



STUDY GUIDE

United Nations Human Rights Council



Surveillance states & Human Rights



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1. WHAT IS MASS SURVEILLANCE?

In modern society, a surveillance state can be defined as one whose government engages in thorough surveillance of large amounts of both its citizens and visitors. Regardless of one's innocence or guilt, they're monitored and their information is compiled and stored by the government. Data collection plays a key role in attaining the role of a monopoly on knowledge.

Additionally, said states monitor potential threats concerning the state's interests or surveillance practices. They tend to stray towards redefining laws in secrecy.

When it comes to the methods employed by surveillance states we may distinguish between them based on whether the observed are aware of said supervision, dividing the methods into covert and overt. Surveillance may present itself in tracking, internet monitoring, video & camera systems, artificial intelligence, biometric data collection, and even human surveillance.



2. THE RISE OF MODERN SURVEILLANCE STATES

Knowledge itself is power

-Francis Bacon

INTRODUCTION

There is a plethora of examples of states utilizing spies to stay in power. In the past monarchies and republics alike utilized spymasters to stay one step ahead of their enemies. However, these were not surveillance states in the proper sense of the word. As the industrial revolution was taking place people became progressively harder to control as society became more and more chaotic. These intelligence agencies help the government gain knowledge of the workings of society, which gives them the ability to better control it. The *Geheime Staatspolizei* of the Habsburg Monarchy and the *Okhrana* of the Russian Empire are early examples of modern intelligence agencies. After the collapse of the monarchical order following WW2 intelligence agencies became even more popular and expanded. The NKVD was founded in 1917, MI6 in 1920, the Gestapo in 1933 and the CIA in 1947. These intelligence agencies gathered intelligence on foreign and domestic enemies and helped the ruling regime stay in power. After the Berlin Wall fell in 1989 a sizable number of these agencies underwent a drastic transformation. Many collapsed and those that remained were greatly curbed. The prevailing mood in the world during the 1990s was that after the collapse of the Soviet Union the world would inevitably become a democratic, capitalist, and pacifist place where intelligence agencies were not needed.

This all changed on 9. 11. 2001. The horrible terrorist attacks set in motion many changes, one of them being the rise of the modern surveillance state globally.

WESTERN SURVEILLANCE STATES

One of the most essential functions of government is to provide security for its citizens. The atrocity that was 9/11 was a direct result of the insufficiency of U.S intelligence infrastructure. Widespread calls emerged in favour of creating a huge and powerful security apparatus that would prevent such attacks from taking place.



The result was the Patriot Act. The Patriot Act reformed and extensively financed the many U.S intelligence agencies.

It also gave the U.S federal government new authority:

- Wiretapping/ hacking individuals without a valid warrant
- Access to the private internet accounts of every U.S citizen
- Detaining non-U.S citizens indefinitely without trial or charge
- Rapidly expanding the network of surveillance equipment

Many other western countries (such as the U.K, France and Germany) adopted similar laws after they themselves experienced terrorist attacks. Today most western states possess intelligence agencies with wide spread power and influence. These intelligence agencies operate with minimal oversight with massive resources. There have been many scandals, such as the Snowden files, but the topic of western surveillance never became a national topic and is currently overshadowed by other concerns such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, microchip crisis, manufacturing and deglobalization.

CHINESE SURVEILLANCE STATE

The People's Republic of China launched its mass surveillance program in 2005. Beforehand, surveillance was existent in China, but it limited and haphazard. Today, surveillance in China utilizes many different methods:

SKYNET

- Skynet is a network of hundreds of millions of cameras all over China
- It compiles data from these cameras into a central surveillance database
- It has begun using facial recognition, big data analysis and AI technology to improve its efficiency
- It is used to prevent criminality, terrorism and also to track dissidents and minorities



APP SURVEILLANCE

- The Chinese government requires all internet providers in China to provide it with the metadata of its users
- All apps and websites that are permitted to operate with China are required to share the data of all its users with the Chinese government
- The Chinese government uses AI to analyse this information and also uses it as evidence in individual cases

SOCIAL CREDIT SYSTEM

- Social credit is a system whereby each citizen is assigned positive or negative social credit points in relation to his behaviour
- “Good” behaviour is rewarded with privileges, and “bad” behaviour is severely punished by additional surveillance, social ostracization and blacklisting from public institutions (such as hospitals, universities, and government jobs...)
- It is currently functioning on a regional basis in multiple Chinese cities, but there is no national-level system

OTHERS

Every single state utilizes some form of surveillance. Mass surveillance is also widespread. Notable examples are countries such as Russia, India, Indonesia, Singapore, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.



3. THE DILEMMA

The Human Rights Council will be tasked with solving a difficult dilemma. How can the UN reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable nature of surveillance states, which violate the privacy of individuals and the United Nations Human Rights Charter which affirms that right:

Article 3 Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person.

However, the UN also recognizes reality and some compromise on this matter is possible. As security is only achievable through a reduction in freedom. This is visible in Article 29 of the Human Rights Charter:

Article 29 In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

Now it is up to you delegates to set the boundaries of surveillance states and to come up with a solution that allows states to retain security and also protect the privacy of the world's citizens.



4. POSITION PAPER GUIDE

A Position Paper is an official document presented by each country present in a committee. This strategic document is a proclamation of each country's stance on the topic and is a way to inform the Chairs and other Delegates of said country's position in advance. The paper should clearly describe the approach every country deems appropriate to be taken regarding the issue about to be discussed. The Delegates should briefly state the solutions and potential measures to be recommended by their respective country, to be further discussed during debates along other pieces of data and information they deem necessary ahead of the conference.

The Delegates are expected to include the following:

- The measures their country has taken in the past to tackle the problem
- The current situation in their country
- Their country's relation to the issue at hand
- The country's proposed solutions

A Position Paper is the base on which every Delegate should build upon during the days of the conference. Each and every Delegate is expected to show consistency with the values and principles they have stated and presented in their Position Paper. The Position Paper is also the first piece of work read and analysed by the Chairs and shows both the research put into preparing for the conference and each Delegate's understanding of the topic itself.

While describing their country's current stance and viewpoint of the problem, a Delegate should introduce the topic from their country's perspective to be better understood by the committee's members. The Delegate should ideally phrase their Position Paper to appeal to countries potentially willing to cooperate with them on the Resolution and implement their suggested solutions.

In conclusion, a Delegate's Position Paper is the first statement put out by them and should contain everything needed to comprehend their stance in relation to the issue and explain the approach they will be taking during the debates.

The deadline for the Position Paper is the 19th of April, until midnight. Please submit your Position Papers to the official Žilina MUN mymun.com website.



FURTHER READING

<https://privacyinternational.org/blog/1513/defining-surveillance-state>

<https://www.asisonline.org/security-management-magazine/monthly-issues/security-technology/archive/2021/june/The-Rise-of-The-Surveillance-State/>

[How to Write a Model UN Position Paper - \(Examples Inside\) \(wisemee.com\)](#)