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magazine

where the experts come to talk

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NATO Review » Cyber - the good, the bad and the bug-free » Cyberwar - does it exist?

Cyberwar - does it exist?

Cyber war does not exist. This is the bald statement summarising the work of Dr Thomas Rid of King's College London, who feels that cyber attacks meet none of the conditions of war. NATO Review asked how he came to this conclusion and what it meant for the security field.

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Cyberwar - does it exist?

Cyberwar is a term

that is often coined these days,

but what does it actually mean?

NATO Review talks to an expert

who claims

that cyberwar doesn't even exist

and that the term is being misused.

If something happens, it can be

a conventional act of violence,

whether we call it an act of war...

Whether I call it that

doesn't matter, I'm just an academic.

What matters is if prime ministers

and presidents call it an act of war.

And whether they do so or not

is a political decision.

Think of the Boston terrorist attacks.

How does this fit with the crippling

cyber attack on Estonia in 2007?

A country like Estonia

certainly wasn't brought to its knees

by a denial of service attacks.

If that actually would have happened

the president of Estonia wouldn't

have written in The New York Times

that it actually was

a blessing in retrospect

because Estonia learned

some interesting lessons from it.

So what is the difference between

a cyber and a conventional attack?

In the context of computer attacks

offensive capabilities

don't necessarily translate

into defensive capabilities.

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Cyber attacks: how can they hurt us?



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Being better at offensive capabilities
doesn't make you better defensively.
So, that's a sharp contrast to many
conventional weapon systems.
So when would a cyber attack
cross the threshold
and become an act of war?
We've never seen an act...
an attack that was violent at first
and was political and somebody said:
I did this to you,
and that was instrumental
and that somebody said:
I did this to you
to change your behaviour,
because usually people and states
don't take credit for cyber attacks.
We have an empirical record
to talk about. It's mostly espionage,
computer crime,
a little bit of sabotage,
and of course, hactivism, subversion.
We haven't seen
something that is an act...
the use of force
through a computer code.
Why don't we talk about the real
problems, how we can solve them,
as opposed to talking about
what could possibly happen
and how we would call that.
Is there a danger of exaggerating
the effect of cyber attacks?
We are still human beings
and despite Facebook
we still exist in the physical arena.
It's like online dating.
What counts is not online, but offline.
And of course if we talk about
violence here the same is very true.
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Queen Elizabeth II

quotes

*Whatever life throws at us, our individual responses will be all the stronger
for working together and sharing the load*

NEWSLETTER

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