# Security Analysis of a PUF based RFID Authentication Protocol

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**Abstract.** In this paper we consider the security of a PUF based RFID Authentication protocol which has been recently proposed by Bassil *et al.* [2]. The designers have claimed that their protocol offers immunity against a broad range of attacks while it provides excellent performance. However, we prove in contrary to its designers claim, this protocol does not provide any security. We present an efficient secret disclosure attack which retrieves all secret parameters of the protocol. Given those secret parameters, it would be trivial to apply any other attack in the context on the protocol. However, to highlight other weaknesses of the protocol we present extra reader traceability, impersonation and desynchronization attacks that do not require disclosing the secret parameters necessarily. Success probability of all mentioned attacks is almost "1" while the complexity is at most two runs of protocol.

**Keywords:** RFID, Authentication, PUF, Traceability Attack, Reader Impersonation Attack, Tag impersonation Attack, Desynchronization Attack.

## 1 Introduction

Radio Frequency Identification systems is a wireless system which uses radio frequency to identify objects, animals, human and so on. Crescive spread of RFID leads security and privacy problems to become propounded. To address the mentioned issues and to help the admission of this technology, a lot of RFID authentication protocols have been proposed already in the literatures [3, 5–8, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19–21, 23–25, 29–36]. To address the resources constraint restrictions of RFID systems several researchers have tried to provide ultralightweight protocol to be employed in the RFID applications. This class of RFID protocols only use limited number of ultralightweight operations in their construction, e.g. bit wise AND, OR, XOR and Rotate. Examples of these protocols are

[12,16,18,20] and [24]. However, the later analysis demonstrated that it is not any easy task to design a secure protocol in this way [1,4,11,22,26–28]. On the other hand, some recent works attempted to employee Physically Unclonable Functions (PUF) to design ultralightweight authentication protocols [2, 14, 15].

A Physically Unclonable Function (PUF), is a piece of hardware that produces a signature, either based on the unique characteristics of a particular instance alone, or in concert with a user defined input. Several different types of PUFs exist [10]. Common to all solutions is that they rely on the variation of delays in wires and gates that exist in all electronic devices. Furthermore, despite efforts to reduce this normally unwelcome feature, delays seem to increase with newer technology as IC designs are becoming smaller [9]. The reason why PUFs are so attractive in the security field is not only that they are cheap to implement, both monetarily and in hardware, they are also hard for an attacker to tamper with. If the attacker tries to evaluate the PUF or IC, e.g. using probes to measure wire delays, the characteristics of that particular PUF will be changed (perhaps forever), therefore it will not give the information that the attacker expected.

### 1.1 Overview of the Current Work

In this paper we consider the security of a PUF based RFID Authentication protocol which has been recently proposed by Bassil, El-Beaino, Kayssi and Chehab [2] which we denote it in short by BEKC protocol henceforth. They have claimed that the designed protocol resists the known attacks despite of its excellent performance. However, in this paper we demonstrate that BEKC protocol does not provide resistance against secret disclosure attack, traceability attack, tag and reader impersonation attack and desynchronization attack.

**Paper Organization :** The notations used in the paper are presented in Section 2. BEKC protocol is described in Section 3. In Section 4, Section 5, Section 6 and Section 7 we present our secret disclosure attack, traceability attack, reader impersonation attack and desynchronization attack respectively. Finally, we conclude the paper in Section 8.

## 2 Preliminaries

Throughout the paper, we use the following notations:

- $R_i$: RFID reader $i$.
- $T_i$: RFID tag $i$.
- $PUF$: Physically Uncloneable Function.
- $SVT_i$: The 96 bits secret value of $T_i$ which is generated by a PUF embedded in $T_i$.
- $SVR_i$: The 96 bits secret value of $R_i$ which is generated by a PUF embedded in $T_i$.
- $Rotl(x, y)$: is a circular shift on the value of $x$ by ($y$ mod 96) to the left.
- $Rotr(x, y)$: is a circular shift on the value of $x$ by ($y$ mod 96) to the right.
- $n_1$ and $n_2$ : Two 96 bits random numbers generated by the reader.
- $\oplus$: The XOR operation.
- $+$: The bitwise OR operation.
- $A \leftarrow B$: Refers to assigning $B$ to $A$.

## 3 Description of BEKC Protocol

In BEKC protocol, a PUF is embedded inside each tag to produce the secret value of the tag, $SVT_i$, which is computed as $SVT_i = PUF(challenge)$, where *challenge* is provided from an external source during an initialization phase before deploying the tags. Hence, due to the nature of the PUF function, each tag $T_i$ will have a different secret value. Moreover, another secret value related to the reader, $SVR_i$, is stored in the tag which is computed as $SVR_i = PUF(SVT_i)$. Therefore, each tag has a unique pair of $SVT_i$ and $SVR_i$ stored in it initially. In addition, this pair is also stored in the back-end database. In BEKC protocol, which is depicted in Fig. 1, a reader $R_i$ and a tag $T_i$ authenticates each other as follows:

1. $R_i$ sends the "Hello" message to $T_i$.
2. On receiving the message, $T_i$ responds with its $SVT_i$.
3. Once $R_i$ receipt the message, it will search for the entry corresponding to $SVT_i$ in the back-end database. If there is no record for the $SVT_i$ in the back-end database, a new request is sent by $R_i$ to $T_i$, however, this time $T_i$ replies with the old un-updated $SVT_i$ to consider possible desynchronization between the reader and the tag. But if $R_i$ finds a record for $SVT_i$ in the back-end database, it generates two 96-bit random numbers $n_1$ and $n_2$, computes $A = SVT_i \oplus SVR_i \oplus n_1$, $B = Rotl(SVR_i + n_2, SVT_i)$ and $C = Rotl(SVT_i \oplus SVR_i \oplus n_1, n_2)$ and sends $A\|B\|C$ to $T_i$.
4. Once $T_i$ receipt the message, it employees $A$ and $B$ to extract the random numbers $n_1$ and $n_2$. Then, it computes $C' = Rotl(SVT_i \oplus$

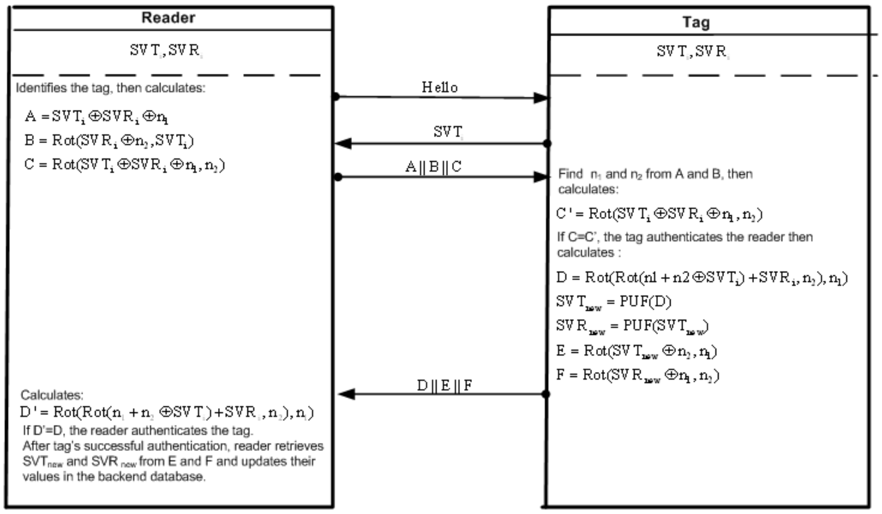


**Fig. 1.** BEKC Protocol.

$SVR_i \oplus n_1, n_2)$ and compares it with the received $C$. If $C \neq C'$ the tag will stop the authentication procedure, otherwise the reader is authenticated. Next, the tag computes $D$, $E$ and $F$ and updates $SVT_i$ and $SVR_i$ and sends $D\|E\|F$ to $R_i$. To calculate $D$, $E$ and $F$ and update $SVT_i$ and $SVR_i$, the tag does as follows:

$$D = Rotl(Rotl(n_1 + n_2 \oplus SVT_i) + SVR_i, n_2), n_1)$$

$$SVT_{new} = PUF(D)$$

$$SVR_{new} = PUF(SVT_{new})$$

$$E = Rotl(SVT_{new} \oplus n_2, n_1)$$

$$F = Rotl(SVR_{new} \oplus n_1, n_2)$$

5. On receiving the message, $R_i$ computes $D' = Rotl(Rotl(n_1 + n_2 \oplus SVT_i) + SVR_i, n_2), n_1)$ and compares it with the received $D$ to make sure that the tag was able to retrieve the correct random numbers $n_1$ and $n_2$. If $D' = D$, $R_i$ authenticates $T_i$ as a legitimate tag, retrieves $SVT_{new}$ and $SVR_{new}$ from $E$ and $F$ and updates their related records in the back-end database.

## 4 Secret Disclosure Attack

In this section, we present an efficient secret disclosure attack which leads to disclose all secret values of the reader and the tag that participate in BEKC protocol. To disclose the secret values, the adversary $\mathcal{A}$ can do as follows:

1. $\mathcal{A}$ eavesdrops one successful run of protocol between tag $T_i$ and legitimate reader $R_i$ and stores the transferred values include $SVT_i$, $A$, $B$,$C$,$D$,$E$ and $F$ where :

$$A = SVT_i \oplus SVR_i \oplus n_1 \tag{1}$$
$$B = Rotl(SVR_i + n_2, SVT_i) \tag{2}$$
$$C = Rotl(SVT_i \oplus SVR_i \oplus n_1, n_2) \tag{3}$$
$$D = Rotl((Rotl(n_1 + n_2 \oplus SVT_i) + SVR_i, n_2), n_1) \tag{4}$$
$$SVT_{new} = PUF(D) \tag{5}$$
$$SVR_{new} = PUF(SVT_{new}) \tag{6}$$
$$E = Rotl(SVT_{new} \oplus n_2, n_1) \tag{7}$$
$$F = Rotl(SVR_{new} \oplus n_1, n_2) \tag{8}$$

2. $\mathcal{A}$ sends a "Hello" message to $T_i$ and $T_i$ responds with its current $SVT$ which is $SVT_{new}$ in the above equations.
3. $\mathcal{A}$ does the following computations:
   (a) $\forall\ i = 0\ \ldots\ 95$:
      i. If $Rotr(C, i) = A$ then returns $i$ as $n_2$ $mode$ 96.
   (b) $\forall\ i = 0\ \ldots\ 95$:
      i. $n_1$ $mode$ $96 \leftarrow i$
      ii. $n_2' \leftarrow (Rotr(E, n_1)) \oplus SVT_{new}$
      iii. If $n_2'$ $mode$ $96 = n_2$ $mode$ 96 then returns $n_2'$ as $n_2$.
   (c) Given $B$, $C$ and $SVT_i$ from the eavesdropping phase of attack (Step 1) and $n_2$ from step 3(b)iii, to eavesdrop $SVR_i$ and $n_1$, $\mathcal{A}$ does as follows:
      i. $SVR_i \leftarrow (Rotr(B, SVT_i)) - n_2$
      ii. $n_1 \leftarrow (Rotr(C, n_2)) \oplus SVR_i \oplus SVT_i$
4. To confirm the correctness of the retrieved parameters, the returned $n_2$ from Step 3(b)iii and the returned $n_1$ and $SVR_i$ from Step 3c, $\mathcal{A}$ verifies whether $D \stackrel{?}{=} Rotl((Rotl(n_1 + n_2 \oplus SVT_i) + SVR_i, n_2), n_1)$. If the verification is passed $\mathcal{A}$ can retries $SVR_{new}$ as $Rotr(F, n_2) \oplus n_1$; otherwise it returnees to Step 3a and continue with the remaining values of $i$.

An attacker which follows the above attack would be able to disclose all secret values involved in the protocol, i.e., $n_1$, $n_2$, $(SVR_i)_{old}$, $(SVR_i)_{new}$, $(SVR_i)_{old}$ and $(SVR_i)_{new}$. The success probability of our secret disclosure attack is "1" and the complexity is only two runs of protocol. It must be noted that at the end of the attack the current record of the back-end database for $T_i$ is $(SVR_i)_{new}$ and $(SVT_i)_{new}$ and $T_i$ holds $(SVR_i)_{old}$, $(SVT_i)_{old}$, $(SVR_i)_{new}$, and $(SVT_i)_{new}$.

It must be noted that since the adversary knows all secret parameters then it can easily do what attack it wants. For example it can impersonate the tag, impersonate the reader, desynchronize the tag and the reader, trace the tag and etc. However, to show other weaknesses of the protocol we present other attacks against the protocol in the rest of the paper.

## 5 Traceability Attack

BECK protocol's designers have claimed that their protocol provides tag's location privacy. They have stated since each tag have a unique PUF which is used to update $SVT_i$ and $SVR_i$ and the reader uses two random numbers $n_1$ and $n_2$ in its responses, the tag responses in different run of protocol can not be linked and it is not possible to trace the tag. However, it is easy that as far as the tag has not updated its $SVT_i$ and $SVR_i$ it will return a same $SVT_i$ as response to the "Hello" command sent by the legitimate reader or the adversary. This property is enough to trace the tag between two successful runs of protocol. In addition, following the protocol decryption, tag keeps a record of $(SVR_i)_{old}$ and $(SVT_i)_{old}$ and if the reader repeats the "Hello" command, tag will reply with $(SVT_i)_{old}$ as a response to the second "Hello" sent by the reader. Hence, even after one successful run of the protocol the adversary would be able to trace the tag.

The adversary will fail in its attack if two tags comes up with the same $SVT_i$. Since $SVT_i$ is assumed to be random, the success probability of the given traceability attacks are not less than $(1-2^{-96})^2$ while the complexities are at most two runs of protocol.

## 6 Reader Impersonation Attack

Bassil *et al.* claimed that their protocol resists against reader impersonation attack. They have stated since only the tag and the legitimate reader have the correct mappings between $SVT_i$ and $SVR_i$ thus an impersonating reader will not be authenticated by the legitimate tag. However, in this section, we prove that this claim unfortunately does not hold. To impersonate the reader, an adversary $\mathcal{A}$ can do as follows:

1. **(Phase 1: Learning)** $\mathcal{A}$ eavesdrops one successful run of protocol and stores $SVT_i$, $A$, $B$,$C$,$D$, $E$ and $F$.
2. **(Phase 2: Impersonation)** To impersonate $R_i$, $\mathcal{A}$ does as follows:
   (a) $\mathcal{A}$ supplants $R_i$ and starts another session of protocol and sends a "Hello" command to the tag and the tag responds with its updated value of $SVT_i$, $(SVT_i)_{new}$.
   (b) $\mathcal{A}$ sends again "Hello" command to the tag and the tag responds with its old value of $SVT_i$, $SVT_i$.
   (c) $\mathcal{A}$ sends the eavesdropped $A\|B\|C$ to $T_i$.
   (d) Once $T_i$ receipt the message, it employees $A$ and $B$ to extract the random numbers $n_1$ and $n_2$. Then, it computes $C' = Rotl(SVT_i \oplus SVR_i \oplus n_1, n_2))$ and compares it with the received $C$. Since $C = C'$ the tag authenticates $\mathcal{A}$ as a legitimate reader.

The success probability of our reader impersonation attack is "1" and the complexity is only two runs of BECK protocol.

## 7 Desynchronization Attack

BECK protocol's designers have claimed that in their protocol desynchronization problem can be overcame by storing two sequential versions of $SVT_i$ and $SVR_i$ at the tag, one pair before the updating and the other after the updating. In addition, they have mentioned that an explicit ACK may be sent by the reader to confirm the updating stage. However we show that their protocol suffers from explicit desynchronization attack. The given desynchronization attack is based on this fact that when in the last step of the protocol $T_i$ sends $D\|E\|F$ to $R_i$, $R_i$ verifies the correctness of $D$ to authenticate the tag and if $D$ passes the verification successfully it also accept the received $E$ and $F$ to extract the new recodes of $SVT_i$ and $SVR_i$ to be stored in the database. However, an active adversary can manipulate the transferred $D\|E\|F$ and replace it by $D\|E'\|F'$ for some $E' \neq E$ and $F' \neq F$. Therefore, the reader retrieves different values for $SVT_i$ and $SVR_i$ compared to the records of $SVT_i$ and $SVR_i$ in the tag. Hence, the tag and the reader would be desynchronized at the end of the attack with the probability of almost "1". The complexity of the given attack is only one run of the protocol.

## 8 Conclusion

In this paper we investigated the security of a PUF based RFID authentication protocol which recently has been proposed by Bassil *et al.* [2]. We have shown that, in contrary to its designers' claims, this protocol does not provide resistance against secret disclosure attack, traceability attack, reader impersonation attack and desynchronization attacks. Success probability of all mentioned attacks is almost "1" while the complexity is at most two runs of protocol. This result shows that designing a secure lightweight protocol is not an easy task.

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