

OF HARDWARE SECURITY AND THE RESEARCH WORLD OF CASA





A JOURNEY INTO THE DEPTHS OF HARDWARE SECURITY AND THE RESEARCH WORLD OF CASA



## CASA

### Cyber Security in the Age of Large-Scale Adversaries

Outstanding scientists within the Cluster of Excellence "CASA - Cyber Security in the Age of Large-Scale Adversaries" research and develop strong and sustainable countermeasures against powerful cyber attackers, with a particular focus on nation-state attackers. Research in CASA is characterized by a highly interdisciplinary approach that examines not only technical issues, but also the interplay between human behavior and IT security. This unique, holistic approach forms the basis for excellent IT security research.

### CASA unites four main research areas:

**HUB A** "Future Cryptography": Researching future cryptography and developing quantum-resistant approaches with provable security.

**HUB B** "Embedded Security": Tackling the task of strengthening the security of embedded systems at the hardware level by investigating the interaction of security systems with their physical environment.

**HUB C** "Secure Systems": Developing secure and efficient systems at the software level. Machine Learning is one of the many methods used to explore and expand this field.

**HUB D** "Usability": Focusing on usable security and privacy and researching the interface between humans and technology.

Each HUB addresses specific major research challenges that have been carefully selected to address security issues critical to the protection against large-scale attackers. The challenges of HUB B are:

Research Challenge 4: Platform Trojans Research Challenge 5: Physical-Layer Security Research Challenge 6: Next-Generation Implementation Security



Deep in a river valley of the CASA Universe, beaver brothers Paul and Carl are struggling to secure their dam. The wooden structure has a disturbance and they are running out of ideas.



That's when they remember a story they were told long ago, about a place hidden in the depths of the river. A place that may hold solutions to the siblings' problem.



Paul takes a deep breath and dives: Nothing will stop the desperate beaver from saving his dam architecture.





# Content

## CHALLENGE 4

### **Platform Trojans**

What do Hardware Trojans look like? How can we defend against them?

### **CHALLENGE 5** Physical-Layer Security

How to construct new security building blocks from wireless radio signals?

# CHALLENGE 6

#### Next-Generation Implementation Security

How can we secure future computers against attacks that exploit the ways that crypto is implemented?

### CASA BACKGROUND

CASA stands for 'Cyber Security in the Age of Large-Scale Adversaries' and is funded as a Cluster of Excellence (EXC) within the Excellence Strategy of the DFG in Germany. Its goal is to enable sustainable security against sophisticated large-scale attacks. Therefore, an interdisciplinary team explores not only technical, but also social factors and implications. The Cluster of Excellence is located at Ruhr University Bochum.



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# CASA WIKI

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A Hardware Trojan is a malicious modification or insertion of circuitry into an Integrated Circuit (IC) or electronic device. It is performed post-design by an entity other than the original designer to compromise the security or functionality of the device. The name refers to the Greek 'Trojan Horse' tale.

A microchip is a small electronic device made of semiconductor materials that performs various functions such as the processing and storing of information. Microchips are integral parts of smartphones, cars, planes and lots of other devices.

#### Hardware Reverse Engineering

is the process of taking apart a physical device (e.g. a microchip) to understand its design and functionality. Applications (of hardware reverse engineering) include the detection of intellectual property infringement or Hardware Trojans.

**Hackers** are people with advanced knowledge of hardware and software. So-called white-hat hackers seek out vulnerabilities in order to mitigate them. Black-hat hackers, on the other hand, exploit them for malicious goals.

**Microcode** is an updatable part of modern CPUs. It was invented to solve issues in computer chips as in 1994 Intel had to recall an entire CPU series due to a bug. The microcode design details are typically company secrets. While this updatability is useful, it also opens a potential door for harmful interference.

INTENTIONALLY WEAKENED HARDWARE COMPONENTS ARE A REALISTIC THREAT AS YOU PAINFULLY NOTICED AT YOUR DAM. JUST HAVE A LOOK OUT OF THE WINDOW. HERE AT CHALLENGE 4, WE FOCUS ON HARDWARE. BOTH MICROCHIPS AND THEIR LOW-LEVEL FIRMWARE CAN BE MANIPULATED. THIS IS VERY DANGEROUS AND HERE'S WHY:

Firstly, it can be extremely difficult to detect such manipulations and it is often impossible to remove them.

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Secondly, low-level manipulations can disable all other higher-level security mechanisms.



Finally, such attacks can compromise millions of devices, for example in the case of network routers.



WE RESEARCH HARDWARE TROJANS. THEREFORE, WE PURSUE THREE GOALS:

#### **RESEARCH GOALS**

1

**UNDERSTAND** the design of Hardware Trojans as well as their implications for system security.

DEFEND against Hardware Trojans by developing countermeasures that address both known and unknown attacks to ensure a proactive and comprehensive defense.

> YES, EVEN WE HEARD ABOUT IT

ON BEAVER NEWS.

**PREVENT** upcoming attacks by developing new design methodologies, guided by psychological research on the (limits of) human abilities involved in Trojan insertion.

YOU PROBABLY REMEMBER THE CRYPTO AG CASE?

# **REAL LIFE STORY**

Crypto AG was a Swiss company that manufactured analog cipher devices. Some versions were intentionally weakened by backdoors. This allowed Western intelligence agencies (namely the CIA, the British GCHQ, and the German BND) to decrypt messages sent by other users. More than a hundred countries, such as Iran, India, and several Latin American countries, were affected. This is an appropriate example of bypassing security mechanisms at the hardware level.







IT IS NOT UNLIKELY, BUT THERE ARE MORE POSSIBILITIES. PERHAPS THE TIMBER SUPPLY FOR THE DAM WAS REPLACED BY DAMAGED MATERIAL WITHOUT YOU NOTICING. IT IS BEST TO ASK OUR PALS WHO DEAL WITH PHYSICAL-LAYER SECURITY. THEY INVESTIGATE SOLUTIONS TO DETECT SUCH MANIPULATIONS.

> THANK YOU SO MUCH! I DEFINITELY LEARNED A LOT!

BY THE WAY, WE CALL THEIR BUILDING THE TREASURE CHAMBER. YOU SOON WILL FIND OUT WHY.







### **RESEARCH GOALS**

Investigate novel techniques for securing communication channels.

2 Design and build nextgeneration secure wireless communication.

Investigate wireless sensing systems to monitor the physical integrity of computing systems.

Investigate privacy aspects of wireless sensing.









# CASA WIKI

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**Wireless sensing** is the process of inferring information about physical environments from ordinary wireless communication signals (similar to radar).

### Wireless channels are the

combinations of all physical effects that affect a wireless signal traveling from a transmitter to a receiver. An analogy from the acoustic domain: If one person speaks, a second person may hear that same speech, but attenuated (less loud) and with added reverb from the room (due to reflections). The wireless channel is like a fingerprint of the physical environment.

**Tamper detection** describes the processing of some sensor data (e.g. observing wireless channels) to detect unauthorized physical changes of an environment, possibly indicating a physical attack.

**Intelligent reflecting surfaces** are digitally configurable reflectors of radio waves that can be used to manipulate wireless signals. The technology is likely to be integrated into future 6G wireless communication systems.

**Human motion detection** utilizes wireless sensing to identify the presence of individuals, possibly violating their privacy. Apart from that, more advanced applications of wireless sensing include the recognition of activities and gestures as well as vital sign monitoring.







CASA WIKI

#### Cryptographic primitives are

mathematical algorithms used as fundamental building blocks in security protocols. They ensure that the protected data cannot be read or tampered with and that it actually originates from the entity that claims to have sent it.

**An implementation** is a realization of a technical specification or algorithm as a program (software) or electronic device (hardware). For this, implementation attacks attempt to break the realization of the cryptographic algorithm rather than the cryptography itself.

**Side-Channel Analysis** (SCA) observes and evaluates unintentional physical characteristics (e.g. power consumption, electro-magnetic radiation, or response time) of an electronic device while cryptographic implementations are performed by the target.

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# **REAL LIFE STORY**

As an experiment, researchers from Ruhr University Bochum (RUB) managed to modify and extract information from the University Mensa cards. First they found out which chip was used in the card. By measuring the electromagnetic emanations produced while using the card for contactless payments, they discovered that all cards used an identical secret key. Consequently, it was relatively easy to reveal the information stored on the cards. With knowledge of the key and its content, it was possible to manipulate any card's credit balance within a fraction of a second. Finally, missing security measures in the system's backend made it very easy to pay with such manipulated cards.









THIS IS, OF COURSE, NOT ACTUALLY VISIBLE TO THE NAKED EYE. STILL, ALTHOUGH IT LOOKS LIKE A SINGLE OBJECT, IT IS HARD TO FIND AND PIECE TOGETHER THE SEPARATE DATA PACKAGES WITHIN

THE VAST DATA FLOW.







# ABOUT CASA

**CASA: Cyber Security in the Age of Large-Scale Adversaries** was established in 2019. It is the only Cluster of Excellence in the field of computer security in Germany. CASA is funded by a grant from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) worth about 30 million Euros, which ensures excellent research conditions.

CASA brings together a core group of principal investigators, chosen with a strong focus on security and privacy, with selected top-level researchers from highly relevant neighboring disciplines. The team covers the full scope needed to tackle the challenging research problems in modern computer security; namely computer science, mathematics, electrical engineering, and psychology.

CASA is hosted by the Horst Görtz Institute for IT • Security (hgi.rub.de/en), a pioneering research center in Germany. Furthermore, CASA collaborates strongly with the Max Planck Institute for Security and Privacy in Bochum (mpi-sp.org) and several other institutes and universities.

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#### What is a "Cluster of Excellence"?

With the funding line "Clusters of Excellence", internationally competitive research centers at universities or university alliances in Germany are provided with project-based funding for a period of 7 years. Within the clusters, scientists from different disciplines and institutions work together on a research project. The funding gives them the opportunity to concentrate intensively on their research goal, to train young scientists and to recruit international top researchers.

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# **TECHNICAL BACKGROUND**

The concepts and methods presented in this comic were developed by researchers involved in the Cluster of Excellence CASA. If you are interested in more details, you can find the original publications online. These scientific papers explain the results in more detail. For many publications we also publish the source code and other research artifacts. Please reach out to us, if you have questions: info@casa.rub.de

# PUBLICATIONS

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Nils Albartus, Clemens Nasenberg, Florian Stolz, Marc Fyrbiak, Christof Paar, Russell Tessier, **On the Design** and Misuse of Microcoded (Embedded) Processors — A Cautionary Note, USENIX: Usenix Security Symposium, 2021

Endres Puschner, Thorben Moos, Steffen Becker, Christian Kison, Amir Moradi, Christof Paar, **Red Team vs. Blue Team: A Real-World Hardware Trojan Detection Case Study Across Four Modern CMOS Technology Generations**, IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy (SP), 2023

Paul Staat, Simon Mulzer, Stefan Roth, Veelasha Moonsamy, Markus Heinrichs, Rainer Kronberger, Aydin Sezgin, Christof Paar, **IRShield: A Countermeasure Against Adversarial Physical-Layer Wireless Sensing**, IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy (SP), 2022 Paul Staat, Johannes Tobisch, Christian Zenger, Christof Paar, Anti-Tamper Radio: System-Level Tamper Detection for Computing Systems, IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy (SP), 2022

David Knichel, Amir Moradi, Nicolai Müller, Pascal Sasdrich, Automated Generation of Masked Hardware, IACR Transactions on Cryptographic Hardware and Embedded Systems, 2022(1), pp. 589–629

David Knichel, Pascal Sasdrich, Amir Moradi, SILVER – Statistical Independence and Leakage Verification, In: Advances in Cryptology – ASIACRYPT 2020. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, Vol. 12491, Springer

#### CASA HUB B

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FROM HARDWARE TROJANS TO SIDE-CHANNEL ATTACKS, IT HAS BECOME CLEAR THAT HARDWARE CAN ALSO BE THE TARGET OF ATTACKS. AS SYSTEMS FALL INTO THE HANDS OF VARIOUS AND POTENTIALLY MALICIOUS USERS, NUMEROUS OPPORTUNITIES ARISE TO BREACH SUCH SEEMINGLY AND ALLEGEDLY SECURE SYSTEMS.

FOLLOW FEARLESS BEAVER PAUL ON HIS DIVE INTO THE RESEARCH FINDINGS OF CASA'S HUB B. WILL HE SOLVE THE MYSTERY OF HIS FAMILY'S UNSTABLE DAM? HAVE THEY BECOME THE TARGET OF A LARGE-SCALE ADVERSARY?

FIND OUT MORE!

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