PCache: Permutation-based Cache to Counter
Eviction-based Cache-based Side-Channel
Attacks

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Introduction

Security Threat: In cloud computing, some components are used by attackers as a side-channel to steal secrets of co-running applications.
Cache-based side-channel attacks [M. Werner, USENIX Security 2019]

- Extracting keys of cryptographic algorithms (RSA, AES, etc).
- Monitoring keystrokes.
- Reading unauthorized address space.
Introduction

• Unfortunately, existing countermeasures disable sharing, which incurs underutilization.

• Countermeasures retaining shared cache design are not secure.

• **Our Goal:** To achieve security against cache-based side-channel attacks while
  • Retaining the shared cache design
  • Negligible performance overhead

• **Our Solution:** Permutation based cache architecture
Outline

• Background
• Security Issue: Prime+Probe Attack
• Prior countermeasures their Limitations
• Direct Relation problem
• PCache
• Security and Performance Results
Caches

Core 1

Cache

DRAM

Longer Time

Shorter Time
Background: Cache structure and Mapping

Memory Address

Tag | Index
---|---
A | 1
B | 1
C | 1
D | 1
E | 1

Way 0 | Way 1 | Way 2 | Way 3
---|---|---|---
Set 0 | | | |
Set 1 | E | B | C | A
Set 2 | | | |
Set 3 | | | |
Set 4 | | | |

Cache
Eviction based Cache Side Channel Attacks: Prime+Probe Attack

If (secret == 1)
    func(V1);
else
    func(V5);
Prime+Probe Attack: Prime Step

- Attacker finds the eviction set, which are the memory addresses that collide with the V1.
- Attacker fills the cache with the eviction set memory addresses by accessing them.
Prime+Probe Attack: Waiting steps

- Attacker waits for the prefixed time and call the victim to execute.
- Let say while execution victim evicts A2.
Prime+Probe Attack: Probe Step

- Attacker again check the state of cache by accessing all members of eviction set.
- If attacker finds any member of eviction set evicted form the cache, it gets the information that victim has accessed the Set 0.
Prior Countermeasures

- As memory address mapping is secret, eviction set is unknown to attacker
- Security depends on that the attacker cannot find eviction set.

- ScatterCache [M. Werner, USENIX Security 2019]
- CEASER [M. K. Qureshi, MICRO’18]
Limitation in ScatterCache and CEASER

Prime+Prune+Probe technique can reveal eviction sets [A. Purnal et al., S&P’ 2020]

1) **Prime** - Attacker randomly chooses memory addresses and places them in cache.
2) **Prune** - Attacker ensures that all accessed addresses are in cache by re-accessing.
3) **Call the victim to execute.**
4) **Probe** - Attacker accesses again all addresses and observes access latency.
Our Perspective About Problem

• Direct Relation Problem
• Our Hypothesis
  • Eliminating direct relation between incoming memory address (V1) and evicted cache line (A3) can make impractical for attacker to find eviction set by generating random collisions in cache.
Pcache: Realization of Direct Relation Elimination

Group 1

Group 2

Group 3

Incoming Mem Block

Permutation Functions
Pcache: Realization of Direct Relation Elimination

V1 replaced A5 and A5 relocated to group 2

Permutation Functions
Pcache: Realization of Direct Relation Elimination

A5 replaced A1 and A1 relocated to group 3

Permutation Functions
Pcache: Realization of Direct Relation Elimination

Permutation Functions

A1 replaced A8 and A8 evicted

Evicted
Security Perspective of PCache

Evicting members of eviction set

Incoming Memory Block

Hidden members in Eviction set, which are impractical to find.
Possible Attack to Find hidden members
Breaking Branch Technique

Prime +Prune+Probe Attack to find evicting members

1) Attacker randomly chooses memory addresses and places them in cache.
2) Attacker ensures that all accessed addresses are in cache by re-accessing.
3) Call the victim to execute.
4) Attacker accesses again all addresses and observes access latency to find evicting members of eviction set.

Breaking Branch to find hidden members

1) Attacker again accesses addresses except one.
2) Attacker ensures that all accessed addresses are in cache by re-accessing.
3) Call the victim to execute.
4) Attacker accesses again all addresses and observes access latency of A4.
Possible Attack by Estimating Eviction Distribution

• The attacker randomly fills whole Pcache.
• Then allows the interested victim program to access PCache, which causes.
• eviction of attacker’s filled cache lines.
• The attacker observes these evictions and relates the cache lines having high eviction probability with the interested victim access.
• The attacker has to access as many times to ensure that all possible evicting cache lines should be selected multiple times for eviction. The number of memory accesses can be modeled as coupon collector’s problem.
• If attacker can distinguish the eviction distributions per each victim memory access, then there is a possibility that an attacker can steal secrets.
Security Evaluation

• We build functional model of PCache using Python.

• We evaluated the security using
  • Prime+Prune+Probe and breaking branch technique.
  • Eviction distribution Estimation

• For time analysis, we used following data [A. Purnal et al. , S&P’ 2020]
  • cache hit time = 9.5ns,
  • cache miss time = 50ns ,
  • victim execution time = 0.5ms and
  • cache flush time = 3.6ms.
Prime+Prune+Probe and Breaking Branch Technique

• We extracted victim and attacker access to find 1000 evicting and hidden members using Prime+Prune+Probe and breaking-branch technique. Then, we have averaged 1000 samples to form finding time of one member of eviction set.

• Following Table shows that attacker would need ≈25 months (or 2 years) to learn eviction set against one memory address in 10MB cache with 32 ways and 4 groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Attacker access to find Non-Evicting Members (k)</th>
<th>Time to find Non-Evicting Members (hours)</th>
<th>Attacker access to find hidden members (k)</th>
<th>Time to find hidden members (hours)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>113.03</td>
<td>613.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>919.52</td>
<td>12605.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1150.68</td>
<td>18497.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Eviction Distribution Estimation

Eviction distribution is developed by accessing victim memory access 18.86k times on 8MB cache with 32 ways and 4 groups.

- Empty locations can be used by attacker to identify the incoming memory address.
- Because of no empty locations, it is impractical for attacker to identify the incoming memory address.

Eviction caused by repeatedly accessing single victim memory addresses.

Eviction caused by repeatedly accessing 100 sequenced victim memory addresses.
Performance Evaluation

• We have build the PCache in ChampSim. [D. Sanchez ISCA 2013].
• We have used weighted speed-up metric to quantify performance.
• We have normalized 32/4 PCache performance relative to baseline architecture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baseline Configuration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1 Cache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2 Cache</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L3 Cache</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance Results

PCache with random replacement policy shows less degradation as compared to baseline on some workloads, which is 1.6% at maximum.
Conclusions

• We have presented a cache design that provides security against eviction-based cache-based SCAs by making large eviction sets and introducing hidden members in the replacement process.

• Our evaluation shows that, for 10MB cache, the attacker needs 2 years to learn eviction set against one memory address.

• Overall, the performance loss is only 0.002% on average as compared to the set-associative cache over SPEC CPU2017.
Thank you