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**CRITICAL ATTACKS: HOW ECONOMY COULD  
BE SAVED BY CYBER INSURANCE**

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## SUMMARY

Nowadays, it is consolidated the large and massive use of the Internet and its applications, causing more and more structures to be laid upon the Internet and its interconnections; it goes from simple users, that surf the Net for searching general information and social interactions, to business users, that rely on the Internet for economic and working issues, to administrative users, in this group stand large and important users such as banks and financial institutions and governments.

The heavy and important dependence of society on information technology implies that valuable and key assets are potentially and easily exposed to global cyber threats, and furthermore that any users can be susceptible to cyber attacks, paralysing their operative terms and leaving them exposed to further damages (A practical guide to assessing your cyber security strategy, 2012). For thus, this outlines the need of employing cyber security measures, which consist of “*a combination of technology and security procedures*” (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2013). Applying cyber security is the first step of security combination, it consists of technologies, processes and practices designed to protect networks and data from attacks, damages and unauthorized access; but, since attackers are always one step further and can exploit any kind of vulnerabilities in the system, cyber security cannot prevent all potential attacks which networks are exposed to.

So, there is need to check out security confidence, through cyber assurance, that systems are confident enough to meet operational need (Alberts et al., 2009), also in stress situations like attacks, failures, accidents and unexpected events. In this case, it is helpful to prepare a disaster plan, according to strategic risk management, that can be activated in case of cyber attacks. At the same level, there is information assurance that comprehends operations of protection and defence of information systems by ensuring and controlling their availability, integrity, authentication, confidentiality, and non-repudiation, including the restoration of information systems by incorporating protection, detection, and reaction capabilities. It consists essentially of systematic

protection throughout acquisition, elaboration and storage of information and data. As last step of combination, companies arrive to cyber insurance in order to transfer risk to other parties. Cyber insurance has as purpose to mitigate losses caused by cyber accidents. Its main goal and benefit is to sensitively reduce number of cyber attacks thanks to preventive measures that discourage them. The fundamental mechanism of insurance applied to IT is the encouragement of implementation of best practices, by basing premiums on the level of self-protection adopted by insured party (U.S. Homeland Security, 2012); in this way insurance can limit the level of losses faced during and after a cyber attack.

The principal hypothesis this thesis is aiming to answer to is that cyber insurance can effectively be a vital tool and strategy for firms, in particular for critical infrastructures owners and operators, in order to mitigate all those risks that cannot be covered and absorbed by cyber security strategies implemented by companies. Indeed, the major objective of the dissertation is to highlight the significant role of critical infrastructures and to encourage cyber security with more than one approach and strategy.

Therefore, the principal assumption on which this dissertation is relying is the importance and criticality of critical infrastructures, that, consequently, need further and more focused protection against both physical failures and damages and, especially, cyber-related attacks. Nowadays, all the world rely on a well-functioning Internet, for any kind of services, from transportation to energy, from health care to energy, from food to government. The *“interconnectedness within and across systems also means that infrastructures are vulnerable to local disruptions, which could lead to widespread or catastrophic failures”* (National Research Council, 2002). The stronger the interconnection between users, infrastructures and security, the less resilient is the system made by critical infrastructures. When an infrastructure provides vital and fundamental services to nation’s well-being, which comprehends state-of-art functioning systems, security and public order within national borders, is called critical infrastructure.

European Council formulated the Directive 2008/114/EC of 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2008, which establishes common procedure for identification and designation of European Critical Infrastructure (ECI). ECI is defined as “*critical infrastructure located in the EU Member States, the disruption or destruction of which would have a significant impact on at least two Member States of the EU*”(Holt, 2013). The list of Critical Infrastructures is growing at an increased pace. The most important macro areas are Finance and Banking, Manufacturing, Food and Agriculture, Health, Energy, Water, Transportation and Postal services, Security and Emergency services, Government and Information and Communications Technology.

Critical infrastructures, indeed, represent the backbone of modern society, as they become more and more important for civilized economies and also developing countries' economies. Thanks to a deep analysis of their definition, since it affects further considerations, critical infrastructures are demodulated in order to identify those infrastructures whose incapacity or destruction would have a debilitating impact on the defence or economic security of the nation (in Moteff, Parfomak, 2004). Another sign of criticality is the strong dependency on other infrastructures and thus strong interdependency (Hammerli, Renda, 2010), consequently, the interdependency and importance of these infrastructure are the focus for economy, government and social life, therefore these infrastructures are considered critical, since their malfunctioning and failures can bring a general disturbance or, worse, to a loss of investments, efficiency and life comfort.

Singularly, nations have listed different critical infrastructures depending on national interests and weaknesses, even if there are common industries that are controlled by the majority of nations, such as electric power supply, water supply, banking and finance, defence, food, public health, telecommunications and transportation.

Their existence is woven into society's habits, therefore they are under the spotlight of governments and policy attention. It is essential that critical infrastructures are robust, reliable and resilient, able to face possible risks, coming from nature or human error or attack. Several new technology-based infrastructures have been created over the last century and half (Goodman *et*

*al.*, 2003), their development and intensive usage characterize modern society and determine its vulnerabilities.

Moreover, critical infrastructures are such a complex issues because they are vital and ubiquitous, therefore their lack of capacity or even their destruction affects not only security and social issues of one nation, but it has devastating cascade effects across national borders, causing shock transmissions across borders and across numerous infrastructures, which determine the impossibility to consider and analyze a single-standing infrastructure isolated from environment or other infrastructures.

Since physical parts of these networks have to undergo to alarming range of threats coming from nature, such as earthquakes, extreme winds, floods, tsunamis, and wildfires, they are also threatened by terrorist acts, design faults, aging materials and inadequate maintenance. Maintenance itself is a key aspect against failure, but it is also the aspect less assessed by investors, declining constantly the resilience of systems and thus increasing the probability of severe failures.

Failure of major infrastructure could provoke catastrophic effects, indeed the failure of these significant systems can cause environmental damages, important cost to economy and possible threats to life. The solution to be undertaken in order to decrease the likelihood of failures is to adequately maintain and protect critical infrastructures and to build reserve capacity, useful during emergency actions; it is essential for this purpose to better include private sectors, since they can easily and better assess systems status and address proper protection, because of firsthand information and data (Brömmelhörster *et al.*, 2004).

Therefore, serious protection issues have to not be just limited to engineering design systems, but need to embrace topic of legacy systems, the difficulty to understand strategic threats, the need for training and information sharing. In order to face properly critical infrastructure protection (CIP), it must be acknowledged numerous challenges that, if addressed, will improve security. First of all, it has been noticed a limited pool of resources available in order to address security problems, that could increase risks and inhibit businesses.

Then, the lack of sharing news about threats and incident among government and private actors can increase the risk of attacks because there is a sense of unpreparedness among actors. Moreover, it results chaos and inefficiencies created by poor coordination among public agencies. Furthermore, the increasing sophistication of tools and methods used by hackers worsens the fastness of response and its efficacy, requiring high level of cyber security, in order to be prepare for cyber attacks.

This is also the result of difficultness of establishing effective partnerships between government and businesses. In order to improve the protection over critical infrastructures, a clear and effective cooperation among government and private companies must be set to maximize the security over critical infrastructure and minimize costs and disadvantages that can arise during a non-efficient collaboration, which can create obstacles to the final objective, which is protecting critical infrastructures.

First of all, incentives must be put clear and motivating for private companies in order to undertake all the necessary actions for reducing infrastructure vulnerabilities; often it is more convenient from a business point of view to accept the risk of an hypothetical or possible terrorist attacks or damages than coping with sure costs, that tend to outweigh the future benefits. Even if government can set goals, it lays on private companies to efficiently implement steps, because they have deep knowledge of the overall system. However National Strategy for Homeland Security (2002) represents an obsolete approach to the problem, where government addresses protection activities only to markets that do not provide adequately on their own. The strategy assures that there are enough and enough strong incentives in private market to supply sufficiently protection, ensuring to rely on private sector. Even if numbers agree with this statement, as 85% of critical infrastructures is privately owned, it is consolidated that a backup support of government is essential, since *“market forces alone are, as a rule, insufficient to induce needed investments in protection”* (National Strategy for Homeland Security, 2002).

Despite a lack of incentives for private companies, large corporations have political and financial forces and credibility to assume the role of protecting infrastructures, moreover they have, or at least they can afford, technical



expertise and experience. However, they face uncertainties because of asymmetrical information, as other critical infrastructure tends to retain information about their own infrastructures, and therefore, they can underestimate the emergency behind protecting critical infrastructures.

In order to foster cooperation, owners of critical infrastructure should know the reaction of jurisdiction to attacks and its actions to prevent them and the level of coordination among local jurisdiction and government.

In order to give proper considerations, the dissertation goes on analyzing Critical Information Infrastructures (CII), critical information infrastructures are more sensitive to external attacks and technological vulnerabilities, which can be easily exploited by malicious attackers. Internet is by design open and exposed to threats, but at the same time it leaves room to improvements and to reduce vulnerable points of access, in order to improve and boost resilience and robustness of Internet and consequently of all other critical infrastructures which rely upon.

In the dissertation, it is given a full description of three of the most important and concerning aspects of the dark side of the Internet, cyber attacks, cyber warfare and cyber terrorism, as these aspects represent the evolution of cybercrime, which comes alongside with technology advancements, and reflect the different intentions of attackers. Moreover, a clear and net distinction between these terms is useful when a strategy for security and protection need to be designed, and it needs to take into account the different consequences and targets. Cyber threats require awareness and improved security practices, which need to be shared by any users and to be aware. Therefore, it should be addressed the creation and implementation of robust culture of cyber security (Cornish *et al.*, 2011) in order to create an homogenous basis of security which is shared by the majority of users.

The conclusion of the discussion about cyber security ends in stating that, in order to prevent or mitigate damages of cyber attacks, security frameworks help managers and strategists to construct and apply a suitable and tailored cyber security which is consistent with factors, such as economical, political and cultural. Implementing basic principles at IT system infrastructure, as

dictated by Dr. Amoroso (2011), may ensure an efficient cyber security for the most technological structures, such as critical infrastructures which need a special and more focused security and defense in order to avoid severe damages for society.

Consequently, the organization which runs critical infrastructure by employing an efficient CIP and CIIP, it has assured the information supply chain and secured its cyber infrastructures against cyber crime, ensuring stakeholders and insurance operators that the organization has low likelihood of suffering severe damages provoked by cyber criminals. By implementing these protections and security strategies, an organization is reassuring and stating its risk appetite in order to successfully underwrite a cyber insurance which helps to mitigate unexpected or residual risks and damages, which are unprotected through all the undertaken security actions.

Since there is a growing dependency on technology and an increased threat of unauthorized access to data and information, there is also a response of insurance market to these challenges, backed by an increased awareness and knowledge of corporations about cyber risks and exposure (Airmic technical, 2012), consequently, the potentiality of insurance results significant for organizations as a control mechanism.

Cyber insurance has been described as “an *effective, market-driven way of increasing cyber security*” (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011). In fact, it is nearly impossible to reach a perfect coverage by attack and damages. The impossibility comes due to several causes (Pal, Hui, 2012), first of all because there is not yet sound and proven technical solutions; then because of the diverse intentions that lay behind attacks; but also misaligned incentives between network users, security providers and regulatory authorities leave room for attacks; there are strong externalities and free-riding problem; moreover it is difficult to measure quantitatively and qualitatively risks; system failure is amplified by customer lock-in and first mover effects of vulnerable security products and by problem of lemons market, which is the electronic medium of computers networks, “*via which online communications takes place*”(Pal, Hui, 2012).

In this failing system, cyber insurance is catching on, according to Pal and Hui, thanks to three reasons. It increases the overall network safety by adopting self-defence strategy, in order to respond to an increase to insurance premium. Cyber insurance integrates the partial protection offered by cyber security strategies; in fact, these means cannot reach absolute protection unless it upgrades technologies and it should face enormous expenditures to adequate security systems. Therefore, it is optimal choice to transfer risks, faced because of lack of total security, to a third party that can leverage them. Cyber insurance, moreover, can be a solution to misaligned incentives, by combining benefits that actors seek on the Internet. Insurers earn profit from premiums, network users will be able to hedge potential losses, while security software producers can benefit from first mover advantage and lock-in strategies.

The thesis, at this point, reaches its objective to expose the benefits of implementing cyber insurance for firms, and especially, for critical infrastructures and CII.

Even if insurance market may still present possible failures, insurance for critical infrastructure is a possible way to protect nations' capabilities to ensure society future and present wellbeing. Therefore, the insurance may act as a facilitator tool in order to collect information and risk assessment (Cukier, 2005), which will enable insurers with greater information power as they may improve insurance conditions, terms and premiums. Insurance, as a result, acts as a collector of information and best practices which are shared across the industry, improving the efficiency and the protection of data, software and business.

Furthermore, insurance market in order to be the most fair and efficient, needs to have a reasonable and enough good knowledge about the expected losses and their likelihood of occurring by tracing and knowing the probability distribution of the insured events (Rowlands, Devlin, 2006). However, because of non-independency of events, since, in the case of CI, the interrelation among events, components and infrastructures are present and strong, the analytics of past events in order to foreseen future ones is challenged and complex (Rowlands, Devlin, 2006).

Another benefit of cyber insurance implementation is that cyber insurance has the power to improve information about security, since it requires a wide collection of data about cyber threats and cyber attacks; at the same way, cyber insurance can affect positively security decisions and the overall network environment, spreading the adoption of these mitigation strategies.

Incentives are requested and needed in order to boost and improve the accessibility to insurance in order to mitigate risks and costs. In order to improve economic efficiency, it is required to encourage firms in engaging the optimal level of risk mitigation (Rowlands, Devlin, 2006); it is possible by requiring, as terms of insurance contracts, more investment. It is still important the government contribution to insurance market and critical infrastructures, where government should focus on major cyber/physical events and on helping stakeholders by assuming the role of *super partes* (US Homeland Security, 2012). Even if governmental agencies succeeded in identifying cyber threats and their sources, it is up to organizations to insure their operations by deciding which cyber threats address, as it is useless and inefficient to “*insure against everyone and everything*” (US Homeland Security, 2012), by implementing protection strategies which address basic cyber threats, and by relying on agencies cooperation if a complex cyber attack should occur.

Cyber insurance has still to address challenges in order to improve and boost its adoption towards firms and industries. In fact, an increased adoption of cyber insurance is proved to improve the Internet conditions for the majority of users, even those that do not purchase cyber insurance (Lelarge, Bolot, 2009), to improve cyber security and to reassure stakeholders.

In conclusion, it is possible to state that, as this thesis tried to prove and explain, cyber insurance market is essential and a vital presence for companies that want to transfer cyber risks to third parties, and it will have a larger role for industries as soon as governments will clarify and reason cyber security investments.

In special way for critical infrastructures, cyber insurance represents an effective and efficient tool in order to encourage owners and operators to implement improved cyber security strategies and it reassures stakeholders of

the reliability and resilience of these backbone structures, which are assumed to continue providing their services for the sake of society well being.

This thesis is structured in five main chapters, which face principal topics and issues related to critical infrastructures and cyber insurance.

**Chapter one** rotates around the figure of Critical Infrastructures and their interdependencies with the external environment, formed by society, economics and politics. Through a deep and transversal theoretical investigation, it is possible to notice how critical infrastructures are fundamental and essential for the entire world.

**Chapter two** investigates in critical infrastructure particularities which are Critical Information Infrastructures. These are the base of many other critical sectors, linked with strong interdependencies and nebulous boundaries as Internet and telecommunications technologies (ICT) improve and enter daily life with numerous and different applications.

**Chapter three** deals with the importance and value of information and data, which constitute the essential raw material for any business. As WikiLeaks has proven, the security and protection of sensitive information and data becomes a priority for organizations, which try to construct valiant models that could help business to deal efficiently with everyday operations and processes. Therefore, models and management strategies would be useful and indispensable for business in order to handle carefully these key assets.

**Chapter four** shows the risks that organizations, and general users, meet by using and running IT infrastructures, which represent the pivotal structure for modern organizations. In fact, cyberspace and computer machines are now the key platform in which the complex relation between human factors and economic advantage takes place, as the Internet and its infrastructure connect people, provide governmental services and help running businesses and services. However, the complexities are evident for any users, since risks, threats and vulnerabilities are the first threats to organizational security, and it also represents one of the top threats to national security, second only to terrorism.

**Chapter five** introduces the importance of cyber insurance, which transfers cyber risks to an insurance company that can effectively and profitably mitigate risks in return of premiums. In fact, as the importance of the Internet grows, firms are more vulnerable to threats and risks coming from cyber criminals, who attempt to gain unauthorized credentials and access to sensitive information, causing significant financial and business losses to firms. However, cyber insurance proves that, if effectively implemented alongside with cyber security strategies and risk management procedures, it is a valid ally for mitigating those risks that remain uncovered by normal security strategies. Moreover, cyber insurance may affect positively other industries and users, thanks to improved cyber security spread over the Internet and IT infrastructures.

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