



NATO AND CANADIAN RESPONSES TO RUSSIA SINCE ITS ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA IN 2014

Date: April 19, 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 April 19, 2018, the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies Vancouver, along with the Vancouver branch of the Canadian International Council hosted a joint event. This included a presentation from the Simon Fraser University School of International Studies Associate Professor Dr. Nicole Jackson on “NATO and Canadian Responses to Russia, Post-2014.” The subsequent question and discussion period focused on identifying the methodological, knowledge, and policy gaps contained in Canadian literature on Russia. Further discussed, was how this lack of Russian knowledge is leading to confusion over which military and diplomatic instruments NATO, and Canada specifically, should employ in response to recent Russian actions. The roundtable portion of the evening focused on the poisoning of the former Russian spy and double agent, Sergei Skripal in the United Kingdom, and the subsequent expulsion of Russian diplomats from NATO and Canada.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Jackson’s presentation consisted of addressing current military and diplomatic strategies being employed by Canada in response to Russian actions, as well as identifying Russia’s hybrid tactics. The presentation highlighted the lack of research being conducted, as well as the lack of foreign policy debate, into how exactly Russia poses a threat to Canadian security. This has created gaps in Canadian and NATO policies on coherent Russian responses. Jackson argued that Canada should establish a Centre for Hybrid Threats, involving government officials, military, think tanks and NGOs, and begin to engage in multidisciplinary debate, in order to address Canada’s academic and policy knowledge gaps. The roundtable portion of the event discussed the Canadian and

NATO expulsion of Russian diplomats, due to the suspected Russian poisoning of Sergei Skripal in the U.K. This was analyzed from the context of Canada already containing a lack of Russian research knowledge, and the expelled diplomats representing a further loss of information sources and communication channels, inhibiting intelligence assessments, and the development of contingencies.

BACKGROUND

Diplomatic relations between Canada and Russia are at an all-time low that is unproductive and dangerous. All diplomatic ties are essentially cut off following the expulsion of Russian diplomats, with economic sanctions being applied on both sides. There exists a further trend of deterioration and distrust in relations between Russia and the West, which threatens escalation. Canada would need to increase bilateral contacts and open communication with Russia, as well as pursue systematic cooperation in areas of mutual interest, in order to contain a more balanced, non-zero-sum relationship.

Canada's military response to Russia in the Baltics, through its troops in Latvia, has contained the purpose of collective defence and deterrence by establishing an 'enforced presence'. In 2014, after the annexation of Crimea, Canada conducted air policing, military training, as well as maintained a maritime presence in the Baltics. Such deterrence, however, is only effective if Russia's intentions and capabilities are known, on which Canada currently lacks research. Canada's long-term foreign policy objectives could be clarified, better informing Canada's military commitments and capabilities in Latvia. Engaging in increased research on Russian concerns and 'red lines' would also help determine the degree of effectiveness of Canadian actions, as well as the response such actions will summon.

There exists a significant lack of critical literature on the implications the changing nature of warfare will have on Canadian security and foreign policy. Canada needs to continue to develop a coherent strategy to deal with hybrid warfare. NATO has prioritized Russia in its efforts to counter hybrid warfare. NATO refers to hybrid warfare as a combination of conventional and unconventional methods employed to destabilize states. This includes more modern tactics such as cyber-attacks and information warfare, used in collaboration with more conventional military tactics. This proves a unique Russian military doctrine, utilized to avoid direct military methods and avoid attribution, maintaining Russia's legitimacy.

Russia represents an opportunity for Canada and the West to think strategically about how they want to bilaterally engage with Russia, and to coordinate a strategy based on long-term objectives. This will require a better understanding of Russia's perceptions, strategic concerns, specific intentions, and a knowledge of how our actions will affect them, in order to develop better policy responses. It is, therefore, beneficial to bring together experts on NATO and Russia to collaborate and engage with each other's literature. The Canadian Government could do this by reaching out to a wider cross-section of Canadian-Russian experts. This would encourage more academic and nongovernmental expertise, as well as public discourse on Russia. Further strategies could include investing in and increasing the availability of Russian and Eurasian studies in universities, facilitating student-centered initiatives to engage younger individuals in foreign and defence policy, and Russian relations.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION AND WEST COAST PERSPECTIVES

The discussion following Jackson's presentation on NATO and Canadian responses to Russia post-2014, centered around Canada's gaps in Russian research and understanding, their impacts, and how to bridge these gaps:

- Russia is determined to retain influence in its former Soviet region, and to be a key diplomatic global actor.
- Russia's pursuit of hard and soft power, both regionally and globally, is aimed at protecting its authoritarian regime.
- Canada is failing to think from a Russian perspective, due to its lack of information on Russian politics, intentions, and strategic goals.
- Russian policies should be openly debated amongst academics, the public, practitioners, etc., to ensure that policies are aligned with a coherent strategy, meeting Canada's long-term objectives.
- There is a significant need for more knowledge and academic work on all aspects of NATO and Canadian responses to Russia.
- NATO and Russia-specific experts need to collaborate, to engage more with each other's literature.
- There exists confusion over what military (conventional, nuclear, hybrid) and diplomatic instruments should be used to respond to Russia's multifaceted action.
- Canada should consider establishing a Centre for Hybrid Threats, which would include academics, government officials and military, journalists, lawyers, as well as think tanks and NGO representatives.

Regarding the roundtable discussion, Canadian responses to the alleged Russian poisoning of Sergei Skripal were considered:

- It is arguably, not strategically wise for Canada to expel Russian diplomats.
- There is a need to keep communication lines open, even when in ‘conflict’ with states, in order to generate intelligence assessments and develop contingencies.
- The West is potentially creating security dilemmas by using traditional military techniques in new forms of non-violent warfare.
- The coordination among Western states is not strong enough to take a bipolar stance against Russia, as has happened in the past.
- There is a need for Canada and NATO to understand Russian empires and politics, in order to understand their power structures.
- The West can target alliances which support Russians politically, such as removing investment from London real estate.



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