

# Detecting And Visualizing Denial-of-Service And Network Probe Attacks Using Principal Component Analysis

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A multivariate statistical method called Principal Component Analysis is used to detect Denial-of-Service and Network Probe attacks using the 1998 DARPA data set. Visualization of network activity and possible intrusions is achieved using Bi-plots, which are used as a graphical means for summarizing the statistics. The principal components are calculated for both attack and normal traffic, and the loading values of the various feature vector components are analyzed with respect to the principal components. The variance and standard deviation of the principal components are calculated and analyzed. A brief introduction to Principal Component Analysis and the merits of using it for detecting the selected intrusions are discussed. A method for identifying an attack based on these results is proposed. The results obtained using the proposed threshold value for detecting the selected intrusions show that a detection rate of 100% can be achieved using this method.

**Keywords:** Intrusion Detection, Multivariate Statistics, Network Traffic Visualization

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## 1. Introduction

With the growing rate of interconnections among computer systems, network security is becoming a major challenge. In order to meet this challenge, Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS) are being designed to protect the availability, confidentiality and integrity of critical networked information systems. Automated detection and immediate reporting of intrusion events are required in order to provide a timely response to attacks.

Early in the research into IDS, two major approaches known as anomaly detection and signature detection were arrived at. The former relies on flagging behaviors that are abnormal and the later flagging behaviors that are close to some previously defined pattern signature of a known intrusion [1]. This paper describes a network-based anomaly detection method for detecting Denial of Service and Network Probe attacks.

The detection of intrusions or system abuses presupposes the existence of a model [2]. In signature detection, also referred to as misuse detection, the known attack patterns are modeled through the construction of a library of attack signatures. Incoming patterns that match an element of the library are labeled as attacks. If only exact matching is allowed, misuse detectors operate with no false alarms. By allowing some tolerance in attack matching, there is a risk of false alarms, but the detector is expected to be able to detect certain classes of unknown attacks that do not deviate much from the attacks listed in the library. Such attacks are called *neighboring* attacks.

In anomaly detection, the normal behavior of the system is modeled. Incoming patterns that deviate substantially from normal behavior are labeled as attacks. The premise that malicious activity is a subset of anomalous activity implies that the abnormal patterns can be utilized to indicate attacks. The presence of

false alarms is expected in this case in exchange for the hope of detecting *unknown* attacks, which may be substantially different from *neighboring* attacks. These are called *novel* attacks. Detecting novel attacks, while keeping acceptably low rates of false alarm, is possibly the most challenging and important problem in intrusion detection.

In this study, a method for detecting selected types of network intrusions is presented. The selected intrusions represent two classes of attacks; namely Denial of Service (DoS) attacks and Network Probe (NP) attacks. Both attacks have a common characteristic of utilizing many packets as seen by the network interface, which are different from other attacks which may use as low as one packet to complete an attack. The method uses Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to reduce the dimensionality of the feature vectors to enable better visualization and analysis of the data. The data for both normal and attack types are extracted from the 1998 DARPA Intrusion Detection Evaluation data sets [4]. Portions of the data sets are processed to create a new database of feature vectors. These feature vectors represent the Internet Protocol (IP) header of the packets. The feature vectors are analyzed using PCA and various statistics are generated during this process, including the principal components, their standard deviations and the loading of each feature on the principal components. Bi-plots are used to represent a summary of these statistics in a graphical form. Based on the generated statistics, a method is proposed to detect intrusions with relatively low false alarm rates. The ability to visualize network activity and possible intrusions using Bi-plots are of primary importance, since they can be used by system administrators and security personnel to monitor the network traffic.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses related work in intrusion detection using multivariate statistical approaches with emphasis on those using PCA. Section 3 provides an introduction to PCA and its applicability to the field of intrusion detection. Section 4 describes Denial of Service and Network Probe attacks with emphasis on the attacks selected for this study. Section 5 details the process of data collection and preprocessing and the creation of feature vectors. It also describes how the various statistics are generated using PCA results. Section 6 discusses the results obtained and suggests a method of detecting intrusions using these results. False alarm rates are also discussed here. Finally, Section 7 provides a conclusion of the work and recommendations for future work.

## 2. Related Work

IDS research has been ongoing for the past 15 years producing a number of viable systems, some of which have become profitable commercial ventures [5]. There are a number of research projects that focus on using statistical approaches for anomaly detection.

Ye et al [6], [7] discuss probabilistic techniques of intrusion detection, including decision tree, Hotelling's  $T^2$  test, chi-square multivariate test and Markov Chains. These tests are applied to audit data to investigate the frequency property and the ordering property of the data.

Taylor et al [8], [9] present a method for detecting network intrusions that addresses the problem of monitoring high speed network traffic and the time constraints on administrators for managing network security. They use multivariate statistics techniques, namely, Cluster Analysis and PCA to find groups in the observed data. They create a database of aggregated network sessions based on individual packets source and destination Internet Protocol port numbers. Then, they use PCA to reduce the dimensionality of the created vectors and overlay the cluster analysis results onto the PCA plots to see how well the cluster solution fits the natural distribution of the data points. The current study extends this work by addressing the need for better visualization of network activities and possible threats, through the use of Bi-plots. It uses the loading values of feature vectors on the first and second principal components as measures of possible attacks. It also uses raw individual packet data to eliminate the need for extra preprocessing of the input data.

DuMouchel et al [10] discuss a method for detecting unauthorized users masquerading as registered users by comparing in real time the sequence of commands given by each user to a profile of the user's past

behavior. They use a Principal Component Regression model to reduce the dimensionality of the test statistics.

Staniford-Chen et al [11] address the problem of tracing intruders who obscure their identity by logging through a chain of multiple machines. They use PCA to infer the best choice of thumbprinting parameters from data. They introduce *thumbprints*, which are short summaries of the content of a connection.

Shah et al [3] study how fuzzy data mining concepts can cooperate in synergy to perform Distributed Intrusion Detection. They describe attacks using a semantically rich language, reason over them and subsequently classify them as instances of an attack of a specific type. They use PCA to reduce the dimensionality of the collected data.

This study extends the above work by emphasizing the need for better and simple visualization tools to be used to enhance the decision making process for systems administrators and security personnel, using Bi-plots. It also suggests a simple process for data preprocessing to minimize computational costs associated with its possible implementation for real-time monitoring of traffic.

### 3. What is Principal Component Analysis?

Principal Component Analysis [12] is a well-established technique for dimensionality reduction and multivariate analysis. Examples of its many applications include data compression, image processing, visualization, exploratory data analysis, pattern recognition, and time series prediction. A complete discussion of PCA can be found in textbooks [13], [14]. The popularity of PCA comes from three important properties. First, it is the optimal (in terms of mean squared error) linear scheme for compressing a set of high dimensional vectors into a set of lower dimensional vectors and then reconstructing the original set. Second, the model parameters can be computed directly from the data - for example by diagonalizing the sample covariance matrix. Third, compression and decompression are easy operations to perform given the model parameters - they require only matrix multiplication.

A multi-dimensional hyper-space is often difficult to visualize. Summarizing multivariate attributes by two or three variables that can be displayed graphically with minimal loss of information is useful in knowledge discovery. Because it is hard to visualize a multi-dimensional space, PCA is mainly used to reduce the dimensionality of  $d$  multivariate attributes into two or three dimensions.

PCA summarizes the variation in correlated multivariate attributes to a set of non-correlated components, each of which is a particular linear combination of the original variables. The extracted non-correlated components are called Principal Components (PC) and are estimated from the eigenvectors of the covariance matrix of the original variables. Therefore, the objective of PCA is to achieve parsimony and reduce dimensionality by extracting the smallest number components that account for most of the variation in the original multivariate data and to summarize the data with little loss of information.

The PCA model can be represented by:

$$u_{m \times 1} = W_{m \times d} x_{d \times 1}$$

where  $u$ , an  $m$ -dimensional vector, is a projection of  $x$  - the original  $d$ -dimensional data vector ( $m \ll d$ ).

It can be shown [12] that the  $m$  projection vectors that maximize the variance of  $u$ , called the principal axes, are given by the eigenvectors  $e_1, e_2, \dots, e_m$  of the data set's covariance matrix  $S$ , corresponding to the  $m$  largest non-zero eigenvalues  $\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \dots, \lambda_m$ .

The data set's covariance matrix  $S$  can be found from:

$$S = \frac{1}{n-1} \sum_{i=1}^n (x - \mathbf{m})(x - \mathbf{m})^T$$

where  $\mathbf{m}$  is the mean vector of  $x$ . The eigenvectors  $e_i$  can be found by solving the set of equations:

$$(S - \lambda_i I)e_i = 0 \quad i = 1, 2, \dots, d$$

where  $\lambda_i$  are the eigenvalues of  $S$ . After calculating the eigenvectors, they are sorted by the magnitude of the corresponding eigenvalues. Then the  $m$  vectors with the largest eigenvalues are chosen. The PCA projection matrix is then calculated as:

$$W = E^T$$

where  $E$  has the  $m$  eigenvectors as its columns. Here  $W$  is a  $m \times d$  matrix.

One of the motives behind the selection of PCA for the detection of network traffic anomalies is its ability to operate on the input feature vector's space directly without the need to transform the data into another output space as in the case with self-learning techniques.

#### 4. Denial of Service and Network Probe Attacks

In a DoS attack, the attacker makes some computing or memory resource too busy, or too full, to handle legitimate users' requests. But before an attacker launches an attack on a given site, the attacker typically probes the victim's network or host by searching these networks and hosts for open ports. This is done using a sweeping process across the different hosts on a network and within a single host for services that are up by probing the open ports. This process is referred to as *Probe Attacks*.

**Table 1 : Description of DoS and Probe Attacks**

Attack Name	Attack Description
Smurf (DoS)	Denial of Service ICMP echo reply flood
Neptune (DoS)	SYN flood Denial of Service on one or more ports
IPsweep (Probe)	Surveillance sweep performing either a port sweep or ping on multiple host addresses
Portsweep (Probe)	Surveillance sweep through many ports to determine which services are supported on a single host

Table 1 summarizes the types of attacks used in this study. The attacks are described in more details below. Smurf attacks, also known as directed broadcast attacks, are a popular form of DoS packet floods. Smurf attacks rely on directed broadcast to create a flood of traffic for a victim. The attacker sends a ping packet to the broadcast address for some network on the Internet that will accept and respond to directed broadcast messages, known as the Smurf amplifier. These are typically mis-configured hosts that allow the translation of broadcast IP addresses to broadcast Medium Access Control (MAC) addresses. The attacker uses a spoofed source address of the victim. For Example, if there are 30 hosts connected to the Smurf amplifier, the attacker can cause 30 packets to be sent to the victim by sending a single packet to the Smurf amplifier [15].

Neptune attacks can make memory resources too full for a victim by sending a TCP packet requesting to initiate a TCP session. This packet is part of a three-way handshake that is needed to establish a TCP connection between two hosts. The SYN flag on this packet is set to indicate that a new connection is to be established. This packet includes a spoofed source address, such that the victim is not able to finish the handshake but had allocated an amount of system memory for this connection. After sending many of these packets, the victim eventually runs out of memory resources.

IPsweep and Portsweep, as their names suggest, sweep through IP addresses and port numbers for a victim network and host respectively looking for open ports that could potentially be used later in an attack.

## 5. Data Collection and Preprocessing

### 5.1 Data Collection

The 1998 DARPA Intrusion Detection data sets were used as the source of all traffic patterns in this study. The training data set includes traffic collected over a period of seven weeks and contains traces of many types of network attacks as well as normal network traffic.

This data set has been widely used in the research in Intrusion Detection, and has been used in comparative evaluation of many IDSs. McHugh [16] presents a critical review of the design and execution of this data set. Attack traces were identified using the time stamps published on the DARPA project web site.

### 5.2 Data Preprocessing

Data sets were preprocessed by extracting the IP packet header information to create feature vectors. The resulting feature vectors were used to calculate the principal components and other statistics. The feature vector chosen has the following format:

SIP $x$	SPort	DIP $x$	DPort	Prot	PLen
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Where

- SIP $x$  = Source IP address nibble, where  $x = [1-4]$ . Four nibbles constitute the full source IP address
- SPort = Source Port number
- DIP $x$  = Destination IP address nibble, where  $x = [1-4]$ . Four nibbles constitute the full destination IP address
- DPort = Destination Port number
- Prot = Protocol type: TCP, UDP or ICMP
- PLen = Packet length in bytes

This format represents the IP packet header information. Each feature vector has 12 components corresponding to dimension  $d$  in the PCA equation for original data vector  $x$ . The IP source and destination addresses are broken down to their network and host addresses to enable the analysis of all types of network addresses.

Seven data sets were created, each containing 300 feature vectors as described above. Four data sets represented the four different attack types one each of shown in Table 1. The three remaining data sets represent different portions of normal network traffic across different weeks of the DARPA Data Sets. This allows for variations of normal traffic to be accounted for in the experiment.

One of the motives in creating small data sets (i.e. 300 feature vectors each) for representing the feature vectors is to study the effectiveness of this method for real-time applications. Real-time processing of network traffic mandates the creation of small sized databases that are dynamically created from real-time traffic presented at the network interface. Since DARPA data is only available statically, seven small data sets were created to mimic the case of dynamic real-time operation.

With each packet header being represented by a 12 dimensional feature vector, it is difficult to view this high-dimensional vector graphically and be able to extract the relationships between its various features. It is equally difficult to extract the relationship between the many vectors in a set. Therefore, the goal of using PCA is to reduce the dimensionality of the feature vector by extracting the PCs and using the first and second components to represent most of the variance in the data. It is also important to be able to graphically depict the relationship between the various feature vector components and the calculated PCs, to see which of the features affect the PCs most. This graphical representation would enable better visualization of the summary of the relationships in the data set. This visualization is achieved using Bi-plots. Note that the first two principal components only provide the direction of maximum variance in the data but do not provide a clear relationship with the traffic being normal or malicious. But the loading

values of the individual feature vector components on the first two principal components indicate a strong relationship between the nature of the traffic and these loading values as will be described in section 6.

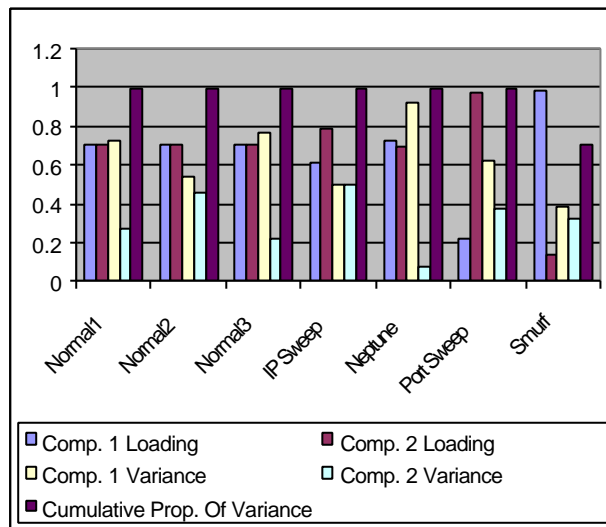
### 5.3 Statistics Generation

PCA was performed on all data sets where each feature vector would be represented by its 12 components. An exploratory analysis and statistical modeling tool called S-Plus [17] was used to generate the required statistics for this study. The following statistics were generated for each data set:

- Standard Deviation for each component
- Proportion of variance for each component
- Loading value of each feature on all individual components
- A Bi-Plot representing the loading of the different features on the first and second components

## 6. Results

The *principal component loadings* are the coefficients of the principal components transformation. They provide a convenient summary of the influence of the original variables on the principal components, and thus a useful basis for interpretation of data. A large coefficient (in absolute value) corresponds to a high loading, while a coefficient near zero has a low loading [18]. A large loading value indicates that a feature has a large influence on a given PC value. In this case, the emphasis is on the first two PCs and their loading values. The emphasis is also on those features that have the highest loading values on the two components.



**Figure 1: Component Loading and Variance**

Figure 1 shows the loading and variance of the first and second principal components for all data sets. Normal 1, 2 and 3 represent 3 randomly chosen data sets from normal traffic. IP sweep, Neptune, Portsweep and Smurf represent data sets for these attacks.

### 6.1 Detecting Intrusions

In the results above, the first two principal components consistently had their highest absolute value loading from SPort and DPort features across all data sets with the exception of Smurf. For example, in Normal 1 data set the first two bars represent the loading values of features SPort and DPort on the first two PCs. The feature names can be seen on the Bi-plot in Figure 3 (top). The third and fourth bars represent the amount of variance that each PC accounts for. The fifth bar represents the cumulative variance accounted

for by both the first and second PC. It is clear that the first two PCs account for 99% of the variance in the data. And since the SPort and DPort features account for the highest loading values of these first two PCs, these features are considered to affect the variance most. This phenomena reflects the high variance in both source and destination port numbers for all data sets, except for Smurf at which the highest variance was due to source IP address components. Port numbers in TCP connections vary from 0 to 65534 and represent the different network services offered within the TCP protocol.

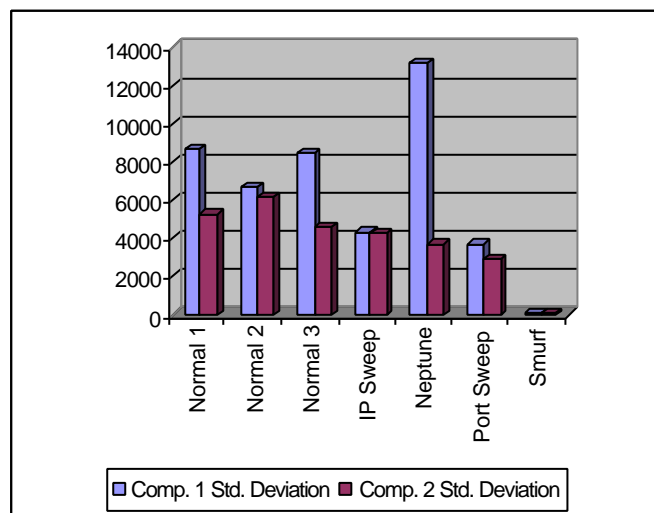
Note that the loading values for the first and second principal components in the three normal data sets are equal, with a value of 0.7. This represents the balance in variance in the packets flowing between a client and a server with respect to the source and destination ports. In TCP, the data and acknowledgement packets regularly flow between the client and the server, each using a designated TCP port number for the duration of the session.

For the four attack data sets, note that the loading values for the first and second principal components are not equal, possibly representing an imbalance in variance in the packets flowing between a client and a server with respect to the source and destination port numbers.

In IP sweep attacks, one or more machines (IPs) are sweeping through a list of server machines looking for open ports that can later be utilized in an attack. While in Port sweep attacks, one machine is sweeping through all ports of a single server machine looking for open ports. In both cases, there is an irregular use of port numbers that causes the variance in the PCs to vary, with an associated irregularity in the loading values.

In Neptune attacks, a flood of SYN packets is sent to one or more ports of the server machine, but from many clients with, typically, non-existing (spoofed) IP addresses. The packets seen by the server appears to be coming from many different IP addresses with different source port numbers. This is represented by the irregularity in both loading and variance of the principal components.

In Smurf attacks, attackers utilize floods of Internet Control Message Protocol (ICMP) echo reply packets to attack a server. Using amplifying stations, attackers utilize broadcast addressing to amplify the attack. The packets seen by the server appear to be coming from many different IP addresses but to one source port. Therefore, 99% of the variance for this data set is represented by the first four principal components and has their loading values associated with SIP1, SIP2, SIP3 and SIP4, instead of the source and destination ports as in previous attacks.



**Figure 2: Standard Deviation Values for first Two Principal Components**

Figure 2 shows the standard deviation for the first and second principal components for all data sets. In the case of IP sweep and Port sweep attacks, the standard deviation of both source and destination port numbers is almost similar. This is due to the similarity in utilizing source and destination port numbers in these attacks.

In Neptune attacks, the source and destination ports vary differently where the source port would have the highest variance. In Smurf attacks, the first two components, namely SIP1 and SIP2, represent only a portion of the variance and have a relatively small standard deviation value.

With these results, it is possible to use the loading values of the features on the first and second principal components to identify an attack. For normal traffic, loading values appear to be similar, while during an attack the loading values differ significantly for the first two principal components. A threshold value could be used to make such a distinction. In addition, the decision could be further enhanced using the standard deviation values for first and second components. Whenever these values differ significantly, an additional data point could be obtained regarding the possibility of an attack.

Table 2 shows the results from a possible threshold  $C$  for the detection of an attack based on the loading values. This threshold is represented by the following equation:

$$C = abs((l_1 - l_2) p_v * 100)$$

where,  $l_1$  and  $l_2$  are the loading values for the first and second principal components, and  $p_v$  is the cumulative proportion of variance for the first and second principal components from Figure 1.

**Table 2 : Attack Threshold Calculation**

Attack Data Set	Comp. 1 Loading	Comp. 2 Loading	Cum. Prop. Of Variance	Attack Criteria
Normal 1	0.707	0.707	0.999	0.00
Normal 2	0.709	0.705	0.998	0.40
Normal 3	0.708	0.706	0.997	0.20
IP Sweep	0.617	0.787	0.998	16.97
Neptune	0.723	0.69	0.999	3.30
Port Sweep	0.221	0.974	0.998	75.15
Smurf	0.981	0.139	0.705	59.36

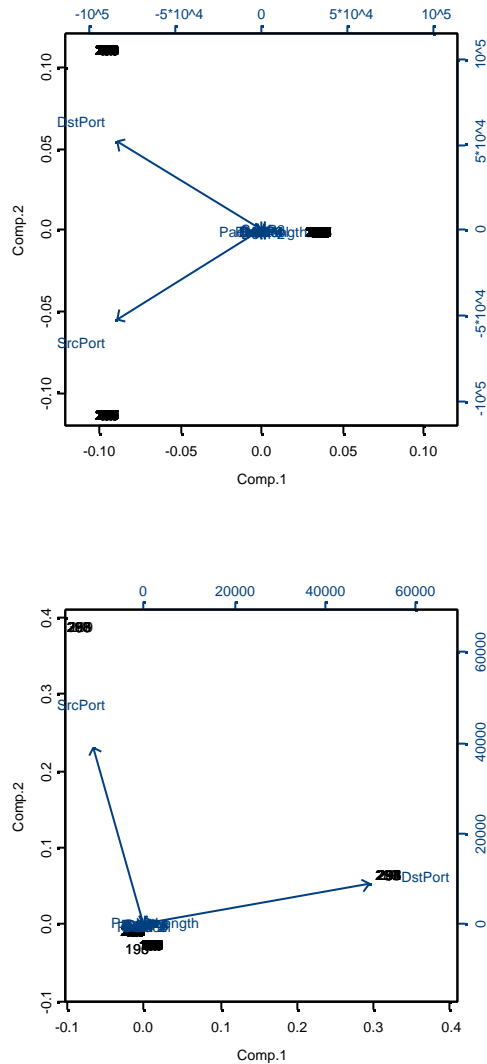
If a value of  $C = 1$  is used given the above data sets, we could achieve a 100% detection rate. In practice, the value of  $C$  may be chosen differently to accommodate the various traffic patterns on a given network such that high detection rates and low false alarm rates are achieved. This value of  $C = 1$  is an example of how the values of  $C$  should be chosen to maximize detection rates and minimize false alarms. The subset of the DARPA data sets used for this study is not by any means a representative of all network traffic that can exist in real networks.

In addition to the calculation of the attack threshold, Bi-plots could be utilized to visually interpret the loading values of the principal components and to see which features had the highest loading on a given principal component value. This could provide system administrators and security personal with a quick visual summary of the network traffic and possible intrusions.

A Bi-Plot allows the representation of both the original variables and the transformed observations on the principal components axes. By showing the transformed observations, the data can be easily interpreted in terms of the principal components. By showing the variables, the relationships between those variables and the principal components can be viewed graphically.

Figure [3] shows two sample Bi-plots generated for Normal 1 and Port sweep data sets.





**Figure 3: Bi-plots for Normal 1 (top) and Portsweep (bottom) data sets**

Interpreting the Bi-Plot is straightforward: the  $x$ -axis represents the values for the first principal component, the  $y$ -axis represents the values for the second principal component. The original variables are represented by arrows, which graphically indicate the proportion of the original variance explained by the first two principal components. The direction of the arrows indicates the relative loadings on the first and second principal components.

In Figure 3, for Normal 1 data set (top), the two arrows indicate the relative loading values of features SPort (SrcPort) and DPort (DstPort) on the first two PCs. It can be seen that the *relative absolute* values are equal resulting in equal length arrows. For Portsweep data set (bottom), the two arrows also show that the highest loading values on the first two PCs were due to SPort and DPort, but the lengths of the vectors are not equal indicating a possible attack.

## 7. Conclusion and Future Work

This study presents a method for detecting Denial-of-Service attacks and Network Probe attacks using Principal Component Analysis as a multivariate statistical tool. The study described the nature of these

attacks, introduced Principal Component Analysis and discussed the merits of using it for detecting intrusions. The study presented the approach used to extract the Principal Components and the related statistics. It also discussed the results obtained from using a proposed threshold value for detecting the subject intrusions. This threshold value can yield 100% detection rate using the limited sets of data used. The study presented a graphical method for interpreting the results obtained based on the Bi-plots. Future work includes testing this model to work in a real-time environment at which network traffic is collected, processed and analyzed for intrusions dynamically. This may involve using a more comprehensive criterion that accounts for other statistics including standard deviation values of the Principal Components. In addition, an enhancement may be added to utilize Bi-plots for visual interpretation of data in real-time. In this case the entire DARPA data sets can be used to qualify the results.

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