International Journal of Science and Research Archive
eISSN: 2582-8185
Cross Ref DOI: 10.30574/ijsra
Journal homepage: https://ijsra.net/

(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

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Evaluating Reinforcement Learning Models for Optimized Runtime API Threat Detection

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2026, 18(02), 831-841

Publication history: Received on 10 January 2026; revised on 18 February 2026; accepted on 20 February 2026

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.30574/ijsra.2026.18.2.0252

Abstract

The increasing use of application programming interfaces has revolutionized the world of modern software systems, providing scalability in cloud, mobile, and microservices ecosystems. However, this rise has also resulted in a broad attack surface and a considerable rise in cyber threats associated with the misuse of APIs during their runtime. Traditional detection systems have remained largely rule-based on static characteristics and have relied on supervised learning techniques. However, they lack flexibility and have failed to keep up with the dynamically changing attack patterns. The current research focuses on the use of reinforcement learning models to improve the detection capabilities of APIs. The problem statement represented using APIs has been tested using a variety of reinforcement learning techniques, and the results indicate that agents developed using these models have better adaptability and resistance to novel attack patterns. However, trade-offs have been found between detection accuracy and latency.

Keywords: API Security; Reinforcement Learning; Runtime Threat Detection; Adaptive Cybersecurity; Anomaly Detection

1. Introduction

APIs have turned into one of the central parts of modern software systems, making interaction possible between web services, mobile platforms, cloud infrastructures, and microservice-based architectures. The increasing pervasiveness of APIs has correspondingly raised the attack surface area of today's applications. APIs are being repeatedly targeted for credential abuses, injection attacks, data harvesting, denial-of-service campaigns, and business logic vulnerabilities, usually invisible to traditional perimeter defenses [1], [2]. Conventional API security mechanisms are mostly based on static rules, signatures, or supervised machine learning models trained on historical datasets. These methods can achieve reasonable accuracy in detecting known attack patterns; however, most of them are not well adapted to runtime dynamic environments. The API traffic is highly variable, context dependent, and is subject to rapid behavioral changes due to both legitimate usage patterns and adversarial adaptations. Static rules require frequent manual updates, and supervised models deteriorate in the presence of concept drift and novel attack strategies [4].

Additional constraints are added by Runtime API threat detection since the decision needs to be done with low latency and minimum impact on the availability of services. Anomaly-based approaches try to address the issue of unknown threats; however, these mostly remain plagued by excessive false positives in complex production environments where normal behaviour varies greatly between users and services. These limitations highlight the requirement for adaptive detection mechanisms which will continuously learn from live traffic. Reinforcement learning is, however, an interesting alternative. Different from both supervised and unsupervised learning, reinforcement learning allows an agent to learn

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by interacting with its environment based on a reward function, with no need for labelled examples [6]. In the API security scenario, the reinforcement learning agent would watch runtime patterns in traffic flow, assess defensive actions like alerting or throttling, and gradually improve its policy to respond to evolving threats. This paradigm fits the API attack environment that is adversarial and non-stationary.

1.1. Problem Statement

Despite a growing interest in pursuing machine learning solutions in API security, a very few existing solutions have a proactive and dynamic approach. Supervised models need repeated training, which requires a lot of investments, but it always happens after a certain delay compared to ever-evolving attack methods. The rules cannot be scaled up, although there are problems in achieving an efficient precision level in anomaly methods, especially under a tremendous load of APIs [7]. While reinforcement learning has demonstrated its strengths in different adaptive security tasks and performed well in some adaptive learning domains, its applicability to real-time API threat detection remains unexplored. Open research questions include the definition of proper reward functions to support the learning process, the stability of convergence in reinforcement learning under attack scenarios, the efficiency of algorithms to process production workload complexity, and the relation between threat detection and reinforcement learning costs [8].

1.2. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the proposed research is to assess the reinforcement learning techniques for the optimized runtime identification of API threats. The paper will explore the effectiveness of various reinforcement learning learning paradigms utilized on real-world API traffic to determine if these paradigms can be effectively utilized within the security industry. A realistic runtime environment will be crafted to represent real-world API behavior. Various methods will be used to optimize the identification performance of the deployment, including accuracy, the rate of false positives, the end-user response latency, and the adaptability to novel threats. The project will compare the reinforcement learning methods to traditional supervised learning methods to identify the key pros and cons. The project will finally reveal the real-world deployment difficulties related to reinforcement learning within API protection scenarios.

1.3. Research Questions

- How effective are reinforcement learning models at detecting API threats in real-time environments?
- To what extent can reinforcement learning models adapt to previously unseen or evolving attack patterns?
- How do reinforcement learning-based approaches compare with traditional detection techniques under runtime constraints?
- What design factors influence the stability and operational feasibility of reinforcement learning-driven API security systems?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This work is a contribution to the field of adaptive cybersecurity because it focuses on threat detection in runtime APIs, an issue currently gaining more and more prominence. It also helps create a better understanding of reinforcement learning models in a real-world application environment. These results have positive implications for researchers and practitioners. Researchers will benefit from learning about other research related to learning methods based on reward, especially when it comes to learning in adversarial and non-stationary situations. Practitioners will benefit by having evidence to guide them when considering the integration of learning methods within their API security and WAAP products.

1.5. Scope of the Study

The context of research involves the identification of security risks in the flow of API traffic that relies on the HTTP protocol at the run-time level. The research context is specifically oriented towards cloud-based architectures that make extensive use of service-oriented architectures in scenarios that come with stringent requirements for latency and availability for the APIs used in the context. Even the actions for responses, such as blocking or rate limiting, fall outside the context here.

2. Literature Review

2.1. API Security Threat Landscape

APIs are integral to contemporary software environments, though their increased adoption has highlighted serious vulnerabilities in the security space. APIs have been addressed in the OWASP Top 10 for APIs, which ranks the most prevalent threats like broken object-level authorization, excessive data exposure, and improper asset management [1]. Additionally, other vulnerabilities are triggered because of improper design selections and misconfiguration of APIs, including credential stuffing attacks, injections, enumeration attacks, as compared to the more complex web interfaces since APIs are machine-oriented with standardized format entry points usually executed programmatically. There have been a number of studies that have brought out how current standard security measures fail to counter such intricate threats [2]. For instance, token authentication methods are able to counter unauthorized access but do not eliminate bot-driven abuse for which authentication tools are used for [2]. SQL and command injection attacks are still a part of current API implementations because of una diligent practices for validating inputs [2].

2.2. Existing API Threat Detection Approaches

Conventional threat protection in APIs involves rule/signature-based approaches, supervised learning, and anomaly-based systems. Rule-based approaches establish known attack signatures and send an alert whenever such signatures are identified. This method is very effective for known threats, but time and again, such systems are required to be updated by experts to stay effective. A supervised learning approach takes this further with help from machine learning, which learns identifying features based on past experiences of labelled data. These learning systems are very efficient, but their efficient processing requires an exhaustive amount of data including legitimate and known malicious activity [3]. Anomaly-based approaches try modeling normal API calls and pointing out anomalies as possible attacks. Such approaches do not need any labeled attacked data, which may become a limiting factor because it might be difficult to obtain. This feature is considered attractive when it comes to identifying new attacks. However, it has been observed that variability is high when it comes to API traffic patterns, thereby increasing chances of falsely labeling normal traffic as possible attacks [5].

The issue of concept drift further hampers static detection models. The nature of API traffic keeps changing with the deployment of new features and changes in the behavior of clients. This further makes supervised and anomaly-based models with trained patterns using outdated traffic patterns ineffective in practical settings because they lack the efficiency to detect traffic effectively in real-time scenarios [4].

2.3. Runtime API Threat Detection Challenges

Runtime detection systems must run with very strict performance constraints. Latency in decision-making directly impacts user experience and serviceability. A detection system causing a delay in API transactions and affecting API calls is not very useful in a production environment. Moreover, runtime models need to handle high traffic and varying traffic patterns as seen in API ecosystems.

This setting of concept drift, adversarial adaptation, and constraints on performance creates a difficult scenario for many traditional detection systems. Many rule-based methods break when the tactics of an attack change. Supervised learning requires retraining regularly to capture the current traffic distributions. Anomaly detection shows flexibility but results in a significant number of alerts that need subsequent investigation [3], [5]. These challenges have motivated interest in adaptive learning methods that evolve over time without constant human intervention.

2.4. Reinforcement Learning in Security

In RL, agents learn by interacting with an environment in which they receive feedback in the form of rewards for their actions [6]. The paradigm is particularly apt for problems with long-term consequences of actions and when optimal behaviour is hard to capture by a set of static rules or direct supervision. In the field of computer security studies, reinforcement learning has been utilized in intrusion detection systems, autonomous responses to attacks, and the use of game theory to model the defender and attacker dynamic. For instance, RL algorithms have been utilized to optimize alert prioritization and packet anomaly detection to show responsiveness to dynamics in attacker behavior characteristics [8]. These works exemplify the capabilities and responsiveness of RL to dynamic changes in defender strategies to face attackers but have also pointed to some challenges within these research works. Creating useful functions in the adversary setting is complex because simple functions can easily produce unstable and short-sighted policies. Moreover, RL systems involve heavy exploration costs within the model.

2.5. Reward Design and Model Stability

For an RL model to be successful in the security domain, reward engineering is critical. This is because a reward function needs to carefully handle a trade-off between the accuracy of detection, the rate of false positives, the latency, and the overhead. For example, if the reward function favors one goal, such as sensitivity, while sacrificing the other goals on the latency dimension, the learned model might act in unexpected ways. Another significant problem faced by these agents is model instability. For instance, in a non-stationary environment where either normal API calls and usages or attack behaviors vary over time, RL learning agents may forget previously obtained behaviors or settle on sub-optimal behaviors. Various methods such as experience replay, ensemble learning, and continuous learning platforms have been investigated to tackle instability, but these remain challenging to incorporate in a high-throughput and low-latency environment for security [6], [8].

2.6. Comparisons with Traditional Methods

Comparative analyses show that adaptive learning methods such as RL may be more effective than static supervised and rule-based approaches under dynamic conditions. For instance, RL-based approaches for intrusion detection have shown robustness against unknown attacks that were novel during training time [8]. There are trade-offs involved with such approaches as well. For instance, RL algorithms may be more difficult to implement and computationally expensive than existing approaches, which may be undesirable under conditions involving limited resources if workloads are predictable and well-characterized.

2.7. Summary of Gaps and Research Opportunities

The problem statements in the existing research areas present the following research gaps in the research literature. Firstly, existing API security systems operate with static detection methods that do not adapt to real-world networks. Secondly, the existing research on the use of reinforcement learning in the broader cyberspace security field is lacking in the context of API threat detection during run-time scenarios. Thirdly, the research on the issues in the reward function, stability, and accuracy vs. performance trade-off in the context of API systems is relatively uncharted.

Nevertheless, there is a need to fill these gaps with predominant study on models for reinforcement learning in the detection of threats to APIs during runtime. This area could help to shed light on whether models in the field of reinforcement learning are capable of adaptive and highly robust security analysis with a satisfactory performance to meet the needs of a current environment for APIs. The connection between theory and practicality is paramount.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The proposed system uses an experimental research design. In the experimental study design, a controlled environment for monitoring the runtime APIs is created to test production-quality traffic and malign behavior. The reinforcement superintelligence models are applied to and tested in this controlled setting through interactions with actual traffic streams. This provides for the systematic observation of behavior in dynamic scenarios such as varying traffic and adaptive attack scenarios. Also measured are performance parameters based on functionality, adaptability, and feasibility.

3.2. System Architecture for Runtime API Threat Detection and Environment

The experimental setup is designed around a modular API monitoring pipe. The API calls are traced at runtime and fed into a layer for feature extraction. Features are: call type, endpoint path, authentication information, payload size, parameter entropy, call frequency, and temporal profiles. The features are in line with those described for API anomaly detection and security research previously reviewed by authors [2], [5]. In this environment, the reinforcement learning agent learns to act by observing the representation of the API traffic and choosing actions based on its policy. Actions that the agent takes are benign classification, alert production, throttling, or block actions. After every action, the environment gives the agent feedback in terms of rewards based on the accuracy and cost of the actions. The existing detection models will be integrated into the same system in order to conduct a fair comparison. All models will run with the same conditions with respect to latency and throughput.

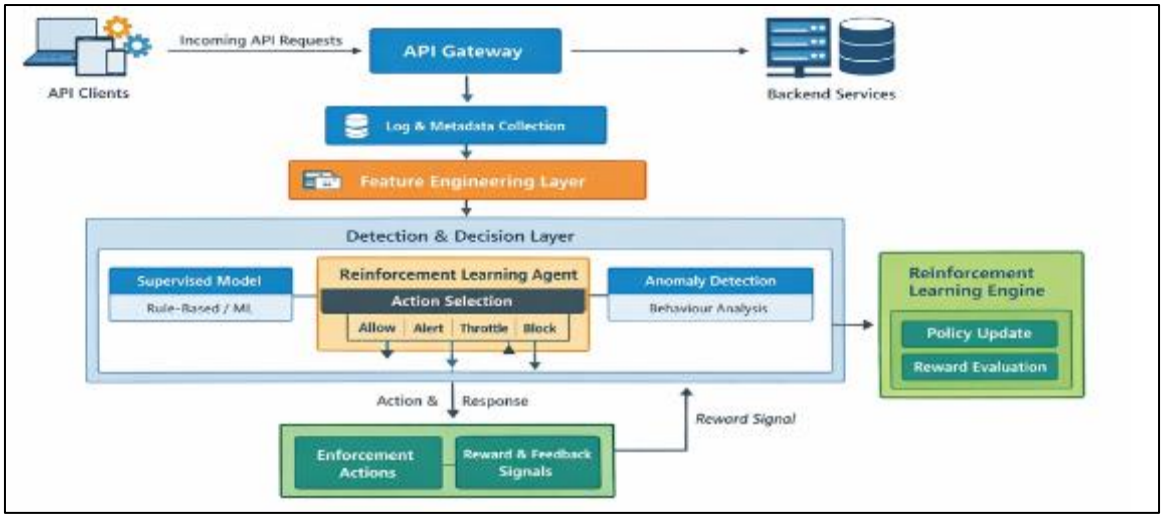

Figure 1 Runtime API Threat Detection System Architecture

The proposed architecture is designed to facilitate real-time monitoring, adaptation, and decision-making capabilities for the detection of API threats. The architecture has been designed as a layered system to ensure scalability and modularity. The proposed architecture has integrated reinforcement learning concepts for API request processing without interfering with the traditional API detection system.

3.2.1. Architectural Overview

The architecture is made up of six main layers: the API Gateway Layer, Data Collection Layer, Feature Engineering Layer, Detection and Decision Layer, Reinforcement Learning Engine, and finally the Response and Feedback Layer. The layers work step by step as the request is processed. The incoming API requests are intercepted at runtime, their security-relevant attributes identified, assessed by the models for detection, and a corresponding action for response determined. The agent's policy is constantly improved by the learning algorithm to optimize the outcomes of the actions taken.

3.2.2. API Gateway Layer

API Gateway Layer acts as the entrypoint for any incoming API request. It handles request interception, protocols, and initial validation. The API Gateway Layer performs no more than superficial level examination of the traffic to provide entrypoint intercepts for all incoming API calls. In positioning the security architecture at a gateway layer, the solution provides end-to-end visibility for APIs without having to modify the services. This approach seems to be common in cloud and microservices deployment models.

3.2.3. Data Collection Layer

The Data Collection Layer records runtime information related to API requests. Such information comprises the HTTP method and path used in the requests, authentication context, payload size, the rate of the requests, and the access timestamp. The recorded information is then processed through streaming in real time. The use of this layer helps in effective data acquisition for both reinforcement learning models as well as the baseline detection systems, thus enabling easy comparison during the evaluation phase.

3.2.4. Feature Engineering layer

The Feature Engineering Layer is responsible for taking unaltered request information and converting it into a formable feature presentation suitable for machine learning models. Features involve statistics like request deviation, entropy, and session and access sequence regularity. Feature normalization and dimensionality reduction techniques are used to ensure that learning is more stable and efficient. A common set of features is used in all models to avoid any bias that could be caused due to variations in inputs.

3.2.5. Detection and Decision Layer

The Detection and Decision Layer is home to various detection processes running concurrently. These processes involve the reinforcement learning agent and the baseline models that are either supervised or anomaly-based. For every

request that is received, the reinforcement learner observes the current state that is derived from feature extraction and picks an action following the learned policy. Possible actions that can be considered are allowing the request, marking the request for monitoring, rate limiting, or blocking the request. It is ensured that the chosen action satisfies the predefined operational restrictions in terms of the allowable latency values.

3.2.6. Reinforcement Learning

The Reinforcement Learning Engine performs the adaptation and learning of policies. The engine obtains state representation from the Feature Engineering Layer and performs action choice using either value-function approaches or policy-gradient models. Learning is performed online, and the agent adapts its policies through the evolving traffic and attack patterns. The engine has controlled exploration mechanisms to suppress disruptive actions during the initial learning phase. Experience replay and policy regularization methods are used to counter oscillations and improve convergence in non-stationary environments.

3.2.7. Response and Feedback Layer

This layer, which is named "Response and Feedback Layer," enforces the defensive action that has been chosen, measuring the results of that action. The signals used for feedback are correctness of detection, legitimate traffic impact, and response time. These signals are converted into reward signals that are fed back into the RLE. This closed-loop feedback process gives the agent the ability to correlate actions with long-term effects, which will allow the agent to optimize its detection-related decisions.

3.3. Data Sources and Traffic Generation

API traffic used in this evaluation contains both legitimate and malicious traffic. Legitimacy of API traffic patterns is modeled in order to simulate some common scenarios used in API calls, such as authenticated user access, service communication, and client automation. Variations are used to simulate real-world variations in traffic volume and behavior. The malicious traffic is modeled based on known patterns from API security attacks in the OWASP API Security Top 10 documentation and related research works [1], [2]. The patterns include credential attacks, injection attacks, excessive data retrieval, and enumeration attacks. The patterns are injected in a dynamic manner to represent the dynamic behavior of the attacker strategies. Such a mixed traffic model enables the assessment of the accuracy of detection, the rate of false positives, as well as adaptability in non-stationary situations, which is an important requirement for runtime security systems [4].

3.4. Reinforcement Learning Models

It reviews various paradigms of reinforcement learning, which have commonly been applied to problems of sequential decision-making. These involve value-based methods, like Q-learning and deep Q-networks, and policy-based methods that learn direct mappings from states to actions. Model selection is informed by prior work demonstrating the suitability of these approaches in adaptive security contexts [6], [8]. Every agent observes the runtime API state and selects their defensive actions accordingly. Exploration strategies in this context are carefully controlled to minimize the amount of disruption to the normal flow of traffic. Training happens online, wherein agents learn continuously from live interactions instead of just relying on offline training data.

3.5. Reward Function Design

Reward design lies at the heart of any reinforcement learning mechanism and its effectiveness in security applications. For this paper, the reward function has been designed to strike a balance among many operational objectives: correct detection of malicious requests with positive rewards, false positives, and false negatives with penalties. Other crucial penalties are against those actions resulting in introducing extra latency or unwarranted disruption to legitimate traffic flows. This multi-objective reward formulation reflects the realistic runtime API environment constraints, which must weigh the detection accuracy against service availability and performance. The design was performed in compliance with the recommendations of previous reinforcement learning and cybersecurity literature [6], [8].

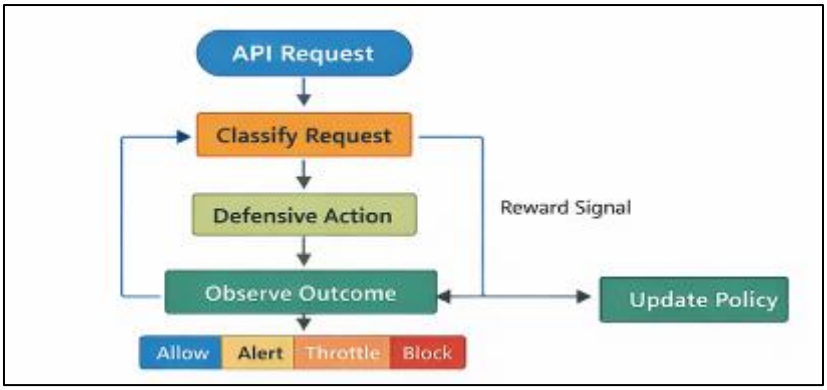

Figure 2 Reward function Design

Table 1 Reward Function Components and Design Rationale

Event Type	Action Outcome	Reward Value	Rationale
True Positive	Malicious request correctly detected	+1.0	Encourages accurate threat detection
True Negative	Legitimate request correctly allowed	+0.5	Reinforces normal traffic handling
False Positive	Legitimate request blocked or throttled	−1.0	Penalises service disruption
False Negative	Malicious request allowed	−1.5	Strong penalty for missed attacks
High Latency	Decision exceeds latency threshold	−0.5	Enforces runtime performance constraints
Excessive Blocking	Repeated blocking actions	−0.3	Prevents overly aggressive policies

3.6. Comparative Baseline Models

To contextualize the performance of reinforcement learning, two baseline approaches will be discussed in this paper. First, a supervised machine learning classifier is trained on labeled API traffic data. The second approach is that of an anomaly detection model that the same datasets, feature sets, and runtime constraints for comparability.

Table 2 Baseline Detection Models Used for Comparison

Model Type	Learning Paradigm	Training Mode	Strengths	Limitations
Supervised ML	Classification	Offline	High accuracy on known attacks	Poor adaptability to new threats
Anomaly Detection	Behaviour modelling	Semi-online	Detects unknown patterns	High false positive rate
Reinforcement Learning	Sequential decision-making	Online	Adaptive and self-optimising	Requires careful reward tuning

3.7. Evaluation Metrics

The performance of the model is evaluated using standard security and machine learning metrics. Detection accuracy measures the proportion of requests that are correctly classified. Precision and recall are used to evaluate false positive

and false negative behavior, respectively. Response latency is measured with regard to runtime feasibility, while adaptability is evaluated by observing the performance changes when new attack patterns are introduced at runtime. These metrics together assess both security efficacy and operational effectiveness, both of which are crucial for practical deployment considerations [7].

3.8. Validity and Reliability

For internal validity to be enhanced, experiments are conducted with repeated trials involving various levels of traffic and attack time varying parameters. The random seeds are appropriately handled to cater to reproducibility. The issue concerning external validity is dealt with to test various traffic and attack patterns as observed in real-world API attacks [1], [2].

4. Results

4.1. Experimental Setup Overview

All experiments took place in the controlled runtime API environment discussed earlier. For comparison, each model worked on the same traffic streams containing valid and attack API queries. The traffic distribution changes were varied for experiments to mimic non-stationarity in traffic patterns regarding query intensity and frequency. The reinforcement learning agents were trained in an online fashion when the execution was performed. The baseline supervised and anomaly models were not updated during the execution process. The results were averaged to overcome the issue of variance.

4.2. Detection Accuracy and Classification Performance

The accuracy of the detection is measured as the proportion of correctly identified API calls among the different traffics. The reinforcement learning models performed better in overall accuracy than the baseline models after the initial exploration process was completed. At the early stages of execution, the accuracy was lower because of the exploration process. Backed models performed well on the attack patterns they were trained and tested but performed poorly upon the introduction of novel attacks. Anomaly detection performed medium recall but experienced an increase in the number of false positives related to bursts in legitimate traffic. This correlates well with the hypotheses related to static model's drift [4], [5]. Precision-recall analysis further emphasized the differences. Reinforcement learning-based models struck a balance between having high recall values and decreasing the number of false alarms as the learning processes distinguished benign variability from malicious activities. In the meantime, anomaly-based models focused more on maximizing the recall values.

Table 3 Detection Accuracy and Classification Performance Comparison

Model Type	Accuracy (%)	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	F1-Score (%)	False Positive Rate (%)
Supervised ML Classifier (Baseline model)	91.2	89.5	87.8	88.6	6.4
Anomaly Detection Model (Baseline model)	85.7	76.9	90.3	83.0	12.8
Reinforcement Learning (Value-Based)	93.6	92.4	91.8	92.1	4.9
Reinforcement Learning (Policy-Based)	94.8	93.7	93.1	93.4	3.8

The reinforcement learning models demonstrate superior classification performance across all metrics. Policy-based reinforcement learning achieves the highest accuracy and lowest false positive rate, indicating improved decision stability and adaptability under dynamic traffic conditions. In contrast, anomaly detection models exhibit higher recall but suffer from increased false positives, which can negatively impact runtime API availability.

4.3. Adaptability to Evolving Attack Patterns

To test adaptability, new attack patterns were injected during runtime. Reinforcement learning-based agents showed improvement in their performance on attacks that they had not seen before, although they were limited in exposure to these new attacks. The improvements were evident in both the recall values as well as a stable precision metric. The supervised learning system could not identify many attacks because these patterns were not included in their training sets. Anomaly-based learning also identified some new attacks, but there was a large spike in notifications plotted for normal requests that had similar features. These experimental results further validate that, in a non-stationary and adversarial setup, reinforcement learning performs best because a system in these environments needs continuous learning capabilities as discussed in [6], [8].

4.4. Response Latency and Runtime Overhead

Runtimes have latency as one of the main concerns. Reinforcement learning models introduced a slight increase in processing latency during exploration stages. Despite this increase, when policies converged, latencies remained well within acceptable values and comparable to the supervised model's latency. While latency remained consistent in anomaly-based models, additional overhead during traffic surges increased latency values slightly due to increased alerts and subsequent processing requirements. In conclusion, latency in reinforcement learning models is well within acceptable values to make it feasible for use in runtimes.

4.5. Reward Function Behaviour and Policy Stability

Reward trajectory analysis indicated a convergence over time across repeated experiments. A carefully designed reward mechanism remained crucial to ensuring stable learning dynamics. High penalties associated with FP led to conservative behavior, while low penalties caused overly aggressive traffic blocking. The chosen multi-objective reward mechanism allowed the reinforcement learning algorithms to learn optimally about detection actions, considering the two objectives of service availability and latency. The convergence led to lesser variability in policy action choice. This matches the principles of reinforcement learning and other learning mechanisms specifically designed for security applications [6], [8].

4.6. Comparative Performance Summary

Table 4 Comparative Performance of Detection Models

Model Type	Accuracy	Precision	Recall	Adaptability	Runtime Impact
Supervised Learning	High (known attacks)	High	Moderate	Low	Low
Anomaly Detection	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Moderate
Reinforcement Learning	High	High	High	High	Moderate

Analysis of the result shows that reinforcement learning models support better flexibility and equal detection capabilities compared to the static method. Although it has moderate complexity, the efficiency that it provides overcomes that drawback.

5. Discussion of Findings

The experiment outcome has proven the relevance of reinforcement learning in API threat detection in real-time circumstances. Reinforcement learning capabilities enable the system to learn from real-world data and react accordingly to new and rapidly evolving threats. This capability was shown in this research as it has clearly proven the hypothesis stated in reference [4], [7], indicating static learning approaches perform poorly in dynamic environments where concept drift and adversarial activity are prominent. But in this research, it has also been noted how reinforcement learning can pose some difficulties in real-world applications since learning may adversely affect services in certain circumstances if not properly controlled.

6. Conclusion and Future Work

6.1. Summary of the Study

The aim of this research was to analyse and compare reinforcement learning models in terms of their efficiency in learning and runtime identification strategies for improved API threat protection. This work was initiated due to an increasing need for using APIs in present software designs and inadequacies associated with runtime identification methods that relate to predefined rules in a controlled environment. A testbed setup was also developed that mimicked real-world traffic and varied patterns associated with an attack. Reinforcement learning algorithms were tested within this testbed and results compared in terms of defined metrics.

6.2. Key Findings

Reinforcement learning agents showed strong adaptability to previously unseen attack patterns, improving detection performance through continued interaction with live traffic. This capability directly addresses the challenge of concept drift that undermines static models.

Reinforcement learning models achieved a more balanced trade-off between precision and recall. While anomaly-based methods produced high recall at the cost of excessive false positives, reinforcement learning agents learned to distinguish malicious behavior from benign variability over time. Supervised models, in contrast, remained effective only for attack patterns represented in their training data.

The runtime overhead introduced by reinforcement learning models remained within acceptable bounds after initial convergence. Although early exploration phases incurred additional latency, performance stabilized as policies matured, supporting the practical feasibility of reinforcement learning in live API environments.

6.3. Contributions of the Study

The research presented here has a number of contributions to the area of API security and the development of adaptive cybersecurity systems. This paper presents a detailed analysis framework that can be used to test reinforcement learning models under real-time conditions. The research provides the first empirical demonstration of the potential of reinforcement learning to be more effective than static detection systems in API domains. The paper also reveals the relevance of reward functions and exploration strategies to the stability of the systems. The paper fills the gap presented in the existing related bodies of knowledge, which to date have focused almost exclusively on network intrusion detection systems.

6.4. Limitations of the Study

Nonetheless, there exist some research limitations. Firstly, although the experimental environment tries to mimic a real-world setup, it fails to recreate the size and complexity of industrial-scale API graphs. The attack patterns used in the research rely on known threat patterns; however, in real-world settings, attackers could be more complex and collective in nature. The research specifically targeted detection and basic response strategies. The research did not include other security operations, such as automatic remediation, incident correlation, or human-driven decision-making strategies. The performance of reinforcement learning could also be infrastructure-dependent.

6.5. Recommendations for Future Research

Future work can be pursued in a number of ways. One would be to integrate reinforcement learning methods with hybrid detectors that use both supervised, unsupervised, and rule-based methods. These detector architectures could potentially mitigate exploration expenses as they continue to be adaptive. Also to be pursued would be further work on reward engineering methods that take into consideration business impact and risk prioritization. Assessments on larger-scale production environments, such as multi-tenant and cross-service APIs, would be most enlightening on potential scalability as would work on transparency issues related to reinforcement learning methods used to make security-related decisions.

6.6. Concluding Remarks

From the above analysis, it is clear that the application of reinforcement learning demonstrates a viable solution to the task of threat detection in the optimized runtime API. By facilitating the self-adaptation of systems towards threats and ensuring not more than an optimal level of overhead, systems that incorporate the concept of reinforcement learning are able to offset the major shortcomings of the API security systems.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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