

Differential cryptanalysis of conjugate ciphers

Jules Baudrin

based on joint works with C. Beierle, P. Felke, G. Leander,
P. Neumann, L. Perrin & L. Stennes

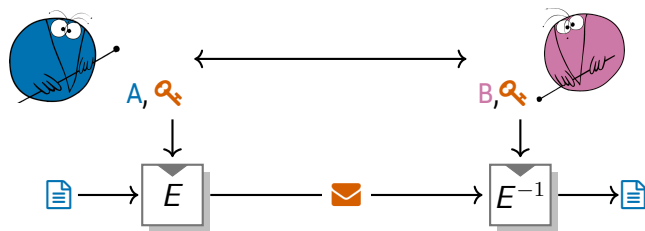


Rennes cryptography seminar, February 7th, 2025

Symmetric encryption

Goal

Ensure confidentiality



Constraints

- Secure
- Easily implemented
- Arbitrary-long messages

Definition (Primitive)

Low-level algorithm for *very specific* tasks

Example (Block cipher)

Encrypts *fixed-size* messages

↪ A block cipher \mathcal{E} is a family of bijections $\mathcal{E} = (E_k: \mathbb{F}_2^n \xrightarrow{\sim} \mathbb{F}_2^n)_{k \in \mathbb{F}_2^\kappa}$.



Building a block cipher

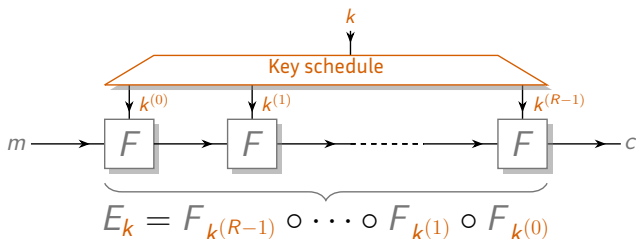
Recap (Block cipher)



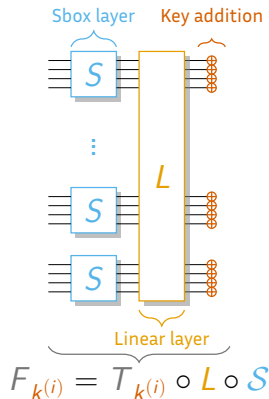
A family of bijections $\mathcal{E} = \left(E_k: \mathbb{F}_2^n \xrightarrow{\sim} \mathbb{F}_2^n \right)_{k \in \mathbb{F}_2^{\kappa}}$.

Should be *efficient* and *secure*.

Iterated construction



Substitution Permutation Network



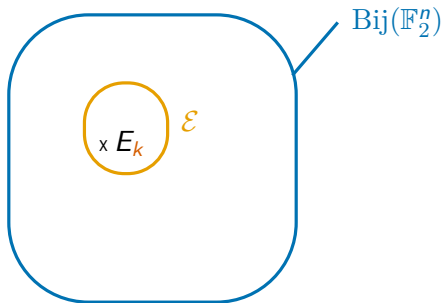
Indistinguishability

Recap (Block cipher)



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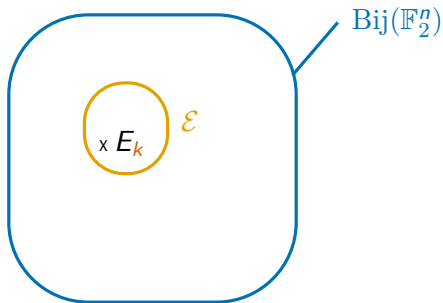
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Should be *efficient* and *secure*.



Definition (Indistinguishability)

$[E \stackrel{\$}{\leftarrow} \mathcal{E}]$ *indistinguishable* from $[F \stackrel{\$}{\leftarrow} \text{Bij}(\mathbb{F}_2^n)]$.

Outline

I - Introduction

II - Differential cryptanalysis

III - Differential cryptanalysis of conjugate ciphers

IV - Relationship with standard differential cryptanalysis

II - Differential cryptanalysis

Differential distinguisher

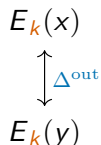
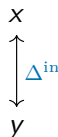
Recap



$$\mathcal{E} = \left(E_k : \mathbb{F}_2^n \xrightarrow{\sim} \mathbb{F}_2^n \right)_{k \in \mathbb{F}_2^\kappa}.$$

$$[E \stackrel{\$}{\leftarrow} \mathcal{E}] \text{ or } [F \stackrel{\$}{\leftarrow} \text{Bij}(\mathbb{F}_2^n)] ?$$

The difference Δ^{out} between two ciphertexts *should be uniformly distributed*, even when the difference Δ^{in} between plaintexts is chosen.



Differential distinguisher

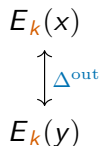
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For a random bijection F

$F(x + \Delta^{\text{in}}) + F(x) = \Delta^{\text{out}}$ has 1 solution x on average.

Differential distinguisher

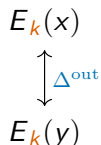
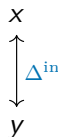
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Differential distinguisher

[BihSha91]

$\Delta^{\text{in}} \neq 0, \Delta^{\text{out}}$ s.t for many k , $E_k(x + \Delta^{\text{in}}) + E_k(x) = \Delta^{\text{out}}$ has many solutions x .

Differential cryptanalysis

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} x^{(0)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(0)}}} & x^{(1)} & \text{-----} & x^{(R-1)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(R-1)}}} & E_k(x^{(0)}) \\ \updownarrow \Delta^{\text{in}} & & \updownarrow \Delta^{(1)} & & \updownarrow \Delta^{(R-1)} & & \updownarrow \Delta^{\text{out}} \\ y^{(0)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(0)}}} & y^{(1)} & \text{-----} & y^{(R-1)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(R-1)}}} & E_k(y^{(0)}) \end{array}$$

$$F_{k^{(i)}} = F \circ T_{k^{(i)}} \text{ for } i \geq 0.$$

Differential cryptanalysis

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 x^{(0)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(0)}}} & x^{(1)} & \dashrightarrow & x^{(R-1)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(R-1)}}} & E_k(x^{(0)}) \\
 \updownarrow \Delta^{\text{in}} & & \updownarrow \Delta^{(1)} & & \updownarrow \Delta^{(R-1)} & & \updownarrow \Delta^{\text{out}} \\
 y^{(0)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(0)}}} & y^{(1)} & \dashrightarrow & y^{(R-1)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(R-1)}}} & E_k(y^{(0)})
 \end{array}$$

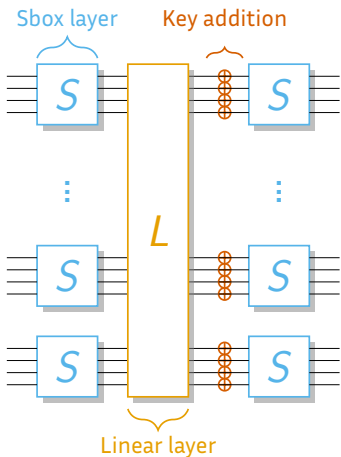
$$F_{k^{(i)}} = F \circ T_{k^{(i)}} \text{ for } i \geq 0.$$

On average over all key sequences

[LaiMasMur91]

$$\mathbb{E} \left[\Delta^{(0)} \xrightarrow{\mathcal{E}} \Delta^{(r)} \right] \geq \mathbb{E} \left[\Delta^{(0)} \xrightarrow{F} \Delta^{(1)} \rightarrow \dots \xrightarrow{F} \Delta^{(R)} \right] = \prod_{i=0}^{R-1} \mathbb{P} \left[\Delta^{(i)} \xrightarrow{F} \Delta^{(i+1)} \right]$$

Resisting differential cryptanalysis



As a designer

[DaeRij00]

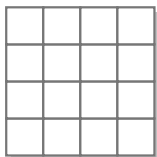
- Low *differential uniformity*:

[Nyberg94]

$$\delta(S) = \max_{\Delta^{\text{in}} \neq 0, \Delta^{\text{out}}} |\{x, S(x + \Delta^{\text{in}}) + S(x) = \Delta^{\text{out}}\}|$$

- Minimum number of active Sboxes determined by L

Advanced Encryption Standard (AES)

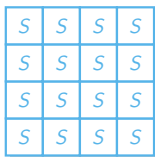
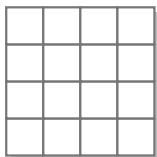


AES

[DaeRij00]

- 4×4 matrix of bytes = 128-bit state

Advanced Encryption Standard (AES)



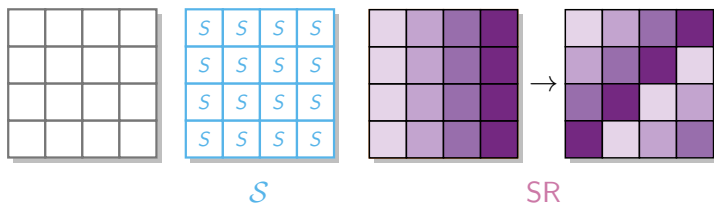
S

AES

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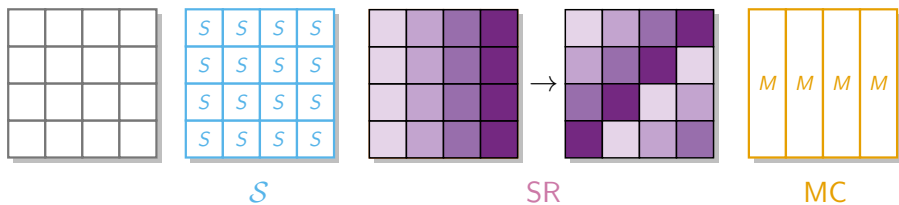


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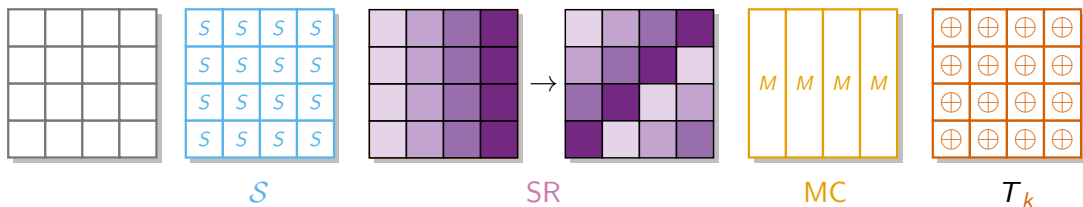


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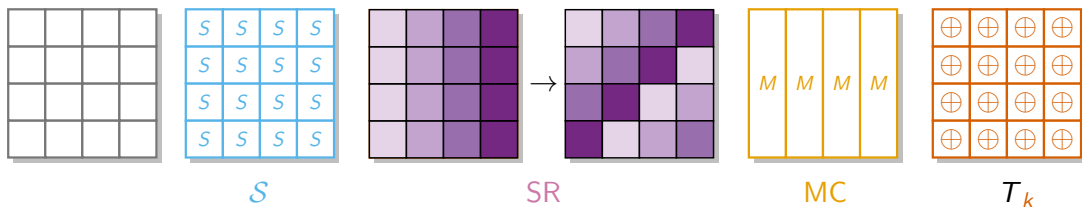


AES

[DaeRij00]

- 4×4 matrix of bytes = 128-bit state
- $F_{k(i)} = T_{k(i)} \circ MC \circ SR \circ S$.
- Repeat 10 times.

Advanced Encryption Standard (AES)



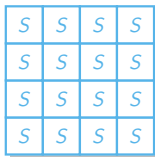
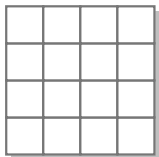
AES

[DaeRij00]

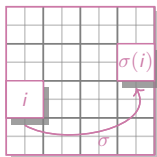
- 4×4 matrix of bytes = 128-bit state
- $F_{k^{(i)}} = T_{k^{(i)}} \circ MC \circ SR \circ S$.
- Repeat 10 times.
- $\delta(S) = 4$.

- Structured linear layer $MC \circ SR$: $\implies \mathbb{E} \left[\Delta^{(0)} \xrightarrow{F^{(0)}} \Delta^{(1)} \rightarrow \dots \xrightarrow{F^{(3)}} \Delta^{(3)} \right] \leq 2^{-150}$.

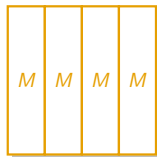
Midori



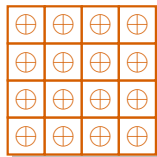
S



SC

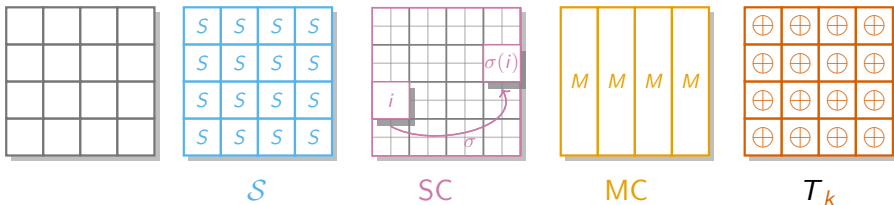


MC



T_k

Midori



Midori

[BBISHAR15]

- 4×4 matrix of *nibbles* = 64-bit state
- $F_{k(i)} = T_{k(i)} \circ MC \circ SC \circ S$.
- Repeat 16 times.
- $\delta(S) = 4$.
- $\mathbb{E} \left[\Delta^{(0)} \xrightarrow{F^{(0)}} \Delta^{(1)} \rightarrow \dots \xrightarrow{F^{(6)}} \Delta^{(7)} \right] \leq 2^{-70}$.

III - Differential cryptanalysis of conjugate ciphers

Changing our point of view

Chosen plaintext access = freedom of study

- 1) Encrypt $H(x)$ $\rightsquigarrow E_k \circ H(x)$
- 2) Apply G $\rightsquigarrow G \circ E_k \circ H(x)$
- 3) Study $G \circ E_k \circ H$

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Conjugation

The conjugate of F relative to G is the function $G \circ F \circ G^{-1}$ denoted by F^G .

F^G is the *same function* as F , *up to a change of variables*.

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$$E_k = F_{k^{(R-1)}} \circ \dots \circ F_{k^{(1)}} \circ F_{k^{(0)}}$$

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$$E_k^G = F_{k^{(R-1)}}^G \circ \dots \circ F_{k^{(1)}}^G \circ F_{k^{(0)}}^G$$

Proof left as exercise. \square

$$(G^{-1} \circ G = \text{Id})$$

Changing our point of view

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- 1) Encrypt $H(x)$ $\rightsquigarrow E_k \circ H(x)$
- 2) Apply G $\rightsquigarrow G \circ E_k \circ H(x)$
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The conjugate of F relative to G is the function $G \circ F \circ G^{-1}$ denoted by F^G .

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$$(G^{-1} \circ G = \text{Id})$$

Is it simpler to attack E_k^G than E_k ?

Linear VS non-linear change of variables

Recap



$$F^G := G \circ F \circ G^{-1}$$

$$E_k^G = F_{k^{(R-1)}}^G \circ \dots \circ F_{k^{(1)}}^G \circ F_{k^{(0)}}^G$$

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Definition/Proposition (Affine equivalence)

Def: $F_1 \sim_{\text{aff}} F_2$ if $\exists A, B$ bijective affine s.t. $A \circ F_1 \circ B = F_2$.

Prop: If $F_1 \sim_{\text{aff}} F_2$, then $\delta(F_1) = \delta(F_2)$ and $\mathcal{L}(F_1) = \mathcal{L}(F_2)$

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Corollary

• If G linear, $\delta(F) = \delta(F^G)$ and $\mathcal{L}(F) = \mathcal{L}(F^G)$

\implies Fine-grained arguments are needed.

• If G non-linear ?

\implies Linear attack cf. [BeiCanLea18]

\implies Differential attack cf. [BFLNPS23, BBFLNPS24]

Non-linear change of variables (1/3)

$$F_{k^{(i)}} = T_{k^{(i)}} \circ \text{MC} \circ \text{SC} \circ \mathcal{S} \quad \rightsquigarrow \quad F_{k^{(i)}}^G = T_{k^{(i)}}^G \circ \text{MC}^G \circ \text{SC}^G \circ \mathcal{S}^G$$

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Main problem

If F is *linear*, F^G is a priori not.

$\implies T_k^G$ *non-linear dependency* in the key bits.

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The usual case

For all Δ and all k : $\mathbb{P} \left[\Delta \xrightarrow{T_k} \Delta \right] = 1$

$$T_k(x + \Delta) = x + \Delta + k = T_k(x) + \Delta$$

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A possible solution

Conjugated case For *some* Δ and *some* k : $\mathbb{P} \left[\Delta \xrightarrow{T_k^G} \Delta \right] = 1$

\implies **Weak-key attacks!**

Recap



Conjugated case For *some* Δ and *some* k : $\mathbb{P} \left[\Delta \xrightarrow{T_k^G} \Delta \right] = 1$

Recap



Conjugated case For *some* Δ and *some* k : $\mathbb{P} \left[\Delta \xrightarrow{T_k^G} \Delta \right] = 1$

Weak-key space

$$W(\Delta) = \left\{ k, \mathbb{P} \left[\Delta \xrightarrow{T_k^G} \Delta \right] = 1 \right\}$$

$$\mathbb{P} \left[\Delta \xrightarrow{T_k^G} \Delta \right] = 1 \iff \forall x, T_k^G(x) + T_k^G(x + \Delta) = \Delta$$

Recap



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Definition (Derivative)

The function $D_\Delta F: x \mapsto F(x) + F(x + \Delta)$ is the *derivative* of F along the direction Δ .

Recap



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The function $D_\Delta F: x \mapsto F(x) + F(x + \Delta)$ is the *derivative* of F along the direction Δ .

$$\mathbb{P} \left[\Delta \xrightarrow{T_k^G} \Delta \right] = 1 \iff D_\Delta T_k^G \text{ is constant}$$

Non-linear change of variables (3/3)

Intuition

T_k^G with constant derivatives $\rightsquigarrow T_k^G = G \circ T_k \circ G^{-1}$ somehow close to be linear.

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Our explored space

\mathcal{G} Sbox layer based on $G: \mathbb{F}_2^4 \rightarrow \mathbb{F}_2^4$ with

$$G(x_0, x_1, x_2, x_3) = (x_0 + g(x_1, x_2, x_3), x_1, x_2, x_3)$$

$$(G = G^{-1})$$

Non-linear change of variables (3/3)

Intuition

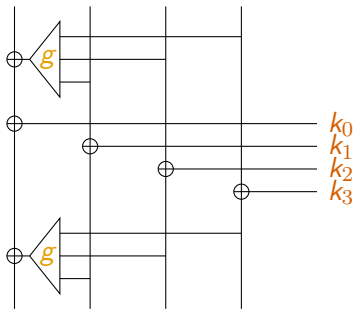
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$$(G = G^{-1})$$



$$T_k^G(x_0, x_1, x_2, x_3) = \begin{pmatrix} x_0 + k_0 + D_{\tilde{k}}g(x_1, x_2, x_3) \\ x_1 + k_1 \\ x_2 + k_2 \\ x_3 + k_3 \end{pmatrix}$$

g quadratic $\implies T_k^G$ linear \implies constant derivatives $D_{\Delta} T_k^G$

The case of Midori

Sbox

By computer search, there exist G and Δ s.t $\mathbb{P} \left[\Delta \xrightarrow{S^G} \Delta \right] = 1$

$$\mathbb{P} \left[\nabla \xrightarrow{S^G} \nabla \right] = 1.$$

$$\nabla = (\Delta, \dots, \Delta).$$

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$$\nabla = (\Delta, \dots, \Delta).$$

Linear layer

$$M = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & \text{Id} & \text{Id} & \text{Id} \\ \text{Id} & 0 & \text{Id} & \text{Id} \\ \text{Id} & \text{Id} & 0 & \text{Id} \\ \text{Id} & \text{Id} & \text{Id} & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

$$\mathbb{P} \left[\nabla \xrightarrow{MC^G} \nabla \right] = 1$$

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$\nabla = (\Delta, \dots, \Delta).$

Linear layer

$$M = \begin{pmatrix} 0 & \text{Id} & \text{Id} & \text{Id} \\ \text{Id} & 0 & \text{Id} & \text{Id} \\ \text{Id} & \text{Id} & 0 & \text{Id} \\ \text{Id} & \text{Id} & \text{Id} & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

$$\mathbb{P} \left[\nabla \xrightarrow{\text{MC}^G} \nabla \right] = 1$$

Probability-1 distinguisher for infinitely many rounds[★]

$$\mathbb{P} \left[\nabla \xrightarrow{S^G} \nabla \xrightarrow{(\text{MCoSC})^G} \nabla \xrightarrow{T_{k(0)}^G} \nabla \xrightarrow{S^G} \nabla \xrightarrow{(\text{MCoSC})^G} \nabla \xrightarrow{T_{k(1)}^G} \nabla \xrightarrow{S^G} \nabla \xrightarrow{(\text{MCoSC})^G} \nabla \xrightarrow{T_{k(0)}^G} \dots \right] = 1$$

★ If the two round keys are weak. $\frac{|W(\nabla)|}{2^{64}} = 2^{-16} \implies 2^{96}$ weak-keys for *variants* of Midori

Equivalent points of view

$$\mathbb{P}[\Delta^{\text{in}} \xrightarrow{F^G} \Delta^{\text{out}}] = 1 \quad \iff \quad \forall x, F^G(x + \Delta^{\text{in}}) + F^G(x) = \Delta^{\text{out}}$$

Equivalent points of view

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbb{P}[\Delta^{\text{in}} \xrightarrow{F^G} \Delta^{\text{out}}] = 1 &\iff \forall x, F^G(x + \Delta^{\text{in}}) + F^G(x) = \Delta^{\text{out}} \\ &\iff G \circ F \circ G^{-1} \circ T_{\Delta^{\text{in}}} = T_{\Delta^{\text{out}}} \circ G \circ F \circ G^{-1} \end{aligned}$$

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Equivalent points of view

- “Commutation” $F \circ A = B \circ F$

[BFLNPS23]

Equivalent points of view

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- “Commutation” $F \circ A = B \circ F$ [BFLNPS23]
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Equivalent points of view

- “Commutation” $F \circ A = B \circ F$ [BFLNPS23]
- Self-equivalence $B^{-1} \circ F \circ A = F$ [BFLNPS23]
- Differential eq. for *another group law* $F \circ (G^{-1} \circ T_{\Delta^{\text{in}}} \circ G) = (G^{-1} \circ T_{\Delta^{\text{out}}} \circ G) \circ F$
 $G^{-1} T_{\Delta} G$ is an addition, up to a change of variables. [CivBloSal19, CalCivInv24]

Benefits from each point of view

$$\begin{aligned}\mathbb{P}[\Delta^{\text{in}} \xrightarrow{FG} \Delta^{\text{out}}] = 1 &\iff F \circ (G^{-1} \circ T_{\Delta^{\text{in}}} \circ G) = (G^{-1} \circ T_{\Delta^{\text{out}}} \circ G) \circ F \\ &\iff F \circ A = B \circ F \\ &\iff B^{-1} \circ F \circ A = F\end{aligned}$$

Self affine-equivalence for the Sbox

Efficient search for affine bijections A, B s.t. $B^{-1} \circ F \circ A = F$

[BDBP03][Dinur18]

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Commutation for linear layer

For Midori, A affine and $A = B$.

$$\begin{pmatrix} 0 & \text{Id} & \text{Id} & \text{Id} \\ \text{Id} & 0 & \text{Id} & \text{Id} \\ \text{Id} & \text{Id} & 0 & \text{Id} \\ \text{Id} & \text{Id} & \text{Id} & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} A & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & A & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & A & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & A \end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix} A & 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & A & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & A & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & A \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} 0 & \text{Id} & \text{Id} & \text{Id} \\ \text{Id} & 0 & \text{Id} & \text{Id} \\ \text{Id} & \text{Id} & 0 & \text{Id} \\ \text{Id} & \text{Id} & \text{Id} & 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

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Alternative group law for key addition layer

Bounds on the dimension of $W(\Delta)$.

[CivBloSal19]

Differential cryptanalysis of conjugates *makes sense*

Theorem (Many fruitful points of view)

Commutative \supset Affine commutative \approx Differential for conjugates = Differential w.r.t $(\mathbb{F}_2^n, \diamond)$

Open questions

- Efficient ways of finding “good” G ?
- *Probabilistic* cryptanalysis
- Associated *security criteria* ?

IV - Relationship with standard differential cryptanalysis

From commutative cryptanalysis back to differential cryptanalysis

Recap (Commutative interpretation for “almost”-Midori)



Under weak-key hypothesis, there exists an affine bijective mapping \mathcal{A} such that:

$$\mathcal{A} \circ F = F \circ \mathcal{A} \quad \text{for every layer } F.$$

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc} x^{(0)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(0)}}} & x^{(1)} & \text{-----} & x^{(R-1)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(0)}}} & E_k(x^{(0)}) \\ \downarrow \mathcal{A} & & \downarrow \mathcal{A} & & \downarrow \mathcal{A} & & \downarrow \mathcal{A} \\ y^{(0)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(0)}}} & y^{(1)} & \text{-----} & y^{(R-1)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(0)}}} & E_k(y^{(0)}) \end{array}$$

From commutative cryptanalysis back to differential cryptanalysis

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 \end{array}$$

Differential cryptanalysis

Commutative cryptanalysis restricted to $\mathcal{A}(x) = \text{Id}(x) + \Delta$

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 x^{(0)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(0)}}} & x^{(1)} & \text{-----} & x^{(R-1)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(R-1)}}} & E_k(x^{(0)}) \\
 \updownarrow \Delta^{\text{in}} & & \updownarrow \Delta^{(1)} & & \updownarrow \Delta^{(R-1)} & & \updownarrow \Delta^{\text{out}} \\
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 \end{array}$$

Differential interpretation of a commutative distinguisher

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
 x^{(0)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(0)}}} & x^{(1)} & \dashrightarrow & x^{(R-1)} & \xrightarrow{F_{k^{(R-1)}}} & E_k(x^{(0)}) \\
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$$\Delta^{(i)} := x^{(i)} \oplus y^{(i)} = x^{(i)} \oplus \mathcal{A}(x^{(i)})$$

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Observation

Let $C: x \mapsto x \oplus \mathcal{A}(x)$. Then $C(\mathbb{F}_2^4) = \{\delta, \delta'\}$ where $\delta \neq \delta'$.

$$\forall \Delta \in \{\delta, \delta'\}^{16}, \mathbb{P}_{x \leftarrow \mathbb{F}_2^{64}}(x + \mathcal{A}(x) = \Delta) = 2^{-16}$$

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Surprising differential interpretation

A differential pair $(x, x + \Delta)$ coincides with a commutative pair $(x, \mathcal{A}(x))$ with proba 2^{-16}

$$\Delta \xrightarrow{2^{-16}} \mathcal{A} \xrightarrow{1} \dots \xrightarrow{1} \mathcal{A} \xrightarrow{2^{-16}} \Delta$$

Recap

Under weak-key hypothesis:

- $\mathbb{P}_{x \leftarrow \mathcal{X}}^{\$} (\Delta \rightarrow \{\delta, \delta'\}^{16}) \geq 2^{-16}$ for any $\Delta \in \{\delta, \delta'\}^{16}$.
- If output differences are uniformly distributed, then:
 $\mathbb{P}_{x \leftarrow \mathcal{X}}^{\$} (\Delta \rightarrow \Delta') \approx 2^{-32}$ for any $\Delta, \Delta' \in \{\delta, \delta'\}^{16}$
- Holds for *infinitely many rounds* !

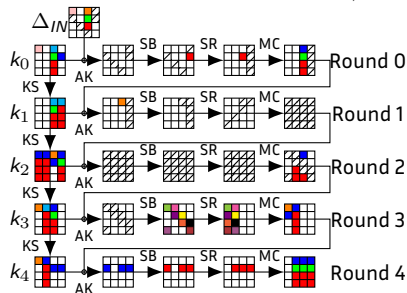
Weak-key differential interpretation

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Standard case : *quite low* $\mathbb{P}_{k,x}$



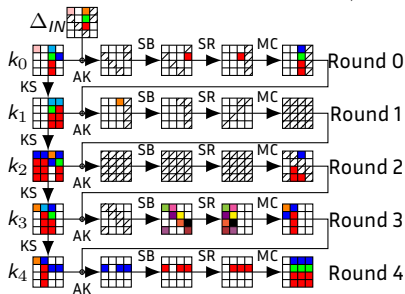
Weak-key differential interpretation

Recap

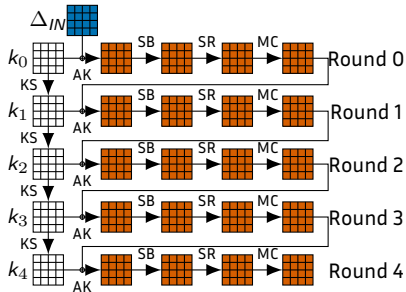
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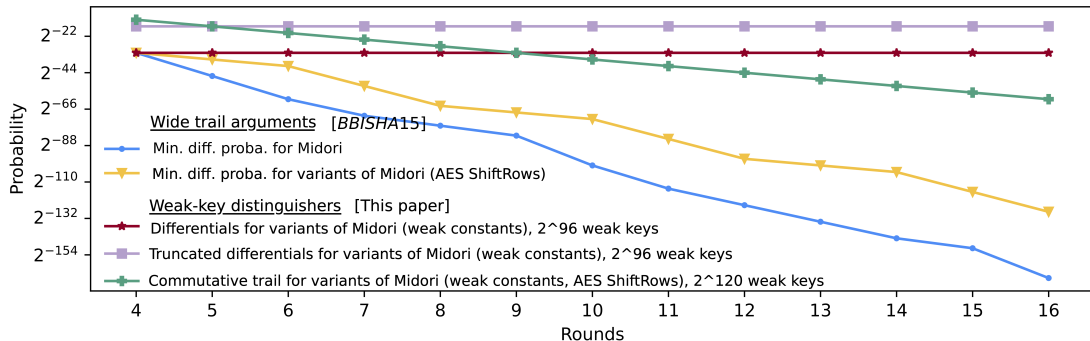
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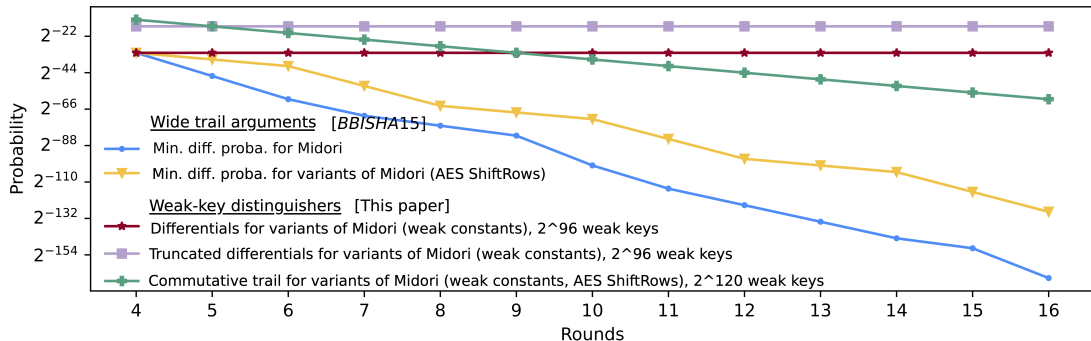
This work: *high* \mathbb{P}_x for *some* k



Weak-key Differential interpretation, part 2



Weak-key Differential interpretation, part 2



Caution

- *Same observations* for the CAESAR candidate SCREAM.
- *Same idea* can be used to *hide* probability-1 differential trails.

[C:BFLNS23]

Good news

Probability-1 commutative trails can be *automatically* detected !

Differential cryptanalysis

- Efficient ways of finding “good” G ?
- *Probabilistic* cryptanalysis
- Associated *security criteria* ?

Systematization of change of variables in cryptanalysis?

- Linear using non-linear G [BeiCanLea18]
- Differential using non-linear G [BFLNPS23, BBFLNPS24]
- Integral using linear G [DerFou20, DerFouLam20, HebLamLeaTod21]

Change of variables in design?

Classification of known optimal functions w.r.t differential cryptanalysis [BCanPer24]