**Information Warfare**

In recent years, foreign interference in U.S. elections has become a huge concern. Shedd and Stradner paint a pretty clear picture of how Russia, China, and Iran have tried to mess with American politics not by launching missiles or sending soldiers, but by spreading disinformation online to divide Americans and shake their confidence in democracy. Russia has been especially aggressive, using social media “troll farms” and fake accounts to push fake news and stir up fights online. China tends to play a longer game, trying to shape how Americans see China itself and U.S.China relations. Iran is smaller scale but still jumps in, mainly to undermine U.S. leadership or make people lose trust in institutions. The key point from their article is that all three countries are using the internet, social media, and information campaigns as weapons not to destroy things physically, but to attack the U.S. from the inside by making Americans doubt each other and their government.

In this Case Analysis, I will argue that using Deontology as my ethical tool shows that Russia, China, and Iran are engaging in information warfare against the U.S. and their actions are not morally justifiable because they deliberately break the moral duty not to deceive or manipulate others. I will also argue that if the U.S. interfered in the same way in their elections, it would also be information warfare and equally unjustifiable under the same duty-based reasoning.

Lt. Col. Jarred Prier’s article, “Commanding the Trend,” explains that modern information warfare isn’t just about hacking or spreading a single piece of fake news it’s about controlling the conversation online. He talks about “commanding the trend,” which is basically shaping what people are talking about and how they think about it on social media. It’s like creating a wave and then riding it. Instead of dropping bombs, countries can now drop tweets and memes to cause chaos. If you can make a topic trend, you can influence what millions of people believe without them realizing they’re being manipulated.

When I think about the interference described by Shedd and Stradner, it lines up perfectly with Prier’s idea. Russia is the best example. They don’t just post random lies they figure out where Americans are already divided, like on race, immigration, or gun rights, and then pump out posts to make people angrier. They create fake groups on Facebook and Twitter and push hashtags until they start trending. People start arguing, sharing posts, and before long, the conflict spreads like wildfire. China and Iran do similar things but with slightly different goals China cares more about shaping the global image of China, and Iran just wants to make the U.S. look weak and divided. All of this is a clear case of information warfare because they’re deliberately trying to manipulate and destabilize a country through information instead of traditional weapons.

Looking at this from a Deontological perspective makes it pretty straightforward. Deontology is all about duties and moral rules you do what’s right because it’s your duty, not because of the consequences. One of the clearest moral duties is to not lie or manipulate people, because lying treats people as tools instead of as free, rational individuals. What Russia, China, and Iran are doing is basically weaponizing lies and half truths to mess with democratic decision making. They’re treating American citizens like pawns in a game. From a deontological view, this is inherently wrong.

Now, what about if the U.S. decided to fight fire with fire and did the same thing to Russia, China, or Iran? Some people might say it would be fair because those countries started it. But Deontology doesn’t care about revenge or an eye for an eye. It says that if something is a moral duty, it applies universally. If it’s wrong to deceive and manipulate voters, then it’s wrong even if you’re doing it to an enemy. So if the U.S. ran similar campaigns to interfere with their elections, it would also be morally wrong under this framework. You can’t break your own moral duties just because someone else broke theirs.

Valerie morkevicius talks about wars of information and how they connect to Just War Theory, which is the idea that even wars have rules and moral limits. She explains that in the modern world, conflicts aren’t always about soldiers and bombs sometimes they’re about information. And if we think of information as a battlefield, then we have to ask are these attacks part of a just war or are they just wrong no matter what?

She breaks down some of the traditional just war criteria things like having a just cause, the right intention, and proportionality and applies them to information warfare. If we use that lens, Russia, China, and Iran fail the test. Their campaigns don’t have a just cause they’re not defending themselves from an attack, they’re just trying to gain power or make the U.S. weaker. Their intentions are also wrong, because their goal is to create chaos, distrust, and division, not to protect anyone. And proportionality doesn’t really fit either, because spreading lies that undermine a whole democracy is a massive harm for the sake of relatively small political gain.

From a Deontological view, this fits perfectly with what I said earlier. Even if these countries claimed that they were protecting themselves or trying to balance out U.S. influence in the world, that wouldn’t make it right. Duties don’t change based on politics. Deontology would say they still have a duty not to lie and manipulate innocent people. Even in war some actions are always wrong. Election interference through disinformation is one of those because it violates the moral duty to respect other nations and their citizens as moral agents.

And if the U.S. flipped the script and interfered in their elections the same way, Deontology would judge that as wrong, too. morkevicius framework reinforces this because just war thinking doesn’t allow you to commit unjust actions just because the other side did it first. Two wrongs don’t make a right in moral philosophy. It might be tempting for the U.S. to retaliate or teach them a lesson but from a duty based ethical stance, manipulating voters in another country is still a breach of moral duty.

To sum it all up, Russia, China, and Iran are clearly engaging in information warfare against the United States by spreading disinformation, creating online chaos, and trying to make Americans lose faith in their democracy. Looking at this through Prier’s concept of commanding the trend and morkevicius ideas about just wars of information makes it obvious that these campaigns are deliberate acts of information warfare. Using Deontology, we can see that these actions are morally wrong because they involve lying, deception, and using people as tools rather than respecting them as free decision-makers.

Some might argue that since these countries are doing it to the U.S. it would be justified for the U.S. to do the same thing back. But Deontology doesn’t allow morality to depend on who started it. A duty is a duty, and lying and manipulating others is always wrong. Retaliation through similar disinformation campaigns would just make the U.S. guilty of the same moral failure.

The bigger problem here is that information warfare blurs the line between peace and war. It tempts countries to act in ways that might seem effective but are still morally wrong. My argument faces a challenge in the real world, governments often ignore strict moral rules to protect their interests. But if we want to hold onto the idea of moral duties in international relations, then we have to admit that both the foreign interference and any potential U.S. retaliation would be unjustifiable. Sticking to those moral duties might feel like tying one hand behind your back, but it’s the only way to avoid sinking to the same level as the adversaries.