

Security versus Privacy in the Age of COVID-19

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April 24, 2020

Abstract

Seeing the title of this conference, in 1980, it must have been natural to consider, security as being more important than privacy, although, alphabetically, privacy precedes security.

HIPAA was created in 1996, the age of AIDS, a disease spread through sexual contact or blood. Privacy protected the individual against unjustified bias, without undermining national security. In this talk we wonder whether in the case of COVID-19:

- privacy of the individual has undermined national security,
- and whether we need to revise the ethics of hacking. Indeed, today's computers contain information about medical tests in progress, considered confidential until published in a refereed publication.

We in particular wonder:

- how many deaths could have been avoided if, as in Singapore¹, privacy would have been sacrificed by revealing where people got infected,
- how HIPAA (and similar rules) have failed to protect the privacy of medical doctors. Indeed, landlords knowing their tenants profession, evicted medical doctors in Australia and the UK,
- whether NSA should have bugged computers in Chinese hospitals using hacking (as Vietnam allegedly did, NY-Times, April 22, 2020, but denied on April 23, 2020),
- whether the high number of deaths of COVID-19 in the Western world is an intelligence failure.

¹As observed by the author firsthand.