



## **HUMAN INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY**

**Date:** November 19, 2024

*Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.*

### **KEY EVENTS**

On November 19th, 2024, Adj. Prof. Candyce Kelshall presented *Human Infrastructure Security* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were the notion of human infrastructure security and identity-wellbeing, the weapons used in soft and hybrid war, and the creation of new spectacle violence frameworks.

### **NATURE OF DISCUSSION**

The human infrastructure is defined as the stable inter-relationships between plural identity-based communities that make up a society's social structure, and is currently vulnerable to attack given a lack of recognition or specialized protection forces. It generates both lethal and non-lethal impacts and weakens states. Given its lack of definition or identification as a threat, the notion of human infrastructure and identity wellbeing entails new defensive legislation as an unprecedented security issue that is both internal and external.

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **Presentation**

The lack of recognition for the cohesion and social wellbeing of a state's population and their norms and values is a vulnerability within society, presenting an invisible security threat. Despite its equal importance to the critical infrastructure (CI) of the state, there is no existing definition for human infrastructure security (HIS) relating to people living in a space and continuing to participate in daily life, with the applied connotation of national security. Human infrastructure (HI) is the non-physical and intangible basis of all norms,

practices, and beliefs in a state, underscoring the role of identity, constructed based upon an individual's view of the world, in society as opposed to ideology, which is a set of beliefs of an individual or group. Identity-based communities are not geographically, religiously, demographically, or ideologically defined. Conversely, a mix of identities is present in any individual's daily life, who subsequently aligns themselves with others possessing similar habits, practices, perspectives, and grievances, such as playing the same sport. Multiple identities form the human infrastructure and are contingent on unbiased access to shared spaces of social and cultural interaction. While the integrity of the state's territory and borders are protected through both external facing threat mitigations, such as the military, and internal facing threat mitigations, such as policing and public safety forces, the notion of identity is not considered and should be taken seriously.

A strong correlation exists between HI and CI as together they make up the keys to modern life. For instance, the distribution of water and electricity is a prerequisite of freedom of expression, as well as how we worship, meet, work, and conduct other activities that broadly define democracy and liberalism. It also requires social infrastructure — goods and services that enable society to thrive — to function, such as cellular service providers and the internet. While attacks on CI, like airports or water facilities, may be rebuilt in a few years, the rebuilding of the human infrastructure takes a generation.

Subsequently, the notion of soft war arises as it is designed to harm with an intention to cause discord, promote distrust of the government, and remove legitimacy from leaders in positions of trust. Soft war recognizes the pathway from frustration leading to anger and, resultantly, violence. In this sense, misinformation and disinformation may be seen as actual weapons utilized by states to create soft and kinetic violence through the use of polarizing word bombs or meme missiles. Hybrid warfare is witnessed through these attacks, which are aimed at citizens rather than soldiers of the state. This can also be identified through the intentional amplification of an issue both online or offline to divide a population among identity lines and weaken it from within. For example, Russia allegedly funded both Black Lives Matter and All/Blue Lives Matter simultaneously to ensure that discord was continuous.

Further analysis by the CASIS Vancouver Research Team focused on the targeting of HI and CI using forced removals in Gaza city as a case study. By focusing on the targeting of health centers, places of worship, schools, and other social institutions, it was determined that they were targeted in order to damage the social infrastructure needed to function.

A new lens recognizing the human infrastructure and its importance is needed to identify previously invisible violence against HI. Through engaging with the spaces, locations, and patterns of social interaction within society, this lens may aid in recognizing the threat actors who seek to do harm to the harmony and stability of interrelationships between individuals making up the communities within a state. While attacks on the HI are executed with precision and intention, we are seemingly blind to their purpose. Furthermore, we complicate attribution by ascribing old definitions to new threats, for example labelling a variety of attacks as terrorism, despite a lack of political or ideological motive behind them.

Correspondingly, the chapter “Security and the Human Infrastructure” by Kelshall, David, and Harron (2024) designed a series of spectacle violence frameworks, proposing a typology of anomist, hybrid terrorist (HyT), extremist, and terrorist actors. Anomists are defined as spectacle violence kinetic actors whose intention and targeting are identity-based and focused on the HI of a society rather than political representations. Similarly, extremists are not political but rather socially radicalized and defined by the use of emotive language and imagery, used to garner support and telegraph their views. HyTs possess both political motivation and extremist sentiment in their intentions. Lastly, terrorists are radicalized politically violent actors with grievances against the state.

### **Question and Answer**

*In the era of misinformation and disinformation how can an individual differentiate between a peaceful protest and a soft violence and the influence behind it. To add to that, is there a stabilized standard for information to be assessed?*

The answer is simple: just look for emotive content. To understand if something is misinformation or disinformation, one must consider how much of it is designed to make you feel angry or self-righteous when you read it, including the types of imagery or pictures that might be used. Information is meant to give you additional knowledge that you don't have. Misinformation and disinformation attempt to control an individual's emotions. It's directive rather than descriptive. To learn more on this topic, visit the CASIS Vancouver website for more information on models and tools generated to identify whether online content comprises misinformation or disinformation.

*What does Canada need to do to rigorously clamp down on the disinformation operations without further incensing individuals who already feel disenfranchised by the government?*

Citizens in the state have 100% accountability for their actions, including content that is shared online. The CASIS Vancouver team was tasked with just asking the question "why?" in the forums that were scrapped and engaged with. Statements like "let's go dox this particular journalist" were met with "why?" and what was found is that people could not get past the second "why". They just didn't have the knowledge. All they had was a sensation that they were angry, but they couldn't quite rationalize why. Essentially, critical thinking, such as just asking "why" helps people's mindsets and changes the way they think about the issue, even slightly. It was a very interesting discovery.

*Given the ongoing attacks on Human Infrastructure such as the Russia and Ukraine conflict, how can international organizations like the UN under International law, or as a system of international governance, directly mitigate these attacks?*

Because the nature of these attacks breaks international law and the fact of the attacks occurring are actually considered to be war crimes, then the answer is that the illiberal nature of what we are seeing is that liberalism and liberal institutions are meaningless. That is the painful truth. International law is meaningless in this context, because they're liberal and what we're seeing is illiberal. It's contrary to all the laws that exist. It is crucial to come up with a new means by which we can hold our governments accountable and protect our citizens from information that is designed to cause discord and delegitimize governments. It has to start at the top, but critical thinking must also be applied at the bottom in order to stand up and say that these things are not acceptable. That's not happening right now, and by our tolerance that signals acceptance.

### **KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION**

- HI is the target of the new era of undeclared, illiberal war. The disintegration of interrelationships by attacks of HI means that communities and thereby the state cannot effectively function.
- Misinformation and disinformation is an urgent threat to the HI of our communities and a fourth, undefended border with no dedicated protection service.
- Real-time conflicts, such as in Gaza city, indicate deliberate damages to CI, attacks on hospitals and cultural property, and other attacks on the HI which do not encompass any specialized protection mechanisms.

- CI and SI are intertwined in the tapestry of HI and are needed for society to effectively function and thrive.
- Given a lack of recognition of the HI and its importance, there is no means of measuring harm to the HI as its security and stability does not have a means of classification and are typically incorrectly classified under terrorism.

### FURTHER READING

Kelshall, C., David, S., & Harron, M. (2024). Security and the Human Infrastructure. In: Adlakha-Hutcheon, G., Kelshall, C. (eds) (In)Security: Identifying the Invisible Disruptors of Security. Advanced Sciences and Technologies for Security Applications. Springer Nature. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-67608-6\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-67608-6_5)

Kelshall, C., David, S., Harron, M., & Kryski, E. (2024). Spectacle Violence Actors. *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v7i2.6736>



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Published by the Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare and Simon Fraser University

Available from: <https://jicw.org/>

The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare  
Volume 7, Issue 3

