

Ethical Assessment of Russian Election Interference Using the Framework of Just Information Warfare

N. Manzonelli¹ J. Zuccarelli²

¹IACS
Harvard University

²IACS
Harvard University

AC221 Final Project, April 2022



Table of Contents

- 1 Introduction to Just Information Warfare
- 2 Case Study: Russian 2016 Election Interference
- 3 Conclusions



Table of Contents

- 1 Introduction to Just Information Warfare
- 2 Case Study: Russian 2016 Election Interference
- 3 Conclusions



Information Warfare

Definition

The use of ICTs devoted to breaching an adversary's informational infrastructure in order to either disrupt it or acquire relevant data about the adversary's resources, military strategies, etc.^a

^aEdward L Waltz. *Information Warfare Principles and Operations*. Artech House, Inc., 1998.

Examples

(2015) US Office of Personnel Management Data Breach

(2022) Russo-Ukrainian War



Just War Theory

Definition

An ethical framework that deals with the justification of why (“*jus ad bellum*” –right to go to war) and how (“*jus in bello*” –right conduct in war) wars are fought.^a

^a[Michael Walzer](#). *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. [Hachette UK](#), 2015.

Principles

jus ad bellum: I.) Just Cause II.) Legitimate Authority III.) Right Intention
IV.) Reasonable Prospects of Success V.) Proportionality VI.) Last Resort
jus in bello: I.) Discrimination II.) Proportionality III.) Necessity



Information Ethics

Definition

An ethical framework that considers the duty of any moral agent with respect to its contribution to the informational environment.^a

^aLuciano Floridi. *The Ethics of Information*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Principles

- I.) Entropy ought not to be caused in the infosphere
- II.) Entropy ought to be prevented in the infosphere
- III.) Entropy ought to be removed from the infosphere
- IV.) The flourishing of informational entities as well as of the whole infosphere ought to be promoted by preserving, cultivating and enriching their properties

Just Information Warfare

Definition

A framework that merges the principles of JWT and IE to consider the ethical implications of informational phenomena^a

^aMariarosaria Taddeo. "Just Information Warfare". In: *Topoi* 35.1 (2016), pp. 213–224.

Principles

- I.) IW ought to be waged only against those entities that endanger or disrupt the well-being of the infosphere
 - II.) IW ought to be waged to preserve the well-being of the infosphere
 - III.) IW ought not to be waged to promote the well-being of the infosphere
- Corollary: the waging of IW must comply with the principle of proportionality

Table of Contents

- 1 Introduction to Just Information Warfare
- 2 Case Study: Russian 2016 Election Interference
- 3 Conclusions



Case Background

- **2016 US Presidential Election:** Trump (Rep.) defeats Clinton (Dem.) 304-227
- Russian Election Interference
 - Goals: Damage the Clinton campaign, Boost the Trump campaign, Sow distrust in American democracy
 - Techniques: Probing state voter databases, Cyber attacks against the Clinton campaign/DCCC/DNC, Spreading propaganda on social media
 - Repercussions: Federal grand jury indictment against 12 Russian military intelligence officers, Economic sanctions
 - Source: "S. Rept. 116-290 - Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election, Volumes I-V." *Congress.gov*, Library of Congress, 3 April 2022.



Case Background (cont.)



Figure: Russian Military Intelligence Officers Wanted by FBI



Case Analysis

- Russian use of IW in the 2016 election → **UNJUST**
 - Violation of principles I and II
 - Entropy: Stealing voter information, Stealing and leaking Clinton campaign/DCCC/DNC emails, Developing of troll farms/bots to spread false messages on social media



Case Analysis (cont.)

- US response to Russian IW → **JUST**
 - Supported by principles I and II
 - Federal grand jury indictment 12 Russian intelligence officers
 - Development of election-security task forces at the FBI, the DHS, the NSA and the US Cyber Command has been expanded and “made permanent” (public-private sector cooperation)
 - Use of economic sanctions against Russians affiliated with the Internet Research Agency, an organization that manipulates social media for misinformation purposes



Table of Contents

- 1 Introduction to Just Information Warfare
- 2 Case Study: Russian 2016 Election Interference
- 3 Conclusions







Key Takeaways

- Traditional ethical theories/frameworks are not directly applicable within the realm of cyberspace due to its unique nature
- Election interference is an increasingly popular form of IW that countries must protect against
- JIW is a relatively new and useful ethical tool for reasoning about a proper response to instances of IW such as election interference



References

-  Floridi, Luciano. *The Ethics of Information*. Oxford University Press, 2013.
-  Taddeo, Mariarosaria. “Just Information Warfare”. In: *Topoi* 35.1 (2016), pp. 213–224.
-  Waltz, Edward L. *Information Warfare Principles and Operations*. Artech House, Inc., 1998.
-  Walzer, Michael. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*. Hachette UK, 2015.

