



SPECTACLE VIOLENCE ACTORS

Date: September 19, 2024

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KEY EVENTS

On September 19th, 2024, Professor Candyce Kelshall, Sam David, Millie Harron, and Evan Kryski presented *Spectacle Violence Actors*. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were:

1. Spectacle violence actors can be better defined beyond the label of “terrorist.”
2. There is a fourth undefended border (aside from air, sea, and land) that is being exploited by spectacle-violence actors—this border is the human infrastructure.
3. Traditional non-combatants are engaged in an often invisible substate non-kinetic war, and that conflict should be redefined through the harm it causes, its implications, and who is impacted.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

This panel argued that spectacle violence actors are often conflated under the typology of terrorist and that evidence suggests this creates blind spots in the identification of actors as well as difficulties in interruption or interdiction for law enforcement. Using an assessment of 44 case studies ranging from 1985 to the present day, they concluded that there are four distinct typologies of spectacle violence actors. A new assessment model was used to better define the motivations of violent actors. This case study and new model were used to address existing justifications for these acts and offer avenues for mitigation, rather than labelling all spectacle violence acts under the universal umbrella of “terrorism”.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Human Infrastructure (HI) can be defined as the stable inter-relationships between multiple, identity-based particularistic groups within a state. HI is an invisible and undefended fourth border where individuals are unwitting victims to non-combatants engaging in sub-state warfare intended to harm cohesion and stability within and between communities.

The new definition of spectacle violence analyses who is harmed by an action, the nature of that harm, and what happens when that harm is targeted and intent on damaging the relationship between communities. Communities who live and work inside a state are now intentionally targeted as a means to spread this harm. These attacks are often built upon the perception by the spectacle violence actor that there is a fault in general society and only violent action will be able to remedy it. These attacks will generally lead to targeted groups losing utility of social spaces and retreating inwardly into their identity community, fragmenting the HI.

Using new methodology and modelling, the panellists determined four subcategories within the frame of violent actors. Those being:

1. **Hybrid terrorists** - Politically aware extremist actors who use highly public violence to damage the legitimacy and power of authorities and failures of the socio-political system.
2. **Identity extremists** - Hate-based actors that seek to engage in conflict against an identified “other.” They aim to protect and preserve their identity, which they perceive as threatened.
3. **Anomists** - Anti-systemist actors who seek to change the structure and direction of society, believing all avenues to achieve this besides violence have been blocked. These actors are typically frustrated with the “status quo” as they may feel that the wellbeing of their affiliated identity is being targeted. Anomists target HI.
4. **Terrorists** - Terrorists are politically and state-focused. They are clandestine actors who are motivated by vengeance and engage in perceived acts of retribution against the state or state actors.

The panellists argued that to better address spectacle violence actors, it is crucial to apply a lens that defines HI in order to make visible the actors that target it and more completely protect our societies.

Question and Answer

Is Canada prepared to tackle the issue of fifth-generation warfare within the confines of our Charter and current laws, or does the internet's ever-growing prevalence and difficulty in combating Violent Transnational Social Movements require an overhaul of our Justice System?

While an overhaul is quite ambitious, spectacle violence actor analyses typically have a missing lens that prevents us from locating human infrastructure insecurities. We need to look at how we question and define our threats in an evolving security environment.

For example, the term 'misinformation' is typically used as a description and not a definition, meaning that the root causes behind why people share misinformation (spreading information that someone believes or wants to be true) are not properly addressed. Defining misinformation will allow policymakers to better understand its role and purpose and therefore, be able to better address information integrity in the public sphere. There is a space for intelligence and government agencies to be more precise on what the purpose of a particular action is rather than a universal label that does not provide useful details about an incident or operation.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- There is a new spectacle violence actor typology that is focused on damaging the relationship between communities to degrade social trust and cohesion.
- There is deliberate harm focused on non-combatants (citizens) in a state where victims are unprepared and untrained for these acts intended to bring about social unrest.
- Terrorism should not be viewed as an all-encompassing label; instead, there are several subcategories for actors who carry out spectacle violence without terroristic intent.

FURTHER READING

Adlakha-Hutcheon, G., & Kelshall, C.M. (Eds.). (2024). *(In)Security: Identifying the Invisible Disruptors of Security*. Springer Nature. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-67608-6>

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Kelshall, C.M. (2022). Fifth Generation Warfare? Violent Transnational Social Movements as Security Disruptors. In: Adlakha-Hutcheon, G., Masys, A. (eds) *Disruption, Ideation and Innovation for Defence and Security. Advanced Sciences and Technologies for Security Applications*. Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06636-8_13



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