Introduction to the Cisco ASA

The Cisco ASA provides advanced stateful firewall and VPN concentrator functionality in one device as well as integrated services with add-on modules. The ASA includes many advanced features, such as multiple security contexts (similar to virtualized firewalls), clustering (combining multiple firewalls into a single firewall), transparent (Layer 2) firewall or routed (Layer 3) firewall operation, advanced inspection engines, IPsec VPN, SSL VPN, and clientless SSL VPN support, and many more features.

Note ASDM supports many ASA versions. The ASDM documentation and online help includes all of the latest features supported by the ASA. If you are running an older version of ASA software, the documentation might include features that are not supported in your version. Please refer to the feature history table for each chapter to determine when features were added. For the minimum supported version of ASDM for each ASA version, see Cisco ASA Compatibility. See also Special, Deprecated, and Legacy Services, on page 17.

ASDM Requirements

ASDM Java Requirements

You can install ASDM using Oracle JRE 8.0. OpenJRE is not supported.

Note ASDM is not tested on Linux.

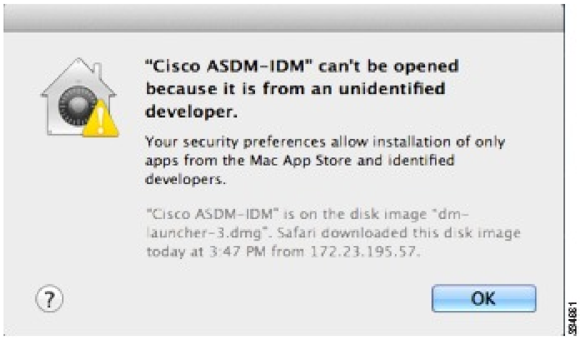
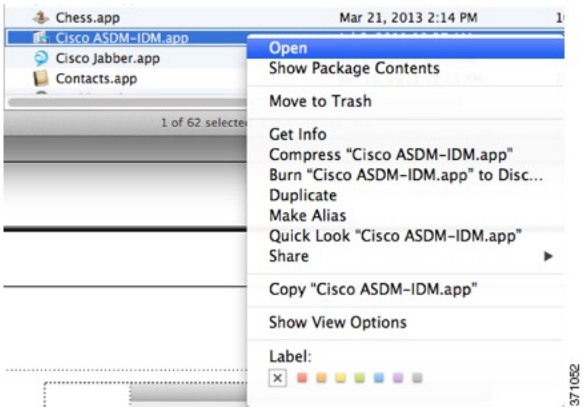
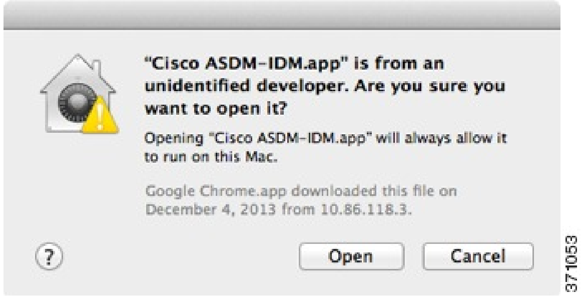
Table 1: ASA and ASA FirePOWER: ASDM Operating System and Browser Requirements

Operating System	Browser				Oracle JRE
	Internet Explorer	Firefox	Safari	Chrome	
Microsoft Windows (English and Japanese): 10 8 7 Server 2012 R2 Server 2012 Server 2008	Yes	Yes	No support	Yes	8.0
Apple OS X 10.4 and later	No support	Yes	Yes	Yes (64-bit version only)	8.0

ASDM Compatibility Notes

The following table lists compatibility caveats for ASDM.

Conditions	Notes
Windows 10	"**This app can't run on your PC**" error message. When you install the ASDM Launcher, Windows 10 might replace the ASDM shortcut target with the Windows Scripting Host path, which causes this error. To fix the shortcut target: **1.** Choose **Start** > **Cisco ASDM-IDM Launcher**, and right-click the **Cisco ASDM-IDM Launcher** application. **2.** Choose **More** > **Open file location**. Windows opens the directory with the shortcut icon. **3.** Right click the shortcut icon, and choose **Properties**. **4.** Change the **Target** to: **C:\Windows\System32\wscript.exe invisible.vbs run.bat** **5.** Click **OK**.
OS X	On OS X, you may be prompted to install Java the first time you run ASDM; follow the prompts as necessary. ASDM will launch after the installation completes.

Conditions	Notes
OS X 10.8 and later	You need to allow ASDM to run because it is not signed with an Apple Developer ID. If you do not change your security preferences, you see an error screen.  "Cisco ASDM-IDM" can't be opened because it is from an unidentified developer. Your security preferences allow installation of only apps from the Mac App Store and identified developers. "Cisco ASDM-IDM" is on the disk image "dm-launcher-3.dmg". Safari downloaded this disk image today at 3:47 PM from 172.23.195.57. 1. To allow ASDM to run, right-click (or Ctrl-Click) the Cisco ASDM-IDM Launcher icon, and choose **Open**.  Chess.app Mar 21, 2013 2:14 PM Cisco ASDM-IDM.app Cisco Jabber.app Contacts.app 1 of 62 selecte Open Show Package Contents Move to Trash Get Info Compress "Cisco ASDM-IDM.app" Burn "Cisco ASDM-IDM.app" to Disc... Duplicate Make Alias Quick Look "Cisco ASDM-IDM.app" Share Copy "Cisco ASDM-IDM.app" Show View Options Label: 371052 2. You see a similar error screen; however, you can open ASDM from this screen. Click **Open**. The ASDM-IDM Launcher opens.  "Cisco ASDM-IDM.app" is from an unidentified developer. Are you sure you want to open it? Opening "Cisco ASDM-IDM.app" will always allow it to run on this Mac. Google Chrome.app downloaded this file on December 4, 2013 from 10.86.118.3.

Conditions	Notes
Requires Strong Encryption license (3DES/AES) on ASA **Note** Smart licensing models allow initial access with ASDM without the Strong Encryption license.	ASDM requires an SSL connection to the ASA. You can request a 3DES license from Cisco: **1.** Go to www.cisco.com/go/license. **2.** Click **Continue to Product License Registration**. **3.** In the Licensing Portal, click **Get Other Licenses** next to the text field. **4.** Choose **IPS, Crypto, Other...** from the drop-down list. **5.** Type **ASA** in to the **Search by Keyword** field. **6.** Select **Cisco ASA 3DES/AES License** in the **Product** list, and click **Next**. **7.** Enter the serial number of the ASA, and follow the prompts to request a 3DES/AES license for the ASA.
• Self-signed certificate or an untrusted certificate • IPv6 • Firefox and Safari	When the ASA uses a self-signed certificate or an untrusted certificate, Firefox and Safari are unable to add security exceptions when browsing using HTTPS over IPv6. See https://bugzilla.mozilla.org/show_bug.cgi?id=633001. This caveat affects all SSL connections originating from Firefox or Safari to the ASA (including ASDM connections). To avoid this caveat, configure a proper certificate for the ASA that is issued by a trusted certificate authority.
• SSL encryption on the ASA must include both RC4-MD5 and RC4-SHA1 or disable SSL false start in Chrome. • Chrome	If you change the SSL encryption on the ASA to exclude both RC4-MD5 and RC4-SHA1 algorithms (these algorithms are enabled by default), then Chrome cannot launch ASDM due to the Chrome "SSL false start" feature. We suggest re-enabling one of these algorithms (see the **Configuration** > **Device Management** > **Advanced** > **SSL Settings** pane); or you can disable SSL false start in Chrome using the **--disable-ssl-false-start** flag according to Run Chromium with flags.
IE9 for servers	For Internet Explorer 9.0 for servers, the "**Do not save encrypted pages to disk**" option is enabled by default (See **Tools** > **Internet Options** > **Advanced**). This option causes the initial ASDM download to fail. Be sure to disable this option to allow ASDM to download.

Hardware and Software Compatibility

For a complete list of supported hardware and software, see Cisco ASA Compatibility.

VPN Compatibility

See Supported VPN Platforms, Cisco ASA Series.

New Features

This section lists new features for each release.

Note New, changed, and deprecated syslog messages are listed in the syslog message guide.

New Features in ASA 9.8(4)

Released: April 24, 2019

Feature	Description
VPN Features	
Add subdomains to webVPN HSTS	Allows domain owners to submit what domains should be included in the HSTS preload list for web browsers. New/Modified screens: **Configuration** > **Remote Access VPN** > **Clientless SSL VPN Access** > **Advanced** > **Proxies** > **Enable HSTS Subdomains**field *Also in 9.12(1).*
Administrative Features	
Allow non-browser-based HTTPS clients to access the ASA	You can allow non-browser-based HTTPS clients to access HTTPS services on the ASA. By default, ASDM, CSM, and REST API are allowed. Many specialty clients (for example, python libraries, curl, and wget) do not support Cross-site request forgery (CSRF) token-based authentication, so you need to specifically allow these clients to use the ASA basic authentication method. For security purposes, you should only allow required clients. New/Modified screens. **Configuration** > **Device Management** > **Management Access** > **HTTP Non-Browser Client Support** *Also in 9.12(1).*

Feature	Description
show tech-support includes additional output	The output of the **show tech-support** is enhanced to display the output of the following: • **show ipv6 interface** • **show aaa-server** • **show fragment** New/Modified commands: **show tech-support** *Also in 9.12(1).*
Support to enable and disable the results for free memory and used memory statistics during SNMP walk operations	To avoid overutilization of CPU resources, you can enable and disable the query of free memory and used memory statistics collected through SNMP walk operations. New or modified screen: **Configuration** > **Device Management** > **Management Access** > **SNMP** *Also in 9.10(1).*

New Features in ASA 9.8(3)/ASDM 7.9(2.152)

Released: July 2, 2018

Feature	Description
Platform Features	
Firepower 2100 Active LED now lights amber when in standby mode	Formerly, the Active LED was unlit in standby mode.
Firewall Features	
Support for removing the logout button from the cut-through proxy login page.	If you configure the cut-through proxy to obtain user identity information (the AAA authentication listener), you can now remove the logout button from the page. This is useful in case where users connect from behind a NAT device and cannot be distinguished by IP address. When one user logs out, it logs out all users of the IP address. New/Modified commands: **aaa authentication listener no-logout-button**. No ASDM support.
Trustsec SXP connection configurable delete hold down timer	The default SXP connection hold down timer is 120 seconds. You can now configure this timer, between 120 to 64000 seconds. New/Modified commands: **cts sxp delete-hold-down period**, **show cts sxp connection brief**, **show cts sxp connections** No ASDM support.
VPN Features	

Feature	Description
Support for legacy SAML authentication	If you deploy an ASA with the fix for CSCvg65072, then the default SAML behavior is to use the embedded browser, which is not supported on AnyConnect 4.4 or 4.5. Therefore, to continue to use AnyConnect 4.4 or 4.5, you must enable the legacy external browser SAML authentication method. Because of security limitations, use this option only as part of a temporary plan to migrate to AnyConnect 4.6. This option will be deprecated in the near future. New/Modified screens: **Configuration** > **Remote Access VPN** > **Network (Client) Access** > **AnyConnect Connection Profiles** page **>** **Connection Profiles** area **>** **Add** button **>** **Add AnyConnect Connection Profile** dialog box **Configuration** > **Remote Access VPN** > **Clientless SSL VPN Access** > **Connection Profiles** > page **>** **Connection Profiles** area **>** **Add** button **>** **Add Clientless SSL VPN Connection Profile** dialog box New/Modified options: **SAML External Browser** check box
Interface Features	
Unique MAC address generation for single context mode	You can now enable unique MAC address generation for VLAN subinterfaces in single context mode. Normally, subinterfaces share the same MAC address with the main interface. Because IPv6 link-local addresses are generated based on the MAC address, this feature allows for unique IPv6 link-local addresses. New or modified command: **mac-address auto** No ASDM support. *Also in 9.9(2) and later.*

New Features in ASDM 7.8(2.151)

Released: October 12, 2017

Feature	Description
Firewall Features	
Ethertype access control list changes	EtherType access control lists now support Ethernet II IPX (EII IPX). In addition, new keywords are added to the DSAP keyword to support common DSAP values: BPDU (0x42), IPX (0xE0), Raw IPX (0xFF), and ISIS (0xFE). Consequently, existing EtherType access contol entries that use the BPDU or ISIS keywords will be converted automatically to use the DSAP specification, and rules for IPX will be converted to 3 rules (DSAP IPX, DSAP Raw IPX, and EII IPX). In addition, packet capture that uses IPX as an EtherType value has been deprecated, because IPX corresponds to 3 separate EtherTypes. This feature is supported in 9.8(2.9) and other interim releases. For more information, see CSCvf57908. We modified the following screens: **Configuration** > **Firewall** > **Ethertype Rules**.

New Features in ASA 9.8(2)/ASDM 7.8(2)

Released: August 28, 2017

Feature	Description
Platform Features	
ASA for the Firepower 2100 series	We introduced the ASA for the Firepower 2110, 2120, 2130, and 2140. Similar to the Firepower 4100 and 9300, the Firepower 2100 runs the base FXOS operating system and then the ASA operating system as an application. The Firepower 2100 implementation couples FXOS more closely with the ASA than the Firepower 4100 and 9300 do (pared down FXOS functions, single device image bundle, easy management access for both ASA and FXOS). FXOS owns configuring hardware settings for interfaces, including creating EtherChannels, as well as NTP services, hardware monitoring, and other basic functions. You can use the Firepower Chassis Manager or the FXOS CLI for this configuration. The ASA owns all other functionality, including Smart Licensing (unlike the Firepower 4100 and 9300). The ASA and FXOS each have their own IP address on the Management 1/1 interface, and you can configure management of both the ASA and FXOS instances from any data interface. We introduced the following screens: **Configuration** > **Device Management** > **Management Access** > **FXOS Remote Management**
Department of Defense Unified Capabilities Approved Products List	The ASA was updated to comply with the Unified Capabilities Approved Products List (UC APL) requirements. In this release, when you enter the **fips enable** command, the ASA will reload. Both failover peers must be in the same FIPS mode before you enable failover. We modified the following command: **fips enable**
ASAv for Amazon Web Services M4 instance support	You can now deploy the ASAv as an M4 instance. We did not modify any screens.
ASAv5 1.5 GB RAM capability	Starting in Version 9.7(1), the ASAv5 may experience memory exhaustion where certain functions such as enabling AnyConnect or downloading files to the ASAv fail. You can now assign 1.5 GB (up from 1 GB) of RAM to the ASAv5. We did not modify any screens.
VPN Features	
HTTP Strict Transport Security (HSTS) header support	HSTS protects websites against protocol downgrade attacks and cookie hijacking on clientless SSL VPN. It lets web servers declare that web browsers (or other complying user agents) should only interact with it using secure HTTPS connections, and never via the insecure HTTP protocol. HSTS is an IETF standards track protocol and is specified in RFC 6797. We modified the following screens: **Configuration > Remote Access VPN > Clientless SSL VPN Access > Advanced > Proxies**
Interface Features	
VLAN support for the ASAv50	The ASAv50 now supports VLANs on the ixgbe-vf vNIC for SR-IOV interfaces. We did not modify any screens.

New Features in ASA 9.8(1.200)

Released: July 30, 2017

Note This release is only supported on the ASAv for Microsoft Azure. These features are not supported in Version 9.8(2).

Feature	Description
High Availability and Scalability Features	
Active/Backup High Availability for ASAv on Microsoft Azure	A stateless Active/Backup solution that allows for a failure of the active ASAv to trigger an automatic failover of the system to the backup ASAv in the Microsoft Azure public cloud. We introduced the following commands: **failover cloud** No ASDM support.

New Features in ASDM 7.8(1.150)

Released: June 20, 2017

There are no new features in this release.

New Features in ASA 9.8(1)/ASDM 7.8(1)

Released: May 15, 2017

Feature	Description
Platform Features	
ASAv50 platform	The ASAv virtual platform has added a high-end performance ASAv50 platform that provides 10 Gbps Firewall throughput levels. The ASAv50 requires ixgbe-vf vNICs, which are supported on VMware and KVM only.
SR-IOV on the ASAv platform	The ASAv virtual platform supports Single Root I/O Virtualization (SR-IOV) interfaces, which allows multiple VMs to share a single PCIe network adapter inside a host. ASAv SR-IOV support is available on VMware, KVM, and AWS only.
Automatic ASP load balancing now supported for the ASAv	Formerly, you could only manually enable and disable ASP load balancing. We modified the following screen: **Configuration > Device Management > Advanced > ASP Load Balancing**
Firewall Features	

Feature	Description
Support for setting the TLS proxy server SSL cipher suite	You can now set the SSL cipher suite when the ASA acts as a TLS proxy server. Formerly, you could only set global settings for the ASA on the **Configuration** > **Device Management** > **Advanced** > **SSL Settings** > **Encryption** page. We modified the following screen: **Configuration** > **Firewall** > **Unified Communications** > **TLS Proxy**, Add/Edit dialog boxes, **Server Configuration** page.
Global timeout for ICMP errors	You can now set the idle time before the ASA removes an ICMP connection after receiving an ICMP echo-reply packet. When this timeout is disabled (the default), and you enable ICMP inspection, then the ASA removes the ICMP connection as soon as an echo-reply is received; thus any ICMP errors that are generated for the (now closed) connection are dropped. This timeout delays the removal of ICMP connections so you can receive important ICMP errors. We modified the following screen: **Configuration** > **Firewall** > **Advanced** > **Global Timeouts**.
High Availability and Scalability Features	
Improved cluster unit health-check failure detection	You can now configure a lower holdtime for the unit health check: .3 seconds minimum. The previous minimum was .8 seconds. This feature changes the unit health check messaging scheme to *heartbeats* in the data plane from *keepalives* in the control plane. Using heartbeats improves the reliability and the responsiveness of clustering by not being susceptible to control plane CPU hogging and scheduling delays. Note that configuring a lower holdtime increases cluster control link messaging activity. We suggest that you analyze your network before you configure a low holdtime; for example, make sure a ping from one unit to another over the cluster control link returns within the *holdtime*/3, because there will be three heartbeat messages during one holdtime interval. If you downgrade your ASA software after setting the hold time to .3 - .7, this setting will revert to the default of 3 seconds because the new setting is unsupported. We modified the following screen: **Configuration** > **Device Management** > **High Availability and Scalability** > **ASA Cluster**
Configurable debounce time to mark an interface as failed for the Firepower 4100/9300 chassis	You can now configure the debounce time before the ASA considers an interface to be failed, and the unit is removed from the cluster. This feature allows for faster detection of interface failures. Note that configuring a lower debounce time increases the chances of false-positives. When an interface status update occurs, the ASA waits the number of milliseconds specified before marking the interface as failed and the unit is removed from the cluster. The default debounce time is 500 ms, with a range of 300 ms to 9 seconds. New or modified screen: **Configuration** > **Device Management** > **High Availability and Scalability** > **ASA Cluster**
VPN Features	

Feature	Description
Support for IKEv2, certificate based authentication, and ACL in VTI	Virtual Tunnel Interface (VTI) now supports BGP (static VTI). You can now use IKEv2 in standalone and high availability modes. You can use certificate based authentication by setting up a trustpoint in the IPsec profile. You can also apply access lists on VTI using access-group commands to filter ingress traffic. We introduced options to select the trustpoint for certificate based authentication in the following screen: **Configuration** > **Site-to-Site VPN** > **Advanced** > **IPsec Proposals (Transform Sets)** > **IPsec Profile** > **Add**
Mobile IKEv2 (MobIKE) is enabled by default	Mobile devices operating as remote access clients require transparent IP address changes while moving. Supporting MobIKE on ASA allows a current IKE security association (SA) to be updated without deleting the current SA. MobIKE is “always on.”
SAML 2.0 SSO Updates	The default signing method for a signature in a SAML request changed from SHA1 to SHA2, and you can configure which signing method you prefer: rsa-sha1, rsa-sha256, rsa-sha384, or rsa-sha512. We introduced changes to the following screen: **Configuration > Remote Access VPN > Clientless SSL VPN Access > Advanced > Single Sign On Servers > Add**.
Change for **tunnelgroup webvpn-attributes**	We changed the **pre-fill-username** and **secondary-pre-fill-username** value from **ssl-client** to **client**.
AAA Features	
Login history	By default, the login history is saved for 90 days. You can disable this feature or change the duration, up to 365 days. This feature only applies to usernames in the local database when you enable local AAA authentication for one or more of the management methods (SSH, ASDM, Telnet, and so on). We introduced the following screen: **Configuration** > **Device Management** > **Users/AAA** > **Login History**
Password policy enforcement to prohibit the reuse of passwords, and prohibit use of a password matching a username	You can now prohibit the reuse of previous passwords for up to 7 generations, and you can also prohibit the use of a password that matches a username. We modified the following screen: **Configuration** > **Device Management** > **Users/AAA** > **Password Policy**

Feature	Description
Separate authentication for users with SSH public key authentication and users with passwords	In releases prior to 9.6(2), you could enable SSH public key authentication (**ssh authentication**) without also explicitly enabling AAA SSH authentication with the Local user database (**aaa authentication ssh console LOCAL**). In 9.6(2), the ASA required you to explicitly enable AAA SSH authentication. In this release, you no longer have to explicitly enable AAA SSH authentication; when you configure the **ssh authentication** command for a user, local authentication is enabled by default for users with this type of authentication. Moreover, when you explicitly configure AAA SSH authentication, this configuration only applies for usernames with *passwords*, and you can use any AAA server type (**aaa authentication ssh console radius_1**, for example). For example, some users can use public key authentication using the local database, and other users can use passwords with RADIUS. We did not modify any screens. *Also in Version 9.6(3).*
Monitoring and Troubleshooting Features	
Saving currently-running packet captures when the ASA crashes	Formerly, active packet captures were lost if the ASA crashed. Now, packet captures are saved to disk 0 at the time of the crash with the filename [*context_name*.]*capture_name*.**pcap**. We did not modify any screens.

Firewall Functional Overview

Firewalls protect inside networks from unauthorized access by users on an outside network. A firewall can also protect inside networks from each other, for example, by keeping a human resources network separate from a user network. If you have network resources that need to be available to an outside user, such as a web or FTP server, you can place these resources on a separate network behind the firewall, called a *demilitarized zone* (DMZ). The firewall allows limited access to the DMZ, but because the DMZ only includes the public servers, an attack there only affects the servers and does not affect the other inside networks. You can also control when inside users access outside networks (for example, access to the Internet), by allowing only certain addresses out, by requiring authentication or authorization, or by coordinating with an external URL filtering server.

When discussing networks connected to a firewall, the *outside* network is in front of the firewall, the *inside* network is protected and behind the firewall, and a *DMZ*, while behind the firewall, allows limited access to outside users. Because the ASA lets you configure many interfaces with varied security policies, including many inside interfaces, many DMZs, and even many outside interfaces if desired, these terms are used in a general sense only.

Security Policy Overview

A security policy determines which traffic is allowed to pass through the firewall to access another network. By default, the ASA allows traffic to flow freely from an inside network (higher security level) to an outside network (lower security level). You can apply actions to traffic to customize the security policy.

Permitting or Denying Traffic with Access Rules

You can apply access rules to limit traffic from inside to outside, or allow traffic from outside to inside. For bridge group interfaces, you can also apply an EtherType access rule to allow non-IP traffic.

Applying NAT

Some of the benefits of NAT include the following:

- You can use private addresses on your inside networks. Private addresses are not routable on the Internet.
- NAT hides the local addresses from other networks, so attackers cannot learn the real address of a host.
- NAT can resolve IP routing problems by supporting overlapping IP addresses.

Protecting from IP Fragments

The ASA provides IP fragment protection. This feature performs full reassembly of all ICMP error messages and virtual reassembly of the remaining IP fragments that are routed through the ASA. Fragments that fail the security check are dropped and logged. Virtual reassembly cannot be disabled.

Applying HTTP, HTTPS, or FTP Filtering

Although you can use access lists to prevent outbound access to specific websites or FTP servers, configuring and managing web usage this way is not practical because of the size and dynamic nature of the Internet.

You can configure Cloud Web Security on the ASA, or install an ASA module that provides URL and other filtering services, such as ASA CX or ASA FirePOWER. You can also use the ASA in conjunction with an external product such as the Cisco Web Security Appliance (WSA).

Applying Application Inspection

Inspection engines are required for services that embed IP addressing information in the user data packet or that open secondary channels on dynamically assigned ports. These protocols require the ASA to do a deep packet inspection.

Sending Traffic to Supported Hardware or Software Modules

Some ASA models allow you to configure software modules, or to insert hardware modules into the chassis, to provide advanced services. These modules provide additional traffic inspection and can block traffic based on your configured policies. You can send traffic to these modules to take advantage of these advanced services.

Applying QoS Policies

Some network traffic, such as voice and streaming video, cannot tolerate long latency times. QoS is a network feature that lets you give priority to these types of traffic. QoS refers to the capability of a network to provide better service to selected network traffic.

Applying Connection Limits and TCP Normalization

You can limit TCP and UDP connections and embryonic connections. Limiting the number of connections and embryonic connections protects you from a DoS attack. The ASA uses the embryonic limit to trigger TCP Intercept, which protects inside systems from a DoS attack perpetrated by flooding an interface with

TCP SYN packets. An embryonic connection is a connection request that has not finished the necessary handshake between source and destination.

TCP normalization is a feature consisting of advanced TCP connection settings designed to drop packets that do not appear normal.

Enabling Threat Detection

You can configure scanning threat detection and basic threat detection, and also how to use statistics to analyze threats.

Basic threat detection detects activity that might be related to an attack, such as a DoS attack, and automatically sends a system log message.

A typical scanning attack consists of a host that tests the accessibility of every IP address in a subnet (by scanning through many hosts in the subnet or sweeping through many ports in a host or subnet). The scanning threat detection feature determines when a host is performing a scan. Unlike IPS scan detection that is based on traffic signatures, the ASA scanning threat detection feature maintains an extensive database that contains host statistics that can be analyzed for scanning activity.

The host database tracks suspicious activity such as connections with no return activity, access of closed service ports, vulnerable TCP behaviors such as non-random IPID, and many more behaviors.

You can configure the ASA to send system log messages about an attacker or you can automatically shun the host.

Firewall Mode Overview

The ASA runs in two different firewall modes:

- Routed
- Transparent

In routed mode, the ASA is considered to be a router hop in the network.

In transparent mode, the ASA acts like a “bump in the wire,” or a “stealth firewall,” and is not considered a router hop. The ASA connects to the same network on its inside and outside interfaces in a "bridge group".

You might use a transparent firewall to simplify your network configuration. Transparent mode is also useful if you want the firewall to be invisible to attackers. You can also use a transparent firewall for traffic that would otherwise be blocked in routed mode. For example, a transparent firewall can allow multicast streams using an EtherType access list.

Routed mode supports Integrated Routing and Bridging, so you can also configure bridge groups in routed mode, and route between bridge groups and regular interfaces. In routed mode, you can replicate transparent mode functionality; if you do not need multiple context mode or clustering, you might consider using routed mode instead.

Stateful Inspection Overview

All traffic that goes through the ASA is inspected using the Adaptive Security Algorithm and either allowed through or dropped. A simple packet filter can check for the correct source address, destination address, and ports, but it does not check that the packet sequence or flags are correct. A filter also checks *every* packet against the filter, which can be a slow process.

Note The TCP state bypass feature allows you to customize the packet flow.

A stateful firewall like the ASA, however, takes into consideration the state of a packet:

- Is this a new connection?

  If it is a new connection, the ASA has to check the packet against access lists and perform other tasks to determine if the packet is allowed or denied. To perform this check, the first packet of the session goes through the "session management path," and depending on the type of traffic, it might also pass through the "control plane path."

  The session management path is responsible for the following tasks:

  - Performing the access list checks
  - Performing route lookups
  - Allocating NAT translations (xlates)
  - Establishing sessions in the "fast path"

  The ASA creates forward and reverse flows in the fast path for TCP traffic; the ASA also creates connection state information for connectionless protocols like UDP, ICMP (when you enable ICMP inspection), so that they can also use the fast path.

  Note For other IP protocols, like SCTP, the ASA does not create reverse path flows. As a result, ICMP error packets that refer to these connections are dropped.

  Some packets that require Layer 7 inspection (the packet payload must be inspected or altered) are passed on to the control plane path. Layer 7 inspection engines are required for protocols that have two or more channels: a data channel, which uses well-known port numbers, and a control channel, which uses different port numbers for each session. These protocols include FTP, H.323, and SNMP.

- Is this an established connection?

  If the connection is already established, the ASA does not need to re-check packets; most matching packets can go through the "fast" path in both directions. The fast path is responsible for the following tasks:

  - IP checksum verification
  - Session lookup
  - TCP sequence number check
  - NAT translations based on existing sessions
  - Layer 3 and Layer 4 header adjustments

  Data packets for protocols that require Layer 7 inspection can also go through the fast path.

  Some established session packets must continue to go through the session management path or the control plane path. Packets that go through the session management path include HTTP packets that require inspection or content filtering. Packets that go through the control plane path include the control packets for protocols that require Layer 7 inspection.

VPN Functional Overview

A VPN is a secure connection across a TCP/IP network (such as the Internet) that appears as a private connection. This secure connection is called a tunnel. The ASA uses tunneling protocols to negotiate security parameters, create and manage tunnels, encapsulate packets, transmit or receive them through the tunnel, and unencapsulate them. The ASA functions as a bidirectional tunnel endpoint: it can receive plain packets, encapsulate them, and send them to the other end of the tunnel where they are unencapsulated and sent to their final destination. It can also receive encapsulated packets, unencapsulate them, and send them to their final destination. The ASA invokes various standard protocols to accomplish these functions.

The ASA performs the following functions:

- Establishes tunnels
- Negotiates tunnel parameters
- Authenticates users
- Assigns user addresses
- Encrypts and decrypts data
- Manages security keys
- Manages data transfer across the tunnel
- Manages data transfer inbound and outbound as a tunnel endpoint or router

The ASA invokes various standard protocols to accomplish these functions.

Security Context Overview

You can partition a single ASA into multiple virtual devices, known as security contexts. Each context is an independent device, with its own security policy, interfaces, and administrators. Multiple contexts are similar to having multiple standalone devices. Many features are supported in multiple context mode, including routing tables, firewall features, IPS, and management; however, some features are not supported. See the feature chapters for more information.

In multiple context mode, the ASA includes a configuration for each context that identifies the security policy, interfaces, and almost all the options you can configure on a standalone device. The system administrator adds and manages contexts by configuring them in the system configuration, which, like a single mode configuration, is the startup configuration. The system configuration identifies basic settings for the ASA. The system configuration does not include any network interfaces or network settings for itself; rather, when the system needs to access network resources (such as downloading the contexts from the server), it uses one of the contexts that is designated as the admin context.

The admin context is just like any other context, except that when a user logs into the admin context, then that user has system administrator rights and can access the system and all other contexts.

ASA Clustering Overview

ASA Clustering lets you group multiple ASAs together as a single logical device. A cluster provides all the convenience of a single device (management, integration into a network) while achieving the increased throughput and redundancy of multiple devices.

You perform all configuration (aside from the bootstrap configuration) on the control unit only; the configuration is then replicated to the member units.

Special, Deprecated, and Legacy Services

For some services, documentation is located outside of the main configuration guides and online help.

Special Services Guides

Special services allow the ASA to interoperate with other Cisco products; for example, by providing a security proxy for phone services (Unified Communications), or by providing Botnet traffic filtering in conjunction with the dynamic database from the Cisco update server, or by providing WCCP services for the Cisco Web Security Appliance. Some of these special services are covered in separate guides:

- Cisco ASA Botnet Traffic Filter Guide
- Cisco ASA NetFlow Implementation Guide
- Cisco ASA Unified Communications Guide
- Cisco ASA WCCP Traffic Redirection Guide
- SNMP Version 3 Tools Implementation Guide

Deprecated Services

For deprecated features, see the configuration guide for your ASA version. Similarly, for redesigned features such as NAT between Version 8.2 and 8.3 or transparent mode interfaces between Version 8.3 and 8.4, refer to the configuration guide for your version. Although ASDM is backwards compatible with previous ASA releases, the configuration guide and online help only cover the latest release.

Legacy Services Guide

Legacy services are still supported on the ASA, however there may be better alternative services that you can use instead. Legacy services are covered in a separate guide:

Cisco ASA Legacy Feature Guide

This guide includes the following chapters:

- Configuring RIP
- AAA Rules for Network Access
- Using Protection Tools, which includes Preventing IP Spoofing (**ip verify reverse-path**), Configuring the Fragment Size (**fragment**), Blocking Unwanted Connections (**shun**), Configuring TCP Options (for ASDM), and Configuring IP Audit for Basic IPS Support (**ip audit**).
- Configuring Filtering Services