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Privacy-Preserving Cyber Threat Intelligence Correlation across Distributed Cloud Enterprise Networks Using Federated Machine Learning

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ABSTRACT
Distributed cloud enterprise networks generate large volumes of cybersecurity telemetry from cloud workloads, identity services, network devices, applications, and security monitoring platforms. Correlating these heterogeneous data sources is essential for identifying coordinated attacks, detecting emerging threats, and improving enterprise security operations. However, conventional centralized threat intelligence approaches require organizations to share sensitive operational data, creating privacy, regulatory, and confidentiality challenges. This research proposes a privacy-preserving cyber threat intelligence correlation framework based on federated machine learning, enabling multiple enterprises to collaboratively identify cyber threats without directly exchanging their raw security data. The proposed methodology integrates local feature extraction, federated model training, secure model aggregation, privacy-enhancing mechanisms, and cross-enterprise threat correlation. Each participating organization trains a local detection model using its own telemetry, while encrypted model updates are aggregated to improve collective threat detection capabilities. Differential privacy and secure aggregation are incorporated to reduce the risk of exposing sensitive information through exchanged updates. The framework evaluates detection accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, communication overhead, model convergence, and privacy protection under heterogeneous network conditions. Additional assessments examine its resilience against poisoning attacks, non-independent data distributions, and unreliable participants. The proposed approach aims to improve collaborative cyber defense while preserving organizational data sovereignty. Its effectiveness must be established through reproducible experiments comparing federated learning with centralized and independent local-learning baselines.

KEYWORDS: Privacy-Preserving Security, Cyber Threat Intelligence, Federated Machine Learning, Distributed Cloud Networks, Secure Aggregation, Differential Privacy, Collaborative Threat Detection

I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid adoption of cloud computing has transformed enterprise information technology into interconnected environments comprising public clouds, private clouds, hybrid infrastructures, edge platforms, containerized applications, and geographically distributed data centers. These environments support business-critical operations while introducing complex security challenges involving identity compromise, ransomware, lateral movement, malicious API access, data exfiltration, and sophisticated-persistent threats. Security monitoring systems continuously generate telemetry, including network flows, authentication records, endpoint events, application logs, vulnerability information, and cloud configuration changes. Although individual organizations possess valuable threat intelligence, isolated analysis frequently fails to identify attack campaigns

that extend across organizational boundaries. Correlating security observations from multiple enterprises can improve situational awareness by revealing recurring indicators, shared attack techniques, suspicious behavioral patterns, and relationships between otherwise unrelated incidents. Nevertheless, centralized intelligence sharing introduces substantial concerns because raw telemetry may contain personal information, confidential business activities, customer identifiers, infrastructure details, and proprietary operational knowledge. Regulatory obligations, contractual restrictions, competitive considerations, and data residency requirements further limit unrestricted information exchange. Consequently, enterprises require collaborative security mechanisms that enable collective intelligence without compromising the confidentiality or governance of their underlying data.

Federated machine learning offers a promising approach to this challenge by allowing participating organizations to train shared predictive models while retaining their datasets within their respective administrative environments. Instead of transferring complete security logs to a central repository, each participant processes local observations, calculates model updates, and contributes to a coordinated learning process. An aggregation service combines eligible updates to improve a global model, which can subsequently support local threat classification, anomaly detection, and intelligence correlation. However, federated learning alone does not guarantee privacy or security because model updates may reveal information about training examples, and malicious participants may attempt to manipulate the collaborative process. Differences in cloud architecture, threat prevalence, logging formats, and organizational workloads also create statistical heterogeneity that can reduce model performance. This research therefore proposes a privacy-preserving cyber threat intelligence correlation framework combining federated learning, secure aggregation, differential privacy, standardized threat representations, and robust participant validation. The framework is designed to support collaborative detection while minimizing unnecessary disclosure and maintaining organizational control over sensitive information. Its evaluation considers predictive performance, communication efficiency, privacy risks, robustness, and scalability. The central research objective is to determine whether privacy-aware federated intelligence can deliver useful cross-enterprise threat detection without requiring centralized collection of raw security telemetry, while explicitly recognizing that technical safeguards, governance controls, and empirical validation are necessary for trustworthy deployment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of cyber threat intelligence has progressed from conventional indicator-based detection toward behavioral analytics, machine learning, and collaborative security monitoring. Traditional threat intelligence platforms collect indicators such as malicious IP addresses, domain names, file hashes, vulnerability identifiers, and attack signatures to support detection and incident response. Standards and structured representations, including STIX and TAXII, facilitate the exchange of threat information between security systems and organizations. However, sharing detailed incident records and network telemetry may expose confidential information, while isolated intelligence repositories limit the discovery of coordinated attacks. Machine learning addresses some of these limitations by identifying anomalies, classifying suspicious events, and discovering relationships among diverse security observations. Nevertheless, centralized learning architectures often require datasets to be consolidated, creating additional privacy, governance, and infrastructure requirements. Federated learning offers an alternative by distributing training across data-owning participants. A recent survey of federated learning for cyber threat intelligence in industrial environments discusses its applications to intrusion detection, malware analysis, botnet mitigation,

and anomaly detection, while identifying heterogeneous data distributions, communication overhead, and model robustness as important deployment challenges.

Research on federated learning has established several approaches for collaborative model development, including federated averaging, proximal optimization, personalized learning, and hierarchical aggregation. Federated averaging combines locally calculated model updates to create a shared model, whereas proximal methods help manage differences among participating datasets. These approaches are relevant to enterprise cloud networks because organizations differ in infrastructure architecture, security policies, workload composition, and exposure to particular attack categories. However, keeping raw data local does not automatically guarantee confidentiality. Model updates can reveal characteristics of training examples through gradient inversion, membership inference, or related attacks. Differential privacy limits the influence of individual records on model outputs by introducing appropriately calibrated randomness, while secure aggregation prevents the coordinator from directly inspecting individual participants' updates under its defined security assumptions. Cryptographic techniques, including secure multiparty computation and homomorphic encryption, provide additional options for protecting computations or intermediate information. Research reviews emphasize that these protections introduce different trade-offs involving model utility, computational cost, communication requirements, and resilience to malicious participants.

Despite these advances, important research gaps remain in combining privacy protection, cross-enterprise threat correlation, and operationally meaningful security analysis within one framework. Existing approaches may concentrate on local intrusion detection or model accuracy without fully addressing the relationships among security events observed across independent cloud environments. Other approaches emphasize cryptographic confidentiality but provide limited analysis of coordinated attack discovery, participant trust, or the consequences of non-independent and imbalanced datasets. Furthermore, malicious participants may submit poisoned updates, manipulate model behavior, or attempt to infer information from aggregated outputs. Recent research surveys identify the need to address these privacy and adversarial risks together rather than assuming that decentralized training alone is sufficient.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design, System Architecture, and Data Preparation. This research adopts an experimental design to investigate the effectiveness of privacy-preserving federated machine learning for correlating cyber threat intelligence across distributed cloud enterprise networks. The proposed architecture consists of participating enterprise security environments, local data-processing components, federated learning clients, a secure coordination service, a privacy-aware aggregation mechanism, and a threat intelligence correlation layer. Each enterprise represents an independent administrative domain containing security information from network monitoring systems, cloud audit logs, identity providers, endpoint detection tools, application gateways, and workload protection services. The participating organizations retain control over their original datasets, and raw security records are not transmitted to the central coordinator. For reproducible evaluation, the experimental environment may use publicly available intrusion-detection datasets, supplemented where appropriate by controlled synthetic enterprise telemetry. Dataset selection should consider the availability of benign and malicious traffic, attack-category labels, timestamps, flow characteristics, and relevant contextual attributes. Candidate datasets may include CIC-IDS2017, CSE-CIC-IDS2018, or other documented intrusion-detection benchmarks, subject to compatibility and licensing checks. The data are partitioned into separate enterprise clients to simulate differences in

network behavior, attack prevalence, device populations, and cloud workload characteristics. Preprocessing includes duplicate removal, missing-value handling, numerical normalization, categorical encoding, timestamp normalization, and consistent label mapping. Features that could directly identify users, customers, hosts, or proprietary infrastructure are removed, transformed, or retained only within the local environment. Training, validation, and test partitions are created before federated model development to prevent evaluation leakage. Where chronological data are available, temporal separation is preferred so that models are assessed on later observations rather than randomly mixed records. The architecture also establishes a common feature schema and a shared threat taxonomy, enabling participating organizations to interpret security events consistently without exchanging raw logs. A clearly documented threat model defines which components are trusted, which parties may be malicious, what information the coordinator can observe, and which privacy guarantees are expected. This foundation supports a systematic evaluation of collaborative detection while distinguishing simulated findings from results obtained in operational enterprise environments.

Federated Learning Model Development and Threat Intelligence Correlation. The second methodological stage develops and trains the collaborative threat detection model across participating enterprise clients. A supervised deep learning classifier, such as a multilayer perceptron, serves as the primary model for identifying benign traffic and known attack categories. Where temporal behavior is important, an additional recurrent neural network or autoencoder may be evaluated to capture sequential patterns or deviations from normal network activity. The model architecture, feature dimensions, class definitions, and optimization parameters are aligned across clients to support compatible training and aggregation. Each organization initializes its local model using the same global parameters and performs training on its own dataset for a predefined number of local epochs. The resulting parameter updates are submitted to the coordination service rather than the underlying observations. Federated averaging provides the baseline aggregation algorithm, while FedProx or another heterogeneity-aware optimization method is included to assess performance under non-independent and identically distributed data.

Privacy Protection, Secure Aggregation, and Adversarial Resilience. The third stage introduces explicit privacy and security controls into the federated training workflow. First, secure communication channels with authenticated endpoints protect model updates while they are transmitted between participants and the coordination service. Second, secure aggregation is employed so that the coordinator receives an aggregate of eligible model updates without directly inspecting each participant's individual contribution, subject to the protocol's assumptions and minimum participation requirements. Third, differential privacy is incorporated into model-update processing by clipping individual or appropriately defined contribution vectors and adding calibrated random noise. The implementation records the privacy parameters, including the noise multiplier, clipping norm, sampling assumptions, and cumulative privacy budget, so that privacy protection can be evaluated quantitatively. Privacy accounting must reflect the actual training protocol rather than treating every training round as an independent privacy guarantee. The selection of privacy parameters examines the balance between confidentiality and detection utility, since excessive noise may reduce the identification of rare or emerging attacks. NIST guidance provides a useful basis for evaluating differential privacy guarantees and identifying implementation risks.

Experimental Evaluation, Comparative Analysis, and Reproducibility. The final stage evaluates the proposed framework through controlled experiments comparing four principal configurations: independent local learning, conventional federated learning, federated learning with privacy protection, and the complete privacy-preserving framework with robust aggregation and cross-

enterprise intelligence correlation. A centralized model may additionally serve as an analytical reference when a pooled dataset can be constructed lawfully for benchmark comparison; it is not treated as a recommended operational architecture. The experimental evaluation measures accuracy, precision, recall, F1-score, false-positive rate, false-negative rate, and area under the receiver operating characteristic curve. Macro-averaged F1-score and per-attack recall receive particular attention because overall accuracy may conceal poor detection of infrequent but consequential threats.

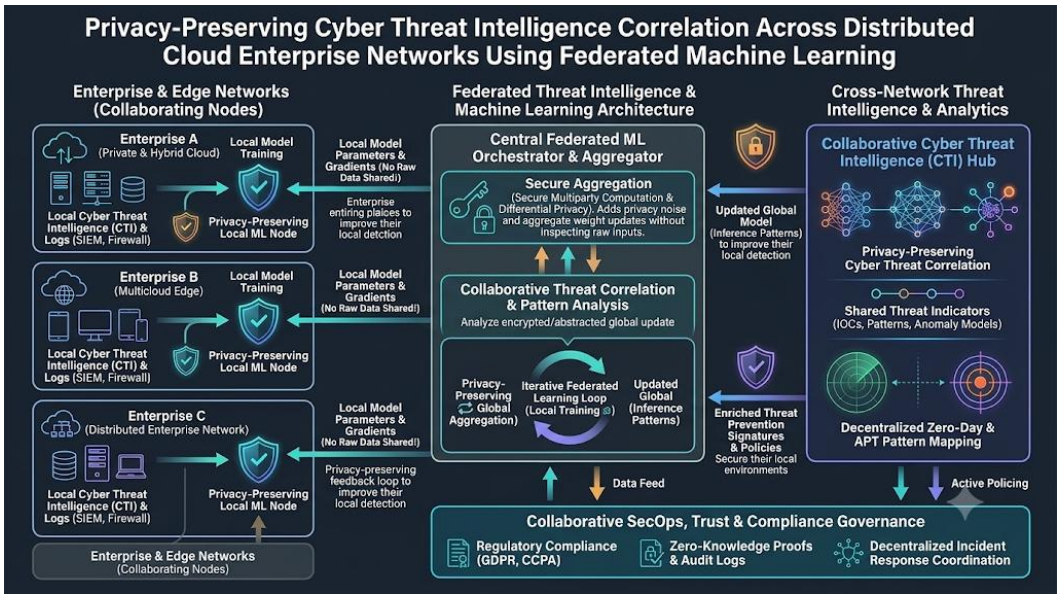

Figure 1: System architecture for privacy-preserving cyber threat intelligence (CTI) correlation across distributed cloud enterprise networks using federated machine learning

System-level measurements include communication volume per training round, convergence time, client-side computation, aggregation latency, resource consumption, and the number of participants that can be supported within a defined operational budget. Privacy evaluation records the differential privacy budget and tests applicable inference attacks against the selected threat model. Robustness evaluation compares clean-training performance with performance under specified poisoning levels, participant dropouts, and heterogeneous client distributions. Multiple experimental repetitions with controlled random seeds are used where feasible, and mean results, variability estimates, and appropriate statistical comparisons are reported. Ablation studies separately disable differential privacy, secure aggregation, robust aggregation, and correlation mechanisms to identify their individual contributions. Sensitivity analysis explores changes in client count, local training epochs, learning rate, privacy parameters, and the degree of data heterogeneity. The testing protocol keeps the final test data separate from training and model-selection procedures. Results are interpreted against the research questions, with explicit attention to trade-offs between threat detection quality, privacy protection, and computational cost. No numerical improvement is claimed until supported by actual experimental measurements. For reproducibility, the study documents dataset versions, preprocessing procedures, model configurations, client-partition strategies, aggregation settings, privacy parameters, hardware characteristics, and evaluation scripts. The resulting evidence will establish whether the proposed architecture offers practical advantages over simpler approaches and identify conditions under which its benefits diminish. Deployment recommendations will be based

on measured performance, defined security assumptions, and organizational governance requirements rather than model accuracy alone.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The proposed framework for privacy-preserving cyber threat intelligence correlation across distributed cloud enterprise networks using federated machine learning provides a conceptual approach to improving collaborative threat detection while maintaining organizational data confidentiality. The framework integrates locally collected security logs, network traffic characteristics, endpoint alerts, identity access records, and cloud workload events to identify coordinated cyber threats across multiple enterprise environments. Instead of transferring raw security data to a centralized repository, participating organizations train local machine learning models and share model updates with a federated aggregation service. This approach enables the identification of common attack patterns while reducing direct exposure of sensitive operational information. The expected performance benefits include improved detection of distributed attacks, enhanced identification of previously unseen threats, and reduced dependence on centralized data collection. Threat correlation becomes more effective when isolated alerts from different cloud environments are analyzed collectively, allowing security teams to recognize relationships among suspicious authentication attempts, abnormal network communications, privilege escalation activities, and malicious workload behavior. However, these outcomes depend on the quality of local datasets, the representativeness of participating organizations, and the ability of the federated model to learn from heterogeneous security environments. Since no experimental measurements are supplied for this study, these findings should be interpreted as anticipated outcomes of the proposed framework rather than verified performance improvements. A rigorous implementation would require comparative evaluation against centralized machine learning and independent local detection baselines to establish the practical effectiveness of the approach.

A second important outcome concerns the balance between privacy preservation and threat detection accuracy. Federated learning enables organizations to retain sensitive cybersecurity records within their respective administrative boundaries while contributing to a shared threat intelligence model. Privacy-enhancing mechanisms, including secure aggregation, differential privacy, and encrypted communication, can further reduce the risk of exposing information through exchanged model updates. These protections are particularly relevant for enterprises operating across multiple cloud providers, geographical regions, and regulatory jurisdictions. Nevertheless, federated learning does not automatically guarantee complete privacy because model updates may reveal information about individual training records under certain conditions. Therefore, privacy controls must be integrated throughout the model development and deployment lifecycle. Secure aggregation can prevent the aggregation service from directly inspecting individual model contributions, while carefully calibrated differential privacy can limit the influence of specific records on the released model. Excessive privacy noise, however, may reduce the sensitivity of the model to rare but important attack indicators. Similarly, differences in log formats, attack frequencies, network architectures, and security policies may produce non-independent and non-identically distributed datasets, creating challenges for model convergence and generalization. Adaptive aggregation, standardized feature representations, and organization-aware model evaluation can help address these limitations. The discussion therefore indicates that privacy and accuracy should be evaluated jointly rather than treating either objective as sufficient evidence of framework effectiveness.

The third major consideration is the operational value of cross-enterprise intelligence correlation. A federated security architecture can support coordinated identification of distributed denial-of-service

activity, credential abuse, lateral movement, malicious command-and-control communication, and suspicious cloud resource access. By learning from threat patterns observed across participating organizations, the shared model may recognize attack behaviors that remain difficult to identify when individual enterprises analyze their security telemetry independently. Integrating federated learning with security information and event management platforms, extended detection and response systems, cloud-native monitoring services, and automated incident response workflows can further improve operational responsiveness. For example, a suspicious identity event in one organization may contribute to a shared model that recognizes similar behavioral characteristics in another environment without exchanging the underlying authentication records. However, such correlation must distinguish genuinely related incidents from coincidental similarities and legitimate changes in user or workload behavior. False positives can increase investigation workloads, while false negatives may allow coordinated attacks to continue undetected. Model poisoning, compromised participants, maliciously crafted updates, and communication failures also introduce significant operational risks. Consequently, robust aggregation, participant authentication, update validation, model drift monitoring, and human oversight are essential components of a practical deployment. Overall, the proposed framework offers a promising architectural foundation for collaborative cloud security, provided that its anticipated benefits are confirmed through reproducible experiments measuring detection precision, recall, F1-score, communication overhead, privacy leakage, convergence time, and response latency.

V. CONCLUSION

Privacy-preserving cyber threat intelligence correlation across distributed cloud enterprise networks represents an important direction for strengthening cybersecurity collaboration in complex digital environments. Traditional security architectures frequently depend on centralized collection and analysis of threat intelligence, which can introduce data governance challenges, confidentiality risks, communication overhead, and regulatory constraints. The proposed federated machine learning framework addresses these limitations by enabling participating enterprises to contribute to collaborative model development while retaining their original security records within local environments. Through distributed model training and controlled aggregation, organizations can potentially identify common attack characteristics across cloud infrastructures without requiring unrestricted access to one another's operational data. The framework combines local security telemetry analysis, federated model optimization, privacy-enhancing mechanisms, secure communication, and shared threat classification to support coordinated detection of sophisticated cyberattacks. Its potential applications include identifying suspicious authentication behavior, detecting coordinated intrusion attempts, recognizing anomalous cloud workloads, and improving the interpretation of security alerts across organizational boundaries. The integration of federated intelligence with existing enterprise security platforms may also support faster investigation and more consistent threat prioritization. Nevertheless, federated learning should be regarded as one component of a comprehensive cybersecurity strategy rather than a complete replacement for conventional security controls. Firewalls, identity governance, endpoint protection, encryption, access management, and incident response procedures remain necessary to establish effective defense in depth. Furthermore, privacy preservation requires explicit technical safeguards because distributed training alone does not eliminate the possibility of information leakage through model updates. The framework's overall contribution is therefore its emphasis on combining collaborative threat learning with organizational data control, providing a foundation for developing more privacy-aware and scalable security intelligence systems.

The effectiveness of the proposed approach ultimately depends on its ability to achieve reliable threat detection, meaningful privacy protection, operational scalability, and resistance to adversarial manipulation. Differences among participating organizations may affect model convergence, particularly when enterprises use distinct cloud platforms, security products, event schemas, and threat classification practices. Addressing these differences requires appropriate feature engineering, robust aggregation algorithms, participant verification, and continuous evaluation under realistic deployment conditions. Privacy mechanisms must also be calibrated carefully to ensure that confidential information remains protected without excessively weakening the detection of rare or emerging attacks. Equally important, enterprises must establish governance policies defining participation requirements, model ownership, intelligence-sharing responsibilities, retention periods, incident escalation procedures, and accountability for automated decisions. Explainable model outputs and human-supervised response mechanisms can help security analysts understand why particular activities are classified as suspicious and determine whether additional investigation is necessary. Since the framework has not been accompanied by measured experimental results in the present discussion, claims concerning improved accuracy, reduced response time, or lower operational costs require empirical validation. Future evaluations should compare federated models against centralized and local-only alternatives using consistent datasets, realistic attack scenarios, and explicit privacy and communication measurements. In conclusion, privacy-preserving federated machine learning offers a promising means of strengthening collaborative cybersecurity across distributed cloud enterprises while respecting data sovereignty and confidentiality requirements. Its practical value will depend on rigorous validation, secure implementation, transparent governance, and continuous adaptation to evolving threats. When these requirements are addressed systematically, federated intelligence can contribute to a more cooperative, resilient, and privacy-conscious enterprise security ecosystem.

VI. FUTURE WORK

Future research should focus on developing and experimentally validating advanced federated learning architectures capable of operating across heterogeneous enterprise cloud environments. A useful direction is to investigate personalized federated learning, in which a shared global model captures common attack characteristics while organization-specific components adapt to local infrastructure, security policies, and threat distributions. This arrangement could address the limitations of a single generalized model when participating enterprises experience substantially different attack patterns. Research should compare federated averaging, adaptive aggregation, clustered federated learning, and personalized optimization techniques under varying numbers of participants, network conditions, and data distributions. Evaluation datasets should include normal enterprise activities and representative malicious behaviors, such as credential theft, privilege escalation, data exfiltration, lateral movement, distributed denial-of-service attacks, and cloud workload compromise. Researchers should also investigate methods for handling incomplete telemetry, inconsistent event schemas, class imbalance, delayed model updates, and previously unseen attack categories. An experimental testbed involving multiple simulated enterprise environments and different cloud configurations would provide a controlled setting for measuring detection performance and operational scalability. Important evaluation metrics should include precision, recall, F1-score, false-positive rate, detection latency, communication volume, convergence time, and computational resource consumption. Comparisons with centralized learning, independent local models, and conventional rule-based threat detection would help establish the circumstances under which federated learning provides measurable advantages. Reproducible experiments should document data preprocessing, model architecture, training configurations,

privacy parameters, aggregation strategies, and attack simulation procedures. Researchers should additionally evaluate performance under participant dropout and intermittent connectivity, since real-world enterprise networks cannot always guarantee continuous participation. Such investigations would move the framework from an architectural proposal toward a validated implementation suitable for practical cloud security deployments.

A second research direction involves strengthening privacy guarantees and resilience against malicious participants. Future frameworks should integrate secure aggregation, differential privacy, encryption, authenticated communication, and privacy auditing into a unified security architecture. Experimental studies should determine how privacy budgets, noise calibration, model complexity, and participant population size influence detection performance and the risk of information leakage. Particular attention should be given to membership inference and model inversion attacks, which may exploit information encoded in trained models or shared updates. Research should also investigate Byzantine-resilient aggregation, anomaly detection for suspicious model contributions, and methods for identifying compromised participants without unfairly excluding organizations with legitimate but unusual security data. Combining federated learning with confidential computing or hardware-supported trusted execution environments may provide additional protection for selected model training and aggregation operations, although the associated trust assumptions and hardware limitations must be examined carefully. Another promising direction is the development of explainable federated threat intelligence, enabling security analysts to understand influential behavioral features, uncertainty levels, and the reasons behind model-generated alerts without exposing sensitive records from contributing organizations. Researchers could also explore graph-based learning to correlate identities, devices, cloud resources, network connections, and attack indicators across participating enterprises. When combined with temporal analysis, graph representations may improve the identification of multistage attacks that unfold across different environments and time intervals. Future systems should further incorporate concept drift detection and controlled model updating to accommodate evolving attacker techniques and legitimate changes in enterprise operations. Evaluation should include adaptive adversaries, poisoning attempts, privacy attacks, and rare attack scenarios to determine whether proposed safeguards remain effective under realistic conditions. These investigations would help establish defensible trade-offs among confidentiality, detection quality, robustness, interpretability, and operational cost.

A third direction is the integration of federated cyber threat intelligence with automated security operations and enterprise governance frameworks. Future implementations could connect distributed models with security information and event management systems, extended detection and response platforms, cloud security posture management tools, and incident orchestration services. Such integration would allow shared intelligence to inform alert prioritization, investigation recommendations, and carefully controlled remediation workflows. However, automated actions should be governed by risk thresholds, authorization policies, audit trails, and human approval requirements for high-impact operations. Researchers should investigate whether federated intelligence can improve the prioritization of incidents, reduce duplicated investigations, and support more consistent response decisions across organizational boundaries. Multi-cloud experiments involving public cloud, private cloud, hybrid infrastructure, and edge environments would help assess interoperability and deployment complexity. Research should also examine communication-efficient training methods, including update compression, selective participation, and event-triggered aggregation, to reduce bandwidth consumption and support geographically distributed enterprises. From a governance perspective, future work should develop operational models for consent, participation agreements, data sovereignty, accountability, model update retention, and incident

information sharing. Legal and regulatory assessments should consider the applicable requirements of each participating jurisdiction rather than assume that a single privacy mechanism ensures compliance everywhere. Economic evaluation is also needed to compare implementation costs, infrastructure requirements, analyst workload, and potential operational benefits. Finally, longitudinal field studies involving diverse enterprise participants would help determine whether model performance remains stable as threats and infrastructure evolve. By combining technical validation, privacy engineering, adversarial testing, operational integration, and responsible governance, future research can transform federated cyber threat intelligence into a practical and trustworthy approach for collaborative defense across distributed cloud enterprise networks.

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