POWER IMBALANCES IN UKRAINE

The western press is ginning up alarm because hackers caused a power outage in Ukraine.

> Western Ukraine power company Prykarpattyaoblenergo reported an outage on Dec. 23, saying the area affected included regional capital Ivano-Frankivsk. Ukraine's SBU state security service responded by blaming Russia and the energy ministry in Kiev set up a commission to investigate the matter.
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> While Prykarpattyaoblenergo was the only Ukraine electric firm that reported an outage, similar malware was found in the networks of at least two other utilities, said Robert Lipovsky, senior malware researcher at Bratislava-based security company ESET. He said they were ESET customers, but declined to name them or elaborate.

If you buy that this really is the first time hackers have brought down power (I don't), it is somewhat alarming as a proof of concept. But in reality, that concept was proved by StuxNet and the attack on a German steel mill at the end of 2014.

I'm more interested in the discrepancy of coverage between this and the physical sabotage of power lines going into Crimea in November.

> A state of emergency was declared after four pylons that transmit power to Crimea were blown up on Friday and Saturday night. Russia's energy ministry scrambled to restore electricity to cities using generators, but the majority of people on the peninsula remained powerless on Saturday night.
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> Cable and mobile internet stopped

> working, though there was still mobile phone coverage, and water supplies to high-rise buildings halted.
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> [snip]
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> On Saturday, the pylons were the scene of violent clashes between activists from the Right Sector nationalist movement and paramilitary police, Ukrainian media reported. Ukrainian nationalists have long been agitating for an energy blockade of Crimea to exert pressure on the former Ukrainian territory.

There was even less attention to a smaller attack just before the New Year. (h/t joanneleon, who alerted me to it)

> Officials said concrete pylons supporting power lines near the village of Bohdanivka, in southern Ukraine's Kherson region, were damaged on Wednesday night.
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> "According to preliminary conclusions of experts… the pylon was damaged in an explosion," a statement from police said on Thursday.
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> [snip]
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> Crimean Tatar activist Lenur Islyamov suggested that strong winds might have brought down the pylon and denied that Tatar activists had been behind the latest power cut.

While the physical attack did get coverage, there seemed to be little concern about the implications of an attack aiming to undercut Russian control of the peninsula. Whereas here, the attack is treated as illegitimate *and* a purported new line in the sand.

I get why this is the case (though the press ought to rethink their bias in reporting it this

way). After all, when *our* allies engage in sabotage we don’t consider it as such.

But the US is just as vulnerable to physical sabotage as cyber sabotage, as an apparently still unsolved April 16, 2013 attack on a PG&E substation in Silicon Valley demonstrated, and as the case of Crimea shows, physical sabotage can be more debilitating. We should really be cautious about what we treat as normatively acceptable.