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May 1st, 2022

PHIL

Cyberwarfare

Iran and Israel are currently exchanging cyberattack blows back and forth with increasing severity. The attacks and retaliations between one another have not explicitly been to cause death, but by proxy the probability of death occurring has increased. While the attacks have been happening for over a decade by now, the civilian effects have been increasing. From Israel causing Iran citizens to be unable to fill up gas from gas stations to Iran retaliating by targeting hospital systems in Israel, the cyberattacks are escalating in damage. With Iran having political sanctions, it is difficult for them to upgrade and stay updated on software patches, resulting in cyberattacks becoming both easier and more frequent. Due to both this and from the difficulty of tracing cyber-attacks, this has led to an easier method of waging war without directly causing a loss of life. In this case analysis, I will argue that deontology shows us that the cyberwar between Israel and Iran is just a war because the escalation of the war lies in protecting their people and deterring threats, without the added concepts of having a war to accomplish what the enemy would perceive as good things.

Boylan argues that the just war theory, as it currently stands, is out of date and needs to be revised in accordance with technological innovations. While Boylan argues that "the difference between sabotage and cyber warfare is matter of degree", the matter of degree is a relative term that is open to interpretation from the victim’s side. In this point he argues that if just one company or group of people were attacked digitally, then this would be a minor offence equivalent to breaking a law. On the other side, if an entire navy ship was targeted and taken offline while the attacking country took advantage of this, then that would be a war crime. These differences are not black and white however, but hundreds of shades of gray as it comes down to the respective laws of the country where the attack took place. In the United States of America, and attack like DDoS on a company would result in criminal penalties akin to a fine and jail time, an attack of this nature to a different country could result in harsher penalties depending on their respective laws. In this nature, Boylan argues that it is necessary to have a new Geneva convention to come to a consensus on the severity that should be interpreted universally by cyber-attacks.

    In the case of the attacks between Iran and Israel, both attacks clearly fall into the former category talked about previously. To shed confusion, I will refer to the attacks on a company or group of people without bodily harm regarding the country’s most likely consequences if the attacker was a citizen of the victim. Under this idea, the attacks that both countries have launched at one another have not seriously crippled each other's infrastructure. Imagine a sink in a bathroom. Boylan’s concepts of the intentions and consequences from a cyber-attack can be viewed as either putting tape underneath the faucet to prevent the flow of water versus taking a sledgehammer and breaking the faucet all together. Under the first idea, all one must do is remove the tape and the faucet works fine, whereas under the latter the entire faucet must be repaired. Israel could have deleted and distorted the entire system for operating all of their pumps and embed a virus that actively deletes any added fixes, thus causing massive infrastructure damages and possibly leading to the need for massive hardware replacement. Instead of this, the damage was light enough that it can almost be viewed as just sending a message. This message basically said "Hey, we could have crippled you, but we didn't. Stop what you are doing or else we will" by showing how they could infiltrate their systems. Iran responded to this with a similar concept but escalating the severity by targeting a hospital.

    Under the ethical tool of Deontology, both countries are doing exactly what they should do given the respective situation they are in. Kant's idea that one must always act in a moral way is a relative concept depending on which side of a war you are on. To the citizens of Iran, it is moral to protect and fight for them and deter any threats of war in a way that stops a response. The same can be said for Israel's interpretation of the war. Therefore, both countries are taking the best response and measures that they can in order to prevent loss of life on their own citizens while still asserting dominance that they will not just roll over and take an attack. As opposed to a direct loss of life, both countries are taking a more anonymous and indirect path of violence by not specifically setting out to kill or seriously injure, but rather extremely inconvenience the other country. The attack on the hospital was not specifically set out to kill anyone, even though that may be an unintended effect, but rather show that they have the capacity to target everything including hospitals.

    On the other hand, Taddeo argues that not only does cyberwarfare most likely "cause none or very little casualties", but that it can be used to resolve conflicts. The ability of cyberwarfare to resolve conflicts while avoiding bloodshed is an important understanding in that it is more akin to diplomatic talks than it is loss of life. Additionally, who exactly is a civilian and who is a military member relatively becomes far more blurred, as with cyber-attacks it is no longer a necessary requirement to be in the military off in another country commanding or serving with troops in order to wage a war. Rather, it can be done from the comfort of your home. This advancement in the idea of a just war is argued to allow for cyberwarfare to have a place in how it not only can be used to deter a full on physical, traditional war but that it allows for the country to defend itself without exhausting life on either side.

    From Taddeo's understanding in relation to the conflict between Iran and Israel, the intention of performing these cyber-attacks is done for two reasons. To deter a further escalation of the conflict and to avoid specific bloodshed on either side, as both of these ideas would specifically lead to an all-out war involving military troops, mutual casualties, and the prospect of losing. It is ironic in this case then that the cyberattacks between the two countries have gone on for a decade without either one stopping the attacks, but instead escalating the situation. With what Taddeo argues is a just war, the war between Iran and Israel that is happening right now is indeed a just war as it is both the path of least resistance and allows for neither one to commit such atrocities that peace is out of the question. As argued previously, both countries could have launched far worse attacks against each other during each attack, but instead chose to basically show the other country the capacity they have for attacking and how it could be far worse if need be.

    Under the concepts of Deontology, yet again it is shown that both countries are arguing for protection of their own people that is being done for good reasons. Each country is not retaliating against one another in a blatant attempt to cause loss of life or critically injure the infrastructure of the other, but instead in both an attempt at a resolution while still coming out on top and showing that they will not back down from a threat. Under the eyes of deontology, a good thing is being done for good reasons, and therefore each country has the moral high ground in respect to their people. The difficult part of assessing this situation is that only up until now do both countries have the moral high ground. In the future, depending on how this situation continues, this may not remain the case as the situation has been shown to be escalating. If this does lead to bloodshed, then it would not be a just war as bad things would be happening, even if they are for good reasons.

    As it currently stands, the cyberwar between the two countries has been shown to be a just war. This has been shown between both the understandings of Boylan and Taddeo to currently exist as a just war. Neither country has been launching attacks with the specific intention of bloodshed, but instead with the hope that the conflict will end while avoiding direct bloodshed. With the types of attacks launched by both countries, the loss of life could have been far greater than anything that did happen, and major infrastructure attacks could have also taken place. Again, it is important to highlight that this situation is not over, and appears to still be escalating, so it is difficult to gauge the situation in a complete manner. Neither country has shown to be backing down, and therefore while the war is just, the war has not been successful. It remains to be seen if the current conflict will evolve into something more deadly and serious, but for now the conflict is just on both sides and happening for the protection and betterment of their own people. It should be noted though that a more diplomatic approach could be more successful at ending this conflict.