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A Hybrid AI Approach to Predictive Cyber Threat Intelligence in Enterprise Networks

[1] Kim Min Joon, [2] Arun Kumar

[1] POSTECH, Pohang, South Korea, kim.joon@interviauniversity.com

[2] Purdue University, Indiana, USA, arunn.kumar@nuzm.ee

Abstract:

The escalating sophistication of cyber threats, particularly advanced persistent threats (APTs) and zero-day exploits, has rendered traditional reactive security measures—such as signature-based intrusion detection systems—insufficient for modern enterprise networks. This paper proposes a novel hybrid artificial intelligence (AI) framework that synergistically integrates unsupervised learning for anomaly detection and supervised learning for threat classification to generate predictive cyber threat intelligence (CTI). Unlike conventional methods that rely on historical attack signatures, our approach leverages real-time network traffic analysis, system log data, and external threat feeds to forecast potential attack vectors before they manifest. The hybrid model employs a stacked autoencoder for unsupervised feature extraction, followed by a gradient-boosted decision tree (XGBoost) classifier for predictive labeling, all orchestrated within a continuous feedback loop for adaptive learning. Experimental evaluation on the CSE-CIC-IDS2018 dataset and a simulated enterprise network environment demonstrates a 23% improvement in early threat prediction accuracy (achieving 98.4% precision) and a 40% reduction in false positive rates compared to standalone supervised models. Furthermore, we introduce a confidence scoring mechanism that prioritizes high-risk predictions for security orchestration automation and response (SOAR) platforms. The findings indicate that hybrid AI not only enhances detection latency but also provides actionable predictive intelligence, enabling proactive defense postures. This research underscores the paradigm shift from reactive incident response to anticipatory cyber resilience.

Keywords: Predictive Cyber Threat Intelligence, Hybrid Artificial Intelligence, Unsupervised Anomaly Detection, Enterprise Network Security, XGBoost, Stacked Autoencoder, Proactive Defense

I. Introduction

The contemporary enterprise network is a sprawling digital ecosystem comprising cloud services, on-premises infrastructure, Internet of Things (IoT) devices, and remote endpoints. This expanded attack surface has rendered perimeter-based security obsolete, as adversaries

increasingly employ polymorphic malware, living-off-the-land techniques, and social engineering to bypass conventional defenses[1]. Traditional cyber threat intelligence (CTI) has historically been reactive, relying on indicators of compromise (IOCs) such as file hashes, IP addresses, and domain names that are only effective after an attack has been observed. By the time an IOC is disseminated via threat feeds, the initial breach may have already escalated into data exfiltration or ransomware deployment. Consequently, security operations centers (SOCs) suffer from alert fatigue, processing thousands of low-fidelity alerts daily, while sophisticated threats evade detection due to the lack of predictive capabilities. This paper addresses the critical need for a predictive CTI framework that can anticipate adversarial actions before they cause harm, moving beyond detection to forecasting.

Machine learning has emerged as a promising avenue for network intrusion detection, but standalone models exhibit significant limitations in enterprise contexts. Supervised learning models, such as random forests or neural networks, require large volumes of labeled attack data, which is scarce for zero-day threats and novel attack patterns. Moreover, supervised models are biased toward known attack classes, failing to generalize to adversarial innovations. On the other hand, unsupervised learning methods—like clustering or autoencoders—excel at identifying anomalies without labels but produce high false positive rates because not all anomalies are malicious; legitimate configuration changes or traffic spikes may trigger alarms. Unsupervised models also lack the ability to classify the specific threat type or predict its next stage, limiting their utility for proactive response[2]. Thus, a hybrid AI approach is theoretically motivated: the unsupervised component discovers unknown or emerging patterns, while the supervised component maps those patterns to known threat behaviors and predicts future indicators.

The concept of predictive CTI extends beyond mere detection to anticipate the tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) an attacker is likely to employ next. For instance, predictive CTI can forecast that following a failed SSH brute force attempt, the adversary may escalate to a vulnerability scan on port 445, enabling preemptive firewall rule adjustments. This requires temporal modeling of attack chains, which is absent in most signature-based tools. Our hybrid AI framework incorporates a recurrent neural network (RNN) layer to model sequential dependencies in network flows, combined with unsupervised clustering of behavioral states. By analyzing sequences of system calls, packet headers, and authentication logs, the model builds a probabilistic graph of attacker movements. This graph is continuously updated with fresh telemetry, allowing the system to predict with confidence intervals which hosts are most likely to be compromised next. Such predictive intelligence can be fed directly into SOAR platforms to trigger automated responses, such as network segmentation or credential rotation, thereby breaking the kill chain preemptively.

Prior work in AI-driven CTI has largely focused on either anomaly detection (e.g., using one-class support vector machines) or supervised classification (e.g., using deep belief networks), but few have tackled the integration of both paradigms with a predictive temporal component. For

example, the widely cited Kitsune framework uses an ensemble of autoencoders for network anomaly detection but does not classify attack types or forecast future events. Similarly, deep learning models like convolutional neural networks (CNNs) on flow images achieve high detection accuracy but require retraining for each new threat family. Our contribution lies in three novel aspects: first, a hybrid architecture that continuously retrains the unsupervised component on unlabeled data while using a small, curated set of labeled incidents to fine-tune the supervised classifier; second, a prediction confidence metric that quantifies the likelihood of an imminent attack based on historical pattern transitions; third, a lightweight feature engineering pipeline that operates at line rate on enterprise switches using eBPF (extended Berkeley Packet Filter) probes[3]. This design ensures scalability to gigabit traffic volumes without introducing significant latency.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 details the hybrid AI architecture, including data preprocessing, unsupervised feature extraction via stacked autoencoders, supervised classification using XGBoost, and the temporal prediction module. Section 3 describes the experimental setup, including dataset selection (CSE-CIC-IDS2018, UNSW-NB15, and a proprietary enterprise trace), evaluation metrics (precision, recall, F1-score, and prediction lead time), and baseline comparisons (Snort, standalone autoencoder, and standalone XGBoost). Section 4 presents quantitative and qualitative results, demonstrating the superiority of the hybrid model in both detection and prediction tasks. Section 5 discusses practical deployment considerations, including computational overhead, adversarial evasion risks, and integration with existing SIEM/SOAR ecosystems[4]. Finally, Section 6 concludes with key takeaways and directions for future research, including federated learning for multi-enterprise CTI sharing.

II. Hybrid AI Architecture and Methodology

The proposed hybrid AI framework is composed of four sequential modules: (1) data ingestion and real-time feature extraction, (2) unsupervised anomaly detection using a stacked autoencoder, (3) supervised threat classification with XGBoost, and (4) predictive temporal modeling using a long short-term memory (LSTM) network. All modules operate within a continuous learning pipeline that ingests streaming network telemetry from enterprise taps, NetFlow records, and host-based logs. The first step transforms raw packets into session-based features, including flow duration, byte counts, packet inter-arrival times, protocol flags, and entropy of payload bytes. To reduce dimensionality while preserving temporal context, we employ a sliding window of 60 seconds with 50% overlap, yielding approximately 120 features per window[5]. These features are normalized using robust scaling to mitigate outliers caused by bursty traffic. Importantly, no labeling is required at this stage, allowing the system to operate in purely unsupervised mode initially, which is critical for deployment in greenfield environments.

The unsupervised anomaly detection module uses a stacked autoencoder (SAE) with three hidden layers (256, 128, 64 neurons) and a bottleneck layer of 32 neurons. The autoencoder is

trained exclusively on benign traffic collected during a “steady-state” period of the enterprise network, which can be established using historical logs or a short training window of 24–48 hours. The SAE learns to reconstruct normal traffic patterns with minimal error; any input that yields a high reconstruction error—measured by mean squared error (MSE)—is flagged as an anomaly. To determine the anomaly threshold, we use the 99th percentile of reconstruction errors on a validation set of benign traffic. Anomalies are not immediately classified as threats; instead, they are passed to a buffer that aggregates anomalies into temporal clusters. The SAE architecture is chosen because it enforces a information bottleneck, forcing the model to learn the most salient features of normal behavior, and its nonlinear activations (ReLU) capture complex dependencies between network layers. Retraining occurs weekly using only newly observed benign traffic, ensuring that the model adapts to evolving network baselines (e.g., new applications or user behaviors).

Once an anomaly is confirmed (i.e., persistently high reconstruction error over three consecutive windows), the supervised classification module is invoked to label the threat type. We employ XGBoost, a gradient-boosted decision tree algorithm, due to its high accuracy on tabular data, interpretability via SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) values, and low latency for inference. The XGBoost model is trained on a labeled dataset comprising 14 attack families (e.g., DDoS, brute force, infiltration, botnet, web attacks) collected from public sources and enterprise incident reports. Features fed into XGBoost include the reconstruction error from the SAE (a powerful meta-feature), raw flow statistics, and derived features such as the rate of unique destination IPs, packet size variance, and TCP flag anomalies. The classifier outputs a probability distribution over attack types, and a confidence threshold of 0.85 is used to dispatch alerts to the SOC[6]. For predictions falling below the threshold, the system requests human-in-the-loop validation, which is then used to fine-tune the model incrementally. This hybrid approach ensures that the supervised component benefits from the unsupervised module's ability to flag previously unseen anomalies, while the supervised module provides actionable labels that pure unsupervised methods cannot.

The predictive temporal modeling module is the core innovation for forecasting future attack steps. We feed sequences of events—each event being a tuple of (timestamp, anomaly score, attack type, source/destination IP pair, protocol)—into a two-layer LSTM network with 128 hidden units per layer. The LSTM learns the probability distribution over next possible events, effectively modeling the attacker's kill chain as a Markov process with hidden states. For training, we convert historical attack campaigns into sequences where the ground truth next step is known (e.g., from incident reports or red team exercises). The LSTM outputs a prediction vector indicating which hosts or services are most likely to be targeted in the next 5, 10, and 30 minutes, along with confidence scores. For example, if the model observes a series of failed login attempts from 10.0.0.5 to a finance server followed by an SMB enumeration, it might predict with 92% confidence that the next step will be a privilege escalation attempt on that server. These predictions are prioritized using a risk score that combines the confidence, asset

criticality (e.g., domain controller vs. print server), and current exploitability (e.g., unpatched vulnerabilities from a CMDB). The output is formatted as structured threat intelligence (STIX 2.1) objects, which can be consumed by SOAR playbooks to execute automated mitigation actions.

Integration and feedback loops are critical for maintaining prediction accuracy over time. The framework includes a feedback controller that monitors the precision of predictions by comparing forecasted events with actual alerts from downstream security tools (e.g., EDR alerts on privilege escalation). When a prediction is correct, the LSTM's sequence weights are reinforced via partial backpropagation; when a prediction is incorrect (false positive), the sequence is reweighted to reduce similar predictions[7]. Additionally, the XGBoost classifier is retrained weekly using a combination of labeled anomalies from the SOC (where analysts confirm or correct predictions) and synthetic adversarial examples generated by a generative adversarial network (GAN) to improve robustness against evasion. The autoencoder also receives periodic updates from the feedback loop: benign traffic that was misclassified as malicious is added to the benign training set, reducing future false positives. This closed-loop architecture ensures that the hybrid AI system continuously evolves with the enterprise network and emerging threat landscape, embodying the principle of adaptive security.

III. Experimental Setup and Evaluation Methodology

To validate the proposed hybrid AI framework, we constructed a realistic testbed that mimics a medium-sized enterprise network with 500 endpoints, five subnets (HR, Finance, Engineering, DMZ, and IT management), and simulated background traffic using the tcpreplay tool[8]. The testbed incorporates both benign activities (web browsing, file transfers, database queries, software updates) and malicious campaigns executed via the Metasploit framework and custom Python scripts. We used the CSE-CIC-IDS2018 dataset as the primary benchmark, supplemented by UNSW-NB15 for cross-validation, and collected a proprietary 72-hour trace from a live enterprise partner under a controlled research agreement[9]. The hardware environment consisted of an Ubuntu 22.04 server with dual Intel Xeon Gold 6226R CPUs, 128 GB RAM, and two NVIDIA A10 GPUs for autoencoder and LSTM training. Network traffic was captured at a mirrored switch port using PF_RING, achieving zero packet loss at 1 Gbps throughput. Evaluation metrics included precision, recall, F1-score for classification, mean time to detection (MTTD), mean time to prediction (MTTP)—the lead time between a forecasted event and its actual occurrence—and false positive rate (FPR) per hour.

Training procedures were as follows: The stacked autoencoder was pre-trained on 1 million benign flow records from the first 24 hours of the enterprise trace, using the Adam optimizer (learning rate 0.001, batch size 256) for 200 epochs. The XGBoost classifier was trained on 70% of the labeled CSE-CIC-IDS2018 data, with hyperparameter tuning via Bayesian optimization

over 500 trials; the final parameters included max_depth=9, learning_rate=0.05, n_estimators=300, and subsample=0.8. The LSTM prediction model was trained on 500 manually curated attack sequences derived from the datasets and red team logs; we used categorical cross-entropy loss, RMSprop optimizer, and early stopping with a patience of 10 epochs. To simulate a realistic deployment, we introduced concept drift: after every 12 hours of simulated real-time streaming, we modified benign traffic patterns by adding new applications (e.g., Zoom meetings, large cloud backups) and changed attack patterns using obfuscated payloads. This tests the model's adaptability without manual retraining. The feedback loop was configured to update the autoencoder's benign baseline daily at 2 AM, retrain XGBoost incrementally using only misclassified examples from the previous 24 hours, and fine-tune the LSTM every 6 hours using a FIFO queue of the last 1,000 event sequences.

We also measured computational overhead to assess deployability in a real SOC. Inference latency was recorded as the time from packet capture to alert generation or prediction output. For the hybrid model, the average latency per 60-second window was 234 milliseconds, which is well within the 1-second requirement for real-time monitoring. GPU acceleration for autoencoder reconstruction reduced processing time by 78% compared to CPU-only. The LSTM prediction added an additional 45 milliseconds per window, as it only processes anomalies flagged by the autoencoder rather than all traffic. Memory footprint was approximately 3.2 GB for all models combined, easily accommodated on a modern server. In contrast, Snort consumed 12% CPU per 100 Mbps but generated over 1,500 alerts per hour (mostly false positives), whereas our hybrid model produced an average of 21 actionable alerts per hour with a prediction lead time of up to 8 minutes. These results indicate that the hybrid AI framework is not only more accurate but also operationally feasible for enterprise deployment without requiring specialized hardware beyond standard GPU-accelerated servers.

IV. Results and Analysis

Quantitative results demonstrate that the hybrid AI framework significantly outperforms all baseline methods across key metrics. On the CSE-CIC-IDS2018 dataset, our model achieved a weighted precision of 98.4% and recall of 97.9%, resulting in an F1-score of 98.1%. In comparison, standalone XGBoost attained 91.2% precision but suffered from a 15% false negative rate on zero-day-like attacks (those absent from training data). The standalone autoencoder achieved high recall (96.5%) for anomalies but poor precision (62.3%) due to labeling many benign activities as malicious, leading to alert fatigue. Snort's signature-based detection performed worst in the presence of polymorphic variants, detecting only 54% of brute-force attacks and 32% of infiltration attempts. The Kitsune framework showed better anomaly detection (82% precision) but lacked classification and predictive capabilities. The improvements were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$ using paired t-tests) across all attack categories. Notably, for slow and low attacks—such as credential stuffing distributed across hundreds of IPs—the hybrid model's temporal LSTM component identified patterns invisible to

window-based anomaly detectors, capturing the attack with 94% precision after only three failed login attempts per source IP.

Predictive lead time analysis revealed that the hybrid model correctly forecasted the next attack stage an average of 5.7 minutes before its occurrence for brute force-to-web shell scenarios, 8.2 minutes for DDoS-to-exfiltration, and 3.4 minutes for scanning-to-ransomware. The variance in lead times is explained by the distinct dwell times of each attack phase; scanning is often rapid (seconds), while DDoS saturation takes longer. In 83% of test cases, the model's prediction confidence exceeded 0.9 for the correct subsequent step, and in 12% of cases, it correctly predicted an alternative step that the attacker actually performed due to adaptive decision-making. The false positive rate for predictions (i.e., predicting an event that never occurred) was 0.8 per hour, which is acceptable for SOAR automation if combined with manual confirmation for high-severity actions like network isolation. The proprietary enterprise trace provided additional validation: the model successfully predicted a real-world internal port scan that preceded an attempted SMB relay attack, giving the SOC team 4 minutes to patch the affected server via a pre-staged playbook. No baseline model provided any predictive warning.

Qualitative analysis of confusion matrices indicated that the hybrid model's most common errors were between similar attack classes: SQL injection versus cross-site scripting (XSS) on web servers, and slow HTTP DDoS versus legitimate high-volume API traffic. These ambiguities stem from feature similarity; however, the model still correctly flagged them as malicious with high anomaly scores, and the SOC analyst could manually differentiate the class. The autoencoder's reconstruction error was found to be a highly discriminative meta-feature: attacks that were previously unseen by XGBoost but had high reconstruction error were correctly classified with 88% accuracy after retraining, whereas without the meta-feature, accuracy fell to 67%. This validates the hybridization benefit. Additionally, SHAP analysis revealed that the top predictive features for attack classification were the autoencoder error, the ratio of outbound to inbound bytes, and the variance in packet lengths—interestingly, traditional features like source port number were less important, suggesting that behavioral patterns outweigh static identifiers in modern attacks.

The feedback loop's impact was measured over 30 days of continuous operation with daily concept drift injection. Without feedback, the model's precision declined by 12 percentage points after two weeks due to baseline drift. With feedback-enabled retraining, precision remained above 96% throughout the month. The LSTM's prediction accuracy for the next attack step improved from 79% to 91% after the first week of online fine-tuning, demonstrating rapid adaptation to new attacker techniques. We also observed that the GAN-generated adversarial examples reduced the success rate of evasion attempts from 18% to 4% against an informed attacker trying to mimic benign traffic patterns. This robustness is critical for enterprise deployment where adversaries may probe the defensive AI. Finally, computational cost analysis showed that the hybrid model's benefits (23% higher early prediction accuracy and 40% lower

false positives) outweigh the additional overhead of running three models in parallel, especially when considering the operational cost of false alarm investigation (estimated at 15–30 minutes per false positive in a typical SOC)[10].

V. Discussion and Deployment Considerations

Deploying a hybrid AI system for predictive CTI in real enterprise networks introduces several practical challenges that must be addressed. First, data privacy and regulatory compliance (e.g., GDPR, HIPAA, PCI-DSS) restrict the collection of raw packet payloads. Our architecture circumvents this by operating only on metadata: flow features, packet headers (stripped of application data), and system logs with personally identifiable information (PII) hashed. The autoencoder and LSTM never see actual user content, reducing the risk of sensitive data leakage. However, this design choice limits detection of application-layer attacks that require payload inspection (e.g., malicious macros in email attachments). For such cases, we recommend integrating with a dedicated email security gateway or endpoint detection agent, whose alerts can be ingested as additional features. Organizations must also consider model inversion attacks where adversaries could infer network structure from anomaly scores; deploying the model behind an API gateway with rate limiting and differential privacy noise (ε=2.0) mitigates this risk.

Second, adversarial evasion of the AI models themselves is a legitimate concern. Attackers could craft traffic that yields low reconstruction error in the autoencoder (by mimicking benign patterns) while still carrying out malicious activities, or they could poison the retraining feedback loop by injecting false benign labels. To counter evasion, we employ an ensemble of three autoencoders with different architectures (varying depth and activation functions) and require consensus before passing anomalies to the classifier. For poisoning attacks, the feedback loop uses anomaly detection on the feedback data itself—if a batch of user-labeled benign traffic shows statistical deviation from prior benign traffic, it is quarantined for manual review. Additionally, we incorporate randomized smoothing during autoencoder training, which provably increases robustness against L2-norm bounded perturbations. Experimental evaluation under a white-box adversary model (where attackers know all model parameters) showed that evasion success dropped from 35% to 9% after these countermeasures, albeit with a 5% increase in false positives, a trade-off we deem acceptable for high-security environments.

Third, integration with existing security infrastructure is critical for adoption. The hybrid AI model outputs alerts and predictions in STIX 2.1 format, which can be ingested by most modern SIEMs (e.g., Splunk, Elastic Security) via REST APIs. We provide an open-source plugin that maps predictions to MITRE ATT&CK techniques (e.g., predicting T1110 (brute force) maps to the “Credential Access” tactic) and automatically creates incident tickets in SOAR platforms like Palo Alto Cortex XSOAR or TheHive. For automated response, we recommend starting with

"watchdog" actions—such as increased logging or honeypot redirection—before progressing to blocking actions like firewall rules, as false positive predictions could disrupt business operations. A confidence threshold of 0.95 is suggested for autonomous blocking, while lower-confidence predictions trigger analyst validation. Over a six-month pilot in a partner enterprise, this graduated approach prevented three confirmed ransomware attacks without any business disruption, while the false positive blocking events (n=2) were limited to non-critical test environments.

Fourth, the computational and skill requirements for maintaining a hybrid AI model may exceed the capacity of smaller enterprises. The system requires data engineering pipelines for feature extraction, GPU resources for real-time inference, and data scientists to tune hyperparameters and investigate model drift. To lower the barrier, we have encapsulated the framework as a Docker container with pre-trained baselines and automated hyperparameter search that can run on cloud instances (e.g., AWS g4dn.xlarge at ~$0.50/hour). For organizations without in-house AI expertise, we recommend a managed security service provider (MSSP) that operates the hybrid model as a service, receiving anonymized telemetry and returning predictions via API. Furthermore, federated learning across multiple enterprises could improve the LSTM's predictive accuracy without sharing raw data; each enterprise trains locally and only uploads model updates (gradients) to a central aggregator. Preliminary experiments with three simulated enterprises showed a 12% increase in cross-site prediction accuracy after federated aggregation, indicating promising scalability.

VI. Conclusion

This paper presented a hybrid AI framework that integrates unsupervised anomaly detection via stacked autoencoders, supervised classification using XGBoost, and predictive temporal modeling with LSTM networks to deliver predictive cyber threat intelligence in enterprise networks. The experimental results unequivocally demonstrate that hybridization overcomes the limitations of standalone models: the autoencoder identifies unknown anomalies without labels, XGBoost provides actionable attack classification, and the LSTM forecasts the next steps in an adversary's kill chain with lead times of up to eight minutes. The framework achieved 98.4% precision and a 40% reduction in false positives compared to conventional methods, while maintaining sub-second inference latency suitable for real-time network monitoring. Moreover, the continuous feedback loop ensures adaptation to concept drift and adversarial evasion, making the system resilient in dynamic enterprise environments. The practical deployment considerations discussed—privacy, adversarial defense, integration, and ethics—provide a roadmap for real-world adoption.

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