Physically Related Functions: A New Paradigm for Light-weight Key-Exchange

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we propose a novel primitive named *Physically Related Function* (PReF) which are devices with hardware roots of trust. It enables secure key-exchange with no pre-established/embedded secret keys. This work is motivated by the need to perform key-exchange between lightweight resource-constrained devices. We present a proof-of-concept realization of our contributions in hardware using FPGAs.

Keywords: Boolean functions, Key-exchange protocol, Physically Related Functions

1 INTRODUCTION

The most straightforward way of achieving secure key-exchange is via standard cryptographic techniques, where an initially exchanged secret key allows the devices to encrypt all ensuing communication. However, these devices are *far too resource-constrained* to either support the heavy protection mechanisms against invasive and semi-invasive attacks [8] associated with secure key-storage (as in symmetric-key primitives) or does not have provisions for renewal of certificates (as in asymmetric-key primitives). This is a scenario frequently encountered today with the widespread advent of Internet of Things (IoT) and Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS). Amazon, Uber, and UPS and other major corporations have recently announced plans to launch commercial autonomous drone operations [3, 4]. The widespread deployment of such technologies would potentially involve millions of devices communicating with each other. This makes it essential to design light-weight protocols for secure communication that can scale to a large number of devices.

In this paper, we introduce novel hardware primitives called *Physically Related Functions* (abbrv. *PReFs*). We present a PReF-based on-the-fly key-exchange scheme, without the need to store any secret key or the need to contact any trusted third party. We present a proof-of-concept (PoC) realization of PReFs in hardware using 84 separate Xilinx Artix 7 FPGAs.

2 PHYSICALLY RELATED FUNCTIONS

A pair of PReFs $(\mathbf{D}_\mathsf{A}, \mathbf{D}_\mathsf{B})$ physically implement the functions $(f_\mathsf{A}, f_\mathsf{B})$ with input space $\mathcal{X}$ and output space $\mathcal{Y}$ such that there exists a specific subset of inputs $\mathcal{X}_{\mathsf{A,B}} \subseteq \mathcal{X}$ such that the output behaviors of the functions f_A and f_B on each input in $\mathcal{X}_{\mathsf{A,B}}$ are correlated with respect to some distance metric (eg. Hamming Distance (HD)). On the other hand, for any $x \in \mathcal{X} \setminus \mathcal{X}_{\mathsf{A,B}}$ any probabilistic poly-time bounded algorithm that only has access to an implementation of f_A and does not not have (even black-box) access to an implementation of f_B cannot distinguish $f_\mathsf{B}(x)$ from random. This is defined as the pseudorandomness property of PReFs.

$\mathbf{D}_\mathsf{A}$: Round 1

(1) Samples input $x \in \mathcal{X}_{\mathsf{A,B}}$ and key $r \xleftarrow{R} \{0,1\}^k$.
(2) Computes
$$y_\mathsf{A} = f_\mathsf{A}(x), \quad \mathbf{A} = \mathsf{E}(r) + y_\mathsf{A}.$$
(3) Sends $\langle x, \mathbf{A} \rangle$ to $\mathbf{D}_B$.

$\mathbf{D}_\mathsf{B}$: Round 1

(1) Computes
$$y_\mathsf{B} = f_\mathsf{B}(x), \quad r' = \mathsf{D}(\mathbf{A} + y_\mathsf{B}).$$

Figure 1: Basic Key Exchange

PReF-based Key Exchange Scheme

Now, we develop a key-exchange scheme for secure communication between two devices in a PReF network. Our protocols preclude the usage of long-term secure key storage, as is usually the case with a large class of key-exchange protocols based on traditional cryptographic approaches [1, 6]. In other words, it avoids not only the need for dedicated key storage but also the associated countermeasures for preventing potential physical attacks (both invasive and non-invasive) targeting such key storage. It is also superior to the key-exchange schemes based on alternative primitives (such as Physically Uncloneable Functions (PUFs)) which are asymmetric in nature requiring one (or both) device(s) to perform complex computations or require trusted third party during the protocol run. So, in a way, our scheme achieves the best of both worlds, especially in the context of lightweight resource-constrained devices.

Protocol Description. Let $(\mathbf{D}_\mathsf{A}, \mathbf{D}_\mathsf{B})$ be a pair of PReFs as described previously, such that $\mathcal{X} = \{0,1\}^m$ and $\mathcal{Y} = \{0,1\}^n$. These devices form a PReF pair over the input subset $\mathcal{X}_{\mathsf{A,B}} \subset \mathcal{X}$ such that for any $x \in \mathcal{X}_{\mathsf{A,B}}$, $\mathsf{HD}(f(x), g(x)) \leq \delta$. Let (E, D) be the encoding and decoding algorithms of an (n, k, δ) linear error correction code (ECC).

We present a basic PReF-based key exchange protocol as described in Fig. 1, that requires no computational resources beyond evaluating PReF outputs. It enables a key exchange between two PReF devices $\mathbf{D}_\mathsf{A}$ and $\mathbf{D}_\mathsf{B}$ with the *unique* "related" input set $\mathcal{X}_{A,B}$. The protocol involves a single round of communication between the devices and is considerably light-weight given that it only uses error-correcting codes in addition to PReFs.

Theoretical Implications. This protocol also has some interesting theoretical implications about the *computational power of* PReFs. It is well-known that no computationally secure key-exchange protocol (even multi-round) can be based in a black-box manner on purely symmetric-key cryptographic primitives such as pseudorandom functions or symmetric-key encryption [5]. The fact that we can bypass this impossibility result using only PReFs and no additional cryptographic primitives/trusted parties indicates that PReFs are, in fact, more powerful than simple symmetric-key cryptoprimitives. This makes PReFs an interesting object of study from a cryptographic standpoint.

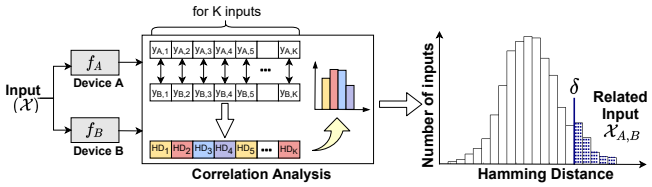

Figure 2: Overview of output-correlation estimation between two devices embodying a pair of ReFs.

3 REALIZING PREFS IN HARDWARE

In this section, we establish the feasibility of embedding "related" functions into physical devices , i.e. the feasibility of realizing PReFs in hardware. We show that the notion of correlation with respect to Hamming distance (HD) allows us to obtain a set of "related" inputs for any pair of random Boolean functions.

Correlation Analysis of Boolean Functions. In Boolean theory, the cross-correlation function [7] is used to study the cryptographic properties of Boolean functions. The cross-correlation function for two Boolean functions $f : \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathcal{Y}$ and $g : \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathcal{Y}$ where $\mathcal{X} = \{0,1\}^n$ and $\mathcal{Y} = \{0,1\}$ calculates the correlation between its outputs over the complete input set $\mathcal{X}$. It is given by:

$$\mathbf{C}_{f,g} = \frac{1}{|\mathcal{X}|} \sum_{x \in \mathcal{X}} (-1)^{f(x) \oplus g(x)}$$

and its value lies in $[-1, 1]$. Now, if the functions f and g are chosen *uniformly at random* from the space of all n-bit Boolean functions, their outputs will be statistically uncorrelated. Hence, $C_{f,g} = 0$.

For this work, we have exploited the fact that even if f and g are statistically uncorrelated, there exist some inputs for which both have the same outputs. We can split $\mathcal{X}$ into two disjoint subsets $\mathcal{X}_0$ and $\mathcal{X}_1$ such that $f(x) = g(x)\ \forall x \in \mathcal{X}_0$ and $f(x) \neq g(x)\ \forall x \in \mathcal{X}_1$. Therefore, we can say that f and g are related over the subset $\mathcal{X}_0$. For a more generic analysis, consider the functions $f_A, f_B : \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathcal{Y}$, where $\mathcal{X} = \{0,1\}^n$ and $Y = \{0,1\}^m$. To find the input subset over which f_A and f_B are related, we split the input set into disjoint subsets $\{\mathcal{X}_0, \mathcal{X}_1, \cdots, \mathcal{X}_m\}$, such that for any input belonging to subset $\mathcal{X}_i$, the HD between the function outputs is i. Note that the HD is calculated over the m-bit response.

Let $f_{\mathsf{A}}(x)[i]$ denote the i^{th} bit of the output of f_{A} for an input x and let $\mathbf{q}$ be the probability with which $f_{\mathsf{A}}(x)[i] \oplus f_{\mathsf{B}}(x)[i] = 1$ occurs, for any $i \in [1, m]$. The probability that $\mathsf{HD}(f_{\mathsf{A}}(x), f_{\mathsf{B}}(x))$ takes the value $j \in [0, m]$ can be given as:

$$\Pr\left[\mathsf{HD}(f_{\mathsf{A}}(x), f_{\mathsf{B}}(x)) = j\right] = \binom{m}{j} \mathbf{q}^j (1-\mathbf{q})^{m-j}. \quad (1)$$

From the above equation, it is evident that the frequency distribution calculated using the HD follows a Binomial distribution. Let $\epsilon_{\mathsf{A,B}}$ denote the probability with which $\mathsf{HD}(f_{\mathsf{A}}(x), f_{\mathsf{B}}(x)) \leq \delta$ holds. We can calculate $\epsilon_{\mathsf{A,B}}$ as:

$$\epsilon_{\mathsf{A,B}} = \Pr\left[\mathsf{HD}(f_{\mathsf{A}}(x), f_{\mathsf{B}}(x)) \leq \delta\right] = \sum_{j=0}^{\delta} \binom{m}{j} \mathbf{q}^j (1-\mathbf{q})^{m-j}. \quad (2)$$

Then the size of the input subset $\mathcal{X}_{\mathsf{A,B}} \subseteq \mathcal{X}$, over which the outputs of f_{A} and f_{B} have HD atmost δ is given as:

$$\left|\mathcal{X}_{\mathsf{A,B}}\right| = \epsilon_{\mathsf{A,B}} |\mathcal{X}|. \quad (3)$$

A pair of functions f_{A} and f_{B} are said to be related if $\mathcal{X}_{\mathsf{A,B}} \neq \emptyset$ and $\epsilon_{\mathsf{A,B}} > 0$. Thus with this notion of output-correlation, we can obtain "related" inputs for any pair of random Boolean functions.

As already mentioned, our aim is to realize PReFs using hardware devices. Equipped with this analysis, we simply design Boolean functions as hardware circuits and rely on the internal variability of every device to introduce unpredictable yet repetitive randomness in the circuit behaviour.

4 EXPERIMENTAL EVALUATION

We present a proof-of-concept (PoC) realization of PReFs, using PUFs for embedding Boolean functions in hardware devices and a prototype evaluation of the PReF-based KE protocol. For the PoC realization of the PReF constructs, we deploy the PUF design proposed in [2] in 84 Artix-7 FPGAs which takes 64-bit binary input and generates 224-bit binary output. To identify the "related" input subsets, we characterise every PUF with 20K random inputs and calculate HD of the outputs for every pair. We observe that HD follows Binomial distribution which corroborates with our theoretical analysis presented in Sec. 3. We filter the challenges for which the HD is less than a pre-determined threshold δ (ref. Fig. 2). Next, we find the true positive rate (TPR) and false positive rate (FPR) of protocol. To calculate TPR, we randomly choose 1000 inputs over which a pair of related devices can communicate. We observe that the probability that two devices establish the same key is 100%, for all the 1000 inputs. We use the same inputs to find the probability (FPR) that an illegitimate device (not related over the chosen input subset) can successfully exchange the key with a legitimate device. The FPR of the protocol is observed to range from 2^{-90} to 2^{-110} for all the 1000 inputs.

5 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this paper, we initiated the study of *Cryptophasia in Hardware* using a novel class of hardware primitives called *Physically Related Functions* (PReFs) that have not been studied before to the best of our knowledge. We demonstrated how PReFs can be used to establish a key-exchange scheme with no pre-established secure channels and no secure storage for cryptographic keys. We established the feasibility of our proposal via concrete prototype implementations and extensive experimental implementations on Artix-7 FPGAs.

As a future work, we will build authenticated key-exchange schemes for a network of resource-constrained devices, ensuring secure communication between any two devices.

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