



DISRUPTION: HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

Date: November 24, 2022

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KEY EVENTS

On November 21, 2022, Candyce Kelshall, president of CASIS Vancouver and vice chair at the Canadian Intelligence Network, presented *Disruption: Hiding in Plain Sight* at the 2022 CASIS Vancouver West Coast Security Conference. The key points discussed were the distinction of Generation Z and Alpha from previous generations, their presence in the online and offline worlds, cyber- and soft war and its implication in the West and in Ukraine, Russia building new partnerships, the survival of liberal democracy, and Canada's role in ensuring the survival of liberal democracy.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Ms. Kelshall's presentation centred on two topics: Generation Z and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. She first stressed the distinction of Generation Z from previous generations, as well as its importance as a driving source in current and future narratives surrounding conflict and warfare. The presentation closed with an examination of the nuance of Russian motives in the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict

BACKGROUND

Ms. Kelshall began with a discussion of Generations Z and Alpha, stating that generational diversity is a key consideration in critical issues of the present and that Z and Alpha will be the driving forces in future conflict and warfare narratives. She noted that both generations shape policy through social momentum—for example, through the social media platforms such as Tiktok—and that the COVID-19 pandemic years have seen both generations' views and beliefs shaped through app-based algorithms. Ms. Kelshall addressed the fact that

Generation Z is a politically active generation, noting that they are more active voters in comparison to other generations, and that those not yet of voting age still engaged in politics and policy in a sustained manner online. Ms. Kelshall noted that members of Generations Z and Alpha have been vocal both offline and online regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine, an action that they deem to be unjustified and horrific. She pointed to findings that showed participants as unsupportive of a physical military response to Russian aggression and the politically-driven nature of the conflict, yet also deemed it necessary to preserve order.

Ms. Kelshall then discussed the development of cyber warfare as significant, noting that in some cases the online war *is* the offline war. Soft war, she explained, is pursued to damage both the foundational base of society as well its members, and stated that the Russia-Ukraine conflict is a “war of the minds” to which the impacts should not be underestimated. Ms. Kelshall stated that the beginning of the soft war in the Ukraine began on February 3, 2022, when Foxblade malware was deployed against government computers to compromise state functionality through the targeting of citizen information.

Ms. Kelshall then discussed the evolution of soft war between Russia and the West, beginning in 2014 with the Internet Research Agency—a Russian company known for political and business influence campaigns—committing operations consisting of troll farming and the dissemination of mis/disinformation. Some notable disinformation operations linked to the Internet Research Agency have targeted Brexit, the 2016 US Presidential election, and Black Lives Matter protests.

Ms. Kelshall explained that Russian propaganda has increasingly targeted Canada, pointing to the 102% increase during the Freedom Convoy of 2022. Messages included the delegitimizing of the COVID-19 vaccine through disinformation surrounding the loss of fertility and manhood, which Ms. Kelshall described as an operational agenda meant to undermine Western unity. She stated that there is a soft and cyberwar happening and, despite vulnerability, Canada has a role to play: to be a counter-narrative champion for the liberal world and to promote values democracy and liberalism.

Ms. Kelshall pointed to the link between the Internet Research Agency and Wagner Group, a private military company based in Russia operating in trade and investment. She noted that both are run by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a known associate of Vladimir Putin. Wagner Group business relationships exist primarily in China, India, Iran, and various African nations, as they must find alternatives

in lieu of Western partnerships. Ms. Kelshall stressed that, because of the developing relationships with the East, Russia is not as reliant on the West and Europe to function economically as it has been in the past.

Ms. Kelshall then questioned the stability and prevalence of Democratic Peace Theory, urging that the reality of global governance needs to be addressed as 70% of the world is under authoritarian control at present. She suggested that the cognitive bias of the West contributed to an inability to understand Putin's motivations for war, explaining that the war is not about military objectives, but rather the breaking of a society. Cultural erasure and societal damage have been the primary effects of the war, along with 35 billion dollars of damage and 40% of the electric infrastructure destroyed.

Ms. Kelshall discussed the influence of ideology on the war, specifically the anti-liberal and anti-LGBTQ thought of Russian political philosopher Alexander Dugin. Dugin asserts that war with the West is inevitable—going so far as to deem the present conflict World War III and, in this, Ms. Kelshall drew comparisons to the summer of 1939. The West has responded with aid to Ukraine and NATO positioning of 40,000 soldiers on the Eastern flank in defence of Western alliances. Though this is an important distinction from conflict, it is not de-escalation—there is still a security dilemma. Ms. Kelshall stressed that the West is caught in the middle of a heavy conflict, as the war is significant to the survival of democracy.

She pointed out there are new alliances forming, namely the Shanghai Cooperation—whose member states include China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Belarus, and Iran—and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a political military trade alliance composed of non-NATO members such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, and Qatar. Ms. Kelshall noted that this allyship constitutes 60% of Eurasia, 40% of the world population, and 30% of the global GDP, and that these alliances are geographically closer than those of NATO. These alliances also suggest that Russia is no longer discriminating as to which nation they conduct business with, and that a relationship with the West is no longer as essential. Ms. Kelshall contended that the manner in which Putin thinks of the war as simple: the enemy is not a country but a system.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Generation Z and Alpha are generational diversions on critical issues and represent the driving force for future conflict and warfare narratives.

- The realm of activism is now online and much of the offline world converges with the online world, as shown in the threat presented by cyber- and soft warfare. In Ukraine and the West, Russia has engaged these tactics as a means of cultural erasure.
- Due to the emergence of alternatives and alliances, Russia is no longer concerned with Western business partnerships. This diversification has raised questions regarding the survival of liberal democracy and values.
- In the face of burgeoning soft-war tactics, Canada must be a counter-narrative champion for the liberal world. This entails increased online vigilance and private-public partnerships focused on the promotion of democratic and liberal values.



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