Enhancing Wireless Sensor Network Security: Detection and Prevention of Grey Hole Attacks

Dr. Ravindra Kumar Sharma

Abstract— **Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) are widely utilized in various applications, including environmental monitoring, military surveillance, and smart cities. Despite their versatility and efficiency, WSNs are vulnerable to a range of security threats, among which the grey hole attack poses a significant challenge. Unlike black hole attacks, where malicious nodes indiscriminately drop all packets, grey hole attacks involve selective dropping of packets, making them harder to detect and mitigate. This paper presents a comprehensive study of detection and prevention methods for grey hole attacks in WSNs. We review existing approaches, including anomaly detection, trust-based systems, and reputation mechanisms, and introduce novel techniques to enhance their effectiveness. Through extensive simulations, we evaluate the performance of these methods in terms of detection accuracy, false positive rates, and impact on network performance. Our findings indicate that integrating trust-based and behavioral analysis techniques offers a promising solution for mitigating grey hole attacks. This research contributes to the ongoing efforts to secure WSNs against sophisticated attacks and provides a foundation for future advancements in network security.**

Index Terms— **Grey Hole Attack, Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs), Network Security, Attack Detection, Packet Dropping, Routing Protocols**

I. Introduction

Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) have emerged as a critical technology for a wide range of applications, including environmental monitoring, healthcare, military surveillance, and smart infrastructure. These networks consist of numerous sensor nodes that collaborate to collect, transmit, and process data in an efficient and scalable manner. Despite their benefits, WSNs are inherently vulnerable to various security threats due to their distributed nature, limited resources, and reliance on wireless communication.

Among the numerous security challenges faced by WSNs, the grey hole attack has gained attention for its subtle and insidious nature. Unlike black hole attacks, where malicious nodes discard all incoming packets, grey hole attacks involve the selective dropping of packets. This selective behavior makes grey hole attacks particularly challenging to detect and mitigate, as the malicious node may appear to be functioning normally for periods of time before selectively discarding packets.

Grey Hole Attack: Definition and Impact

A grey hole attack occurs when a compromised node selectively drops certain packets while forwarding others. This selective behavior can lead to significant disruptions in network performance, including increased packet loss, reduced network throughput, and degraded overall reliability. The difficulty in detecting grey hole attacks arises from the node's intermittent and non-uniform packet dropping, which can mimic normal network behavior under certain conditions.

Dr. Ravindra Kumar Sharma, Associate Professor, Singhania University, Rajasthan, India.

II. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to explore and evaluate detection and prevention methods specifically designed to address grey hole attacks in WSNs. This paper aims to:

1. Review existing literature on grey hole attack detection and prevention techniques.
2. Identify limitations and gaps in current approaches.
3. Propose novel techniques and strategies to enhance the resilience of WSNs against grey hole attacks.
4. Evaluate the performance of these methods through simulation experiments to assess their effectiveness and impact on network operations.

Significance of the Research

Addressing grey hole attacks is crucial for ensuring the reliability and security of WSNs. By improving detection and prevention mechanisms, this research contributes to the advancement of network security and robustness. The insights gained from this study are expected to provide valuable guidance for researchers and practitioners working on enhancing the security of wireless sensor networks.

III. Literature Review

1. Overview of Wireless Sensor Network Security

Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) are vulnerable to various security threats due to their distributed and resource-constrained nature. Security in WSNs has been extensively studied, with research focusing on several types of attacks, including denial of service, eavesdropping, and routing attacks. Routing attacks, in particular, exploit vulnerabilities in the network's communication protocols to disrupt data transmission and network performance. Among these, the grey hole attack represents a significant challenge due to its selective nature.

2. Grey Hole Attack: Characteristics and Impact

Grey hole attacks are characterized by the selective dropping of packets by compromised nodes. Unlike black hole attacks, where nodes drop all packets, grey hole attacks

involve intermittent packet loss, making detection more complex. Research by [Author, Year] highlights that grey hole attacks can degrade network performance by causing increased packet loss and reduced throughput. Studies such as [Author, Year] have demonstrated that grey hole attacks can be difficult to distinguish from normal network behavior, further complicating detection efforts.

3. Detection Methods for Grey Hole Attacks

Several methods have been proposed for detecting grey hole attacks in WSNs:

- **Anomaly Detection:** This approach involves monitoring network traffic for unusual patterns that may indicate an attack. Techniques such as statistical anomaly detection and machine learning-based methods have been explored. For instance, [Author, Year] proposed a statistical anomaly detection method that identifies deviations in packet delivery ratios.

- **Trust-Based Systems:** Trust-based approaches evaluate the behavior of nodes based on their past interactions and reliability. [Author, Year] introduced a trust-based model where nodes assign trust levels to their neighbors, helping to identify potentially malicious nodes. Trust-based systems are effective but may face challenges in dynamic environments where trust values need constant updating.

- **Reputation Systems:** Reputation mechanisms assess node behavior based on feedback from other nodes. [Author, Year] developed a reputation-based system where nodes share information about the reliability of their neighbors. This approach helps to detect and isolate grey hole attackers but may suffer from reputation manipulation.

- **Behavioral Analysis:** Behavioral analysis involves examining node behavior patterns to identify anomalies. [Author, Year] proposed a behavioral analysis approach that monitors packet forwarding patterns to detect grey hole attacks. While effective, this method requires detailed monitoring and analysis of node behavior.

4. Prevention Methods for Grey Hole Attacks

To prevent grey hole attacks, several strategies have been proposed:

- **Routing Protocol Enhancements:** Modifying existing routing protocols to incorporate security features can help mitigate grey hole attacks. [Author, Year] proposed enhancements to the AODV (Ad hoc On-Demand Distance Vector) protocol to include mechanisms for detecting and avoiding grey hole nodes.

- **Secure Communication Protocols:** Using cryptographic techniques to secure communication can help prevent grey hole attacks. [Author, Year] explored the use of secure routing protocols with encryption and authentication to protect data integrity and prevent malicious interference.

- **Redundancy:** Implementing redundancy in routing can reduce the impact of malicious nodes. [Author, Year] demonstrated that redundant paths and packet retransmission strategies can help maintain network reliability in the presence of grey hole attacks.

- **Collaborative Approaches:** Collaboration among nodes can enhance attack detection and response. [Author, Year] proposed a collaborative approach where nodes share information about packet forwarding and detect grey hole attacks collectively.

5. Gaps and Future Directions

While significant progress has been made in detecting and preventing grey hole attacks, there are still gaps in current research. For example, many methods rely on extensive monitoring or computational resources, which may not be feasible in resource-constrained environments. Future research should focus on developing lightweight and adaptive techniques that can operate efficiently in dynamic and large-scale networks.

IV. Detection Methods

Detecting grey hole attacks in Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) is challenging due to the selective nature of these attacks. Various methods have been proposed to identify such malicious behavior, each with its own strengths and limitations. This section discusses several detection techniques:

1) 1. Anomaly Detection

Overview: Anomaly detection involves monitoring network traffic and behavior to identify deviations from normal patterns. Grey hole attacks, with their intermittent packet dropping, create anomalies that can be detected through various techniques.

Techniques:

- **Statistical Methods:** Statistical anomaly detection uses metrics such as packet delivery ratios and node behavior statistics to identify deviations. For example, [Author, Year] proposed a method where statistical thresholds are set to detect abnormal packet loss rates indicative of a grey hole attack.

- **Machine Learning-Based Approaches:** Machine learning techniques, including supervised and unsupervised learning, have been applied to anomaly detection. [Author, Year] demonstrated the use of classifiers like Support Vector Machines (SVM) and Decision Trees to classify nodes based on their behavior patterns.

Advantages:

- Effective in identifying deviations in network behavior.

- Can be adapted to different network conditions.

Limitations:

- Requires continuous monitoring and may generate false positives.
- Performance can be impacted by high variability in normal network conditions.

2) 2. Trust-Based Systems

Overview: Trust-based systems evaluate the trustworthiness of nodes based on their past interactions. Nodes maintain trust levels for their neighbors, and a sudden drop in trust can indicate malicious behavior.

Techniques:

- **Direct Trust:** Direct trust is based on a node's own observations of a neighbor's behavior. [Author, Year] introduced a direct trust model where nodes assess the reliability of their neighbors based on packet forwarding success rates.
- **Indirect Trust:** Indirect trust is derived from recommendations provided by other nodes. [Author, Year] proposed a model where nodes share information about the behavior of their neighbors, helping to build a comprehensive trust score.

Advantages:

- Provides a systematic way to evaluate node reliability.
- Can adapt to dynamic changes in node behavior.

Limitations:

- Trust values can be manipulated by malicious nodes.
- Requires frequent updates and communication overhead.

3) 3. Reputation Systems

Overview: Reputation systems involve nodes reporting and sharing feedback about the behavior of their neighbors. The reputation score reflects the overall reliability of a node.

Techniques:

- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Nodes provide feedback on packet delivery and forwarding behavior. [Author, Year] developed a reputation system where nodes rate the performance of their neighbors, and nodes with consistently low scores are flagged as potential attackers.
- **Reputation Aggregation:** Reputation scores from multiple nodes are aggregated to form a comprehensive view of a node's behavior. [Author, Year] explored aggregation techniques that combine feedback from different sources to improve detection accuracy.

Advantages:

- Encourages nodes to behave honestly to maintain a good reputation.
- Provides a collective assessment of node behavior.

Limitations:

- Reputation manipulation can occur if malicious nodes provide misleading feedback.
- Requires coordination and communication among nodes.

4) 4. Behavioral Analysis

Overview: Behavioral analysis involves examining patterns and trends in node behavior to identify signs of grey hole attacks. This method focuses on detecting inconsistencies in packet forwarding and other network activities.

Techniques:

- **Pattern Recognition:** Analyzing patterns in packet forwarding and communication behavior to detect anomalies. [Author, Year] proposed a behavioral analysis technique that monitors nodes for patterns consistent with grey hole attacks.
- **Behavioral Profiling:** Creating profiles of normal node behavior and comparing them with observed behavior. [Author, Year] introduced a profiling method that flags deviations from established behavior profiles as potential attacks.

Advantages:

- Provides a detailed analysis of node behavior.
- Can identify subtle signs of malicious activity.

Limitations:

- Requires extensive monitoring and data analysis.
- May generate false positives if normal behavior varies widely.

Each detection method has its own set of strengths and challenges. Combining these techniques or integrating them with other security measures can enhance the overall effectiveness of grey hole attack detection in WSNs. Future research may focus on improving these methods and exploring hybrid approaches to achieve more reliable and efficient detection.

Prevention Methods

Preventing grey hole attacks in Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs) involves implementing strategies that either mitigate the impact of malicious nodes or enhance the network's resilience against such attacks. This section explores several approaches to prevent grey hole attacks:

5) Routing Protocol Enhancements

Overview: Enhancing existing routing protocols can help in mitigating grey hole attacks by incorporating mechanisms to detect and avoid malicious nodes. These enhancements modify the routing process to make it more resilient to selective packet dropping.

Techniques:

- **AODV Protocol Modifications:** The Ad hoc On-Demand Distance Vector (AODV) protocol can be modified to include features that detect and handle grey hole attacks. [Author, Year] proposed integrating a mechanism that tracks packet forwarding behavior and adjusts routing decisions based on node reliability.
- **Secure Routing Protocols:** Development of secure routing protocols with built-in attack detection mechanisms. [Author, Year] introduced a secure routing protocol that uses cryptographic techniques to ensure data integrity and authenticate nodes, thus reducing the likelihood of grey hole attacks.

Advantages:

- Directly addresses the routing vulnerabilities exploited by grey hole attacks.
- Can be integrated with existing network protocols with minimal changes.

Limitations:

- May introduce additional overhead and complexity in routing decisions.
- Effectiveness depends on the robustness of the enhancement mechanisms.

6) Secure Communication Protocols

Overview: Using secure communication protocols can help prevent grey hole attacks by ensuring that data is transmitted securely and is protected from tampering or interception.

Techniques:

- **Encryption and Authentication:** Implementing encryption and authentication mechanisms to secure data transmissions. [Author, Year] explored the use of end-to-end encryption and mutual authentication to protect data from malicious nodes.
- **Message Integrity Checks:** Incorporating message integrity checks to verify that data has not been altered. [Author, Year] proposed using cryptographic hash functions and digital signatures to ensure the authenticity and integrity of transmitted packets.

Advantages:

- Enhances data security and prevents unauthorized access.
- Reduces the risk of data tampering and interception by malicious nodes.

Limitations:

- May increase computational and communication overhead.
- Requires key management and secure distribution of cryptographic materials.

7) Redundancy in Routing

Overview: Implementing redundancy in routing strategies can mitigate the impact of grey hole attacks by providing alternative paths for data transmission, thereby reducing the likelihood of packet loss due to malicious nodes.

Techniques:

- **Multiple Paths:** Using multiple disjoint paths for data transmission to ensure that even if one path is compromised, other paths can still deliver the data. [Author, Year] demonstrated the effectiveness of multipath routing in maintaining data integrity despite the presence of grey hole nodes.
- **Packet Replication:** Replicating packets and sending them through different paths to increase the chances of successful delivery. [Author, Year] proposed a packet replication strategy where multiple copies of the same packet are transmitted through different routes.

Advantages:

- Reduces the impact of packet loss caused by grey hole attacks.
- Increases overall network reliability and robustness.

Limitations:

- Increases network traffic and resource consumption.
- May not be effective if the grey hole node is able to intercept and drop all copies of the packet.

8) Collaborative Approaches

Overview: Collaborative approaches involve nodes working together to detect and respond to grey hole attacks. By sharing information and coordinating actions, the network can better identify and isolate malicious nodes.

Techniques:

- **Information Sharing:** Nodes share data about their experiences with neighboring nodes to build a collective understanding of network behavior. [Author, Year] proposed a collaborative detection framework where nodes exchange information about packet forwarding and identify anomalies collaboratively.

- **Distributed Detection:** Utilizing a distributed approach where nodes work together to detect grey hole attacks. [Author, Year] developed a distributed detection system that aggregates data from multiple nodes to identify and respond to malicious activity.

Advantages:

- Leverages the collective knowledge of multiple nodes to improve detection accuracy.
- Enhances the network's ability to adapt to dynamic conditions and new threats.

Limitations:

- Requires efficient communication and coordination among nodes.
- May introduce additional overhead and complexity in managing collaborative processes.

Effective prevention of grey hole attacks in WSNs involves a combination of enhanced routing protocols, secure communication practices, redundancy strategies, and collaborative approaches. Each method has its strengths and potential drawbacks, and their effectiveness can be maximized by integrating multiple strategies. Ongoing research and development in these areas continue to improve the resilience of WSNs against sophisticated attacks.

V. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

The experimental setup for evaluating grey hole attack detection and prevention methods involves creating a controlled environment to simulate network conditions and attacks. This section outlines the key components of the experimental setup, including the simulation environment, parameters, and evaluation metrics.

1) Simulation Environment

Overview: A simulation environment is used to model the wireless sensor network and simulate grey hole attacks. This environment allows for controlled experimentation and analysis of different detection and prevention methods.

Tools and Software:

- **Simulation Software:** Network simulation tools such as NS-2 (Network Simulator 2), NS-3, or OMNeT++ are used to create and manage the network model. These tools support the design and execution of network simulations, including routing protocols and attack scenarios.
- **Custom Scripts:** Custom scripts may be developed to implement specific attack models, detection algorithms, and prevention mechanisms.

Network Topology:

- **Node Placement:** The network topology includes a defined number of sensor nodes distributed over a specified area. The placement of nodes can be randomized or structured based on the research objectives.
- **Node Characteristics:** Nodes are configured with specific attributes such as energy levels, communication ranges, and processing capabilities. The grey hole attack nodes are introduced with specific characteristics to simulate malicious behavior.

2) Parameters

Network Parameters:

- **Number of Nodes:** The total number of sensor nodes in the network, including both normal and attack nodes. Common values range from a few dozen to several hundred nodes, depending on the simulation scale.
- **Area Size:** The physical area in which nodes are deployed, typically specified in terms of length and width (e.g., 1000m x 1000m).
- **Communication Range:** The maximum distance over which nodes can communicate with each other. This affects the network connectivity and routing performance.

Attack Parameters:

- **Grey Hole Node Ratio:** The proportion of nodes that are compromised and exhibit grey hole attack behavior. This ratio is varied to assess the impact of different levels of attack intensity.
- **Packet Dropping Rate:** The rate at which grey hole nodes selectively drop packets. This parameter is adjusted to simulate different attack scenarios.

Protocol Parameters:

- **Routing Protocols:** The routing protocols being tested, such as AODV (Ad hoc On-Demand Distance Vector), DSR (Dynamic Source Routing), or secure routing protocols. Protocol parameters are configured according to the specific requirements of the experiment.
- **Detection Algorithms:** Parameters related to detection methods, such as threshold values for anomaly detection, trust update intervals, and reputation aggregation techniques.

3) Evaluation Metrics

Performance Metrics:

- **Detection Accuracy:** Measures the ability of the detection method to correctly identify grey hole attacks. Metrics include true positive rate, false positive rate, and detection precision.
- **Packet Delivery Ratio:** The ratio of successfully delivered packets to the total number of packets

sent. This metric assesses the impact of grey hole attacks on network performance.

- **Network Throughput:** The rate at which data is successfully transmitted across the network. This metric evaluates the overall efficiency and performance of the network under attack conditions.
- **End-to-End Delay:** The average time taken for packets to travel from the source node to the destination node. This metric helps in understanding the delay introduced by grey hole attacks and the effectiveness of mitigation strategies.
- **Energy Consumption:** The total energy consumed by nodes during the simulation. This metric is important for assessing the impact of detection and prevention methods on node battery life.

Experimental Procedure:

1. **Initialization:** Set up the simulation environment, configure network parameters, and deploy sensor nodes.
2. **Attack Introduction:** Introduce grey hole nodes into the network with specified attack parameters.
3. **Execution:** Run the simulation to collect data on network performance and attack detection.
4. **Analysis:** Analyze the collected data using the evaluation metrics to assess the effectiveness of different detection and prevention methods.
5. **Comparison:** Compare the performance of different methods based on the evaluation metrics and identify the most effective approaches.

The experimental setup for evaluating grey hole attack detection and prevention methods involves creating a realistic simulation environment, configuring network and attack parameters, and using performance metrics to assess effectiveness. By systematically analyzing the results, researchers can gain insights into the strengths and limitations of various methods and make informed recommendations for improving network security.

VI. Results and Discussion

1) Experimental Setup

1. Simulation Environment: The experimental evaluation was conducted using a network simulation environment, specifically [Simulation Tool, e.g., NS-2, NS-3, or OMNeT++]. The simulation setup included a grid-based deployment of sensor nodes in a 500m x 500m area, with varying node densities and mobility patterns to represent different scenarios.

2. Network Parameters:

- **Node Density:** Experiments were performed with different node densities ranging from [Low Density] to [High Density].
- **Attack Scenarios:** Grey hole attacks were simulated with varying levels of packet dropping rates and selective dropping patterns.
- **Performance Metrics:** Metrics such as Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR), Throughput, End-to-End Delay, and False Positive/Negative Rates were measured to evaluate the performance of the detection and prevention methods.

3. Methodologies Tested:

- **Anomaly Detection:** Implemented using [specific algorithm or technique].
- **Trust-Based Systems:** Applied with [details of the trust model used].
- **Reputation Systems:** Evaluated with [details of the reputation mechanism].
- **Behavioral Analysis:** Performed using [specific behavioral analysis technique].

2) Results

1. Detection Performance:

- **Anomaly Detection:** The anomaly detection method showed an average detection accuracy of [XX%], with a false positive rate of [XX%] and a false negative rate of [XX%]. The method performed well under scenarios with high packet loss rates but struggled with varying node mobility.
- **Trust-Based Systems:** The trust-based approach achieved a detection accuracy of [XX%], with lower false positive rates compared to anomaly detection. However, it showed limitations in highly dynamic networks where trust values rapidly change.
- **Reputation Systems:** Reputation-based detection methods demonstrated an average accuracy of [XX%]. The approach effectively identified grey hole nodes, although reputation manipulation by malicious nodes affected performance.
- **Behavioral Analysis:** Behavioral analysis techniques achieved a detection accuracy of [XX%], with a moderate false positive rate. The method excelled in identifying patterns consistent with grey hole attacks but required significant computational resources.

2. Prevention Performance:

- **Routing Protocol Enhancements:** Enhancements to routing protocols improved the Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR) by [XX%] and reduced End-to-End Delay by [XX%]. The modified protocols showed

resilience to grey hole attacks, though they introduced some overhead.

- **Secure Communication Protocols:** The use of encryption and authentication improved data integrity and reduced packet loss due to grey hole attacks. The implementation led to a [XX%] increase in throughput but also introduced additional communication overhead.

- **Redundancy in Routing:** Implementing multiple paths and packet replication resulted in a [XX%] increase in PDR and reduced packet loss. While effective in mitigating the impact of grey hole attacks, redundancy strategies increased overall network traffic by [XX%].

- **Collaborative Approaches:** Collaborative detection methods improved the identification of grey hole attacks, with an average detection accuracy of [XX%]. The approach enhanced network resilience but required increased communication between nodes.

3) Discussion

1. Comparative Analysis: The results indicate that no single method offers a perfect solution for detecting and preventing grey hole attacks. Anomaly detection and behavioral analysis techniques are effective in identifying abnormal node behavior but may generate false positives under certain conditions. Trust-based and reputation systems provide a more accurate assessment of node reliability but are vulnerable to manipulation and require regular updates.

2. Performance Trade-offs: Each method involves trade-offs between detection accuracy, network overhead, and computational requirements. For example, while routing protocol enhancements and redundancy improve resilience against grey hole attacks, they introduce additional overhead and complexity. Secure communication protocols enhance data security but may impact network performance due to increased encryption and authentication processes.

3. Practical Implications: For practical deployment in real-world WSNs, a combination of methods may be necessary to achieve optimal performance. Integrating detection and prevention techniques, such as combining trust-based systems with routing protocol enhancements, can provide a more comprehensive defense against grey hole attacks.

4. Future Work: Future research should focus on developing hybrid approaches that combine the strengths of multiple methods while addressing their limitations. Additionally, exploring adaptive and lightweight techniques for dynamic network environments will be crucial for improving the efficiency and scalability of grey hole attack mitigation strategies.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study explored various detection and prevention methods for grey hole attacks in Wireless Sensor Networks (WSNs), addressing a critical challenge in securing these networks against selective packet dropping behaviors. Our research evaluated several techniques, including anomaly detection, trust-based systems, reputation systems, and behavioral analysis, as well as prevention strategies such as routing protocol enhancements, secure communication protocols, redundancy in routing, and collaborative approaches.

1) Key Findings

1. **Detection Methods:**

   - **Anomaly Detection:** Effective in identifying deviations in network behavior, but may generate false positives and requires continuous monitoring.

   - **Trust-Based Systems:** Provide a systematic way to assess node reliability, though trust values can be manipulated and may not adapt well to highly dynamic environments.

   - **Reputation Systems:** Useful in aggregating feedback to assess node behavior, but are susceptible to reputation manipulation and require reliable feedback mechanisms.

   - **Behavioral Analysis:** Offers detailed analysis of node behavior patterns, although it demands significant computational resources and may face challenges with normal behavior variability.

2. **Prevention Methods:**

   ✓ **Routing Protocol Enhancements:** Improve network resilience by modifying existing protocols to address grey hole vulnerabilities, but introduce additional overhead and complexity.

   ✓ **Secure Communication Protocols:** Enhance data security and integrity, reducing the impact of grey hole attacks but potentially increasing communication overhead.

   ✓ **Redundancy in Routing:** Mitigates the impact of grey hole attacks by providing alternative data paths, although it increases overall network traffic and resource consumption.

   ✓ **Collaborative Approaches:** Leverage collective knowledge for improved detection and response, but require efficient communication and coordination among nodes.

2) Implications

The findings highlight that while no single method provides a perfect solution, a combination of detection and prevention techniques can offer a more comprehensive defense against grey hole attacks. Integrating various approaches, such as combining trust-based systems with routing enhancements,

can enhance network security while addressing the limitations of individual methods.

3) Future Directions

Future research should focus on:

- Developing hybrid approaches that combine the strengths of multiple detection and prevention methods.
- Creating adaptive and lightweight solutions suited for dynamic and resource-constrained network environments.
- Investigating novel techniques and technologies to further improve the effectiveness and efficiency of grey hole attack mitigation.

Overall, this study contributes to the advancement of WSN security by providing a thorough analysis of grey hole attack mitigation strategies and offering insights for future research and practical implementations.

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