



CHINESE-RUSSIAN COLLABORATION: THE ICE ROAD IN THE ARCTIC

Date: March 22, 2018

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

KEY EVENTS

On March 22, 2018, the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies Vancouver hosted its second roundtable meeting themed by a presentation on “The Arctic Dimensions of China’s Belt and Road Initiative” by Dr. Eva Busza, Vice-President of the Asia Pacific Foundation. The following question period and roundtable discussion gave a number of perspectives on the security implications of both this Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as well as the controversy surrounding recent revelations about Cambridge Analytica’s data collection.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Dr. Busza’s presentation highlighted the Chinese-led investment in a ‘Polar Silk Road’ through the lens of energy security and the implications for Canada, the security components of which carried over to the roundtable discussion on privacy rights. The presentation given by Dr. Busza explored the involvement of Yamal LNG in pursuing an Arctic BRI through investment in a northern sea route and future plans for an Arctic Corridor between Finland and Norway, in attempts to insulate against the power of the United States (US). The question and-answer period of the presentation highlighted various implications of this BRI for Canada. The separate roundtable discussion on Cambridge Analytica prompted debate on the intersection between the right to privacy, data ownership, democracy, and the use of social media.

BACKGROUND

Central to Dr. Busza’s presentation is the BRI – Belt and Road Initiative. The BRI is a key policy of China’s global infrastructure strategy that seeks to integrate

Eurasian energy resources to East Asian markets. Its main purpose is to insulate China against the power of the US while providing China with economic and energy security. In support of this strategy, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin recently reached an agreement to establish a special “Yamal Economic Zone” that effectively coordinates investment and diplomacy in Arctic liquefied natural gas (LNG) shipping routes.

Yamal LNG is an LNG plant and port in Russia’s Arctic Yamal peninsula whose purpose is to produce and transport LNG to East Asian markets via Russia’s Arctic coast, the Barents Sea, and the Suez Canal. Aimed at proving the viability of a northern sea route, Yamal LNG looks to use ice breaker-like ships to maintain an ice-free channel throughout the Arctic winter. Previous disinterest in a northern sea route due to high capital and insurance costs is waning with the increasing success of Yamal shipping in the Arctic.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION AND WEST COAST PERSPECTIVES

Dr. Busza’s presentation raised questions about the implications of increasing Arctic shipping traffic for Canada – particularly with respect to the Northwest Passage.

- Arctic governance was discussed in relation to the rights of Canada’s Aboriginals and the impact that increased shipping activity in the Arctic might have on their way of life.
- Adaptation and mitigation of disasters such as oil spills, sinking ships, and ship crashes were discussed in terms of ownership of responsibility, environmental impacts for Canada’s Arctic territories, and ability to respond to disasters in the far North.
- Climate change and environmental concerns arising from increased shipping traffic in the Northwest Passage were suggested as topics that might be used to mobilize public awareness and support for Canada’s Arctic sovereignty and preservation.
- The creation of a coalition of middle power states (Canada included) interested in fostering preservation of the Arctic was suggested as a way of providing support and strength to these states’ concerns and abilities to pursue their strategies of Arctic preservation.

The implications of increased Arctic activity for British Columbia (BC) were also discussed in relation to LNG. Discussion included the likelihood of rising oil and gas prices for the people of BC if China and the East Asian market begin to rely

more heavily on the Arctic northern sea route, rather than LNG shipments from Canada's west coast.

As per the roundtable discussion, key points included the framing of the CA Facebook privacy breach as a human rights issue and as a privacy issue, rather than an intellectual property rights issue; ownership of online data; and the intersection of information, democracy, and law – e.g., contrasting property rights with free speech.

- Points of discussion centered around personal responsibility for what is posted online and for agreeing to platforms' terms of agreements which outline expectations for use of data. Some members stated strong agreement with full personal responsibility while others erred on side of the right to privacy.
- Data as a commodity was a key point of discussion which prompted views on the idea of compensation for use of personal data for activities such as advertising.
- A question about CA's collection and use of data as an attack on capitalism was posed by a member. This was met with views about the danger of freedoms being constrained by private companies who have access to vast amounts of personal data with little checks on its use. This prompted the idea that society is moving in a counter-democratic direction.
- Questions were posed as to how companies with surveillance capabilities might be regulated.
- Discussion concluded with musings on how to link data protection to international law, if international law exists in the capacity to address issues such as these, given the gaps in ability to regulate global platforms across states, and how future rights as an online user might be conceptualized.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The emergence of Sino-Russian cooperation in developing a viable Arctic sea route challenges Canada's competitiveness in the LNG arena, specifically in East Asian markets.
- A future Arctic Silk Road and its prompting of further interest in the Northwest Passage poses challenges for Canada in securing its own Arctic sovereignty and preserving delicate environmental conditions in its Arctic territories.

- Information warfare is a key contemporary threat with vast implications for the use of individuals' data, especially its use for political or aggressive purposes which poses even stronger challenges to democracy in the realm of law, governance, privacy, and surveillance.
- There exist gaps in international law that prohibit effective governance of global online platforms such as Facebook across states. Key questions include how to establish international norms for the use of data and conduct of private companies with global surveillance and collection capabilities, how to police these companies and their collection and use of data from one state to another, and how to uphold relevant international law and appropriate punishments across states.
- The use of personal online data and its subjection to the privacy rights narrative has been heavily constructed by the media, and can be contrasted with the idea of treating personal information as property (e.g. intellectual property).



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