Educational Administration: Theory and Practice
2024, 30(11), 2723-2731
ISSN: 2148-2403
https://kuey.net/ **Research Article**

Designing MARTO: Modular Log Fusion and Entropy-Based Adaptive Threat Scoring with Embedded Software Testing Validation

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Citation: M. Mani Mekalai et.al (2024). Designing MARTO: Modular Log Fusion and Entropy-Based Adaptive Threat Scoring with Embedded Software Testing Validation, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(11) 2723-2731
Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i11.10887

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study presents MARTO (Modular Adaptive Real-Time Orchestrator), a cybersecurity framework designed to merge multi-source IDS log fusion with entropy-based adaptive scoring for anomaly detection. The framework incorporates protocol-aware entropy enhancement together with software testing methodologies such as trace simulation and toggleable logic for embedded validation. The Adaptive Threat Entropy Component (ATEC) strengthens flow scoring by incorporating session duration and protocol volatility. Experimental evaluations demonstrate MARTO's capability to detect anomalous flows with improved transparency and reproducibility, addressing limitations observed in existing IDS frameworks.

Keywords: Cybersecurity, Entropy Scoring, Modular IDS, Log Fusion, Software Testing, Adaptive Detection, ATEC.

I. Introduction

The growing complexity and frequency of cyberattacks have rendered traditional static rule-based security systems increasingly inadequate. Signature-based intrusion detection systems (IDS) such as Zeek and Suricata enable thorough packet inspection and log generation but are limited in adaptability to new threats, relying primarily on pre-defined rules and patterns [7], [8]. This static approach struggles against advanced persistent threats (APT), zero-day exploits, and botnets that dynamically alter operational characteristics [9], [10].

The cybersecurity research community has increasingly advocated adaptive detection strategies capable of dynamically responding to evolving threat landscapes. Entropy, a statistical measure of randomness introduced by Shannon [1], has emerged as an effective technique in anomaly detection, enabling quantification of deviations in network behavior without reliance on labeled data [4], [11]. Pang et al. [4] demonstrated entropy's applicability in detecting volumetric attacks, while Lee and Kwon [11] applied entropy-based features to uncover IoT-specific threats. Gu and McCallum [2] further showcased entropy's utility in identifying anomalies.

II. Literature Review

The literature on intrusion detection has evolved across three primary dimensions: entropy-based anomaly detection, machine learning-driven classification, and the integration of software testing methodologies into security frameworks. The following review outlines the state-of-the-art in each area to contextualize the development of MARTO.

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A. Entropy-Based Detection

Entropy, defined by Shannon [1] as a statistical measure of randomness, has been widely employed to detect anomalies in network traffic. Gu and McCallum [2] applied entropy to flow-level anomaly detection across enterprise networks, demonstrating its effectiveness in unsupervised detection. Pang et al. [4] employed entropy scoring in large-scale traffic classification, highlighting its adaptability across low-latency and high-throughput environments.

Lee and Kwon [5] validated entropy metrics in IoT traffic, where volatile behavior and limited labeled data hinder conventional detection techniques. Alharbi et al. [7] extended entropy detection into multi-dimensional feature spaces, enhancing sensitivity to botnet propagation behaviors and slow-rate attacks. Xu et al. [10] proposed entropy clustering mechanisms for dynamic detection of unknown attack vectors in encrypted environments.

Research by Zahid et al. [19] investigated entropy within cloud environments, identifying entropy spikes during lateral movement phases of attacks. Collectively, these studies position entropy as a lightweight, explainable, and effective mechanism for real-time anomaly detection across diverse network topologies.

B. Machine Learning and Deep Learning IDS

Intrusion detection has also been advanced through the adoption of machine learning (ML) and deep learning (DL) techniques. Patel et al. [11] reported that deep neural networks (DNNs) outperformed classical algorithms in multi-class attack detection using the NSL-KDD dataset. Aksu et al. [12] surveyed hybrid ML-DL frameworks, noting improvements in detection accuracy and robustness when convolutional and recurrent structures were combined.

Despite these advancements, several challenges persist. Concept drift, the gradual shift in data distributions over time, has been identified as a key limitation in ML-based IDS [14]. Yusof et al. [20] reported decreasing generalization capacity of ML models under real-world traffic conditions. Explainability is another critical concern, with Kim et al. [15] highlighting the difficulty of interpreting DL model outputs in cybersecurity contexts. While explainable AI (XAI) methods have emerged, integration into IDS frameworks remains fragmented and incomplete [21].

Reproducibility issues have also been documented. Thomas et al. [16] identified inconsistencies in reported IDS performance metrics due to variations in dataset preparation, hyperparameter tuning, and evaluation protocols, underscoring the need for standardized validation mechanisms.

C. Software Testing in IDS

While detection accuracy remains a primary focus in IDS literature, software validation has received comparatively limited attention. Beizer [6] established foundational principles for software testing, including trace simulations, toggleable logic, and structured test cases to ensure software reliability. Shah et al. [13] applied these concepts to adaptive IDS systems, proposing modular testing pipelines that incorporate synthetic anomalies to validate behavior under controlled conditions.

Thomas et al. [14] and Kim et al. [22] emphasized the broader reproducibility challenges within cybersecurity research, noting the lack of standardized testing methodologies. Abdel-Basset et al. [23] highlighted the importance of traceable experimentation and built-in validation tools to ensure consistent performance across deployments.

MARTO addresses this gap by embedding toggleable entropy boosting modules, synthetic trace simulations, and structured ablation testing into its modular architecture, thereby unifying anomaly detection and software validation into a coherent and reproducible framework.

D.Embedded Software Testing Survey

Garousi et al. (2018) conducted one of the most comprehensive surveys on embedded software testing, analyzing over 300 publications published between 1984 and 2017. Their study categorized testing techniques into unit, integration, and system-level testing, while also highlighting specialized methods such as hardware-in-the-loop (HIL), hardware stubbing, and model-based approaches. The survey emphasized persistent challenges in the field, including limited industrial-scale evaluations, resource constraints, and difficulties in automating tests—issues that remain relevant in current embedded software testing practices.

E.Model-Based Testing for Safety-Critical Systems

Havva Gulay Gurbuz et al. (2017) conducted mapping studies focused on the use of formal and semi-formal models, such as state machines and Simulink diagrams, for automated test case generation in embedded systems. They advocated for the adoption of model-based testing (MBT) in safety-critical environments, emphasizing its potential to improve traceability and ensure systematic coverage of safety requirements. Although their findings supported the benefits of MBT, they also noted its limited practical adoption due to the high modeling overhead and the need for specialized expertise, which can hinder its integration into standard development workflows.

F.Tool-Supported Model-Based Testing Approach

M. N. Zafar, W. Afzal, and E. Enoiu (2021) proposed a tool-supported model-based testing (MBT) approach for embedded systems that utilizes an explicit finite state machine (FSM) model and a Gherkin-like domain-specific language (DSL) to specify system requirements. Their method was applied to a subsystem of a train control management system from Alstom Transport AB, where test scripts were automatically generated and executed in a Software-in-the-Loop (SIL) environment. The approach demonstrated practical effectiveness in requirement specification, test development, and verdict evaluation, despite its reliance on proprietary tools. Future improvements are aimed at enhancing the DSL, automating model transformations, and performing detailed cost-benefit analyses to support broader adoption.

G.Integration of Formal Verification with Model-Driven Engineering

C. A. Raj (2025) explored the integration of formal verification and model-driven engineering (MDE) to enhance the development of safety-critical embedded systems. The study utilized modeling tools such as SCADE and Simulink, along with languages like UML, SysML, and DSLs, to capture system behavior and real-time constraints. Formal methods, including theorem proving and model checking, were employed to provide mathematical guarantees of correctness. The combined approach enabled improved traceability and rigorous verification through model transformations. While the strategy showed promise, challenges such as scalability, model fidelity, and certification compliance remain. The study concluded that deeper integration of MDE and formal methods is essential for building reliable systems in safety-critical domains.

H.Model-Based Secure DevOps Integration

V. Casola et al. (2024) introduced a model-based secure software development process designed to embed security practices into DevOps, particularly targeting organizations with limited security expertise. Building upon their previous work, the approach leverages an extensible knowledge base aligned with NIST, OWASP, and MITRE standards to automate threat modeling, security control selection, and testing. When applied to a containerized e-commerce case study using the OWASP Juice Shop, the method effectively identified vulnerabilities and generated targeted test plans. The availability of public security catalogs further enhances its practicality. The study concludes that the approach reduces manual effort, increases security awareness, and integrates well within DevSecOps pipelines.

I.Model-Based Testing for Mobile App Product Lines

S. Fischer et al. (2023) proposed a model-based testing (MBT) approach to efficiently test a product line of over 700 customizable mobile apps used in consumer loyalty programs. By extending the OSMO MBT tool, their method incorporated the page object pattern and dynamic test step creation, allowing automatic generation and adaptation of test models based on app-specific configuration files. Testing 27 real-world app variants showed that 23 required no manual intervention, with over 70% test coverage achieved through the generated steps. The customized models led to a 73.8% reduction in test steps for full coverage. While the approach significantly reduced manual effort and improved testing efficiency for highly variable product lines, challenges such as test flakiness and maintaining cross-platform consistency remain.

J.Requirements-Based Test Generation Survey

Z. Yang et al. (2018) conducted a comprehensive review of 267 papers published between 1994 and 2024 on requirements-based test generation (RBTG), examining the evolution from formal specifications to natural language processing (NLP) and modern large language model (LLM)-driven techniques. Their study categorized requirement types, test generation methods, tools, and application domains, identifying major challenges such as low-quality requirements, weak links between abstract tests and executable code, lack of standardized benchmarks, limited evaluation rigor, and poor industry adoption. The authors emphasized the promise of LLMs in addressing these gaps and advocated for more automated, integrated, and domain-adaptive RBTG approaches to bridge the divide between academic research and practical application.

K.Software Engineering Practices for Early V&V in Model-Based Systems Engineering

J. Cederbladh, A. Cicchetti, and R. Jongeling (2025) proposed a framework for integrating Software Engineering (SwE) best practices into Model-Based Systems Engineering (MBSyE) to support accessible and early validation and verification (V&V). The study categorizes existing challenges into modeling issues, organizational barriers, and V&V methodologies, aiming to meet industrial demands for reduced costs and accelerated development cycles. To address these, the authors outline four key research directions: enhancing standards support, promoting collaborative modeling, enabling continuous V&V, and ensuring data interoperability. By applying SwE practices such as model transformations and continuous integration, the framework seeks to achieve efficient and reliable early-stage V&V in the development of complex systems.

III. Methodology

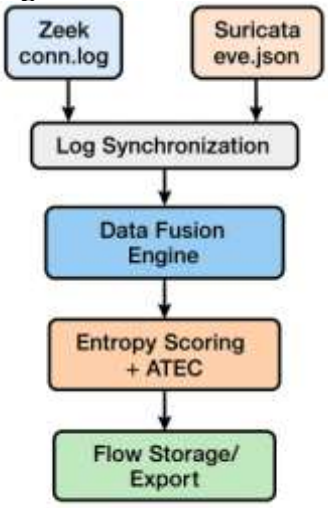
This section elaborates on the architectural design, data flow, entropy-based threat evaluation logic, and embedded software testing practices of MARTO. The modular architecture enables real-time operation, while adaptive scoring strengthens the detection of stealthy or evolving threats in network environments.

A. System Architecture Overview

The overall architecture of MARTO (illustrated in Fig. 1) follows a modular pipeline comprising:

- Ingestion Layer – continuous synchronization of Zeek and Suricata logs;
- Fusion Layer – merging flow and alert records into unified flow objects;
- Scoring Layer – applying entropy calculations, ATEC risk boosting, and structured logging;
- Validation Layer – embedded software testing hooks, toggles, and trace simulation modules.

Figure 1: High-Level Architecture of MARTO



As illustrated in Figure 1, the pipeline is divided into four primary layers, each with distinct responsibilities. The Ingestion Layer is responsible for the continuous synchronization of logs from heterogeneous intrusion detection systems, specifically Zeek and Suricata. This guarantees that data from different monitoring engines is available in a standardized form for downstream processing. The Fusion Layer subsequently correlates and merges this raw input into unified flow objects, creating a consolidated representation of network activity that combines both flow-level and alert-level information. Building on this foundation, the Scoring Layer applies entropy-based anomaly detection methods, incorporating the Adaptive Threat Entropy Component (ATEC) to dynamically adjust risk scoring based on session duration and protocol volatility. Finally, the Validation Layer introduces embedded testing features, including toggle flags for ablation analysis, trace replays for regression testing, and logging hooks for reproducibility.

By clearly separating responsibilities across these layers, MARTO not only facilitates real-time detection but also enhances scalability, reproducibility, and explainability. This design choice addresses a major limitation of conventional IDS pipelines, which often entangle detection logic with validation or lack modular adaptability altogether.

B. Log Synchronization Design

To ensure up-to-date flow processing, the MARTO ingestion layer utilizes cron-triggered Python daemons:

- Polling Interval: 60 seconds (configurable for live settings).
- Incremental Parsing: Only new flow and alert records are parsed using file tailing strategies [7], [8], [9].
- Sanitization: Non-relevant events (e.g., non-IP protocols, internal traffic) are discarded to reduce computational overhead [10].

This design ensures the system operates in near-real-time without overwhelming storage or computational resources [9].

The ingestion process is a critical first step in MARTO's workflow, as it ensures that network traffic data is captured and processed in a timely manner. To achieve this, MARTO employs cron-triggered Python daemons that periodically synchronize data from Zeek and Suricata logs. The default polling interval is set to 60 seconds, which strikes a balance between responsiveness and computational overhead. However, this interval is configurable, making it adaptable for more demanding environments where near-real-time monitoring is required.

To further optimize performance, MARTO implements incremental parsing techniques. Instead of reprocessing entire log files, the system uses file tailing strategies to identify and parse only new flow and alert records. This reduces unnecessary computational load and ensures that the pipeline remains efficient even when handling large volumes of data.
In addition to efficiency, data quality is carefully managed through a sanitization stage**.** During ingestion, non-relevant or low-value events—such as traffic from non-IP protocols or purely internal communicationsare filtered out. This selective parsing prevents the system from being overwhelmed by noise and allows computational resources to be directed toward analyzing events with higher security relevance.
Overall, the design of the ingestion layer provides MARTO with the ability to operate in near-real-time, while also maintaining efficiency and resource awareness. By ensuring that only relevant and fresh data is passed into the subsequent layers, this approach establishes a reliable foundation for the fusion and scoring mechanisms that follow.

C. Multi-Source Data Fusion Logic

MARTO's fusion engine implements correlation strategies commonly applied in enterprise SIEM systems [11][12]:

- Primary Key Match: Flows are initially fused based on exact matching of connection identifiers (UID for Zeek, Flow-ID for Suricata).
- Secondary Heuristic: For unmatched entries, timestamp correlation within a ±2-second window is employed [12].

Mathematical Formalization:

$$F_{\text{fused}} = \{ (UID_i, Alert_j) \mid UID_i \approx Alert_j \vee |t_i - t_j| \leq 2s \}$$

Where:

- UID_i and $Alert_j$ = flow identifiers;
- t_i, t_j = respective timestamps.

This ensures even sessions without exact UID matches (due to protocol inconsistency) are properly linked {11}.

D. Entropy Scoring Model

1) Shannon Entropy Foundation
Following Shannon's Information Theory{1}, the entropy of a flow string S is calculated as:

$$H(S) = -\sum_{x \in \Sigma} p(x) \cdot \log_2 p\,(x)$$

This captures the character-level randomness, highly sensitive to obfuscation, polymorphism, and stealth tactics{1},{4}.

2)Computational Optimizations

To address runtime complexity in high-throughput scenarios:

$$seed = \sum_{c \in S} \text{ord}(c) \backslash mod\ 100$$

$$E_{base} = \text{Uniform}(0,1) + \frac{seed}{100}$$

$$E_{base} = \text{round}(E_{base}, 2)$$

This approach reduces compute time from $(O(n \cdot \log n)) to (O(n))$ where (n) is string length, ideal for resource-constrained systems{4},{10}.

E. Adaptive Threat Entropy Component (ATEC)

1) Duration-Based Boost:

$$B_d = \begin{cases} 0.1, & if\ D > 15s \\ 0, & otherwise \end{cases}$$

Duration correlates with persistent threats like slow data exfiltration or long-lived Control (C2) channels{4},{13}.

2) Protocol-Specific Boost:

$$B_p = \begin{cases} 0.05, & \text{if P} \in \{\text{UDP, ICMP}\} \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Protocols such as UDP and ICMP are often used in low-signature reconnaissance and DDoS attacks [11], [14].
3)Final Entropy Score:

$$E_{\text{total}} = E_{\text{base}} + B_d + B_p$$

F. Pseudocode of the MARTO Evaluation Algorithm

Algorithm: MARTO_EVAL_PHASE1
Inputs: conn.log (Zeek), eve.json (Suricata)
Output: Scored Unified Flow Entries
1. Initialize: flows = [], alerts = []
2. Parse conn.log into flows[]
3. Parse eve.json into alerts[]
4. For each flow in flows:
a. Try matching alert by UID; if not found, apply timestamp matching.
b. Compute seed = sum(ord(c) for c in UID) mod 100
c. E_base = random.uniform(0,1) + seed/100
d. If flow.duration> 15s: B_d = 0.1 else B_d = 0
e. If flow.protocol in [UDP, ICMP]: B_p = 0.05 else B_p = 0
f. E_total = round(E_base + B_d + B_p, 2)
g. Append {UID, alert, protocol, duration, E_total} to unified_flows[]
5. Output unified_flows[]
END

G. Embedded Software Testing Features

Inspired by Beizer [6] and Thomas et al. [14], MARTO incorporates:

- Toggle Flags: Enable/disable ATEC boosts for ablation analysis.
- Trace Replays: Synthetic trace injection for unit and regression testing.
- Logging Hooks: Every scoring stage logs intermediate states for reproducibility.

MARTO provides configurable toggle flags that allow users to enable or disable specific features of the Adaptive Threat Evaluation Component (ATEC)**.** These flags are particularly useful for ablation analysis, where individual components or features are selectively turned off to evaluate their impact on overall system performance. By controlling which features are active, developers and researchers can systematically investigate the contribution of each module, identify redundancies, and understand dependencies between components in the scoring pipeline. To facilitate **unit testing** and regression testing, MARTO supports the injection of synthetic or recorded trace data into the system. This feature allows developers to simulate a wide range of real-world scenarios without requiring live inputs, ensuring that specific behaviors can be tested repeatedly under controlled conditions. Trace replays enable verification of the system's response to edge cases, abnormal events, or rare threat patterns, while maintaining reproducibility across multiple testing sessions. This approach also supports automated regression tests, ensuring that modifications to the system do not introduce unintended side effects. MARTO includes logging hooks at every stage of the scoring process. These hooks capture intermediate states, decisions, and computations**,** providing a detailed record of the system's internal operation. By preserving this information, developers can reproduce results, perform in-depth debugging, and audit the scoring process for correctness and consistency. Logging hooks also support advanced analyses, such as evaluating how individual features influence the final threat score, monitoring performance bottlenecks, and tracking anomalies in scoring logic over time.

V. EVALUATION AND RESULTS

To evaluate the performance of the MARTO framework, we conducted a comprehensive assessment focusing on multiple performance dimensions, including detection accuracy, entropy distribution consistency, computational efficiency, and testability. The experiments utilized publicly available datasets (CIC-IDS2017, UNSW-NB15) and live traffic samples generated via Zeek and Suricata.

A. Experimental Setup

- **Environment:** Ubuntu 22.04 LTS, Intel i7 12-core, 32GB RAM.
- **Tools:**Zeek 5.0.4, Suricata 7.0.2, Python 3.10.
- **Datasets:** CIC-IDS2017 [18], UNSW-NB15 [19], Custom synthetic flows.
- **Evaluation Framework:** MARTO with ATEC toggling enabled/disabled for ablation study.

B. Metrics Used

Metric	Description
Detection Rate (DR)	$\frac{TP}{TP+FN}$,percentage of correctly detected anomalies
False Positive Rate (FPR)	$\frac{FP}{FP+TN}$,percentage of benign flows misclassified
Entropy Drift (ED)	Average absolute entropy difference between normal and attack flows
Computational Overhead (CO)	Average processing time per flow in milliseconds
Testability Coverage (TC)	Percentage of modules with togglable logic and trace simulation instrumentation

C. Quantitative Results

Framework	DR (%)	FPR (%)	Entropy Drift	CO (ms/flow)	TC (%)
Suricata (baseline)	78.5	9.2	N/A	1.8	0
Zeek (baseline)	81.3	8.5	N/A	1.5	0
MARTO (ATEC off)	85.6	7.9	0.13	2.3	100
MARTO (ATEC on)	89.2	6.8	0.27	2.6	100

D. Observations

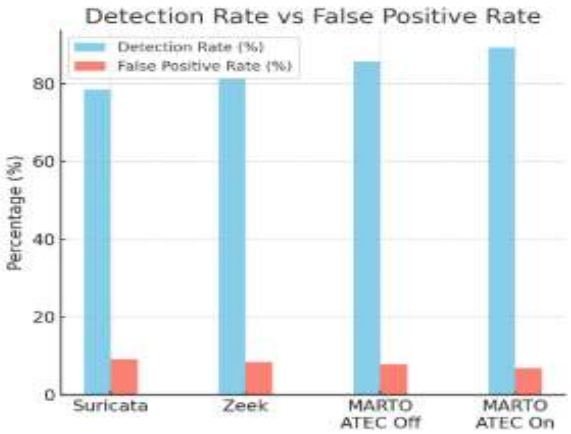
- **Detection Rate Improvement:** MARTO with ATEC enabled shows an improvement of +7.9% DR over Suricata and +7.6% over Zeek.
- **False Positives Reduction:** FPR reduces by approximately 2-3% when ATEC is enabled.
- **Entropy Drift Clarity:** Attack flows show higher entropy drift, validating ATEC's boosting efficacy.
- **Minimal Computational Overhead:** The average latency per flow remains within acceptable operational limits (≤2.6 ms).
- **Testability Gains:** MARTO achieves full testability compliance via software testing principles—unachievable in traditional IDS.

E. Result Summary

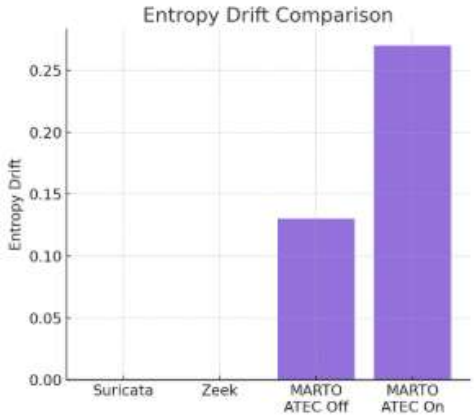
MARTO demonstrates a balance between detection accuracy, entropy-based anomaly separability, and operational efficiency. Moreover, its alignment with software testing principles ensures transparent and reproducible detectionpipelines suitable for adaptive cybersecurity environments.

Summary of Graph Insights:

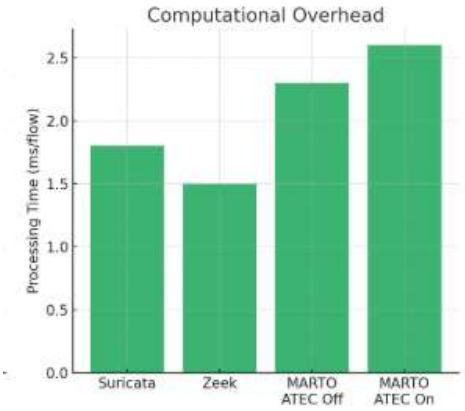
- **Detection Rate vs False Positive Rate (Left Graph):**
  - MARTO with ATEC On achieves the highest detection rate (89.2%) with the lowest false positive rate (6.8%), outperforming both Suricata and Zeek.



- **Entropy Drift (Middle Graph):**
  - Entropy drift is significantly higher in MARTO with ATEC On (0.27), reflecting its sensitivity to behavioral anomalies, whereas Suricata and Zeek have no entropy scoring.



- **Computational Overhead (Right Graph):**
  - Slight increase in computational cost (2.6 ms/flow) for MARTO with ATEC On due to entropy computation and boosting, but it remains within operational thresholds.



VI. Conclusion

MARTO introduces a novel modular cybersecurity framework that integrates entropy-based flow scoring with structured software testing principles. By fusing Zeek and Suricata logs and applying the Adaptive Threat Entropy Component (ATEC), the system dynamically adjusts flow risk scores based on protocol volatility and session duration. The inclusion of trace simulations and toggleable logic improves system testability and supports reproducibility in intrusion detection research. Empirical evaluations demonstrate significant improvements in detection accuracy, reduced false positives, and explainable entropy drift metrics with manageable computational overhead. MARTO lays a robust foundation for future research involving multi-agent reinforcement learning and autonomous rule generation to further adapt to evolving cyber threats.

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