cpacket NETWORKS

Application Note

Isolating Network Problems with the cCloud™ Visibility Suite

How to Identify and Isolate Network Problems in the Cloud to Reduce Service Outages

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Highlights

- Learn how to acquire packet data in Cloud environments
- Learn about network Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
- Learn how to isolate network problems in Hybrid-Cloud infrastructures

Isolating Network Problems

This Application Note is intended for network, security, application, and operational teams to understand the process of efficiently isolating network problems in today's cloud environments, including hybrid infrastructures. This is important because when issues arise, IT team members often spend time trying to isolate the problem to know who is best suited to troubleshoot and resolve it. Isolating network issues with various teams and exonerating the network infrastructure is always very frustrating!

Network Packet data and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) provide the foundational network data and insights that facilitate root cause analysis (RCA) that can be challenging depending on which operational team owns the infrastructure layer under scrutiny. This can lead to time delays with stressful finger-pointing between infrastructure owners and Cloud Service Providers.

This application note will step you through instrumenting public cloud infrastructure for visibility, optimizing RCA and the overall Operational Efficiency (OE) of the IT team.

Network Visibility for Cloud Infrastructure

The NetOps team often takes the lead in isolating a problem to determine whether the network is at fault and communicating that result. The NetOps investigation also often provides clues to the areas of concern and which IT domain owns the problem. Therefore, network visibility is vital to efficiently isolating and solving IT problems.

Network visibility fabric, Network Packet Brokers (NPB) specifically, ensure that packets are replicated and delivered to the correct personnel, dashboards and performance management tools are key to effective troubleshooting. Every troubleshooting effort begins with RCA that relies on network visibility, especially since a network failure is often blamed first.

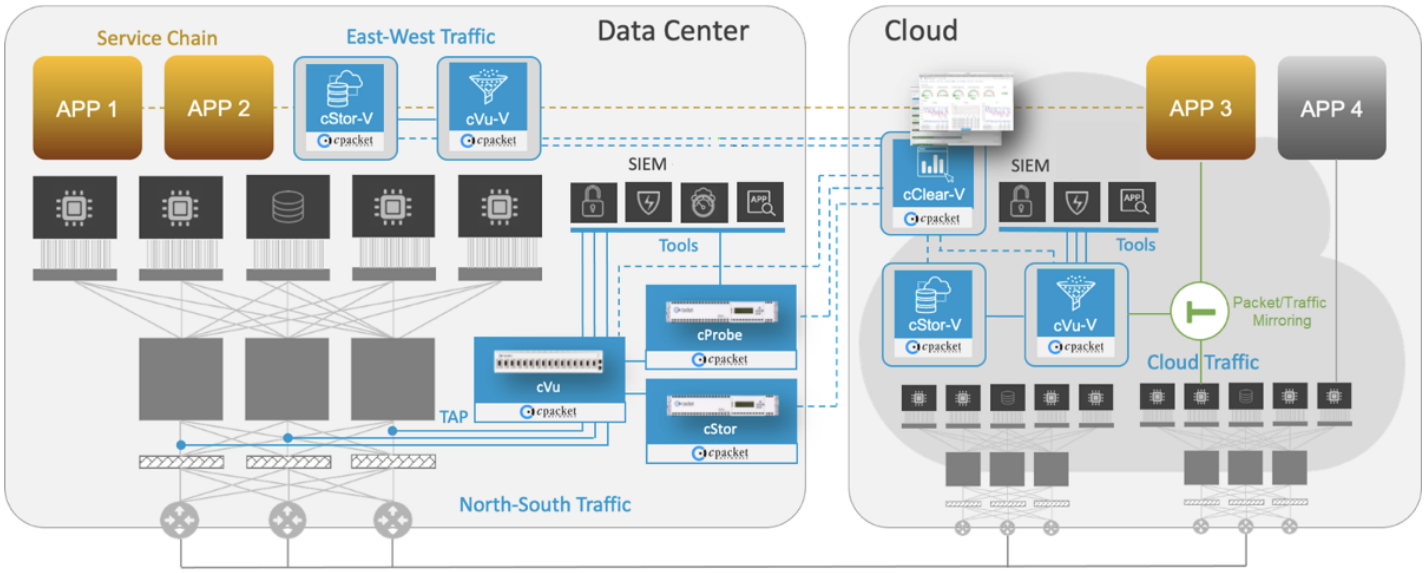

Figure 1: Hybrid-Cloud Observability Architecture

If your IT infrastructure is single-cloud, multi-cloud, or hybrid, you will need to gain visibility from streamed and stored network packet data throughout your entire environment. You'll want your cloud visibility fabric and network packet data to be holistic and uniform for hybrid infrastructure to minimize tool sprawl, manual correlation, and RCA.

cCloud Visibility Suite Appliances

The cPacket Networks cCloud Visibility Suite has several components that perform packet acquisition, replication, filtering, forwarding, storage, and analytics. Altogether it provides vital visibility for cloud infrastructure without placing agents or probes into the production workload host, virtual machine (VM), or Application Layer. Analytics applied to acquired network packets provide KPIs, that along with the raw data, can be exported via API, presented in dashboards, and trigger actionable alerts. Figure 1 below shows an example of hybrid infrastructure, including physical and virtual appliances for network visibility.

At cPacket, we know the importance of the "4Ws" of pinpointing the root cause of problems, especially complex and hard to diagnose problems. The "4Ws" are: What, Where, When, and Why? Organizations deploy instances of the cVu®-V Virtualized Network Packet Broker appliance into the infrastructure to provide lossless monitors to acquire, filter, replicate, and forward packets from native and custom vantage points to multiple targets and tools. Network monitors strategically located in the network infrastructure forward traffic to security, forensics, NDR, performance, and packet capture tools. cPacket cStor® Packet Capture appliance provides network packet storage and archiving for forensic investigation, and the cClear® Analytics Engine appliance provides the KPI visualizations through a single pane of glass.

Network metrics data and telemetry increasingly provide actionable insights into network flow behavior and anomalies. The deluge of data is overwhelming, including noise from noncritical events, logs, and metrics. The shared responsibilities in the cloud and layered network ownership create increasingly challenging incident ownership, troubleshooting, and dealing with the SLA process for today's hybrid operational teams. Incident Response optimization and reducing Mean Time to Resolution (MTTR) become the focus when dealing with multiple support teams and organizations quickly getting to the data! Not only do we deal with the operational ping pong with our server, platform, or DevOps teams, now we must factor in Cloud Service Provider support teams requesting PCAP data and analysis increasing time to RCA.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Let's first review a few definitions that are listed in Table 1 that will facilitate the use-cases and examples that follow.

Parameters	Definition
Session 5 tuple	Identify the session with Client IP, Server IP, Client Port, Server Port, IP Protocol (always TCP)
Client	dpoint that sent the SYN packet
Server	The endpoint that received the SYN packet and sent the SYN-ACK
RTT From Server	Round trip time as measured between the packet sent by the client to the acknowledgment sent by the server
RTT To Server	Round trip time as measured between the packet sent by the server to the acknowledgment sent by the client
Retransmissions Server	The total number of retransmissions from the server-side. Retransmission is considered when the packet has a sequence number that goes backward
Retransmissions Client	The total number of retransmissions from the client-side. Retransmission is considered when the packet has a sequence number that goes backward
SYN Failure	The session had SYN packet but without SYN-ACK, indicate a security issue or server issue or network issue
Missing SYN	The session had a SYN-ACK packet, but no SYN packet might indicate security threat or asymmetric routing
Z-Win Server count	The total count of packets with TCP window set to zero from the server
Z-Win Client count	The total count of packets with TCP window set to zero from the client
[TCP] Sessions	Sessions represent a TCP connection. TCP sessions are two-sided and have a "client" and a "server". The client is the endpoint that sent the SYN message, and the server is the endpoint that responded with a SYN-ACK. This relationship has to be maintained during the session. TCP sessions are identified by the duration of the session, the number of packets and bytes of the session, retransmission, window-size (MinWin), response-time (RSP-Time), and round-trip time (RTT).
TCP Retransmission	TCP retransmissions occur in many ways, and different tools, including Wireshark, have different methods to identify and report them. cPacket uses a simple algorithm by which a retransmission is counted every time the sequence number in a TCP packet goes backward

Table 1: Relevant KPI Definitions

Figure 2 below shows a typical client-server TCP connection flow. A cVu-V Virtual Network Packet Broker is used as an agentless monitor in the conversation path that reports network KPIs to help understand the health of the connection flow and latency metrics.

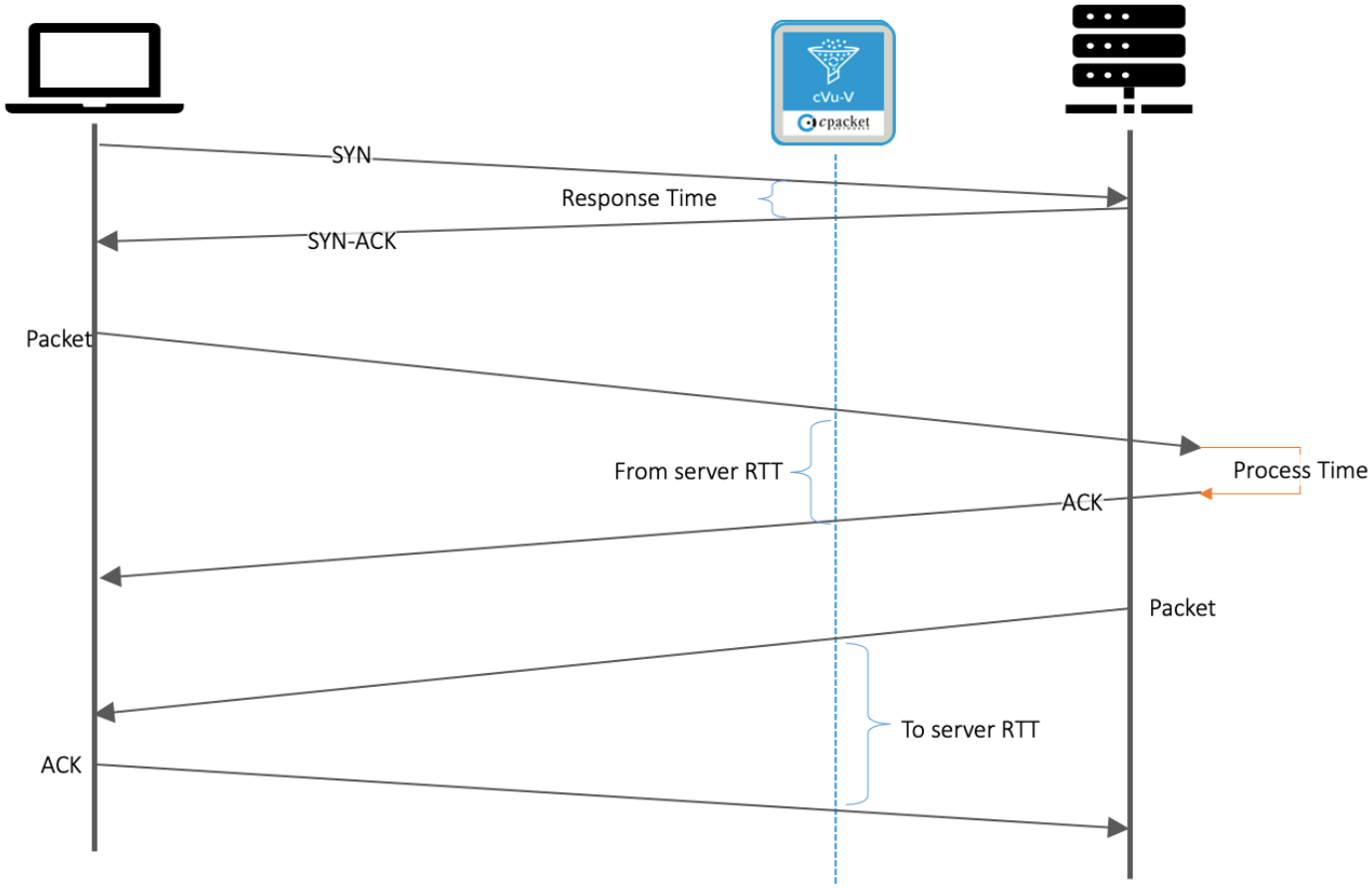

Figure 2 – TCP Connection Flow

Isolating Network Issues

D When problems arise, the Help Desk receives an incident ticket that kicks off an RCA effort to identify the root cause of the problem and understand its impact. Once the root cause is known, the problem can be isolated, typically one of these domains: client device(s), servers, virtual machines, application (including underlying services), or network services. Determining where the problem is, such as a VM, instance, application, service, or network, enables the IT team to respond appropriately.

If the problem is due to a VM or cloud instance, knowing the IP address of what has failed or malfunctioned completes the isolation of the problem so that remediation can proceed. Let's take an example of a reported service down, or the user experience is impacted. Once the IP address of the problematic service is known, you can use the cPacket cClear®-V Analytics Engine appliance to download the PCAP file for the time of the incident. To do so, you'll want to select **cClear> Capture**

Enter the reported Server IP address and time period under investigation and add any filtering to reduce the noise in the PCAP file. Then click **Select> Download**

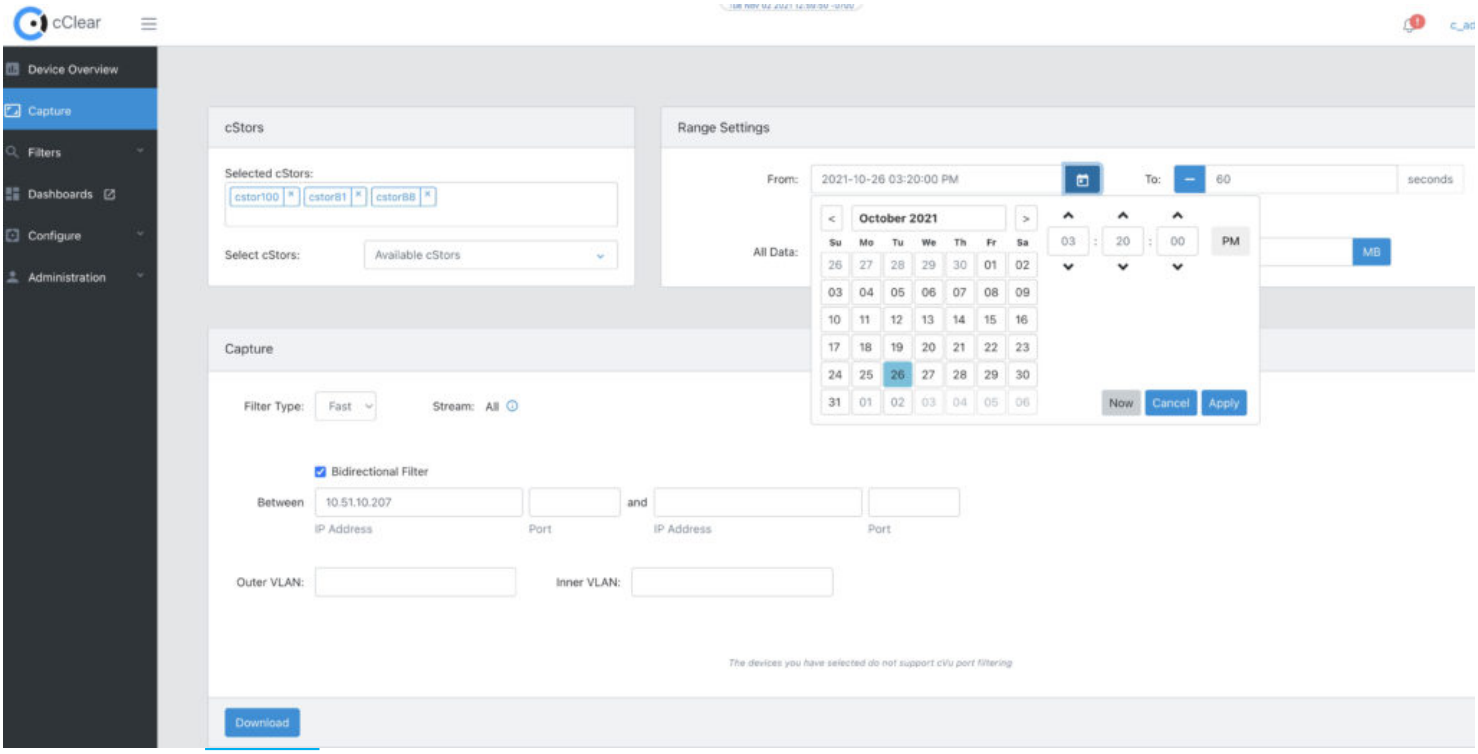

Figure 3 – Select Download PCAP for 10.51.10.207

It is that easy to group packets from across multiple vantage points in the network and download them as a single PCAP file. Select the “Range Settings” for the incident time period under investigation to filter packet details on the archived forensic data. Figure 4 shows an example PCAP file with out-of-order packets.

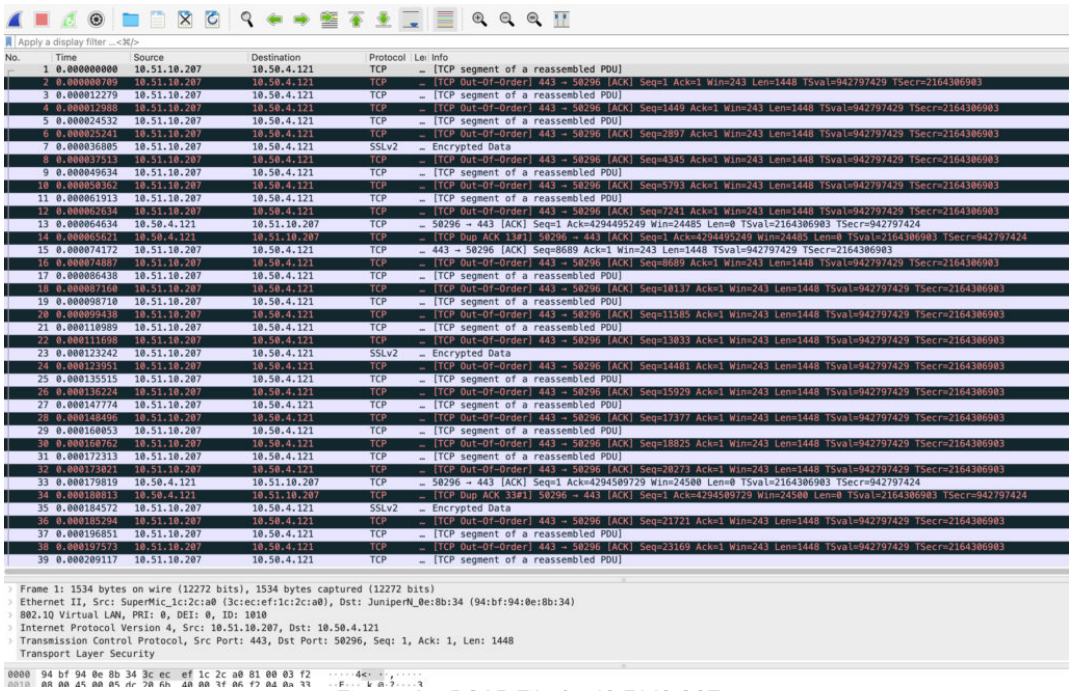

Figure 4 – PCAP File for 10.51.10.207

If you do not have the specific client/server details, then you will need to identify them using the cPacket cClear®-V Analytics Engine, which is done by selecting **Dashboards> TCP Health Dashboard**

Figure 5 below is a high-level TCP Health dashboard that displays the network segments horizontally (i.e., DMZ, AWS, LAB) with relevant KPIs listed in columns, which is an excellent high-level starting point. This tells you which network service or key performance indicators are signaling problems versus operating normally. This gives the operator a high-level view of the network segments and a general indication of health. The TCP Health dashboard very quickly isolates the incident to the LAB segment by showing the health and performance for the past five minutes.

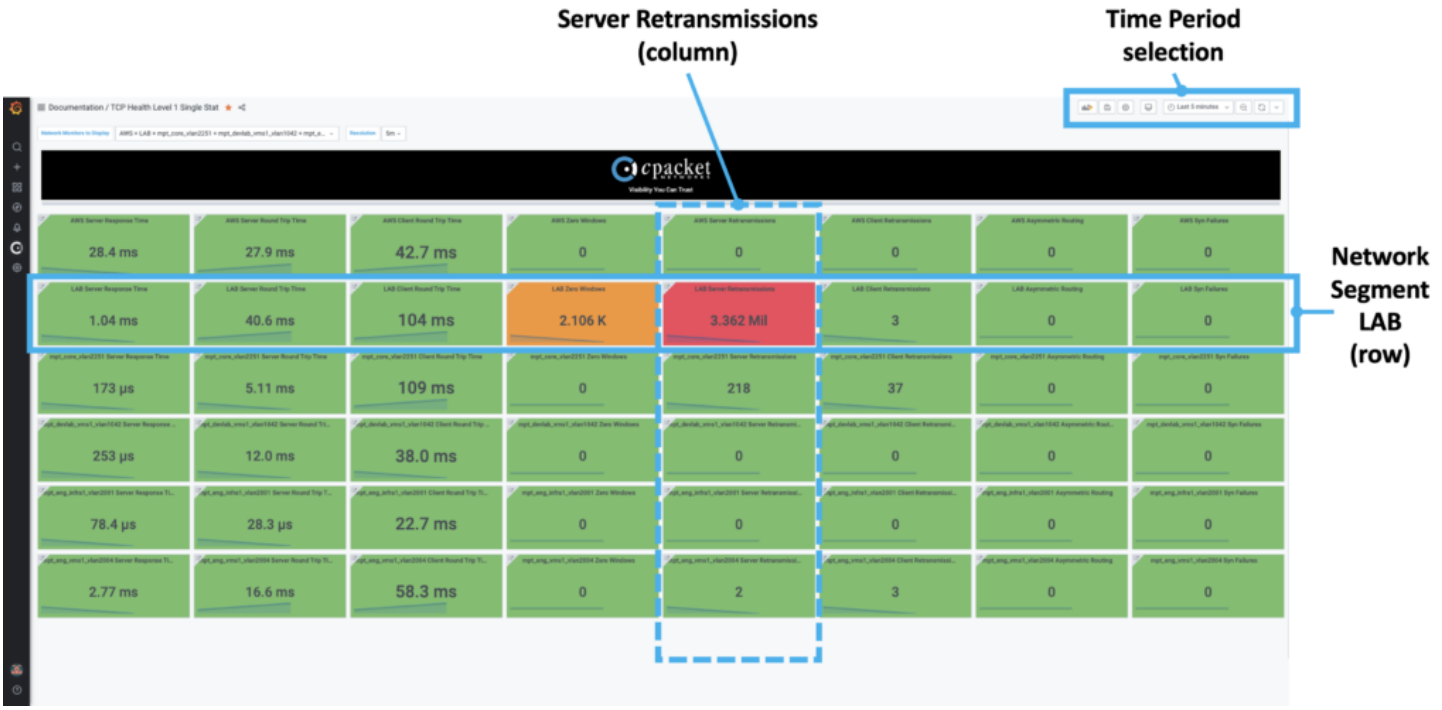

Figure 5 – TCP Health Dashboard

At this point, you and your team have valuable insights - the What, Where, and When that isolate the problem and determine the root cause.

By clicking on the LAB Server Retransmissions KPI (red box), this will take you to a drill-down visualization showing the IP addresses in the flow for the last 5-minutes (Figure 6). This view will show you both the client and server involved in the Server Retransmissions.

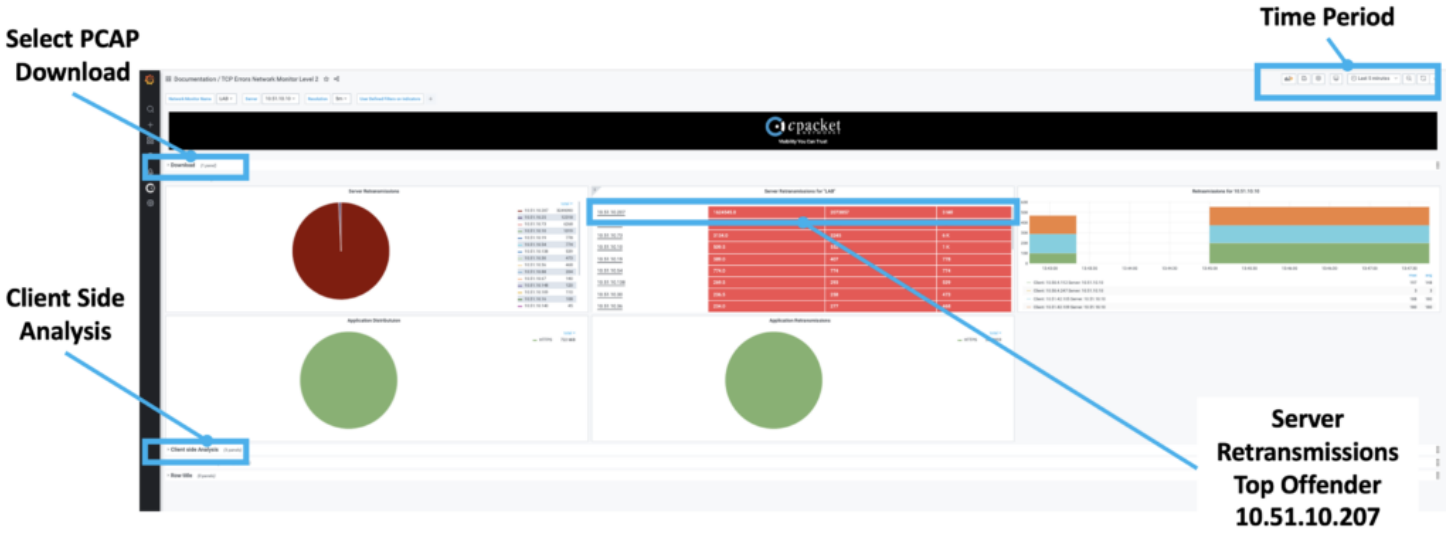

Figure 6 – TCP Errors Level 2 – Server-Side Analysis

Now you have the IP addresses we are interested in, selecting the download is very simple, as shown in Figure 7. There are options for filtering, including Berkley Packet Filtering (BPF), that allow you to home in on the data of interest.

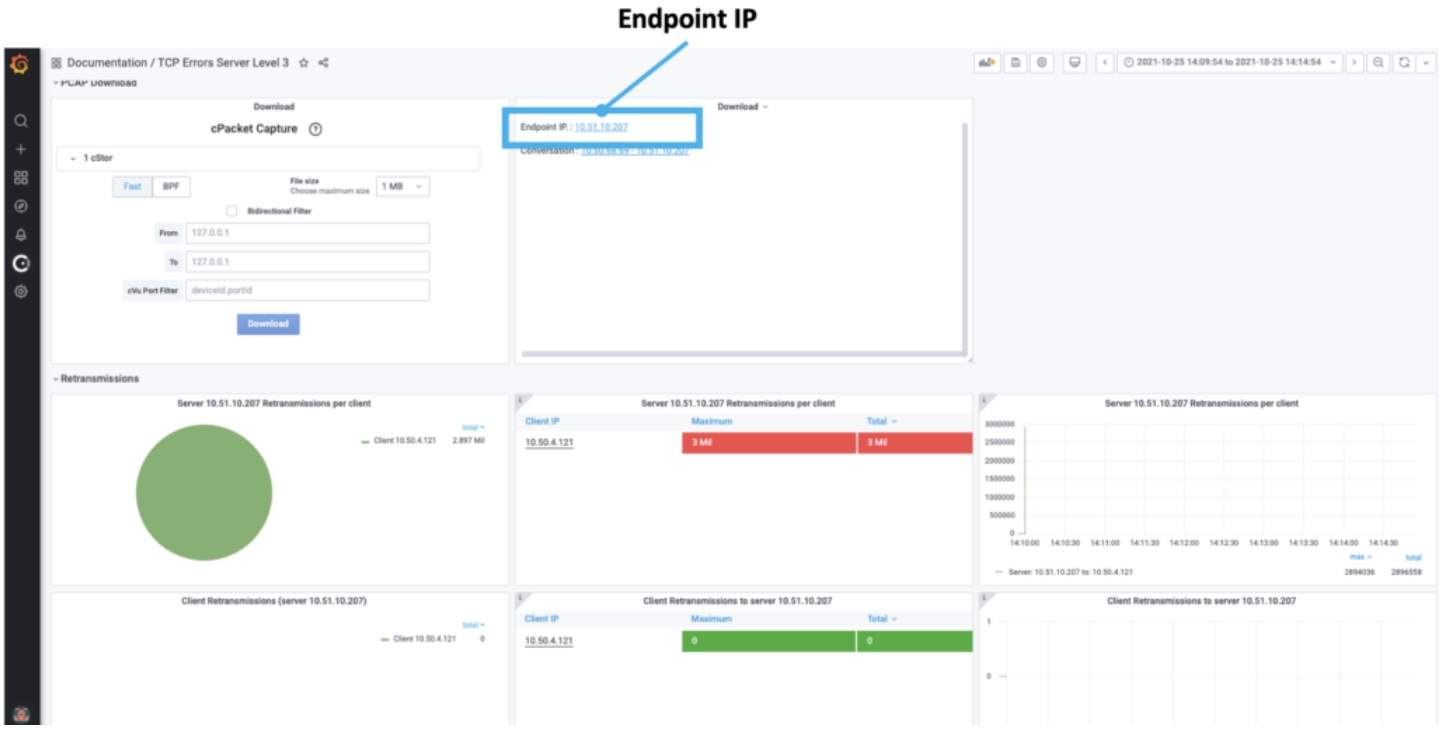

Figure 7 – Select Download PCAP 10.51.10.207

In this incident example, we discovered the network was operating as expected. The connectivity between the two offending hosts was generating out-of-order TCP sequence packets. This is the time to engage with the server and/or application team to let them know further investigation of the two nodes in the LAB network requires detailed inspection. This enables them to efficiently isolate the problem by giving them access to the network packet data and KPIs or sending a PCAP file.

The team discovered the port 443 connection was coming from a development vSphere VM instance to an engineering server in a hung state. The system was no longer responding to user inputs, but its IP address was still responding.

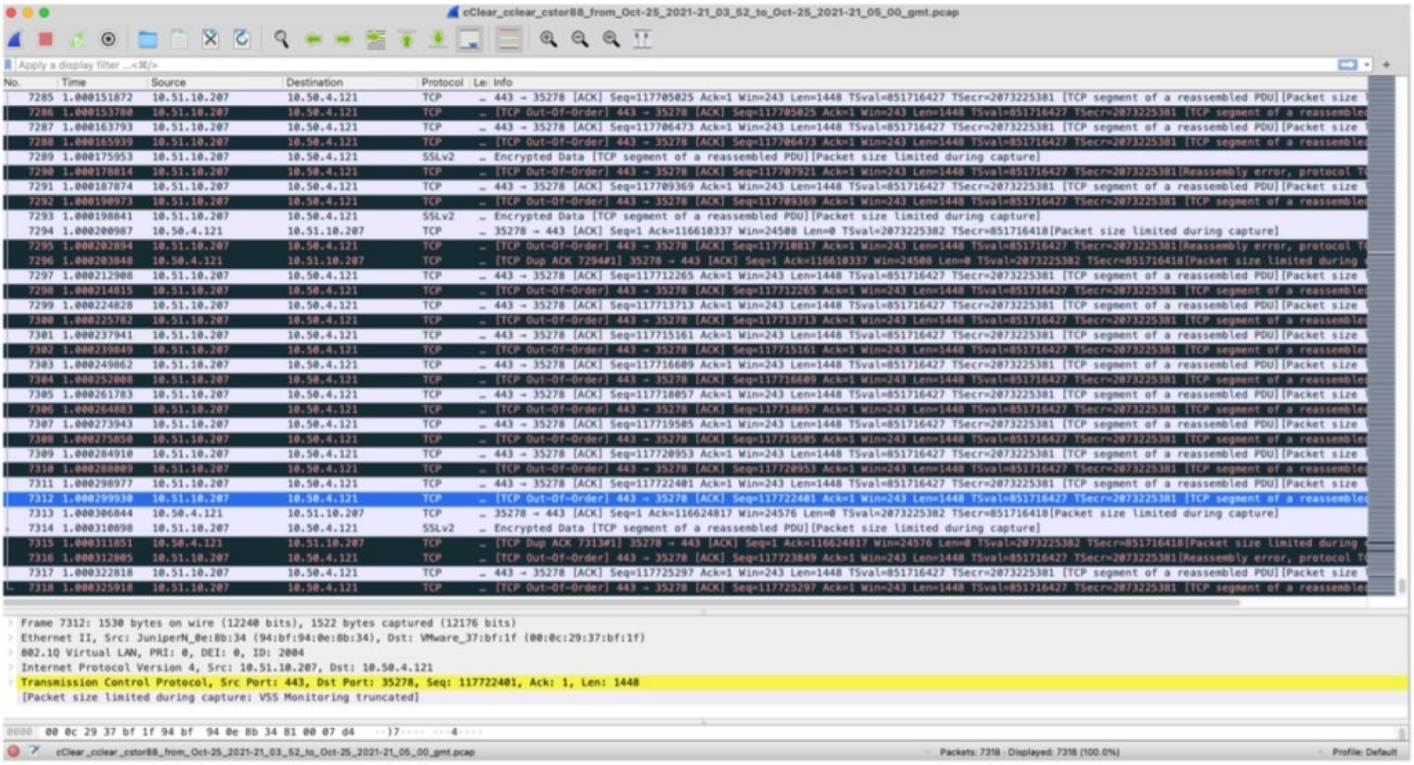

Figure 8 – Wireshark PCAP Forensic file for 10.51.10.207

Summary for Isolating Network Problems

This document helps you navigate the challenge of managing a large amount of network telemetry data to efficiently isolate problems and reduce the back and forth between operational teams. Faster isolation and root cause determination is essential to the NetOps team because the network is typically guilty until proven innocent (which is somewhat jokingly referred to as the meantime to innocence).

When you need to isolate and troubleshoot network, server, or application problems, you will need to leverage the output of the cCloud Visibility Suite, which are streamed and stored packet data plus KPIs from analytics for troubleshooting and isolating Network, Server, or Application problems. We used an example to show how network problems are isolated after too many Server Retransmissions occurred. This resulted in discovering the IP addresses involved in the connection flow and the PCAP file available for analysis.

This application note showed you how to use the cCloud Visibility Suite, the packet data it provides, and the steps to take to solve problems. Hence, giving much greater confidence when working on a high-priority incident during an enormously stressful time will ensure operational teams effectively avoid excessive outages.

Related Information:

cPacket Cloud Observability for AWS – Solution Brief
cPacket Intelligent Observability Platform for Azure – Solution Brief