

PRAMUN 2021

Disarmament and Cybersecurity committee

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Topic #2: The question of digital surveillance by governments

Background information

Mass digital surveillance is a widespread tool used by governments and is usually done by government agencies (e.g., FBI & NSA in USA, Ministry of State Security in China, BND in Germany etc.). Although not against human rights necessarily, it is speculated that some countries (for example China or the USA) are violating the Declaration of human rights (mostly the article 12, 19 and 20) because of the extent of their surveillance. The problem is that this extent is mostly unknown as the contents of surveillance are top secret and governments do not give much information about the use of surveillance in their country. This secrecy is also a factor in the attention brought to this issue as there is not much public attention in this problem. It is only when the secrets are uncovered when the much-needed attention is brought. Regardless of what we think about his actions, the leak done by Edward Snowden created a huge interest in this issue. Another spike of interest arose when China introduced its Social Credit System, which relies upon the surveillance of its citizens.

UN involvement

UN involvement in this issue is mainly the Resolution 68/167 passed by General Assembly in 2013 in reaction of the leaks done by Edward Snowden. It mainly emphasizes that surveillance must be done in such a way so that it does not interfere with human rights. It also recognizes its importance in fight against terrorism and other criminal activities.

Bloc positions

Surveillance is pretty much anyone's game meaning that all countries should be concerned. It is a matter of not giving up any surveillance while sounding as if you want it to end altogether. A strong alliance in this matter exists between the USA, UK, New Zealand, Canada and Australia called "The Five Eyes". Although still allied with the USA, EU does distance itself and criticizes the US government in this matter. And of course, China and Russia are also big players in this field.

Questions to consider

- 1) How exactly does my country profit from surveillance, what is it trying to achieve?
- 2) Is there a way of surveilling people without violating their privacy?
- 3) How to bring more public attention to the topic?
- 4) Technologies are outpacing legislation; how can we stop that?

Sources

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

Resolution 68/167

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N13/449/47/PDF/N1344947.pdf?OpenElement>

The Guardian interview with Edward Snowden

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2019/sep/13/edward-snowden-interview-whistleblowing-russia-ai-permanent-record>

The Guardian about Chinese mass surveillance

<https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/dec/02/big-brother-is-watching-chinese-city-with-26m-cameras-is-worlds-most-heavily-surveilled>