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Case Analysis 6.4

In 2021 a massive cyberattack hit Iran causing issues with the country's gas infrastructure. This attack was on the 2-year anniversary of a record price hike on fuel that occurred in 2019. While the identities of the perpetrators have not been discovered, the assumption made by the Iranian government has been that it is the doing of Israel, a common enemy of Iran. Iran and Israel have been launching cyberattacks on each other for years, with no clear notion of who started it, or when it will end. In this Case Analysis, I will be arguing with the consequentialist tool, that the cyberwar between Iran and Israel is unjust, because they are only taking into account their hate for the other country, while ignoring the lives of the innocent people who are being hurt and being put in harm's way by the frequent attacks on each of the country's infrastructure.

In Michael Boylan's paper, "Can there be a Just Cyber War," Boylan argues that cases of cyber war can be justified when the losses caused by the attack act as more of nuisances rather than posing actual harm to human beings. Nuisances in this case being things that just cause a person to be late or cost a company money, while yes, these things can be annoying, no one was hurt physically, so it can be justified. On the other side of that coin, it is seen that once a cyber attack does cause harm that is when the act cannot be justified, someone went out of their way to hurt people, therefore it cannot be forgiven.

Boylan calls on the example of Stuxnet in his paper, the malware that was deployed to target an Iranian nuclear enrichment center. The attack specifically targeted the centrifuges that would spin the nuclear material for enrichment. The attack itself caused these centrifuges to spin uncontrollably until they ripped themselves apart. And while no one died, this act carried the risk to kill a lot of people. People work in those facilities, and with being in the same place as multiple heavy machines ripping themselves apart, it is a miracle that no one died from the Stuxnet attack. If someone had died from the Stuxnet attack it could be theorized that the cyberwar would have evolved into a more physical war. Which in turn, would justify the war from that point forward. If we look at this through a consequentialist point of view, we can see that there is no justification for attacks from either side, because all these acts are doing is causing suffering for the other side, these attacks do not give Iran or Israel an upper hand over the other, it is just to cause the other side to suffer more. This viewpoint can help us see that both sides are not attacking each other for the greater good of their people, but because they just want to cause the most pain possible for their enemy's infrastructure. And yes, it can be argued that these attacks are just acts of retaliation, but from the outside it just seems like two people hurling insults and rocks at one another just because the other person did it before them, and they have been doing it for so long that they do not know who originally started it. If we bring back

Boylan's point of view, the way things are now should justify this war, as harm is being committed on both sides, but this war feels different, since there is no true aggressor or defender, both sides are acting as aggressors.

Throughout Boylan's paper he highlights the fact of how much our society has become reliant on the computerization of our infrastructure, and how fundamentally simple it would be for hackers to take over landmarks such as the London Eye Ferris wheel. The fact of the matter is that the risk of cyber attacks is much higher than ever with how our society functions today. If we bring back the idea of consequentialism it could be argued that in order to decrease the risk of suffering from the effect of cyber attacks, we should just stop using internet connected devices, but we cannot do that, because our world has been internet connected for over 30 years, going back on that much progress is impossible. This can help us see that the escalation of these cyber attacks will experience existential growth of both severity and scope if something is not done to fix it. The only way to stop the suffering caused by cyber warfare would be to get these countries to stop hurling cyber attacks at one another, all they are doing is hurting the people who are not at fault of whatever reason these countries hate each other.

In Mariarosario Taddeo's paper, "An Analysis of Just Cyber Warfare," she brings up the idea of the Just War Theory, which is a theory, and to an extent, guideline, of how a war must be conducted in order for it to be justified. Things like needing a reason to go to war, but also guidelines in conduct, or how a country needs to act when in a war. "Jus in bello", which is "right conduct in war" is the term that is used to describe this. Behavior that falls in line with this would be to only fight your enemy, therefore, the military and government of your enemy, and to stay away from noncombatants. The cyber attacks Israel and Iran have been hurling at each other fundamentally ignore that, as these attacks do affect noncombatants.

When the attack against the fuel infrastructure occurred, the only people who were affected by it were the civilians. I would be shocked if it came out that any government official or military personnel were affected by the attack. The issue that arises can be tied in well with the consequentialist point of view, all that these attacks are achieving is causing more suffering for the people at large, instead of what should be targeted in war, which is government and military infrastructure. When either Iran or Israel sends out an attack against the other that only affects civilians, that is not justifiable cyber warfare, that is terrorism. Targeting civilians takes out any possibility of being considered just cyber warfare and can get moved comfortably into the definition of cyber terrorism, which according to the Just War Theory, is not something you do in war that can be justified.

Taddeo calls upon an idea that helps highlight the faults of the cyber war between Iran and Israel, to summarize it, the correct way to decide what action to take, is to figure out how that action will affect people, and if that effect causes too much harm, do not take the action in question. When you think about how Iran and Israel are handling the situation, it seems like they are not taking those ideas into question, and are just retaliating at each other out of hate, rather than retaliating because they feel threatened by the other. Taddeo's ideas help us see that Israel and Iran are creating these attacks to cause the most damage possible. Instead of serving swift and proportionate attacks, they are trying to cause the most damage to their enemy as possible,

for example, Stuxnet, there is no doubt that a cyber attack could simply turn off the centrifuges that were affected, but they wanted to send a message, which caused the centrifuges to explode the way they did. Circling back to consequentialism, we can see that Israel and Iran just want to cause as much suffering to each other as possible, they want to turn the trolley to hit as many people as possible if those people are from their enemy. They tell themselves that their next attack will make the other side stop sending attacks, but neither side wants to actually stop, they just want to intimidate the other into stopping by force rather than diplomacy and doing that just plants the seed for the next attack, and the one after that. Peace has not been achieved because neither side wants peace, both sides want to cripple the other so that they can claim victory over the other. With consequentialism in mind, we can see that Israel and Iran see victory as who can cause the other to suffer the most, instead of simply destroying them.

In conclusion, this is not a “Just Cyber War.” Neither side is fighting for anything other than the desire to take out the other, both Israel and Iran will keep sending attack after attack to each other until someone “wins.” Their attacks do not just hurt the governments in question, but they also hurt the civilians who most likely do not want war and would rather be at peace with their neighbors, but unfortunately the people in charge do not hold the same sentiment, and continue the attacks because they want to cause as much suffering as possible for their enemies. They claim it is an act of retaliation, but it is clear to see that there is no clear beginning to the attacks and that there is no clear end. These attacks will occur until one side wins or until, by a miracle, peace or diplomacy is somehow achieved between these two countries. Hopefully that is a future that can be achieved but until then, there is no justification for this bitter war.