Research Report

GA 4: Special Political

Transparency in Governments with Regards to Public Safety

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Forum	GA 4
Issue:	Transparency in governments with regards to public safety
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Introduction

Transparency has been an issue raised several times in the past, whether it is for transparency in armaments or the transparency of industry. However, recent events have led to the questioning of the transparency regarding the safety of the public – possible threats, measures and countermeasures, intelligence, security dilemmas. So far different member states have different policies for handling public safety and the amount of transparency they allow. This issue is being brought to attention of many countries by the media, and now action has to be taken in order to assure public safety measures to the world.

General Overview

Why did this issue occur?

Events in the past which concern with public safety always have something to do with the poor relay of information and procedures. Public safety is only at risk when there is an impeding threat or disaster, if the lack of spreading the information between different departments of the state and internationally allows these threats and disasters to affect the public.

One of the first major transparency issues brought up was the transparency of weapons in 1991, when many conflicts were taking place, such as the Somali Civil War, the Gulf War, and the Yugoslav Wars. The import of arms to the opposition was proving to be difficult for peacekeeping and international forces to maintain order and control in the conflict areas. Therefore in order to track and understand how much artillery was transported to what country from another, the General Assembly (GA) passed resolution 46/36 on 9th December 1991. This resolution took action to track the transfers of armaments of one state to another through the Register of Conventional Arms. The trade tracking allowed information to be relayed from one organization to another, and hence allowed the effective tackling of complications during these conflicts.

Another issue that attracted attention to transparency was the issue of industries being unclear in communication over their work, causing doubts as to dishonesty and corruption. To deal with this issue, the GA passed resolution 62/274 "Strengthening Transparency in Industries", which

urges industries in the private sector on a global scale to coordinate with their governments, allowing corruption and dishonesty to be taken care of.

However, the most important issue arises when the safety of the public is put at risk due to the poor relay of information between governmental bodies, such as the intelligence or risk management departments and the state security department. This has happened on many occasions, such as the 9/11 World Trade Center incident on 11th September 2001, the London bombings in 2005, the Mumbai terror attacks in 2008, and the most recent Fukushima disaster.

The Fukushima Disaster

The Fukushima disaster is one the most important events in recent history as it was the worst radioactive related disaster since Chernobyl. The Japanese authorities were not well informed about what precautionary methods were taken up by the staff of the plant in case of sever earthquakes and tsunamis, which are not uncommon in the region of Japan. Where exactly the communication gap occurred is not fully evident, but it is certain that if the plant had reviewed its standard of procedures with the government, a disaster on such a scale could have been avoided, and the population within the thirty mile radius would not be put at risk, let alone the workers of the plant. The lack of coordination led to panic and desperation to be able to control this disaster, but in the process, people inside a thirty mile radius from the plant were put a high risk, not to mention other countries along with the wildlife of the sea (as water is a good carrier of radioactive substances).

The Fukushima disaster has shown that not only is transparency needed with the government, but proper coordination in standard protocols to react to situations like these need to be established. But the government could only do so if it knew about the safety measures.

Major Parties Involved

There are organizations which specifically concern themselves with the transparency of nations, but there are no specific NGOs which focus on the transparency of public safety, though few such as Interpol and WHO have raised concerns regarding public safety.

The main parties are the nations themselves. Each has its own set of regulations, but all must come to a common understanding to make generalized rules.

Timeline

Date	Event
9/12/1991	"Transparency of Armaments" resolution 46/36 passed by the UN General Assembly
11/09/2001	9/11 Attacks on the WTC in New York, USA, and the US Pentagon

7/07/2005	London Bombings
26/09/2008	"Strengthening transparency in Industries" resolution 62/274 passed by the UN GA
26/11/2008	Mumbai terror attacks
11/03/2011	Fukushima Daiichi disaster begins due to earthquake shutting down reactors 1, 2, and 3 in Japan

Previous attempts to solve the issue

After the various terror attacks, governments have been able to tackle further threats, such as the US finding and eliminating the threat of the man who carried explosives in his undergarments on a flight to Detroit, USA; the failure of the liquid bomb plot in the UK; and the work of the Indian government to reduce threats from certain factions such as the Indian Mujahideen. However, there is no general set of guidelines for all nations, which has led to disasters such as the Fukushima Daichii disaster, along with the BP oil spill scandal.

As the issue is new and is gaining momentum, there have been no such attempts to solve the issue of transparency of public safety as governments have believed, and may still do, that they are responsible for the extent to which they should be transparent or not, and therefore no global guidelines have been set till now.

Possible solutions

The main aspect that must be solved is the fact that communication between different departments is currently very poor, as there is not enough circulation of information regarding threats or disasters, along with standard of procedures.

A generalized proposition could be made that every state creates a law in their territory which requires the various departments to be accessed by one common server or are connected by any other means so that information is instantly available. However, a possible flaw is that these common pools of information can be accessed by hackers and/or terrorists enrolled in such departments (infiltration).

Monthly status reports of all information regarding any threats and disasters can be relayed by the circulation of these reports amongst the state departments. This solution however also has a setback, being the fact that some agencies may not find the need to share such information.

States could also share information internationally on a secured channel and circulate and update information about threats. This is a similar case to the previous possible solution as one country may feel that giving the amount of information could risk themselves. Another problem is also the differences in political systems meaning certain countries are unable to adapt to measures other countries adapt.

More related to dealing with risk areas and disasters, industries or plants working with highly dangerous materials could be commanded to update their standards of procedures in tackling crisis situations every three months in accordance with their local governments. This however depends on the state, along with the regional issues and requirements within states, and is therefore hard to apply generally to all member states of the UN.

However, there are numerous more solutions concerning terrorism related threats and disasters. These should not to be solely considered as there are also natural threats and disasters which sometime cause more danger to the safety of the public and should be tackled as well.

Appendices

Transparency in Arms resolution: http://www.un.org/depts/ddar/Register/4636.html

Strengthening Transparency in Industries resolution: http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N07/480/15/PDF/N0748015.pdf?OpenElement

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"62/274. Strengthening Transparency in Industries." United Nations General Assembly, 11 Sept. 2008. Web. 9 Sept. 2011. <http://www.un.int/azerbaijan/pdf/N0748015_transp.pdf>.

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