Applied Cryptology

Daniel Page

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September 5, 2025

Keep in mind there are *two* PDFs available (of which this is the latter):

- 1. a PDF of examinable material used as lecture slides, and
- 2. a PDF of non-examinable, extra material:
 - the associated notes page may be pre-populated with extra, written explaination of material covered in lecture(s), plus
 - anything with a "grey'ed out" header/footer represents extra material which is useful and/or interesting but out of scope (and hence not covered).

Notes:
Notes:

COMS30048 lecture: week #16

- ► Agenda: explore implementation attacks via
 - 1. an "in theory", i.e., concept-oriented perspective,
 - 1.1 explanation,
 - 1.2 justification,
 - 1.3 formalisation.

and

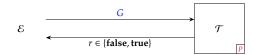
- 2. an "in practice", i.e., example-oriented perspective,
- 2.1 attacks,
- 2.2 countermeasures.
- Caveat!
 - \sim 2 hours \Rightarrow introductory, and (very) selective (versus definitive) coverage.

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Part 1.1: in theory (1) Explanation

- ► Scenario:
 - ightharpoonup given the following interaction between an **attacker** $\mathcal E$ and a **target** $\mathcal T$



- and noting that
 - ▶ the password P has |P| characters in it,
 - each character in *G* and *P* is assumed to be from a known alphabet

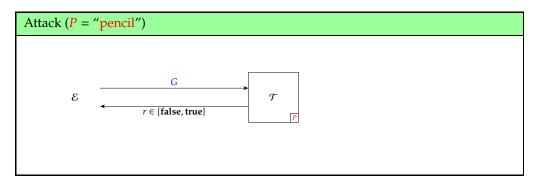
$$A = \{'a', 'b', \ldots, 'z'\}$$

such that |A| = 26,

▶ how can \mathcal{E} mount a successful attack, i.e., input a guess G matching P?



► Idea: brute-force attack (i.e., try every *G*).

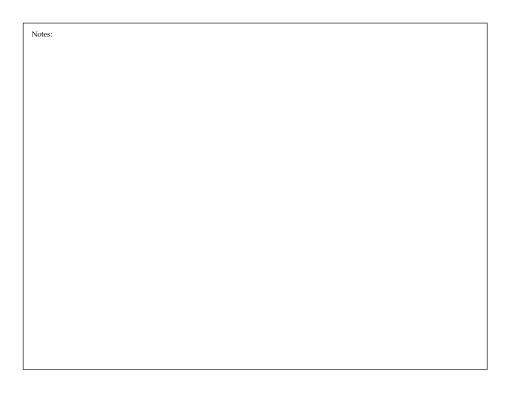




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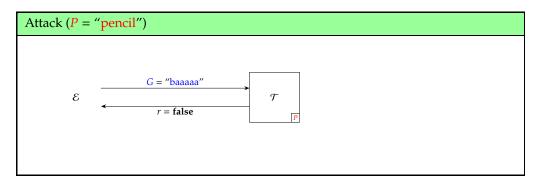
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Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation



Notes:			<u> </u>

► Idea: brute-force attack (i.e., try every *G*).





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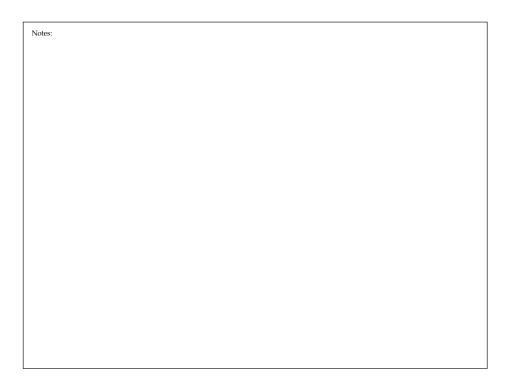
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Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation

Attack (
$$P = "pencil"$$
)
$$\mathcal{E}$$

$$r = false$$

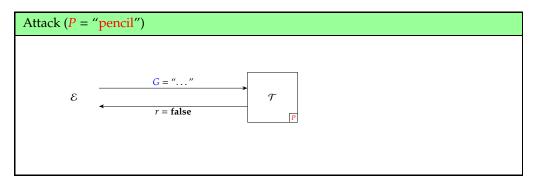
$$T$$



Notes:			



► Idea: brute-force attack (i.e., try every *G*).





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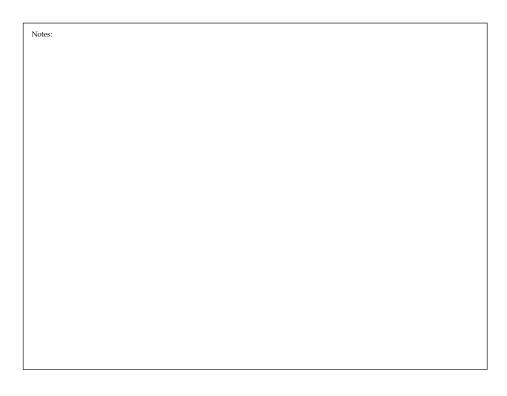
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Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation

Attack (
$$P = "pencil"$$
)
$$\mathcal{E}$$

$$r = false$$

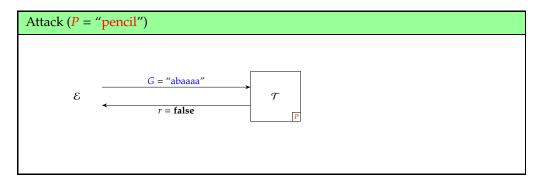
$$T$$



Notes:			



► Idea: brute-force attack (i.e., try every *G*).





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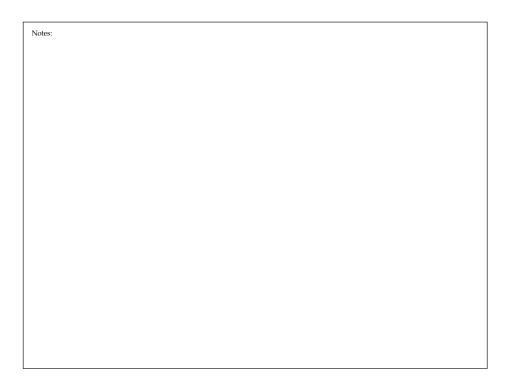
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Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation

Attack (
$$P = "pencil"$$
)
$$\mathcal{E}$$

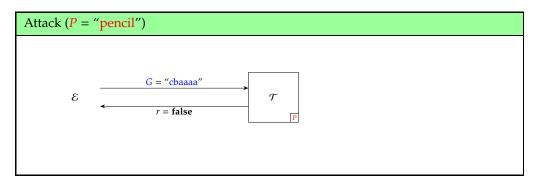
$$r = false$$

$$T$$



Notes:			

► Idea: brute-force attack (i.e., try every *G*).





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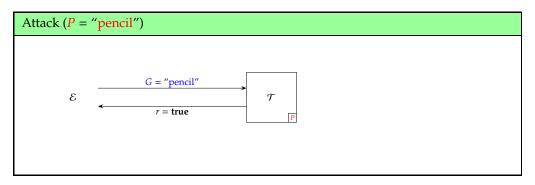
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Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation



Notes:			

► Idea: brute-force attack (i.e., try every *G*).



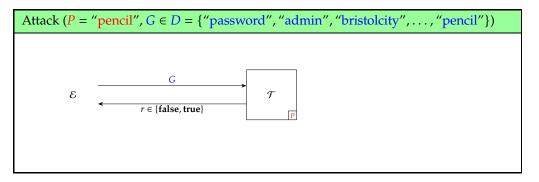
- ∴ if we play by the rules then
- +ve: we always guess a G = P
- -ve: we need quite a lot of guesses, e.g., for a 6-character lower-case password we'd make

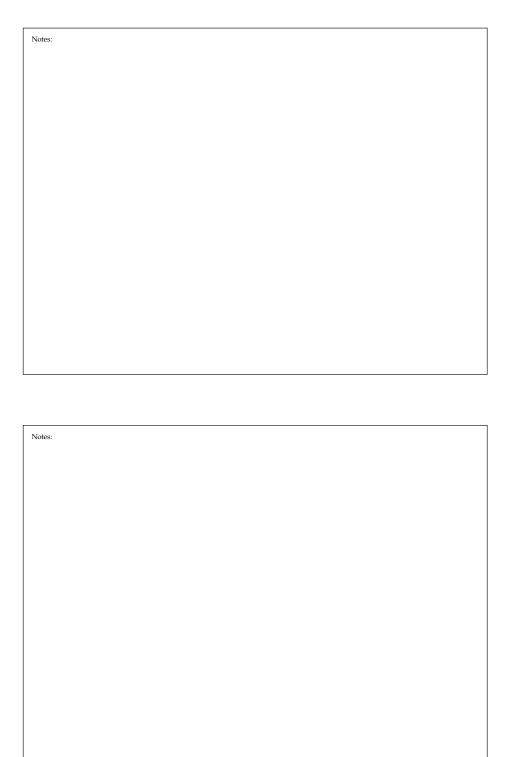
$$26^6 = 308915776$$

in the worst-case

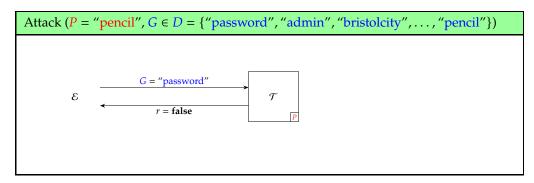
Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation

► Idea: dictionary attack (i.e., try common *G*).





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► Idea: dictionary attack (i.e., try common *G*).

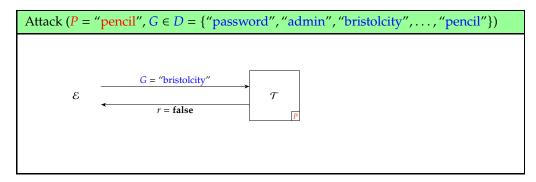
Attack (
$$P = \text{"pencil"}, G \in D = \{\text{"password"}, \text{"admin"}, \text{"bristolcity"}, \dots, \text{"pencil"}\}$$
)
$$\varepsilon$$

$$r = \text{false}$$



Notes:			

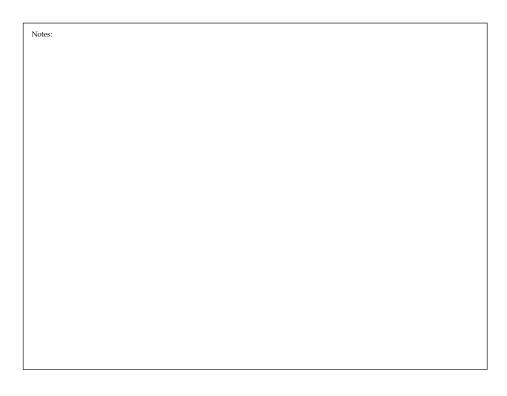
▶ Idea: dictionary attack (i.e., try common *G*).





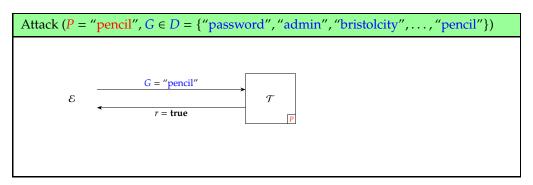
Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation

► Idea: dictionary attack (i.e., try common *G*).



Note	tes:		

► Idea: dictionary attack (i.e., try common *G*).



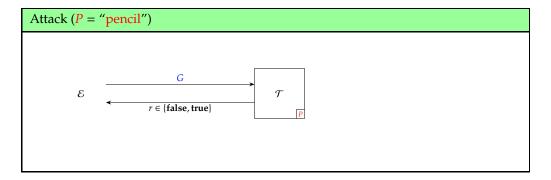
∴ if we play by the rules then

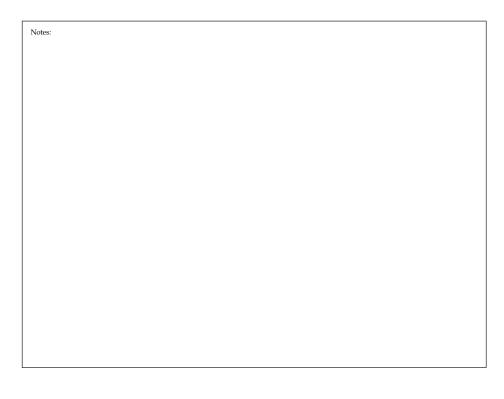
-ve: if $P \notin D$, we won't guess a G = P

+ve: we need fewer guesses, i.e., |D| in the worst-case



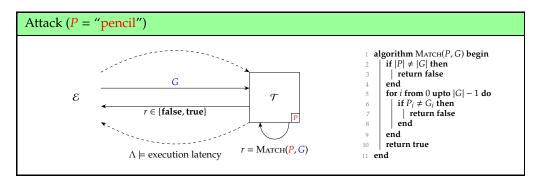
Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation







► Idea: side-channel attack.

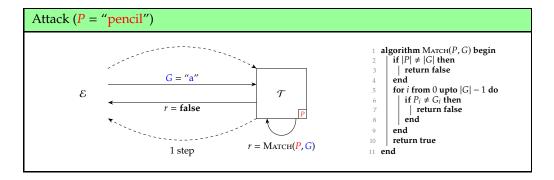


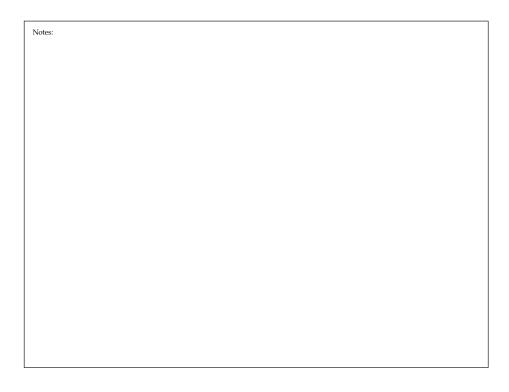
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Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation

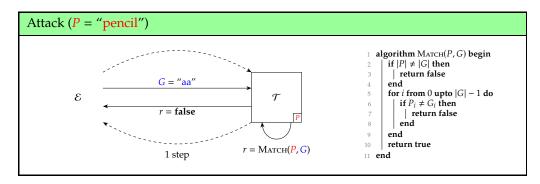






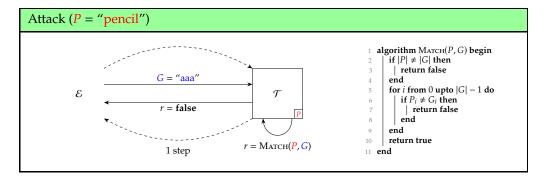


► Idea: side-channel attack.





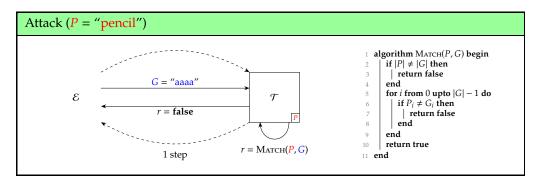
Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation







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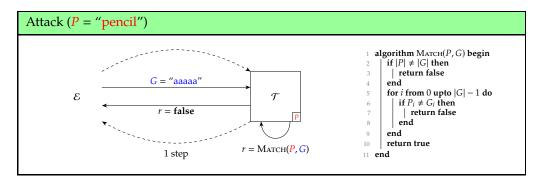
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Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation

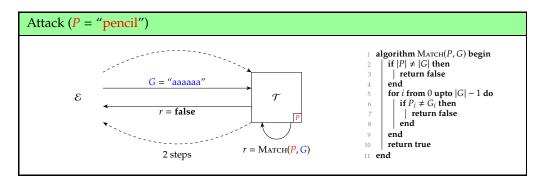








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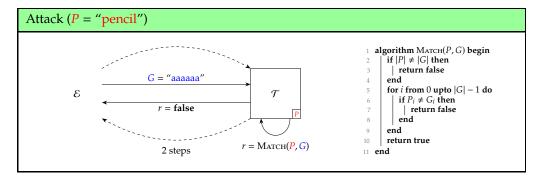
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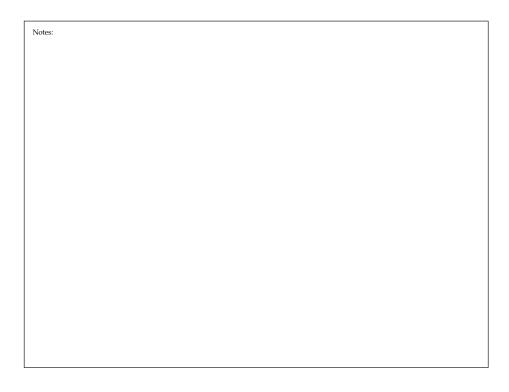
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Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation

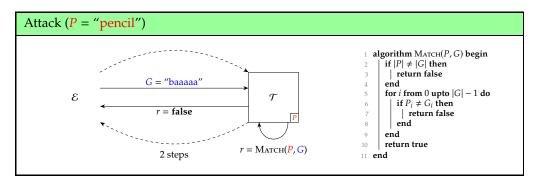








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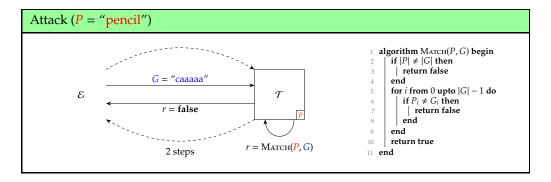


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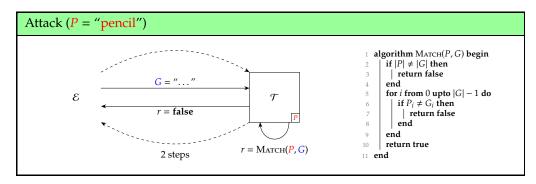
Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation



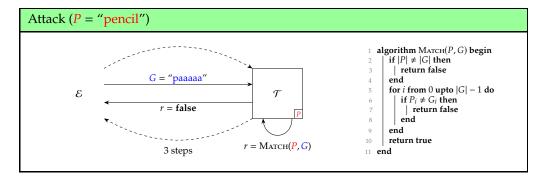


Notes:		

► Idea: side-channel attack.



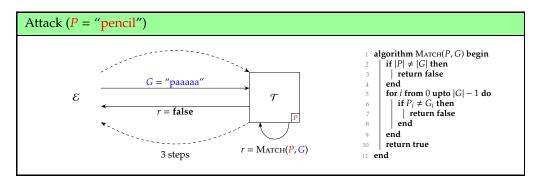
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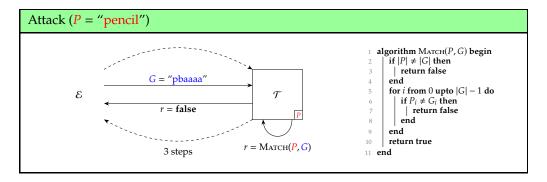


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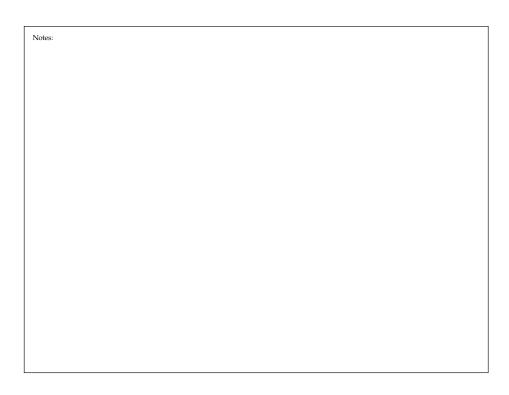
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Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation

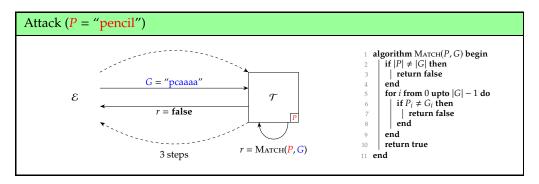








► Idea: side-channel attack.

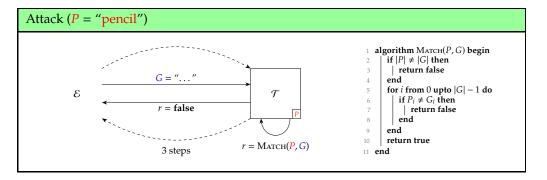


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Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation

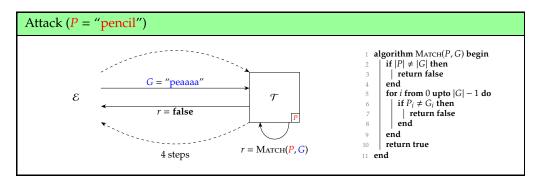




Notes:		



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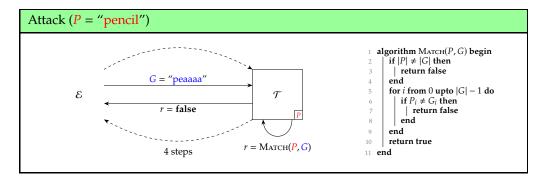
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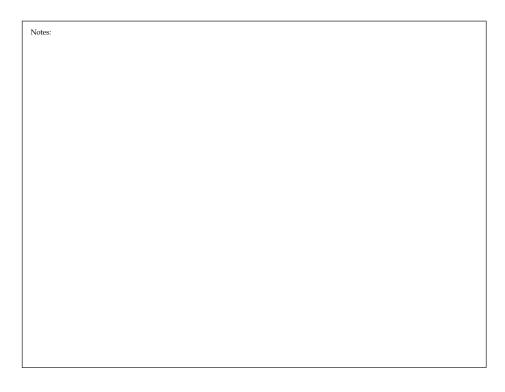
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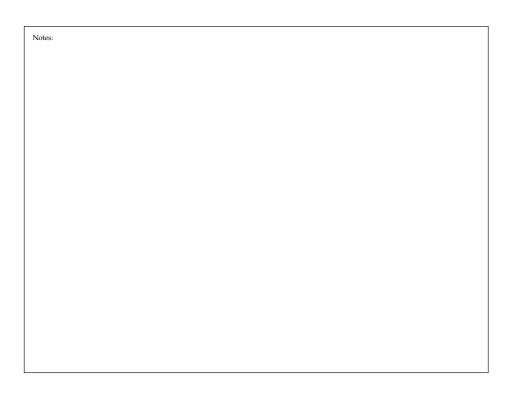
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Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation

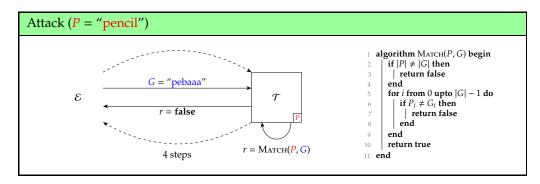








► Idea: side-channel attack.



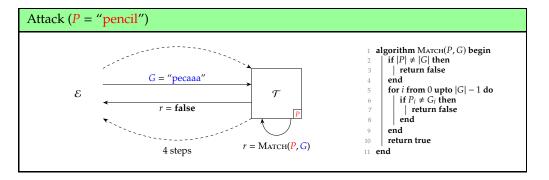
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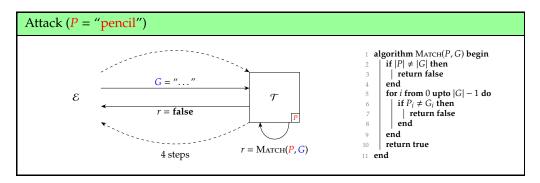
Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation



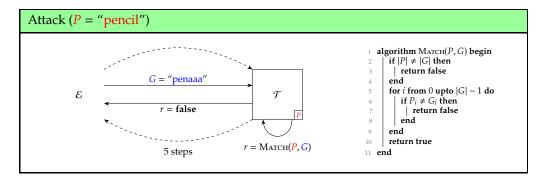




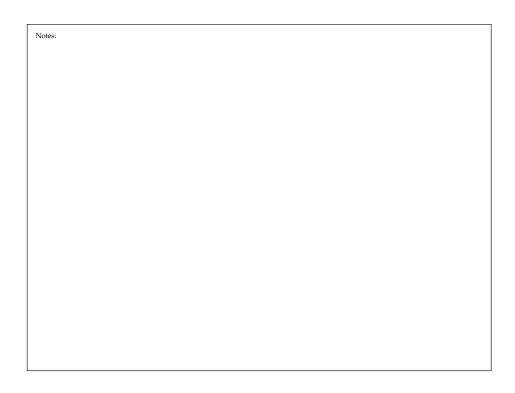
► Idea: side-channel attack.



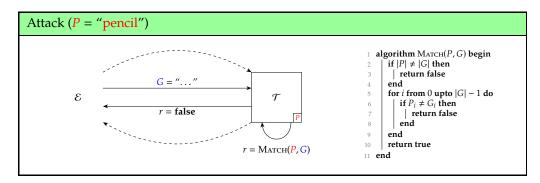
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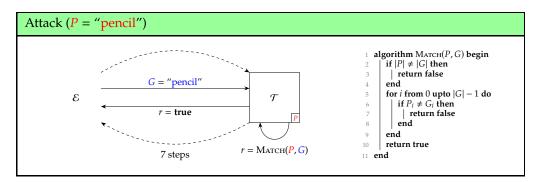
► Idea: side-channel attack.





Part 1.1: in theory (2) Explanation

► Idea: side-channel attack.



: if we bend the rules a little then

+ve: we always guess a G = P

+ve: we don't need too many guesses, e.g., for a 6-character lower-case password we'd make

$$26 \cdot 6 = 156$$

in the worst-case (plus the few extra to recover |P|)



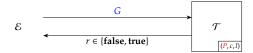




Notes:	

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1				

- Scenario:
 - ightharpoonup given the following interaction between an **attacker** $\mathcal E$ and a **target** $\mathcal T$



- and noting that
 - the Personal Identification Number (PIN) P has |P| = 4 digits in it,
 - each digit in *G* and *P* is assumed to be from a known alphabet

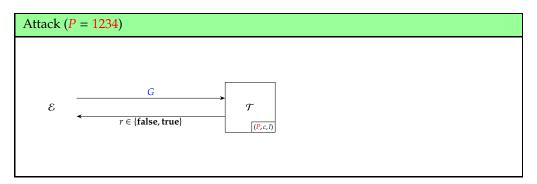
$$A = \{0, 1, \dots, 9\}$$

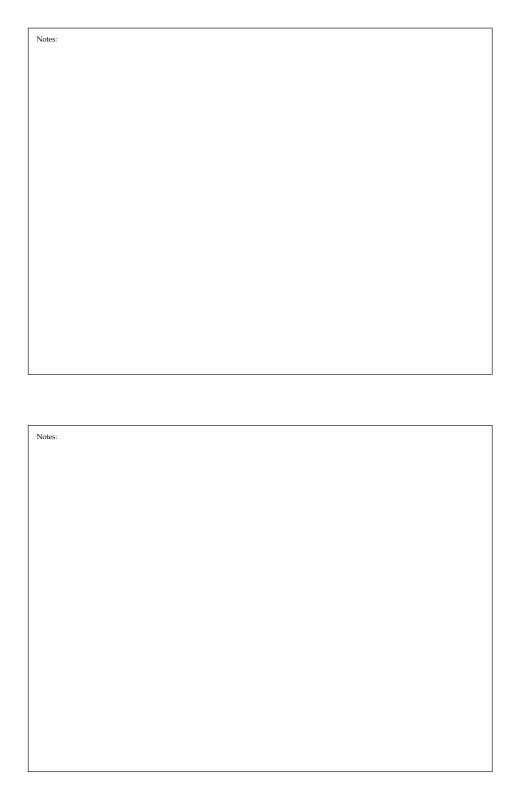
- such that |A| = 10,
- the counter c is incremented after each (successive) incorrect guess; when c exceeds a limit l = 3, the target becomes "locked",
- ▶ how can \mathcal{E} mount a successful attack, i.e., input a guess G matching P?



Part 1.1: in theory (4) Explanation

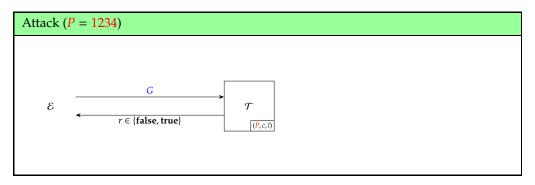
► Idea:







► Idea:



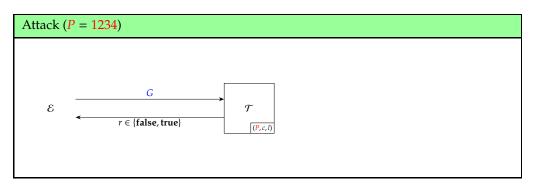
- : similar attacks as before apply, namely
- 1. brute-force attack:

 - +ve: $10^4 = 10000$ possible PINs is not many -ve: the counter limits how viable this approach is

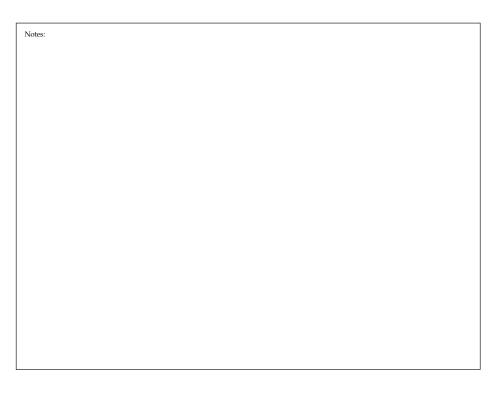


Part 1.1: in theory (4) Explanation

► Idea:

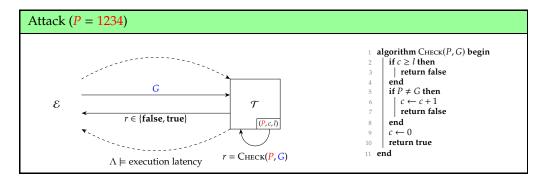


- : similar attacks as before apply, namely
- 2. dictionary attack:
 - +ve: reasoning re. common passwords still applies to PINs (e.g., a birthday)
 - -ve: the counter limits how viable this approach is





► Idea:

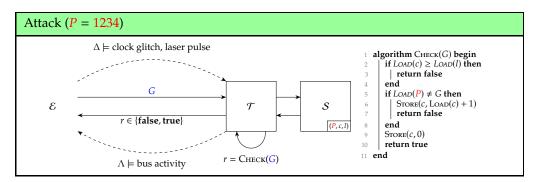


- ∴ similar attacks as before apply, namely
- 3. side-channel attack:
 - +ve: we can still measure execution time of Check
 - −ve: comparison of *P* and *G* no longer has data-dependent execution time

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Part 1.1: in theory (4) Explanation

► Idea:

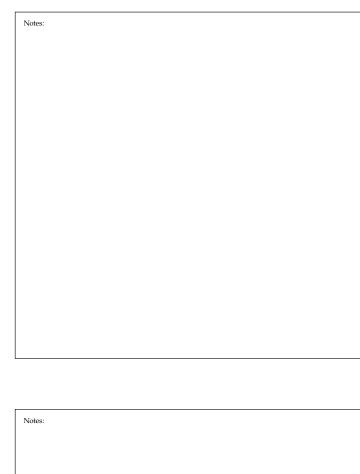


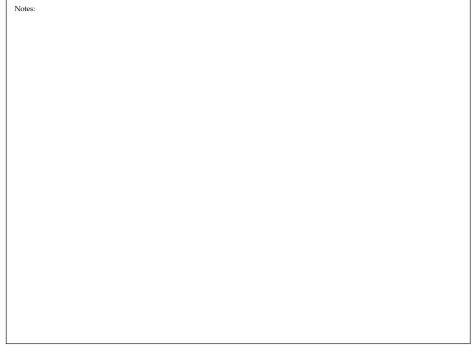
but consider some more implementation detail:

- 1. we might consider different indirect inputs and outputs,
- 2. use of an external, non-volatile storage (e.g., SIM card) implies that for $x \leftarrow y$ we have

$$x \text{ on LHS} \sim \text{store operation}$$

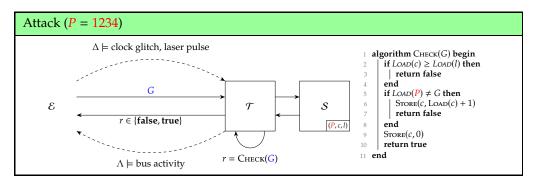
 $y \text{ on RHS} \sim \text{load operation}$ $\rightarrow \text{Store}(x, \text{Load}(y))$







► Idea: fault induction attack.



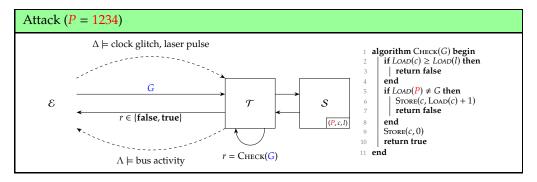
- ∴ we could consider
- 1. disrupting state, e.g.

 - corrupt (or randomise) content stored by S,
 if l is an n-bit integer, all 2ⁿ l values of a random l' mean more guesses.



Part 1.1: in theory (4) Explanation

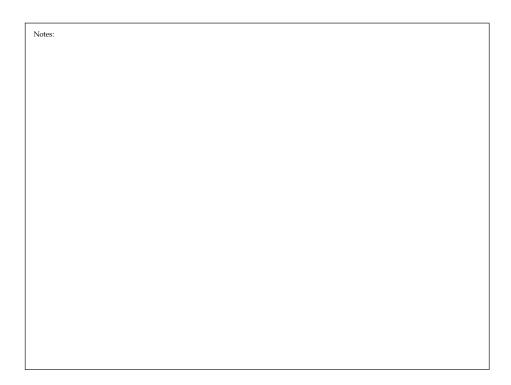
► Idea: fault induction attack.



- .. we could consider
- 2. disrupting execution, e.g.
 - control the power supply and probe the command bus,
 - when a command of the form Store(x, y) is detected, we know it relates to either

Line #6 : we know $P \neq G \sim$ disconnect the power, and prevent update to cLine #9 : we know $P = G \sim$ do nothing

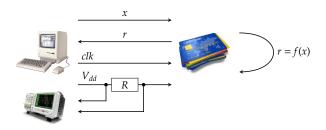




Notes:			

Part 1.2: in theory (1) Justification: $\Lambda = \text{power consumption}$

Example: consider a scenario



whereby

- Ohm's Law tells us that, i.e., V = IR, so we can acquire a power consumption trace

$$\Lambda = \langle \Lambda_0, \Lambda_1, \dots, \Lambda_{l-1} \rangle$$

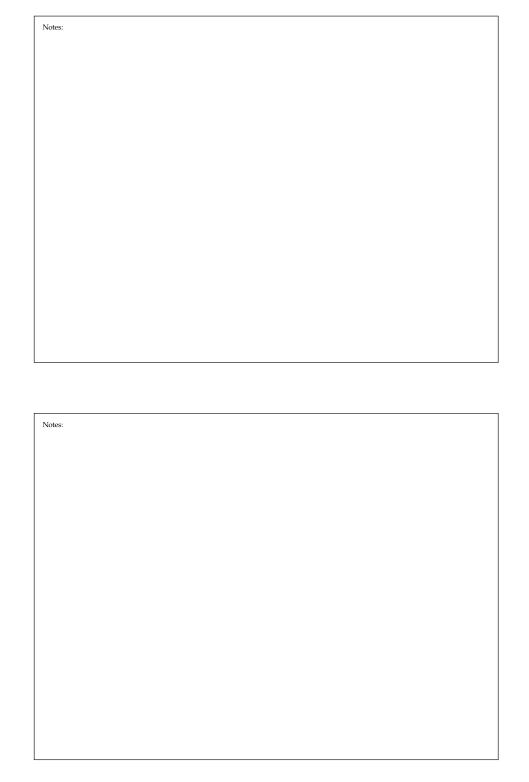
i.e., an l-element sequence of instantaneous samples during execution of f.

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Part 1.2: in theory (1)

Justification: $\Lambda = \text{power consumption}$

- ► Claim: Λ may be
 - computation-dependent, i.e., depends on definition and implementation of *f* , and/or
 - ightharpoonup data-dependent, i.e., depends on x.

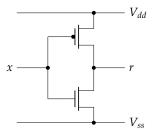




Part 1.2: in theory (1)

Justification: $\Lambda = power consumption$

- ► Why?
 - ► From a hardware perspective



power consumption will stem from

- 1. **static consumption**, and
- 2. dynamic consumption.
- ► Therefore, different switching behaviour ⇒ different power consumption, i.e.,

```
if x = 0, setting x \leftarrow 0 \Rightarrow static only \Rightarrow low(er) power consumption if x = 0, setting x \leftarrow 1 \Rightarrow static plus dynamic \Rightarrow high(er) power consumption if x = 1, setting x \leftarrow 0 \Rightarrow static plus dynamic \Rightarrow high(er) power consumption if x = 1, setting x \leftarrow 1 \Rightarrow static only \Rightarrow low(er) power consumption
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which is data-dependent, and not *necessarily* in a symmetric manner.

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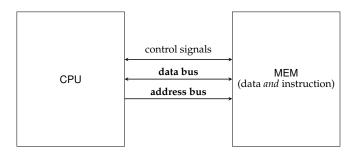
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Part 1.2: in theory (1)

Justification: $\Lambda = \text{power consumption}$

- ► Why?
 - ► From a software perspective



power consumption will stem from

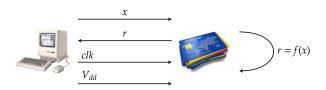
- 1. computation,
- 2. communication (i.e., use of buses), and
- 3. storage (e.g., registers, memory),
- 4. ...

all of which are data-dependent.

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Part 1.2: in theory (2) Justification: Λ = execution latency

Example: consider a scenario



whereby

we measure

 Λ_x = time when x is transmitted Λ_r = time when *r* is received

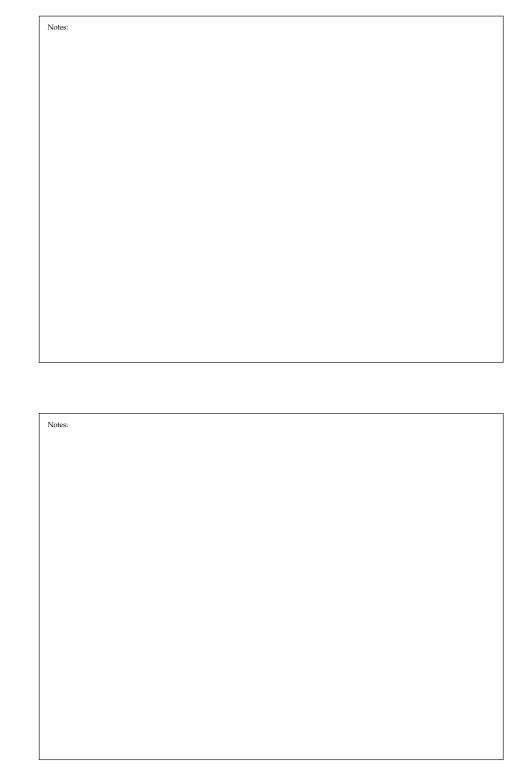
so that

 $\Lambda = \Lambda_r - \Lambda_x$ approximates the execution latency of f.



Part 1.2: in theory (2) Justification: Λ = execution latency

- ► Claim: Λ may be
 - computation-dependent, i.e., depends on definition and implementation of *f* , and/or
 - ightharpoonup data-dependent, i.e., depends on x.





Part 1.2: in theory (2) Justification: Λ = execution latency

▶ Why? for example, in each of

1.
$$\begin{array}{c} & \dots \\ & \text{if } \mathsf{GPR}[x] = 0 \text{ then } \mathsf{PC} \leftarrow \mathit{done} \\ & \mathsf{stmt} \\ & \mathit{done} : \cdots \end{array} \right\} \begin{array}{c} \mathsf{a. } \mathsf{GPR}[x] = 0 \text{ so stmt is not executed} \\ \mathsf{b. } \mathsf{GPR}[x] = 1 \text{ so stmt is} \end{array}$$

2.
$$GPR[r] \leftarrow MEM[GPR[x]]$$
 a. $MEM[GPR[x]]$ is resident in cache b. $MEM[GPR[x]]$ is not resident in cache

3.
$$\begin{array}{c} \cdots \\ \mathsf{GPR}[r] \leftarrow \mathsf{GPR}[x] \times \mathsf{GPR}[y] \\ \cdots \end{array} \right\} \begin{array}{c} \mathsf{a. GPR}[x] \; \mathsf{has small magnitude} \\ \mathsf{b. GPR}[x] \; \mathsf{has large magnitude} \end{array}$$

it *could* be the case that

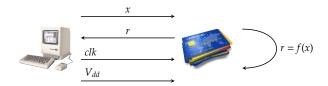
- low(er) execution latency
- high(er) execution latency

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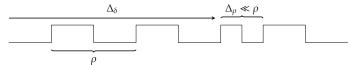
Notes:

Part 1.2: in theory (3) Justification: $\Delta = \operatorname{clock}$ glitch

Example: consider a scenario



whereby a controlled "glitch", i.e.,



such that

- $ightharpoonup \rho$ is the clock period,
- Δ_ρ is the period of the glitch,
 Δ_δ is the offset of the glitch.

can be caused in the clock signal *clk*.



Part 1.2: in theory (3) Justification: $\Delta = \operatorname{clock}$ glitch

► Claim: given

 Δ might allow one to skip the branch instruction, i.e., always execute stmt.

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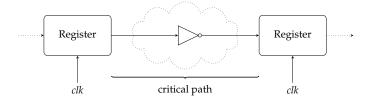
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Part 1.2: in theory (3) Justification: $\Delta = \operatorname{clock}$ glitch

- ► Why?
 - recall that



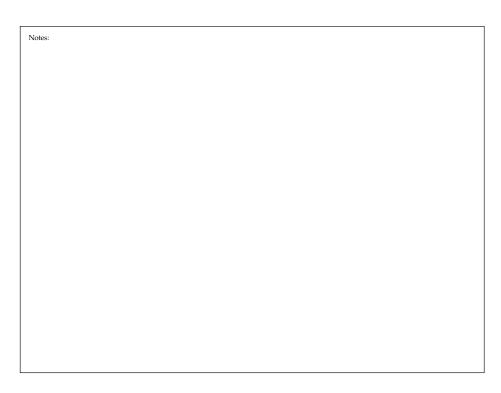
where, if ρ is close to the critical path, the glitch is likely shorter,

- therefore, it is plausible such a glitch can prevent complete execution of an instruction, e.g.,
 - ▶ GPR[x] = 0 is not computed in time,
 - PC is not updated in time,

•

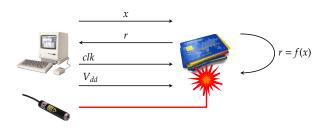
meaning that instruction is skipped.

Notes:	



Part 1.2: in theory (4) Justification: $\Delta = \text{laser pulse}$

Example: consider a scenario



whereby a focused laser pulse can be aimed at the target device.

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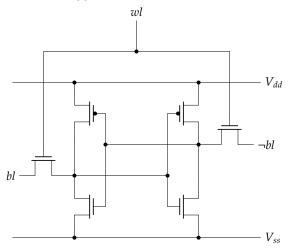
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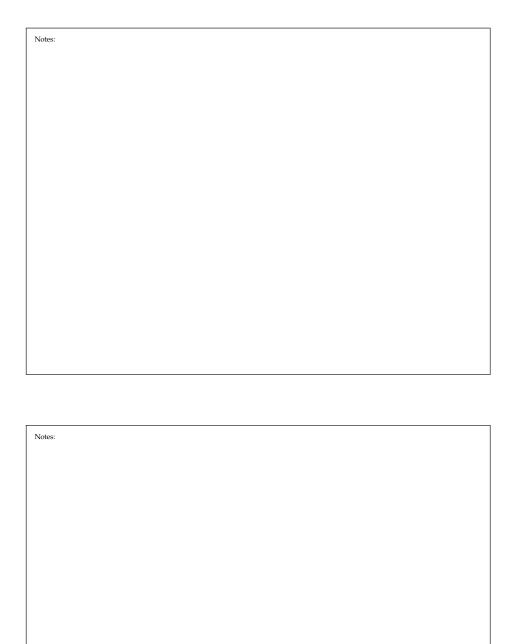
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Part 1.2: in theory (4) Justification: $\Delta = \text{laser pulse}$

ightharpoonup Claim: Δ might allow one to toggle the state of



i.e., an SRAM-based memory cell (within some larger device).



Part 1.2: in theory (4) Justification: $\Delta = laser pulse$

► Why?

▶ after decapsulation





- at least the top layer of the device is exposed,

 the laser pulse can ionise regions of semi-conductor material,

 doing so can be used to activate a transistor,
- if the bottom-left transistor can be activated (for some short period), this will toggle *Q*.

https://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~sps32/ches02-optofault.pdf



Part 1.3: in theory (1) Formalisation: attacks

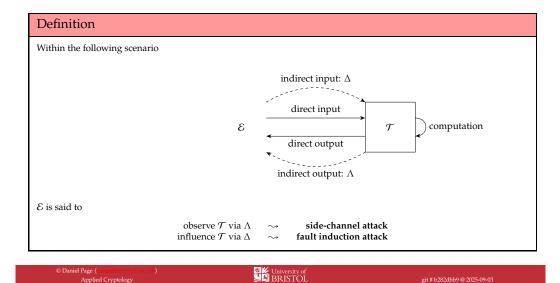
Definition

A **cryptanalytic attack** focuses on exploiting a vulnerability in the abstract, on-paper specification of a target. In contrast, an **implementation attack** focuses on exploiting a vulnerability in the concrete, in-practice implementation of a target by 1) actively influencing and/or 2) passively observing behaviour by it.

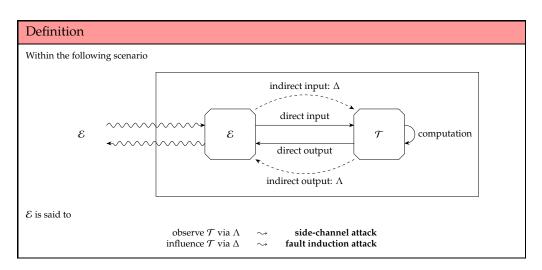
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Part 1.3: in theory (1) Formalisation: attacks



Part 1.3: in theory (1) Formalisation: attacks







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Part 1.3: in theory (2) Formalisation: attacks

Definition

 \mathcal{E} wants to realise some sort of attack goal, e.g.,

- recovery of state from the target
- 2. manipulation of state in the target
- manipulation of behaviour by the target

measured relative to both efficacy and efficiency.



Part 1.3: in theory (2) Formalisation: attacks

Definition

 \mathcal{E} employs an **attack strategy**, which might be (generically) characterised as, e.g.,

- 1. profiled versus non-profiled
- adaptive versus non-adaptive differential versus non-differential

which also captures features of standard cryptanalysis, including known plaintext, chosen plaintext, etc.

Definition

 \mathcal{E} operates an **attack process**: *typically* this involves

- 1. an offline pre-interaction phase : characterise, calibrate, pre-compute, etc.
- an online interaction phase : use input to acquire output
- an offline post-interaction phase : use input and output to realise goal

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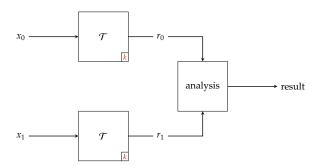
Part 1.3: in theory (2) Formalisation: attacks

E employs an attack mechanism, which can be (generically) characterised as, e.g., 1. software versus hardware 2. generic versus specific 3. local versus remote 4. contact-based versus contact-less 5. invasive versus non-invasive 6. destructive versus non-destructive 7. synchronous versus non-deterministic

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Part 1.3: in theory (3) Formalisation: attacks

- ► Note that:
 - ▶ a differential cryptanalytic attack [5]

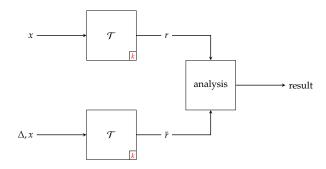


(roughly) analyses how an input difference affects the output difference.

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Part 1.3: in theory (3) Formalisation: attacks

- Note that:
 - a differential fault induction attack



(typically) analyses how a fault affects the output difference.

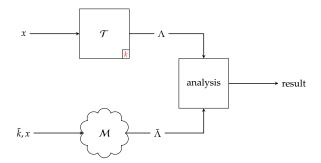
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Part 1.3: in theory (3) Formalisation: attacks

- ► Note that:
 - a differential side-channel attack



is (typically) such that

- \blacktriangleright \mathcal{M} is a **model** (or simulation) of \mathcal{T} ,
- \tilde{k} is a **hypothesis** about (part of) k,
- $\tilde{\Lambda}$ is the **hypothetical leakage** (cf. the *actual* leakage Λ),

and so

 $\begin{array}{cccc} \text{non-differential} & \Rightarrow & 1 \text{ interaction} & \simeq & \text{analysis within} & \text{single } \Lambda \\ & \text{differential} & \Rightarrow & n \text{ interactions} & \simeq & \text{analysis between many } \Lambda \end{array}$





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Part 1.3: in theory (4) Formalisation: attacks

Definition

The information leaked via some side-channel is modelled as $\mathcal{M}(\cdot) = \mathcal{M}_d(\cdot) + \mathcal{M}_n$, i.e., as the sum of 1) data-dependent **signal** (of interest) and 2) **noise** components.

Definition

Let *V* denote a set of values some (intermediate) variable can take, and *L* denote a set of leakage values.

- A **value**-based leakage model is such that $\mathcal{M}_d: V \to L$, meaning the leakage value depends on the current value of some variable.
- A **transition**-based leakage model is such that $M_d: V \times V \to L$, meaning the leakage value depends on the previous and current value of some variable (i.e., the transition from the former to the latter).

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Part 1.3: in theory (4)

Formalisation: attacks

Definition

The information leaked via some side-channel is modelled as $\mathcal{M}(\cdot) = \mathcal{M}_d(\cdot) + \mathcal{M}_n$, i.e., as the sum of 1) data-dependent **signal** (of interest) and 2) **noise** components.

Definition

Let *V* denote a set of values some (intermediate) variable can take, and *L* denote a set of leakage values.

- A value-based leakage model is such that M_d : V → L, meaning the leakage value depends on the current value of some variable.
- A **transition**-based leakage model is such that $M_d: V \times V \to L$, meaning the leakage value depends on the previous and current value of some variable (i.e., the transition from the former to the latter).

Example:

- 1. Hamming weight ⇒ value-based leakage model
- 2. Hamming distance ⇒ transition-based leakage model

Notes:	

Part 1.3: in theory (5) Formalisation: attacks

Definition

A fault model is an abstraction of the fault induction mechanism, i.e., it separates fault induction from fault exploitation. it captures features such as

- precise control, imprecise control, no control 1. timing ⇒ precise control, imprecise control, no control $location \Rightarrow$
- 2. 3. duration ⇒ transient, permanent, destructive
- single fault; multiple, i.e., *n* faults plurality \Rightarrow
- 1 bit, *n* bits, variable granularity ⇒
- effect \Rightarrow
- set-to-0/1, stuck-at-0/1, flip, randomise, variable input data, computation on data, storage of data, execution of instructions implication \Rightarrow



Part 1.3: in theory (6) Formalisation: countermeasures

Definition

 \mathcal{T} might employ a **countermeasure strategy**, which can be (generically) characterised as, e.g.,

- implicit versus explicit
- detection versus prevention

and typically forms a layered approach, i.e., a suite of countermeasures versus a single "silver-bullet" or panacea.

Notes:		

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Part 1.3: in theory (6) Formalisation: countermeasures

Definition

 \mathcal{T} might design an *abstract* **countermeasure mechanism**, within (at least) the following *levels*

- 1. protocol,
- 2. specification,
- 3. implementation, i.e.,
 - software, and/or
 - hardware.

Definition

 \mathcal{T} might implement a *concrete* **countermeasure mechanism**, which can be (generically) characterised as, e.g.,

- software versus hardware 1.
- 2. generic versus specific
- 3. selective versus non-selective
- proactive versus reactive



Part 1.3: in theory (7) Formalisation: countermeasures

Definition

Countermeasures against implementation attacks based on information leakage often fall into the following classes:

- 1. **hiding** \simeq decrease SNR, or
- 2. masking ~ randomised redundant representation.

Notes:		

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Part 1.3: in theory (8)

Formalisation: countermeasures

Definition

Among a large design space of countermeasures, instances that focus on hiding (typically) fall into the following sub-

- 1. increase noise, e.g., make Λ random:
 - a. spatial displacement, i.e., where the operation is computed,
- b. **temporal displacement**, i.e., *when* the operation is computed, which can be further divided into
 - padding (or skewing), and
 - reordering (or shuffling),
- c. diversified computation, i.e., how the operation is computed, d. obfuscated computation, e.g., whether the operation computed is real or fake (or a dummy).
- 2. decrease signal, e.g., make Λ constant:
 - a. data-oblivious (or "constant-time") computation of the operation.



Part 1.3: in theory (9)

Formalisation: countermeasures

Definition

Among a large design space of countermeasures, instances that focus on masking (typically) fall into the following sub-

1. Boolean masking (or additive masking):

$$x \mapsto \hat{x} = \langle \hat{x}[0], \hat{x}[1], \dots, \hat{x}[d] \rangle$$

such that

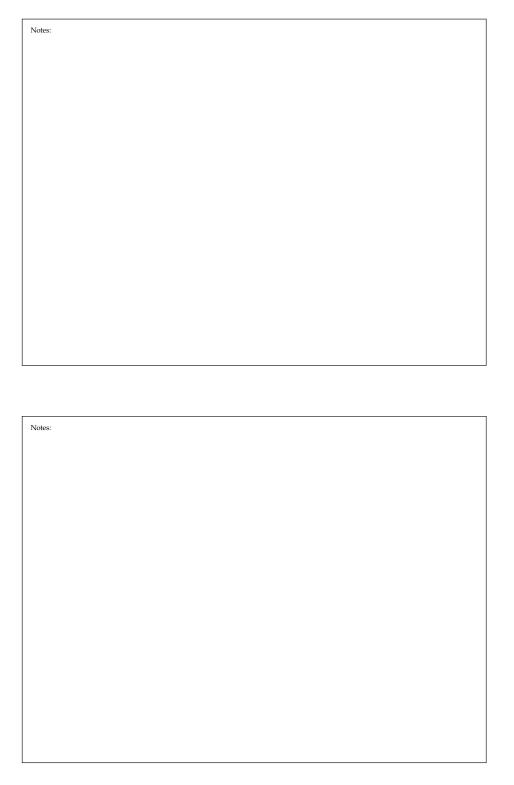
$$x = \hat{x}[0] \oplus \hat{x}[1] \oplus \cdots \oplus \hat{x}[d],$$

2. arithmetic masking (or multiplicative masking):

$$x \mapsto \hat{x} = \langle \hat{x}[0], \hat{x}[1], \dots, \hat{x}[d] \rangle$$

such that

$$x = \hat{x}[0] + \hat{x}[1] + \dots + \hat{x}[d] \pmod{2^w}.$$





Part 1.3: in theory (10) Formalisation: countermeasures

Definition

Countermeasures against implementation attacks based on fault induction often fall into the following classes:

- 1. induction-oriented, e.g.,
 - shielding,
 - sensing,
 - hiding,

- 2. exploitation-oriented, e.g.,
 - duplication,
 - infection,
 - checksum.



Part 1.3: in theory (11)

Formalisation: countermeasures

Definition

Among a large design space of countermeasures, instances that focus on exploitation are (typically) parameterised by

- 1. type of duplication, e.g.,
- temporal duplication: n computations of f(x) in 1 location, spatial duplication: 1 computation of f(x) in n locations,
- 2. degree of duplication,
- 3. type of check, e.g.,
- direct check: $f(x) \stackrel{?}{=} f(x)$,
- linearity check: $f(-x) \stackrel{?}{=} -f(x)$,
- inversion check: $f^{-1}(f(x)) \stackrel{?}{=} x$,
- 4. frequency of check, and
- 5. type of action, e.g.,
 - preventative action: $f(x) \neq f(x) \leadsto \bot$, infective action: $f(x) \neq f(x) \leadsto \$$,

and yield an outcome with an associated detection probability.

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Conclusions

- ► Take away points: implementation attacks
 - 1. are a potent threat, forming part of a complex attack landscape,
 - 2. extend well beyond cryptographic targets, posing a more general (cyber-)security challenge,
 - 3. present significant challenges, e.g., per
 - "attacks only get better" principle,
 - "no free lunch" principle,
 - need to consider multiple layers of abstraction,

such that "raising the bar" is of use if not ideal,

4. demand care re. evaluation and/or certification (e.g., FIPS 140-3 [9]) requirements.

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Additional Reading

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- P.C. Kocher et al. "Introduction to differential power analysis". In: Journal of Cryptographic Engineering (JCEN) 1.1 (2011), pp. 5–27.
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- D. Karaklajić, J.-M. Schmidt, and I. Verbauwhede. "Hardware Designer's Guide to Fault Attacks". In: IEEE Transactions on Very Large Scale Integration (VLSI) Systems 21.12 (2013), pp. 2295–2306.
- B. Yuce, P. Schaumont, and M. Witteman. "Fault Attacks on Secure Embedded Software: Threats, Design, and Evaluation". In: Journal of Hardware and Systems Security 2.2 (2018), pp. 111–130.

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