XEP-0285: Encapsulating Digital Signatures in XMPP

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<th>Type</th>
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<td>Standards Track</td>
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</table>

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1 Introduction

This document is one of two proposals for digital signatures in XMPP. It is expected that only one of these proposals be progressed beyond Experimental on the Standards Track.

This document provides a technical specification for Digital Signatures in Extensible Messaging and Presence Protocol (XMPP) ¹ based upon End-to-End Object Encryption (E2EEncrypt ²) "work in progress".

The S/MIME approach defined in RFC 3923 ³ has never been implemented in XMPP clients to the best of our knowledge, but has some attractive features, especially the ability to store-and-forward a signed message at a user’s server if the user is not online when the message is received (in the XMPP community this is called "offline storage" and the message is referred to as an "offline message"). The authors surmise that RFC 3923 has not been implemented mainly because it adds several new dependencies to XMPP clients, especially MIME (along with the CPIM and MSGFMT media types).

This document explores the possibility of an approach that is similar to but simpler than RFC 3923. Like the approach detailed in RFC 3923, the approach utilizes encapsulating digital signatures.

Like other encapsulating signature approaches (e.g., Current Jabber OpenPGP Usage (XEP-0027) ⁴), this approach does not support optimistic signing.

2 Signing XMPP Stanzas

The process that a sending agent follows for securing stanzas is very similar regardless of the form of stanza (i.e., <iq/>, <message/>, or <presence/>).

1. Constructs a cleartext version of the stanza, \( S \).
2. Notes the current UTC date and time \( N \) when this stanza is constructed, formatted as described in Section 5.
3. Converts the stanza to a UTF-8, as defined by RFC 3629 ⁵, encoded string, optionally removing line breaks and other insignificant whitespace between elements and attributes, i.e., \( \text{UTF-8-encode}(S) = S' \). We call \( S' \) a "stanza-string" because for purposes of signing and verification it is treated not as XML but as an opaque string (this avoids the need for complex canonicalization of the XML input).

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4. Constructs a plaintext envelope (E) `<plain/>` qualified by the "urn:xmpp:signed:0" namespace as follows:
   - The attribute 'timestamp' set to the UTC date and time value N
   - The XML character data set to the base64-encoded form of S' (where the encoding adheres to the definition in Section 4 of BASE64 and where the padding bits are set to zero). This encoding is necessary to preserve a canonicalized form of S'.

5. Converts the envelope (E) to a UTF-8 encoded string, optionally removing line breaks and other insignificant whitespace between elements and attributes, i.e., E' = UTF8-encode(E).

6. Produce a signature of UTF8-encoded envelope (E') using the intended signature algorithm. T = signature(E'). (This step is underspecified and will be expanded upon in later revision of this document.)

7. Base64-encodes T to produce the signature data T'.

8. Constructs an `<signed/>` element qualified by the "urn:xmpp:signed:0" namespace as follows:
   - The child element `<signature>` (implicitly qualified by the "urn:xmpp:signed:0" namespace) as follows:
     - The attribute 'algorithm' set to a string identifying the signature algorithm used.
     - The XML character data T'.
   - The child element `<data>` (implicitly qualified by the "urn:xmpp:signed:0" namespace) as follows:
     - The XML character data E'.

9. Sends the `<signed/>` element as the payload of a stanza that SHOULD match the stanza from step 1 in kind (e.g., `<message/>`), type (e.g., "chat"), and addressing (e.g. to="romeo@montague.net" from="juliet@capulet.net/balcony"). If the original stanza (S) has a value for the "id" attribute, this stanza MUST NOT use the same value for its "id" attribute.

2.1 Example of Signing Messages

The sender begins with the cleartext version of the `<message/>` stanza "S":

\[<message xmlns='jabber:client'
         from='juliet@capulet.net/balcony'
         id='183ef129'
         to='romeo@montague.net'>\]

\(^6\text{RFC 4648: The Base16, Base32, and Base64 Data <http://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc4648>.}\)
The sender then performs the steps 1 through 4 from above to generate:

```
<plain xmlns="urn:xmpp:signed:0"
      timestamp="2010-06-29T02:15:21.012Z">
  PG1lc3NhZ2UgeG1sbnM9ImlptzJ1cjpjbGl1bnQ1IGZyb209Imp1bGl1dEBjYXVl
  bGV0Lm5ldC9iYWxjb255Iib0bz0icm9tZWNJabW9udGVndWUubmV0Ii8eXBlPS
  JjaGF0i48dGhyZWFkPmM2Mzc3ODI0LWEzMDctNDBkZC04ZmUwLWJhZDZ1NzI5O
  WFKmdwvGhyZWFkPjixb2R5PloZJXJzmyZSBhcnQgdGhvSwgUm9tZWNyZW8/PC9i
  b2R5PjwvWVzc2FnZT4=
</plain>
```

And then performs steps 5 through 9 steps, causing the following to be sent:

```
<message xmlns='jabber:client'
         from='juliet@capulet.net/balcony'
         id='6410ed123'
         to='romeo@montague.net'
         type='chat'>
  <signed xmlns='urn:xmpp:signed:0'>
    <signature algorithm="RSA-SHA1">
      DxbxIziY1C1Ytcxj01FlsdfmdLMv96JM1MAQZ7jh49Ibs0IPsx12LyLmqhK
      9/94UXDKQLvLJz
      gAmw8V2b+zmyZelTzJsmB+H
      HHiLFVXK2Dd4Jfetsafsflc7uNWg0gAeiKTHffgivesEC/2WxwoJ3
      JUMRYQ9ykiPEjZS0GZ/k=
    </signature>
  <data>
    PHBsYWluIHHtebG5zPSj1cm46eG1wcDpzaWduZWQ6MCIgdGl1ZXN0YW1wPSIyMDExLTA2LTI5VDAy
    0jE10jIxLjAxMi0iPpgiFBHMWxjM05oWjJvZ2VHMXNibk05SW1waFltSxjabanBqYkdsbGJuW1J
    R1p5YjIwOUU1tcDFiR2xsZEVCAliYQpogiDFiRi1wTG01bGRD0w1ZV3hqYjI1NU1pOj8eBpY205
    dFpXOUFiVz11ZEdWbmRXVXVibVYwSw1CMGYYQmxQUwogIEpqYUdGME1qNDhkR2h5WldGa1BtTTJN
    emN6T0RJMEexXRXpNRGN0TkRCa1pDMRabVV3TFdKafEwmx0ekk1TwogIFdG61Ed32rR2h5WldG
    a1BqeGliMII1UGxkb1pYSxabT15W1NCaG1NuWdkR2hZFN3Z1V0XRaVzgvVEMSmQogIGl1yUjYVQ
    and2Y1dWemMyRm5saVDQ9CjwvcGxhaW4+Cg==
  </data>
</signed>
</message>
```
2.2 Example of Securing IQs
To be added....

3 Interaction with Stanza Semantics

The following limitations and caveats apply:

- Undirected `<presence/>` stanzas SHOULD NOT be signed.
- Stanzas directed to multiplexing services (e.g. multi-user chat) SHOULD NOT be signed, unless the sender has established the service supports the handling of signed stanzas.

4 Handling of Inbound Stanzas

Several scenarios are possible when an entity receives an encrypted stanza:

Case #1: The receiving application does not understand the protocol.

Case #2: The receiving application understands the protocol and is able to verify the signature.

Case #3: The receiving application understands the protocol and is able to verify the signature, but the timestamps fail the checks specified under Checking of Timestamps.

Case #4: The receiving application understands the protocol and is unable to verify the signature.

In Case #1, the receiving application MUST do one and only one of the following: (1) ignore the `<signed/>` extension, (2) ignore the entire stanza, or (3), except where precluded by the protocol (RFC 6120), return a `<service-unavailable/>` error to the sender.

In Case #2, the receiving application MUST NOT return a stanza error to the sender, since this is the success case.

In Case #3, the receiving application MAY, except where precluded by the protocol, return a `<not-acceptable/>` error to the sender, optionally supplemented by an application-specific error condition element of `<bad-timestamp/>` as shown below:

```
<message from='romeo@example.net/orchard'
   id='6410ed123'
   to='juliet@capulet.net/balcony'
   type='error'>
```

In Case #4, the receiving application SHOULD, except as precluded by the protocol, return a 
<bad-request/> error to the sender, optionally supplemented by an application-specific error 
condition element of <bad-signature/> as shown below:

```
<message from='romeo@example.net/orchard'
id='6410ed123'
to='juliet@capulet.net/balcony'
type='error'>
  <signed xmlns='urn:xmpp:signed:0'>
    <!-{}- original content -{}->
  </signed>
  <error type='modify'>
    <bad-request xmlns='urn:ietf:params:xml:ns:xmpp-stanzas'/>
    <bad-signature xmlns='urn:xmpp:signed:0'/>
  </error>
</message>
```

Additionally in Case #4, the receiving application SHOULD NOT present the stanza to the 
intended recipient (human or application) and SHOULD provide some explicit alternate 
processing of the stanza (which may be to display a message informing the recipient that it 
has received a stanza that cannot be verified).

5 Inclusion and Checking of Timestamps

Timestamps are included to help prevent replay attacks. All timestamps MUST conform 
to DATETIME 8 and be presented as UTC with no offset, always including the seconds and 
fractions of a second to three digits (resulting in a datetime 24 characters in length). Absent 
a local adjustment to the sending agent’s perceived time or the underlying clock time, the 
sending agent MUST ensure that the timestamps it sends to the receiver increase monotoni-
cally (if necessary by incrementing the seconds fraction in the timestamp if the clock returns 
the same time for multiple requests). The following rules apply to the receiving application:

- It MUST verify that the timestamp received is within five minutes of the current time, 
except as described below for offline messages.

• If the foregoing check fails, the timestamp SHOULD be presented to the receiving entity (human or application) marked with descriptive text indicating "old timestamp" or "future timestamp" and the receiving entity MAY return a stanza error to the sender (except as precluded in the protocol).

The foregoing timestamp checks assume that the recipient is online when the message is received. However, if the recipient is offline then the server will probably store the message for delivery when the recipient is next online (offline storage does not apply to <iq/> or <presence/> stanzas, only <message/> stanzas). As described in Best Practices for Handling Offline Messages (XEP-0160) ⁹, when sending an offline message to the recipient, the server SHOULD include delayed delivery data as specified in Delayed Delivery (XEP-0203) ¹⁰ so that the recipient knows that this is an offline message and also knows the original time of receipt at the server. In this case, the recipient SHOULD verify that the timestamp received in the encrypted message is within five minutes of the time stamped by the recipient’s server in the <delay/> element.

### 6 Mandatory-to-Implement Cryptographic Algorithms

All implementations MUST support the following algorithms. Implementations MAY support other algorithms as well.

• TBD (RSA/SHA1? RSASSA-RKCS1-v1_5? RSASSA-PSS?)

### 7 Certificates

To participate in end-to-end signing using the methods defined in this document, a client needs to possess an X.509 certificate. It is expected that many clients will generate their own (self-signed) certificates rather than obtain a certificate issued by a certification authority (CA). In any case the certificate MUST include an XMPP address that is represented using the ASN.1 Object Identifier "id-on-xmppAddr" as specified in Section 5.1.1 of RFC 3920bis.

### 8 Security Considerations

TBD.

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9 XMPP Registrar Considerations

9.1 XML Namespace Name for Signed Data in XMPP

A URN sub-namespace of signed content for the Extensible Messaging and Presence Protocol (XMPP) is defined as follows.

URI: urn:xmpp:signed

Specification: ProtoXEP

Description: This is an XML namespace name of signed content for the Extensible Messaging and Presence Protocol as defined by ProtoXEP.

Registrant Contact: XSF

10 Acknowledgements

This document borrows ideas and text from End-to-End Object Encryption "work in progress" by Matthew Miller and Peter Saint-Andre.