

Meet-in-the-Middle Preimage Attacks on Sponge-based Hashing

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Outline

- 1 Introduction to the Meet-in-the-Middle Attack
- 2 MITM Attack on Sponge-based Hashing: Framework & Automatic Tool
- 3 Applications to Keccak, Xoodyak and Ascon
- 4 Conclusion and Future Work

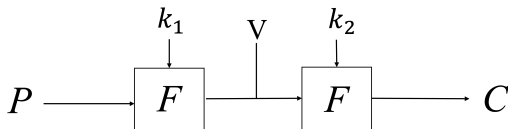
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Meet-in-the-Middle (MITM) Attack

- Proposed by Diffie and Hellman in 1977 [DH77]
- A generic technique for cryptanalysis of symmetric-key primitives
- An efficient exhaustive search way based on the birthday attack

Example: Double Encryption

- $C = E_K(P) = F_{K_2}(F_{K_1}(P))$, $K = K_1 || K_2$
- The time complexity of a naive exhaust search: $2^{|K_1|+|K_2|}$
- The time complexity of MITM attack: $2^{|K_1|+|K_2|-n}$
 - Meet in the middle: $F_{K_1}(P) ? = F_{K_2}^{-1}(C)$



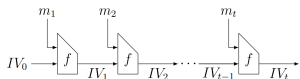
Meet-in-the-Middle (MITM) Attack

- It has been widely applied on block ciphers and hash functions.
- Various techniques improve the framework of MitM attack
 - internal state guessing, splice-and-cut, initial structure, bicliques, 3-subset MitM, indirect-partial matching, sieve-in-the-middle, match-box, dissection, differential-aided MitM, nonlinear constrained neutral words...
- There are also some MILP-based automatic tools.
 - Sasaki at IWSEC 2018, Bao et al. at EUROCRYPT 2021 and CRYPTO 2022, Dong et al. at CRYPTO 2021...
- The MITM attack and its variants have broken:
 - MD4, GOST, MD5, HAVAL, GEA-1/2 ...

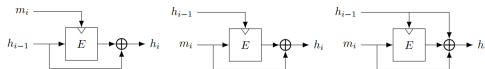
MITM Preimage Attacks on Hash Functions

Most MITM attacks targeted on Merkle-Damgård hash functions

- The feed-forward mechanism \rightarrow A closed computation path



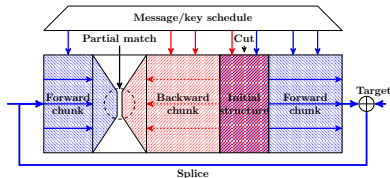
Merkle-Damgård construction



The compression functions f : block cipher + PGV modes

The Splice-and-Cut MITM attacks

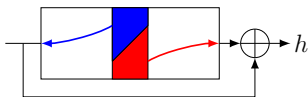
- The chunk separation.
- The neutral sets (■/■): the degree of freedom (DoF) for each chunk.
- The partial matching: the filtering ability (degree of matching, DoM).



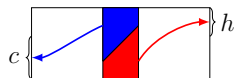


Does it work for Sponge-based Hashing?

MITM Attack on Sponge-based Hashing vs. MD Hashing



(a) MITM on DM



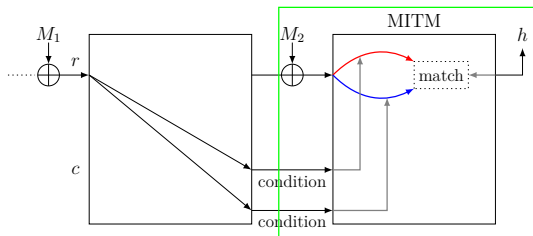
(b) MITM on Sponge

- The complexity of exhaustive search: 2^h
- For MITM attack on the MD hashing
 - The search space $< 2^h$
- For MITM attack on the sponge-based hashing
 - The search space is $2^{(h+c)}$ to meet not only h but also c .
Not a good idea!

We need to search for a more compact space.

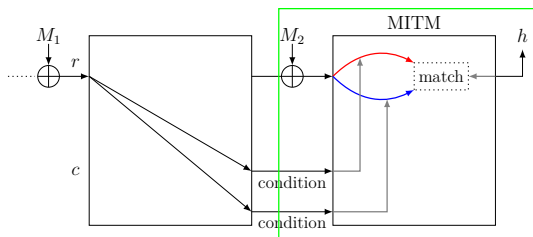
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Framework of the MITM Attack on Sponge-based Hashing



- Start from the r -bit rate part and search for a h -bit subspace (if $r > h$)
- Only forward computations are involved
- Specify the configurations: the two neutral sets of the outer part, the two independent forward computation chunks, the matching points
- Partially solve the inverse of the permutation from the h -bit target
- Set conditions to control the characteristic propagation

The MITM Episode on Sponge-based Hashing

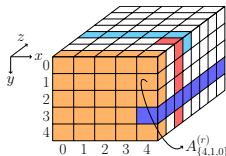


- For 2^{d_1} values of ■ neutral set, compute **forward** to the matching points;
- For 2^{d_2} values of ■ neutral set, compute **forward** to the matching points;
- Compute backward with the known h -bit target to the matching points to derive an m -bit matching and filter states.

Automatic MITM Attack Model on Sponge-based Hashing

Example: Keccak

- Keccak- f permutation: $A^{(r)} \xrightarrow{\theta} \theta^{(r)} \xrightarrow{\rho} \rho^{(r)} \xrightarrow{\pi} \pi^{(r)} \xrightarrow{\chi} \chi^{(r)} \xrightarrow{\iota} A^{(r+1)}$



MILP model: The Objective Function + Constraints

- Modelling the Starting State
- Modelling the Attribute Propagation: XOR (θ) and S-box (χ)
- Modelling the Matching Phase
- Auxiliary Techniques:** Conditions + Linear Structure + CP-Kernel

Encoding Scheme

3-bit encoding scheme: $(\omega_0, \omega_1, \omega_2)$

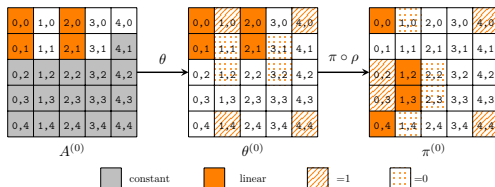
- \blacksquare : $(1, 1, 1)$, global constant bits
- \blacksquare : $(0, 1, 1)$, depend on \blacksquare and \blacksquare
- \blacksquare : $(1, 1, 0)$, depend on \blacksquare and \blacksquare
- \blacksquare : $(0, 1, 0)$, depend on $\blacksquare/\blacksquare/\blacksquare$, but the expression does not contain the product of \blacksquare and \blacksquare
- \square : $(0, 0, 0)$, depend on the product of \blacksquare and \blacksquare

Remark

- In previous MILP-aid MITM models: $(\square, \blacksquare, \blacksquare)$
- In our model: $(\square, \blacksquare, \blacksquare, \blacksquare, \blacksquare)$
- The addition of \blacksquare and \blacksquare (not multiplied) can also be used

Modelling the Starting State with the Linear Structure

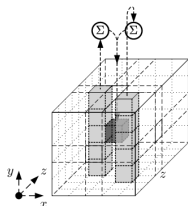
- The linear structure (Guo et al. ASIACRYPT 2016)



- Control the diffusion of θ operation
 - $A_{\{0,0,z\}}^{(0)}$ and $A_{\{0,1,z\}}^{(0)}$ should be the same color
 - $A_{\{0,0,z\}}^{(0)} \oplus A_{\{0,1,z\}}^{(0)}$ should be constant
- Add conditions to reduce the diffusion over χ
 - For the row $\pi_{\{*,0,z\}}^{(0)}$, set $\pi_{\{1,0,z\}}^{(0)} = 0$ and $\pi_{\{4,0,z\}}^{(0)} = 1$
- Model $A^{(1)}$ only considering the linear operation $\pi \circ \rho$ from $A^{(0)}$

Modelling the θ operation

$$\theta : \theta_{\{x,y,z\}}^{(r)} = A_{\{x,y,z\}}^{(r)} \oplus \sum_{y'=0}^4 (A_{\{x-1,y',z\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{x+1,y',z-1\}}^{(r)})$$



We decompose the θ operation to three steps in our model:

$$C_{\{x,z\}}^{(r)} = A_{\{x,0,z\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{x,1,z\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{x,2,z\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{x,3,z\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{x,4,z\}}^{(r)},$$

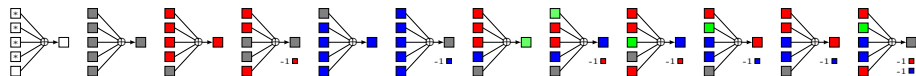
$$D_{\{x,z\}}^{(r)} = C_{\{x-1,z\}}^{(r)} \oplus C_{\{x+1,z-1\}}^{(r)},$$

$$\theta_{\{x,y,z\}}^{(r)} = A_{\{x,y,z\}}^{(r)} \oplus D_{\{x,z\}}^{(r)}.$$

Modelling the θ operation (Cont.)

The rule of XOR with an arbitrary number of inputs

- XOR-RULE-1: If the inputs have $(0,0,0)$ □ bit, the output is □.
- XOR-RULE-2: If the inputs are all $(1,1,1)$ ■ bits, the output is ■.
- XOR-RULE-3: If the inputs have $(1,1,0)$ ■ (≥ 1) and □ (≥ 0) bits:
 - the output is ■ without consuming DoF, or □ by consuming 1 DoF of ■.
- XOR-RULE-4: If the inputs have $(0,1,1)$ ■ (≥ 1) and □ (≥ 0) bits,
 - the output is ■ without consuming DoF, or □ by consuming 1 DoF of ■.
- XOR-RULE-5: If the inputs have at least two kinds of ■, ■ and □ bits:
 - the output can be □ without consuming DoF.
 - the output can be ■ (or ■) by consuming one DoF of ■ (or ■).
 - the output can be □ by consuming one DoF of ■ and one DoF of ■.



Modelling the θ operation (Cont.)

Constraints

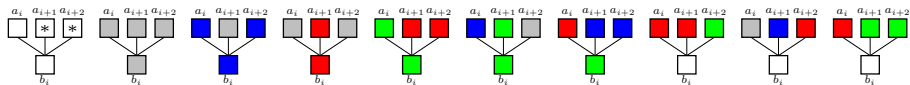
- Define three 0-1 variables ν_i ($i \in \{0, 1, 2\}$), where $\nu_0 = 1$ if and only if all the ω_0 's of the 5 input bits are 1, similar to the cases $i = 1, 2$.
- The above five rules can be represented by (ν_0, ν_1, ν_2) :
 - $(\nu_0, \nu_1, \nu_2) = (*, 0, *)$, XOR-RULE-1 is applied.
 - $(\nu_0, \nu_1, \nu_2) = (1, 1, 1)$, XOR-RULE-2 is applied.
 - $(\nu_0, \nu_1, \nu_2) = (1, 1, 0)$, XOR-RULE-3 is applied.
 - $(\nu_0, \nu_1, \nu_2) = (0, 1, 1)$, XOR-RULE-4 is applied.
 - $(\nu_0, \nu_1, \nu_2) = (0, 1, 0)$, XOR-RULE-5 is applied.
- Define the output bit as $(\omega_0^O, \omega_1^O, \omega_2^O)$, the consumed DoF of \blacksquare bits and \blacksquare bits are $(\delta_{\mathcal{R}}, \delta_{\mathcal{B}})$:

$$\begin{cases} \omega_0^O - \nu_0 \geq 0, & -\omega_0^O + \nu_1 \geq 0, \\ \omega_1^O - \nu_1 = 0, \\ \omega_2^O - \nu_2 \geq 0, & -\omega_2^O + \nu_1 \geq 0, \end{cases} \quad \begin{cases} \delta_{\mathcal{R}} - \omega_0^O + \nu_0 = 0, \\ \delta_{\mathcal{B}} - \omega_2^O + \nu_2 = 0. \end{cases}$$

Modelling the χ operation

$$\chi : \mathbb{F}_2^n \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_2^n, b_i = a_i \oplus (a_{i+1} \oplus 1) \cdot a_{i+2}, i = 0, 1, \dots, 4$$

- If there are \square bits in (a_i, a_{i+1}, a_{i+2}) , the output is \square
- If there are all \blacksquare bits, the output is \blacksquare
- If there are only \blacksquare (≥ 1) and \blacksquare (≥ 0) bits, the output will be \blacksquare
- If there are only \blacksquare (≥ 1) and \blacksquare (≥ 0) bits, the output will be \blacksquare
- If there are \square , or more than two kinds of \blacksquare , \blacksquare and \square bits in (a_i, a_{i+1}, a_{i+2}) :
 - if a_{i+1} and a_{i+2} are all \blacksquare (or \blacksquare), the output is \square
 - if a_{i+1} or a_{i+2} is \blacksquare , the output is \square
 - if a_{i+1} and a_{i+2} are of arbitrarily two kinds of \blacksquare , \blacksquare , \square , the output is \square

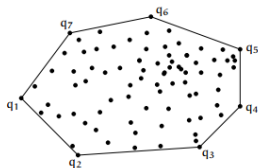
Modelling the χ operation (Cont.)

Constraints

Derive linear inequalities by using the convex hull computation (Sun et al. ASIACRYPT 2014)



(a) Input.



(b) Output.

Modelling the Matching Phase

Property of χ (Guo et al. ASIACRYPT 2016)

When there are three known consecutive output bits, two linear equations of the input bits can be constructed. Eg. Assuming that (b_0, b_1, b_2) are known, two linear equations on (a_0, a_1, a_2, a_3) are constructed as

$$b_0 = a_0 \oplus (b_1 \oplus 1) \cdot a_2,$$

$$b_1 = a_1 \oplus (b_2 \oplus 1) \cdot a_3.$$

For Keccak-512, we have:

$$A_{\{0,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} = \pi_{\{0,1,z\}}^{(r)} \oplus (A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1) \cdot \pi_{\{2,1,z\}}^{(r)}$$

$$A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} = \pi_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r)} \oplus (A_{\{2,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1) \cdot \pi_{\{3,1,z\}}^{(r)}$$

Modelling the Matching Phase (Cont.)

Apply the inverse of $\rho \circ \pi$, and add the same known $\theta_{\{x,x,z\}}^{(r)}$, we have

$$\begin{aligned}
 & A_{\{0,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus \theta_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \underbrace{(A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1)} \cdot \theta_{\{0,0,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)} \\
 &= \theta_{\{3,0,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \theta_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \underbrace{(A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1)} \cdot (\theta_{\{0,2,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \theta_{\{0,0,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)})
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 & A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus \theta_{\{4,4,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \underbrace{(A_{\{2,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1)} \cdot \theta_{\{1,1,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)} \\
 &= \theta_{\{4,1,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \theta_{\{4,4,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \underbrace{(A_{\{2,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1)} \cdot (\theta_{\{1,3,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \theta_{\{1,1,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)})
 \end{aligned}$$

Modelling the Matching Phase (Cont.)

The CP-kernel Property of θ

$$\begin{aligned} \theta_{\{3,0,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \theta_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} &= A_{\{3,0,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)}, \\ \theta_{\{0,2,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \theta_{\{0,0,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)} &= A_{\{0,2,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{0,0,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)}, \\ \theta_{\{4,1,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \theta_{\{4,4,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)} &= A_{\{4,1,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{4,4,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)}, \\ \theta_{\{1,3,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \theta_{\{1,1,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)} &= A_{\{1,3,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{1,1,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)}. \end{aligned}$$

Modelling the Matching Phase (Cont.)

With the CP-kernel property of θ , we have

$$\begin{aligned}
 & A_{\{0,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus \theta_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus (A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1) \cdot \theta_{\{0,0,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)} \\
 &= \theta_{\{3,0,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \theta_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus (A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1) \cdot (\theta_{\{0,2,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \theta_{\{0,0,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)}) \\
 &\quad \downarrow \\
 & A_{\{0,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus \theta_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus (A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1) \cdot \theta_{\{0,0,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)} \\
 &= A_{\{3,0,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus (A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1) \cdot (A_{\{0,2,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{0,0,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)})
 \end{aligned}$$

Modelling the Matching Phase (Cont.)

Similarly,

$$\begin{aligned}
 & A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus \theta_{\{4,4,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)} \oplus (A_{\{2,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1) \cdot \theta_{\{1,1,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)} \\
 &= \theta_{\{4,1,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \theta_{\{4,4,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)} \oplus (A_{\{2,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1) \cdot (\theta_{\{1,3,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)} \oplus \theta_{\{1,1,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)}) \\
 &\quad \downarrow \\
 & A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus \theta_{\{4,4,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)} \oplus (A_{\{2,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1) \cdot \theta_{\{1,1,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)} \\
 &= A_{\{4,1,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{4,4,z-\gamma[4,1]\}}^{(r)} \oplus (A_{\{2,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1) \cdot (A_{\{1,3,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{1,1,z-\gamma[1,3]\}}^{(r)})
 \end{aligned}$$

Modelling the Matching Phase (Cont.)

Leaked linear relations of $A^{(r)}$ from the hash value $A^{(r+1)}$

$$\begin{aligned} & A_{\{3,0,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus (A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1) \cdot (A_{\{0,2,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)} \oplus A_{\{0,0,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)}) \\ & = A_{\{0,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus \theta_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)} \oplus (A_{\{1,1,z\}}^{(r+1)} \oplus 1) \cdot \theta_{\{0,0,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)} \end{aligned}$$

Conditions in Matching Points of Keccak

If four bits $(A_{\{3,0,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)}, A_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)}, A_{\{0,2,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)}, A_{\{0,0,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)})$ in $A^{(r)}$ satisfy the following two conditions, there is a 1-bit filter:

- (1) No \square in $(A_{\{3,0,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)}, A_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)}, A_{\{0,2,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)}, A_{\{0,0,z-\gamma[0,2]\}}^{(r)})$.
- (2) $(A_{\{3,0,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)}, A_{\{3,3,z-\gamma[3,0]\}}^{(r)})$ is of $(\blacksquare, \blacksquare), (\blacksquare, \blacksquare), (\blacksquare, \blacksquare), (\blacksquare, \blacksquare)$, or opposite order.

The Objective Function

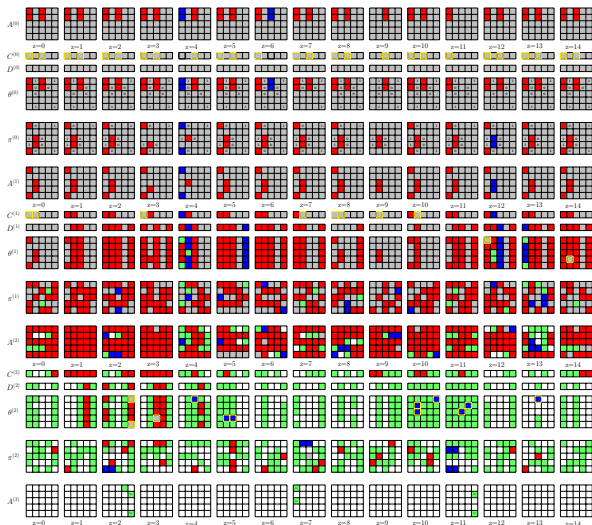
- Maximize $\min\{\text{DoF}_{\mathcal{R}}, \text{DoF}_{\mathcal{B}}, \text{DoM}\}$ to find the optimal attacks
 - $\text{DoF}_{\mathcal{R}} = \lambda_{\mathcal{R}} - l_{\mathcal{R}}$, $l_{\mathcal{R}}$ be the accumulated consumption of DoF of ■
 - $\text{DoF}_{\mathcal{B}} = \lambda_{\mathcal{B}} - l_{\mathcal{B}}$, and $l_{\mathcal{B}}$ be the consumption of DoF of ■
 - $\text{DoM} = \sum \delta_{\mathcal{M}}$

- Maximize v_{obj}

$$\{v_{obj} \leq \text{DoF}_{\mathcal{R}}, v_{obj} \leq \text{DoF}_{\mathcal{B}}, v_{obj} \leq \text{DoM}\}.$$

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The MITM preimage attack on 4-round Keccak-512



- , : DoF of -1
- : DoF of -1
- : for matching

- DOF ()=108
- DOF ()=8
- DOF =8

The attack model is shown in Figure [10](#),[16](#),[17](#),[18](#) in our paper.
 Perform the attack with (M_1, M_2) , the MitM episode is placed at M_2 .

Attack Results of Keccak-512

Target	Attacks	Methods	Rounds	Time	Memory	Ref.
Keccak-512	Preimage	Lin.Stru.	2	2^{384}	-	[GLS16]
		Lin.Stru.	2	2^{321}	-	[Raj19]
		Lin.Stru.	2	2^{270}	-	[LIMY21]
		Lin.Stru.	2	2^{252}	-	[HLY22]
		Lin.Stru.	3	2^{482}	-	[GLS16]
		Lin.Stru.	3	2^{475}	-	[Raj19]
		Lin.Stru.	3	2^{452}	-	[LIMY21]
		Lin.Stru.	3	2^{426}	-	[HLY22]
		Rotational	4	2^{506}	-	[MPS13]
	MitM	4	$2^{504.58}$	2^{108}	Ours	
Collision	Diff.	2	Practical	-	[NRM11]	
	Diff.	3	Practical	-	[DDS13]	

Attack Results of Xoodyak-XOF and Ascon-XOF

Target	Attacks	Methods	Rounds	Time	Memory	Ref.
Xoodyak-XOF	Preimage	Neural	1	-	-	[LLL ⁺ 21]
		MitM	3	$2^{125.06}$	2^{97}	Ours
Ascon-XOF	Preimage	Cube-like	2	2^{103}	-	[DEMS21]
		MitM	3	$2^{120.58}$	2^{39}	Ours
		MitM	4	$2^{124.67}$	2^{54}	Ours
		Algebraic [†]	6	$2^{127.3}$	-	[DEMS21]
	Collision	Diff.	2	2^{103}	-	[GPT21]

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Conclusion

- Since 1977, the birthday-paradox MitM attack has been widely applied to block ciphers or MD-based hash functions, this is the first attempt to apply it to sponge-based hash functions
- Dedicated bit-level MILP based automatic tools for MitM attacks, leading to improved or first preimage attacks on reduced-round Keccak-512, Ascon-XOF, and Xoodyak-XOF

Future Work

- For other instances of Keccak, it is open problem to apply one or two-round linear structures in the search for MitM attacks
- More tricks can be combined with automatic MILP model to achieve non-negligible improvements
 - Accelerate the search
 - Enlarge the space of solutions
- Extend to MitM collision attacks on sponge-based hash functions

[ePrint 2023/518](#)

Lingyue Qin, Boxin Zhao, Jialiang Hua, Xiaoyang Dong, Xiaoyun Wang.
Weak-Diffusion Structure: Meet-in-the-Middle Attacks on Sponge-based Hashing Revisited.



Questions or Comments?

Reference I



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Collision attacks on up to 5 rounds of SHA-3 using generalized internal differentials. In *FSE 2013*, volume 8424, pages 219–240. Springer, 2013.



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Ascon v1.2: Lightweight authenticated encryption and hashing. *J. Cryptol.*, 34(3):33, 2021.



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