



OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

# Anatomy of a DNS Cache Poisoning Attack





# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

# Introduction



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The purpose of this presentation is to dissect the “Domain Name System (DNS) Cache Poisoning” Cyber attack. We will cover:

- Real-world examples of DNS cache poisoning
- A definition of DNS
- An overview of the technology behind DNS
- The role played by DNS Cache within DNS
- Ways in which Cyber-criminals exploit vulnerabilities in the DNS to steal information from unsuspecting victims
- Best practices in preventing attacks



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

## About the presenter:

Name: Boyan Lazarevski

Profession: IT Operations Specialist

Experience: System Administration, Network Security

Interests: Cybersecurity, Computer Hardware, Retro-computing





OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

# Defining the Problem



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

On January 26, 2015, a hacker group managed to redirect visitors of the Malaysia Airlines (MAS) official website to another site displaying malicious content.



MAS denied that their systems had been hacked and claimed that their web servers were intact despite news reports indicating it was a hacking incident.



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

MAS was right. Their own hardware/servers were not actually “hacked”. Instead, they had fallen victim to a hack attack that indirectly affected them.

This attack is known as “DNS Cache Poisoning”.

The attackers (or Cyber-criminals) abused the cached IP address in the DNS server to redirect their web site visitors to a completely different web page.







# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

- April 2018, a major DNS cache poisoning attack compromised Amazon's DNS servers, redirecting users to malicious web sites.
- November 2011, a large-scale attack on ISPs in Brazil rerouted traffic from popular sites (including Google, Gmail and Hotmail) to a web page that installs malicious Java applets.
- December 2009, hackers redirect traffic from Twitter to their own web site.
- July 2008, a major DNS cache poisoning attack on AT&T DNS servers. Many websites become unavailable to millions of web users.







OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

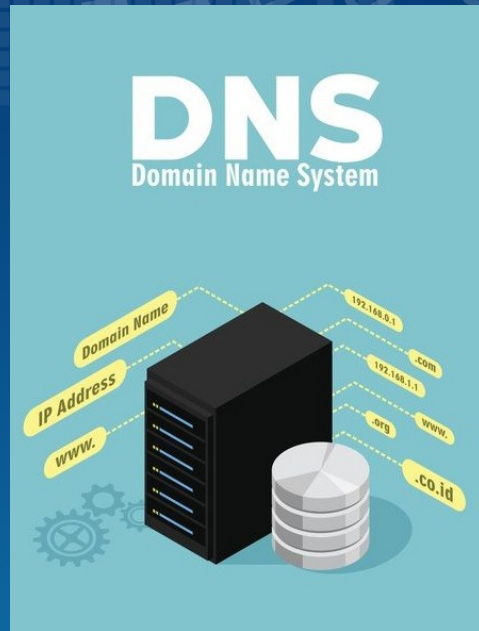
# What is the DNS ?



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

- Domain Name System (DNS)
  - Communications Protocol, part of the “TCP/IP suite”
  - A critical “building block” of the Internet.
  - Web browsers, e-mail services, and social networks rely 24/7 on its availability.
  - However... it is also a critical attack vector!
- (Perhaps the most overlooked internet service in terms of Cybersecurity)





OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

# The DNS Resolution Process



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The user types  
“www.owasp.org”  
into a web  
browser, which in  
turn creates a  
DNS query and  
sends it to the  
default DNS  
Recursive  
Resolver server.

owasp.org



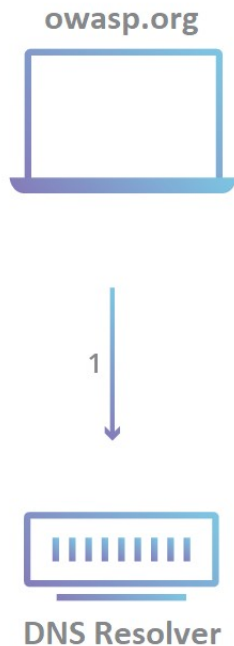




# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The DNS Recursive Resolver is the first stop for the DNS query. In most cases it is a server hosted by the Internet Service Provider (ISP).

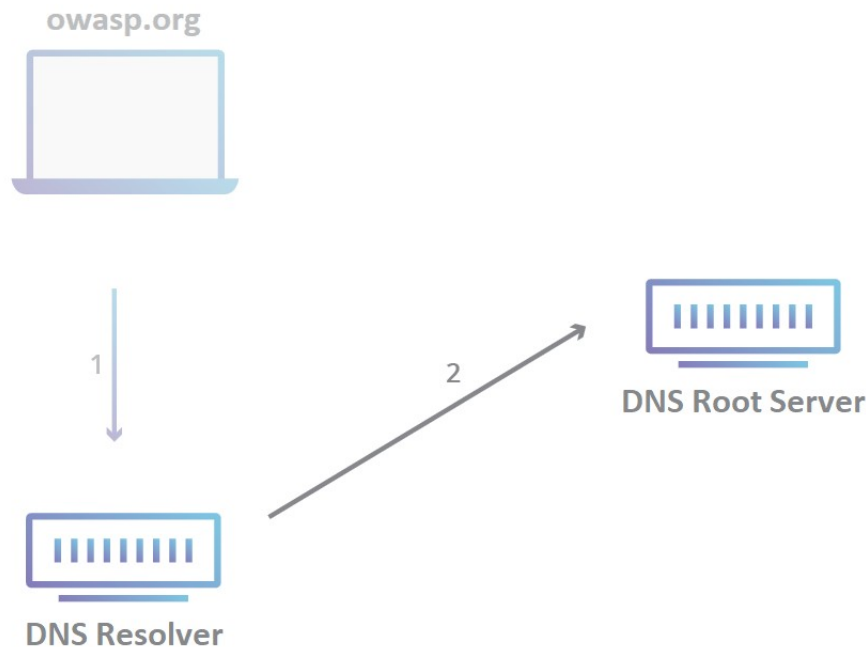




# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

After receiving a DNS query from a host computer's web browser, the DNS resolver will send a request to a DNS Root Server.

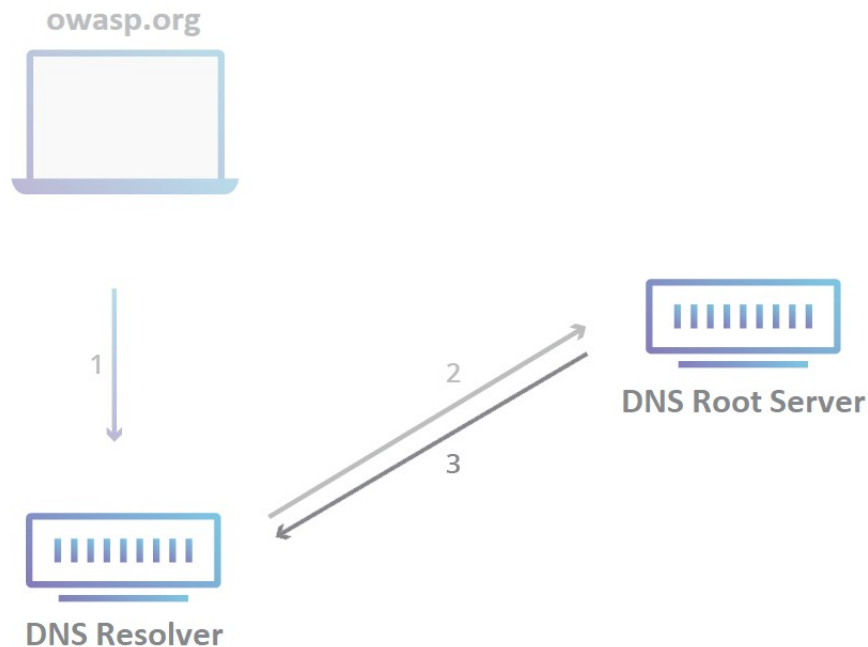




# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The DNS Root server responds to the DNS resolver with the address of a DNS Top Level Domain (TLD) server that stores information for .org domains.

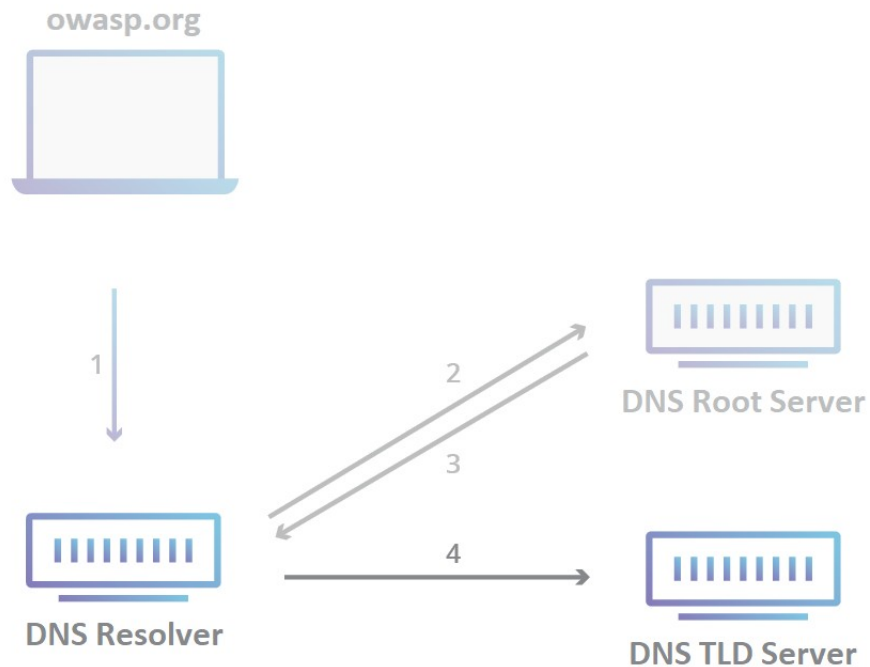




# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The DNS resolver  
makes a request  
to the .org DNS  
TLD server



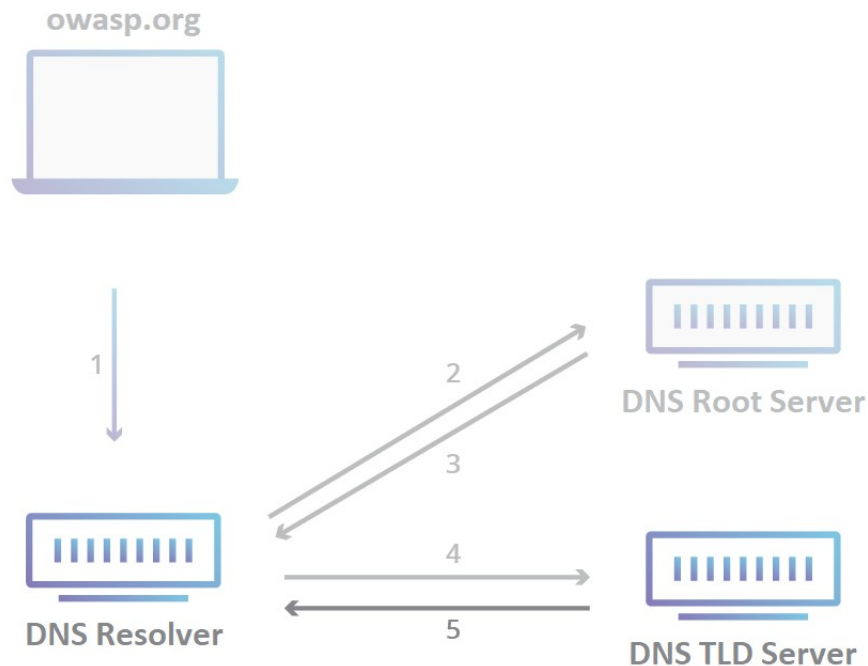




# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The DNS TLD  
server responds  
with the IP  
address of an DNS  
Authoritative  
Name server.

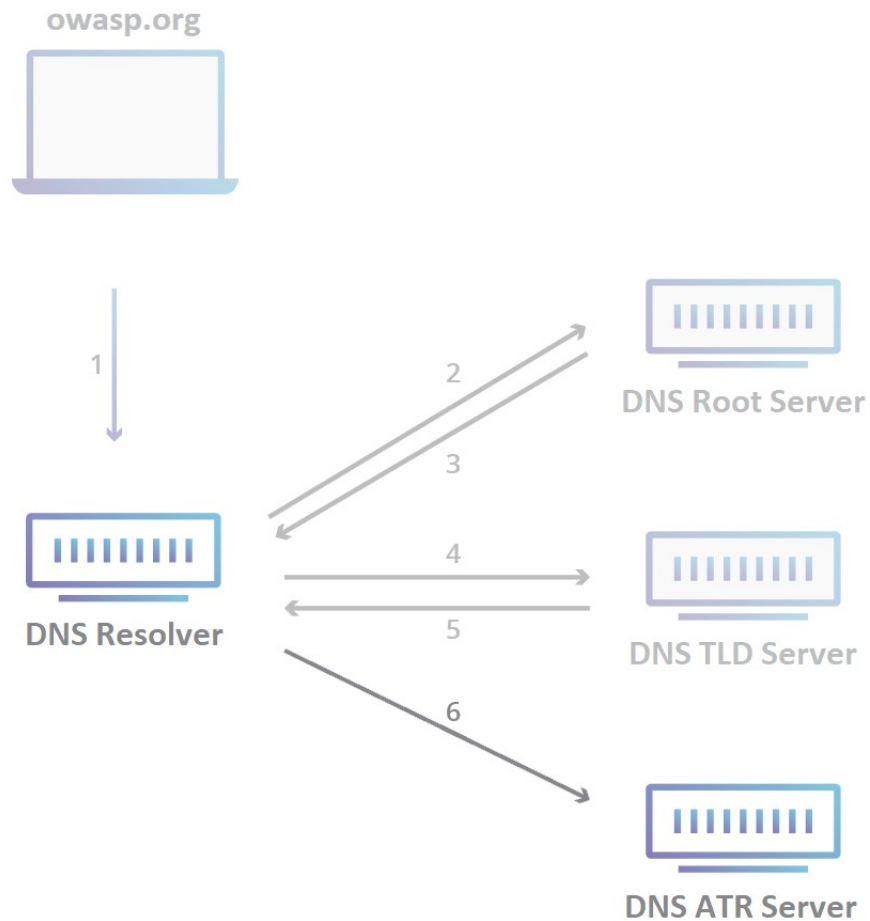




# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The DNS Resolver  
sends a query to  
the DNS  
Authoritative  
Name server.

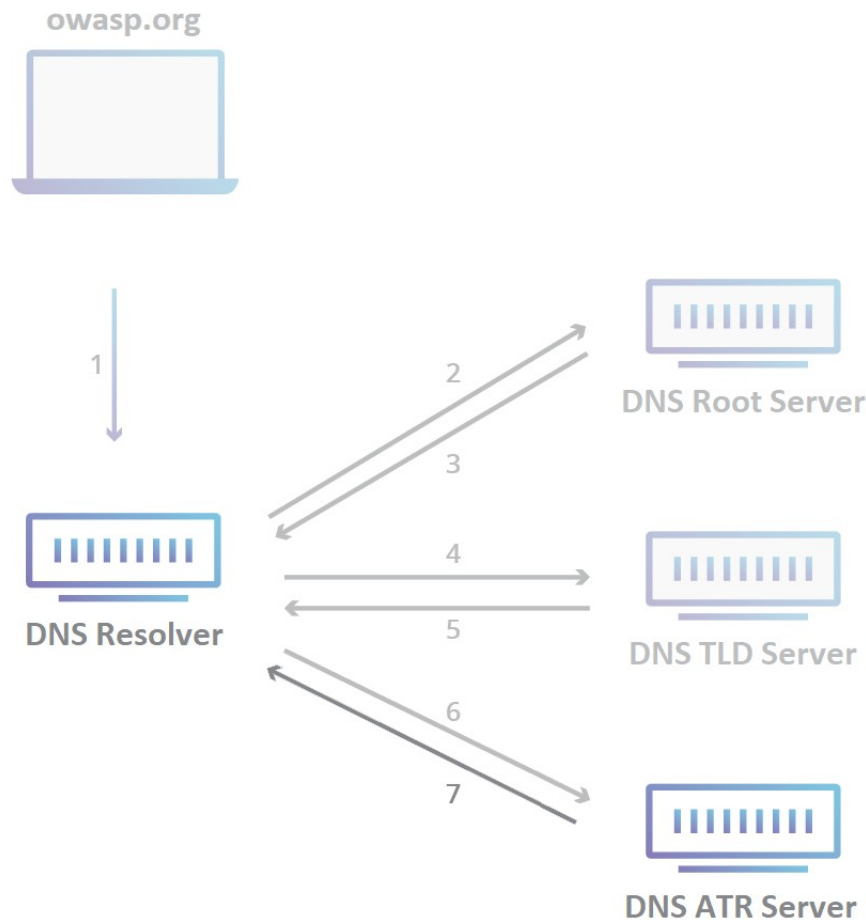




# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The DNS  
Authoritative  
Name server  
holds the actual  
DNS IP records,  
and sends the IP  
address for  
“owasp.org” to  
the DNS Resolver.

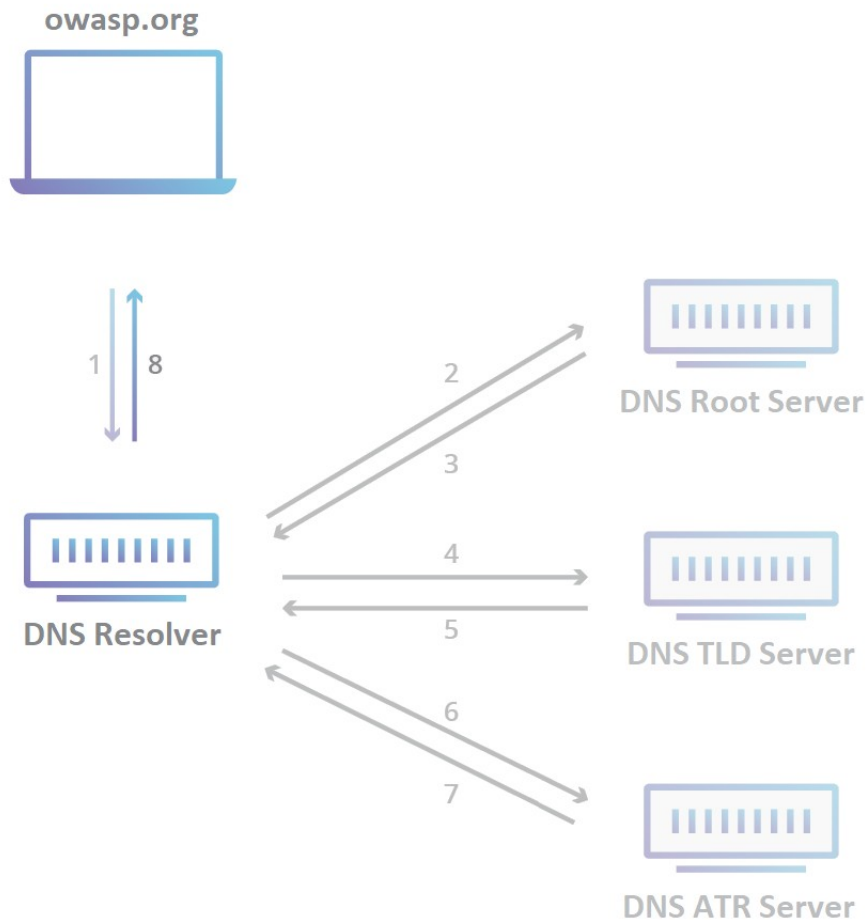




# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The DNS Resolver sends to host computer a DNS response that contains the IP address of the website initially requested.



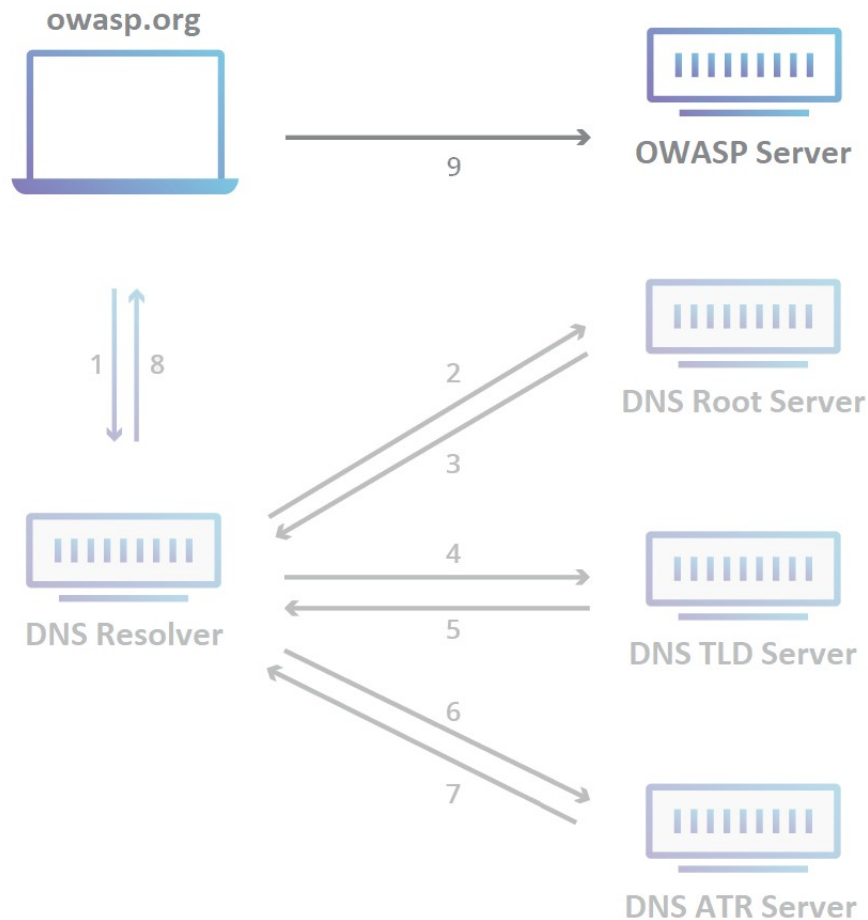




# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The user's web browser uses the IP address received from the DNS response to start a Transport Layer Security (TLS) encrypted connection session with OWASP's Web Server.

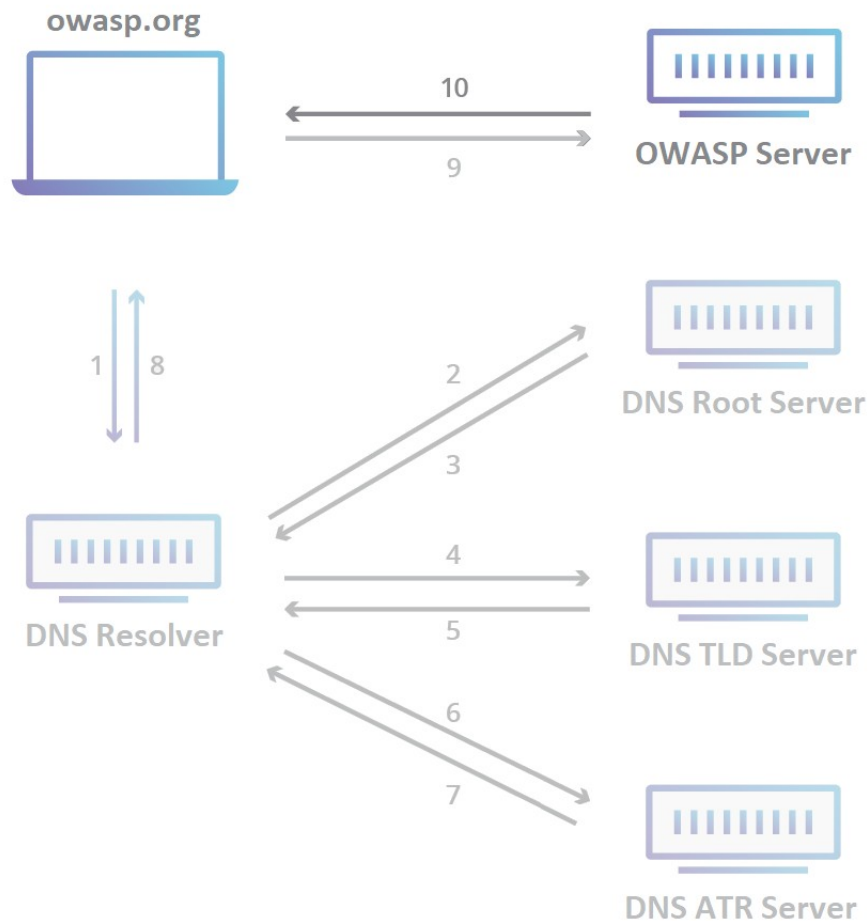




# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

- Server responds
- A secure connection over port 443 is established
- The Web Server begins transmitting thousands of packets of data containing web page resources.

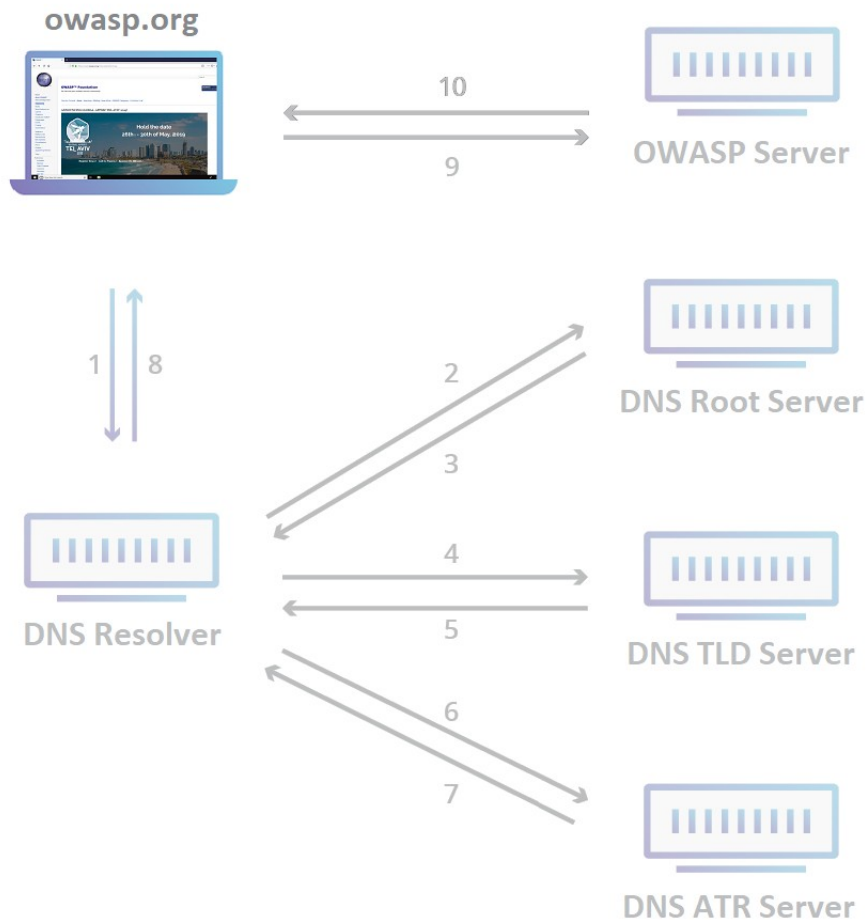




# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The user's  
(client's)  
computer receives  
the individual TCP  
packets,  
assembles them,  
and reconstructs  
the HTTP data  
sent by the Web  
Server over the  
secure connection



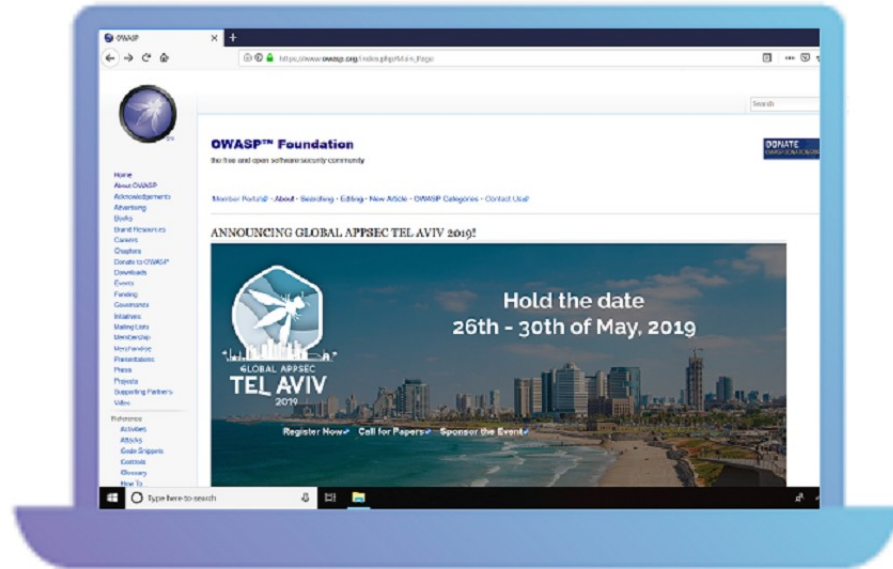


# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

- OWASP's web page is displayed on the user's computer monitor.

- This concludes the DNS Resolution process.







OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

# Structure of DNS Messages



dns

- ▶ Frame 185: 80 bytes on wire (640 bits), 80 bytes captured (640 bits) on interface 0
- ▶ Ethernet II, Src: Vmware\_cc:79:b8 (00:0c:29:cc:79:b8), Dst: Vmware\_fa:b7:c0 (00:50:56:fa:b7:c0)
- ▶ Internet Protocol Version 4, Src: 192.168.224.209, Dst: 192.168.224.2
- ▶ User Datagram Protocol, Src Port: 36611, Dst Port: 53
- ▼ Domain Name System (query)

Transaction ID: 0xbd63

## ▼ Flags: 0x0100 Standard query

```

0... .. = Response: Message is a query
.000 0... .. = Opcode: Standard query (0)
... ..0. .... = Truncated: Message is not truncated
... ..1 .... = Recursion desired: Do query recursively
... ..0... .. = Z: reserved (0)
... ..0 .... = Non-authenticated data: Unacceptable

```

Questions: 1

Answer RRs: 0

Authority RRs: 0

Additional RRs: 1

## ▼ Queries

## ▼ owasp.org: type A, class IN

Name: owasp.org

[Name Length: 9]

[Label Count: 2]

Type: A (Host Address) (1)

Class: IN (0x0001)

## ▶ Additional records

[\[Response In: 187\]](#)

```

0000  00 50 56 fa b7 c0 00 0c 29 cc 79 b8 08 00 45 00  ·PV··· )·y···E·
0010  00 42 40 c4 40 00 40 11 b7 c1 c0 a8 e0 d1 c0 a8  ·B@·@·@· ·····
0020  e0 02 8f 03 00 35 00 2e 42 65 bd 63 01 00 00 01  ····5· Be·c···
0030  00 00 00 00 00 01 05 6f 77 61 73 70 03 6f 72 67  ·····o wasp·org
0040  00 00 01 00 01 00 00 29 02 00 00 00 00 00 00 00  ·····) ·····

```



dns

```

▶ Frame 187: 96 bytes on wire (768 bits), 96 bytes captured (768 bits) on interface 0
▶ Ethernet II, Src: Vmware_fa:b7:c0 (00:50:56:fa:b7:c0), Dst: Vmware_cc:79:b8 (00:0c:29:cc:79:b8)
▶ Internet Protocol Version 4, Src: 192.168.224.2, Dst: 192.168.224.209
▶ User Datagram Protocol, Src Port: 53, Dst Port: 36611
▼ Domain Name System (response)
  Transaction ID: 0xbd63
  ▼ Flags: 0x8180 Standard query response, No error
    1... .. = Response: Message is a response
    .000 0... .. = Opcode: Standard query (0)
    .... .0... .. = Authoritative: Server is not an authority for domain
    .... ..0... .. = Truncated: Message is not truncated
    .... ...1... .. = Recursion desired: Do query recursively
    .... ....1... .. = Recursion available: Server can do recursive queries
    .... ....0... .. = Z: reserved (0)
    .... ....0... .. = Answer authenticated: Answer/authority portion was not authenticated by the server
    .... ....0... .. = Non-authenticated data: Unacceptable
    .... ....0000 = Reply code: No error (0)
  Questions: 1
  Answer RRs: 1
  Authority RRs: 0
  Additional RRs: 1
  ▶ Queries
  ▼ Answers
    ▼ owasp.org: type A, class IN, addr 104.130.219.202
      Name: owasp.org
      Type: A (Host Address) (1)
      Class: IN (0x0001)
      Time to live: 5
      Data length: 4
      Address: 104.130.219.202
  ▶ Additional records
  [Request In: 185]
  [Time: 0.125611149 seconds]

```

## DNS Response



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

## DNS Cache



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

- There are many public DNS servers that the DNS Resolver can use to speed up the resolution process.
- However it's much faster to have a local copy (even a temporary one) of the DNS "phone book." This is exactly where DNS caches come into play.
- Each operating system (OS) (Windows and MAC OS by default, and UNIX via a Daemon) stores a temporary DNS cache database that contains a list of all recently accessed domain names and the addresses that DNS calculated for them the first time a request was made.





# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

```
C:\ Command Prompt

owasp.org
-----
Record Name . . . . . : owasp.org
Record Type . . . . . : 1
Time To Live . . . . . : 757
Data Length . . . . . : 4
Section . . . . . : Answer
A (Host) Record . . . : 104.130.219.202
```

In a local DNS cache entry, the "A" record contains the IPv4 address for the given website name. IPv6 addresses use the "AAAA" record. The DNS cache stores this address, the requested website name, and several other parameters from the host DNS entry.



OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

How does the  
“Poisoning” of the DNS Cache  
occur?

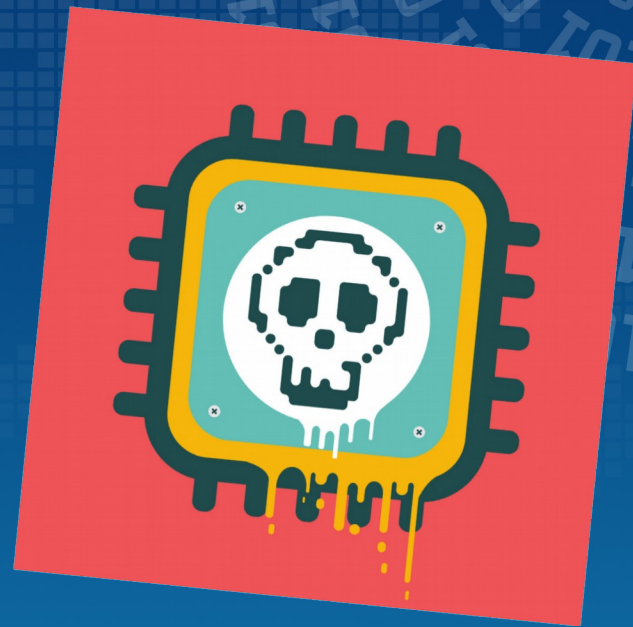


# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

A DNS cache becomes “poisoned” or polluted when unauthorized domain names or IP addresses are inserted into it. The corruption of the DNS cache can be achieved either by:

- Computer malware, or
- Network attacks that insert invalid DNS entries into the cache.





# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

Reminder: when a user tries to browse to a website, the computer queries its local DNS cache for the IP address.

If the DNS cache has a copy of the record, it replies.

If not, it queries an “upstream” DNS server, relays the results back to the end user, and caches them for next time.





# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

Attackers have devised a way to “spoof” DNS responses - to forge DNS responses that look as if they are coming from legitimate DNS servers. If an attacker successfully spoofs a DNS response, it can make the receiving DNS server cache a poisoned record.

But how does that help the attackers?







# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

By being redirected to a wrong destination, we may end up suffering from a phishing attack – which is the ultimate goal of this type of Man-in-the-Middle attacks!





# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

For example:

- An attacker learns that the Department of Computer Science at the University of Ghana regularly visits the OWASP website to check the most updated vulnerability databases and get up to speed with the latest development in web app security.
- The attacker poisons the University's DNS Resolver, sending users to the attacker's web site.
- The attacker creates a legitimate looking OWASP login page to get users to enter their credentials.
- The attacker could have also relayed website traffic to the real server ("Man-in-the-middle" style), so no one notices.
- This approach can be used to obtain bank account information...





# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

But wait a moment...

- What about the “Transaction ID” that we mentioned previously?
- Don't DNS Queries and Responses contain Transaction IDs that are read by the Application layer of the user's computer?

Well yes, but there are two problems:

- The Transaction is a 16-bit binary number ( $2^{16}$  = any number between 0 and 65536).
- DNS servers accept near-simultaneous responses to requests, allowing attackers to make multiple guesses about the transaction ID (something like a brute force attack against a password).



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project



## DNS Spoofing Demonstration





# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The demonstration is carried on a LAN network composed of the following three elements:

- Default Gateway (IP address 192.168.224.2)
- Attacker computer (IP address 192.168.224.13)
- Target computer (IP address 192.168.224.211)

The application used to carry out the DNS Spoofing is Ettercap: a free and open source network security tool for man-in-the-middle attacks.





# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

Prepare for the attack by configuring the attack parameters:

- Step 1: Make a fake OWASP HTML web-page (phishing web-page). Set it up on an Apache Web Server hosted on the Attacker computer (the fake web-site will be accessed by typing the IP address of the Attacker computer onto a browser).
- Step 2: Go to the Ettercap directory and open the "etter.dns" using a text editor. At the bottom of the file, add the name to the website that we want to want to attack (in this case, "www.owasp.org") and also add the IP that we want the Target computer to be redirected to (in this case, the IP address of the Attacker computer, hosting the fake web-page). See the following screenshot for illustration.



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

The attack  
parameters that  
were added manually  
are marked with the  
red square:

```
Activities Terminal ▾

File Edit View Search Terminal Help
GNU nano 2.9.3 /etc/ettercap/etter.dns

# resolutions. I.e. Windows/Samba file sharing.
#

LAB-PC* WINS 127.0.0.1

#####
# Demonstration for OWASP Security Event

owasp.org      A      192.168.224.13
*.owasp.org    A      192.168.224.13
www.owasp.org  A      192.168.224.13

# vim:ts=8:noexpandtab
```



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

Step 3:  
Open Ettercap in  
sudo mode and  
select Sniff>Unified  
Sniffing



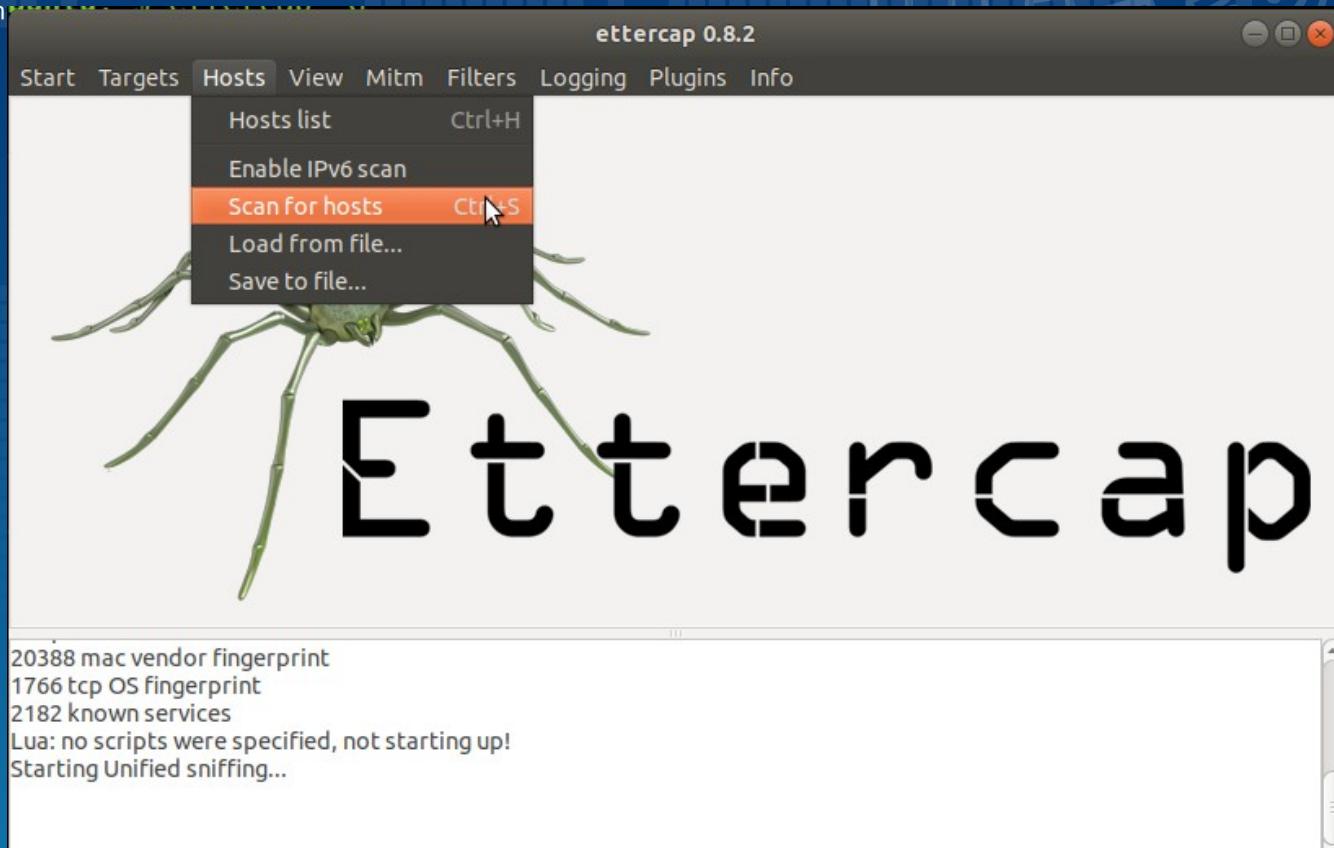


# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

Step 4:

Go to Hosts>Scan for  
Hosts to find devices  
connected to the  
LAN

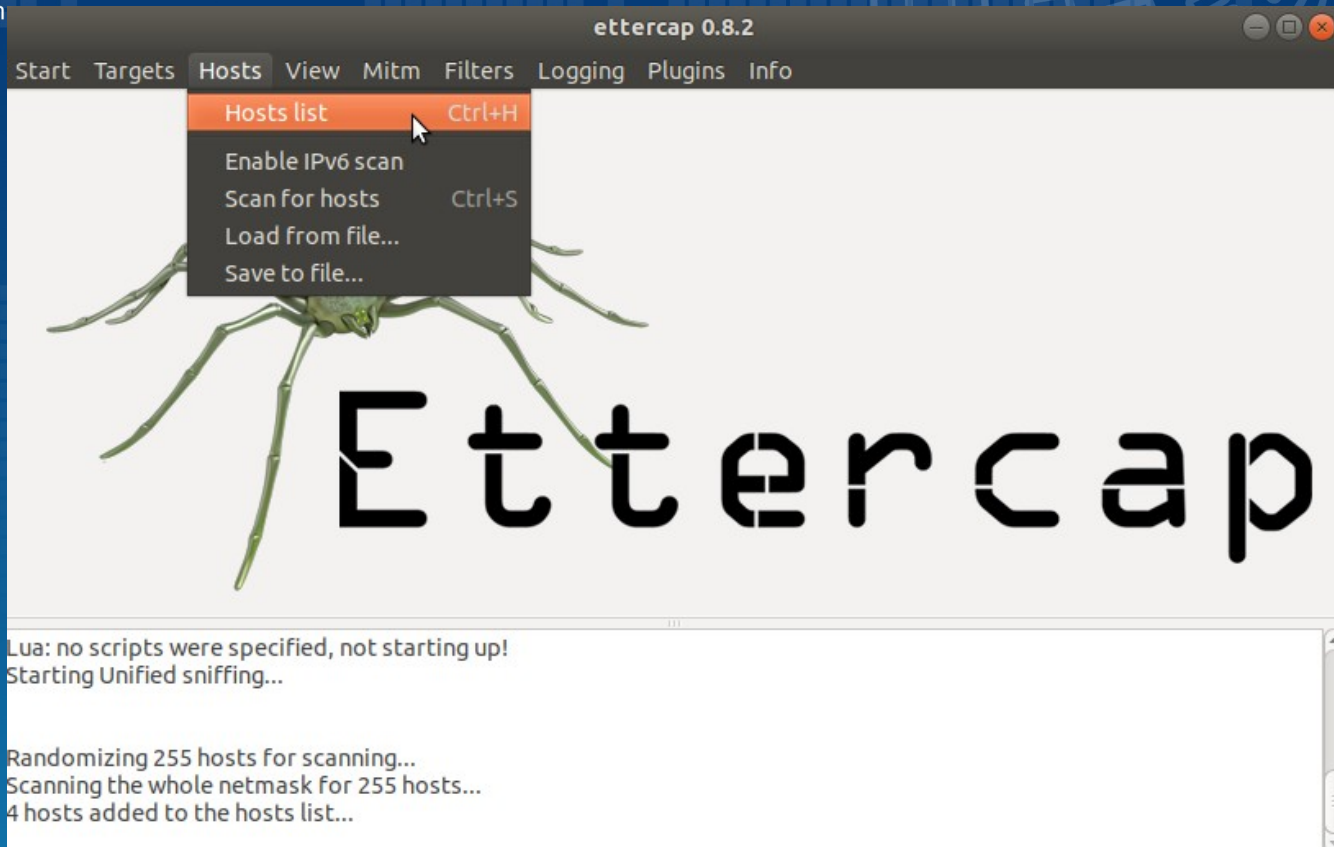




# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

Step 5:  
Go to Hosts>Hosts  
List to display the list  
of devices







# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

## Step 6:

From the list, select the IP address of the Target computer and add it to Target 1 and also select the IP address of the default gateway and add it to Target 2

The screenshot shows the ettercap 0.8.2 application window. The 'Host List' tab is active, displaying a table with the following data:

IP Address	MAC Address	Description
192.168.224.1	00:50:56:C0:00:08	
192.168.224.2	00:50:56:EA:2A:52	
192.168.224.211	00:0C:29:EF:9B:63	
192.168.224.254	00:50:56:EC:91:24	

Below the table are three buttons: 'Delete Host', 'Add to Target 1', and 'Add to Target 2'. A red arrow points from the IP address '192.168.224.2' in the table to the 'Add to Target 1' button. A blue arrow points from the IP address '192.168.224.211' in the table to the 'Add to Target 2' button. The status bar at the bottom shows the following messages:

```
Lua: no scripts were specified, not starting up!  
Starting Unified sniffing...  
  
Randomizing 255 hosts for scanning...  
Scanning the whole netmask for 255 hosts...  
4 hosts added to the hosts list...
```



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

Step 7:  
Go to  
Plugins>Manage the  
Plugins

ettercap 0.8.2

Start Targets Hosts View Mitm Filters Logging **Plugins** Info

Host List

IP Address	MAC Address	Description
192.168.224.1	00:50:56:C0:00:08	
192.168.224.2	00:50:56:EA:2A:52	
192.168.224.211	00:0C:29:EF:9B:63	
192.168.224.254	00:50:56:EC:91:24	

Manage the plugins Ctrl+S  
Load a plugin... Ctrl+O

Delete Host Add to Target 1 Add to Target 2

Host 192.168.224.211 added to TARGET1  
Host 192.168.224.2 added to TARGET2



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

Step 8:  
From the list of  
plugins select  
"dns\_spoof"

The screenshot shows the ettercap 0.8.2 application window. The 'Plugins' tab is active, displaying a table of available plugins. The 'dns\_spoof' plugin is highlighted with an orange background. Below the table, a status bar shows two hosts added to targets.

Name	Version	Info
arp_cop	1.1	Report suspicious ARP activity
autoadd	1.2	Automatically add new victims in the target range
chk_poison	1.1	Check if the poisoning had success
<b>dns_spoof</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>Sends spoofed dns replies</b>
dos_attack	1.0	Run a d.o.s. attack against an IP address
dummy	3.0	A plugin template (for developers)
find_conn	1.0	Search connections on a switched LAN
find_ettercap	2.0	Try to find ettercap activity
find_ip	1.0	Search an unused IP address in the subnet
finger	1.6	Fingerprint a remote host
finger_submit	1.0	Submit a fingerprint to ettercap's website

Host 192.168.224.211 added to TARGET1  
Host 192.168.224.2 added to TARGET2

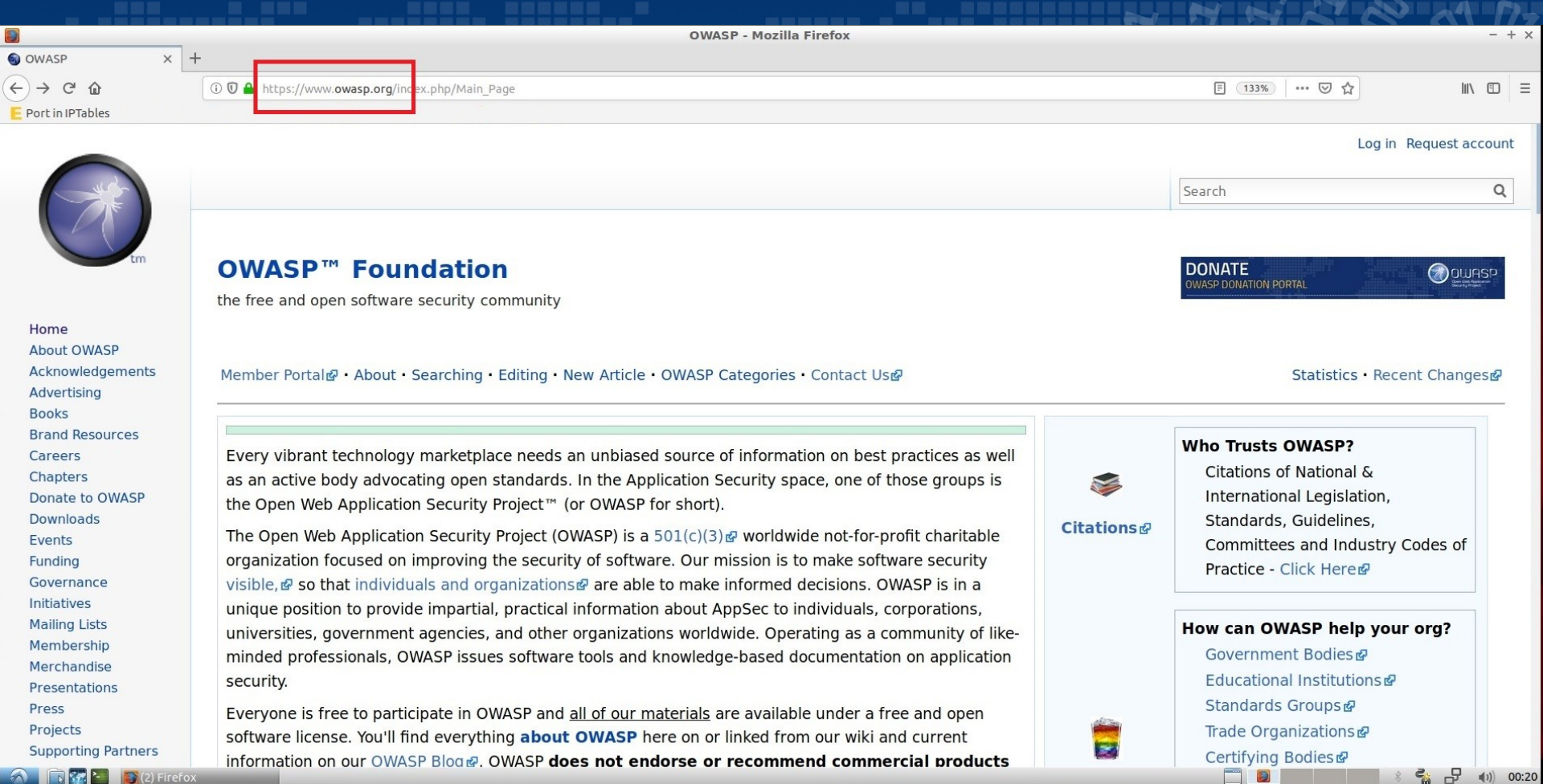


# Open Web Application Security Project

The plugin activates the process of bombarding the target machine with fake DNS responses that resolve owasp.org to IP address 192.168.224.13 (where the fake web-page is hosted by web server on the Attacker machine)

[illegible]





As a result, instead of being directed to the real web-page...





http://www.owasp.org

# Welcome to OWASP's Official Web Page

We are sorry to inform you that we are currently undergoing a company-wide rebranding process, which also affects the design of our website. Please send any important information and correspondence to the following [e-mail address](#)

Sincerely yours, the OWASP Team

| Copyright ©2019 All rights reserved |



...the Victim is directed to the fake web-page (notice that the browser displays the same URL!)



# OWASP

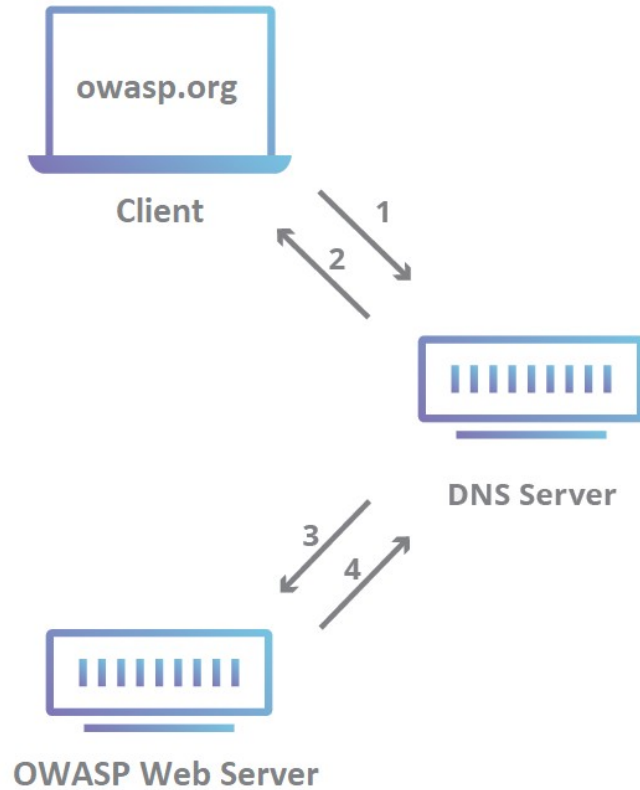
Open Web Application  
Security Project

## **Please Note:**

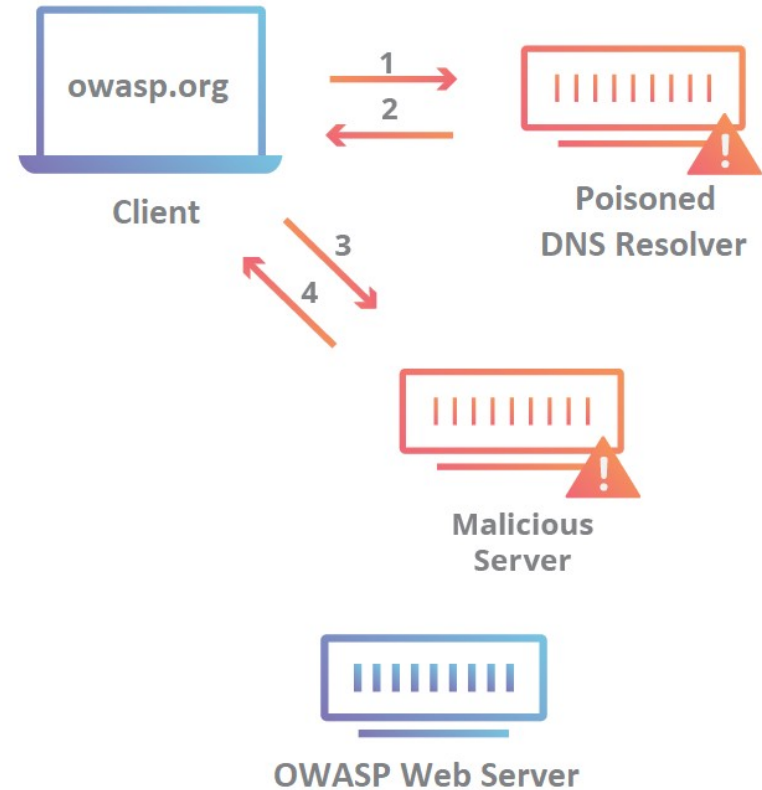
- We have discussed DNS Cache Poisoning methodology used to compromise DNS Cache records stored on users' computers
- However, these principles also apply for tampering with the cached DNS records on DNS Resolver servers!

The following slide shows a topological illustration of the attack.

## NORMAL DNS RESOLUTION



## HIJACKED DNS RESOLUTION





OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

# Avoiding DNS Cache Poisoning



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

Although DNS Poisoning sounds scary, there are ways to (try to) prevent it. Let's first look at some common measures that mainly involve vigilance while browsing the internet:

- Keep your Antivirus/Anti-malware apps "Cooking and Up-to-Date"
- If you have the possibility, browse the internet via a Virtual Machine
- Don't download suspicious files. If you insist, do it through a "sand-boxed app" or a Virtual Machine
- Use a respected DNS Server and a reputable ISP
- Always double-check websites you visit (check if there is HTTPS encryption)
- Flush computer DNS cache as well as DNS cache stored in the router





# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

Additional long-term prevention measures include:

- **Virtual Private Network (VPN):** A service that encrypts all the internet traffic going to and from a device and routes it through an intermediary server in a location of the user's choosing.
- **Encrypted DNS:** Apps that encrypt DNS traffic between the user and an OpenDNS nameserver (similar to how SSL encrypts traffic to websites that use HTTPS).



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

Security mechanisms developed for DNS server operators:

- **UDP Source Port Randomization** (UDP SPR): What this does is setting the UDP source port randomly, so an attacker would have to guess both the transaction ID and the source port in a short time window - which is usually not feasible (since they would need to make  $2^{32}$  combinations).
- **DNS Security Extensions** (DNSSEC): It is a protocol designed to create a unique cryptographic signature and store it alongside other DNS records. Thus, DNSSEC provides DNS with an additional methods of verification by digitally signing the DNS information. This is done on all levels of the DNS Resolution process.



# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

## The End ?





# OWASP

Open Web Application  
Security Project

## References

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30978299>

[https://www.pcworld.com/article/149126/dns\\_attack\\_writer.html](https://www.pcworld.com/article/149126/dns_attack_writer.html)

<https://medium.com/metacert/major-dns-spoofing-hack-affects-amazon-web-services-157e3565c844>

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/blog/2009/dec/18/twitter-hack-iranian-cyber-army-dns-mowjcamp>

<https://threatpost.com/major-dns-cache-poisoning-attack-hits-brazilian-isps-110711/75859/>

<https://www.lifewire.com/what-is-a-dns-cache-817514>

<https://www.networkworld.com/article/2277316/tech-primers-how-dns-cache-poisoning-works.html>

<https://www.varonis.com/blog/what-is-dns>

<https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/what-is-dns-cache-poisoning>

<https://www.cloudflare.com/learning/dns/dns-security>

<https://www.esecurityplanet.com/network-security/how-to-prevent-dns-attacks.html>

<https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/dnssec-what-is-it-why-important-2019-03-05-en>