Intermittent Session Disconnect in IdP v2.2

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Problem

We have noticed an issue in Shibboleth IdP v2.2. It is affecting a small fraction of users and seem to be intermittent. Fewer than 10 users have reported this problem so far.

When does it occur?

It is likely to occur when:

- User already has a SSO session and visits a second resource/application in the same browser window.
- Sticky session cookie is not passed by the browser.
- SSO/Authn request is handled by a different IdP node.

We have sticky session enabled in our load balancer so that user's browser traffic (for authentication) is always handled by the same IdP node. Load balancer saves a sticky session cookie in the browser. Once SSO session is established, if user visits a second resource/application, user is redirected back to IdP to verify the SSO session. If the browser does not pass the sticky session cookie, load balancer may route the request to a second IdP node and the above error may occur.

When this error occurs IdP displays System Error page, but error description is empty.

Cause

We have determined that the error was caused by subtle configuration errors in the Terracotta caching engine. Terracotta is used by Shibboleth 2.x to replicate sessions across load balanced instances.

Resolution

We corrected the configuration error in the production environment on 9/9/2010.

Work Around (Obsolete: Issue Resolved.)

Advise the user to try the following.

1. Retry i.e. revisit the resource/application.
2. Clear cookie cache and revisit the resource/application.
3. Open a new browser and revisit the resource/application.