

# RISCy Cache Coherence

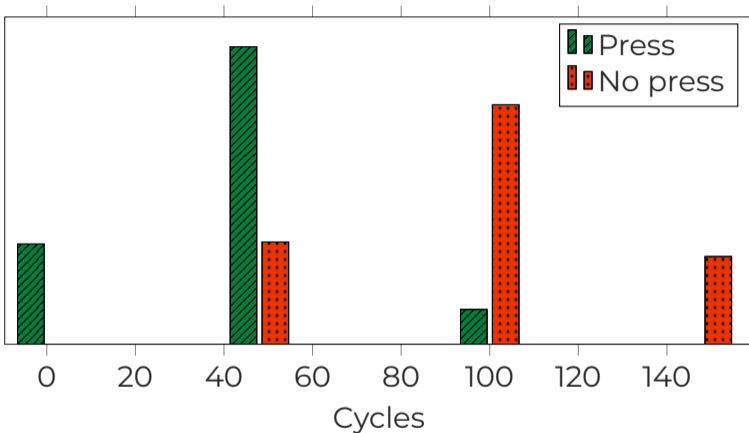
*Timer-Free Architectural Cache Attacks via  
Instruction/Data Cache Incoherence*

**Fabian Thomas**, Michael Schwarz





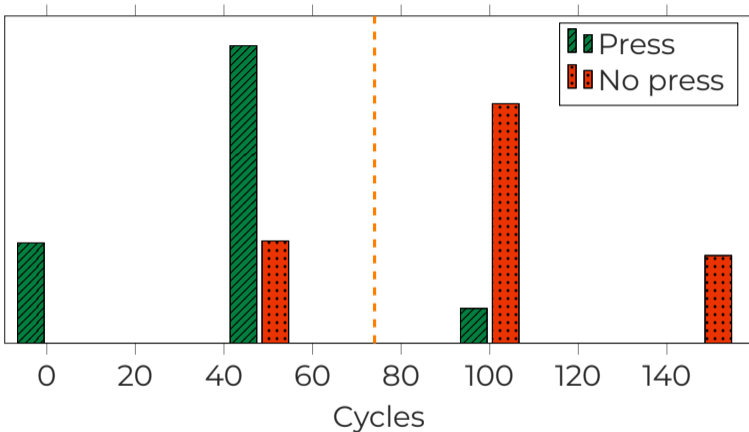
## Where do you draw the line?



Qualcomm Snapdragon X (Oryon)



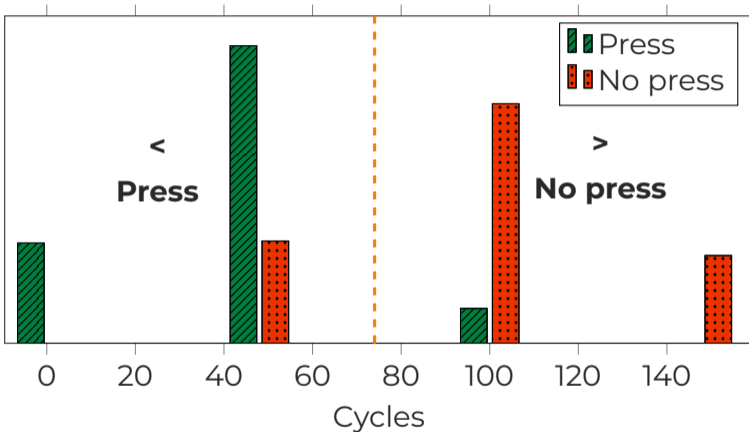
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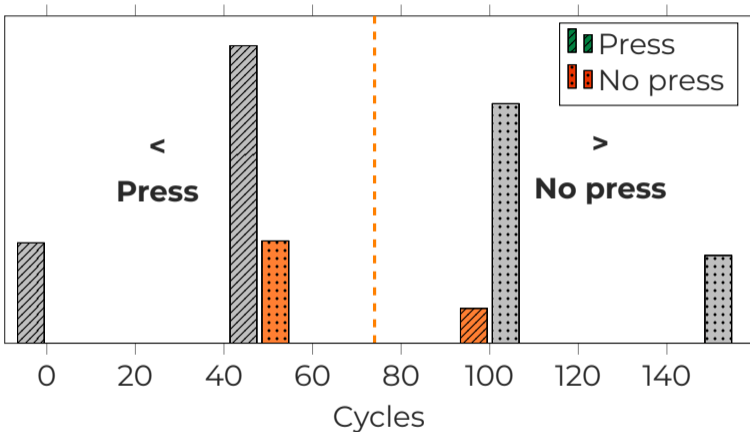
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Qualcomm Snapdragon X (Oryon)



# Where do you draw the line?



Qualcomm Snapdragon X (Oryon)

To offer protection against timing attacks and [fingerprinting](#), `performance.now()` is coarsened based on whether or not the document is [cross-origin isolated](#).

- Resolution in isolated contexts: 5 microseconds
- Resolution in non-isolated contexts: 100 microseconds

Before version 91, [timer resolutions](#) in Chrome were restricted to 5 microseconds on desktop, where [site-isolation](#) is enabled, and to 100 microseconds on Android, where it's not.

Starting from version 91, following a [specification change](#), Chrome will be restricting the resolution of explicit [timers](#) (`performance.now()`, `performance.timeOrigin`, and other performance APIs that expose `DOMHighResTimestamps`) to 100 microseconds across platforms. By enabling [cross-origin isolation](#), websites can relax the restriction to 5 microseconds regardless of platform.

Commit 25e5753

 rniwa committed on Jan 8, 2018

Reduce the precision of "high" resolution time to 1ms

[https://bugs.webkit.org/show\\_bug.cgi?id=189910](https://bugs.webkit.org/show_bug.cgi?id=189910)

<rdar://problem/36885943>

Reviewed by Sam Barati.

Source/WebCore:

Reduced the high precision time's resolution to 1ms, the same precision as `Date.now()`.

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## Solution: Timer-Free Side Channels

# I<sup>2</sup>SC: Instruction-Cache Incoherence Side Channel



## Building Block 1

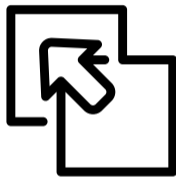
Leak I-cache state via I/D-Cache  
Incoherence

# I<sup>2</sup>SC: Instruction-Cache Incoherence Side Channel



## Building Block 1

Leak I-cache state via I/D-Cache  
Incoherence



## Building Block 2

Transfer cache state of D-cache  
line to I-cache line



# B1: Leaking I-Cache State Without Timers

store "mov r0, 0"

exec code

**D-cache**

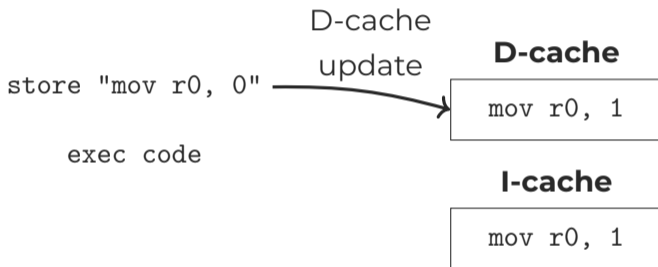
mov r0, 1

**I-cache**

mov r0, 1

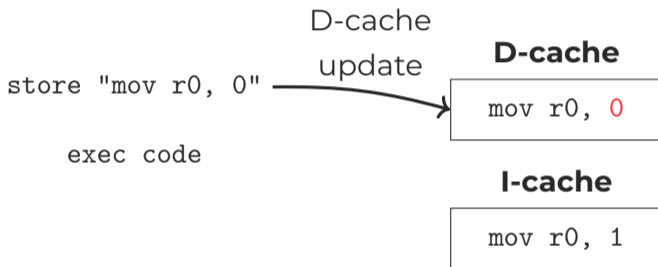


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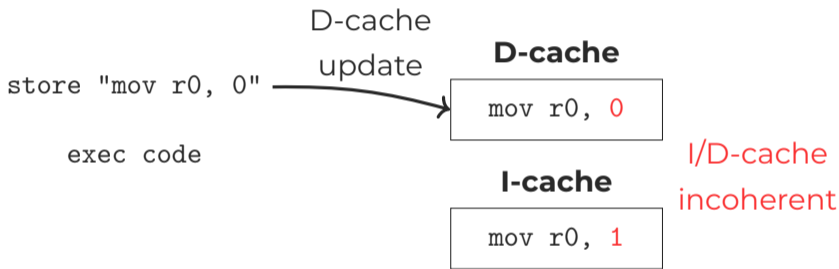


# B1: Leaking I-Cache State Without Timers



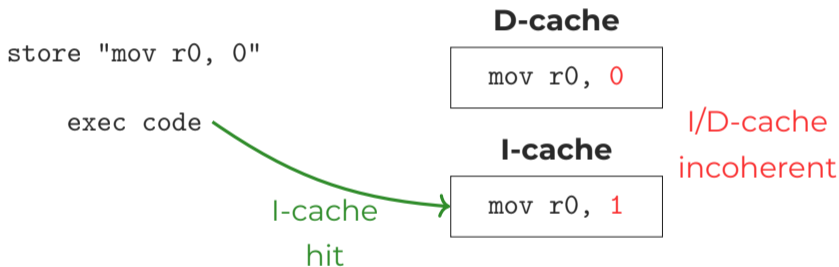


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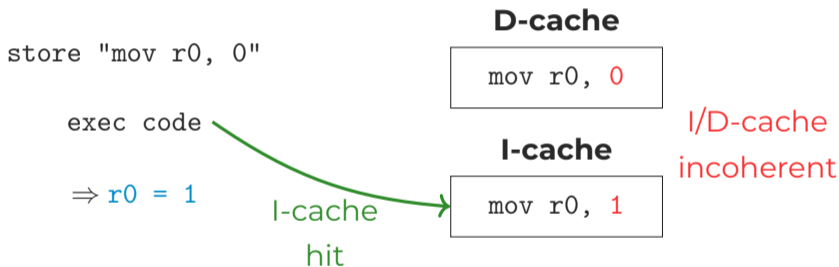


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store "mov r0, 0"

exec code

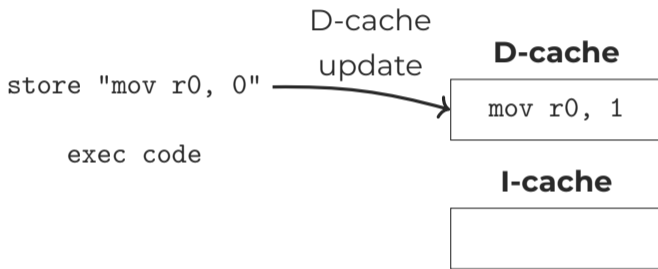
**D-cache**

mov r0, 1

**I-cache**

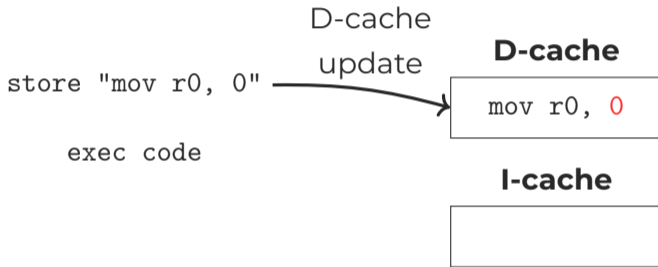


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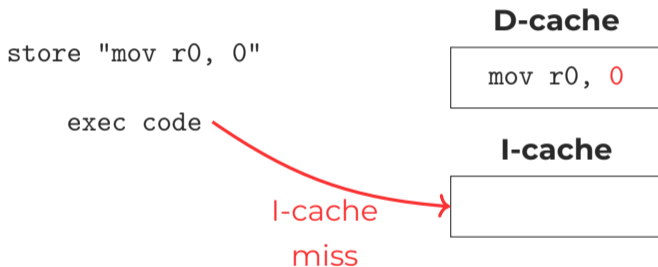


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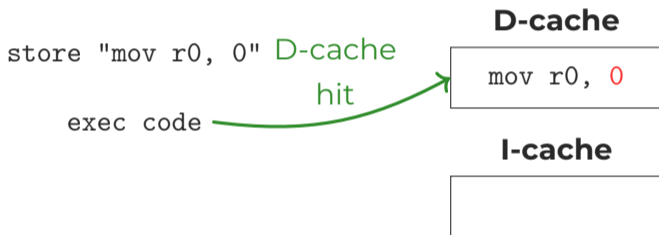


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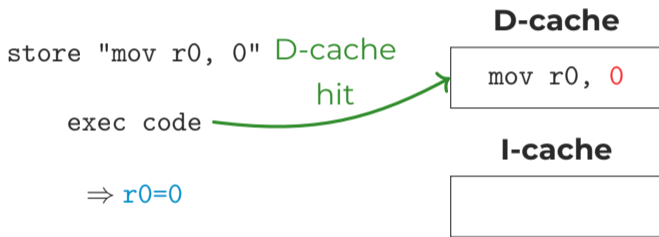


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**D-cache**

```
mov r0, 0
```

**I-cache**

```
mov r0, 1
```

$\Rightarrow r0 = 1$

**D-cache**

```
mov r0, 0
```

**I-cache**

$\Rightarrow r0 = 0$

**code in I-cache**  $\Leftrightarrow r0 = 1$



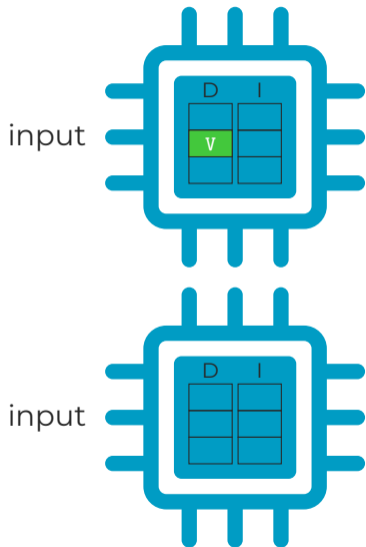
# B1: Leaking I-Cache State Without Timers

Architecture	ARM								RISC-V			LoongArch						
Vendor	ARM								Qualcomm	Huawei	Apple	T-Head	SpacemiT	Loongson				
Microarchitecture	Cortex-A520	Cortex-A72	Cortex-A73	Cortex-A76	Cortex-A78	Cortex-A720	Cortex-A725	Cortex-X4	Neoverse-N1	Oryon	Kunpeng Pro	Icestorm	Firestorm	C906	C908	C910	X60	3A5000-HV
Building Blocks	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●

● = B1 works.

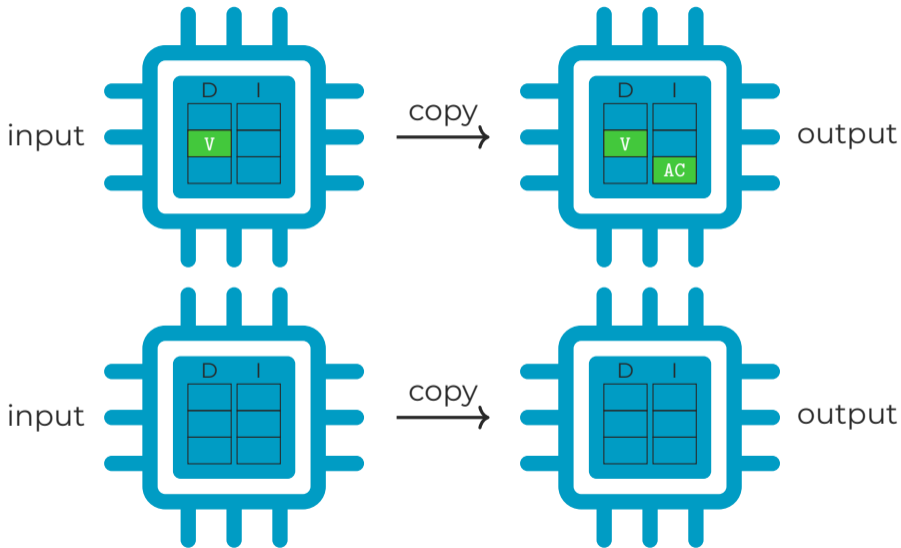


## B2: Cache-State Transfer Gadget





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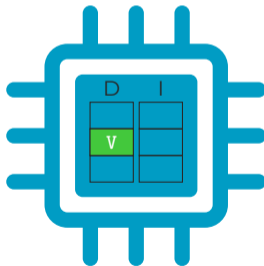
LOAD LR, [x2]

RETURN ←

LOAD x2, VICTIM

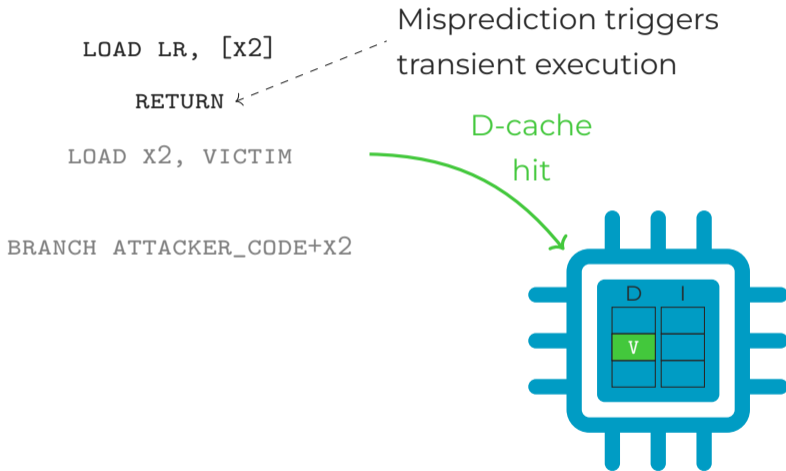
BRANCH ATTACKER\_CODE+x2

Misprediction triggers  
transient execution



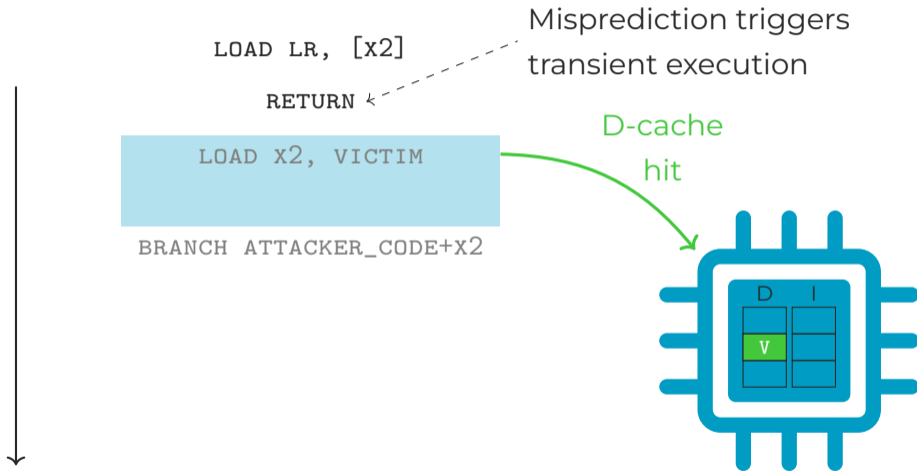


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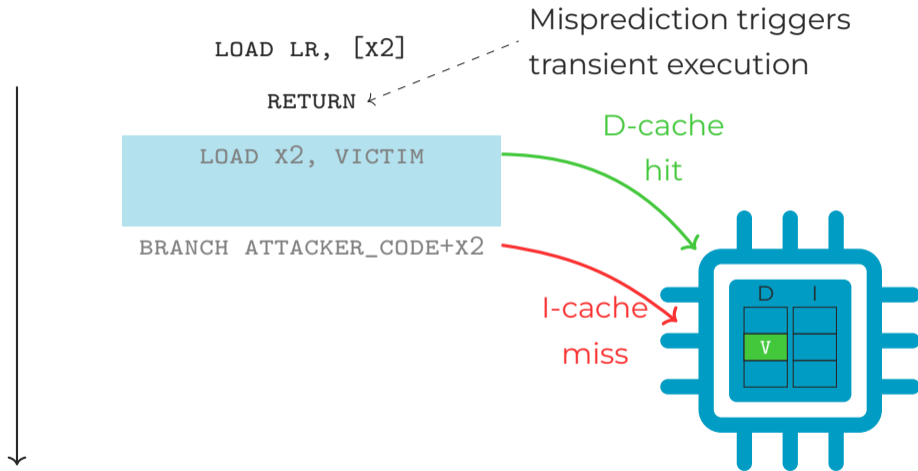


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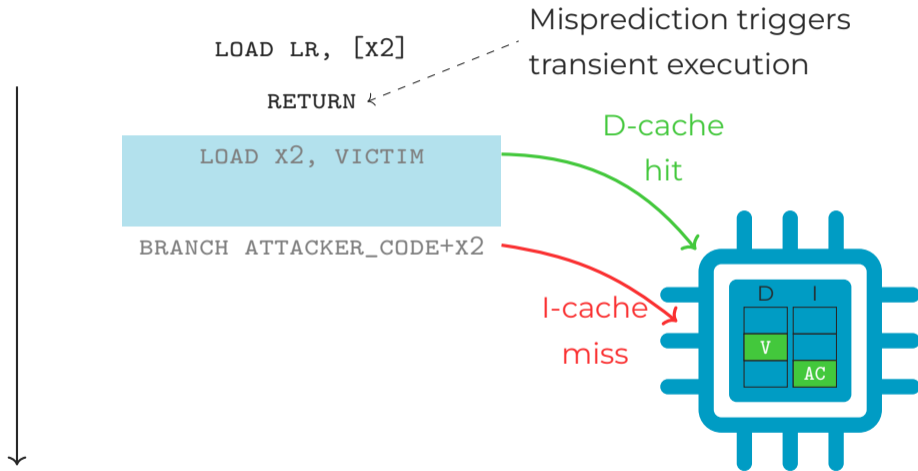


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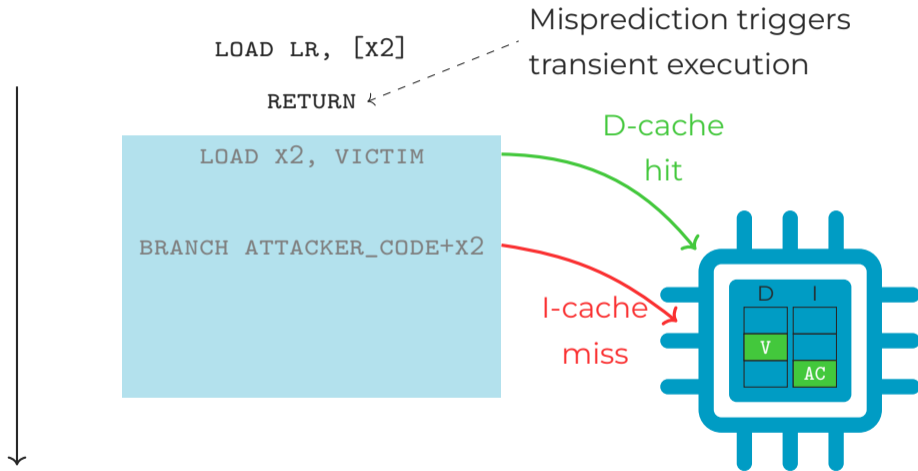


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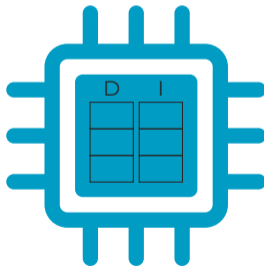
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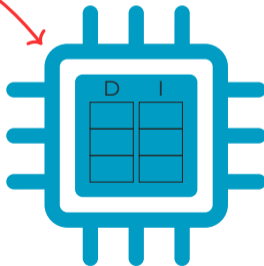
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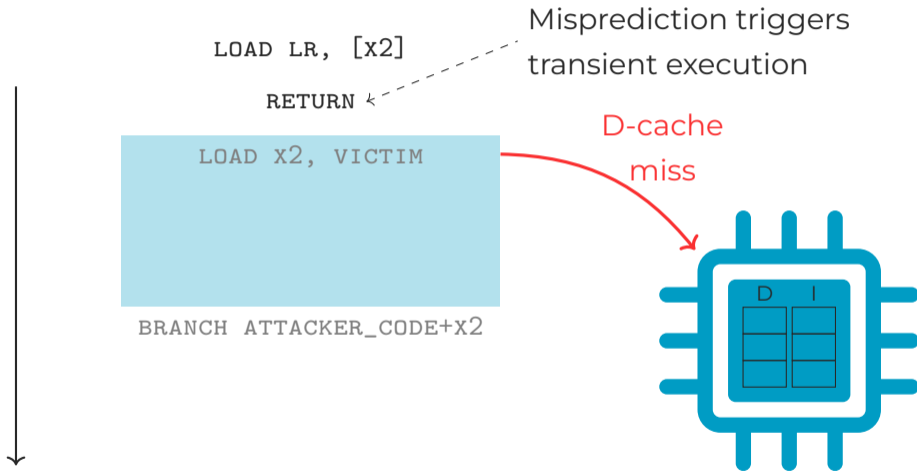
Misprediction triggers  
transient execution

D-cache  
miss



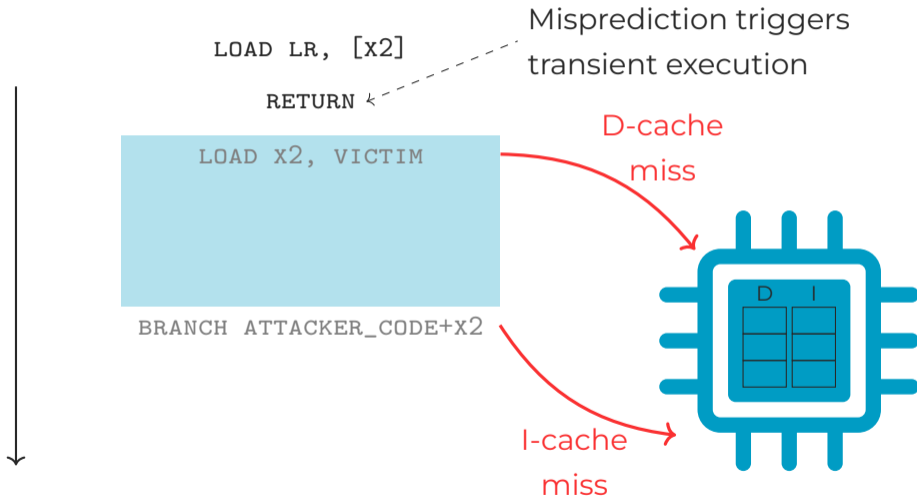


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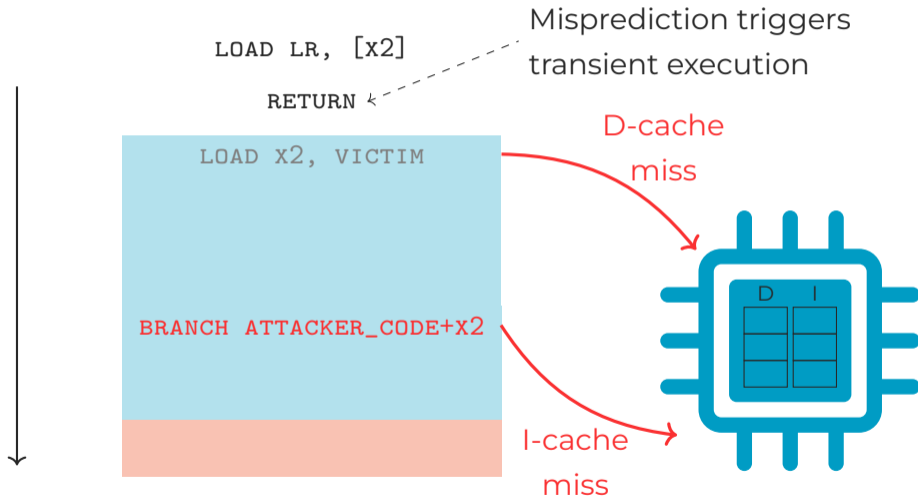


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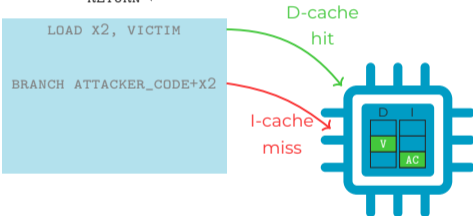
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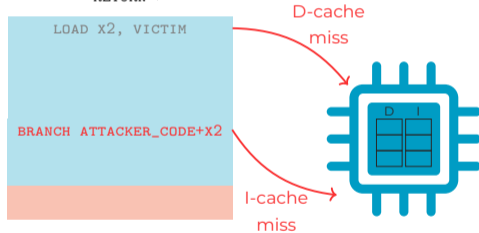


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Misprediction triggers transient execution



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**victim in cache**  $\iff$  **attacker code in cache**



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Building Blocks	○	◐	○	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	○	○	◐	○	◐

◐ = B2 works.





## Case Studies



AES T-table  
key recovery,  
**100%** (Ours) vs.  
**1%** (Flush+Reload)



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key recovery,  
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Spectral attacks,  
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AES T-table  
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Spectral attacks,  
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Side-Channel Attack  
on Android shared  
library (Pixel 9)



# Summary

- Modern systems **restrict timers**

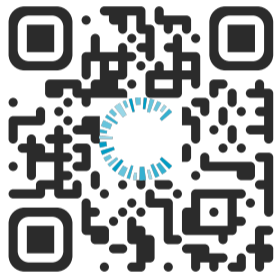


`s.roots.ec/riscy`



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[s.roots.ec/riscy](https://s.roots.ec/riscy)



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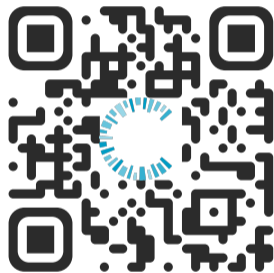


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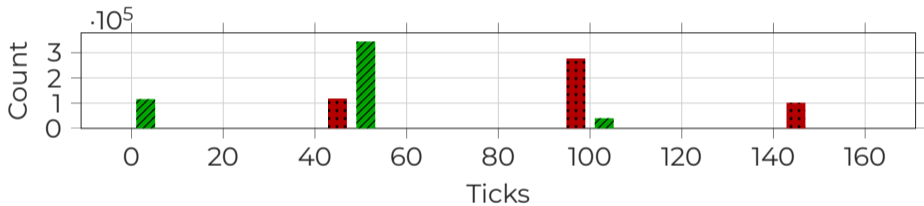
## Summary

- Modern systems **restrict timers**
- I<sup>2</sup>SC is a **timer-free alternative** for classical side-channel attacks on the D-cache
- Building Block 1: Use **D/I-cache incoherence** as side channel
- Building Block 2: **Transfer cache state** of D-cache line to I-cache line
- Available on **12 microarchitectures** across **3 RISC ISAs** (ARM, RISC-V, LoongArch)

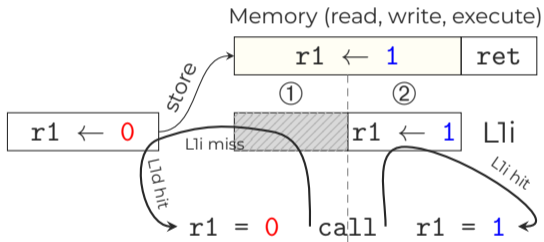


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# Timer Histogram (Oryon)

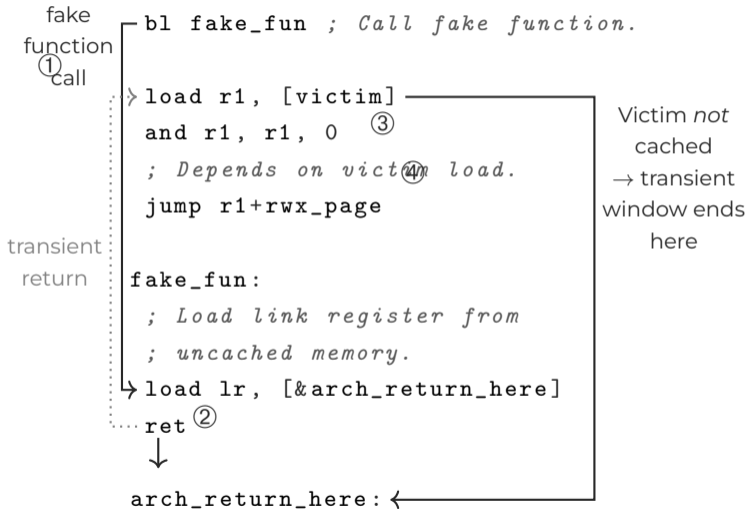


# I<sup>2</sup>SC Overview





# Cache-State Copier Gadget





# Devices

ISA	Microarchitecture	Device	SoC	RAM	OS
ARM	Cortex-A520	Google Pixel 9	Google Tensor G4	12GB	Android 16
	Cortex-A72	MOCHAbin 5G	Marvell ARMADA	8GB	Ubuntu 18.04.6 LTS
	Cortex-A73	ODROID-N2+	Amlogic S922X	4GB	Ubuntu 20.04.5 LTS
	Cortex-A76	NanoPi R6S	Rockchip RK3588S	8GB	Ubuntu 22.04.2 LTS
	Cortex-A78	Radxa NIO 12L	MediaTek Genio 1200	16GB	Rity Demo Layer 23.2-release (kirkstone)
	Cortex-A720	Google Pixel 9	Google Tensor G4	12GB	Android 16
	Cortex-A725	Poco X7 Pro	Mediatek Dimensity 8400 Ultra	8GB	Android 15
	Cortex-X4	Google Pixel 9	Google Tensor G4	12GB	Android 16
	Neoverse-N1	Ampere Altra Q64-30	Ampere Altra Q64-30	64GB	Ubuntu 24.04.2 LTS
	Oryon	Lenovo ThinkCentre Neo 50q QC	Snapdragon X (X1-26-100)	16GB	Microsoft Windows 11 Pro
	Kunpeng Pro	OrangePi Kunpeng Pro	Huawei Kunpeng	16GB	openEuler 22.03 (LTS-SP3)
	Icestorm	Apple MacBook (M1)	Apple M1	16GB	Arch Linux ARM
Firestorm	Apple MacBook (M1)	Apple M1	16GB	Arch Linux ARM	
RISC-V	C906	Lichee RV Dock	Allwinner D1	1GB	Ubuntu 24.04 LTS
	C908	youyeetoo CanMV-K230	Kendryte K230	1GB	Debian GNU/Linux trixie/sid
	C910	LicheePi 4A	T-Head TH1520	8GB	Debian GNU/Linux 12 (bookworm)
	X60	Banana Pi BPI-F3	SpacemiT K1	4GB	Armbian-bpi-SpacemiT 24.5.0-trunk sid
LoongArch	3A5000-HV	Loongson 3A5000	Loongson 3A5000	32GB	Loongnix GNU/Linux 20 (DaoXiangHu)

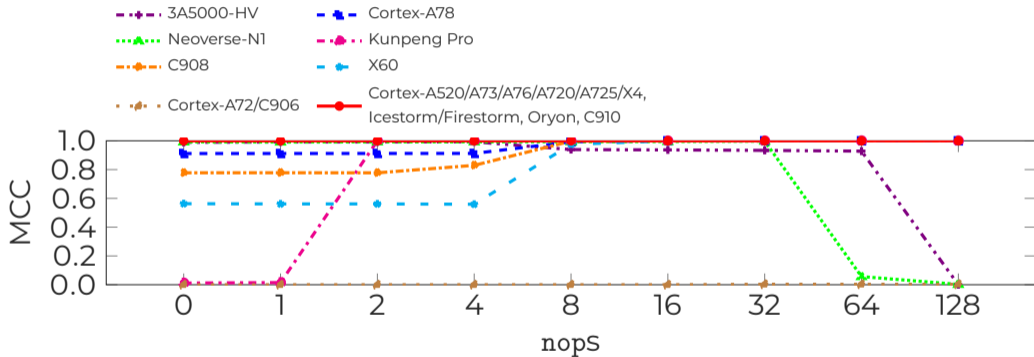


# Forwarding Test

```
; initially [rwx_page] = mov reg1, 1; ret
store mov_reg1_0, [rwx_page]
memory barrier ; optional
N * nop ;  $N=1 \ll k, 0 \leq k \leq 15$ 
jump rwx_page
; observe architectural result in reg1
store mov_reg1_0, [overwrite_here]
memory barrier ; optional
N * nop ;  $N=1 \ll k, 0 \leq k \leq 15$ 
overwrite_here:
mov reg1, 1
; observe architectural result in reg1
```



# Propagation Test





# Transient Fetch Evaluation

Microarch.	Data Load		Instr. Fetch		B2
	uncached	cached	uncached	cached	
Cortex-A72					✓
Cortex-A73					
Cortex-A76					✓
Cortex-A78					✓
Cortex-A720					✓
Cortex-A725					✓
Cortex-X4					✓
Neoverse-N1					✓
Oryon					✓
Kunpeng Pro					✓
Icestorm					✓
Firestorm					✓
C910					✓
3A5000-HV					✓



# B1 Covert Channel

Microarch.	Error Rate (% , ↓)			Throughput (kbit s <sup>-1</sup> , ↑)			Resolution (μs , ↓)		
	Timer	B1	Δ	Timer	B1	Δ%	Timer	B1	Δ%
Cortex-A520	2.83	0.00	-2.8	615.21	777.95	+26.5	1.63	1.29	-20.9
Cortex-A73	0.01	0.18	+0.2	956.99	1410.35	+47.4	1.04	0.71	-31.7
Cortex-A76	15.79	0.03	-15.8	889.83	1036.97	+16.5	1.12	0.96	-14.3
Cortex-A78	1.32	0.00	-1.3	1360.69	1712.61	+25.9	0.73	0.58	-20.5
Cortex-A720	2.67	0.00	-2.7	922.13	1212.07	+31.4	1.08	0.83	-23.1
Cortex-A725	0.67	0.00	-0.7	481.46	539.06	+12.0	2.08	1.86	-10.6
Cortex-X4	12.89	0.04	-12.9	1343.73	1547.63	+15.2	0.74	0.65	-12.2
Neoverse-N1	1.66	0.15	-1.5	756.59	842.06	+11.3	1.32	1.19	-9.8
Oryon	17.76	0.00	-17.8	925.73	1905.49	+105.8	1.08	0.52	-51.9
Kunpeng Pro	0.01	0.03	+0.0	618.42	684.64	+10.7	1.62	1.46	-9.9
Icestorm	0.02	0.00	-0.0	1100.62	1277.07	+16.0	0.91	0.78	-14.3
Firestorm	0.05	0.00	-0.1	1372.07	1534.83	+11.9	0.73	0.65	-11.0
C908	0.61	0.20	-0.4	913.77	824.89	-9.7	1.09	1.21	+11.0
C910	30.69	0.07	-30.6	542.79	538.74	-0.7	1.84	1.86	+1.1
X60	1.13	1.26	+0.1	213.68	211.55	-1.0	4.68	4.73	+1.1
3A5000-HV	0.01	0.36	+0.3	2846.13	2961.38	+4.0	0.35	0.34	-2.9



# B2 Covert Channel

Microarch.	Error Rate (% , ↓)			Throughput (kbit s <sup>-1</sup> , ↑)			Resolution (μs , ↓)		
	Timer	B1	Δ	Timer	B1	Δ%	Timer	B1	Δ%
Cortex-A72	7.13	-	-	232.41	-	-	4.30	-	-
Cortex-A76	16.66	0.58	-16.08	459.96	492.79	+7.14	2.17	2.03	-6.45
Cortex-A78	0.91	0.94	+0.03	617.83	678.59	+9.83	1.62	1.47	-9.26
Cortex-A720	0.88	0.53	-0.35	394.68	448.47	+13.63	2.53	2.23	-11.86
Cortex-A725	6.88	0.04	-6.84	239.71	188.65	-21.30	4.17	5.30	+27.10
Cortex-X4	1.35	0.09	-1.26	572.73	608.73	+6.29	1.75	1.64	-6.29
Neoverse-N1	12.19	8.17	-4.02	321.56	334.86	+4.14	3.11	2.99	-3.86
Oryon	19.30	0.51	-18.79	539.98	741.84	+37.38	1.85	1.35	-27.03
Kunpeng Pro	2.79	3.28	+0.49	305.98	321.76	+5.16	3.27	3.11	-4.89
Icestorm	0.43	0.43	+0.00	467.51	487.75	+4.33	2.14	2.05	-4.21
Firestorm	0.61	0.61	+0.00	605.41	624.82	+3.21	1.65	1.60	-3.03
C910	31.99	0.70	-31.29	57.56	57.35	-0.36	17.37	17.44	+0.40
3A5000-HV	10.74	3.66	-7.08	425.07	398.69	-6.21	2.35	2.51	+6.81



# I<sup>2</sup>SC Covert Channel

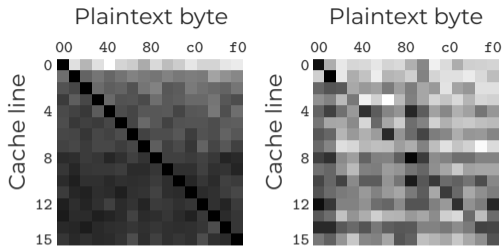
<b>Microarch.</b>	<b>Capacity (kbit s<sup>-1</sup>, ↑)</b>	<b>Error Rate (%, ↓)</b>	<b>Throughput (kbit s<sup>-1</sup>, ↑)</b>	<b>Resolution (μs, ↓)</b>
Cortex-A76	542.02	0.46	566.11	1.77
Cortex-A78	565.40	4.82	783.87	1.28
Cortex-A720	544.64	0.01	545.39	1.83
Cortex-A725	207.79	0.05	209.07	4.78
Cortex-X4	824.14	0.05	829.67	1.21
Neoverse-N1	453.30	0.37	469.93	2.13
Oryon	702.85	1.04	766.85	1.30
Kunpeng Pro	268.82	5.58	390.00	2.56
Icestorm	543.29	0.45	567.07	1.76
Firestorm	691.00	0.49	723.33	1.38
C910	53.95	0.98	58.59	17.07
3A5000-HV	366.05	1.23	404.90	2.47



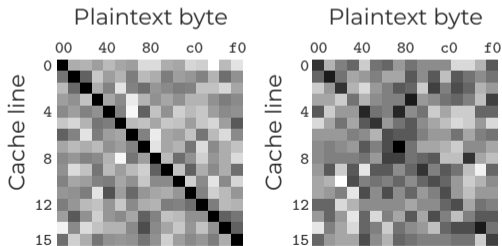
# I<sup>2</sup>SC vs. Flush+Reload

Microarch.	Capacity (kbit s <sup>-1</sup> , ↑)			Error Rate (% , ↓)			Throughput (kbit s <sup>-1</sup> , ↑)		
	F+R	I <sup>2</sup> SC	Δ%	F+R	I <sup>2</sup> SC	Δ	F+R	I <sup>2</sup> SC	Δ%
Oryon	270.56	702.85	+159.8	17.52	1.04	-16.5	818.65	766.85	-6.3
C910	46.55	53.95	+15.9	32.08	0.98	-31.1	491.16	58.59	-88.1
3A5000-HV	213.22	366.05	+71.7	29.97	1.23	-28.7	1790.52	404.90	-77.4

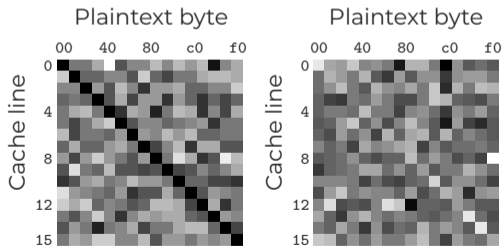
### Oryon



### C910

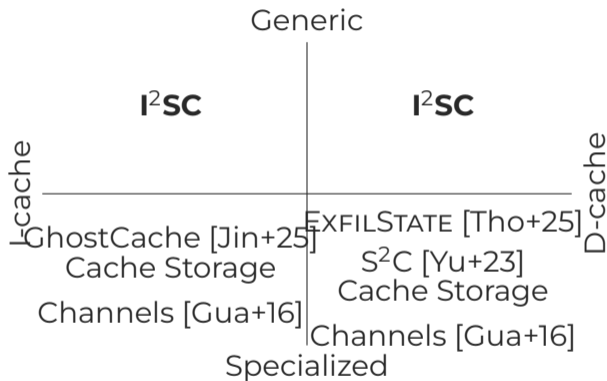


### 3A5000-HV





## Related Work





# Timer Resolution

Microarch.	Resolution (ns)	Min inc	$\Delta$ FR (ns)	$\Delta$ FR/min inc	$\Delta$ iFR (ns)	$\Delta$ iFR/min inc
Cortex-A520	41.00	41.0	91.0	—●	169.0	—●
Cortex-A72	119.00	119.0	166.0	—●	135.0	—●
Cortex-A73	166.00	166.0	171.0	—●	203.0	—●
Cortex-A76	290.99	291.0	178.0	—●	202.0	—●
Cortex-A78	76.00	76.0	148.0	—●	63.0	—●
Cortex-A720	40.00	40.0	83.0	—●	72.0	—●
Cortex-A725	76.00	76.0	333.0	—●	181.0	—●
Cortex-X4	40.00	40.0	65.0	—●	38.0	—●
Neoverse-N1	80.00	80.0	91.0	—●	117.0	—●
Oryon	100.00	100.0	104.0	—●	8.0	—●
Kunpeng Pro	104.00	104.0	172.0	—●	45.0	—●
Icestorm	41.00	41.0	111.0	—●	92.0	—●
Firestorm	41.00	41.0	115.0	—●	62.0	—●
C906	41.67	100.0	385.0	—●	350.0	—●
C908	37.03	100.0	309.0	—●	277.0	—●
C910	333.34	100.0	87.0	—●	133.0	—●
X60	41.66	100.0	385.0	—●	0.0	—●
3A5000-HV	20.00	200.0	1367.0	—●	1244.0	—●



# Used Interfaces

Architecture	Flush (D-cache)	Flush (I-cache)	Memory Barrier	Timer
ARM64	DC CIVAC	IC IVAU	DSB ISH	clock_gettime, CLOCK_MONOTONIC
RISC-V	CBO.FLUSH	—	FENCE RW,RW	RDTIME
RISC-V T-Head	TH.DCACHE.CIVA	TH.ICACHE.IVA	FENCE rw,rw	RDTIME
LoongArch64 (Experiments)	CACOP 0b10011	CACOP 0b10000	DBAR 0	rdtime.d
LoongArch64 (Eval)	Lld eviction	Lli eviction	DBAR 0	RDTIME.D