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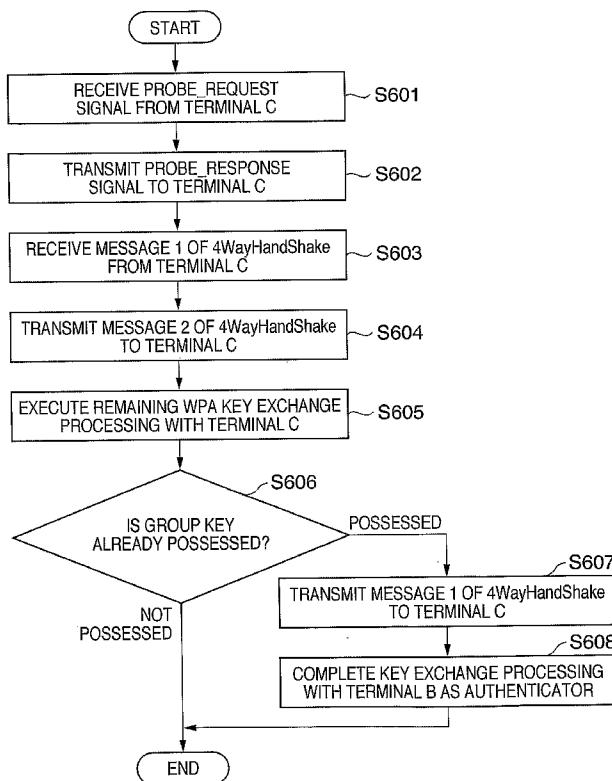
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(54) Title: APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR SHARING OF AN ENCRYPTION KEY IN AN AD-HOC NETWORK

FIG. 6



(57) Abstract: It is so arranged that an encryption key can be shared with a communication apparatus that participates in a network anew, even in an ad-hoc-mode type of environment. In order to achieve this, a communication apparatus determines whether it possesses an encryption key shared with another communication apparatus and, in accordance with the result of the determination, initiates sharing process for sharing the encryption key with a first communication apparatus from the communication apparatus after the sharing process for sharing the encryption key has been initiated from the first communication apparatus.

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DESCRIPTION

APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR SHARING OF AN ENCRYPTION KEY IN AN AD-HOC NETWORK

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to a communication apparatus and a communication method therefor.

BACKGROUND ART

[0002] Communication data is encrypted in order to prevent bugging and tampering. In particular, since wireless communication is readily susceptible to bugging, assuring a secure communication path is important.

[0003] For example, in the infrastructure mode of a wireless LAN, communication terminals and devices at access points implement a standard referred to as WEP (Wired Equivalent Privacy). The WEP standard attempts to assure security by setting an encryption key for a communication terminal and access point in advance and using this encryption key each time communication is performed. With this scheme, however, the encryption key is always fixed and the robustness of the encryption algorithm employed by the WEP standard is not that great. For this reason, various occasions where security cannot be assured have been pointed out.

[0004] In order to solve this problem, a standard referred to as WPA (Wi-Fi Protected Access) has been established. The WPA scheme enhances security by improving the robustness of the encryption algorithm and generating an encryption key for every session in which a communication terminal participates in a network.

[0005] In the infrastructure mode, a communication terminal transmits data to another communication terminal via an access point. In other words, the communication terminal communicates directly only with the access point. This means that it will suffice if only the security of communication with the access point is assured. In an ad-hoc mode, on the other hand, no access point exists and the communication terminal communicates with the communication terminal of the desired party directly. That is, in order for a terminal to perform encrypted communication with other terminals, it is necessary that the terminal possess the encryption key of every one of the other terminals or that use be made of an encryption key that is common for all communication terminals.

[0006] In a case where a terminal possesses the encryption key of every one of other terminals, the more the number of terminals, the more difficult management of the encryption keys becomes.

[0007] In a case where use is made of an

encryption key that is common on the entire network, the load of key management of every terminal is alleviated.

[0008] For example, the specification of Japanese Patent Application Laid-Open No. 2006-332895 describes a method of using an encryption key in the ad-hoc mode.

[0009] In the case where the common encryption key is utilized, however, a problem is that it is difficult to assign the same encryption key to a new terminal, namely a terminal that participates in the network anew.

[0010] The WPA standard for wireless LANs employs a group key as an encryption key shared by a plurality of terminals. By implementing 4-way handshake (4-Way HS) and group key handshake (GKHS), the group key is sent from the terminal that initiates 4-way handshake to another terminal. In the ad-hoc mode, however, the terminal that initiates 4-way handshake is undetermined.

[0011] Further, in the ad-hoc mode, there is no mechanism whereby the terminals that exist on the network are managed centrally. As a result, a terminal already participating in the network does not keep track of terminals that do not possess a group key. Consequently, it is difficult for a terminal already participating in the network to find a terminal that does not possess the group key and to initiate the 4-way handshake.

[0012] In addition, when a terminal that

participates in the network anew initiates the 4-way handshake, the new terminal distributes the group key and the group key that was being utilized on the network thus far cannot be distributed to new terminals.

[0013] The present invention seeks to make it possible to share an encryption key by distributing the encryption key to a communication apparatus that participates in a network anew, even in an ad-hoc-mode type of environment.

DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

[0014] According to one aspect of the present invention, a communication apparatus comprises: sharing means for executing sharing process for sharing an encryption key with a first communication apparatus, wherein an apparatus that initiates the sharing process provides the encryption key in the sharing process; determination means for determining whether the communication apparatus already possesses an encryption key possessed by a second communication apparatus; and control means which, in accordance with result of the determination by the determination means, initiates the sharing process with the first communication apparatus from the communication apparatus after the sharing process for sharing the encryption key has been initiated from the first communication apparatus.

[0015] According to another aspect of the present

invention, a communication method in a communication apparatus, the method comprises the steps of: accepting encryption-key sharing process from a first communication apparatus, wherein an apparatus that initiates the sharing process provides the encryption key; determining whether the communication apparatus already possesses an encryption key possessed by a second communication apparatus; and initiating the sharing process from the communication apparatus in accordance with result of the determination at the determination.

[0016] In accordance with the present invention, it is possible to share an encryption key by distributing the encryption key to a communication apparatus that participates in a network anew, even in an ad-hoc-mode type of environment.

[0017] Further features of the present invention will become apparent from the following description of exemplary embodiments with reference to the attached drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0018] The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of the specification, illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

[0019] FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a terminal according to a first embodiment of the present invention;

[0020] FIG. 2 illustrates a case where an ad-hoc network has been formed by three terminals in the first embodiment of the present invention;

[0021] FIG. 3 is a sequence diagram representing the operation of terminals B and C in the first embodiment;

[0022] FIG. 4 is a sequence diagram representing the operation of terminals B and C in a second embodiment of the present invention;

[0023] FIG. 5 is a flowchart illustrating operation of terminal C in the first embodiment;

[0024] FIG. 6 is a flowchart illustrating operation of terminal B in the first embodiment;

[0025] FIG. 7 is a flowchart illustrating operation of terminal C in the second embodiment;

[0026] FIG. 8 is a flowchart illustrating operation of terminal B in the second embodiment; and

[0027] FIG. 9 is functional block diagram of software within a terminal according to the first embodiment of the present invention.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

[0028] <First Embodiment>

A communication apparatus according to the

present invention will now be described in detail with reference to the drawings. An example in which a wireless LAN system compliant with the standard of IEEE 802.11 is used will be described. The present invention is applicable to other communication schemes as well.

[0029] A hardware configuration in the preferred embodiment will be described.

[0030] FIG. 1 is a block diagram showing a configuration of each terminal (to be described later) according to embodiments to which the present invention is applicable. The overall communication apparatus is indicated at 101. A control unit 102 controls the overall apparatus by executing a control program stored in a storage unit 103. The control unit 102 also exercises sequence control for exchange of an encryption key with another communication apparatus. The storage unit 103 stores the control program executed by the control unit 102 and various information such as communication parameters. Various operations of an operation flowchart and sequence charge described later are performed by having the control unit 102 execute the control program stored in the storage unit 103. A wireless unit 104 is for performing wireless communication. A display unit 105 presents various displays and has a function for outputting visually perceivable information, as in the

manner of an LCD (liquid crystal display) or LED (light-emitting diode), or a function for outputting sound, as in the manner of a speaker. An antenna control unit 107 controls an antenna 108.

[0031] FIG. 9 is block diagram representing an example of software functions blocks executed by the communication apparatus according to this embodiment.

[0032] Reference numeral 901 denotes an overall terminal. A packet receiving unit 902 receives packets associated with a variety of communications, and a packet transmitting unit 903 transmits packets associated with a variety of communications. A search signal transmitting unit 904 controls transmission of a device search signal such as a Probe_Request signal. Transmission of the Probe_Request signal, described later, is performed by the search signal transmitting unit 904. Further, transmission of a Probe_Response signal, which is a signal that is in response to the received Probe_Request signal, also is performed by the search signal transmitting unit 904.

[0033] A search signal receiving unit 905 controls reception of a device search signal such as a Probe_Request signal from another terminal. Receipt of the Probe_Request signal, described later, is performed by the search signal receiving unit 905. Further, reception of a Probe_Response signal also is performed by the search signal receiving unit 905. It should be

noted that various information (self-information) concerning a device that transmits the Probe_Response signal is appended to the Probe_Response signal.

[0034] A key exchange control unit 906 administers sequence control in process for exchanging a session key and group key with another communication apparatus. Process of sessions of 4-way handshake and group key handshake in WPA key exchange process exemplified in this embodiment is executed by the key exchange control unit 906.

[0035] Here 4-way handshake and group key handshake in WPA (Wi-Fi Protected Access) will be described in simple terms. In this embodiment, 4-way handshake and group key handshake are described as encryption-key exchange process but can also be referred to as sharing process whereby an encryption key is provided from one communication apparatus to another communication apparatus and shared.

[0036] The 4-way handshake and group key handshake are executed between an authenticator and a supplicant. In the description that follows, the authenticator is described as the authenticating side and the supplicant as the side to be authenticated.

[0037] With 4-way handshake, a shared key (a pre-shared key) is shared beforehand by the authenticator and supplicant, and the pre-shared key is utilized in generating a session key.

[0038] First, the authenticator generates a random number (a first random number) and sends the supplicant a message 1 that includes the generated first random number.

[0039] Upon receiving message 1, the supplicant generates a random number (second random number) itself. The supplicant generates a session key from the second random number generated by this side itself, the first random number received from the authenticator and the pre-shared key.

[0040] The supplicant that has generated the session key sends the authenticator a message 2 that includes the second random number and its own encryption and authentication support information (WPAIE).

[0041] Upon receiving message 2, the authenticator generates a session key from the first random number generated by the authenticator itself, the second random number received from the supplicant and the pre-shared key. At this stage the authenticator and supplicant have generated the same session key if the first random number, second random number and pre-shared key are the same.

[0042] The authenticator that has generated the session key sends the supplicant a message 3 that includes its own encryption and authentication support information (WPAIE) and a session-key install

instruction.

[0043] The authenticator and supplicant are capable of installing the session key using the sending and receiving of message 3 as the trigger.

[0044] Upon receiving message 3, the supplicant sends the authenticator a message 4 to notify it of the fact that message 3 has been received.

[0045] Thus, with 4-way handshake, messages 1 to 4 are sent and received between the authenticator and the supplicant, whereby a session key serving as an encryption key can be exchanged (in actuality, an exchange of random numbers for generating a session key is performed) and shared.

[0046] It should be noted that installation of a session key can be performed using the sending and receiving of message 4 as the trigger.

[0047] With group key handshake, the authenticator encrypts a group key using a session key exchanged in the 4-way handshake. The authenticator sends the supplicant a message 1 that includes the encrypted group key. The group key is an encryption key for performing group communication. Therefore, if the group key is already being shared with another communication apparatus, then the authenticator transmits this group key. If there is no group key being shared with another communication apparatus, or if a group key being shared with another communication

apparatus is not shared with the supplicant, then the authenticator generates a group key and transmits the generated group key to the supplicant.

[0048] The supplicant uses the session key to decode the group key included in the received message 1 and sends the authenticator a message 2 to notify it of the fact that message 1 has been received.

[0049] Thus, with group handshake, messages 1 and 2 are sent and received between the authenticator and the supplicant, whereby a group key serving as an encryption key for when group communication is carried out can be exchanged.

[0050] Thus the authenticator can also be referred to as a "provider", which supplies an encryption key, and the supplicant can also be referred to as a "receiver" (or "acceptor"), which receives the encryption key provided by the authenticator (provider).

[0051] It should be noted that since 4-way handshake and group handshake have been standardized in IEEE 802.11i, reference should be had to IEEE 802.11i for the details.

[0052] An encryption key storage unit 907 stores session keys and group keys exchanged in the key exchange control unit 906. Whether or not execution of key exchange with another communication apparatus has been completed can be determined by the fact that information has been stored in the encryption key

storage unit 907.

[0053] A random-number generator 908 generates random-number information for when a session key is generated in the key exchange control unit 906. A random number that has been generated in the random-number generator 908 may also be utilized when a group key is generated.

[0054] It should be noted that all of the function blocks are interrelated in terms of software or hardware. Further, the above-mentioned function blocks are examples, and it may be so arranged that a plurality of function blocks construct a single function block, and any function block may be broken down further into blocks that perform a plurality of functions.

[0055] FIG. 2 is a diagram illustrating a terminal A 22, a terminal B 23 and a terminal C 24, as well as an ad-hoc network 21 created by the terminal A 22 and the terminal B 23.

[0056] Each terminal is equipped with a wireless LAN communication function compliant with IEEE 802.11, performs wireless communication by wireless LAN ad-hoc communication ("ad-hoc communication" below) and is configured as illustrated in FIGS. 1 and 2 described earlier.

[0057] In FIG. 2 it is assumed initially that exchange of an encryption key has been completed

between the terminal A 22 (referred to as "terminal A" below) and the terminal B 23 (referred to as "terminal B" below).

[0058] Consider a situation in which the network 21 has been set up by an encryption-key exchange and is joined by the terminal C 24 (referred to as "terminal C" below), which is a newly participating communication apparatus.

[0059] FIG. 5 is an operation flowchart for when terminal C joins the network 21.

[0060] Terminal C transmits a Probe_Request signal in order to search for a network to join (S501). If the network 21 exists, terminal A or terminal B sends back a Probe_Response signal (S502). Here it is assumed that a Probe_Response signal has been received from terminal B.

[0061] Since a party to communication has thus been specified, terminal C, which is the terminal newly participating in the network, initiates process as an authenticator in the process for key exchange. First, terminal C sends terminal B the message 1 of the WPA 4-way handshake (S503). Terminal C subsequently receives the message 2 of the WPA 4-way handshake from terminal B (S504). Owing to receipt of message 2, an agreement to perform a key exchange has been reached between terminal B and terminal C and the remaining WPA key exchange process is executed (S505).

[0062] The remaining WPA key exchange process will now be described. Following step S504, terminal C transmits message 3 of the 4-way handshake to terminal B and, as a response, receives message 4 of the 4-way handshake from terminal B. Owing to the 4-way handshake, session key generation and distribution are performed and the session key is shared between terminal B and terminal C.

[0063] Terminal C carries out group handshake upon the conclusion of 4-way handshake. In group handshake, first the terminal C, which is the authenticator, transmits the message 1 of the group handshake. As a response to message 1, terminal C receives message 2 from terminal B. The group key can be shared by such group handshake.

[0064] This series of message exchanges in 4-way handshake and group handshake is referred to as WPA key exchange process. Similar terminology will be used below.

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[0065] By virtue of the WPA key exchange process of steps S503 to S505, a session key is shared between terminals B and C, the group key is protected by encrypting the group key using the session key, and the group key can be sent from terminal C to terminal B securely.

[0066] The group key generated by terminal C is

shared between terminals B and C by the process thus far. However, in a case where terminal B is already participating in the network 21, the group key just shared and the group key of network 21 will be different and the already existing terminal 21 and terminal C will be incapable of communicating with each other. Accordingly, now terminal B initiates key exchange as the authenticator in order to transmit the group key possessed by the existing network 21 to terminal C.

[0067] Since the trigger of the key exchange is message 1 of the 4-way handshake, terminal C determines whether message 1 of the 4-way handshake is received from terminal B (S506). If nothing in particular is received, then key exchange process is completed and process is exited (S508).

[0068] If message 1 of the 4-way handshake has been received from terminal B at S506, then WPA key exchange process is executed with terminal B serving as the authenticator, as described earlier (S507). Owing to the WPA key exchange process of step S507, a session key is generated between terminal B and terminal C, protection of the group key is afforded by encrypting the group key by the session key, and the group key can be sent from terminal B to terminal C securely. At this time terminal B sends the group key of network 21 (the group key shared by terminals A and B) to terminal

C.

[0069] As a result, terminal C is capable of sharing the group key already possessed by terminal B. Here, for the sake of security, terminal B may update the group key possessed thus far. If terminal B updates the group key, then the group key newly generated by terminal B is transmitted to terminal C. Further, terminal B sends the other terminal (terminal A) a group key identical with the group key that has been transmitted to terminal C. As a result, all of the group keys possessed by the terminals that belong to the network 21 are updated. By updating the group key whenever there is an increase in participating terminals, it is possible to create a network that is more robust in terms of encryption than ad-hoc networks based upon WEP or the like heretofore.

[0070] FIG. 6 is a flowchart illustrating operation of terminal B.

[0071] Terminal B receives a Probe_Request signal from Terminal C, which is attempting to join the network 21 anew (S601). Terminal B sends a Probe_Response signal back to terminal C as a response (S602).

[0072] Since terminal C has recognized the network 21, it sends message 1 of the 4-way handshake. Terminal B, therefore, receives this message (S603).

[0073] Upon receiving message 1, terminal B

transmits message 2 to terminal C (S604). Owing to the sending and receiving of messages 1 and 2, an agreement to perform key exchange process has been reached between terminal B and terminal C and the remaining WPA key exchange process is executed (S605). Specifically, messages 3 and 4 of the 4-way handshake and messages 1 and 2 of the group handshake are sent and received.

[0074] Terminal B receives the group key from terminal C by virtue of this key exchange process. In a case where terminal B has already created the network 21, it possesses the group key before a key exchange is performed with terminal C. However, there are also instances where the network 21 has not been created and this time is the first time the key exchange is carried out. Accordingly, terminal B determines whether it itself already possesses the group key (S606). In other words, terminal B determines whether the network 21 has already been created. If the network 21 has already been created, then this means that terminal B itself already has the group key. If the network has not been created, this means that terminal does not possess the group key.

[0075] If the result of the determination at step S606 is that terminal B does not possess the group key, then process is exited as is. On the other hand, if the result of the determination at step S606 is that terminal B does possess the group key, then terminal B

transmits message 1 of the 4-way handshake to terminal C so that terminal C can communicate within the already existing network 21 (S607). In other words, the role of terminal B switches from that of the supplicant to that of the authenticator and key exchange process starts with terminal B as the authenticator. The sending and receiving of the remaining messages 2 to 4 between terminal B and terminal C and group handshake are carried out and key exchange process with terminal B as the authenticator is completed (S608).

[0076] It should be noted that the process for key exchange between terminals B and C at S607 and S608 has already been described in connection with S506 and S507 in FIG. 5 and need not be described again.

[0077] FIG. 3 is a sequence diagram for when terminal C joins the network 21. The operation algorithms of terminals B and C are as illustrated in FIGS. 6 and 5, respectively, described above.

[0078] Terminal C, which is the newly participating terminal, transmits message 1 of the 4-way handshake to terminal B constituting the network 21 (F301). Terminal B responds by transmitting message 2 of the 4-way handshake (F302). Message 3 (F303) and message 4 (F304) of the 4-way handshake are then exchanged. At the end of the 4-way handshake, an exchange of message 1 (F305) and message 2 (F306) of the group handshake is carried out. As a result,

terminal C shares a group key with terminal B.

[0079] However, terminal B has already created the network 21 with terminal A, as illustrated in FIG. 2. Accordingly, in order for the terminals of the network 21 to communicate with each other, the group key of terminal C must be made to agree with that of terminals A and B. Accordingly, the roles of terminals B and C are changed over and message 1 of the 4-way handshake is now transmitted from terminal B to terminal C (F307). This is followed by reversing the roles of terminal B and C with regard to the operations F301 to F306 to thereby carry out 4-way handshake and group handshake (F307 to F312).

[0080] As a result, the group key possessed by terminal B is applied to terminal C and terminals A, B and C can share the same group key.

[0081] <Second Embodiment>

An example of the hardware configuration in a second embodiment is similar to that of the first embodiment as shown in FIG. 1, and the configuration of the software blocks is assumed to be that shown in FIG. 9. Further, an example of the network configuration in the second embodiment also similar to that of the first embodiment as shown in FIG. 2.

[0082] FIG. 7 is a flowchart illustrating operation of terminal C according to this embodiment.

[0083] Terminal C transmits a Probe_Request signal

in order to search for a network to join (S701). If the network 21 exists, terminal A or terminal B sends back a Probe_Response signal (S702). Here it is assumed that a Probe_Response signal has been received from terminal B.

[0084] Since a party to communication has thus been specified, terminal C, which is the terminal newly participating in the network, initiates process as an authenticator in the process for key exchange. First, terminal C sends terminal B the message 1 of the WPA 4-way handshake (S703).

[0085] If terminal B is already participating in the network 21, terminal C becomes the authenticator and, when it transmits a group key to terminal B, terminal C cannot communicate with the terminals of the network 21. If it so happens that a group key that has been generated by terminal C is coincidentally the same as that of network 21, then terminal C would be capable of communicating with the terminals of network 21 but the possibility of this happening is extremely small. Accordingly, in a case where terminal B has the group key possessed by the already existing network 21, it initiates key exchange as the authenticator in order to transmit this key to terminal C.

[0086] When terminal C transmits message 1 of the WPA 4-way handshake to terminal B, it determines whether message 1 of the 4-way handshake is received

from terminal B (S704).

[0087] If nothing in particular is received, then message 2 of the 4-way handshake is received from terminal B (S709). The remaining key exchange process is then carried out (S710) and key exchange process is terminated (S708).

[0088] More specifically, with terminal C remaining as the authenticator, it performs 4-way handshake and group handshake, transmits the group key of terminal C to terminal B and shares the group key of terminal C.

[0089] On the other hand, if it is determined at step S704 that message 1 of the 4-way handshake has been received from terminal B, then terminal C suspends key exchange process as the authenticator. In this case, terminal B starts key exchange process as the authenticator and terminal C transmits message 2 of the 4-way handshake to terminal B (S706). Since 4-way handshake with terminal B has started, terminal C executes the remaining WPA key exchange process (S707). By virtue of the WPA key exchange process at step S707, a session key is shared between terminals B and C. The group key is protected by this session key and the group key is sent from terminal B to terminal C securely. At this time terminal B sends the group key of the network 21 (this group key is common to both terminals A and B) to terminal C. As a result,

terminal C can share the group key possessed by terminal B. For the sake of security, terminal B can update the group key possessed thus far. In a case where terminal B updates the group key, a group key generated anew by terminal B is transmitted to terminal C. Further, terminal B also sends other terminals (terminal A) a group key the same as the group key that was transmitted to terminal C. As a result, all of the group keys possessed by the terminals that belong to the network 21 are updated. By updating the group key whenever there is an increase in participating terminals, it is possible to create a network that is more robust in terms of encryption than ad-hoc networks based upon WEP or the like heretofore.

[0090] FIG. 8 is a flowchart illustrating operation of terminal B.

[0091] Terminal B receives a Probe_Request signal from Terminal C, which is attempting to join the network 21 anew (S801). Terminal B sends a Probe_Response signal back to terminal C as a response (S802).

[0092] Since terminal C has recognized the network 21, it sends message 1 of the 4-way handshake. Terminal B, therefore, receives this message (S803).

[0093] If 4-way handshake and group handshake continue as is, terminal B will receive the group key from terminal C. However, in a case where terminal B

has already created the network 21, terminal B possesses the group key of terminal 21 (the group key common with that of terminal A) before it executes key exchange with terminal C. However, there are also instances where a network has not been created and this time is the first time the key exchange is carried out. Accordingly, terminal B determines whether it itself already possesses the group key (S804). In other words, terminal B determines whether the network 21 has already been created. If the network 21 has already been created, then this means that terminal B itself already has the group key. If the network has not been created, this means that terminal B does not possess the group key.

[0094] If the result of the determination at step S804 is that terminal B does not possess the group key, then process continues as is. That is, message 2 of the 4-way handshake is transmitted to terminal C (S805). The remaining WPA key exchange process with terminal C is then executed (S806) and key exchange process with terminal C as the authenticator is completed (S807).

[0095] On the other hand, if the result of the determination at step S804 is that terminal B does possess the group key, then terminal B transmits message 1 of the 4-way handshake to terminal C so that terminal C can communicate with the already existing network 21 (S808). In other words, although terminal C

initiated key exchange process as the authenticator, message 1 is transmitted from terminal B to terminal C in order to suspend this process, change over terminal B to the authenticator and initiate key exchange process.

[0096] Thereafter, message 2 of the WPA 4-way handshake from terminal C is received (S809). Owing to receipt of message 2, an agreement to perform a key exchange has been reached between terminal B and terminal C and the remaining WPA key exchange process is executed (S810).

[0097] FIG. 4 is a sequence diagram for when terminal C joins the network 21. The operation algorithms of terminals B and C are as illustrated in FIGS. 8 and 7, respectively, described above.

[0098] Terminal C, which is the newly participating terminal, transmits message 1 of the 4-way handshake to terminal B constituting the network 21 (F401).

[0099] Terminal B has already created the network 21 with terminal A as illustrated in FIG. 2. Accordingly, in order for the terminals of the network 21 to communicate with each other, the group key of terminal C must be made to agree with that of terminals A and B.

[0100] Accordingly, message 1 of the 4-way handshake is now transmitted from terminal B to

terminal C (F402). The roles are reversed and the 4-way handshake and group handshake are carried out (F402 to F407).

[0101] As a result, the group key possessed by terminal B is applied to terminal C and terminals A, B and C can share the same group key.

[0102] In accordance with the description rendered above, a communication apparatus determines whether it possesses an encryption key shared with a second communication apparatus. In accordance with the result of the determination, after sharing process for sharing the encryption key has started from a first communication apparatus, sharing process with the first communication apparatus starts from the communication apparatus itself.

[0103] As a result, an encryption key can be shared with a communication apparatus that participates in a network anew, even in an ad-hoc-mode type of environment.

[0104] Further, when a group key is shared with a new communication apparatus, the group key can be updated. Adopting this arrangement provides a higher level of security. In other words, a different encryption key can be utilized whenever a communication session is established and greater robustness is provided with respect to behavior such as interception and bugging.

[0105] Although the preferred embodiments of the present invention have been described above, they are merely examples for explaining the present invention, and are not intended to limit the scope of the present invention. Various modifications can be made to the embodiments without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

[0106] For example, a key exchange message stipulated by WPA is used in the description of the foregoing embodiments. However, the method of key exchange is not limited; as long as a similar role is performed, any key exchange method may be used.

[0107] Further, an IEEE802.11 wireless LAN has been explained as an example. The present invention may, however, be implemented in another wireless medium such as wireless USB, MBOA, Bluetooth (registered trademark), UWB (Ultra Wide Band), or ZigBee. The present invention may also be implemented in a wired communication medium such as a wired LAN.

[0108] Here MBOA is an abbreviation for Multi Band OFDM Alliance. In addition, UWB includes wireless USB, wireless 1394 and WINET.

[0109] In the present invention, a recording medium which stores software program codes for implementing the above-described functions may be supplied to a system or apparatus, and the computer (or the CPU or MPU) of the system or apparatus may read out

and execute the program codes stored in the storage medium. In this case, the program codes read out from the recording medium implement the functions of the above-described embodiments, and the recording medium which stores the program codes constitutes the present invention.

[0110] The recording medium for supplying the program codes includes a flexible disk, hard disk, optical disk, magneto-optical disk, CD-ROM, CD-R, magnetic tape, nonvolatile memory card, ROM, and DVD.

[0111] The above-described functions are implemented when the computer executes the readout program codes. Also, the above-described functions may be implemented when an operating system running on the computer performs some or all of actual processes on the basis of the instructions of the program codes.

[0112] Furthermore, the above-described functions may be implemented when the program codes read out from the storage medium are written in the memory of a function expansion board inserted into the computer or the memory of a function expansion unit connected to the computer, and the CPU of the function expansion board or function expansion unit performs some or all of actual processes on the basis of the instructions of the program codes.

[0113] While the present invention has been described with reference to exemplary embodiments, it

is to be understood that the invention is not limited to the disclosed exemplary embodiments. The scope of the following claims is to be accorded the broadest interpretation so as to encompass all such modifications and equivalent structures and functions.

[0114] This application claims the benefit of Japanese Patent Application No. 2007-208732, filed August 10, 2007, which is hereby incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

CLAIMS

1. A communication apparatus comprising:

a sharing means for executing sharing process for sharing an encryption key with a first communication apparatus, wherein an apparatus that initiates the sharing process provides the encryption key in the sharing process;

a determination means for determining whether said communication apparatus already possesses an encryption key possessed by a second communication apparatus; and

a control means which, in accordance with result of the determination by said determination means, initiates the sharing process with the first communication apparatus from said communication apparatus after the sharing process has been initiated from the first communication apparatus.

2. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said determination means determines whether a network has already been created with the second communication apparatus.

3. The apparatus according to claim 1 or 2, wherein said control means initiates the sharing process from the communication apparatus, after the first communication apparatus initiates the sharing process and provides the encryption key to said communication apparatus.

4. The apparatus according to claim 1 or 2, wherein said control means suspends the sharing process initiated from the first communication apparatus and initiates the sharing process from the communication apparatus, then the first communication apparatus initiates the sharing process.
5. The apparatus according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein in a case where the sharing process has been initiated from said communication apparatus, said sharing means provides the first communication apparatus with the encryption key that is being shared with the second communication apparatus.
6. The apparatus according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein in a case where the sharing process has been initiated from said communication apparatus, said sharing means provides the first communication apparatus with an encryption key different from an encryption key shared with the second communication apparatus and provides this encryption key to the second communication apparatus.
7. A communication method in a communication apparatus, said method comprising the steps of:
 - accepting encryption-key sharing process from a first communication apparatus, wherein an apparatus that initiates the sharing process provides the encryption key in the sharing process;
 - determining whether said communication apparatus

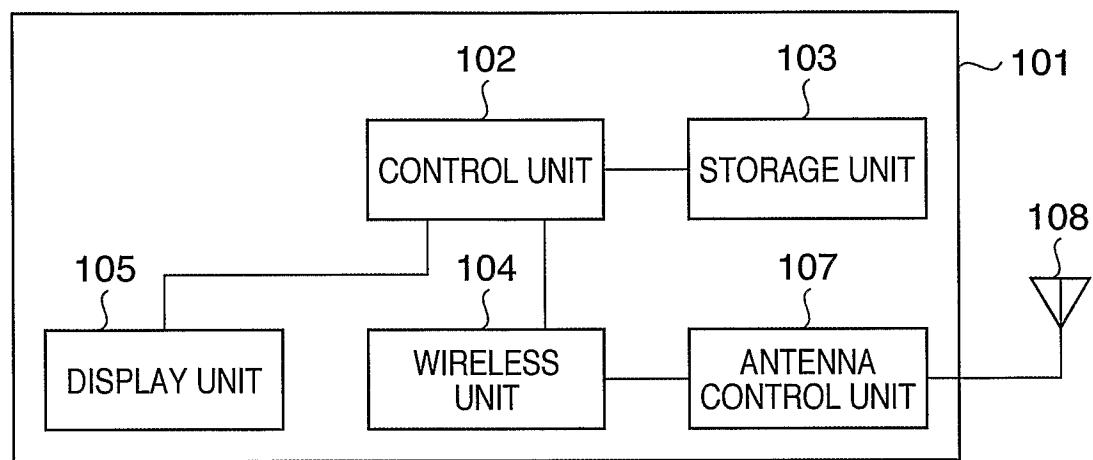
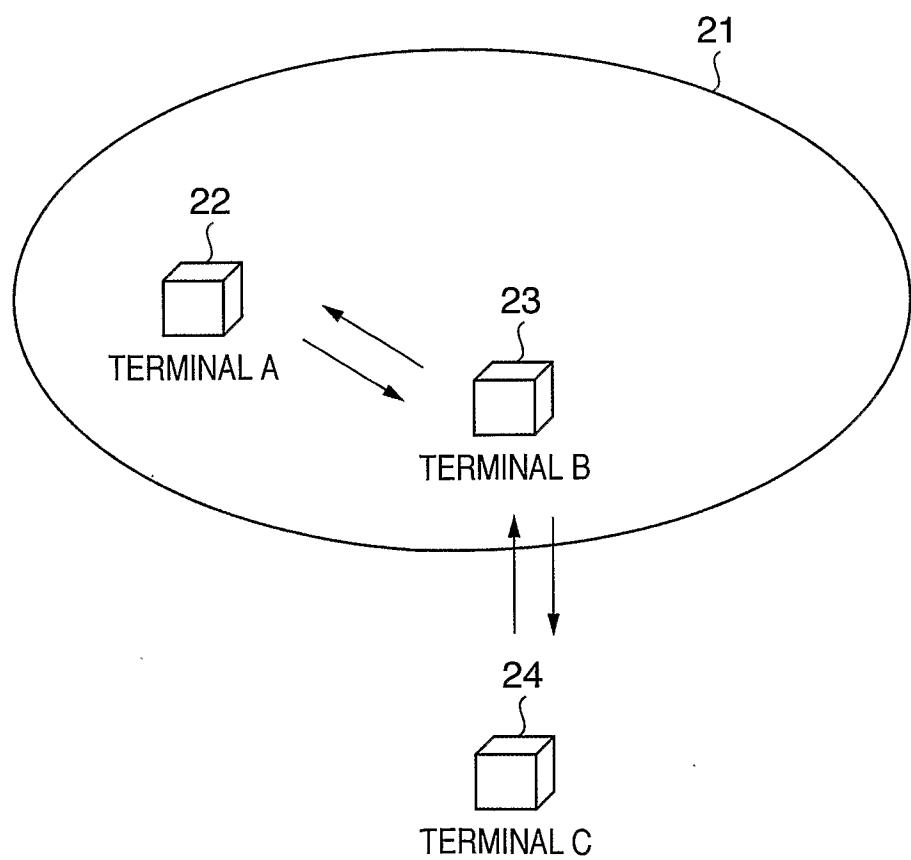
already possesses an encryption key possessed by a second communication apparatus; and

initiating the sharing process from the communication apparatus in accordance with result of the determination at said determination step.

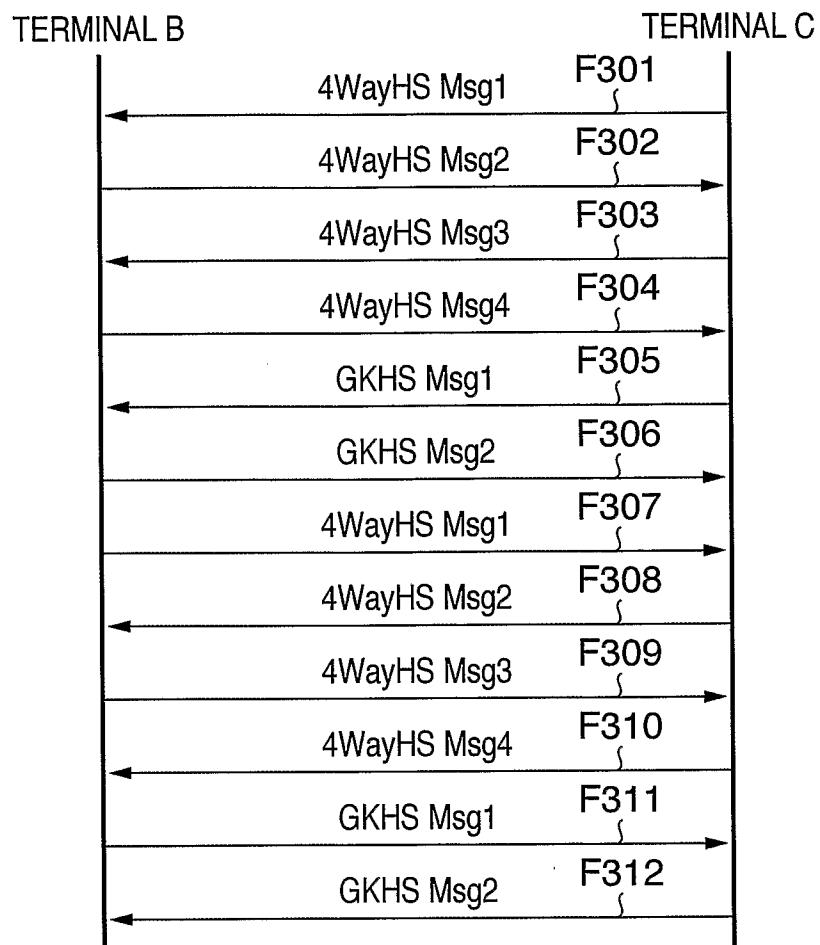
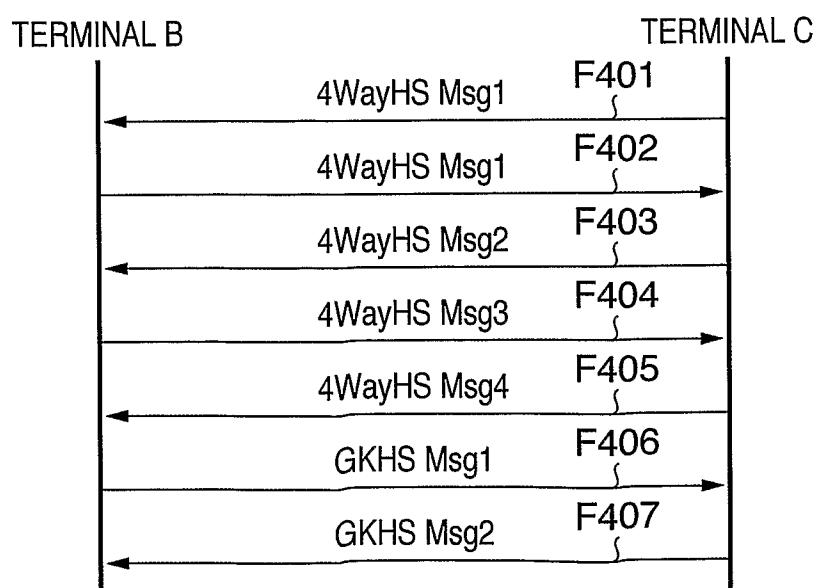
8. A computer program stored on a computer-readable storage medium, said program causing a communication apparatus to execute the communication method set forth in claim 7.

9. A storage medium storing the computer program set forth in claim 8.

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FIG. 1**FIG. 2**

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FIG. 3**FIG. 4**

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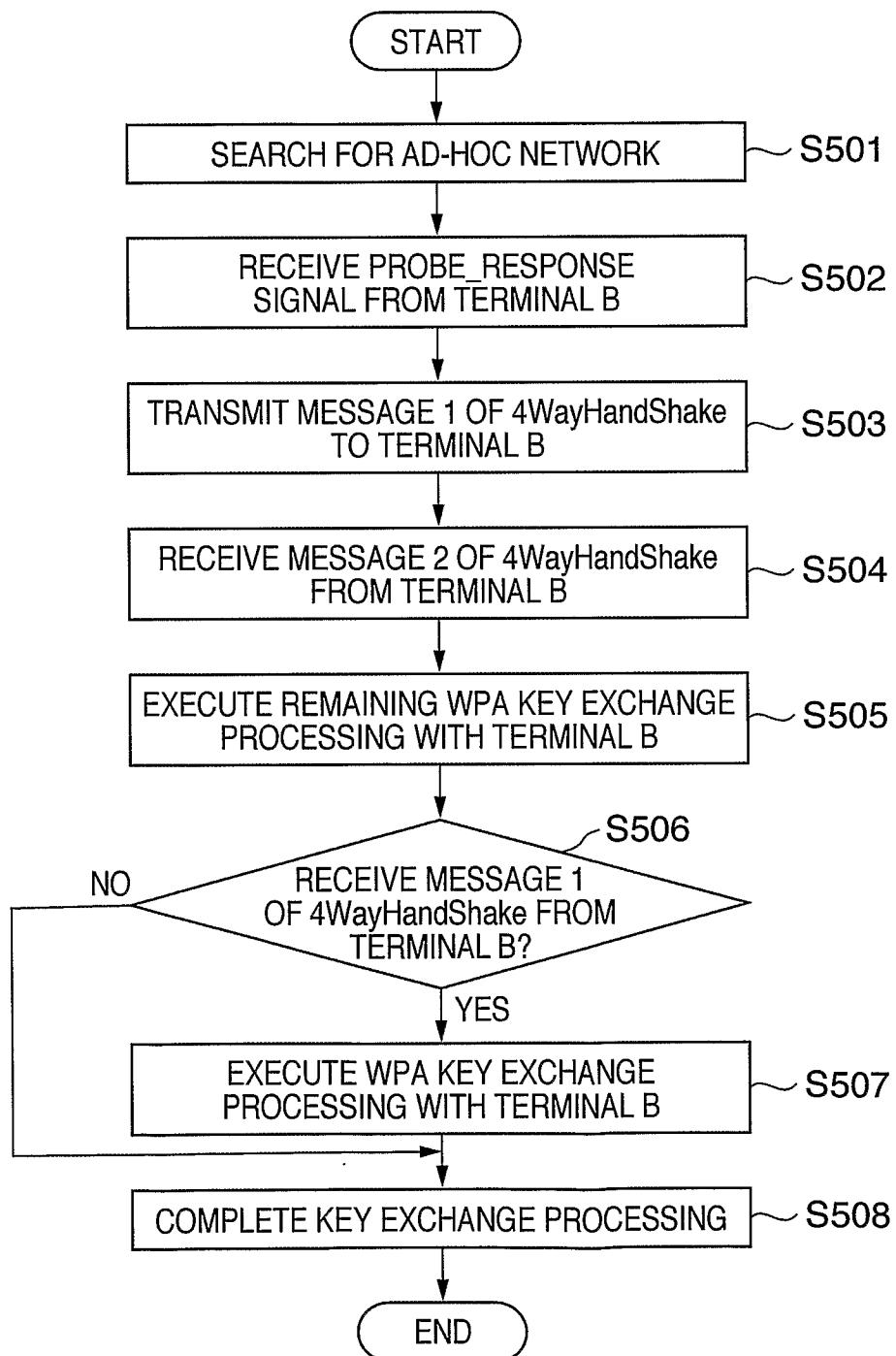
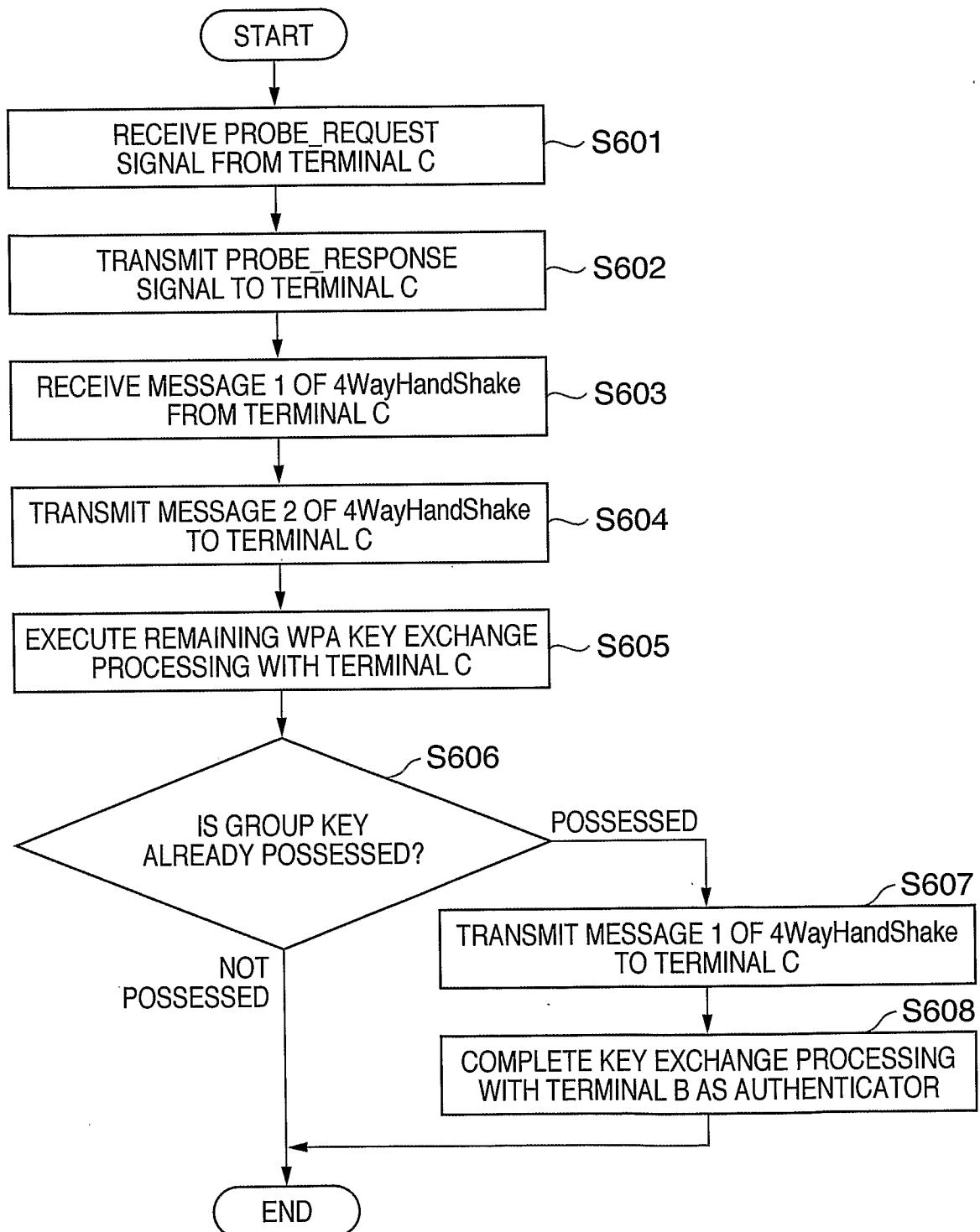
FIG. 5

FIG. 6



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FIG. 7

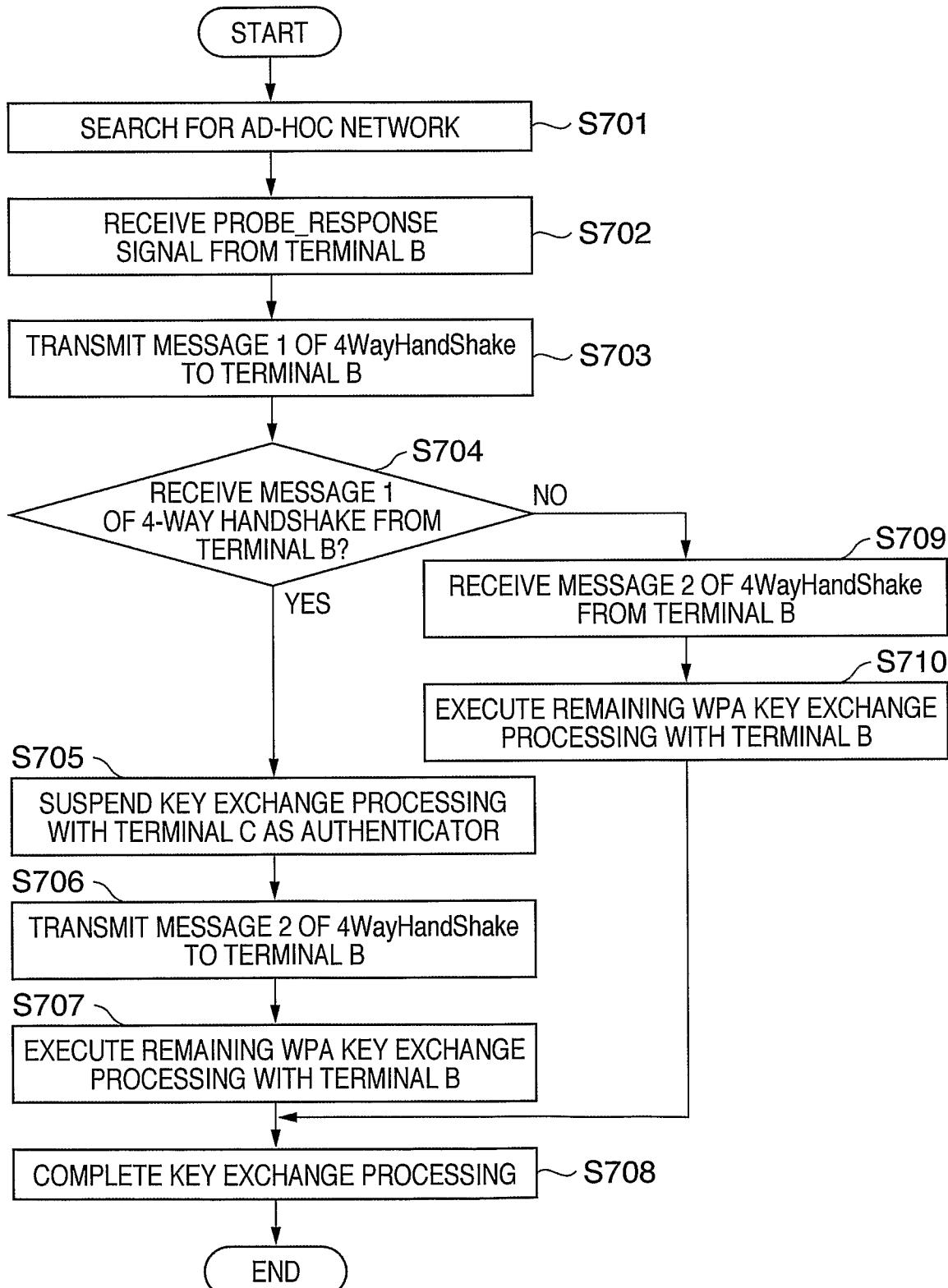
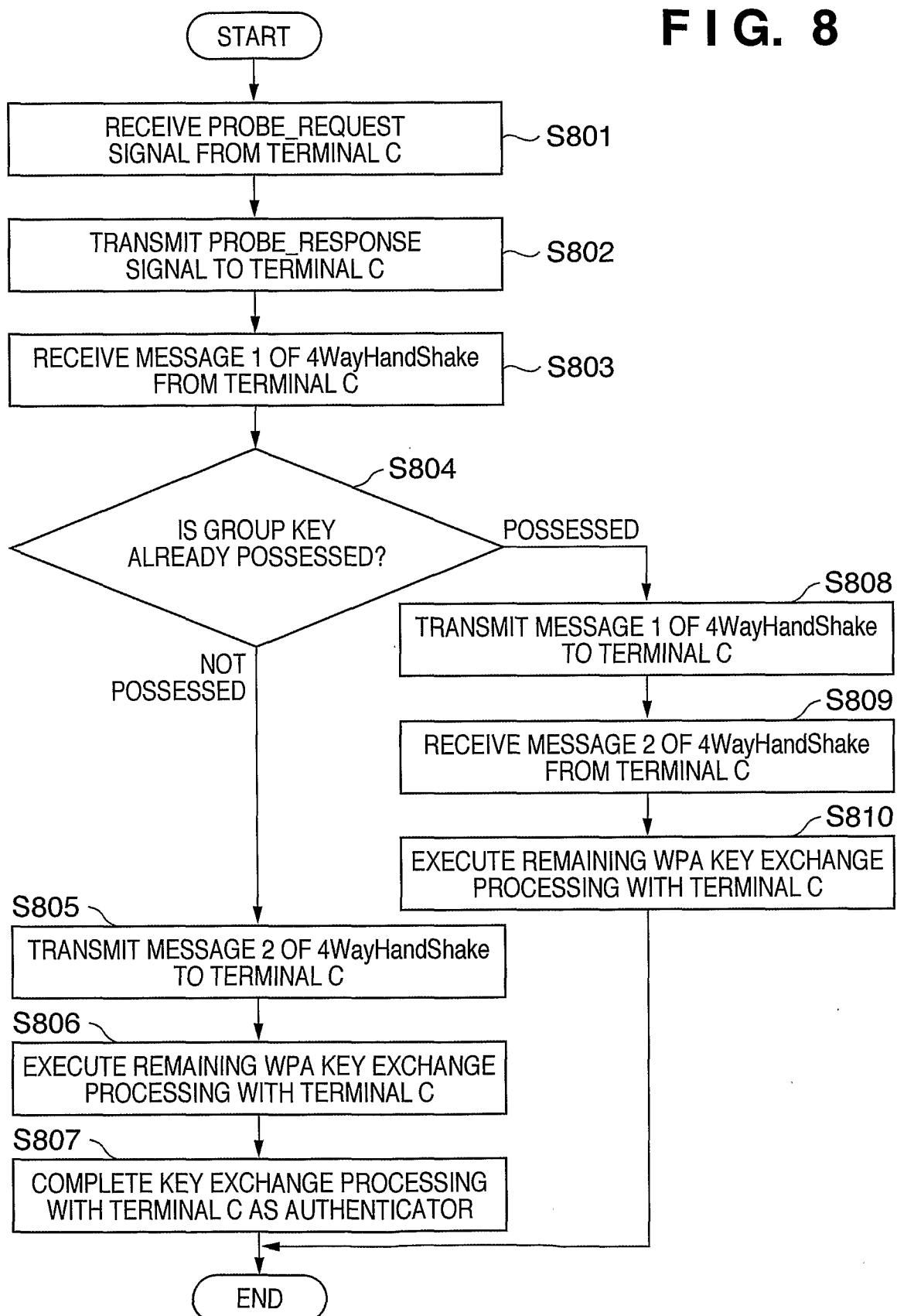
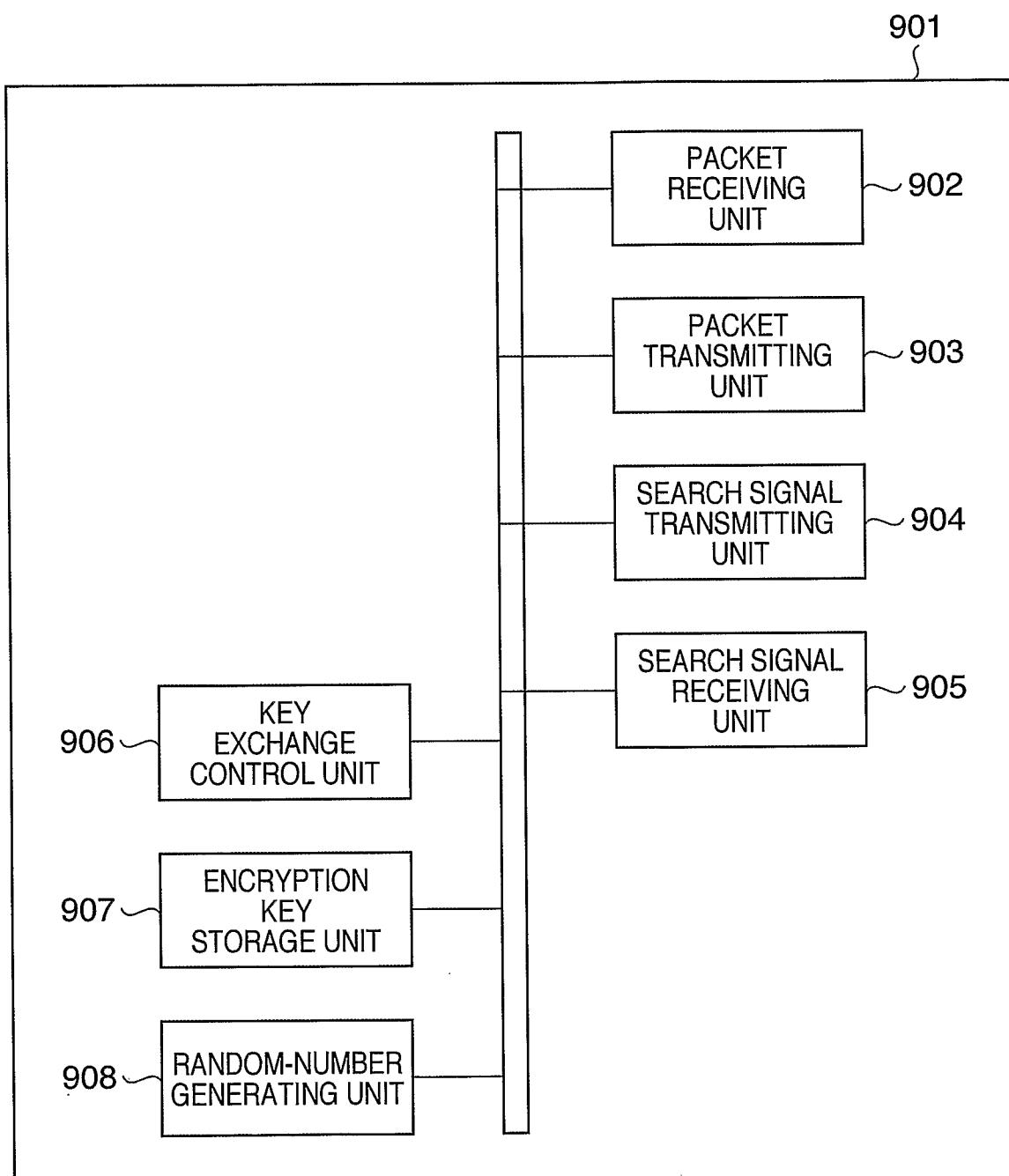


FIG. 8



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FIG. 9



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/JP2008/064379

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
INV. H04W84/18 H04L29/06

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
H04W H04L

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, INSPEC

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	<p>AGRE J ET AL: "Secure NOMadic Wireless Mesh (SnowMesh) 802.11 TGs ESS Mesh Networking Proposal" INTERNET CITATION, [Online] XP007902206 Retrieved from the Internet: URL:http://www.flacp.fujitsulabs.com/snowmesh.pdf [retrieved on 2007-04-27] paragraph [4.3.2.1] – paragraph [4.3.2.2] paragraph [06.2]</p> <p>-----</p> <p>WI-MESH ALLIANCE: "802.11 TGs MAC Enhancement Proposal" IEEE 802.11-05/575R4, WI-MESH ALLIANCE PROPOSAL TO 802.11 TASK GROUP S,, 1 November 2005 (2005-11-01), pages 124-141, XP002480983 paragraph [09.1]</p> <p>-----</p> <p style="text-align: center;">-/-</p>	1-3,5-9
A		1-9

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

- *A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance
- *E* earlier document but published on or after the international filing date
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- *O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means
- *P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

- *T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
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- *Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.
- *&* document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
4 December 2008	11/12/2008
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL – 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer Figiel, Barbara

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/JP2008/064379

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	IEEE COMPUTER SOCIETY: "802.11i IEEE Standard for Information Technology – Telecommunications and information exchange between systems – Local and metropolitan area networks – specific requirements; Part 11: Wireless LAN MAC and PHY specifications; Amendment 6: MAC Security enhancements" IEEE STANDARDS, IEEE, US, vol. 802.11, 23 July 2004 (2004-07-23), pages 1-175, XP002402752 paragraph [08.5] -----	1-9