NET-100 Computer Ethics

10/11/2024

Discussion Post

Sources:

Edward Snowden on Cyber Attacks – PBS, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0e46OtrQps>

Average Annual Change in Total Fertility Rate Since 2007 (chart) – The Institute for Family Studies, <https://ifstudies.org/ifs-admin/resources/fig-1-copy-1-w640.png>

The truth behind Israel’s curiously high fertility rate – National Post, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/danielle-kubes-the-truth-behind-israels-curiously-high-fertility-rate>

            “When you look at the problem of the US prioritizing offense over defense…” is the first statement Snowden makes in this clip, and he goes on to liken the problem to one of bank vaults, giving the argument that we have more to lose, so while we’ve been focusing on offensive technologies, our enemies have gotten into our “vaults” too because we haven’t put enough focus on defensive technologies. I took his premise to mean that everything from our own cyber armament and military strategies to government networks and classified information to economic institutions and customer data is being stolen by our adversaries and then deployed against us.

            I think I mostly agree with Snowden here, if the solution is to put at least an equal if not greater focus on defensive capabilities, but I would caveat that with a “but not at the expense of offensive capabilities.” The US is in a difficult position regarding resource allocation, even considering the ever-growing national debt. The military has a budget every year, and while it is possible to spend over budget, that additional spending must be approved by congress. The DoD has the ability to take from some programs to give to others, but without congress approval, there’s a limited amount of money to work with.

            So I think congress needs to pass a permanent increase to military spending that is reserved specifically for defensive cyber technologies. I’m not sure how that bill would need to be structured, but I’m sure it can happen. Much like during the cold war, we can’t afford to lag behind in offensive cyber capabilities. The US is still a powerful nation, and because of how many hostile nations and ideological groups are actively targeting and attacking the US, we need to be able to get into their systems to learn as much as we can about how we’re being attacked, with what, how it works, etc, etc.. to aid in the development of a proper and effective defensive arsenal.

            In addition to increases to military funding, I think (purely from a practical perspective, though I don’t like it) this might be a good case for a private and public collaboration. Propaganda can be “good,” and propaganda can be bad. The term comes with negative connotations due to how it’s used in references to historical authoritarian regimes, but there are questionably ethical uses for propaganda, at least when viewing it from a “survival of one’s society” perspective. Israel is a good example of how propaganda can lead to positive effects, with its pro-natalist messaging/policies and fully-subsidized IVF campaign leading to an increase in birth rate, which is a very necessary thing for the survival of the Israeli people. When both the global birthrates are plummeting in the Western and other developed nations, and your country is surrounded by people that want to kill you, it would benefit your country to have a high birth rate. Just going to leave that one there.

            Using similarly effective propaganda in collaboration with the media and Hollywood, the military should be running education and recruitment (read: social engineering) campaigns to increase cultural interest in cyberwarfare, teach the younger generations how to code as part of their primary education curriculum, make hackers cool again and push patriotic messaging through movies, streaming, media, and games, deploy bots to social media to infiltrate groups and seed similar messaging, framed to give the impression the cultural zeitgeist was actively shifting, and increase enlistment bonuses with an emphasis on those with the skill set for cyberwarfare.

            As much as I don’t like the government manipulating people and violating our ability to have agency, they would have a valid moral argument that, if enacted, would likely result in a greater chance of the nation’s survival.