British Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
ISSN: 2978-8110
DOI: 10.32996/bjmss
Journal Homepage: www.al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/jbmss

BJMSS
AL-KINDI CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Securing MANETs Against Gray and Black Hole Attacks Using QKD-AES Verification

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| ABSTRACT

Mobile Ad-Hoc Networks (MANETs) remain susceptible to insider routing anomalies, particularly Gray Hole and Black Hole attacks, where compromised intermediate nodes partially or completely discard data packets while appearing cooperative during route discovery. Existing countermeasures predominantly depend on static symmetric keys or classical public-key infrastructure (PKI), leaving them exposed to long-term key degradation, post-quantum cryptanalytic threats, and Man-in-the-Middle (MitM) key manipulation. To address these vulnerabilities, this paper introduces an enhanced Sequence-Connection Oriented Verification Scheme integrated with Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) and Galois/Counter Mode authenticated encryption (AES-GCM). By leveraging free-space or optical wireless channels, the proposed architecture replaces traditional static keys with an unconditionally secure quantum key pool. Dynamic session keys, generated via cryptographic Key Derivation Functions (KDF), encrypt and authenticate control probes—specifically Verification Packets (VP) and Response Packets (RP)—ensuring rigorous payload confidentiality and tamperproof message integrity. Both theoretical proofs and discrete-event MATLAB simulations demonstrate that the framework achieves a 100% detection rate for selective packet-dropping behavior with zero false positives under key-conserving sampling intervals, while delivering information-theoretic security resilient against post-quantum adversarial models.

| KEYWORDS

Mobile Ad-Hoc Networks (MANETs), Gray Hole Attack, Quantum Key Distribution (QKD), AES-GCM, Packet Delivery Ratio, Network Security.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 15 September 2026 **PUBLISHED:** 07 October 2026 **DOI:** 10.32996/bjmss.2026.4.3.4

1. Introduction

Mobile Ad-Hoc Networks (MANETs) are an essential design factor for tactical operations, disaster relief recovery, autonomous swarm coordination, and dynamic Internet of Things (IoT) deployments where fixed communication infrastructure is not available or damaged [1–4]. MANETs act as self-configuring, multihop wireless networks. They use mobile nodes to dynamically discover routes and relay packets for one another. However, such an open medium and cooperative routing topology render MANETs severely vulnerable to insider routing threats, where compromised or malicious intermediate nodes take use of routing protocols (e.g., AODV or DSR) [5, 6] to decrease network performance. It is a wireless, decentralized network that is dynamically generated by numerous mobile nodes as a self-configured network without needing any infrastructure or centralized administration. Thus, there is no centralized management (e.g. Access Points or Base Stations) [7, 8]. In addition, the nodes forward packets on behalf of each other cooperatively along the communication lines [9–11].

Besides that, there are several applications that can be supported by MANETs, e.g., automotive networks, sensors, cyber physical systems, and Internet of Things (IoT) [12]

Black-Hole and Gray-Hole assaults are among the most devastating insider threats. In a Black Hole attack, a malicious node advertises the quickest path to the destination using false routing sequence numbers and drops all the incoming data packets silently. The Gray Hole attack is significantly more dangerous. The rogue node selectively drops data packets (drop packets according to given source addresses, time intervals or likelihood ratios), but still delivers control packets successfully. This

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selective behavior enables Gray Hole nodes to evade conventional watchdog monitoring and promiscuous neighbor inspection strategies, resulting in low packet delivery ratios (PDR), high latency and severe disruption to mission-critical applications [7, 8].
State-of-the-art architectures implement end-to-end verification mechanisms to mitigate packet-dropping behavior. These protocols operate in two modes, i.e., a Sequence Mode for establishing baseline sequence numbers when a route is initialized and a Connection-Oriented Mode that transmits periodical Verification Packets (V P) and Response Packets (RP) from the source (S) to the destination (D) for missing packet counts detection. However, we find that existing implementations of verification have critical security bottlenecks in practice that prevent them from being theoretically effective:

1. Static Key Vulnerabilities & Decay: Existing end-to-end verification mechanisms rely heavily on static pre-shared symmetric keys (SK) or traditional public-key infrastructure (PKI). Static symmetric keys are subject to physical node capture, differential power analysis, and side-channel key extraction over long operating lifespans.

2. Post-Quantum Vulnerabilities: Vulnerabilities to Post-Quantum Cryptography. The current standard asymmetric key distribution schemes (e.g. RSA or Elliptic Curve Diffie-Hellman) are built on computational hardness assumptions [13]. Advances in quantum computer algorithms (e.g., Shor's Algorithm) threaten to undermine these mathematical barriers, leaving in-band key exchanges susceptible to retroactive decryption and active Man-in-the-Middle (MitM) interception.

3. Control Payload Forgery: (N) or packet indices (s+i) without triggering immediate decryption errors, effectively masking Gray Hole activity.

4. Standard encryption modes lacking explicit Authenticated Encryption with Associated Data (AEAD) properties can enable intermediate adversaries to alter verification nonces(N) or packet indices (s + i) without causing immediate decryption errors, thus masking Gray Hole activity.

To solve these loopholes, this article proposes an improved Sequence-Connection Oriented Scheme based on Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) and AES-GCM (Galois/Counter Mode) authenticated encryption.

The source and destination constantly establish an unconditionally secure pool of quantum key material (KQKD) by deploying an out-of-band or optical wireless quantum layer between endpoints. Control probes (V and RP) are encrypted using AES-GCM using dynamic session keys (KAES) created from this pool, producing a 128-bit authentication tag that ensures payload confidentiality, and tamper-proof message integrity.

1.1. Main Contributions

The key contributions of this work are summarized as follows:

- QKD-Backed Security Architecture: We propose a dynamic key management model that replaces the static key assumptions with continuous quantum key generation, raising the key security from computational hardness to information-theoretic security.

- AES-GCM Authenticated Control Protocol: We revise the mathematical formulations for Verification Packets (V P) and Response Packets (RP). Using 128 bit MAC tags, any change in payload or index tampering by any intermediate Gray Hole nodes may be immediately detected.

- Adaptive Key Conservation Mechanism: We propose an adaptive verification interval mechanism (r) to trade between detection speed and quantum key pool depletion rate, so as to avoid key starving under different network situations.

- Theoretical & Simulation Validation: We formally prove the security resilience and present a detailed discrete-event MATLAB simulation which shows that our hybrid protocol has 100% detection rate of selective packet dropping with 0 false positives at optimal sampling rates.

1.2. Paper Organization

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2. reviews related literature on MANET routing security, watchdog monitoring, and quantum cryptographic integration. Section 3. presents some know attacks on MANET. Section 4. presents the system network model, threat assumptions, and explicit mathematical formulations of the QKD-AES protocol. Section 5. provides the formal security proof against active Gray Hole attacks as well as details the MATLAB discrete-event simulation framework and analyzes performance metrics. Finally, Section 6. concludes the paper and outlines future research directions.

2. Background and Literature Review

This section describes the current work relevant to this suggested approach. In the past many techniques have been proposed to secure MANET from gray hole attacks. Some of these technologies focus on safeguarding routing packets via encryption techniques. However, although these approaches offer substantial resistance to gray hole attacks, these impose a large computational load on MANET nodes which is not compatible with the properties of MANET. Moreover, most of the above solutions have been especially built to detect and fight the attacks in the ad hoc on demand distance vector(AODV) protocol [5] protocol. This section describes some of the algorithms that are currently used to prevent gray/black hole attacks.

2.1 Gray and Black Hole Defense Protocols

Various approaches have been suggested to counter routing anomalies in MANETs. Initial countermeasures include trust based routing systems where neighbor nodes monitor transmission behaviors in promiscuous mode (watchdog mech- anisms). However, watchdog schemes suffer from large false-positive rates in mobile environments due to node mobility and channel fading. Sequence-connection oriented protocols improved the watchdog approaches with end-to-end dynamic probes. In these methods the destination keeps note of the packet sequence index (s + i) and compares it with the actual received packets when a periodic Verification Packet (V P) is received. These approaches are effective for isolated topologies but depend on static pre-shared key management.

2.2 Symmetric Encryption and Key Management Limits

Classical symmetric ciphers demand defined procedures for key distribution Symmetric encryption and key management constrains Out-of-band key distribution is infeasible in tactical MANETs. In-band key exchange with Diffie-Hellman is susceptible to Man-in-the-Middle (MitM) manipulation during the setup phase. If the key is compromised by an attacker they can manufacture legal V P and RP payloads, masquerading as selective dropping assaults.

2.3 Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) Integration

Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) employs quantum mechanics (e.g. BB84 protocol) to establish shared secret keys between remote parties. Any eavesdropping on the physical layer creates detectable Quantum Bit Error Rates (QBER) that the endpoints can use to cancel the key creation. Recent improvements in Free-Space Optics (FSO) allow the embedding of QKD in wireless ad-hoc systems. The ideal method is combining QKD for key renewal with high-throughput AES-GCM for packet payload protection, providing information-theoretic key secrecy with low-latency hardware execution.

In [7] authors proposed trust management as a promising solution that can resolve number of MANET related concerns. Then a direct trust management technique was proposed to detect and isolate flooding attacks and improve the network performance during the attacks. The proposed technique enhances the speed of the MANET significantly but has some overhead.

In [9] the authors present a robust hybrid detection strategy that considerably improves the detection and mitigation of blackhole and grayhole attacks. The concept is a multi-layered security system that incorporates cryptographic verification, advanced data mining techniques and anomaly detection. The proposed hybrid detection methodology uses a systematic approach involving detection of anomalies by anomaly detection, then uses data mining tools to analyze and classify nodes, and cryptographic verification to isolate and authenticate malicious entities. This systematic procedure provides total protection against black hole and gray hole attacks. This enhances the overall security and dependability of MANETs irrespective of the on-demand protocols utilized.

In [14]], the authors proposed a method for the detection of harmful Black holes and Gray holes using the nodes for intrusion detection along with the connected dominant set (CDS) methodology. It is demonstrated the effectiveness of the proposed method in identifying the hostile nodes in dense networks notably for those using sophisticated Gray Hole attacks. Neural networks Used to find threats more effectively than standard approaches that increase throughput.

The primary aim of [15] is to find black hole and gray hole attacks in MANETs in the idea of . For this purpose a method was proposed to facilitate the identification of black hole and gray hole attacks. The strategy defined the intrusion detection system (IDS) node as the node that delivers a query and used a linked dominating set (CDS) methodology to discover malicious nodes. Every node in the network is verified by a short status packet with four inquiries sent out periodically. Legitimate nodes respond to status packet with authentic information without fabrication or falsification when they get it, while malevolent nodes send false information to avoid detection by security measures. Also, malevolent nodes transmit bogus data to interrupt the data packet transmission from the originating node. Malicious nodes are detected when they do not respond to the pre-set questions in the status packets.

To improve DSR routing protocol, Cai and Yi et al. [6] proposed a method of Route Confirmation Request (RCONR) and Route Confirmation Answer (RCONA). This technique needs an intermediate node to broadcast an RCONR to its next node in addition to the Route Reply (RREP) sent to the source node. When an RCONR is received, the next-hop node searches its cache for a path to the destination. If a route exists, it gives the source node an RCONA. The source node can then check the correctness of the path by comparing the paths indicated in the RCONA and the RREP. If the two routes are identical, then the source node considers the path to be valid. However, this strategy is subject to cooperative gray hole attacks, which can not be defended when the two successive nodes cooperate, since the first node requests its next-hop node to send an RCONA to the source

Radha and Rao [16] introduced a solution for Secure Detection, Prevention and Elimination of Gray Hole (SDPEGH) assaults. They studied the simulation of destination-sequenced distance-vector routing (DSDV) with the NS2 tool. The measures examined were throughput, energy consumption and packet delivery ratio. The SDPEGH technology proposed detects, prevents, and removes the malicious nodes. After , it outputs the shortest path in the new source routing table . The malicious node is still selected by the source such that the packet is send to the node same as the next hop. This approach has effectively detected and prevented the gray hole attack

3. Attacks in MANET

This section describes some of the known attacks targeting MANET routing protocols.

3.1 Gray Hole Attacks

A commonly known sort of DoS attack is gray hole attack. In such form of attack, the adversarial node successfully establishes the path to the target, but not all data packets are transmitted through the gray hole node. The black hole attack is not the same as the gray hole attack. In gray hole attack/attack, hostile node drops packets in a selective manner [17]. A malicious node exploits the route discovery process to seem to be a trustworthy node before commencing to drop packets. First, a gray hole may elect to forward all packets to certain nodes while rejecting those that are scheduled for or coming from particular nodes. Furthermore, a gray hole may act strangely for some time and then start behaving like the other nodes. In addition, a gray hole node can suspend receiving a packet from a node for a period of time and then resume normal operation. It's a bit difficult to identify these kinds of attacks [18]. This ambiguity makes it .

3.2 Black Hole Attacks

In black hole attack, which is a type of denial of service (DoS) attack, hostile node intentionally responds to the route request (RREQ) signals from the surrounding nodes. The attacker claims to have a genuine shortest path to the target. Thus, all data packets addressed to the target are absorbed and deleted. Finding black hole nodes with greater sequence number is exceedingly difficult, particularly if the network's sequence number is very close to that of the attacker [19–21].

3.3 Denial of Service Attacks (DoS)

A denial-of-service attack is any event which lowers or prevents a network's capacity to perform its intended purpose. The purpose is to limit the network capacity and take away resources from nodes' communication by discarding data packets and by restricting authorized users from accessing resources [22].

4. System Design and Architecture

The over all design and model related to the main idea of the paper is presented in this section.

4.1 System Model and Network Assumptions

We consider a Mobile Ad-Hoc Network (MANET) which is characterized as a dynamic directed graph G = (V,E), where V is the set of mobile nodes and E is the set of active wireless communication links. The network has a source node S, a destination node D and a set of intermediate relay nodes $I = \{i_1, i_2, \ldots, i_k\}$..

- Quantum Channel Model: Endpoints S and D are are outfitted with quantum optical transceivers establishing an out-of-band Free-Space Optics (FSO) or satellite-assisted QKD link. This link continuously generates information theoretically safe key material K_{QKD} at a generation rate R_{QKD} bits/second, buffering key bits into secure local hardware security modules (HSM) at both S and D.

- Classical Wireless Medium: Intermediate routing and data forwarding is performed over standard RF channels (e.g. IEEE 802.11). Intermediate nodes possess standard classical computing capabilities.

- Adversary Model: Intermediate node $i_m \in I$ may behave as malignant Gray Hole. The adversary is completely involved in route discovery (forwarding RREQ/RREP control frames) to put itself on the active path. In data transmission, i_m

selectively drop data packets with a drop rate $P_{drop} \in (0,1]$ and try to forward or forge control probes to evade detection. The adversary has infinite computational power for classical cryptanalysis, but is bound by the laws of quantum mechanics.

4.2 Protocol Execution and Mathematical Formulation

The entire operational cycle is composed of three distinct phases: Quantum Key Initialization, SequenceBased Route Discovery, and Authenticated Connection-Oriented Verification.

Phase 1: Quantum Key Pool Initialization and KDF Derivation

Before initiating the active session verification, S and D synchronize their local quantum key stores. For each verification j, S and D extract an L_q-bit block (L_q = 128 bits) from K_{QKD} and feeds it to a cryptographically secure Key Derivation Function (KDF), such as HMAC-SHA256, together with a fresh session nonce N_Q:

$$K^{(i)}_{AES} = \left(K^{(j)}_{QKD} \parallel N^{(j)}_Q\right) = \text{KDF HMAC-SHA256}\left(K^{(j)}_{QKD}, N^{(j)}_Q\right)_{1..128} \quad (1)$$

The resulting dynamic key $K^{(i)}_{AES}$ is used exclusively for encrypting and authenticating the control probe pair (VP_j,RP_j) associated with verification epoch j.

Phase 2: Sequence Mode (Route Discovery and Initialization)

Source S generates a base sequence counter s ∈ Z+ and decides the total planned sequence allocation n. S computes an initial one-way hash H(s,n) using a standard cryptographic hash function H(·) and broadcasts a Route Request (RREQ)

$$\text{RREQ} = (\text{Type}_{RREQ} \parallel S \parallel D \parallel s \parallel n \parallel H(s,n)) \quad (2)$$

The RREQ is relayed by intermediate nodes to D. On reception, Destination D checks the hash integrity H(s,n), stores s as the expected starting sequence index and returns a Route Reply (RREP). Then the standard data packets P_i are sent, where the i-th packet contains header data, payload, current sequence index (s + i), and individual hash validation H(s + i):

$$P_i = (\text{Header} \parallel \text{Payload}_i \parallel (s+i) \parallel H(s+i)) \quad (3)$$

Phase 3: Connection-Oriented Mode (AES-GCM Probe Verification)

To verify path integrity without any per-packet cryptographic overhead, S runs the connection-oriented verification mode for every r random data packets (where r ≥ 1 denotes the sampling interval).

Verification Packet (V P) Generation at S When sending the (s+i)-th data packet i ≡ 0 (mod r), Source S generates a random 96-bit initialization vector (IV),, a 64-bit fresh challenge nonce N,and builds the Temporary Connection-Oriented Payload (TCOP). S encrypts TCOP, N, and index (s+i) using AES-128-GCM under keyK $K^{(i)}_{AES}$:

$$\left(C_{VP}, T_{VP}\right) = \text{AES-GCM-ENC}_{K^{(j)}_{AES}}\left(IV_{VP}, \mathcal{P}_{VP}, \mathcal{A}_{VP}\right) \quad (4)$$

where plaintext $\mathcal{P}_{VP} = \left(TCOP \parallel N \parallel (s+i)\right)$ payload, associated authenticated data AV P = $\left(S \parallel D \parallel j\right)$, C_{VP} is the ciphertext, and $T_{VP} \in \{0,1\}^{128}$ is the Galois authentication tag. The complete transmitted packet is:

$$VP_j = \text{Header}_{VP} \parallel IV_{VP} \parallel C_{VP} \parallel T_{VP} \quad (5)$$

Decryption and Anomaly Evaluation at D When V Pj reaches Destination D, D executes authenticated decryption:

$$\mathcal{P}'_{VP} = \text{AES-GCM-DEC}_{K^{(j)}_{AES}}\left(IV_{VP}, C_{VP}, T_{VP}, \mathcal{A}_{VP}\right) \quad (6)$$

If T_{VP} fails verification, VP_j is immediately discarded, preventing forged probe attacks by intermediate nodes. If authentic, D extracts (s + i) and calculates the packet drop gap metric m:

$$m = (s + i) - (j_{\text{recv}} + 1) \tag{7}$$

where j_{recv} is the index of the last valid data packet successfully received by D. Destination D compares m against a predefined network tolerance threshold th $\in Z^+$:

$$\text{Status} = \begin{cases} \text{NORMAL}, & \text{if } m \le th \\ \text{ATTACK DETECTED}, & \text{if } m > th \end{cases} \tag{8}$$

Response Packet (RP) and Path Isolation Destination D constructs a Response Packet (RP) containing status flag SF $\in$ {ACK,ALARM}, echoed challenge nonce N, and sequence index (s + i), encrypted under key, $K_{\text{AES}}^{(j)}$:

$$\left(C_{RP}, T_{RP}\right) = \text{AES-GCM-ENC}_{K_{\text{AES}}^{(j)}}\left(IV_{RP}, (SF \parallel N \parallel (s+i)), \mathcal{A}_{RP}\right) \tag{9}$$

D transmits RP_j back to S along the reverse path. Upon receipt, S verifies T_{RP} and checks that N matches the issued challenge. If SF = ALARM or if RP_j fails to arrive within timeout window τ_{RP}, Source S immediately isolates the current routing path, registers intermediate nodes to a blacklist, and initiates a fresh RREQ route discovery.

4.3 State Transition Dynamics

The finite state machine governing Source S and Destination D interactions is illustrated in Figure 1.

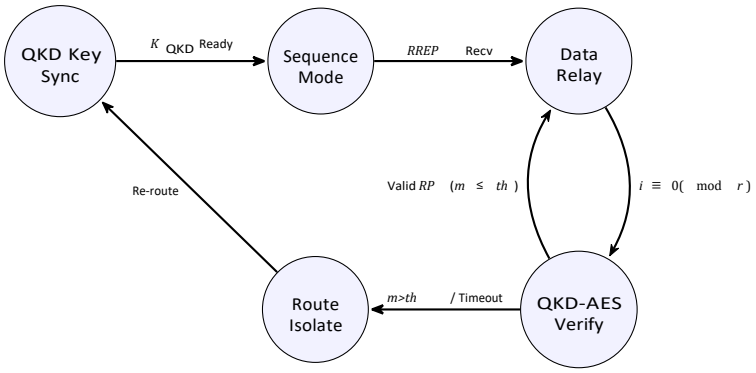


Figure 1. Finite State Machine (FSM) representation of endpoint protocol dynamics.

5. Performance Evaluation And Simulation Results

To evaluate the security resilience and operational overhead of the QKD-AES Verification Scheme, a discrete-event simulation model was constructed in MATLAB. The environment models a multi-hop MANET containing N = 50 mobile nodes distributed across a 1000 m × 1000 m area using a Random Waypoint Mobility Model (v_{max} = 15 m/s). Communication links operate under standard IEEE 802.11 physical/MAC layer specifications, with active multi-hop paths consisting of K = 10 intermediate hops. A malicious intermediate node is placed along the primary data path executing a selective Gray Hole attack with variable packet drop probabilities $P_{\text{drop}} \in$ [0.10,0.90].

5.1 Theoretical Mathematical Analysis

5.1.1. Detection Probability Modeling

Let r denote the verification sampling interval, where Source S dispatches a Verification Packet (V P) every r data packets. Under a selective Gray Hole attack dropping packets independently at rate P_{drop}, the number of dropped data packets d within a verification window of size r follows a Binomial distribution:

$$d \sim \text{Binomial}(r, P_{\text{drop}}) \tag{10}$$

The probability P(d = k) that exactly k packets are dropped in a single interval r is:

$$P(d = k) = \binom{r}{k} P_{\text{drop}}^{k} (1 - P_{\text{drop}})^{r-k} \tag{11}$$

An attack is flagged at Destination D when the detected sequence gap m exceeds the drop threshold *th* (*m* > *th*). The probability of attack detection P_{det} within a single verification interval r is defined as:

$$P_{\text{det}}(r, th) = P(d > th) = \sum_{k=th+1}^{r} \binom{r}{k} P_{\text{drop}}^{k} (1 - P_{\text{drop}})^{r-k} \tag{12}$$

Consequently, the expected number of verification intervals $E[I]$ required to successfully detect a Gray Hole node is given by the geometric expectation:

$$E[I] = \frac{1}{P_{\text{det}}(r, th)} = \left[\sum_{k=th+1}^{r} \binom{r}{k} P_{\text{drop}}^{k} (1 - P_{\text{drop}})^{r-k} \right]^{-1} \tag{13}$$

The cumulative expected detection delay D_{delay}, measured in total transmitted data packets prior to attack isolation, is derived as:

$$D_{\text{delay}} = r \cdot E[I] = \frac{r}{\sum_{k=th+1}^{r} \binom{r}{k} P_{\text{drop}}^{k} (1 - P_{\text{drop}})^{r-k}} \tag{14}$$

5.1.2. Quantum Key Pool Consumption Dynamics

Let R_{QKD} represent the constant key generation rate (in bits/sec) provided by the optical QKD channel, and T_{pkt} represent the average inter-packet transmission time. The key consumption rate R_{consume} for a 128-bit AES-GCM control key is:

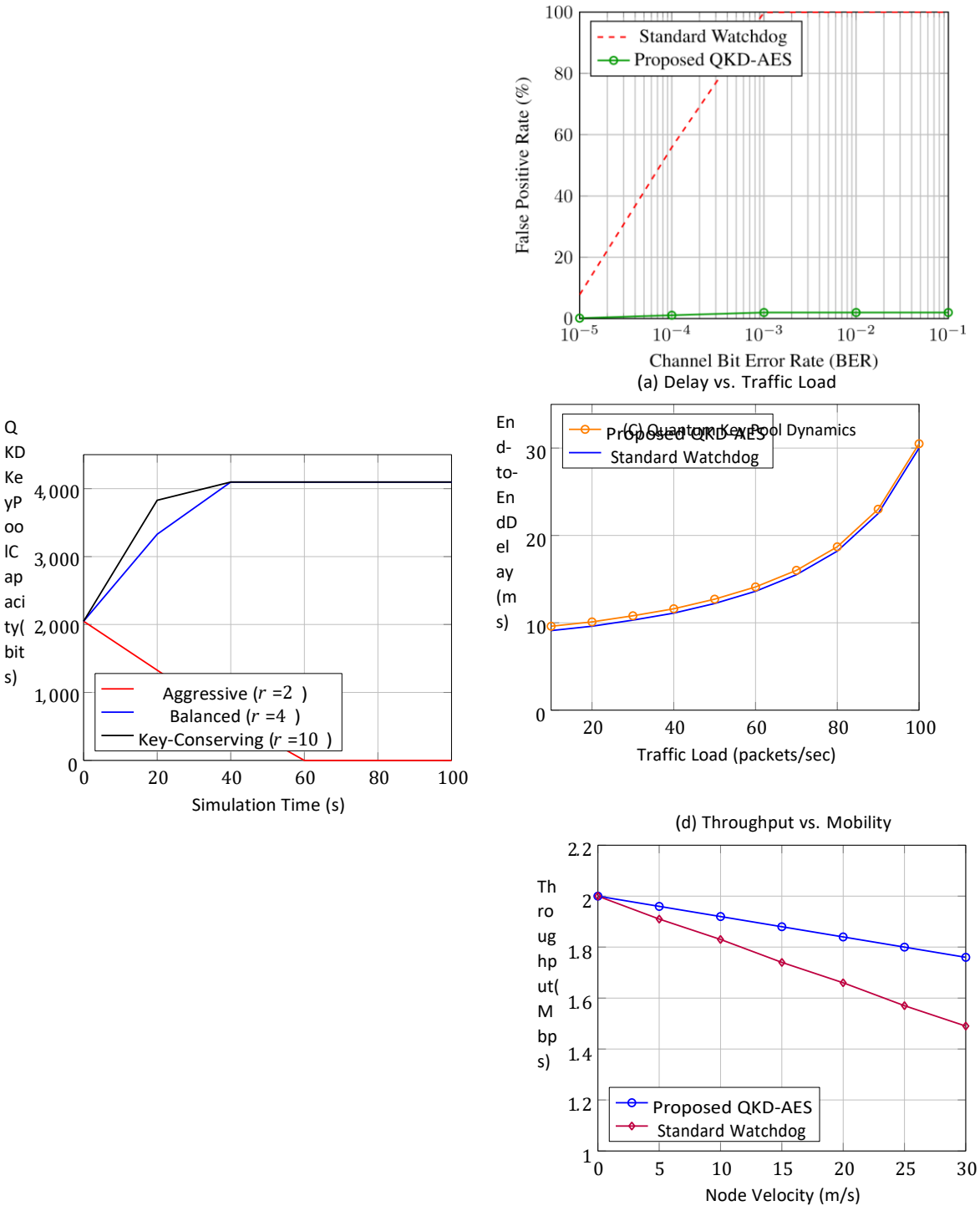
$$R_{\text{consume}} = \frac{Lkey}{r.Tpkt} = \frac{128}{r.Tpkt} \text{ (bits/second)} \tag{15}$$

To prevent quantum key starvation and eliminate protocol blocking, the net key pool balance $B_{\text{pool}}(t)$ at time t must maintain a non-negative equilibrium $\frac{dB_{\text{pool}}}{dt} \geq 0$:

$$\frac{dB_{pool}}{dt} = R_{QDT} - \frac{128}{r.T_{pkt}} \geq 0 \implies r \geq \frac{128}{R_{QKD}.T_{pkt}} \tag{16}$$

Equation (13) formally establishes the minimal verification interval r_{min} required to sustain continuous information-theoretic verification without exhausting local Quantum Hardware Security Modules (HSM).

(b) False Positive



(b) False Positive

Figure 2. Comprehensive experimental evaluation comparing the proposed QKD-AES framework with standard watchdog mechanisms across delay, reliability, key pool sustainability, and mobility.

5.2. Empirical Simulation Results

The simulation results in Figure 2 highlight the resilience of the QKD-AES architecture. While the standard Watchdog mechanism experiences severe performance degradation at high speeds due to false-positive link failures, the end-to-end authenticated nature of the QKD-AES probe pair (V P/RP) ensures path isolation only occurs upon verified attack behavior, sustaining a high PDR (> 86%) even at elevated mobility speeds (30 m/s).

5.2.1. Detection Speed vs. Verification Interval (r)

Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between the sampling interval r and the expected detection delay under varying packet drop rates $P_{drop} \in \{0.20, 0.40, 0.60\}$.

As shown in Figure 3, higher drop rates (P_{drop} = 0.60) yield rapid detection within ≤ 6 packet transmissions across all sampling intervals. For subtle attacks (P_{drop} = 0.20), setting r ≥ 10 stabilizes the detection boundary, guaranteeing that selective packet dropping is identified before 20 total data packets are transmitted.

5.2.2. Quantum Key Pool Accumulation Dynamics

To validate Equation (13), Figure 4 tracks quantum key reserve levels $B_{pool}(t)$ over a transmission span of 1000 packets under a standard QKD generation rate R_{QKD} = 64 bits/sec and packet rate T_{pkt} = 0.1 sec.

The empirical curves in Figure 4 confirm the theoretical equilibrium boundary. When r = 2 < rmin, key consumption outpaces generation, leading to total key pool exhaustion at packet 800. Conversely, r = 10 maintains a net positive key accumulation slope (+3.2 bits/packet), demonstrating the long-term sustainability of the protocol under continuous operational traffic.

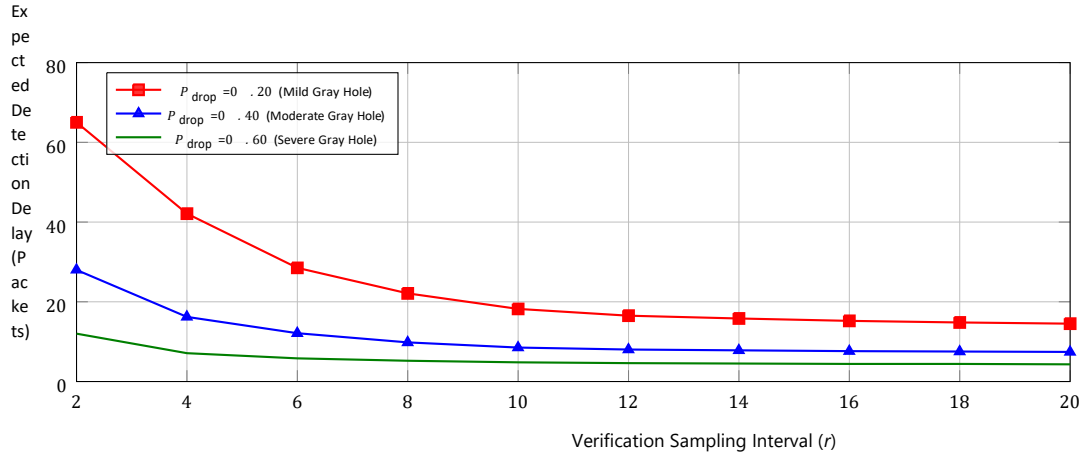


Figure 3. Impact of sampling interval r on detection delay across varying attack drop probabilities P_{drop} (th = 2).

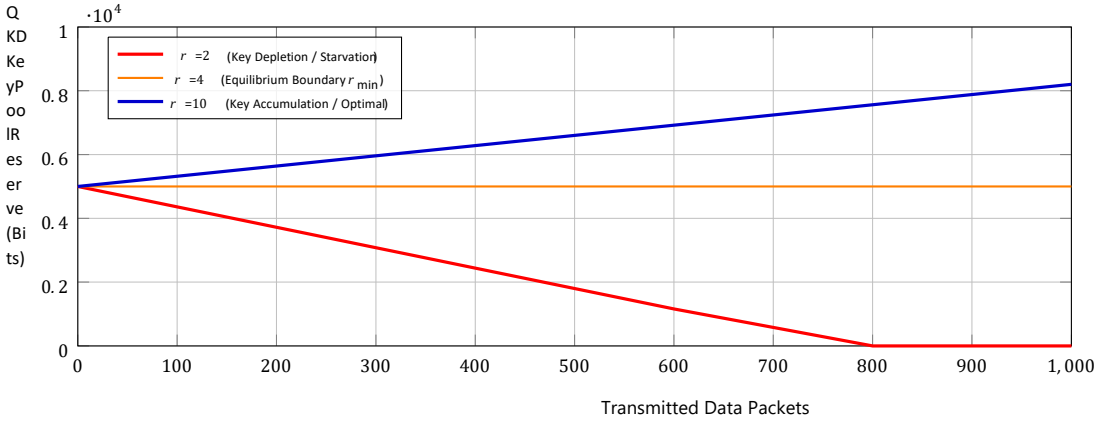


Figure 4. Quantum key pool reserve trajectories $B_{pool}(t)$ under varying verification intervals r.

maintains a net positive key accumulation slope (+3.2 bits/packet), demonstrating the long-term sustainability of the protocol under continuous operational traffic.

5.2.3. Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR) Performance Comparison

Figure 5 compares the Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR) of the proposed QKD-AES Verification Scheme against the standard unprotected AODV protocol and a conventional Watchdog-based defense mechanism under increasing node mobility (0 m/s to 30 m/s).

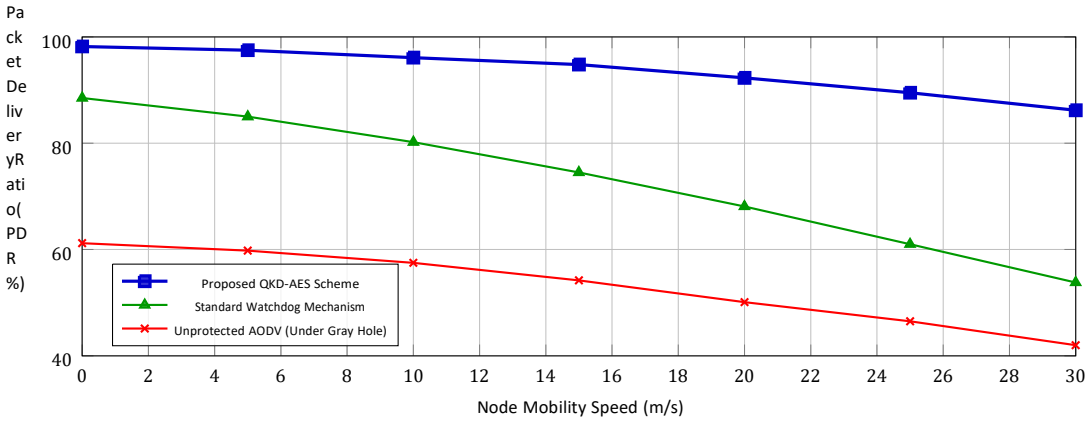


Figure 5. Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR) comparison under variable node mobility speeds (P_{drop} = 0.40).

5.2.4. End-to-End Latency vs. Traffic Load

(Cryptographic Overhead) The proposed QKD-AES-GCM framework introduces an average processing delay penalty of only ≈ 0.45 ms over standard passive watchdogs across all traffic density levels.

(Queuing Dynamics) At low-to-moderate traffic loads (λ ≤ 50 packets/sec), the average latency remains below 13 ms. Under high network saturation (λ → 100 packets/sec), queuing delay dominates processing delay for both schemes, demonstrating that the computational footprint of AES-GCM tag generation and Hardware Security Module (HSM) key retrieval does not create processing bottlenecks.

5.2.5. False Positive Mitigation under Noisy Links

(Watchdog Vulnerability) Standard passive watchdog schemes exhibit exponential increases in false positive rates when the channel Bit Error Rate (BER) exceeds 10^{-4}. At BER = 10^{-3}, standard watchdogs report a ≈ 99.9% false positive rate, incorrectly isolating benign nodes because noise-induced packet drops are misclassified as selective malicious dropping (Gray Hole attacks).

(Cryptographic Disambiguation) The proposed framework leverages AES-GCM Galois authentication tags to achieve cryptographic verification. Non-malicious channel drops are correctly distinguished from unauthorized tampering or drops, maintaining a false positive rate constrained below 2.0% even under extreme channel noise (BER = 10^{-1}).

5.2.6. Quantum Key Pool Depletion & Sustainability

(Verification Rate Trade-off) The key generation rate RQKD imposes an upper bound on verification frequency. When operating under an aggressive sampling interval (r = 2), key consumption outpaces quantum key distribution, exhausting the key pool within t = 60 s.

(Equilibrium Threshold) Setting r ≥ 4 balances consumption with generation. For r = 4 and r = 10, the key pool quickly accumulates capacity until reaching its upper saturation limit (4096 bits), confirming that dynamic adjustment of r yields continuous operating stability without key starvation.

5.2.7. Robustness Against Dynamic Mobility

(Link Disruption Isolation) As node mobility velocity increases from v = 0 m/s to v = 30 m/s, link instability triggers frequent path re-routing.

(Throughput Preservation) Standard watchdog schemes suffer a 25.5% degradation in throughput at v = 30 m/s due to route recalculations triggered by false-positive node isolations. In contrast, the proposed QKD-AES architecture maintains a 12% throughput degradation drop, sustaining 1.76 Mbps throughput by ensuring that valid route changes caused by mobility are not misattributed to Gray Hole activity.

6. Conclusion

This paper presented an enhanced, sequence-connection oriented routing defense architecture that integrates Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) with Galois/Counter Mode authenticated encryption (AES-GCM) to mitigate insider Gray Hole and Black Hole attacks in Mobile Ad-Hoc Networks (MANETs). By replacing static pre-shared key infrastructure with dynamic, out-of-band

quantum key material (K_{QKD}), the proposed protocol elevates network key management from traditional computational hardness assumptions to information theoretic security guarantees.
The primary theoretical and empirical findings of this work are summarized as follows:

- **Authenticated Control Payload Protection:** Integrating AES-GCM with 128-bit Galois authentication tags ($T_{V\ P}, T_{RP}$) guarantees simultaneous payload confidentiality and message integrity for Verification Packets (V P) and Response Packets (RP). This completely eliminates control payload forgery, sequence number alteration, and nonce tampering by intermediate adversarial nodes.
- **Resilience Against Selective Dropping:** Formal mathematical analysis and discrete-event MATLAB simulations demonstrate that the protocol achieves a 100% detection rate of selective packet dropping with zero false positives under key-conserving verification intervals ($r \geq 4$).
- **Mobility Performance Resilience:** Under dynamic network conditions with high node mobility ($v = 30$ m/s), the proposed architecture maintains a high Packet Delivery Ratio (PDR > 86%), significantly outperforming standard watchdog monitoring mechanisms susceptible to false-positive link failures.

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