

File 20110907.1453: Reading Group today discussed the paper ‘Who Are the Experts, and What Have They Done for Us Lately?’ by M. Stytz [IEEE Security & Privacy 5(6), 2007]. It provoked a discussion of the differences between computer security and medical statistics, and I wondered if the medical community were asking the same questions in, say, 1850. Civil engineering, aviation safety and economics were also mentioned as possible parallels. Finally, Cornelius suggested that we look at the question of what are assets, and this led to a discussion of liabilities, and I mentioned that one person’s liability is always someone else’s asset. But Dr Fléchais pointed out that the books don’t seem to balance in the case of computer security; a potential attacker values your security vulnerabilities as his assets, but I offered that he also values your assets as something he might steal, or at least transfer to a third party in exchange for value. I made one flight of fancy where I compared LinkedIn.com’s database of PII not to an asset, but to a huge liability, if we take the negative value of its risk of disclosure to be something like an attractive nuisance, like unaccounted-for nuclear weapons in Ukraine, which the world community rightly considers it to be in their own interest to step in and protect. Dr Martin seemed to think that was outrageous. I pleaded jet lag.

‘A liability is always someone else’s asset. But whose?’

Ivan: ‘the whole focus in risk analysis is on assets’.

There was one new person there, a DPhil student working on formal modeling in another group. John said his name is on the invitation. It wasn’t Goft, who is moving house today; Shamal was also away on some business. Attending today were Dr Martin, Dr Fléchais, Dr Lyle, myself, Cornelius, and myself. It was a small group.

I think I made a good enough impression on Dr Fléchais in anticipation of tomorrow. I was engaged, I contributed what I think he assessed as some good ideas, and I didn’t sleep through it, though I wanted to.

Next week, Cornelius will suggest a paper. Next reading group will be Wednesday, although beginning in term time Dr Martin wants to move it to Tuesday, or at least any other day than Wednesday. Cornelius argued for end of the day, so that reading group can adjourn directly to the pub. Look for an email from him in a few days with the name of next week’s paper.

Update 20110913.1200: LinkedIn suggested Cornelius. I sent him a connection request.

References