

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE STUDIES

RUSSIA AND THE WEST

Temporary Stalemate or Irreconcilable Differences?

Highlights from the CASIS 2017 Annual Symposium

September 29, 2017



This report is based on the views expressed during an annual symposium organised by the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies. Offered as a means to support ongoing discussion on security and intelligence issues, the report does not constitute an analytical document, nor does it represent any formal position of the organisations involved.

<http://www.casis-acers.ca/>

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Who We Are

The Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies (CASIS) is a nonpartisan, voluntary organization established in 1985. Its purpose is to provide informed debate in Canada on security and intelligence issues. A distinguished board of directors comprised of professionals of national and international reputation and status oversee the operations of the association.

Membership is open and currently includes academics, government officials, journalists, lawyers, former intelligence officers, students and interested members of the public committed to the study of intelligence services.

What We Do

For over twenty-five years CASIS has held an annual meeting and has sponsored conferences, symposiums and forums on particular intelligence and security-related themes. The first conference was held at Glendon College in Toronto in June 1984 with others being held in Vancouver, Montreal, Calgary, and Halifax; more recently annual conferences have been held in Ottawa.

As an organization, CASIS was formed in May of 1985 at which time a constitution was adopted. That constitution has been amended and updated through the years, most recently in October 2011. Today CASIS's aims are to:

- To encourage and promote the study of intelligence and security, and the teaching of courses at Canadian universities and colleges in these fields;
- To encourage research in intelligence and security in the interest of higher education, scholarship and an informed public opinion;
- To provide an interdisciplinary forum through which interested academics, and other interested persons may engage in matters relating to intelligence and security;
- To provide a body of resource expertise to the interested public in order to facilitate awareness and understanding of intelligence and security activities as carried out in various sectors, disciplines and organizations;
- To electronically publish regular information about the Association and its activities and other matters pertinent to the Association's mandate;
- To study the role of security and intelligence services in society, to foster the accumulation of knowledge about such activities, and to study the relationships between security and intelligence agencies and the governmental institutions and constitutional values of society.

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The world is going through a period of significant change and instability; although this brings significant opportunity, the bad news is that this is the greatest environment imaginable for disruptors – terrorists, trolls, and tyrants. In the current time, what remains most important is context.

The West and Russia have always had a strategic relationship.

- Neither are without fault for the volatility of the relationship: the West can be condescending, Russia is increasingly paranoid.
- Without forgetting the appalling breaches of international law, such as the annexation of Crimea, the West might begin to contemplate what it can do on its end to ameliorate the relationship – after all, the problem with paranoia is that it develops policies, armed forces, and a mindset that is perceived as aggressiveness.
- The role of individuals within a political context is key in the short-term, however, long-term progress will be decided by our ability to develop the intellectual construct of working with Russia.

The main deciding factor is to assess relative interests, values, and preferential affinity – do we like each other? The world is moving back towards regionalism and spheres of influence:

- The United States is focusing on itself, and its northern and southern borders;
- Russia is taking an expansive view of its sphere; and
- China is looking for opportunities in East and South-east Asia.

What is new is the enthusiasm with which China and Russia are developing their spheres. We tend to forget that Russia is also an Asian power – they need to deal with China as much as they need to deal with Europe.



There are some battles that we just are not winning.

- Terrorism and cyber-crime are proving to be perennial issues, on which the West has spent hundreds of billions of dollars, changed laws and values, and yet remains vulnerable.
- These issues cannot be dealt with on a national basis, they require international and 'interspherical' effort – these are clear opportunities to work with Russia to enhance global security.
- This is not to disregard Russia's corporatist dictatorship, whereby its leadership and state institutions prevail over the will or interests of its people; however, it will continue to be important to move away from binaries, and instead see Russia as a partner in some areas, as there is no other way to manage bilateral relations.

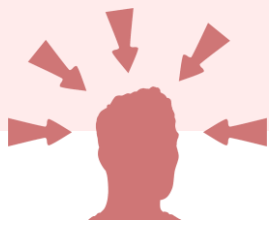
The old adage goes, good walls make for good neighbours – but you should still be able to talk over the wall.

- One lesson that Canada could borrow from Australia is how it has balanced its relationships with the United States and with China.
- There are a number of areas in which Canada and Russia would both benefit from a more thawed relationship, including on search and rescue operations, cultural exchange, climate change research, space exploration, and anti-terrorism cooperation.



Temporary stalemate or irreconcilable differences? We are nuts if we think it is a binary choice.

- It is possible to think Russia is reprehensible and needs to be contained, but still deal with them when needed.
- We know that Russia has an inferiority complex and overcompensates in its relations with the West, but we do not need to antagonize them using levers such as NATO expansion.
- It is possible to have a complex relationship, if the context is always taken into account; we want to reduce tensions, we want them to develop democracy, and we want to have productive engagement, but not all of these need to be solved tomorrow.



Russia Influence Operations

We are witnessing the rebirth of Active Measures.

- Americans prefer military and diplomacy, they are less adept at information and influence campaigns.
- When you are outmatched on foreign policy goals (as Russia is, by the European Union and NATO), it becomes about the force of politics rather than politics of force.
- The Soviet information campaign was difficult to carry out in the 1980s, but exponentially easier with the internet and increased access to capital following Russia's opening to the global economy.

The strategy has been to test messaging in a small subsection, then deploy it widely; not every story is false, it is just selective, targeted, and nimble.

- We should be familiar with the tactic – we use this in the counterterrorism context to develop online relationships with prospective terrorists in order to deradicalize them.
- The goal of modern-day Active Measures is to undermine the integrity of democracy; by blurring fact and fiction, citizens become disenfranchised.



Social media reconnaissance by fire.

— Clint Watts, Policy Research Institute

The sewing of divides in democracy: with the 2016 American presidential election, Russia pulled off the most successful influence operation in the history of the world.

- Russia identified the right audiences, shifted outcomes, and demonstrated that they can pivot support for or against a candidate within their own country. They mastered the art of turning a crack into a canyon by using information: American politicians were already using some form of Active Measures on their own citizens to secure their election.
- Western democracies need to decide what they believe in: aside from being against many things (namely terrorism) what do they stand for? How does one elevate a politician in the social media era to build bridges and not contribute to the divide?

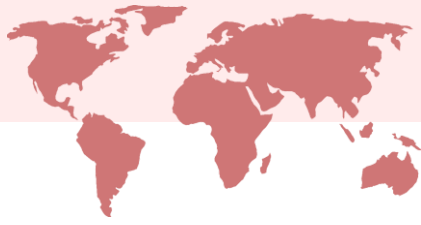
We will increasingly need to think about this question: what should governments do when their citizens who have been targeted in cyber-attacks start protecting themselves, taking unilateral measures? Launching counter-attacks?

- People, corporations, banks, and law firms are the new battlefields in cyber-crime – these are the ways in which you make people vulnerable today.
- This is not unique to the United States – all countries with unsatisfactory cyber protection and defences will continue to lose to those who are motivated and organized.
- Can we tell people not to defend themselves if their government cannot protect them? Democracies are in a terrible position to launch counterattacks.



Remember that like all countries, Russia has a diversity of opinions. We look at Russia as a unitary state but they see us as groups of audiences.

- The playbook is out there now. Authoritarian regimes are watching, as well as political parties and corporations – who is next?



Foreign Policy: US and Canada

Russia's Schizophrenic Policy Towards the United States

In Spring 2017, Russia presented a policy reset with the United States while simultaneously taking actions that are diametrically opposed to US interests, such as violating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty, allowing smugglers to violate North Korean sanctions, supporting the regime in Venezuela, and so forth.

- Russia seems perplexed by US politics and does not seem to understand that the Senate and Congress have more of a role in US-Russia relations than the Trump administration.
- Putin has changed a lot over time and we really do not know who his advisers are, making it difficult to predict policy direction. The decision-making process in Russia is made up of opaque informal networks, unfamiliar to Western audiences who are accustomed to these relationships being formal and constitutionally mandated.
- Putin has two main goals: to maintain power at home for as long as possible, and to go down in history as the man who made Russia great again – not only in military or security policy but to remove the sense of ingrained shame following the Cold War.

Why is Russia inconsistent?

- Theory 1: There's no inconsistency and it is in fact clever geopolitics
Perhaps the reset attempt was meant to be secret, not propaganda. Putin is not a master of realpolitik, and made no effort to balance against China. There was also no effort to make economy more competitive, and conquering territory brings little gain. The war in Syria has actually made Russia weaker due to threats transpiring from returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters.
- Theory 2: Putin succumbed to his own biases
Perhaps Putin does not understand how US politics work. However, good public opinion analysis is available in Russia, and Russia got it spot on around the 2016 US election. For example, the fake Idaho Anti-immigration group created by Russia proves they knew exactly what they were doing despite not understanding US Congress.
- Theory 3: Nobody dares tell Putin the truth
Perhaps the situation is similar that of Saddam Hussein; push too strongly, the messenger may be killed.

- Theory 4: Internal rivalries coming to the forefront

Some people in Putin's closest network, such as businessman Sergey Chemezov, benefit from foreign conflicts. For example, there are a number of Russian arms sales which counter geopolitical interests:

- Selling arms to China, despite history of double-cross;
- Selling arms to Afghanistan, despite destabilizing effect; and
- Selling arms to Turkey, a member of NATO.

There are also increased foreign roles for Siloviki¹; new resources and a sense of purpose to stave off internal revolt. Those who benefit from cooperation with the West include a different Putin network consisting of those in finance and commerce.

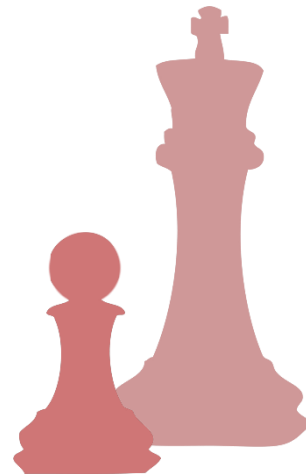
- Theory 5: Russian intelligence agencies have gone rogue

They are not fully "professional" organizations like in the West; they lack a distinct corporate identity. Like all authoritarian states, they blur intelligence with private commerce and politics.

- We know that the FSB uses active cyber criminals, not just former criminals as the US does. As long as Russian cyber criminals serve the state, Russia allows them to continue other work on the side.

We think of Putin as the king, but maybe he's a pawn of all the domestic interests

- Post-Putin, there is no clear successor, and the likely outcome is internal warfare among Siloviki.
- US actions may have very little effect on the future of the US-Russia relationship.



¹ Politicians from the military or security services.

A Canadian Perspective

Any government at any given time is partial to one or another interpretation of history, old or recent. Deliberately, maybe emotionally, and certainly politically, Russia always distinguishes Canada from the US.

- During Perestroika, Canada was treated as a different entity than the US.
- 1992-1995 was marked by intimacy and depth of exchange between Canada and Russia.
- This relationship withered away when Jean Chrétien came to power, partly as result of Ukrainian lobby power and Diaspora politics.
- While Stephen Harper was Prime Minister, Canada suspended all but the most low-level relations with Russia over Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for Donbass separatists. The situation is not much better today, even though the tone has allegedly changed.
- Approximately 20% of Russia's GDP depends on the Arctic. Russia has an increasingly growing influence in the Arctic.



"Speaking to Russia is not a policy, it's a behaviour..."

— Ferry de Kerckhove, University of Ottawa

Canada does not have a clear policy on Russia – in fact it does not have one at all. We are not a player of significance and have forgotten that the Warsaw Pact no longer exists. But is there some rekindling of it?

- Canada ignores that Russia may have a positive role in Syria. We are collectively oblivious to the fact that Russia has a much more formidable interest in fighting extremism than we do, given its proximity to the Middle East and strained relations with Chechnya, which has a majority-Muslim population.
- We have failed to develop a deep cooperation and information exchange with Russia on Syria; we haven't made progress in addressing joint terrorism threats in an effective way.



Domestic Politics and Russian Foreign Policy

Autocrats serve two masters – elite stakeholders and the mass public. In this world, it is easier to be a popular autocrat than an unpopular autocrat; the stakes are high, and those ousted from power end up in jail, exiled or dead. However, Vladimir Putin has proven to be good at managing these two channels and as a result has been a popular leader.

- Putin 1.0 (2000 – 2012) The Economic Phase: Putin came into power in 1999/2000. Putin's initial popularity was tightly correlated to a growing economy. Oil prices started rising quickly and Russia experienced economic growth that had previously been unseen in its history.
- Putin 2.0 (2012-2017) The Anti-Western Phase: From 2000-2012, Putin held a pragmatic foreign policy (e.g. cooperation, Afghanistan support, New START Treaty, Iran Nuclear Deal, etc.). However, in 2012, Putin's popularity begins to decline as the economy declines – leaving Putin to turn to nationalism. Approval ratings increased following annexation of Crimea in 2014, demonstrating Crimea, not sanctions, drives the rally around the Russian flag.

With the presidential election in March 2018, Putin faces three challenges:

1. Economic stagnation: There are few sources of dynamism in the economy and intense competition on energy markets. Managing slow growth going forward is a new challenge for the Kremlin.
2. Nationalist Card: There is a lot of Ukraine fatigue; two thirds of the population are paying little to no attention to Ukrainian related events. Russians support low-cost humanitarian aid but not more costly measures. There are also no more "Crimeas" in sight – i.e. low cost, low risk, high reward territorial grabs.
3. Putin Fatigue/Enthusiasm Deficit: Putin has been in power for 18 years, unchallenged but also uninspired. Putin has also been becoming more repressive in the last 18 months; physical attacks on opposition, bomb threats by radical groups, the rising profile of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, the arrest and trial of a sitting Minister, dismissals of governors – significant tumult.

The Dilemma: to improve the economy, you have to limit your great power nationalist appeals. Russia knows the recipe to economic reform: reduce corruption, increase security of property rights, and increase competition. However, doing so would weaken the interests closest to Putin.

- Russia tries to punch above its weight: relies on cyber, intervening in low-cost affairs like Crimea, and continues military build-up as much as the economy allows.
- Russia demands inclusion into the global order while also challenging international institutions and norms.

Russia needs to be convinced that if they change their behaviour, they will be rewarded.

— Timothy Frye, Columbia University

Russia and Ukraine

There is no chance of Russia ever conceding Crimea and therefore any policy based on the premise that Russia can be coerced or persuaded to concede Crimea will fail. With that said, Donbass is still “up for grabs” and there are a number of theories as to what Russia’s objectives are. These range from destabilizing Ukraine, to revising the international order, to seizing additional territory, to Russia not having a clear plan or objectives and that everything is being improvised.

- Russian decision-making process is opaque, leaving many of these theories unsubstantiated. Instead of trying to decipher what Russia wants, we can look at what the Kremlin actually says and see if it matches Russia’s actions – in this case, official rhetoric matters.
- Russia has stated that Donbass is part of Ukraine, but political stability can only return if people of Donbass feel secure. They have made it clear that this can only be attained by direct negotiations between Kiev and rebels and that there be some sort of autonomy for Donbass within Ukraine.

Russian actions are largely reactive: an effort to gain control of a situation originally outside of its control. There is no evidence to support theses that Russia wishes to annex Donbass, acquire a land bridge to Crimea, overturn the international system, and so forth. Evidence supports the thesis that Russia’s aim is autonomy for Donbass within Ukraine:

- Russia has sought to pressure Kiev to negotiate directly with its opponents in Donbass in order to produce a permanent peace settlement based upon some form of special status for Donbass within Ukraine;
- Russia has sought to pressure rebels to negotiate; and
- Russia has sought control over the rebels, using its influence in order to persuade them to cooperate with the peace process set up at Minsk.

Moscow is likely to accept compromise involving autonomy. However, Russia will not abandon support for rebels without getting something which can be sold as positive to Russian public opinion, as the Russian people largely do not like the Ukrainian government; there would likely be massive backlash if Russia were to give up on Donbass.

- This has not worked thus far because it relies on Kiev being ready to grant autonomy and amnesty, which it has not historically been prepared to do.
- Therefore, Moscow is having to accept some type of Transdnestrization, i.e. making the economy function again by reorienting toward Russia. This requires a ceasefire, some degree of economic and political stability, economic support, and further state formation.
- The likely result, therefore, is a continuation of the process of separation of rebel republics from Ukraine – a product of necessity, rather than desire.



Military and Security Services

Russian Military and the Metaphysics of Threat

How is threat understood?

- If there is no threat, there is no impetus to respond. But different groups have different, narrow, segmented views of what constitutes a threat.

Significant efforts have been made over the last few years to modernize the Russian forces.

- The objective of the New Look program is a large-scale transformation from Soviet-era mobilization forces to a modern, professional force that is able to project power, quell dissent, and increase its sphere of influence outside the Russian Federation.
- This includes new nuclear ballistic missile submarines, new classes of cruise missiles, testing of hypervelocity weapons, advances in cyber capabilities, electronic warfare, and space and counterspace capabilities.
- The Russian forces have created five districts: Western, Southern, Central, Eastern, and Joint Strategic Command (OSK) North, in order to increase the efficiency of their operations.

There is an absence of strategy in Western countries on how to deal with Russian escalation; operational art has displaced strategic thinking in Western countries.

- Western nations need to understand that a lack of direct military threat does not warrant complacency – we have already seen actors from foreign states targeting Canadian government and private sector networks.
- We need to better understand strategy, and the metaphysical purpose of militaries, in order to go further than understanding the importance of a specific military capability.
- What does Russia seek, and how is it bridging its means with its ends?

It is important to understand the social and cultural impact of military strategy.

– Gregory Smolynec, Canadian Department of National Defence

Russia's New National Guard: What For?

The Russian National Guard was created in April 2016. It is a young and ambitious institution, and is under the direct control of Viktor Zolotov, a close friend of Vladimir Putin.

- The National Guard came out of an increasing focus on domestic sources of instability. It is composed of former internal troops (a paramilitary force), special police forces, and the federal state enterprise who guard critical state infrastructure.
- Their tasks include upholding public order, fighting terrorism and extremism, reinforcing border protection and territorial defence, and providing security and protection services. It is seen as a clear indication that the political administration is prepared to handle unrest.

There are two main scenarios that are thought to have led to the creation of the National Guard: political and social protests, and disloyal elites.

- Due to declining incomes and increasing poverty, there is growing unrest among many young people in Russia, as well as several dissatisfied nationalist groups. Increased protests leading into the 2018 election, similar to the mass protests in 2011-2012, are expected.
- A fourth term would likely be Putin's last, and there will need to be a strategy for succession. In 2003 and 2004, members of the elite in Ukraine and Georgia left to join the opposition – this was not overlooked by Russia. The National Guard could be a deterrent for elites seeking to increase their influence in future power shuffles.
- The National Guard allows Putin to strengthen his position as chief negotiator; he can create and manage conflicts, keeping powerful actors such as Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu, FSB Chief Alexander Bortnikov, and Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov in check.

The prospects of the National Guard depend on Putin's threat perception – after all, it really is Putin's Guard.

- The National Guard is primarily a tool for domestic developments, but has a small foreign component: the Decree of May 2017 allows it to be deployed abroad to support the Russian armed forces. It could act in a hybrid war scenario, or perform public order functions in an environment already experiencing unrest.



**There is a risk of a "war of security agencies"
given their overlapping resources and competencies.**

– Margarete Klein, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik



Russia's Path to Regional Hegemony

Vladimir Putin continues his pursuit of regional and economical hegemony in Eurasia. To better understand Russia, the West must be brutally analytical – we lack the language, cultural sensitivity, or mentality to deal with Russia.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a catastrophe. There was no governing talent in the fifteen former Soviet states, which led to conflict, instability, and the constant pull over Ukraine by Russia and Europe.

- The near-term crisis is an impending collapse of the Ukrainian state – the popularity of Mikheil Saakashvili exposes the weak legitimacy of the government in Kiev.
- Putin can try to mitigate these crises by normalizing the balance between Europe, Russia, and Ukraine: a massive, co-financed rebuilding package.

In the context of fragility and sustainability, countries usually survive 60 years. New states suffer through identity crises and enter into collision courses with countries in other spheres of influence. The conflict in Donbass requires neutral, respected peacekeeping forces to guarantee sustainable peace.

APPENDIX

CASIS 2017 Annual Symposium Agenda (Revised)

13:15 – 14:30

Panel 2: The Russian Context

Chair: Alex Wilner, Carleton University

Presentation: "Domestic Politics and Russian Foreign Policy"

Tim Frye, Columbia University

Presentation: "Russia and Ukraine"

Paul Robinson, University of Ottawa

14:30 – 15:00

BREAK

15:00 – 16:15

Panel Three: Military and Security Services

Chair: Stephanie Carvin, Carleton University

Presentation: "Russian Military and the Metaphysics of Threat"

Greg Smolynech, Canadian Department of National Defence

Presentation: "Russia's New National Guard: What For?"

Margarete Klein, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik

16:15-16:45

Closing Speech/Overview:

Introduction of Irvin Studin by Greg Fyffe

Irvin Studin, Global Brief Magazine; Institute for 21st Century Questions

16:45

CASIS Annual Meeting and Election of Board