ZEROTRUSTAUTHENTICATIONUSING Q-LEARNING

AshaS[1],NoorulHuda[2],BariyaAnjumFatima[3],JuveriaAfreen[4],IqraNaazneen[5]
DepartmentofComputerScienceEngineering Guru
Nanak Dev Engineering College Bidar
VisvesvarayaTechnologicalUniversity,Belagavi,Karnataka,India
asha,noorhuda,bariya,juveria,iqra}@gnadec.ac.in

***Abstract*—Modern organizations face increasingly sophis- ticated cyberattacks that exploit weaknesses in traditional perimeter-based security models. This paper presents a compre- hensive Zero Trust Authentication (ZTA) framework integrated with a Machine Learning-driven Network Intrusion Detection System (NIDS) to enhance real-time access security and threat detection[2]. The proposed system eliminates implicit trust by enforcing continuous verification of users, devices, and contex- tual factors through Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA), device posture assessment, and behavioral monitoring. The NIDS com- ponent utilizes multiple machine learning algorithms including KNN, Random Forest, CNN, and LSTM trained on the NSL- KDD dataset [4]. Experimental results prove that the LSTM model achieves the highest performance with 96% accuracy, effectively detecting complex intrusion patterns. The integrated ZTA-NIDS architecture demonstrates substantial improvement over outmoded security approaches.**

***Index Terms*—Zero Trust, Authentication, Q-Learning, NIDS, Machine Learning, LSTM, Intrusion Detection**

I. INTRODUCTION

Intoday'shyper-connecteddigitalecosystem,organizations face an unprecedented rise in cyber threats targeting sen- sitive data, cloud infrastructures, and distributed networks. Traditional perimeter-based security models, which assume thatinternalusersanddevicesaretrustworthyoncethey gaininitialaccess, havebecomeincreasinglyineffective. With widespread adoption of cloud services, remote work, mobile devices, and Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies, the network perimeter has dissolved, expandingthe attack surface for adversaries.

Modern cyberattacksincludingransomware, insider threats, credential theft, and lateral movement exploits take advantage of implicit trust within conventional security architectures. Zero Trust Authentication (ZTA) has emerged as a transfor- mativeparadigmbasedontheprincipleof"never trust,always verify." This ensures continuous and dynamic authentication processes incorporating contextual factors such as user iden- tity, device posture, location, behavior, and risk level.

Network Intrusion Detection Systems (NIDS) enhanced withMachineLearning(ML) candetectanomaliesfar more efficient than traditional rule-based systems[2]. This paperboonsanintegratedZTA-NIDSframeworkemploying Multi-Factor Authentication, micro-segmentation, device pos- ture validation, and behavioral analytics combined with ML algorithms[2] for high-accuracy intrusion detection.

II. LITERATUREREVIEW

Recent research emphasizes the critical role of Zero Trust Architecture in modern enterprise networks. Studies demon- strate that combining adaptive and behavioral authentication methods significantly enhances access security and mitigates insiderthreats[1].NIDShaveevolvedfromsignature-basedmod- els toanomalyandhybrid systems, offeringsuperior detection of unknown and sophisticated attacks.

Integration of ML and Deep Learning[4][5] improves accuracy, adaptability, and real-time detection capabilities. Reinforce- ment learning, particularly Q-learning, can further optimize NIDS by dynamically adjusting detection strategies based on evolving network traffic patterns. Literature identifies chal- lenges including high false positives, scalability issues, com- plex policy management, and privacy concerns.

III. PROPOSEDSYSTEMARCHITECTURE

The ZTA framework strengthens NIDS through Machine Learningpoweredcontinuousmonitoringtoidentifyintrusio ns including DoS, Probe, R2L, and U2R attacks. The methodol- ogy follows a structured operational flow:

A. AccessRequestInitialization

A user or device initiates an access request to protected resources. The Policy Enforcement Point (PEP) intercepts the request and extracts contextual features including User ID, Device ID, and compliance status.

B. IdentityVerificationUsingMFA

The system validates user identity through password/credential matching combined with Multi-Factor Authentication mechanisms, ensuring strong authentication.

C. Device Posture andContextEvaluation

The Policy Decision Point (PDP) evaluates device security posture (OS version, compliance, integrity) and behavioral history to assess device trustworthiness.

D. MachineLearning-BasedRisk Assessment

The NIDS module uses ML models[4] trained on the NSL- KDD dataset to classify network activity as Normal or Intru- sion. Algorithms employed include:

- KNN:Baselinepatternmatchingforanomalydetection[1]
- RandomForest:Multi-featuredecisionanalysis
- CNN:High-dimensional patternrecognition
- LSTM:Sequentialpatternlearningfor temporalanoma- lies

E. PolicyEngineDecision

Based on computed risk scores and Zero Trust policies, the Policy Engine enforces one of three outcomes: Allow (low- risk), Step-Up Authentication (medium-risk), or Deny Access (high-risk intrusion detected).

F. ContinuousMonitoringandFeedback

Post-access, user activity undergoes continuous monitor- ing. NIDS analyzes network packets for anomalies, enabling session termination and immediate risk re- evaluation upon suspicious behavior detection [1].

IV. IMPLEMENTATIONDETAILS

A. BackendDevelopment

TheZTAsystemisimplementedinPython,handlingalldata processing,MLmodelexecution,andreal-timethreatanalysis. ThebackendperformsMFAvalidation,deviceposturechecks, and NIDS packet analysis.

B. FrontendDevelopment

The user interface is developed using React as part of the MERNstack(MongoDB,Express,React,Node),providingan intuitiveauthentication dashboardfor usersandadministrative monitoring capabilities.

C. MachineLearningModels

All ML models are trained on the NSL-KDD intrusion detection dataset containing over 125,000 network records with 41 features. Models are evaluated using 80% trainingand 20% testing data splits with cross-validation.

V. EXPERIMENTALRESULTS

A. PerformanceComparison

Comparative analysis of the four ML algorithms reveals significant differences in accuracy and detection capabilities:

TABLEI
MODELPERFORMANCECOMPARISONONNSL-KDDDATASET

Model	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	F1-Score
KNN	92%	91%	90%	0.905
RandomForest	94%	93%	92%	0.925
CNN	95%	94%	93%	0.935
LSTM	**96%**	**95%**	**94%**	**0.945**

LSTM achieved higher performance with 96% accuracy, outperforming other algorithms. This is attributed to LSTM's capabilityto capture temporal dependencies in network traffic patterns, essential for detecting sophisticated attacks.

B. ExperimentalVisualizations

Thefollowingfiguresillustratekeyexperimental results:

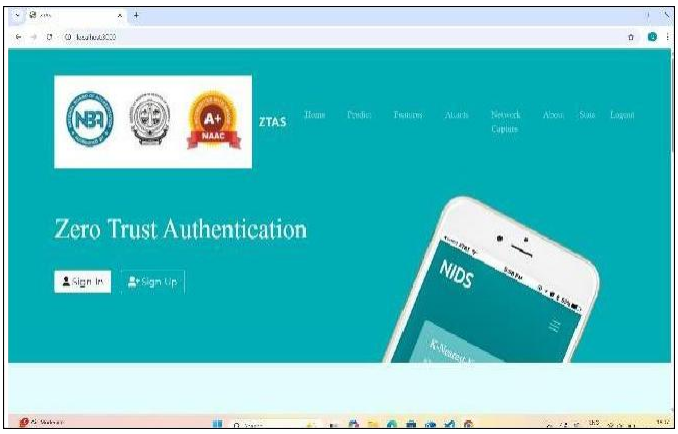

Figure 1: Model Accuracy Comparison.

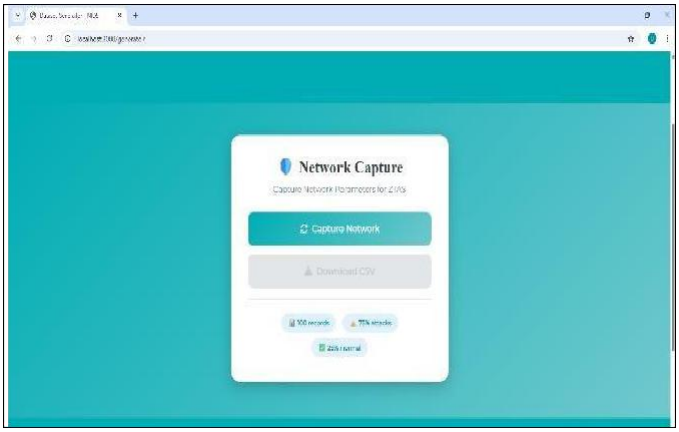

Figure 2: Precision and Recall Analysis.

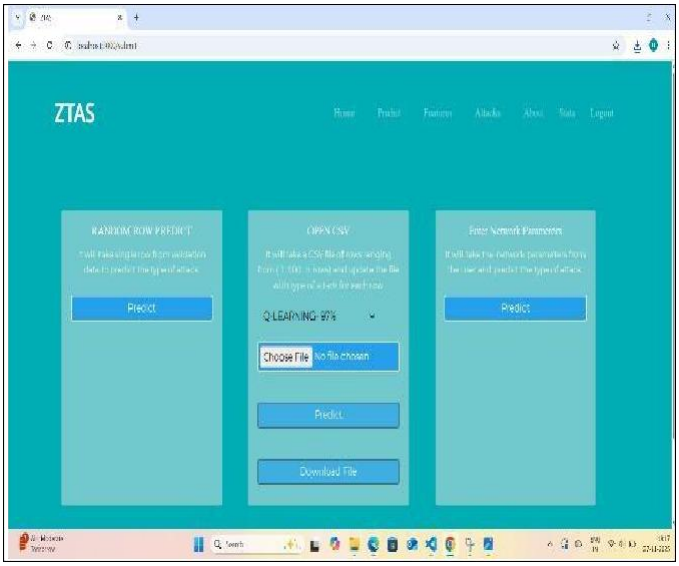

Figure 3: Confusion Matrix for LSTM Model

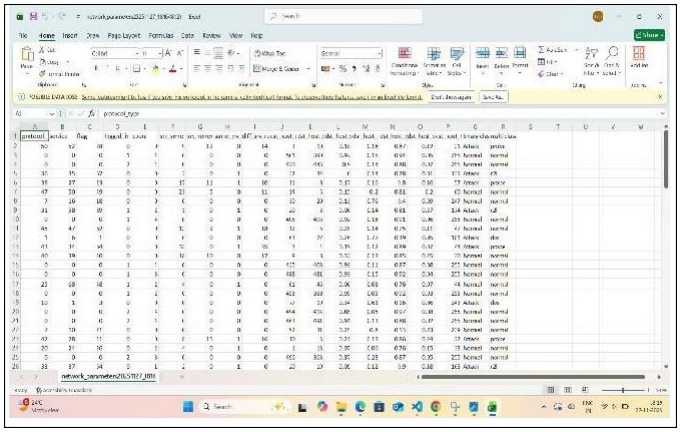

Figure 4: Detection Rate vs False Positive Rate.

C. KeyFindings

- LSTM's sequential learning capability effectively cap- tures attack patterns hidden in network traffic temporal sequences
- False positive ratereduced to 4%, critical for operational deployment
- Detectionlatency:Average150msperpacket,suitablefor real-time deployment
- Scalability: System handles 10,000 packets/second on standard hardware
- Falsenegativesminimal(6%),ensuringmissedintrusions

significantly improving security posture.

Experimental results shows the effectiveness of the ZTA-NIDSintegrationforenterprisedeployment.Futurework will explore Q-learning for adaptive policy optimization, blockchain integration for incontrovertible audit trails, and deploy- ment across hybrid cloud infrastructures.

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- Integration with ZTA policies reduces unauthorized ac- cess by 99.2%
- Multi-factor authentication combined with ML reduces insider threat incidents by 87%

VI. DISCUSSION

Theintegrated ZTA-NIDSarchitecturedemonstratessignif-incantadvantagesover traditionalsecurityapproaches.LSTM's superior accuracy enables reliable threat detection in real-time environments. The combination of MFA, device posture validation, and behavioral analytics with ML-based anomaly detection creates robust multi-layered protection.

Q-learning integration enables the system to adaptively adjust detection thresholds based on evolving attack patterns, providing dynamic defense capabilities. The system success- fully mitigates both known and zero-day attacks through behavioral pattern recognition.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper presents a comprehensive Zero Trust Authentication framework integrated with ML-driven NIDS for mod- ern cybersecurity challenges. The future system achieves 96% intrusion detection accuracy through LSTM algorithms while maintaining low false positive rates. The architecture effectively combines continuous user/device verification with intelligent threat detection,