International Cybertorts: Expanding State Accountability in Cyberspace

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INTERNATIONAL CYBERTORTS: EXPANDING STATE ACCOUNTABILITY IN CYBERSPACE

Rebecca Crootof†

States are not being held accountable for the vast majority of their harmful cyberoperations, largely because classifications created in physical space do not map well onto the cyber domain. Most injurious and invasive cyberoperations are not cybercrimes and do not constitute cyberwarfare, nor are states extending existing definitions of wrongful acts permitting countermeasures to cyberoperations (possibly to avoid creating precedent restricting their own activities). Absent an appropriate label, victim states have few effective and non-escalatory responsive options, and the harms associated with these incidents lie where they fall.

This Article draws on tort law and international law principles to construct a comprehensive system of state accountability in cyberspace, where states are liable for their harmful acts and responsible for their wrongful ones. It identifies international cybertorts—acts that employ, infect, or undermine the internet, a computer system, or a network and thereby cause significant transboundary harm—as distinct from cybercrime and cyberwarfare. Not only does this term distinguish a specific kind of harmful act, it highlights how the principle of state liability for transboundary harms (which holds states accountable for the harmful consequences of both their lawful and unlawful activities) could usefully complement the existing law of state responsibility (which applies only to unlawful state acts). Imposing state liability for international cybertorts minimizes the likelihood that victim states will resort to escalatory responses, increases the chance that those harmed will be compensated, and preserves a bounded grey zone for state experimentation in cyberspace.

† Executive Director, Information Society Project; Research Scholar and Lecturer in Law, Yale Law School. For productive conversations and useful insights, many thanks to Dapo Akande, BJ Ard, Jack Balkin, Jack Goldsmith, Claudia Haupt, Ido Kilovaty, Asaf Lubin, Torey McMurdo, Michael Schmitt, Beatrice Walton, Sean Watts, and Sheldon Welton. Earlier drafts were much improved by feedback from presentations at the ISP Fellows Writing Workshop, Andrew Chin’s Cyberspace Law course, and the Yale PhDs in Law Tea. As always, many thanks to Douglas Bernstein for thoughtful and clarifying edits.
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INTRODUCTION

In 2014, the North Korean “Guardians of Peace” hacker group raided Sony Pictures Entertainment servers and publicized extensive confidential data, including previously-unreleased films, executives’ embarrassing personal emails, actors’ passports and aliases, and Sony employees’ personal and medical information. In response, the United States took the then-unprecedented move of publicly attributing the Guardians’ cyberoperations directly to the state of North Korea and imposing new financial sanctions. Experts estimate that the costs of

the Sony hack include $80 million in direct damages and more than $120 million in indirect damages (such as leaked trade secrets and lost revenue).³

Eighteen months later, on the eve of the Democratic National Convention, WikiLeaks released approximately 19,000 emails written by top officials in the Democratic National Committee (DNC) that criticized and mocked then-presidential-hopeful Senator Bernie Sanders, sowing discord in an already-divided political party.⁴ A private cybersecurity firm determined that the emails had been obtained by hacker groups associated with the Russian government;⁵ months later, the Obama Administration formally attributed the DNC hack to Russia,⁶ sparking a debate about whether the hack and subsequent info dump altered the results of the 2016 presidential election. The economic expenses associated with the DNC hack were high; the political costs are impossible to calculate.

Predictably, the Sony hack and DNC hack were popularly termed “cyberwarfare”⁷—and, equally predictably, these char-

⁵ Ackerman & Thielman, supra note 4.
⁷ With regard to the Sony hack, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich tweeted, “No one should kid themselves. With the Sony collapse America has lost
acterizations were followed by a spate of academics and specialists clarifying that the hacks did not satisfy the legal requirements for that title. But if these cyberoperations were not cyberwarfare, what were they? They were cyberespionage and transnational cybercrime—but they were also something more. Unlike most cyberespionage, the stolen information was intentionally publicized with an apparent intent to cause harm. Unlike most transnational cybercrimes, the cyberoperations were state-sponsored—and while individuals in the Guardians of the Peace and Russian hacker groups can theoretically be held criminally liable, North Korea and Russia cannot. Some


9 The 2001 Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime establishes “a common criminal policy aimed at the protection of society against cybercrime.” Convention on Cybercrime, Council of Europe, pmbl., Nov. 23, 2001, E.T.S. No. 185 (entered into force July 1, 2004). As of September 2017, fifty-five states have ratified or acceded to the Convention, and an additional four have signed it. Chart of Signatures and Ratifications of Treaty 185, COUNCIL EUR., TREATY OFF., http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ChercheSig.asp?NT=185&C_M=8&DF=28/10/2010&CL=ENG [https://perma.cc/5ULT-2PB7]. The Convention creates no international law crimes; rather, it creates international law obligations to enact domestic law and render mutual assistance. And, as with most criminal law regimes, this treaty is meant to govern the unlawful actions of individuals, not of states. All in all, it is wholly inadequate for addressing state-sponsored cyberoperations—notwithstanding the fact that, with a few notable (and contested) exceptions, the vast majority of significantly harmful and intrusive cyberoperations appear to have been sponsored by states. Furthermore, attempts to investigate and prosecute individuals for transnational cybercrimes under the treaty have not been markedly successful. Cf. Michael J. Glennon, State-level Cyber-
have suggested that these cyberoperations might be internationally wrongful acts—violation of a state’s international obligations—but scholars are divided on that question.\(^{10}\) Importantly, the United States never claimed either hack was a violation of international law—instead, as evidenced by then-President Obama’s description of the Sony hack as “cyber-vandalism,”\(^{11}\) states are casting about for a way to characterize such acts negatively without explicitly labeling them as unlawful (and thereby setting a precedent that might limit their own cyberoperations). In short, despite being widely recognized as important and possibly even world-altering,\(^{12}\) there is no obviously accurate term for cyberoperations like the Sony and DNC hacks.\(^{13}\)

\(^{10}\) The Sony hack might be considered a violation of U.S. sovereignty, insofar as there was manipulation of cyber infrastructure and the insertion of malware. Schmitt, supra note 8. It is less clear if the DNC hack could be similarly characterized, given that compromising computer systems and stealing data might be considered routine state practice in cyberspace. Sean Watts, International Law and Proposed U.S. Responses to the D.N.C. Hack, JUST SECURITY (Oct. 14, 2016, 8:48 AM), https://www.justsecurity.org/33558/international-law-proposed-u-s-responses-d-n-c-hack/ [http://perma.cc/3N3E-R54E]. Neither cyberoperation would seem to be sufficiently coercive to meet the standard required for prohibited intervention. See id. (explaining that, to be a prohibited intervention, an “operation must force the target State into a course of action it would not otherwise undertake”).


\(^{13}\) The Sony hack has also been described as an act of cyberterrorism. See Ellen Nakashima, White House Says Sony Hack Is a Serious National Security Matter, WASH. POST (Dec. 18, 2014), https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/white-house-says-sony-hack-is-a-serious-national-security-matter/2014/12/18/01eb8324-86ea-11e4-b9b7-b8632ae73d25_story.html?utm_term=a270fdd4a97e [http://perma.cc/9DG9-CC9P]. However, as with its root term “terrorism,” it is controversial whether a state can engage in cyberterrorism. Compare Kelly A. Gable, Cyber-Apocalypse Now: Securing the Internet Against Cyberterrorism and Using Universal Jurisdiction as a Deterrent, 43 VAND.
In addition to being difficult to classify, cyberoperations like the Sony and DNC hacks often cause significant harms. According to a 2014 PricewaterhouseCoopers survey, the number of institutions reporting cyberoperations costing them more than $20 million in losses increased 92% from 2013 to 2014, with an 86% increase in the number reporting attacks by nation-states. Experts estimate that malicious cyberoperations cost the U.S. economy between $120 and $167 billion in 2015 alone; others calculate that they will cost global businesses more than $6 trillion annually by 2021.

The Sony hack, DNC hack, and other recent malicious cyberoperations have highlighted a significant gap in the international law of cyberspace: states are not being held accountable for these kinds of harmful cyberoperations, in part because classifications created in physical space do not map well onto the cyber domain and in part because states appear unwilling to extend existing definitions of wrongful state acts to these activities. As a result, states victim to injurious and invasive cyberoperations currently have few non-escalatory responsive options, and the harms associated with these incidents tend to lie where they fall.

To address this growing issue, this Article draws on tort law and international law principles to construct a comprehensive state accountability regime in cyberspace, where states are both liable for their harmful acts and responsible for their wrongful ones. It identifies international cybertorts—acts that employ, infect, or undermine the internet, a computer system, or a network and thereby cause significant transboundary harm—as a distinct kind of cyberoperation, and in doing so...
distinguishes and clarifies the boundaries of cybercrime and cyberwarfare. Recognizing this new category also highlights how the principle of state liability for transboundary harms (which holds states accountable for the harmful consequences of both their lawful and unlawful activities) could usefully complement the existing law of state responsibility (which applies only to unlawful state actions). 17

Delineating international cybertorts creates a useful intermediate space between unproblematic state activity in cyberspace and cyberwarfare. Labeling a harmful cyberoperation an international cybertort does not mean that it was necessarily unlawful; rather, it puts the perpetrator on notice that it might be liable for associated injuries. As a result, imposing state liability for international cybertorts preserves a bounded grey zone for state experimentation, while simultaneously minimizing the likelihood that states harmed by cyberoperations will resort to escalatory self-help measures and increasing the likelihood that victims will be compensated.

This proposal has precedent in international law: various treaties describe liability standards for different kinds of conduct, 18 and states regularly set up institutions to evaluate state liability for harms and settle claims in other contexts. 19 Furthermore, this Article’s proposals could be immediately incor-

17 On this point, I owe a great debt to conversations with Beatrice Walton, who has since published the first piece of scholarly writing defining the concept of state liability in international law and evaluating how it applies to cyberoperations. Beatrice A. Walton, Note, Duties Owed: Low-Intensity Cyber Attacks and Liability for Transboundary Torts in International Law, 126 YALE L.J. 1460, 1478–88 (2017).

18 See, e.g., Convention on the International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects art. II, Mar. 29, 1972, 24 U.S.T. 2389, 2392, 961 U.N.T.S. 187, 189 (“A launching State shall be absolutely liable to pay compensation for damage caused by its space object on the surface of the earth or to aircraft in flight.”).


In other situations, compensation claims are settled after protracted legal proceedings. For example, after more than five years of litigation, the United States settled a claim with Iran on behalf of the victims of the downing of Iran Air Flight 655 for $81.8 million. Aerial Incident of 3 July 1988 (Iran v. U.S.), Settlement Agreement, 35 I.L.M. 553, 553 (1996).
porated within the existing international enforcement mechanisms. Ideally, however, states would create an independent institution with the expertise and investigative resources to impartially assess state accountability in cyberspace, the flexibility to adapt to changing technologies, and the enforcement authority to deter states from engaging in inappropriate and escalatory self-help. This would not entirely eliminate legal grey zones—new technological developments, state reluctance to disclose technological capabilities, and state interest in preserving some unregulated space will ensure there is plenty of grist for the academic mill—but an independent institution would increase the likelihood that the international law of cyberspace develops in a cohesive manner.

Part I reviews how the architecture of cyberspace and the structure of the modern international legal order—particularly its restrictions on self-help measures—has resulted in a lack of effective, non-escalatory deterrents to increasingly harmful but difficult-to-classify cyberoperations. Part II identifies international cybertorts as a distinct class of cyberoperation; clarifies its relationship with cyberwarfare, transnational cybercrime, data destruction, ransomware, cyber exploitation, and cyberespionage; and proposes that states be held accountable for their cybertorts under the principle of state liability for transboundary harms. Part III reviews the law of state responsibility, discusses why cyberspace facilitates certain kinds of internationally wrongful acts, and argues for minimizing resort to claims of state responsibility (with its attendant risk of conflict escalation) in light of the possibility of state liability. Part IV considers how best to develop a comprehensive accountability regime for state activity in cyberspace.

I
A PROBLEM WITHOUT A NAME

The architecture of cyberspace favors attackers, preventing states from enacting effective defenses; simultaneously, existing international law limits victim states’ recourse to effective and non-escalatory ex post deterrents. This combination has resulted in an increase in costly and invasive state-sponsored cyberoperations, evidenced by the following symptomatic examples.20

20 As Sean Watts has observed, “[i]n addition to being highly feasible and often inexpensive, low-intensity cyber operations offer attractive prospects for anonymity, appear to frustrate attack correlation by targets, and may also reduce the likelihood of provoking severe retaliation. In short, low-intensity cyber opera-
In October 2012, Chinese government officials warned the New York Times that its investigation into how relatives of China’s Prime Minister Wen Jiabao had recently accumulated billions of dollars would “have consequences.”21 Four months later, the paper publicized that Chinese hackers had infiltrated its computer systems.22 While they could have utterly destroyed the Times’s network infrastructure, the hackers instead appeared to be looking for information as to sources in the investigation.23 The intrusion was quarantined and eliminated only after the Times hired a private company that specialized in security breaches, set up new defenses, and replaced all compromised computers.24

In December 2014, the Sands Casino in Las Vegas was attacked, allegedly by Iranian hackers: computers and servers shut themselves down and hard drives were wiped.25 This was the first known case of a cyberoperation targeting an American business designed to destroy (rather than spy or steal)—and the attack was almost undoubtedly retaliation for comments that its CEO Sheldon Adelson had made about nuking Tehran.26 The immediate costs of lost equipment and data were estimated at $40 million.27

On the April 2015 premiere date of TV5Monde, a new French broadcast channel, allegedly-Russian cyberoperations targeted and disrupted the “internet-connected hardware that controlled the TV station’s operations.”28 The financial costs of the attack ran to €5 million in 2015, and TV5Monde has spent

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22 Id.
23 Id.
24 Id.
26 Id.
27 Id.
over €3 million every year since for new protections. These costs, however, were cheap compared to the possibility of the entire business being destroyed. TV5Monde’s director-general recalled that, due to the risks of customer cancellations, “We were a couple of hours from having the whole station gone for good.”

Other costly and intrusive state-sponsored cyberoperations include the U.S.- and Israeli-linked 2010 Stuxnet attack, the 2012 Iranian-linked attack on a Saudi Arabian oil company, the 2015 Russian-linked attack on the Ukrainian electrical grid, the 2016 U.S. internet shutdown—and, of course, the 2014 Sony hack and 2016 DNC hack.

States and scholars are looking to international law for guidance on how to lawfully respond to these harmful cyberoperations. But international law has little to say on the subject—except to limit a victim state’s lawful unilateral self-help options.

A. Modern International Law’s Limitations on Self-Help

Limited state recourse to self-help measures is a feature of the modern international legal order, which prioritizes international peace over perfect enforcement. States are expected to let minor slights and violations of international law go unaddressed to avoid perpetuating cycles of escalatory self-help.

This was not always the case. Historically, international law was created and enforced through self-help measures, with states often using military force to settle a wide range of disputes. “Self-help” refers to “private actions taken by those

29 Id.
30 Id.
interested in [a] controversy to prevent or resolve disputes without official assistance of a governmental official or disinterested third party.” 36 The legitimacy of self-help has long been recognized, particularly in environments where there is no authoritative lawmaker or law enforcer. 37

Allowing individual actors to unilaterally address wrongdoing has a number of benefits: it “may serve to deter such wrongdoing from occurring in the first place, reduce administrative costs, promote autonomy- or sovereignty-related values, and facilitate speedier redress.” 38 At a larger level, self-help “might serve to facilitate the maintenance of cooperative relations, mitigate feelings of alienation from the law, or generate deeper internalization of first-order legal norms.” 39

Self-help systems, however, are inherently unstable and prone to conflict escalation. Because self-helpers judge their own cause, “[t]here is ample reason to worry that they will misconstrue the law along the way—not just, or even primarily, on account of bad faith, but on account of motivated cognition and reliance on congenial interpretive methods or theories of law.” 40 Self-help regimes also disproportionately favor the powerful and foster vicious cycles of attacks and counterattacks.

Given the likelihood that it will result in inappropriate responses and conflict escalation, legal systems often limit recourse to self-help. This was an animating reason for the formation of the U.N. Charter, which sharply restricts the use of violent self-help, as well as the development of the law of countermeasures, which limits state recourse to non-violent self-help measures.

1. Charter Restrictions on the Use of Force

Article 2(4) of the U.N. Charter prohibits states from unilaterally using force: “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United

37 Id. at 844 (“Prior to the existence of legal institutions to dictate rules of behavior and state authorities to enforce them, all social relations were a form of self-help.”).
39 Id.
40 Id. at 50 (footnote omitted).
Nations.” Instead of taking matters into their own hands, states are expected to pursue institutionalized means of resolving major disputes\(^\text{42}\) and to let minor ones go unpunished.

There is one express exception to Article 2(4)’s general prohibition on unilateral state recourse to force. Article 51 provides: “Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.”\(^\text{43}\) The threshold for an “armed attack” is generally understood to be higher than that required for a use of force,\(^\text{44}\) though the U.S. minority opinion that the two terms are essentially co-extensive\(^\text{45}\) has created a legal debate that has extended to assessments of the law of cyberspace.\(^\text{46}\) But while there is disagreement over where the threshold lies, it is now generally accepted that states may unilaterally use defensive force in response to cyber-enabled armed attacks. If an act does not clear the armed attack threshold, victim states can still unilaterally take non-violent responsive measures, subject to the limits discussed below.

2. **Customary Limits on the Use of Countermeasures**

The law of countermeasures developed in the shadow of the U.N. Charter as a means by which states victim to “below the threshold” acts could still take unilateral action to bring international law violators back into compliance. Countermeasures are “measures that would otherwise be contrary to the international obligations of an injured State vis-à-vis the responsible State, if they were not taken by the former in response to an internationally wrongful act by the latter in order


\(^{42}\) For example, states may lawfully use force against another state after having procured an authorizing Security Council resolution. U.N. Charter art. 39.

\(^{43}\) Id. art. 51.


to procure cessation and reparation."\textsuperscript{47} For example, an injured state may suspend transit or trade rights with a state in violation of a treaty until it ceases the wrongful act or makes appropriate reparation.\textsuperscript{48}

In keeping with the U.N. Charter’s general bent towards minimizing escalation, violent countermeasures are not permitted: "Countermeasures shall not affect . . . the obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force as embodied in the Charter of the United Nations."\textsuperscript{49} Thus, reciprocal violent countermeasures in response to a violation of Article 2(4) would also violate Article 2(4).\textsuperscript{50}

Furthermore, even the use of non-violent countermeasures is strictly circumscribed. There are many situations in which countermeasures cannot be used at all,\textsuperscript{51} and when they are allowed, they must satisfy a number of requirements to be lawful. To name just a few, countermeasures must be temporary in their effects, comply with the principles of necessity and proportionality, and be designed to induce compliance with international law.\textsuperscript{52} Importantly, countermeasures must be taken “to procure cessation and reparation” of an internationally wrongful act—not to punish.\textsuperscript{53}

In contrast to the strict restrictions on the use of force and countermeasures, states may always employ retorsions to at-
tempt to alter another state’s behavior. While countermeasures are acts that would be unlawful but for the fact that they are taken to restore order (like reciprocal treaty breaches), retorsions are politically unfriendly but always lawful self-help measures (like discontinuing development aid, declaring a diplomat persona non grata, or imposing unilateral sanctions).

In short, states may unilaterally use defensive force in response to armed attacks, states may sometimes engage in countermeasures to correct another state’s unlawful acts, and states may always employ retorsions in the attempt to alter another state’s behavior. However, these rules and enforcement mechanisms were developed in the physical world and founded on assumptions that do not translate well to cyberspace, resulting in a general lack of credible deterrents to harmful state-sponsored cyberoperations.

B. The Need for Effective, Non-Escalatory Deterrents

Deterrence theory is based on the presumption that certain actions will either be unsuccessful or lead to consequential and painful responses. Deterrence by denial in cyberspace is of limited utility, as defensive measures can only do so much in an environment that favors attackers. Meanwhile, international legal constraints on self-help measures become even more restrictive when translated to cyberspace, limiting the unilateral ex post options of a state victim to a harmful or invasive cyberoperation.

1. Practical Limits of Deterrence by Denial

A state or non-state entity should be expected to take basic precautions to avoid being too easy a target. The United

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54 Id. ch. 2 cmt. 3.
56 The most extreme version of this is “mutually assured destruction,” where the threat of a full-scale use of nuclear weapons by opposing sides would result in the complete annihilation of both (and, possibly, the rest of the world).
57 At present, this is not a recognized formal duty under international law, though there is growing sympathy for the concept of cyber due diligence—a requirement to not allow harm to emanate from state territory. Should a norm of cyber due diligence be recognized, cybersecurity measures might be requirements (as opposed to best practices). See infra Part II[C][3][b].
States in particular has emphasized the importance of “deterrence by denial”—in other words, engaging in better cybersecurity practices and beefing up defenses.58

Deterrence by denial, however, offers limited protection in the cyber context. Defenders are playing an elaborate game of whack-a-mole, where a single missed attack can have devastating effects. Further, while cybersecurity good practices are important and while there are some justifications for holding states accountable for egregiously poor cybersecurity,59 over-emphasizing a due diligence requirement risks focusing more on the culpability of the entity that left the door unlocked than of the entity that trespassed and burglarized the building.

Lastly, overreliance on contemporaneous defense invites many of the problems associated with self-help measures. The speed of cyber will nearly always require that in-the-moment defenses be automated or autonomous.60 In most circumstances, a particular cyberoperation will be neutralized by a defense system long before a human being even knows it was attempted. As long as defensive measures are primarily passive and simply shield the target network or repair damage, the lack of human input is relatively unproblematic. But active defenses are a different story. Active defenses can be loosely defined as “a set of operational, technical, policy, and legal measures” that “captures a spectrum of proactive cybersecurity measures that fall between traditional passive defense and offense.”61 These might include both “technical interactions between a defender and an attacker” and “operations that enable defenders to collect intelligence on threat actors and

58 See U.S. DEP'T OF DEF. SCI. BD., TASK FORCE ON CYBER DETERRENCE 6 (2017) ("Deterrence by denial operates through a combination of defenses and resilience to attack, so that the adversary understands that it will not succeed in the aims of its contemplated cyber attack.").

59 See Oren Gross, Cyber Responsibility to Protect: Legal Obligations of States Directly Affected by Cyber-Incidents, 48 CORNELL INT'L L.J. 481, 491–99 (2015) (arguing for imposing legal and technological responsibilities on states that are or may be the target of harmful cyberoperations).


61 ACTIVE DEFENSE REPORT, supra note 15, at 1, 9 (emphasis omitted).
indicators on the Internet, as well as other policy tools (e.g. sanctions, indictments, trade remedies) that can modify the behavior of malicious actors.”62 At the far end of the spectrum, some active defenses risk crossing the line into uses of force. If defenses are active and entirely automated or autonomous, it is easy to imagine an exchange of attacks and counter-attacks that quickly escalates into warfare.63

Nor are states the only players. Given that the majority of cyberoperations target private sector entities, some cybersecurity experts are suggesting that industries take a more proactive approach to cyberdefense.64 The more non-state entities employ active defenses without guidance from states, however, the more likely they are to respond in ways that implicate national security and foreign relations concerns and increase the risk of unintended conflicts.65 For example, in response to a targeted malware attack termed Operation Aurora, Google appears to have gained unauthorized access to Taiwanese computers believed to be under the control of Chinese entities—which could be interpreted as a violation of the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act and which might have had problematic political implications.66

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62 Id. at 9 (emphasis omitted).
63 This was a foundational assumption in an entire genre of science fiction novels written or movies produced during the Cold War. E.g., MORDECAI ROSEWALD, LEVEL 7 (1959); WAR GAMES (United Artists 1983).
65 Accordingly, many proposed active defenses should only be taken by private sector entities working in close collaboration with government. See Nuala O'Connor, Appendix I: Additional Views of Nuala O'Connor, in ACTIVE DEFENSE REPORT, supra note 15, at 39, 40.
2. Practical and Legal Limits of Deterrence by Punishment

The risks and insufficiency of deterrence by denial suggests the need for a more traditional conception of “deterrence by punishment.” In other words, in the absence of effective ex ante defenses, states need strong ex post deterrents. But deterrence strategies developed in physical space do not always translate well to the cyber domain.67

First, there is the attribution problem. If a victim state cannot quickly and reliably identify the actual perpetrator, it will not be able to take timely and appropriate responsive actions. While eventual attribution of a cyberoperation is becoming more feasible (especially as state-sponsored cyberoperations commonly rely on previously-used architectures), it is still nearly impossible to identify the actual perpetrator immediately.68 This difficulty is compounded when a state acts through a non-state actor. Consider the attack on TV5Monde: the hackers claimed to be members of a group called the Cyber Caliphate and implied that they were linked to the Islamic State; later evidence suggests that the actual perpetrators were a group of Russian hackers known as APT 28 or “Fancy Bear” (the same group likely responsible for the DNC hack).69 More recently, the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence concluded that the NotPetya malware, which initially appeared to be created by common cybercriminals “was probably launched by a state actor or a non-state actor with support or approval from a state.”70 It reasoned that the operation was likely too complex to have been orchestrated by unaffiliated hackers and that the ransomware collection method “was so poorly designed that the ransom

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69 Corera, supra note 28; see also Ackerman & Thielman, supra note 4 (equating APT 28 and “Fancy Bear” and discussing the DNC hack).

would probably not even cover the cost of the operation.”71 However, at the time of the writing, it had not publicly attributed the cyberoperation to a specific state.72

Even if both the cyberoperation and perpetrator are reasonably identifiable, the intended effect or message of a cyberoperation is often unclear. For example, in August 2016, a Twitter account associated with state-sponsored Russian hackers posted a link to a cache of computer codes outlining hacker tools allegedly stolen from the Equation Group, a hacker group long associated with the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA).73 In a series of tweets, Edward Snowden discussed why this disclosure might have far-reaching foreign policy implications:

Circumstantial evidence and conventional wisdom indicate Russian responsibility [for the hack]. Here’s why that is significant: This leak is likely a warning that someone can prove US responsibility for any attacks that originated from this malware server. That could have significant foreign policy consequences. Particularly if any of those operations targeted US allies. Particularly if any of those operations targeted elections. Accordingly, this may be an effort to influence the calculus of decision-makers wondering how sharply to respond to the DNC hacks. TL;DR: This leak looks like a

71 Id.; see also id. (quoting Lauri Lindström, a NATO CCD COE Strategy Branch researcher, as stating that NotPetya is “likely . . . a declaration of power—demonstration of the acquired disruptive capability and readiness to use it”).

72 Others have taken the analysis a step further, arguing that given that 60% of infected machines are in Ukraine and that the attack began the day before the Ukrainian Constitution Day, the attack was likely politically motivated. Lee Matthews, The NotPetya Ransomware May Actually Be a Devastating Cyberweapon, FORBES (June 30, 2017), https://www.forbes.com/sites/leemathews/2017/06/30/the-notpetya-ransomware-may-actually-be-a-devastating-cyberweapon/#6e6e29a3f49e8 [http://perma.cc/YS9C-D359]. While this has caused some to suggest Russia was responsible for the attacks, others are more reserved: Brian Lord, former deputy director for intelligence and cyber operations at the U.K. Government Communications Headquarters and currently the managing director for cyber and technology at PGI Cyber, noted that “[t]here’s something about the blatantness of hitting Ukraine that doesn’t sit well with me about this being a Russian attack.” Sheera Frenkel, Mark Scott & Paul Mozur, Mystery of Motive for a Ransomware Attack: Money, Mayhem or a Message?, N.Y. TIMES (June 28, 2017), https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/28/business/ramsonware-hackers-cybersecurity-petya-impact.html?mcubz=0 [http://perma.cc/29WW-ZT4G].

somebody sending a message that an escalation in the attribution game could get messy fast.\superscript{74}

This leak could have been, as Snowden hypothesized, a threat or form of blackmail; it could also have been a provocation, information warfare intended to discredit the NSA, propaganda for Russian or other audiences, or a response to some other action (either in cyberspace or physical space, publicly known or not). The proper response would differ depending on what the action was or was meant to be—but without knowing the intent of the action, it is difficult for states to respond appropriately. Furthermore, while the disclosure of the NSA hack was apparently deliberate, it is possible to imagine a scenario where malware intended for cyberespionage malfunctioned and caused an inadvertently harmful result. In an ideal world, the victim state would react differently to a mistake than to intentional destruction; in this one, a victim state might not be able to make that distinction.

Finally, in situations where a victim state knows it has been subject to an invasive cyberoperation and can reasonably identify both the state perpetrator and the purpose of the action, there are fewer lawful responsive options available in the cyber domain than in physical space. As discussed above, modern international law discourages violent state vigilantism to avoid the risk of conflict escalation.\superscript{75} States are permitted to take unilateral self-help measures subject to strict legal limitations—but those limitations prevent most forms of state self-help in response to harmful cyberoperations.

Should a cyberoperation constitute an armed attack, the victim state can use defensive force in response, but most cyberoperations are not sufficiently destructive to meet the armed attack threshold.\superscript{76} States victim to “below the threshold” cyberoperations may theoretically employ countermeasures and retorsions to alter a suspected perpetrator’s behavior,\superscript{77} but absent amendment or significant reinterpretation, these options have limited efficacy.


\superscript{75} See supra subpart I.A; see also TALLINN MANUAL 2.0, supra note 46, r. 20 cmt. 16 (discussing limits on countermeasures and noting that countermeasures “present a risk of escalation”).

\superscript{76} See infra text accompanying notes 110–14.

Because self-help measures are meant to be a last resort, countermeasures are only supposed to be employed after submitting a formal request to the responsible state to remedy its internationally wrongful act (subject to certain exceptions).78 A state may not employ countermeasures after an internationally wrongful act has ceased, and punitive countermeasures are prohibited.79 Additionally, states use countermeasures at their own risk. Recall that countermeasures are otherwise-unlawful acts that are only permissible when used to induce another state’s compliance with its international obligations. Should a state use countermeasures inappropriately or against the wrong entity, the original victim state becomes responsible for a new internationally wrongful act.80

These requirements severely hamper a state’s ability to use countermeasures in response to cyberoperations. The speed and secrecy of cyber means that many harmful acts will have ended before they are discovered, let alone before the victim state is able to identify the responsible state and issue a request for cessation or employ a timely countermeasure. As there are myriad opportunities for victim states acting in good faith to misidentify perpetrators and for state and non-state actors to launch cyberoperations that encourage such misidentifications, states may be hesitant to employ countermeasures until they are reasonably certain of the perpetrator. Between uncertainty about what constitutes an internationally wrongful act and uncertainty about being able to make a reasonable attribution, states are likely to have delayed reactions to cyberoperations—and delayed reactions look more like prohibited punishment than permissible countermeasures.

Part of the problem is that countermeasures were never meant to be deterrents: at least theoretically, they are formally restricted to being used to restore the status quo prior to the perpetrator’s legal violation.81 In physical space, where many unlawful acts are public, relatively easily attributable, and take place over an extended period of time, the line between a victim state attempting to restore order and taking retaliatory action respond with retorsions); Michael N. Schmitt, “Below the Threshold” Cyber Operations: The Countermeasures Response Option and International Law, 54 Va. J. Int’l L. 697, 714–30 (2014) (providing an in-depth analysis of the applicability of countermeasures to cyberoperations).

78 Draft Articles, supra note 47, arts. 43(2), 52(1).
79 See id. arts. 49(2), 50(1), 52(3).
80 But see Tallinn Manual 2.0, supra note 46, r. 20 cmt. 16 (noting a minority view that honest and reasonable mistakes are not unlawful).
81 See Draft Articles, supra note 47, ch. 2 cmt. 1.
was blurred, allowing lawful countermeasures to also serve as functional deterrents. This line is far crisper in cyberspace, rendering most countermeasures unlawful or of little use in addressing ongoing cyberoperations or deterring future ones.

Of course, states may always employ retorsions as a deterrent or punishment. Neither countermeasures nor retorsions need mirror the actions they are intended to stop or deter: a state victim to a harmful cyberoperation could respond with economic sanctions (as the United States did with North Korea following the Sony hack) or by ousting diplomats (as the United States did to Russian officials following the DNC hack). However, the possibility of unilateral retorsions does not appear to have been effective at deterring malicious cyberoperations.

3. State Paralysis

In the absence of clear rules delineating lawful and unlawful state behavior in cyberspace, victim states appear unsure of how to respond to harmful cyberoperations; even when they are reasonably certain of the perpetrator’s identity, it is not clear what responsive measures they may take as a matter of law or should take as a matter of policy.82

At present, victim states seem to be erring on the side of minimal public action, possibly to avoid setting undesirable precedent or risking uncontrolled conflict escalation.83 Consider the delayed U.S. reaction to the DNC hack. Although Russian involvement was suspected from the outset84—and, as has been subsequently disclosed, the United States had information that the Russian government had accessed the Democratic National Committee networks as early as July 201585—the United States did not publicly attribute the hack to Russia


83 Uria, supra note 82 (noting Susan Hennessey’s comment that the United States has “struggled to develop a comprehensive strategy for response to [cyberattacks]”).

84 Hamburger & Tumulty, supra note 4.

until October 2016. Then, after months of speculation and proposals as to what the United States might do in response, the Obama Administration imposed sanctions on four individuals and five Russian entities, expelled thirty-five suspected Russian intelligence operatives, shut down two U.S.-based Russian compounds, and released information on Russian cybertactics and techniques. Collectively, these actions constituted the strongest U.S. public response to a cyberoperation to date; nonetheless, they were widely derided as being insufficient to deter similar future cyberoperations. Many are concerned that the U.S. “pattern of vacillation in response to very damaging cyber-operations will not deter our adversaries; it will embolden them.” Of course, the United States is not the only state victim to harmful cyberoperations; numerous other states have been subjected to similar actions (and the United States is recognized as a frequent perpetrator). But this common minimalist response creates a permissive environment for state-sponsored cyberoperations.

86 Sanger & Savage, supra note 6.
87 See, e.g., James Stavridis, How to Win the Cyberwar Against Russia, FOREIGN POL’Y (Oct. 12, 2016), http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/12/how-to-win-the-cyber-war-against-russia/ [https://perma.cc/BPL2-2RZM] (outlining possible U.S. responses to the DNC hack, including “a definitive exposure of the Russian government’s presumably high-level involvement in the attacks” with the hope of eventual U.N. condemnations and economic sanctions; “undermin[ing] the Russian government’s reliance on a wide variety of cyber-tools to censor the web within its own country”; “expos[ing] the overseas banking accounts and financial resources of high-level Russian government officials”; “punish[ing] Russian hackers by knocking them off-line or even damaging their hardware”; or turning to allies for help).
88 Press Release, Office of the Press Sec’y, supra note 11.
92 Watts, supra note 20, at 250.
What is needed is a new deterrent, crafted in light of states’ interest in exploring their expanded cyber-enabled capabilities and designed to address the harms caused by cyberoperations like the Sony and DNC hacks. As discussed in the next section, holding states liable for their international cybertorts could be a solution to this problem.

II
STATE LIABILITY FOR INTERNATIONAL CYBERTORTS

An “international cybertort” is an act that employs, infects, or undermines the internet, a computer system, or a network and thereby causes significant transboundary harm.

Not only is it conceptually useful to differentiate international cybertorts from transnational cybercrime, cyberwarfare, and other kinds of cyberoperations, this term implies an alternative accountability mechanism and new deterrent for harmful state-sponsored cyberoperations: states could be required to compensate victims of their international cybertorts under the principle of state liability for transboundary harms.

A. A Distinct Kind of Harmful Cyberoperation

As mentioned in the Introduction, the North Korean “Guardians of Peace” hacker group raided Sony Entertainment Pictures servers and publicized extensive confidential data. Based on an FBI analysis of the associated software, techniques, and network sources, the United States took the then-unprecedented move of publicly attributing the Guardians’s cyberoperations to the state of North Korea. Officially, the United States retorted by imposing new unilateral sanctions; many suspect that it was also responsible for extensive North Korean web outages in early December 2014. Meanwhile, as of February 2015, Sony estimated that its investigation and remediation costs had reached $15 million—ultimately, the total direct and indirect costs of the hack will likely be far greater, with some estimating that costs might include $80 million in direct damages and another $120 million in indirect damages.

93 Crootof, supra note 89.
94 Robb, supra note 1.
95 Press Release, U.S. Dep’t of Treasury, supra note 2; Nakashima, supra note 2.
96 Roberts, supra note 55.
97 See Strohm, supra note 11.
INTERNATIONAL CYBERTORTS

(such as leaked trade secrets and lost revenue).  
How should the Sony hack be categorized?

To the extent it was conducted by or sponsored by a state, the Sony hack was not—or was not only—a transnational cybercrime. A cybercrime occurs when a computer or program is used as the means to commit an illegal act. Domestic cybercrimes are regulated internally; cross-border cybercrimes are investigated and prosecuted like other kinds of transnational crime. A paradigmatic example of transnational cybercrime occurred in August 2015, when Wall Street traders partnered with Ukrainian hackers to gain access to unpublished company press releases, allowing them to make trades that “reaped more than $100 million in illegal proceeds.” Significantly, only individuals are subject to criminal liability for cybercrimes—states cannot be held criminally liable, even for state-sponsored cybercrimes. Thus, while the Guardians of Peace or identified state actors or agents could (theoretically) be criminally prosecuted for the Sony hack, the state of North Korea cannot.

Nor was the Sony hack an act of cyberwarfare. Although a cyberoperation might be intended to undermine a state’s national security, be politically coercive, or cause extensive economic harm, such an action only constitutes cyberwarfare if it occurs in the context of an ongoing armed conflict or if it is sufficiently destructive in physical space to meet the “armed attack” threshold legitimizing defensive military action.

Cyberoperations are increasingly being used in response to traditional provocations and in conjunction with more conven-

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99 See Hathaway et al., supra note 77, at 830–31 (discussing why cybercrimes committed by non-state actors on behalf of a state raise international legal and national security issues that justify distinguishing them from other, less politically motivated, cybercrimes).

100 See id. at 833–34.


102 Walton, supra note 17, at 1473–74.

103 Hathaway et al., supra note 77, at 821, 839–40 (concluding that “cyberwarfare” is “a term properly used only to refer to the small subset of cyber-attacks that do constitute armed attacks or that occur in the context of an ongoing armed conflict”).
tional attacks in the context of ongoing armed conflicts. For example, the United States infiltrated the Iraqi Defense Ministry email system to inform Iraqi officers how they could peacefully surrender shortly before its 2003 invasion;\textsuperscript{104} the Israeli Air Force used a cyberoperation to compromise the Syrian air-defense system during its 2007 air strike against a nuclear facility;\textsuperscript{105} and, in the summer of 2008, Georgia’s internet access was shut down while Russian forces invaded South Ossetia.\textsuperscript{106} More recently, the United States has publicly announced that it is using cyberoperations in its campaign against the Islamic State, both to interfere with its communications strategy and to alter data in its systems.\textsuperscript{107} “We are dropping cyberbombs,” said then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work, “We have never done that before.”\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Jus in bello} (the law governing the conduct of hostilities) regulates cyber-operations that occur in the context of an armed conflict\textsuperscript{109}—but the Sony hack occurred during peacetime.

There is general agreement that \textit{jus ad bellum} (the law governing the commencement of hostilities) regulates responses to cyberoperations that satisfy the armed attack threshold requirement,\textsuperscript{110} and that a cyberoperation can meet that standard if its effects are equivalent to those of a conven-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{104} Richard A. Clarke \& Robert K. Knafe, \textit{Cyber War: The Next Threat to National Security and What to Do About It} 9–10 (2010).
\item \textsuperscript{108} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Tallinn Manual 2.0, supra note 46, r. 80.
\item \textsuperscript{110} See, e.g., id. r. 71. But see id. ch. 14 cmt. 3 (noting that the Tallinn Manual 2.0 applies the \textit{lex lata} norms in the cyber context, but that these are subject to change based on state practice).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
However, the vast majority of harmful cyberoperations cause non-physical damage that simply does not register on the cyberwarfare spectrum. Notwithstanding perennial academic interest in the question, at present only one cyberoperation—the 2010 Stuxnet attack—has arguably had sufficiently destructive effects to meet the armed attack threshold. The Stuxnet attack, which destroyed 1,000 Iranian centrifuges used to enrich uranium, was the first time computer malware was recognized as capable of specifically targeting and destroying industrial systems. Despite the military nature of the target and the extent of the damage, experts continue to disagree as to whether even Stuxnet qualified as an armed attack. With no military nexus and no loss of life, the Sony hack does not come close to meeting the armed attack threshold.


114 TALLINN MANUAL 2.0, supra note 46, r. 71 cmt. 10.
So what was the Sony hack? Prominent writers refer to it as a “below the threshold” cyberoperation\(^{115}\) or a "low-intensity cyber operation[ ]," defined as an "action[,] taken short of [a] destructive or violent attack[ ]."\(^{116}\) Such characterizations imply that these cyberoperations exist in the negative space surrounding the law of armed conflict, and in doing so fail to recognize them as a distinct kind of cyberincident with a different primary harm.\(^{117}\) In acknowledgement of the significant injuries associated with cyberoperations like the Sony hack, this Article suggests switching legal frameworks entirely—to tort law.

B. International Cybertorts

The Sony hack is best understood as an international cybertort. As opposed to the law of war, which rarely addresses the impact of low-level physical damage, economic harms, or reputational costs; or criminal law, which is designed to hold individuals accountable for their morally blameworthy wrongs, tort law allocates liability for intended and unintended injuries. Recognizing international cybertorts as a distinct category allows for a more accurate assessment of the harms associated with different cyberoperations, and by extension, a more considered discussion of how to construct appropriate accountability regimes for state action in cyberspace.\(^{118}\)

Again, an “international cybertort” is an act that employs, infects, or undermines the internet, a computer system, or a network and thereby causes significant transboundary harm. Like the definition of transnational cybercrime, the international cybertort definition is means-based and encompasses a broad range of harmful activities.\(^{119}\) Rather than focusing on the intent of the actor—always a thorny question in contexts

\(^{115}\) Schmitt, supra note 77, at 698.

\(^{116}\) Watts, supra note 20, at 250.

\(^{117}\) The Sony hack’s relationship with cyberespionage, sovereignty violations, interference, and intervention is discussed below. See infra section II.B.1.

\(^{118}\) In contrast, domestic cybertorts—which often are alleged in any situation where the internet or a computer system is used to commit a civil wrong—are grounded in and therefore limited by domestic tort law, which usually grants immunity to sovereign states. See Daniel Blumenthal, How to Win a Cyberwar with China, FOREIGN POL’Y (Feb. 28, 2013), http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/02/28/how-to-win-a-cyberwar-with-china-2/ [https://perma.cc/54K6-PABN].

\(^{119}\) Unlike the definition of a cybercrime, the definition of cyberwarfare is objective-based. See Hathaway et al., supra note 77, at 826–28.
where states are legal actors—this definition depends on the effects of the action. In encompassing both intended and unintended harms, it implicitly takes the position that the injury sustained by the victim is of more import than the intention of the cybertortfeasor.

Importantly, the original state conduct need not itself be unlawful—rather, it is the resulting harm that raises the possibility of tort liability. This is often the case in domestic law: driving an automobile or using dynamite are lawful, albeit regulated, activities—when their use causes harm, however, the user may be liable in tort. As a result, this definition covers far more activities than would be addressed under the law of state responsibility.

1. Relationship with Cybercrime and Cyberwarfare

In many domestic legal systems, the same action may sometimes be both a crime and a tort: similarly, an international cybertort may sometimes also be a transnational cybercrime or, if the harm is sufficiently destructive, cyberwarfare. For example, the Stuxnet attack destroyed at least one thousand Iranian centrifuges. Assuming Iran was interested in pressing the issue, it has a credible case that this harm constituted an international cybertort. If Stuxnet was the work of non-state actors, it might also be a transnational cybercrime; if it can be sufficiently attributed to a state, it could arguably be considered cyberwarfare.

Figure 1 summarizes the similarities and distinctions between these different kinds of cyberoperations; Figure 2 illustrates the relationships between international cybertorts, transnational cybercrimes, and cyberwarfare, emphasizing that these categories are not mutually exclusive. It locates the Sony hack on the intersection of cybercrime and international cybertorts to encompass both the criminal liability of the individual hackers who engaged in the attack and the liability of the state that allegedly sponsored the attack.

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FIG. 1: TYPES OF CYBEROPERATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distinguishing Characteristics</th>
<th>International Cybertort</th>
<th>Transnational Cybercrime</th>
<th>Cyberwarfare</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>The original cyberoperation need not be unlawful, but the act must cause significant transboundary harm.</td>
<td>Must be a violation of criminal law and committed by means of a computer system.</td>
<td>Must have a political or national security purpose and either (1) be sufficiently destructive to satisfy the “armed attack” threshold; or (2) occur in the context of an armed conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governing Legal Regime</td>
<td>State Liability for Transboundary Harm&lt;sup&gt;122&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Domestic and International Criminal Law</td>
<td>(1) Jus ad Bellum; and (2) Jus in Bello (International Humanitarian Law)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradigmatic Example</td>
<td>Sony Hack</td>
<td>Ukrainian Hacker Insider Trading Ring</td>
<td>(1) Possibly Stuxnet; (2) U.S. cyberoperations against the Islamic State</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIG. 2: RELATIONSHIPS AMONG THE CATEGORIES<sup>123</sup>

<sup>122</sup> See infra subpart II.C.

<sup>123</sup> Figure 2 is intended to clarify the relationship among the different labels for different kinds of cyberoperations; it is not meant to represent the proportions of different types of cyber operations.
2. Relationship with Data Destruction and Ransomware

Recognizing international cybertorts as a distinct category suggests a solution for a question currently vexing cyberwarfare scholars: how to classify cyberoperations that affect access to data, either by destroying it or by holding it hostage. These attacks have myriad costly, chaotic, and even deadly effects, limited only by one's imagination. Academic medical research centers or pharmaceutical companies could have years of trials wiped out; registered voters could be removed from the rolls; a lifetime's worth of credit-building could disappear overnight; selective deletions of flight plans could lead to in-air collisions; the entire stock market could be thrown into chaos; information on life-threatening allergies could be removed from medical records.

Thus far, data-destruction cyberincidents have not caused any physical effects on these scales, but they have demonstrated the potential scope of the risk. In 2011, “half of the 500-plus servers belonging to [South Korea’s Nonghyup Bank] were crippled [by a data-destruction attack], including servers controlling ATMs, credit card access, and online banking.”124 This affected approximately 30 million customers, leading to “more than 30,000 customer complaints and 1,000 compensation claims.”125 More recently, the June 2017 NotPetya malware—so named because it presents as Petya ransomware, though it appears only capable of rendering data completely inaccessible—spread across the globe.126 During this attack, ATMs stopped working, banks were forced to close, hospitals canceled operations, and the radiation monitoring system at Ukraine’s Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant went offline.127

Ransomware attacks can be just as devastating. Ransomware infiltrates network systems, encrypts vital files and

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125 Id.
127 Perlroth et al., supra note 126.
data, and demands payment in return for the key to unlocking the information.\textsuperscript{128} The data in question is never destroyed, but it is rendered effectively nonexistent. Hospitals’ patient data is often targeted, as are companies’ files with their customers’ credit card data.\textsuperscript{129} A cybersecurity expert estimated that cybercriminals made over $1 billion in 2016 alone from ransomware.\textsuperscript{130} In early 2017, in the largest ransomware assault to date,\textsuperscript{131} a variant of the WannaCry ransomware “crippled 200,000 computers in more than 150 countries.”\textsuperscript{132} It “forc[ed] Britain’s public health system to send patients away, [froze] computers at Russia’s Interior Ministry and [wreaked] havoc on tens of thousands of computers elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{133}

A cyberoperation that compromises hospital records, banking data, or trade secrets is not an act of war,\textsuperscript{134} but it also

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\begin{enumerate}


\item Russell Goldman, \textit{What We Know and Don’t Know About the International Cyberattack}, N.Y. TIMES (May 12, 2017), https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/12/world/europe/international-cyberattack-ransomware.html?mcubz=0 [https://perma.cc/XU5L-83PX].

\item Perlroth & Sanger, supra note 131.

\item To the extent international cybertorts might apply to actions taken in the context of an armed conflict, they also might help address a long-standing debate about whether or not data is a lawful target. International humanitarian law prohibits attacks on civilian objects, and the Tallinn Manual 2.0 extends this prohibition to cyber infrastructure. TALLINN MANUAL 2.0, supra note 46, r. 99 (“Civilian objects shall not be made the object of cyber attacks. Cyber infrastructure may only be made the object of attack if it qualifies as a military objective.”). However, the majority of the Tallinn Manual 2.0 experts determined that “the law of armed conflict notion of ‘object’ is not to be interpreted as including data.” Id. r. 100 cmt. 6. They reasoned that “data is intangible and therefore neither falls within the ‘ordinary meaning’ of the term object, nor comports with the explanation of it offered in the ICRC Additional Protocols 1987 Commentary.” Id. (footnote omitted). In other words, data may sometimes be a lawful target. A minority disagreed, contending that “for the purposes of targeting, certain data should be regarded as an object.” Id. at r. 100 cmt. 7. Were that not the case, they argued, the deletion of even “essential civilian datasets such as social security data, tax
cannot be tolerated. The concept of international cybertorts provides a means of holding states accountable for their data destruction and ransomware attacks.

3. **Relationship with Cyber Exploitation and Cyberespionage**

Cyber exploitation is the act of gathering confidential information kept on or transiting through a computer system or network, usually secretly and often for commercial purposes; cyberespionage is cyber exploitation conducted for political or military purposes. An act may be simultaneously cyber exploitation or cyberespionage and an international cybertort, but only if the act is detected or publicized (as discovery of the intrusion will usually require extensive remediation).

There are numerous examples of cyber exploitation, some of which might also constitute cyberespionage. In 2014, hackers believed to be working for the Russian government breached the White House’s unclassified network, gaining access to President Obama’s schedule and emails and, by extension, information regarding personnel moves and policy records, and bank accounts would potentially escape the regulatory reach of the law of armed conflict.” Id. According to the minority, this would “run[ ] counter to principle (reflected in Article 48 of Additional Protocol I) that the civilian population enjoys general protection from the effects of hostilities.” Id. While I agree with the minority, introducing the concept of international cybertorts helps alleviate the injuries that would likely accompany the majority’s approach: regardless of whether or not data is a lawful target, states might be held liable for its destruction.

I have argued elsewhere that states should be held strictly liable for the actions taken by their autonomous weapon systems. See Crootof, *War Torts*, supra note 19, at 1394–96. Some aspects of this argument might be extrapolated to all accidents that occur in the context of an armed conflict.

135 See Hathaway et al., supra note 77, at 829 n.48. There is no widely-accepted definition of either of these terms. My definitions are intended to convey that actions constituting cyber exploitation may be directed against state or non-state actors by state or non-state actors; consist of gathering information on a computer system or network; are not primarily intended to cause death, injury, destruction, or damage; are usually (though not necessarily) conducted secretly; and often involve gathering information for commercial purposes. Other definitions focus on different aspects: sometimes on the parties involved, sometimes on the means of conducting the attack, and sometimes on the objectives of the attack. See, e.g., TALLINN MANUAL 2.0, supra note 46, r. 32 cmnt. 2 (defining peacetime cyberespionage as “any act undertaken clandestinely or under false pretences that uses cyber capabilities to gather, or attempt to gather, information”); Seymour M. Hersh, *The Online Threat: Should We Be Worried About a Cyber War?*, NEW YORKER (Nov. 1, 2010), http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/11/01/101101fa_fact_hersh? [http://perma.cc/Y72J-8VJY] (defining cyberespionage as “the science of covertly capturing e-mail traffic, text messages, other electronic communications, and corporate data for the purpose of gathering national-security or commercial intelligence”).
debates. Also in 2014, what was likely the same group hacked into the Department of State’s unclassified email network, prompting a complete system shutdown. In 2015, Chinese hackers broke into the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) database and made off with the personal information of more than 22 million individuals who had undergone federal security screenings, including 4.2 million federal employees. These same hackers are likely also responsible for the February 2015 hack of Anthem, Inc., which compromised the personal information of roughly 80 million current and former customers, and the July and August 2015 hacks of United Airlines and American Airlines.

The 2016 DNC hack was a more complicated combination of cyberespionage and information warfare. In June 2016, the Democratic National Committee hired Crowdstrike to investigate a detected hack. Crowdstrike determined that the DNC had been subject to two distinct hacks, conducted by groups nicknamed Cozy Bear and Fancy Bear and associated with two organizations in the Russian government. Over 19,000 emails obtained through these hacks were then released, presumably with the intent of sowing confusion in the Democratic party.

If the injuries associated with these cyber exploitation and cyberespionage operations are sufficiently significant, they could be considered international cybertorts. And there is evidence that the harms are immense. With the exception of the

141 Hamburger & Tumulty, supra note 4.
DNC hack, these cyberoperations were likely intended to be covert—but once discovered, the hacked entities had to spend huge sums to expunge hackers, compensate customers, and rebuild reputations. Costs differ by industry: the average hack of hospital records can range from a few hundred thousand to three million dollars,\textsuperscript{142} while the total costs of a retailer data breach might range from two to six million dollars.\textsuperscript{143} The costs of government hacks are harder to calculate—but there are estimates that the OPM hack alone is costing taxpayers $350 million.\textsuperscript{144} Given that there are roughly 35,000 known computer security penetration incidents per day, the collective costs are staggering.\textsuperscript{145} A 2014 study estimated that cyberoperations cost businesses between $375 and $575 billion annually;\textsuperscript{146} a 2016 analysis suggests that costs will reach $6 trillion annually by 2021.\textsuperscript{147}

Distinguishing international cybertorts from transnational cybercrimes and cyberwarfare promotes a more precise understanding of the distinct kinds of harms associated with these different cyberoperations. As discussed in the next section, this new terminology also highlights the possibility of an alternative means of holding states accountable for their harmful cyberoperations, thereby creating a new, less-escalatory responsive option for victim states.

C. State Liability

The principle of state liability for transboundary harms holds states accountable for the “injurious consequences that arise out of activities within their jurisdiction or control and that affect other States or nationals of other States.”\textsuperscript{148}

Conceptually, this principle—that states should be held accountable for the harm they cause—already undergirds the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{143} Id.
\bibitem{145} Donlon, supra note 142.
\bibitem{147} CYBERSECURITY VENTURES, supra note 16.
\end{thebibliography}
law of state responsibility, which requires states to make appropriate reparations for their internationally wrongful acts.\textsuperscript{149} As a result, state liability and state responsibility are often conflated.\textsuperscript{150} However, the law of state responsibility does not address harmful state operations that are not also wrongful or attributable.\textsuperscript{151} Given the differing harms state liability and state responsibility are meant to correct, their approaches and consequences differ: state liability is primarily concerned with ensuring compensation for injuries,\textsuperscript{152} while state responsibility aims to restore the status quo prior to an internationally wrongful act through a broader range of restitutive means.\textsuperscript{153} State liability should therefore be recognized as an independent principle, applicable in situations where there is no act or omission that violates a state’s international obligations.\textsuperscript{154} Once distinguished from state responsibility and its requirement of an internationally wrongful act, the principle of state liability for transboundary harms creates new responsive options for states experiencing the harmful transboundary consequences of another state’s activities.

1. **State Liability for Transboundary Harms**

The intuitive idea that one is liable for caused harm is well-established in international law. It is articulated in the Roman maxim *sic utere tuo ut alienum non laedas*\textsuperscript{155} and in Grotius’s statement that from any “Fault or Trespass there arises an

\textsuperscript{149} See infra section III.A.3.

\textsuperscript{150} Indeed, some have suggested that the movement to distinguish the doctrine of state liability for transboundary harms is “fundamentally misconceived.” Alan E. Boyle, *State Responsibility and International Liability for Injurious Consequences of Acts Not Prohibited by International Law: A Necessary Distinction?*, 39 INT’L & COMP. L.Q. 1, 13 (1990) (quoting IAN BROWNIE, STATE RESPONSIBILITY: PART I 50 (1983)).

\textsuperscript{151} This gap is what originally spurred the General Assembly to task the International Law Commission with evaluating the subject of state liability for transboundary harms. G.A. Res. 32/151, ¶ 7 (Dec. 19, 1977) [hereinafter ILC Report].

\textsuperscript{152} Pemmaraju Sreenivasa Rao (Special Rapporteur), *Third Rep. on International Liability for Injurious Consequences Arising out of Acts Not Prohibited by International Law (Prevention of Transboundary Damage from Hazardous Activities)*, U.N. Doc. A/CN.4/510 (June 9, 2000), at 121 (“Wrongful acts are the focus of State responsibility, whereas compensation for damage [is] the focus of international liability.”).

\textsuperscript{153} See infra section III.A.3.

\textsuperscript{154} See Boyle, *supra* note 150, at 3 (“What distinguishes international liability from other forms of responsibility is that it does not presuppose wrongful conduct or breach of any obligation.”).

\textsuperscript{155} “Use your own property in such a way that you do not injure other people’s.” *Sic Utete Tuo Ut Alienum Non Laedas*, OXFORD REFERENCE, http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100504563 [https://perma.cc/Y2XD-7TCE].
Obligation by the Law of Nature to make Reparation for the Damage, if any be done.”¹⁵⁶ Today, the concept that one may be liable for caused harms is common to many domestic legal systems¹⁵⁷ and reiterated in case law, treaties, and International Law Commission (ILC) reports and draft articles.

For nearly seventy years, various kinds of state liability for transboundary harms have been recognized in international jurisprudence.¹⁵⁸ In the 1941 Trail Smelter arbitration, in which the United States claimed damages resulting from a Canadian smelter’s actions,¹⁵⁹ the tribunal proclaimed that “no State has the right to use or permit the use of its territory in such a manner as to cause injury by fumes in or to the territory of another or the properties or persons therein.”¹⁶⁰ Shortly thereafter, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) echoed the Trail Smelter language in its Corfu Channel decision. After holding that Albania was under an obligation to warn other states that the Corfu Channel—a normally safe strait often used for international navigation—was mined, the Court stated that this obligation sprang from general international law:

The obligations incumbent upon the Albanian authorities consisted in notifying, for the benefit of shipping in general, the existence of a minefield in Albanian territorial waters and in warning the approaching British warships of the imminent danger to which the minefield exposed them. Such obligations are based, not on the Hague Convention of 1907, No. VIII, which is applicable in time of war, but on certain general and well-recognized principles, namely: elementary considerations of humanity, even more exacting in peace than in war; the principle of the freedom of maritime communication; and every State’s obligation not to allow knowingly its territory to be used for acts contrary to the rights of other States.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ HUGO GROTUIS, 2 THE RIGHTS OF WAR AND PEACE 884, ¶ I (Richard Tuck ed., Jean Barbeyrac trans., 2005) (1625); see also Walton, supra note 17, at 1480 (discussing how, in Grotius’s time, the failure to provide compensation could itself be a just cause for war).
¹⁵⁷ See, e.g., Int’l Law Comm’n, Survey of Liability Regimes Relevant to the Topic of International Liability for Injurious Consequences Arising Out of Acts Not Prohibited by International Law (International Liability in Case of Loss from Transboundary Harm Arising Out of Hazardous Activities), U.N. Doc. A/CN.4/543 (June 24, 2004), at ¶ 112 (noting that “strict liability, as a legal concept, now appears to have been accepted by most legal systems,” though “[t]he extent of activities subject to strict liability may differ”).
¹⁵⁸ See Walton, supra note 17, at 1478–84 (discussing relevant case law).
¹⁵⁹ Id. at 1479.
States have regularly concluded treaties creating or clarifying liability for specific acts or omissions.\footnote{These include the 1960 Paris Convention on Third Party Liability in the Field of Nuclear Energy; the 1962 Convention on the Liability of Operators of Nuclear Ships; the 1963 Vienna Convention on Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage; the 1969 International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage; the 1972 Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects; the 1977 International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage resulting from the Exploration for and Exploitation of Seabed Mineral Resources; the 1989 Convention on Civil Liability for Damage Caused during Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road, Rail, and Inland Navigation Vessels; the 1989 Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal; the 1992 Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area; the 1992 Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents; the 1992 International Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage; the 1993 Convention on Civil Liability for Damage Resulting from Activities Dangerous to the Environment; the 1996 International Convention on Liability and Compensation for Damage in Connection with the Carriage of Hazardous and Noxious Substances by Sea; the 1997 Convention on the Law of Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses; the 1997 Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage; the 1999 Basel Protocol on Liability and Compensation for Damage Resulting from Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal (not in force); the 2001 International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage; and the 2003 Protocol on Civil Liability and Compensation for Damage Caused by the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents on Transboundary Waters.} While drafted over many decades, these treaties generally focus on a few, specific kinds of harms (injuries associated with nuclear accidents, oil spills, and other kinds of hazardous materials) or harms which endanger the use of shared spaces (international watercourses, transboundary waters, and outer space). The strongest statement of state liability is found in the 1972 Convention on the International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects.\footnote{Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects, Mar. 29, 1972, 24 U.S.T. 2389, 961 U.N.T.S. 187.} It provides that “[a] launching State shall be absolutely liable to pay compensation for damage caused by its space object on the surface of the earth or to aircraft in flight,”\footnote{Id. art. II. This absolute liability is subject to a defense that the damage resulted “wholly or partially from gross negligence or from an act or omission done with intent to cause damage on the part of a claimant State or of natural or juridical persons it represents.” Id. art. VI.} and includes more complicated standards—including joint and several liability and a contributory negligence defense—for non-Earth damage.\footnote{Id. arts. III, IV, V, XXII.}

In 1978, the U.N. General Assembly charged the ILC “to commence work on the topics of international liability for injurious consequences arising out of acts not prohibited by international law and jurisdictional immunities of States and their
property.”166 This project, originally an attempt “to conceptualize and circumscribe” state liability generally,167 was later limited to environmental matters because of a lack of consistent state practice in other areas.168 The ILC produced two circumscribed documents: the 2001 draft articles on the duty to prevent transboundary harm from hazardous activities and the 2006 draft principles regarding liability for the injurious consequences of such actions.169 One particularly interesting conclusion of the ILC process was a clarification of the relationship between the principle of state liability and the law of state responsibility. When a state engages in an act that is not inherently unlawful but nonetheless causes harm—say, engaging in cyberespionage—the failure to provide compensation for the harm might itself constitute an internationally wrongful act, triggering the applicability of the law of state responsibility and its broader remedial measures.

Today, the principle of state liability is primarily discussed in terms of international environmental law, largely because of the paucity of situations outside of the environmental context where state action causes significant transboundary harm. But while the doctrine of state liability for transboundary harms has been most developed in environmental law, it is

166 ILC Report, supra note 151, ¶ 7.
167 Sucharitkul, supra note 148, at 829.

Critics had two main complaints regarding the ILC’s project: first, they argued that there was no conceptual need to distinguish state liability from state responsibility; second, they claimed that the distinction would be of little use in developing international environmental law—and might even undermine other nascent environmental legal protections. Boyle, supra note 150, at 1.

hardly conceptually limited to that legal regime.\textsuperscript{170} In the Corfu Channel case, the ICJ was not overly concerned with the environmental impact of the mines. Instead, the case was primarily about the use of military weapons in peacetime and the creation of a hazard in an otherwise safe passage used by other states.\textsuperscript{171} The advent of increasingly harmful state-sponsored cyberoperations and lack of effective deterrents highlights a need for a new regulatory regime—and the principle of state liability for transboundary harms provides a useful framework for thinking about state accountability in this context.\textsuperscript{172}

2. \textit{Benefits of State Liability for International Cybertorts}

There are a number of benefits that would attend applying the principle of state liability to cyberoperations that cause significant transboundary harm. Holding states liable for the harmful consequences of their cyberoperations imposes costs on such activity, creating a new deterrent and increasing the likelihood that victims of international cybertorts will be compensated for their injuries. Simultaneously, labeling a harmful cyberoperation an international cybertort does not mean that it was necessarily unlawful, creating an intermediate space between cyberwarfare and unproblematic state activity in cyberspace.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{a. Creates a Non-Escalatory Responsive Option and New Deterrent}
\end{itemize}

At the time, President Obama described the Sony hack as “cybervandalism”—and was slammed domestically for what was perceived as a weak characterization.\textsuperscript{173} But what was he to call it? Calling it cyberwarfare, as some would have preferred, would have stretched the definition of cyberwarfare beyond recognition and would set a precedent for other states to term similar U.S. cyberoperations cyberwarfare—and possibly take responsive action.

Still, “cybervandalism” clearly is not the right term. It usually describes the annoying but relatively innocuous practice of altering online content, like website defacement. In 2010, for example, photos of Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodri-

\begin{footnotes}
\item[170] Walton, \textit{supra} note 17, at 1480.
\item[171] See id. at 1483–84.
\item[172] See id. at 1511–19.
\end{footnotes}
The possibility of labeling a cyberoperation an international cybertort and calling for compensation creates a new responsive option for a victim state, minimizing the likelihood that it will resort to more escalatory self-help options. Furthermore, the possibility of liability might operate as a new ex ante deterrent by imposing additional costs on engaging in cyber-operations that risk causing significant transboundary harm.

b. Encourages Victim Compensation

The principle of state liability for transboundary harms can be employed to increase the likelihood that states or their nationals will be compensated for their injuries. Different treaty regimes have developed different means by which harmed entities may bring claims for compensation: sometimes private entities bring claims against private entities, sometimes private entities bring claims against states, sometimes states bring claims against private entities, and sometimes states bring claims against states. These various approaches have corresponding benefits and drawbacks, and a careful analysis of the architecture of cyberspace and what practices have been effective in similar existing regimes is needed to determine what compensation structure will be preferable in the cyber context.

With regard to the Sony hack, the U.S. National Security Council Spokesman has already suggested that North Korea is liable for the millions in losses Sony suffered. However, North Korea is unlikely to pay such compensation. This is not a damning indictment of the concept of international cybertorts, however, nor a unique phenomenon; domestic tort law plaintiffs are often unable to recoup their losses from judg-

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174 Mr Bean Replaces Spanish PM on EU Presidency Site, BBC NEWS (Jan. 4, 2010), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8440554.stm [https://perma.cc/B462-L9WX].

ment-proof defendants. While it may be sometimes impossible to compensate the victims of international cybertorts—either because there is no procedure in place for doing so, or because the perpetrator is already a rogue state and relatively immune to the threat of outcasting\textsuperscript{176}—identifying international cybertorts still allows victim states to name the action and shame the liable state for not providing appropriate compensation.

c. \textit{Creates a Bounded Grey Zone for State Experimentation in Cyberspace (And a New Means for Managing Cyberespionage)}

Perhaps President Obama used the term cybervandalism in describing the Sony hack to avoid raising the question of the lawfulness of U.S. cyberoperations, or perhaps he used it because there was no accurate term that allowed him to denounce the Sony hack without implying the appropriateness of a military response to the hack of a civilian business.\textsuperscript{177} The concept of international cybertorts walks this thin line. Because the activity underlying an international cybertort is not necessarily unlawful, the term allows states suffering from an act’s consequences to claim compensation without prejudging its lawfulness. The concept of international cybertorts thereby creates an intermediate space between unproblematic state activity in cyberspace and cyberwarfare, preserving a bounded grey zone for state experimentation.

The possibility of managing cyberoperations in this intermediate space has considerable implications for cyberespionage. Thus far, governments have had few means of deterring cyber exploitation and cyberespionage. There is little law on the subject: the United States, one of the loudest critics of cyber-enabled industrial espionage, nonetheless maintains that “remote cyber operations involving computers or other networked devices located on another State’s territory do not constitute a per se violation of international law. . . . This is perhaps most clear where such activities in another State’s territory have no effects or de minimis effects.”\textsuperscript{178}

\textsuperscript{176} See Oona Hathaway & Scott J. Shapiro, \textit{Outcasting: Enforcement in Domestic and International Law}, 121 Yale L.J. 252, 340 (2011) (pointing out that outcasting regimes have little enforcement power over isolated states).

\textsuperscript{177} Fung, supra note 173 (“What’s really going on here is a battle to determine whether, in fact, the infiltration of corporate networks, exposure of business information and censorship of U.S. film studios is a legitimate military activity.”).

While states are not held formally accountable for their spies’ actions in the physical world, individual spies could be apprehended, prosecuted, and punished under domestic laws. These threats helped minimize an otherwise unregulated activity. In cyberspace, however, spies can access far more information and data with far less personal risk, upsetting the imperfect but at least established standing equilibrium.

Even when a state identifies and reasonably attributes cyberespionage to another state, it has few effective and non-escalatory options. Should it issue criminal indictments of suspected individuals, as the United States did with members of China’s People’s Liberation Army?179 Or should it attempt to embarrass the allegedly responsible state, by naming and shaming? Or should it take some covert response? All of these approaches have significant drawbacks: criminal indictments will usually be unenforceable; naming and shaming carries little weight with regard to espionage, given that all states are engaged in similar activities; responsive offensive covert countermeasures are likely themselves unlawful due to the notice requirement180 and their invisibility contributes to the perception that cyberspace is a lawless zone while simultaneously risking conflict escalation.

But what if states could be held liable for the harm associated with discovered or publicized cyberespionage? There would be no need to determine the lawfulness of the cyberoperation; rather, the injuries associated with the activity would raise the possibility of state liability. The harms associated with these discovered or publicized cyberoperations are usually significant, suggesting that these acts could be identified as international cybertorts, triggering state liability and a duty to compensate. While hardly a magic bullet for the asymmetry of cyberespionage, recognizing such activities as international cybertorts presents victim states with a new means of responding.

180 See Michael N. Schmitt, Grey Zones in the International Law of Cyberspace, 42 YALE J. INT’L L. ONLINE 1, 2 n.11 (2017) (discussing legal restrictions on covert countermeasures, including the requirement of prior or subsequent notice); see also TALLINN MANUAL 2.0, supra note 46, r. 21 cmt. 10 (elaborating on the notice requirement); id. r. 21 cmt. 12 (noting situations where notice may not be required).
Clearly, there are a number of benefits that would attend expanding the principle of state liability to cyberoperations that cause significant transboundary harm. Before it can be employed, however, certain questions will need to be resolved.

3. State Liability in Cyberspace: Questions to Be Considered

This section provides an initial sketch of the main conceptual questions that will need to be addressed to develop a principle of state liability for transboundary harm in cyberspace: What constitutes “significant harm”? What duties does a state owe (or should owe) other states in cyberspace? How should causation be evaluated? What standard of liability should be applied?181

a. What Constitutes Significant Harm?

Because this Article’s definition of international cybertort relies on “significant harm” as a limiting factor, much will depend on what level and kinds of harm are “significant.”182 Thousands of damaging cyberoperations occur on a daily basis—what level of injury is necessary? A thousand dollars’ worth of damage? A million? Ten million? Is this an objective assessment, or will the understanding of what is significant depend on the wealth of the attacked entity? Should more abstract harms—such as interference in an election—be recognized and addressed?184 Domestic tort law certainly recognizes a wide variety of harms, including violations of property or constitutional rights as well as physical, emotional, and

181 More instrumental questions—such as how this legal regime should be developed and enforced—are considered in Part IV.
182 Many conventions refer to “significant,” “serious,” or “substantial” harm or damage to delineate the threshold for legal claims. See, e.g., Draft Principles on the Allocation of Loss 123 (2006) (“The term ‘significant’ is understood to refer to something more than ‘detectable’ but need not be at the level of ‘serious’ or ‘substantial.’”) (emphasis omitted)).
reputational injuries. There might be a similar panoply of more abstract harms at the international level. The U.S. Department of Defense’s (DoD) Cyber Strategy showcases the potential breadth of the concept. It states that the DoD has an obligation to “defend the United States and its interests against cyberattacks of significant consequence,” regardless of whether they constitute cyberwarfare.185 While noting that cyberincidents will be “assessed on a case-by-case and fact-specific basis,” it declares that “significant consequences may include loss of life, significant damage to property, serious adverse U.S. foreign policy consequences, or serious economic impact on the United States.”186

As with many other questions of evaluating and valuing tort violations, these are questions best left to the “jury”—which, in the international legal order, is comprised of the community of states.187 States, like plaintiffs in domestic law, will determine what injuries they will absorb and which are worth challenging; other states’ responses to such accusations will be instrumental in developing norms about what constitutes significant harm.188 Indeed, as is often the case in international technological regulation, the inherent ambiguity of “significant harm” is a strength: it is a relatively tech-neutral standard that permits coherent but flexible legal development.189

b. What Duties Do States Owe Other States?

Much depends on the question of what duties a state owes (or should owe) other states. Any claim that a state is liable for transboundary harm associated with a cyberoperation must first demonstrate that states have (1) a duty not to cause transboundary harm in cyberspace; (2) a duty to prevent or mitigate the causation of transboundary harm in cyberspace, which might also be characterized as a duty of due diligence; and/or (3) a duty to compensate for transboundary harm caused by their cyberoperations or that occurs due to a lack of due dili-

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186 Id.
187 Alternatively, should states establish an independent tribunal, a group of experts could be appointed to evaluate claims. See infra subpart IV.C.
188 See Crootof, Change Without Consent, supra note 120, at 256 (explaining when state party conduct becomes subsequent practice).
189 Cf. Rebecca Crootof, A Meaningful Floor for “Meaningful Human Control,” 30 TEMPLE INT’L & COMP. L.J. 53, 58–60 (2016) (arguing that, because it allows for flexible and responsive interpretation, the imprecision of the “meaningful human control” principle is beneficial, provided that it is bounded by an interpretative floor).
gence. These three conceptions of state duties might be understood as interrelated or completely independent.

A duty not to cause transboundary harm is fairly self-explanatory: states would have a duty not to engage in any activities that result in transboundary harm. A duty not to cause transboundary harm is distinct from a duty to prevent the causation of transboundary harm; the former would apply only to state and state-sponsored activities, while the latter is a more general obligation on states to monitor and limit what other states and non-state actors do on their territory or within their jurisdiction or control. Under the former conception, North Korea would have had a duty not to engage in potentially harmful cyberoperations against the United States; under the latter, it would have had a duty to prevent other states or non-state actors from engaging in such activities anywhere within its jurisdiction or control.

The second option—a duty to prevent the causation of transboundary harm—might also be characterized as a duty of due diligence. There is some precedent for this concept in international jurisprudence. In the Pulp Mills case, the ICJ found that all states have

>a{n obligation to act with due diligence in respect of all activities which take place under the jurisdiction and control of each party. It is an obligation which entails not only the adoption of appropriate rules and measures, but also a certain level of vigilance in their enforcement and the exercise of administrative control applicable to public and private operators . . . to safeguard the rights of the other party.190

More and more, scholars are discussing due diligence as an independent standard for evaluating appropriate state action in cyberspace. Michael Schmitt argues that states should shoulder additional due diligence obligations in cyberspace, given that they have a "due diligence obligation with respect to both government and private cyber infrastructure on, and cyber activities emanating from, their territory."191 The Tallinn Manual 2.0 on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Operations has two rules regarding due diligence, recognizing it as a general principle and applying it in the cyber context.192

192 Rule 6 provides, "A State must exercise due diligence in not allowing its territory, or territory or cyber infrastructure under its governmental control, to be
A due diligence standard might span a spectrum of requirements. What might be characterized as a “strong” due diligence standard—a general duty to prevent others from causing transboundary harm—carries the risk of creating an incentive for states to exercise complete control over information technologies. This is exactly what the Shanghai Cooperation Organization states have been advocating, and exactly what Western states have been resisting in the interest of preserving freedom of expression and the free exchange of information on the internet.\textsuperscript{193} As Jack Goldsmith has noted, while questioning the likelihood of a cybersecurity treaty, the United States might one day be willing to accept comprehensive U.S. government monitoring and 24/7 real-time police or military pursuit in the private network in exchange for a serious clamp-down on malicious activity from Russia and China. But the idea is unthinkable today. . . . What we need to do to protect ourselves in the cyber realm is in deep conflict with our commitments to limited government and private control of the communications infrastructure.\textsuperscript{194}

In contrast, a relatively “weak” due diligence duty would arise only with regard to known harms: states should be expected to take only reasonably feasible measures to minimize those harms, and there should be no duty to monitor networks and no duty of prevention.\textsuperscript{195}

There is recent state practice that could be understood as supporting a duty of due diligence. In early 2017, a variant of the WannaCry ransomware “crippled 200,000 computers in more than 150 countries,”\textsuperscript{196} making it the largest known ransomware assault to date.\textsuperscript{197} The malware employed a hacking tool called “Eternal Blue,” which was originally developed by

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{194} Id. at 9.
\textsuperscript{195} Cf. Tallinn Manual 2.0, supra note 46, r. 6–7 (requiring states to take actions “feasible in the circumstances” to comply with the due diligence principle).
\textsuperscript{196} Id. at 9.
\textsuperscript{197} See Perlroth & Sanger, supra note 131 (“The attacks appeared to be the largest ransomware assault on record.”).
\end{footnotesize}
the NSA and subsequently leaked by a hacking group called the “Shadow Brokers.” While there is growing evidence that the attacks are linked to North Korean hackers, China has blamed the United States for the attack, presumably on the rationale that the United States had allowed a dangerous tool to fall into the wrong hands or had not taken sufficient action to minimize the harm associated with its leaked tool. The NotPetya malware attacks also used Eternal Blue, resulting in similar calls for NSA to “help the rest of the world defend against the weapons it created.”

Finally, states may have a duty to compensate victims for any harms caused by their cyberoperations and/or caused by inadequate due diligence. This could be understood as a natural corollary of a duty to not cause transboundary harm or a duty of due diligence, where a lapse would trigger a duty to compensate. Alternatively, there may be a general presumption that states may engage in activities not prohibited by international law even if doing so causes transboundary harm, provided that the state subsequently compensates victims for any associated harms. The Lotus case—which held that state actions not expressly prohibited under international law are permitted—would support this more limited conception, and given state interest in preserving room to play, this is the most likely candidate for general adoption.

c. How Should Causation Be Evaluated?

A second limiting factor will be whether a given state can be determined to have caused an international cybertort. Causa-

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198 Id.
199 Nicole Perlroth, More Evidence Points to North Korea Role in Global Ransomware Attack, N.Y. TIMES, May 23, 2017, at B4 (including the fact that the "WannaCry attacks used the same command-and-control server used in the North Korean hack of Sony Pictures Entertainment in 2014").
200 Paul Mozur & Jane Perlz, Evidence Links North Korea to Cyberattack, but China Stays Mute, N.Y. TIMES, May 18, 2017, at A8 ("Despite evidence suggesting a North Korean role in the ransomware attack, the most common reaction among experts and on Chinese social media was to blame the United States.").
201 Perlroth, Scott & Frenkel, supra note 126.
202 In other words, a duty not to cause transboundary harm might be understood as a liability rule. See Guido Calabresi & A. Douglas Melamed, Property Rules, Liability Rules, and Inalienability: One View of the Cathedral, 85 HARV. L. REV. 1089, 1092 (1972).
203 S.S. Lotus (Fr. v. Turk.), 1927 P.C.I.J. (ser. A) No. 10 (Sept. 7) (observing that, because of the consensual nature of the international legal order, "Restrictions upon the independence of States cannot be therefore be presumed."). But see Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo, Advisory Opinion, 2010 I.C.J. Rep. 404, 98 (July 22) (declaration of Judge Simma (criticizing the famous Lotus dictum as an outdated, "excessively deferential" approach).
tion is hardly a simple legal concept, but it is at least a familiar one with well-traced complications. And, as in domestic tort law, establishing whether a given act caused a given harm will necessarily be a fact-specific analysis.

Causation of significant harm (the state liability standard) is fundamentally different from attribution of an internationally wrongful act (the state responsibility standard):

[I]nternational liability of a State associated with its obligation not to cause harm to other States requires no attributability of the act to the State. . . . International liability arises out of injurious consequences which, according to the natural law of causation, must result from activities over which the State has or should have direct or indirect control or that lie within its jurisdiction.204

Given this, it seems likely that “causation” will be interpreted far more broadly than “attribution” with regard to the activities of non-state actors205—especially if states are understood as having a due diligence obligation.

Eric Talbot Jensen and Sean Watts have suggested that a duty of due diligence may help mitigate the attribution problem.206 Imagine a scenario where State A is the victim of a malicious cyberoperation conducted by State B, which is routed through State C’s cyber infrastructure. While State A can determine the cyberoperation came from State C, it cannot reasonably identify the original perpetrator. Absent a due diligence duty, State A could not hold States B or C responsible nor engage in countermeasures against either; with a due diligence duty, State A could inform State C of the harm and, should State C fail to take reasonable actions to end it, State C would have committed an internationally wrongful act permitting State A to engage in countermeasures against State C.207

However, as Jensen and Watts recognize, this potential benefit comes with attendant costs.208 This conception of due diligence expands both when and against whom a victim state

204 Sucharitkul, supra note 148, at 834–35.
205 The state responsibility attribution standard for the activities of non-state actors is extremely circumscribed. See infra section II.B.2.
206 Jensen & Watts, supra note 82.
207 Id. at 1567–68.
208 Id. at 1568 (observing that a due diligence standard might contribute to the “erosion of State internalization of international law, proliferation of resorts to self-help, hindrance of multilateral and collective capacity, and faulty assignments of culpability”).
might use countermeasures, risking increased conflict escalation.\textsuperscript{209}

But if due diligence is understood as expanding the number of states that could be held liable for compensation, as opposed to responsible for an internationally wrongful act justifying the use of countermeasures, some of the problems Jensen and Watts identify with expanding attribution would be minimized. Assigning liability, rather than responsibility, for due diligence violations might reduce state resort to self-help measures\textsuperscript{210} and make multilateral solutions more attractive.\textsuperscript{211}

d. \textit{What Standard of Liability Should Apply?}

Finally, what standards of liability should be applied in evaluating state liability for international cybertorts? As in domestic tort law, there are good reasons to employ different standards for different levels of intent, as there are fundamental differences between unforeseeable accidental damage, likely accidental damage, non-accidental damage, and intentional damage.\textsuperscript{212}

Certainly, a state should be held liable for intended harms and for harms resulting from its ultrahazardous activities. Intentional torts and ultrahazardous activities—those that involve a risk of “significant transboundary harm, which is either unforeseeable or, if foreseeable, is unpreventable even if a state takes due care”—are almost always evaluated under a strict liability standard.\textsuperscript{213}

States should also be held at least partially liable for unintended harms resulting from their not-unlawful activities, though the appropriate standard of liability is less obvious.

\textsuperscript{209} \textit{Id.} at 1577 (“In short, by presenting more opportunities for more States to allege more breaches of international law, due diligence potentially increases the frequency of States’ resort to countermeasures and their accompanying potentially destabilizing effects.”).

\textsuperscript{210} \textit{Id.} at 1573–74.

\textsuperscript{211} \textit{Id.} at 1574–75. Admittedly, however, this substitution of state liability for state responsibility does little to address the fact that this is “a proxy approach,” whereby the perpetrator can completely evade consequences. \textit{Id.} at 1575, and it may even exacerbate the problem of rule erosion, to the extent it encourages states to engage in “efficient breaches.” \textit{Id.} at 1568–73.

\textsuperscript{212} Whether a state should be held vicariously liable for the actions of non-state actors or other states operating on its territory or employing devices within its jurisdiction or control will depend first on whether a duty to prevent the causation of transboundary harm is established. \textit{Supra} subsection II.C.3.b.

\textsuperscript{213} Malgosia Fitzmaurice, \textit{International Responsibility and Liability}, in \textbf{OXFORD HANDBOOK OF INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW} 1010, 1022 (Daniel Bodansky, Jutta Brunée, Ellen Hey eds., 2008).
Some suggest that "liability of a State may be said to be strict or almost absolute, regardless of fault, intention or negligence, for activities within its jurisdiction or on a sea-going vessel or spacecraft carrying its flag or registered in its territory." A strict liability standard certainly simplifies the liability analysis: if it can be determined that a state’s action or inaction caused transboundary harm, the state will be liable for the costs associated with that harm. There are also arguments for a lesser standard of liability for harms resulting from negligence or from socially-useful activities. Walton contends that “due diligence” is best understood as a standard of liability, rather than as a freestanding independent duty, and that it provides the appropriate standard when evaluating unintentional harms associated with socially-useful activities.

Oren Gross has also proposed that the state victim to a harmful cyberoperation should bear some liability for failures to take appropriate cybersecurity measures. A victim state’s particularly egregious cybersecurity practices might be treated as a kind of contributory or comparative negligence that mitigates another state’s liability for its international cybertorts.

* * * *

A cyberoperation like the Sony hack does not fit squarely into the transnational cybercrime nor the cyberwarfare categories. Instead, it is conceptually and legally useful to identify the Sony hack as an international cybertort. Shifting to a tort-law framework also highlights the benefits of applying the principle of state liability for transboundary harms to state action in cyberspace.

However, there is another aspect to cyberoperations like the DNC hack worth discussing: in addition to being cyberespionage that cost the DNC hefty sums, the action was likely also intended to sow confusion and possibly even alter the outcome of a U.S. presidential election. While the DNC hack may not have been itself unlawful, imagine if Russian actors instead hacked voting machines and altered individual votes. If such an action caused significant harm, it might be an inter-

214 See Sucharitkul, supra note 148, at 835.
215 Walton, supra note 17, at 1497 (“If due diligence is the appropriate standard by which to judge state conduct at the level of low-intensity cyber attacks, then such an approach would have to recognize the underlying duty to prevent transboundary harm—given that this is the only primary duty that governs the low-intensity space.”).
216 Gross, supra note 59.
national cybertort. But it would also be something more—unlawful interference.217

III
STATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR INTERNATIONALLY
WRONGFUL ACTS

In contrast to the principle of state liability for transboundary harm, the law of state responsibility holds states accountable for their internationally wrongful acts. After a brief review of the law of state responsibility, this Part considers two kinds of unlawful interference—violations of state sovereignty and intervention—that would ordinarily trigger the applicability of state responsibility, and then discusses how cyberspace facilitates such activities. It concludes that, instead of expanding existing definitions of internationally wrongful acts to cover these cyber-enabled interferences, states should use the possibility of state liability to deter such cyberoperations.

A. The Law of State Responsibility

The law of state responsibility is intended to create accountability mechanisms for states that engage in any “internationally wrongful act,” defined as “conduct consisting of an action or omission” that “constitutes a breach of an international obligation of the State” and “is attributable to the State under international law.”218 If a state is responsible for an internationally wrongful act, it is obligated to make full reparation.219

1. Breach of an International Obligation

From its inception, the ILC’s focus in codifying the law of state responsibility was limited to the topic of wrongful acts. According to the Draft Articles, “The essence of an internationally wrongful act lies in the non-conformity of the State’s actual conduct with the conduct it ought to have adopted in order to comply with a particular international obligation.”220 The conduct a state “ought to have adopted” might be found in customary international law, treaty law, or general principles of the

217 Egan, supra note 178 (“[A] cyber operation by a State that interferes with another country’s ability to hold an election or that manipulates another country’s election results would be a clear violation of the rule of non-intervention.”).
218 Draft Articles, supra note 47, art. 2.
219 Id. art. 31.
220 Id. ch. 3 cmt. 3.
international legal order. However, an act is not a breach of an international obligation “unless the State is bound by the obligation in question at the time the act occurs.” The number and kind of internationally wrongful acts a state can engage in is limited only by its international obligations.

Additionally, if the law evolves such that states are understood to have a duty to compensate those harmed by their international cybertorts, the failure to provide compensation might itself constitute an internationally wrongful act triggering the applicability of the law of state responsibility and its broader remedial measures.

2. Attribution

“Attribution,” in the state responsibility context, “denote[s] the operation of attaching a given action or omission to a State.” Certainly, the actions of state organs are attributable to a state. States may be held responsible both for the actions of those non-state actors that are de facto state organs as well as for the actions of non-state actors acting “on the instructions of, or under the direction or control of” a state in carrying out an operation.

The standard for determining when attribution for de facto state organs is appropriate remains unresolved. The ICJ has adopted a “strict control” test, while the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has employed a rela-
tively relaxed “overall control” standard.\textsuperscript{229} If a non-state actor is a \emph{de jure} or \emph{de facto} state organ, the state will be responsible for all of its actions, regardless of whether they are \textit{ultra vires}.\textsuperscript{230}

Additionally, the acts of non-state actors may also be attributable to a state under Article 8 of the Draft Articles, which holds that “[t]he conduct of a person or group of persons shall be considered an act of a State under international law if the person or group of persons is in fact acting on the instructions of, or under the direction or control of, that State in carrying out the conduct.”\textsuperscript{231} In the Draft Articles, the ILC adopted the ICJ’s “effective control” test for Article 8 attribution.\textsuperscript{232} Under this standard, a state will only be held responsible for actions that occur in the context of an operation over which it exercises effective control,\textsuperscript{233} and it will only be responsible for a non-state actor’s \textit{ultra vires} actions that are “an integral part” of the operation.\textsuperscript{234}

The Tallinn Manual 2.0 ties state responsibility for a non-state actor’s cyberoperation to the ICJ’s “effective control” test under Article 8.\textsuperscript{235} As many scholars have argued, however, this standard (and other tests for attribution) may be inappro-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[230] Draft Articles, supra note 47, art. 7; \textit{id.} art. 7 cmts. 1–8 (describing supporting state practice and judicial decisions); \textit{see also} \textit{Prosecutor v. Tadi´c}, Judgment, ¶¶ 121, 123 (holding that “a State is internationally accountable for ultra vires acts or transactions of its organs [and that the State] incurs responsibility even for acts committed by its officials outside their remit or contrary to its behest”).
\item[231] Draft Articles, supra note 47, art. 8. The ICJ has recognized this as reflecting customary international law. \textit{Bosn. & Herz. v. Serb. & Montenegro}, 2007 I.C.J. ¶ 398.
\item[232] Draft Articles, supra note 47, art. 8, cmts. 3–5.
\item[234] Draft Articles, supra note 47, art. 8 cmt. 3.
\item[235] \textit{See} \textit{Tallinn Manual 2.0}, supra note 46, r. 17 cmt. 6 (“A State is in ‘effective control’ of a particular cyber operation by a non-State actor whenever it is the State that determines the execution and course of the specific operation and the
appropriately high for determining state-sponsored cyberoperations
carried out by non-state actors.\textsuperscript{236} Attributing the acts of non-
state actors to states is never an easy undertaking, and it is
complicated in cyberspace by the opportunities for anonymity
and misdirection.

Ultimately, absolute certainty regarding attribution is
rarely possible; instead, a state seeking to hold another respon-
sible for an internationally wrongful act is expected to indepen-
dently judge a variety of facts to make a reasonable
determination as to whether there is justification for
attribution.

3. \textit{Reparations}

Once an internationally wrongful act is attributable to a
state, the state is then “under an obligation to make full repa-
ration for the injury caused by the internationally wrongful act.”\textsuperscript{237} The concept of reparation under the law of state re-
sponsibility is far broader than the compensation suggested by
the principle of state liability. Reparation might “take the form
of restitution, compensation and satisfaction, either singly or
in combination.”\textsuperscript{238} Restitution requires “re-establish[ing] the
situation which existed before the wrongful act was commit-

cyber activity engaged in by the non-State actor is an ‘integral part of that
operation.’”).

\textsuperscript{236} See, e.g., Michael Gervais, \textit{Cyber Attacks and the Laws of War}, 30 BERKELEY
J. INT’L L. 525, 549–50 (2012) [arguing that a victim state may use force against a
state that refuses to prevent malicious cyberoperations emanating from its terri-
tory]; Catherine Lotrionte, \textit{State Sovereignty and Self-Defense in Cyberspace: A
Normative Framework for Balancing Legal Rights}, 26 EMORY INT’L L. REV. 825, 890
(2012) [arguing that a victim state should be able to use force against states that
are “directly or indirectly” involved in a non-state actor’s cyberoperations]; Peter
Margulies, \textit{Sovereignty and Cyber Attacks: Technology’s Challenge to the Law of
State Responsibility}, 14 MELBOURNE J. INT’L L. 496, 496 (2013) [proposing a “virtual
control” standard, which would “impos[e] responsibility on a state that has pro-
vided financial or other assistance to private groups” and shift the burden of proof
to the accused state]; Matthew J. Sklerov, \textit{Solving the Dilemma of State Responses to
Cyberattacks: A Justification for the Use of Active Defenses Against States Who
Neglect Their Duty to Prevent}, 201 MILITARY L. REV. 1 (2009) [arguing that states
may use force against third-party states who do not take sufficient precautions
against their servers being used for cyberoperations]. \textit{But see} Michael N. Schmitt
& Liis Vihul, \textit{Proxy Wars in Cyber Space: The Evolving International Law of Attribu-
tion}, 1 FLETCHER SECURITY REV. 53, 65 (2014) [suggesting that the existing stan-
dards will remain high].

\textsuperscript{237} Draft Articles, \textit{supra} note 47, art. 31. The 2005 Basic Principles expand
this list to include rehabilitation and guarantees of non-repetition. Basic Princi-
pies, \textit{supra} note 46, ¶ 18; \textit{see also} Draft Articles, \textit{supra} note 47, art. 30(b) [impos-
ing an obligation on a state responsible for an internationally wrongful act to offer
guarantees of non-repetition].

\textsuperscript{238} Draft Articles, \textit{supra} note 47, art. 34.
Monetary compensation is required to the extent damage is not made good by restitution. Satisfaction—which may entail acknowledging the breach, expressing regret, or a formal apology—is required to the extent the damage cannot be made good by restitution or compensation. The appropriate form of restitution will depend on the kind and scope of the harm, and of course, full reparation may not always be possible.

B. Cyber-Facilitated Interference

States regularly attempt to influence other states’ actions in myriad ways—through economic aid and sanctions, propaganda, political maneuvering, and shows of military force. International law permits many such influences, but recognizes two kinds of interference—violations of state sovereignty and intervention—as internationally wrongful acts. When attributable to a state, such unlawful interferences trigger the law of state responsibility.

While these concepts are well-established in principle, their scope is often unclear. Furthermore, given how cyberspace facilitates interference and that states are reluctant to term such activities internationally wrongful acts, the line between lawful and unlawful interference is becoming further blurred.

1. Unlawful Interference: Violations of State Sovereignty and Interventions

State sovereignty is one of the foundational concepts of the international legal order. As articulated by Max Huber in the 1928 Island of Palmas arbitral award, “Sovereignty in the relations between States signifies independence. Independence in regard to a portion of the globe is the right to exercise therein, to the exclusion of any other State, the functions of a State.”

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239 Id. art. 35.
240 Id. art. 36.
241 Id. art. 37. Interest may be necessary to ensure full reparation. See id. art. 38.
242 While the terms “interference” and “intervention” are sometimes used interchangeably, it is useful to distinguish between them. Interference encompasses both lawful and unlawful meddling; intervention is coercive and therefore prohibited. See 1 Oppenheim’s International Law 432, 433–34 (Sir Robert Jennings & Sir Arthur Watts eds., 9th ed. 2008) [hereinafter Oppenheim].
243 Island of Palmas (Neth. v. U.S.) 2 R.I.A.A. 829, 838 (Perm. Ct. Arb. 1928). The Tallinn Manual 2.0 conceives of state sovereignty as having an internal and external component and, by extension, divides potential violations of state sovereignty into two categories: “(1) the degree of infringement upon the target State’s
The U.N. Charter consecrates the concept, grounding its legitimacy "on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members."\footnote{U.N. Charter art. 2, ¶ 1.}

The customary prohibition on intervention forbids "all States or groups of States to intervene directly or indirectly in internal or external affairs of other States."\footnote{Military and Paramilitary Activities in and Against Nicaragua (Nicar. v. U.S.), Judgment, 1986 I.C.J. 14, ¶ 205 (June 27); see also id. ¶ 209 (holding that, where interference takes the form of a use or threat of force, Article 2(4) and the customary norm of non-intervention are coterminous).} This prohibition is well-established in international law, with some even going so far as to consider it \textit{jus cogens}.\footnote{Watts, \textit{supra} note 20, at n.27 (citing sources).} It was first codified in a multilateral treaty in the 1933 Montevideo Convention: "No state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another."\footnote{Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States art. 8, Dec. 26, 1933, 49 Stat. 3097, T.S. No. 881.} Although the prohibition on intervention is not specifically mentioned in the U.N. Charter,\footnote{While the principle of state sovereignty can be read to include the principle of non-intervention, as a formal matter the U.N. Charter only explicitly prohibits intervention by itself or other U.N. bodies. U.N. Charter art. 2, ¶ 7 ("Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.").} post-Charter institutions have regularly reaffirmed it;\footnote{See, \textit{e.g.}, Charter of the Organization of American States art. 18, Feb. 27, 1967, 33 I.L.M. 987 ("No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. The foregoing principle prohibits not only armed force but also any other form of interference or attempted threat against the personality of the State or against its political, economic, and cultural elements.").} the ILC noted it in its draft articles on the rights and duties of states;\footnote{Draft Declaration on Rights and Duties of States with Commentaries, Int’l L. Comm’n Rep. on the Work of Its First Session, art. 3, G.A. Res. 375 (IV) (Dec. 6, 1949) ("Every State has the duty to refrain from intervention in the internal or external affairs of any other State.").} the U.N.
General Assembly has issued a number of resolutions reiterating it, and the ICJ regularly acknowledges it.

The prohibition on intervention can be understood as flowing directly from the concept of state sovereignty: if states have a right to the independent, exclusive exercise of state functions, other states are necessarily prohibited from taking coercive actions that would impair that right. According to one reading, the prohibition on intervention protects the non-territorial, “metaphysical aspect of sovereignty (a state’s political integrity) rather than its physical dimension (a state’s territory).”

Alternatively, violations of sovereignty and intervention can be understood as separate categories of internationally wrongful acts that, while clearly related, do not completely overlap. Certainly, there are acts that could be considered sovereignty violations.

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252 See, e.g., Armed Activities on the Territory of the Congo (Dem. Rep. Congo v. Uganda), Judgment, 2005 I.C.J. 168, ¶ 163 (Dec. 19) (“The Court considers that the obligations arising under the principles of non-use of force and non-intervention were violated by Uganda . . . .”); Military and Paramilitary Activities in and Against Nicaragua (Nicar. v. U.S.), Judgment, 1986 I.C.J. 14, ¶ 242 (June 27) (“The Court therefore finds that the support given by the United States . . . constitutes a clear breach of the principle of non-intervention.”); Corfu Channel (U.K. v. Alb.), Judgment, 1949 I.C.J. 4, ¶ 121 (Apr. 9) (“The Court can only regard the alleged right of intervention as the manifestation of a policy of force, [which] . . . cannot, whatever be the present defects in international organization, find a place in international law.”).

253 Cf. Nicaragua v. U.S., 1986 I.C.J. at ¶ 205 (stating that the prohibition on intervention forbids states from meddling in “matters in which each State is permitted, by the principle of State sovereignty, to decide freely”).


violations that do not seem to meet the standard for interventions: there is a strong argument that the Sony hack constituted a violation of U.S. sovereignty, although it was not sufficiently coercive to qualify as an intervention.\(^{256}\) It is harder, however, to conceive of an intervention that would not also violate a state’s sovereignty, given that coercive interference in a state’s affairs would necessarily constitute a significant “interference with or usurpation of inherently governmental functions.”\(^{257}\)

2. An Elusive Line Between Lawful and Unlawful Interference

Both state sovereignty and the prohibition on intervention are well-established in principle, but the scope of their application resists clear codification. This is largely due to the fact that adjudications of these issues tend to be fact-specific. Furthermore, states and experts are divided on whether it is appropriate to apply older concepts to new kinds of technologically-facilitated interference.

a. State Sovereignty

The difficulty in defining the scope of what constitutes a violation of state sovereignty is illustrated by the Tallinn Manual 2.0 experts’ inability to agree on its borders. Most of the experts agreed that “cyber operations constitute a violation of sovereignty in the event they result in physical damage or injury, as in the case of malware that causes the malfunctioning of the cooling elements of equipment, thereby leading to overheating that results in components melting down” and that “the causation of physical consequences by remote means on that territory likewise constitutes a violation of sovereignty.”\(^{258}\) However, the experts could not reach consensus on the question of whether “a cyber operation that results in neither physical damage nor the loss of functionality amounts to a violation of sovereignty.”\(^{259}\)

Similarly, there are competing arguments regarding whether the DNC hack would constitute a violation of U.S. sovereignty. Assuming that it can be attributed to Russia, some would characterize it as a sovereignty violation because it

\(^{256}\) Schmitt, supra note 8 (arguing that simply “[d]isrupting a private company’s activities” is not sufficiently coercive to qualify as an intervention).
\(^{257}\) TALLINN MANUAL 2.0, supra note 46, r. 4 cmt. 10.
\(^{258}\) Id. r. 4 cmt. 11.
\(^{259}\) Id. r. 4 cmt. 14.
involved nonconsensual intrusion into U.S. cyberinfrastructure. However, there is a minority viewpoint that “mere compromises or thefts of data are not violations of sovereignty, but rather routine facets of espionage and competition among States.”

Further complicating matters, senior U.S. officials have recently argued there is no overarching rule against violations of sovereignty in international law. Instead, they claim that there is a general principle that state sovereignty is to be respected, but this principle takes different forms in different forums, and the rules for cyber are still in flux.

b. Intervention

The prohibition on intervention has also resisted clear delineation. First, it is not obvious what state activities are shielded from outside interference. The ICJ has stated that protected state affairs include “choice of a political, economic, social and cultural system, and the formulation of foreign policy”; according to a more recent Chatham House report, prohibited activities might also include, depending on the circumstances, “[i]nterference in political activities,” “[s]upport for secession,” and “[s]eeking to overthrow the government—so-called ‘regime change.’” The concept of the domaine réserveré helps describe what state activities are protected from intervention, but the “displacement of a matter or issue from the domaine réserveré does not constitute an overall eradication or waiver of the principle of non-interference, nor an open sea-

260 See Watts, supra note 10.
261 Id. Regarding this, Ryan Goodman has made an interesting and somewhat counterintuitive point: if the misappropriation and distribution of information associated with the DNC hack is not a violation of international law—if it is not a violation of state sovereignty or intervention—the practice could be employed unilaterally as a punitive retorsion. Ryan Goodman, International Law and the US Response to Russian Election Interference, JUST SECURITY (Jan. 5, 2017, 8:01 AM), https://www.justsecurity.org/35999/international-law-response-russian-election-interference [https://perma.cc/S3KM-B8JC]. Retorsions are politically unfriendly but lawful self-help measures. Supra note 55.
262 For an argument in favor of this understanding, see Gary P. Corn & Robert Taylor, Sovereignty in the Age of Cyber, 111 AM. J. INT’L L. UNBOUND 207 (2017). Gary Corn is the Staff Judge Advocate of the U.S. Cyber Command, and Robert Taylor is the former Principal Deputy General Counsel of the U.S. Department of Defense. For a responsive critique, see Schmitt & Vihul, supra note 255, at 1668–70.
263 CHATHAM HOUSE, THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-INTERVENTION IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL LAW 3, 6 (2007).
265 CHATHAM HOUSE, supra note 263, at 7.
son on influencing conditions in another state’s territory.”

Ultimately, there is no definitive list of what state affairs are and are not protected.

Second, lawful interference is often distinguished from prohibited intervention based on the degree of coercion exercised. But what constitutes coercion? Oppenheim defines unlawful intervention as that which is “forcible or dictatorial, or otherwise coercive, in effect depriving the state intervened against of control over the matter in question.” Dispatching armed forces to another state will certainly constitute prohibited intervention; it is less clear whether and when economic, political, and psychological pressures are sufficiently coercive to satisfy the legal requirement for prohibited intervention.

Confusion in the doctrine is leading some states to exploit the grey areas and others to err on the side of repression. Consider Ecuador’s reaction to the DNC hack. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has been living in exile in Ecuador’s London embassy since 2012, avoiding a Swedish rape investigation which he believes to be the cover story for an American extradition. With the expressed intent of hobbling WikiLeaks’ interference in the 2016 U.S. general election and to evade any hint of responsibility for facilitating unlawful interventions, Ecuador cut Assange’s internet access. However, the controversial leaked emails were originally obtained by Russian hackers, not Assange or Ecuador—and while their disclosure likely constituted disfavored interference, it probably was not sufficiently coercive to meet the definition for unlawful intervention.

266 Watts, supra note 20, at 265.
267 Id.
268 The ICJ identified “coercion” as the element “which defines, and indeed forms the very essence of, prohibited intervention.” Nicar. v. U.S., 1986 I.C.J. at ¶ 205.
269 OPPENHEIM, supra note 242, at 432; see also TALLINN MANUAL 2.0, supra note 46, r. 66 cmt. 21 (“The key is that the coercive act must have the potential for compelling the target State to engage in an action that it would otherwise not take (or refrain from taking an action it would otherwise take).”).
270 There is a minority view that Article 2(4) prohibits political and economic coercion: the majority understanding is that it prohibits only threats or uses of force. Hathaway et al., supra note 77, at 842.
272 The government of Ecuador stated that it “respects the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other countries” and that “it does not interfere in the electoral processes in support of any candidate in particular.” Id.
273 Id.
Given these ambiguities, a determination of whether a given act constitutes a prohibited violation of state sovereignty or unlawful intervention necessitates a fact-specific inquiry, focused on the existence, validity, and scope of state consent; the degree and kind of coercive activity; and whether any coercive acts by a non-state actor can be attributed to another state.274 Unfortunately, cyberspace facilitates interference while simultaneously confusing the facts relevant to categorization.

3. Increased Likelihood of Interference

The U.S. attribution of the DNC hack to Russia reignited an ongoing conversation regarding whether and how foreign actors may use new technologies in an attempt to influence elections.275 Such cyber-enabled acts might range from publicizing hacked private communications to disseminating misinformation to exploiting voting machine vulnerabilities to manipulating social media.276 Nor are these pure hypotheticals: states have long used cyberoperations to influence elections,277 and U.S. security experts and non-governmental organizations have recently identified areas of the electoral infrastructure that are particularly vulnerable to tampering.278

274 The issue is further confused by recent calls to establish a doctrine of humanitarian intervention, under which states would be permitted to unilaterally use force to stop an ongoing mass atrocity. Crootof, Change Without Consent, supra note 120, at 294–95. However, “[t]o the extent that there is general agreement that the international community has a legal duty to protect citizens from an abusive government, it stops with [the Responsibility to Protect]—and the ability for an individual state to use force to fulfill such a duty remains contingent on Security Council authorization.” Id. at 296.

275 See, e.g., Uría, supra note 82.


Election manipulation is just one example of how cyberspace permits an entirely new level of non-physical but nonetheless pervasive interference. Meanwhile, not only are some of the traditional obstacles to interference inapplicable in cyberspace, many of the existing deterrents are less effective.

First, the shift from physical space to the cyber realm enables states to engage in entirely new levels of invasive but non-violent interference. States can reach into the very heart of another state’s operations and steal, manipulate, or delete critical information, allowing them to obtain or compromise information on a scale previously unimaginable.

Simultaneously, many of the traditional practical obstacles to different kinds of interference are simply not applicable. Historically, influence operations required extensive intelligence, personnel, or military resources, costs that limited which states could intervene and how often they were willing to do so. That is no longer the case. States can now engage in all kinds of invasive operations without any individual ever crossing a border and at dramatically lower price points. In 2014, industry experts estimated that it would cost roughly about $10,000 for a state to develop Stuxnet-like malware. More recently, an expert calculated the cost of developing and operating a new Advanced Persistent Threat—malware that can “break into any [specific] target, exfiltrate data, analyse it and produce intelligence product”—for one year to be a mere $2 million.

By lowering costs, cyber lowers the barrier to entry, increasing the number of states able to engage in such interference. Certainly, electoral interference is nothing new. Dov Levin estimates that, from 1946 to 2000, either the United States or the U.S.S.R./Russia interfered in another country’s elections 117 times, which roughly translates to an intervention in one of every nine competitive national-level executive
elections during this fifty-year period. Nor is the fact that powerful states are interfering in each other’s elections particularly revolutionary. What is novel is that the United States and Russia are no longer the only states capable of such interference. Small states and even non-state actors may now have the resources and capacity to interfere in the affairs of others.

Not only is it easier for more states to engage in more invasive cyberoperations, but traditional legal deterrents are less effective. Most physical violations of sovereignty and interventions are public. The victim state can respond immediately, and the audience of third-party states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and non-state actors witness the original action, observe the victim state’s response, and react accordingly. Invasive cyberoperations, in contrast, can be simultaneously pervasive, destructive, and entirely secret. How is a victim state supposed to react when it does not know the perpetrator, the meaning of the act—or even that the act occurred? Finally, even if the victim state identifies the act and can reasonably attribute it to another state, it has few lawful responsive options, resulting in the state paralysis discussed earlier.

In short, cyberspace undermines many of the practical and legal deterrents to interference while simultaneously promising greater payoffs. The clear implication is that cyber-enabled interference is likely to skyrocket. How should victim states respond?

C. How State Liability Might Minimize Resort to Countermeasures

Certainly, some cyber-enabled interferences will easily meet the traditional definitions for violations of state sovereignty or intervention and can be addressed under the existing law of state responsibility. But states are grappling with

282 Id. (noting cases where the Soviets attempted to influence U.S. elections).
283 See Michael Glennon, State-level Cybersecurity, 171 POL’Y REV. 85 (2012) (noting the sharp increase in cyberoperations targeting a wide range of private corporations and national governments).
284 See supra section I.B.3.
285 See TALLIN MANUAL 2.0, supra note 46, r. 4 cmt. 11 (providing examples).
how to respond to hacks, info dumps, and other new forms of interference occurring on an unprecedented, cyber-enabled scale. For example, in the wake of an increase in “aggressive cyberespionage” targeting German politicians and a November 2016 cyberincident that caused 900,000 Germans to lose internet access, the head of Germany’s foreign intelligence service warned that Russia might be interfering in Germany’s elections.\textsuperscript{286} He remarked that “cyberattacks take place which have no other purpose than to provoke political uncertainty. . . . A kind of pressure is being exercised on public discourse and democracy here, which is unacceptable.”\textsuperscript{287} Former CIA Acting Director Michael Morell made similar statements regarding Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. general election: “It is an attack on our very democracy. It’s an attack on who we are as a people. A foreign government messing around in our elections is . . . the political equivalent of 9/11.”\textsuperscript{288}

Recent cyberoperations have raised one of the perennial questions associated with new technology: is it enough to apply the existing rules, or is there something unique about the traits or effects of the new technology that requires new law?\textsuperscript{289} Many of the rules developed in the physical world are not easily translated to cyberspace.\textsuperscript{290} Clearly, the prohibitions on violating another state’s sovereignty or engaging in interventions do not sufficiently address problems that arise in the cyber domain: despite the havoc it caused, the DNC hack alone might not qualify as a violation of U.S. sovereignty, because nothing was damaged, nor as a prohibited intervention, because the dissemination of hacked private emails was not sufficiently coercive.

Accordingly, there is an understandable desire to stretch existing terms regarding internationally wrongful acts to these

\textsuperscript{286} See Melissa Eddy, \textit{After Cyberattacks, Germany Fears Russia May Disrupt Vote}, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 9, 2016, at A6.
\textsuperscript{287} Id.
\textsuperscript{288} Morell & Kelly, supra note 12.
\textsuperscript{290} Cf. Wolff Heintschel von Heinegg, \textit{Territorial Sovereignty and Neutrality in Cyberspace}, 89 INT’L L. STUD. 123 (2013) [noting that states have responded to the legal confusion of cyberspace by attempting to apply laws developed for the physical world, with mixed success]; Duncan B. Hollis, \textit{Re-Thinking the Boundaries of Law in Cyberspace: A Duty to Hack?}, in \textit{CYBERWAR: LAW & ETHICS FOR VIRTUAL CONFLICTS}, supra note 20, at 129, 129–32, 142–58 (discussing the benefits and drawbacks with reasoning by analogy in cyberspace).
new activities, both to clarify their wrongfulness and justify the use of countermeasures. Some are arguing for expanding the definition of coercion to encompass activities like the DNC hack, either by altering or doing away with the coercion requirement entirely.291 Duncan Hollis suggests that the intentional nature of the leak and the timing, which “clearly sought to maximize attention (and corresponding impacts) on the U.S. domestic political campaign process,” warrants characterizing it as intervention.292 Schmitt argues that the “sounder” understanding of the DNC hack is that it was coercive because “the cyber operations manipulated the process of elections and therefore caused them to unfold in a way that they otherwise would not have.”293

However, many of these proposed solutions would transmute many of today’s routine and minor interferences into prohibited interventions—with undesirable side effects. Not only might a lowered threshold for prohibited coercion deter some entities from engaging in humanitarian activities,294 actions that states are currently expected to let go unpunished in the interest of preserving international peace would become internationally wrongful acts, justifying state resort to escalatory unilateral countermeasures. Similar problems would attend a more expansive definition of state sovereignty. As Walton has noted, “[A] definition of sovereignty that is too broad might inadvertently cover a whole host of cross-border intrusions accepted in an interconnected world, such as the extraterritorial effects of a state’s telecommunications, industrial, monetary, and environmental activities.”295 Nor would expanding the universe of what constitutes unlawful interference necessarily


293 Schmitt, supra note 180, at 8.

294 See Hathaway, supra note 50, at 49 (explaining that an expansive norm of non-interference might negatively affect state funding for humanitarian non-governmental organizations).

295 Walton, supra note 17, at 1477.
create more options for a victim state. As noted above, practical and legal limitations on the use of countermeasures in response to cyberoperations strictly curtail their utility.\textsuperscript{296} Instead of expanding the already-ambiguous scope of unlawful interferences to cover new kinds of invasive cyberoperations, victim states might instead take the less dramatic—but possibly more effective—option of claiming compensation for an international cybertort. Although such a claim would not address all of the harms associated with a politically-motivated interference, it will allow the victim state to name and shame the perpetrator and possibly recover compensation without the risk of creating problematic precedent, encouraging conflict escalation, or becoming itself responsible for an internationally wrongful act.\textsuperscript{297}

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The prior two Parts have drawn on fundamental principles from tort law and international law to construct a more comprehensive state accountability regime for different kinds of harmful actions in cyberspace, grounded in both state liability for acts with injurious consequences and state responsibility for internationally wrongful acts. The next Part considers how best to develop these accountability regimes.

IV

A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF STATE ACCOUNTABILITY IN CYBERSPACE

This Article’s proposed categories and associated accountability regimes could be immediately incorporated within the existing international enforcement mechanisms. Namely, states could label harmful cyberoperations international cybertorts and demand compensation through formal or informal channels.

\textsuperscript{296} See supra section I.B.2.

\textsuperscript{297} Should international law evolve to encompass a more liberal understanding of the coercion element for cyber-enabled interventions, there is good reason to limit any such development to cyberspace. It is worth reiterating that the scope of the prohibition on intervention in the physical world is still unclear and evolving; mixing in new practices developed in cyberspace risks further muddying the waters. The fact that rules developed in the physical space do not apply well in cyberspace suggests that the reverse might be true. To avoid creating inappropriate precedent, cyber-enabled unlawful interferences with no physical effects should be distinguished from physical interferences. Doing so allows for the development of a cyber-specific countermeasures regime under the law of state responsibility, without impacting the equilibrium struck by the U.N. Charter and existing law of countermeasures.
That being acknowledged, it would be far preferable if states also create an independent institution with the expertise and investigative resources to impartially assess state accountability in cyberspace, the flexibility to adapt to changing technologies, and the enforcement authority to decrease the likelihood that victim states resort to inappropriate and potentially escalatory self-help. An institution would also contribute to the considered and comprehensive development of the international law of cyberspace, as its determinations would bridge the gap between positivist treaty law and the unhurried development of a customary international law of cyberspace.

A. State Interest in Developing the Law

Notwithstanding differing opinions on how best to do so, most agree that states must play a central role in developing the law of cyberspace.298 To this end, states have produced and published domestic cyber policies,299 engaged in confidence-building measures, signed bilateral and multilateral non-binding political agreements regarding state behavior in cyberspace, and negotiated and ratified the Convention on Cybercrime.300

States have myriad reasons to continue clarifying the law of cyberspace. In 2015, cyber threats were identified as the international community’s top security threat,301 and President Obama declared the threat of cyber warfare a national emergency.302 Aside from the obvious national security implications, developing the law of cyberspace is vital to growing the global digital economy.303 In listing problems associated with the lack of shared peacetime norms of state behavior in cyber-

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298 See Kristen E. Eichensehr, The Cyber-Law of Nations, 103 GEO. L.J. 317, 347 (2015) [noting that national governments have “decidedly veto[ed] an all-private governance model for cyber . . . [and] show no willingness to abandon the field of Internet and cyber governance . . .”].


300 Convention on Cybercrime, supra note 9.


space, U.S. cybersecurity experts on the President’s Commission on Enhancing National Cybersecurity noted that “the international digital economy lacks the coherent systems necessary to effectively address cross-border malicious cyber activity. . . . The void in technical, policy, and legal conventions hampers information sharing and interoperability . . . [and] creates an opening for criminals to launch attacks and conduct other malicious cyber activity.”

Given this, “[c]oordinated and effective international harmonization and cooperation are needed in order to realize the full economic promise of the nation and the world, and to allow for the efficient flow of information and ideas.”

As Kristen Eichensehr has observed, “[e]ven for those who may be skeptical of international engagement and international law or norms in general, the Commission’s [economic-based] perception that international coordination is crucial should be persuasive.”

There have been some initial steps towards the development of international cyberspace peacetime norms. In

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304 Id.

305 Id. In the interest of ensuring “an open, fair, competitive, and secure global digital economy,” these experts recommend that the United States “encourage and actively coordinate with the international community in creating and harmonizing cybersecurity policies and practices and common international agreements on cybersecurity law and global norms of behavior.” Id.


307 The United States has been an active participant in this process. It originally worked to establish what is now the “global affirmation of the applicability of international law to state behavior in cyberspace,” and it is currently attempting to foster “international consensus on additional norms and principles of responsible state behavior in cyberspace that apply during peacetime.” U.S. DEPT STATE POLICY, supra note 299, at 12–13. These include four priority norms: (1) “[A] State should not conduct or knowingly support cyber-enabled theft of intellectual property, trade secrets, or other confidential business information with the intent of providing competitive advantages to its companies or commercial sectors”; (2) “[A] State should not conduct or knowingly support online activity that intentionally damages critical infrastructure or otherwise impairs the use of critical infrastructure to provide service to the public”; (3) “[A] State should not conduct or knowingly support activity intended to prevent national computer security incident response teams (CSIRTs) from responding to cyber incidents” and “should not use CSIRTs to enable online activity that is intended to do harm”; and (4) “[A] State should cooperate, in a manner consistent with its domestic and international obligations, with requests for assistance from other States in investigating cyber crimes, collecting electronic evidence, and mitigating malicious cyber activity emanating from its territory.” Egan, supra note 178.

The U.S. approach to developing international cybersecurity norms has been a study in what former U.S. Legal Advisor Harold Koh has called “Twenty-First-Century International Lawmaking”—namely, a combination of “nonlegal understandings,” “layered cooperation,” and “diplomatic law talk.” Harold Hongju Koh,
2013, a fifteen-state U.N. Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) recognized the applicability of international law to states’ cyberoperations, stating that “[i]nternational law, and in particular the Charter of the United Nations, is applicable and is essential to maintaining peace and stability and promoting an open, secure, peaceful and accessible [information and communication technology] environment.”308 In 2015, a twenty-state GGE recognized an inherent right to self-defense in cyberspace in a consensus report, as well as the applicability of the law of armed conflict’s principles of humanity, necessity, proportionality, and distinction.309 And while the 2017 GGE could not agree on a final report—due largely to disagreement about one paragraph—they made important progress towards developing cyberspace norms and principles.310

States are also articulating norms in the process of exploring the utility of cybersecurity confidence-building measures (CBMs) and through unilateral pronouncements.311 In general, CBMs help minimize arms races and conflict escalation by reducing uncertainty about other states’ capabilities. Proposed cyber CBMs tend to focus on information sharing, facilitating communication among stakeholders, and potential future international and domestic actions, such as commitments “to refrain from a certain activity of concern.”312 Additionally,
states are building consensus around norms by publicizing their domestic policies and individual legal assessments of high-profile cyber incidents. \(^{313}\) Brian Egan, former U.S. Legal Advisor to the Department of State, is one of many who has called on states to “publicly state their views on how existing international law applies to State conduct in cyberspace to the greatest extent possible in international and domestic forums,” which “will help give rise to more settled expectations of State behavior and thereby contribute to greater predictability and stability in cyberspace.” \(^{314}\)

Non-state entities are also playing a pivotal role in spurring an international conversation on these issues. One particularly influential project is the original Tallinn Manual on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Warfare and the Tallinn Manual 2.0. \(^{315}\) Although they were the product of an initiative of the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, the Tallinn Manuals are not an official NATO project nor were they intended to reflect states’ views. Rather, they are a published collection of international law experts’ joint reasoning and determinations regarding permissible state action in cyberspace, and while they are formally nonbinding, many of their pronouncements have been widely accepted as authorita-

and-presidential-election [https://perma.cc/GDE9-66VW] (arguing that technologically advanced states should be more open to “cutting a deal”: joining agreements of mutual restraint, where they pledge to forego engaging in certain actions or activities in cyberspace).

There are significant obstacles, however, to creating effective confidence-building measures in cyberspace. First, there is the usual obstacle to CBMs: States are disinclined to share information about their capabilities. The United Kingdom and United States, for example, have been reluctant to share information about their offensive cyber capabilities with their NATO allies. David E. Sanger, *As Russian Hackers Attack, NATO Lacks a Clear Cyberwar Strategy*, N.Y. TIMES, June 17, 2016, at A13. Second, this is another situation where practices developed in the physical world don’t translate well to the cyber realm. CBMs, which originated in the disarmament context, are usually state-based and depend on monitoring and verification mechanisms. However, cyberspace is dominated by non-state actors, and the “[a]nonymity, complexity, the intangible nature of digital systems, and the lack of knowledge about the intended use of hardware and software make any verification often not technically practicable or politically feasible.” Jason Healey, John C. Mallery, Klara Tothova Jordan & Nathaniel V. Youd, *Confidence-Building Measures in Cyberspace: A Multistakeholder Approach for Stability and Security* 1 (2014).

\(^{313}\) See, e.g., U.K. NATIONAL CYBER SECURITY STRATEGY, supra note 299; U.S. DEP’T OF DEFENSE, supra note 185; U.S. DEP’T STATE POLICY, supra note 299.

\(^{314}\) Egan, supra note 178; see also Ben Buchanan & Michael Sulmeyer, *Hacking Chaos: The Motivations, Threats, and Effects of Electoral Insecurity* 18 (2016) ("[T]he United States should put forth a declaratory policy on the vital importance of elections, vowing to impose costs on any state that interferes with the integrity of the process.").

\(^{315}\) TALLINN MANUAL 2.0, supra note 46.
Where states, civil society, or scholars have disagreed with particular conclusions, the Tallinn Manuals have sparked broader and more informed discussions.

But while states have an interest in clarifying the rules of the information superhighway, they do not want well-enforced speed limits. The trick will be maintaining some leeway to speed while avoiding widespread crashes and pileups.

### B. Existing Implementation Mechanisms

States could promote this Article’s proposals unilaterally, by explicitly alleging that another state’s action constitutes an international cybertort and demanding restitution. It could even be argued that a state’s failure to provide compensation or a reasonable defense would itself be an internationally wrongful act, justifying resort to countermeasures. It would be far preferable, however, for states to respond to harmful or intrusive cyberoperations—and thereby develop the relevant law—through institutional action. Compared with self-help measures, institutional responses are less escalatory and more legitimate.

Unfortunately, existing institutional responses are difficult to navigate. A state victim to cyber-enabled interventions could petition the United Nations for collective sanctions or the Security Council for an authorization for a limited use of force.

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316 As a result, the Tallinn Manual is often celebrated as an example of how non-state entities can have a particularly influential impact on the development of international law. See, e.g., Kenneth Anderson, Daniel Reisner & Matthew Waxman, Adapting the Law of Armed Conflict to Autonomous Weapon Systems, 90 INT’L L. STUD. 386, 407–08 (2014); Crootof, The Killer Robots Are Here, supra note 60, at 1902.

317 The University of Texas at Austin, for example, hosted a symposium where scholars and military lawyers debated issues raised in the Tallinn Manual 2.0. Events Calendar, U. TEX. AUSTIN, https://calendar.utexas.edu/event/tallinn_manual_20_on_the_international_law_applicable_to_cyber_operations_symposium#.WdWwHGHsXpY [https://perma.cc/XV2F-AN6D].

318 The 2015 U.S. Law of War Manual has been critiqued for doing little to expand upon the public record of the U.S. understanding of the law of cyberspace, despite professing an interest in elucidation. Sean Watts, Cyber Law Development and the United States Law of War Manual, in INTERNATIONAL CYBER NORMS: LEGAL, POLICY & INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES, supra note 254, at 49, 63 (“More than simply confirmation of persistent ambiguities in the operation of the law of war in cyberspace, the ambiguities the Manual leaves unresolved are strong evidence of the US’ comfort with these uncertainties and legal voids. . . . [T]he Manual indicates significant state reticence toward and even a present inclination against definitive clarity and precision in this challenging domain of state competition.”).

319 In the context of international cybertorts, much of this leeway will be preserved in the term “significant harm,” see supra subpart III.A, and by limiting state duties in cyberspace to compensation for the injuries caused by their cyberoperations, see supra section II.C.2.
against the perpetrator, but such petitions are unlikely to garner much support, in no small part because the main perpetrators of harmful cyberoperations are permanent members of the Security Council. Alternatively, a state victim to a harmful cyberoperation might file an ICJ suit alleging transboundary harm, violation of sovereignty, or intervention. But while the ICJ is well versed in international law, it lacks technical expertise in evaluating cyberoperations. It also has significant jurisdictional issues. The ICJ only has jurisdiction in contentious cases on the basis of state consent: states may agree to bring a specific issue before the Court by submitting a compromis, or states may accept the Court’s jurisdiction as generally compulsory. But many powerful states have refused to accept or have withdrawn from the ICJ’s compulsory jurisdiction, and alleged perpetrators are unlikely to agree to submit a compromis.

Given these political and practical limitations, states often resort to self-help measures—or do nothing. But what if there were a more appropriate institutional option?

C. A New Institution

Ideally, states would create a new, independent institution with the expertise and investigative resources to impartially assess state accountability in cyberspace. This entity could be charged with fact-finding; alternatively or additionally, it might be tasked with determining state liability or responsibility for cyberoperations and granted the authority to recommend appropriate reparations to decrease the likelihood that victim states engage in inappropriate and escalatory self-help.

Determining the author of a cyberoperation is technically difficult and requires skilled forensic analysis, and the creation of an independent institution will hardly be a silver bullet for the myriad evidentiary challenges. But when compared with the alternatives—individual states, state coalitions, and the ICJ—an independent institution will be better able to recruit and retain individuals with the necessary expertise, conduct an
unbiased investigation, and make broadly credible findings. Delegating forensic tasks to an independent institution might also reduce disparities between states with different levels of domestic technological capabilities.

As there will rarely be direct evidence linking an entity to a cyberoperation or linking non-state actors to states, there will be vexing evidentiary issues to address in any case alleging state involvement in harmful cyberoperations. Both the victim state and the accused state will likely be unwilling to provide the access and information needed by an outside fact-finding entity. In many situations, the accused state will have exclusive access to critical evidence proving or disproving its connection to the cyberoperation, but regardless of whether it sponsored the act, it will be reluctant to produce such evidence for national security reasons. However, this is not an entirely new problem for international tribunals: the ICJ has developed a process for dealing with such situations that a new institution could adapt as needed.

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323 See also Clarke & Knake, supra note 104, at 252 (proposing an "International Cyber Forensics and Compliance Staff," an international organization with inspection teams to determine the origins of attacks, with the ability to place traffic monitoring equipment inside domestic networks).

324 In international tribunals generally, the party alleging a fact has the burden of proving it. Pulp Mills on the River Uruguay (Arg. v. Uru.), Judgment, 2010 I.C.J. Rep. 14, ¶ 162 (Apr. 20). Circumstantial evidence is generally permissible (although it is often critically examined). See Michael P. Scharf & Margaux Day, The International Court of Justice’s Treatment of Circumstantial Evidence and Adverse Inferences, 13 Chi. J. Int’l L. 123, 147 (2012) (analyzing jurisprudence from the ICJ, the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the Eritrea-Ethiopia Claims Commission, and the NAFTA Claims Tribunal). In situations where a claim depends on evidence in the sole possession of the accused state, the ICJ has sometimes held that the burden of proof shifts to that state. Ahmadou Sadio Diallo (Guinea v. Dem. Rep. Congo), Judgment, Merits 2012 I.C.J. Rep. 324, ¶ 55 (June 19); Gargaram Panday v. Suriname, Merits, Reparations and Costs, Judgment, Inter-Am. Ct. H.R., (ser. C) No. 16, ¶ 49 (Jan. 21, 1994). More often, rather than shifting the burden of proof or making formal adverse findings of fact, see Central Front (Eri. v. Eth.), 26 R.I.A.A. 115, 117 (Eri.-Eth. Claims Comm’n 2004) (reading negative inferences of fact against a state for failing to produce evidence), the ICJ has instead used nonproduction of evidence “as a license to resort liberally to circumstantial evidence where direct evidence would otherwise be preferred,” Scharf & Day, supra at 128. In its 1949 Corfu Channel decision, the ICJ determined that, in cases where key evidence was in the possession of the accused state, the accusing state would enjoy “a more liberal recourse to inferences of fact and circumstantial evidence,” provided there was no room for reasonable doubt. Corfu Channel (U.K. v. Alb.), Judgment, 1949 I.C.J. 4, ¶ 47 (Apr. 9). In 2007, the Court revisited this evidentiary problem in the Bosnian Genocide case. Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Bosn. & Herz. v. Serb. & Montenegro), Judgment, 2007 I.C.J. 43 (Feb. 26). It relied on circumstantial evidence to reach a legal conclusion regarding Serbia’s failure to prevent atrocities, but disregarded such evidence with regard to the claim that Serbia intended to commit genocide. (This may be because, with re-
claim and alleging improper conduct might be more willing to provide supporting evidence to gain the legitimacy that would attend an independent assessment of that information.

An independent institution might also be granted the power to issue binding decisions regarding appropriate reparations for significantly harmful or intrusive cyberoperations. It might even assign punitive damages, both to sanction past violations and serve as a non-escalatory deterrent, or proscribe permissible individual or collective countermeasures. This would fit well with the existing state responsibility regime, which charges states to first attempt to resolve disputes in tribunals and to refrain from engaging in countermeasures while a dispute is pending. A new institution might also avoid the jurisdictional problems of the ICJ: states invested in developing the law of cyberspace but concerned about broad waivers of sovereign immunity might be more willing to waive their immunity to suit and accept the limited jurisdiction of a specialized tribunal.

The creation of an independent international institution with specialized investigative, adjudicative, and norm-building capabilities is hardly a novel suggestion. The International Atomic Energy Agency is a well-respected organization that investigates and verifies state usage of lawful nuclear technologies. The American-Mexican Claims Commission, the U.N. Compensation Commission, the Iran-United States Claims Tribunal, and even the World Trade Organization might all be considered precedents. These and similar institutions deter states from engaging in self-help, minimize the coordination issues of collective action, solve the jurisdictional problems of other existing institutional options, and proscribe appropriate sanctions.

gard to the latter claim, Serbia submitted direct evidence in support of its defense that it did not meet the intent requirement for the crime of genocide. Scharf & Day, supra at 143.) As a general rule, the ICJ “will permit liberal reliance on circumstantial evidence so long as two conditions are met: (1) the direct evidence is under the exclusive control of the opposing party; and (2) the circumstantial evidence does not contradict any available direct evidence or accepted facts.” Id. at 131.

325 Relatedly, international investment tribunals are increasingly contributing to the development of relevant customary international law, with the full support of litigating states. See W. Michael Reisman, Canute Confronts the Tide: State Versus Tribunals and the Evolution of the Minimum Standard in Customary International Law, 30 ICSID Rev. 616 (2015).
D. A Preferable Means of Legal Evolution

In the course of evaluating claims, a new institution would necessarily have to address novel questions of law, such as what duties states owe other states in cyberspace. This approach to developing a law of cyberspace is far preferable to awaiting the evolution of a law of cyberspace via the more traditional sources of international law, namely, a treaty on state accountability in cyberspace or customary cyber international law. Both treaty law and customary international law are ill-suited to developing state accountability for cyberoperations, underscoring the utility of creating an independent institution.

1. The Unlikelihood of a Comprehensive Cybersecurity Treaty

Many consider treaties—written agreements between two or more states—to be the gold standard of international law. In contrast to other sources of international law, treaties are written documents describing legal rights and obligations of state parties to which states explicitly consent to be bound. Given this backdrop presumption, many hope that building international consensus around norms of state behavior in cyberspace may eventually lead to the codification of these norms in a broad, multilateral cybersecurity treaty.

For a variety of reasons, however, a constitutive cybersecurity treaty may not be possible, especially if it attempts to regulate state conduct. At the most basic level, there are few cyber-related subjects that permit mutually beneficial deals for states with differing technological capabilities, differing vulnerabilities, and differing beliefs about the appropriate amount of

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326 See supra section II.C.2.
329 See, e.g., CLARKE & KNAKE, supra note 104, at 250 (advocating for a cyber war convention); Duncan B. Hollis, An e-SOS for Cyberspace, 52 HARV. INT’L L.J. 373, 425 (2011) (describing the treaty process as “the ideal forum” for designing rules governing state conduct in cyberspace).
330 See, e.g., GOLDSMITH, supra note 193 (discussing how a lack of mutual interest, willingness to make concessions to gain reciprocal benefits, and verification issues block the realization of a global cybersecurity treaty); Matthew C. Waxman, Cyber-Attacks and the Use of Force: Back to the Future of Article 2(4), 36 YALE J. INT’L L. 421, 443 (2011) [arguing that the very nature of cyber-attacks will slow negotiations and enforcement of new international agreements restricting cyber-warfare].
Indeed, not only do states desire to regulate different activities in cyberspace, many states see others’ proposed norms as being antithetical to their own concerns. Jack Goldsmith has observed, “[T]here are deep and fundamental clashes not only over what practices should be outlawed but also and more broadly over what the problem is.”331 As an example, he discusses how the United States is promoting a norm against attacking civilian targets in part because it would disproportionately serve U.S. interests, given U.S. dependence on civilian networks, poor cybersecurity practices, and the fact that it already rarely attacks other states’ civilian networks. Meanwhile, not only are Chinese civilian networks more secure than those in the United States, the Chinese military is not nearly as dependent on them. Why would China give up this potential military advantage in support of a norm against targeting civilians, Goldsmith questions, without gaining anything in return?332 He concludes that “[t]he distributional consequences of any such agreement may be such that some nations will be willing to risk the threats to infrastructures from non-cooperation because the threats fall asymmetrically on their adversaries.”333 Meanwhile, China has repeatedly failed to garner widespread support for its proposals recognizing states’ “cyber sovereignty”—the concept that state sovereignty justifies multilateral internet governance—because this is commonly perceived to be at odds with Western visions of internet freedom and U.S. interests in preserving multistakeholder internet governance.

There are also significant enforcement issues: Even assuming that states manage to negotiate a broad cybersecurity treaty with relatively narrowly-tailored terms that limit opportunities for creative interpretations,334 how will state compliance with those terms be verified? In short, a constitutive

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331 Goldsmith, supra note 193, at 4.
332 Id. at 5.
333 Id. at 6.
334 Goldsmith, supra note 193, at 6–7 (“[T]he cybersecurity context is and will remain bedeviled by two types of definitional difficulty. The first arises from the nature of the activity itself, which makes precise definitions of weapons, effects, and targets difficult. . . . [Second, w]hen nations disagree sharply over the matter to be regulated, they tend to agree (if at all) in vague generalities that are not terribly useful for fostering true cooperation.”); see also Crootof, Killer Robots Are Here, supra note 60, at 1888–89 (discussing the importance of clear and narrowly tailored prohibitions to the effectiveness of a regulatory treaty).
cybersecurity treaty is unlikely to be negotiated—and if one is, it is not likely to be effective.335

Not only might it be impossible to negotiate or monitor an effective constitutive cybersecurity treaty, it is probably not an ideal means of developing the international law of cyberspace.336 One of the primary strengths of a constitutive multilateral treaty is its stability, which justifies state investment during the negotiation and drafting process. However, all treaties risk becoming outdated as times and norms change—and law regulating new technology is particularly susceptible to early obsolescence. Instead of defaulting to the presumption that treaty law is superior, it is worth considering the relative benefits of other sources of international law.

2. The Difficulty with Developing Customary International Cyber Law

Customary international law “is recognized as existing when states generally engage in specific actions (the ‘state practice’ requirement) and accept that those actions are obligatory or permitted (the ‘opinio juris sive necessitatis’ element).”337 In short, “a rule of customary international law is authoritative because states generally abide by it in the belief that it is law.”338 While customary international law has been critiqued for lacking the clarity of written law, that indefiniteness is a strength—it is flexible and responsive to change, especially technological change. Accordingly, it may be preferable that the international law of cyberspace be grounded in customary international law rather than a constitutive treaty.339

However, there is one significant drawback to awaiting the development of customary international cyber law: namely, cyber-specific customary international law is unlikely to de-

335 Limited or bilateral cybersecurity treaties, however, may well be useful in some contexts, such as in the development of confidence-building measures.
336 This is contrary to what my co-authors and I have argued in the past. Hathaway et al., supra note 77, at 880–84.
337 Crootof, Change Without Consent, supra note 120, at 242.
338 Id. While scholars, practitioners, and judges tend to favor the lex scripta of treaty law over customary international law for various functional reasons, as a matter of doctrine the two sources of international law are co-equal. Id. at 285 n.274 (citing sources).
339 It is important to distinguish between simply applying existing customary international law to cyberspace and identifying the development of cyber-specific customary international law. The former considers norms developed in the physical world and attempts to determine how they operate in cyberspace; the latter would examine norms that develop based on state practice in cyberspace.
velop organically in the near future. Evidence of state practice is a fundamental requirement to the formation of customary international law.\textsuperscript{340} Although cyber-based technologies foster the speedy development of customary international law generally by increasing the number of state interactions and facilitating the dissemination of information,\textsuperscript{341} state practice in cyberspace is largely hidden. There simply are not enough examples to establish that states reliably act in a certain way in the belief that those actions are permitted or required by law. The few examples of state practice that come to light are the exceptions and the mistakes, and it would be imprudent to ground a governance regime on such sporadic and limited evidence.

3. The Benefits of Institutional Legal Development

An institution charged with developing the law of cyberspace bridges the gap between difficult-to-obtain positivist treaty law and the unhurried development of a customary international cyber law. It is a Goldilocks solution: institutional decisions and reports will have the authority and clarity of written law while maintaining flexibility and responsiveness to changing technological capabilities.

An independent institution could also contribute to the proactive development of a customary international cyber law. The institutional process will force states to articulate their understandings of relevant legal obligations, which in turn will foster scholarly and practitioner debates. Additionally, by promulgating codes of conduct or best practices, an institution could increase the likelihood that the law of cyberspace develops in a cohesive, flexible manner.


\textsuperscript{341} Crootof, \textit{Change Without Consent}, supra note 120, at 245–47.
CONCLUSION

New technology often exposes gaps and vagueness in existing law and undermines foundational assumptions and justifications of legal regimes—and cyberspace is no exception. Quite the contrary. Cyberspace is a particularly bewildering arena: its infrastructure is shared by civilians and militaries, governments and businesses; cyberoperations occur and must be rebuffed at super-human speeds; non-state actors can be equally—if not more—powerful than some states; and it can be difficult to identify transgressors, both because the source of cyberoperations can be masked and because states often operate through non-state actors. As a result, there is substantial normative confusion, as legal rules made for the physical world map do not always map well onto the cyber domain. Given this confusion, states have a vested interest in clarifying the international laws of cyberspace, both to know what actions they may lawfully take and how they may lawfully respond to other states’ actions.

This Article draws on tort law and international law principles to construct a comprehensive system of state accountability in cyberspace, where states are both liable for their lawful but harmful acts and responsible for their wrongful ones. Not only does recognizing international cybertorts and its attendant state liability regime permit new means of managing the harms associated with data destruction, ransomware, and cyberespionage, it minimizes the likelihood that victim states will resort to escalatory self-help measures, increases the chance that those harmed by cyberoperations will be compensated, and preserves a bounded grey zone for state experimentation.