No TCP options attached and we never retransmit this. */
-
    skb = alloc_skb(MAX_TCP_HEADER, priority);
+
    skb = alloc_skb(len, priority);
    if (!skb) {

```

```
        NET_INC_STATS(sock_net(sk), LINUX_MIB_TCPABORTFAILED);
        return;
@@ -3641,8 +3643,13 @@ void tcp_send_active_reset(struct sock *sk, gfp_t priority,

    /* Reserve space for headers and prepare control bits. */
    skb_reserve(skb, MAX_TCP_HEADER);
+   skb_put(skb, PAYLOAD_LEN);
    tcp_init_nodata_skb(skb, tcp_acceptable_seq(sk),
                        TCPHDR_ACK | TCPHDR_RST);
+   memset(payload, 0, PAYLOAD_LEN);
+   payload[0] = reason;
+   skb_store_bits(skb, 0, payload, PAYLOAD_LEN);
+   TCP_SKB_CB(skb)->end_seq += PAYLOAD_LEN;
    tcp_mstamp_refresh(tcp_sk(sk));
    /* Send it off. */
    if (tcp_transmit_skb(sk, skb, 0, priority))
```

Figure 5: Complete Patch

A.2. Experimental Validation

To ensure a thorough evaluation, a multi-layered experimental methodology was designed, progressing from basic functional checks to complex, real-world compatibility and stability tests. The whole implementation has been deployed in Tencent's production environment for almost six months.

A.2.1. Functional Verification

The basic functionality test is using iperf or iperf3 to construct a normal termination senario. The tcpdump tool with -X option effectively helps to show the [RST+] flag and the 1000-byte payload, confirming that the kernel correctly generated and transmitted the augmented RST packets.

Two servers, designated as Client A and Server B. The test is conducted as following:

1. Start the iperf3 server on Server B (iperf3 -s).
2. Initiate a connection from Client A to Server B (iperf3 -c [IP_of_B]).
3. After the connection is established, one of the iperf3 processes is terminated using the kill command, triggering the kernel to send an RST packet.

4. Simultaneously, tcpdump is run on either host to capture the reset packet using the filter: 'tcp[tcpflags] & tcp-rst != 0' -X -nn -vv -S.

A.2.2. Compatibility Verification

***Hardwares and Kernels*:** Tests were conducted on various Linux distributions (e.g., Ubuntu or CentOS) with different kernel versions. The physical hosts were equipped with a range of network interface cards (NICs), including Intel i40e, ixgbe, and Mellanox mlx5.

***Virtualization*:** The mechanism was tested in a virtualized environment where the VM used a virtio_net driver and the host employed DPDK to redirect packets in the host.

***Middleboxes*:** Tests were performed with Layer 4 (L4) and Layer 7 (L7) gateways placed between the client and server to verify correct packet parsing and forwarding.

***Wide Area Network (WAN)*:** The setup was tested over long-haul international links to simulate complex conditions, including China-to-Singapore (RTT > 30ms) and China-to-Germany (RTT > 200ms).

In conclusion, across all complex environment tests, the RST packets with payloads were successfully received by the peer. No instances of packets being dropped or mishandled by intermediate middleboxes, gateways, or diverse hardware and software configurations were observed.

Acknowledgments

The "diagnostic payload" name is inspired by Section 5.5.2 of [RFC7252] that was cited by Carsten Bormann in the tcpm mailing list.

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