

STANDING GUARD
on the NATO frontier

2

Fear and Dread

Russia's strategy to dismantle
North Atlantic and European
security cooperation

Alexander Moens with Cornel Turdeanu

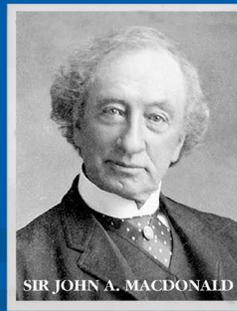


True North in
Canadian public policy

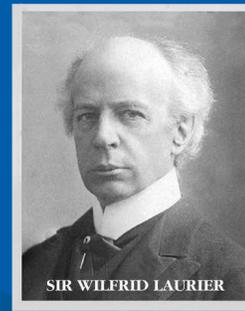
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True North in
Canadian public policy



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Executive Summary

NATO may be facing greater internal challenges in light of uncertainty around the Trump administration, its frequent hectoring on defence spending, and the soft tack the president has taken when dealing with Russia. Yet that should not overshadow the fact that NATO's immediate problem is external – to meet the sustained Russian challenge to European security and stability.

Moscow uses conventional military and nuclear menacing to ramp up fear, danger, and risk for NATO. Russia has also launched an information war to influence the European and North American debate about identity politics, nationalism, and multilateral organizations. Indeed, Russia has started a new round of empire building, first by annexing Crimea and intervening in Ukraine, and later with its intervention in Syria.

Moscow uses conventional military and nuclear menacing to ramp up fear, danger, and risk for NATO.

Moscow is playing a two-level game. At home, these actions solidify support for the strict authoritarianism run out of the Kremlin. Abroad, these actions make NATO and EU members cautious and, by default, respectful of Russia. They put the brakes on a common NATO response and further polarize Western democratic processes, thus providing the strategic and political space for Russia to make its sudden moves.

Russia threatens NATO, the European Union, and all democracies of the Euro-Atlantic region in three ways: by conducting intimidating military exercises on NATO's border, by making overt threats to NATO members near its borders as well as partners such as Sweden, and by discarding established arms

control and political agreements pertaining to the European theatre concluded in the 1990s. Because of NATO's Article 5 collective defence clause, all Allies are at risk when one is threatened.

The military threat is combined with an information warfare campaign whose goal is nothing less than breaking up the political, economic, and military framework of European and North Atlantic cooperation. When NATO and the European Union lose public support, cooperation breaks down and national interests take over. In a fragmented Europe, Russia gains power and influence.

It is crucial to understand that Russia aims for equal status with the United States and is willing to humiliate and intimidate NATO nations in support of that goal.

For Russia, respect is a product of power and strength. NATO has no choice but to demonstrate that the values and interests it protects are also worth military strength and power. There is no need to be provocative, but there must be ample proportionate strength to ensure that Russia sees the boundaries of its own plans and actions. To that extent, NATO has a lot of work to do in building up its capacity to defend against and deter Russia. The Alliance's capacity to defend is paper-thin and its capacity to reinforce its position in Eastern Europe and the Baltics is still non-existent. As long as NATO does not pose a serious counter, the Kremlin will continue to exploit opportunities for coercion and aggression.

Sommaire

L'OTAN pourrait traverser une période d'incertitudes accrues à l'interne, compte tenu de l'imprévisibilité de l'administration Trump, de ses réprimandes continuelles en matière de dépenses militaires et du ton affable adopté par le Président à l'égard de la Russie. Pourtant, cela ne devrait pas occulter le fait que le problème immédiat l'OTAN est externe – elle doit en effet répondre au défi constant que pose la Russie pour la sécurité et la stabilité en Europe.

Moscou compte sur le caractère menaçant de ses forces militaires conventionnelles et nucléaires pour aiguïser le sentiment de peur et la perception du danger et du risque au sein de l'OTAN. La Russie a également lancé une guerre de l'information pour influencer sur le débat européen et nord-américain en matière de politique d'identité, de nationalisme et d'organisations multilatérales. En somme, la Russie a initié un nouveau cycle impérialiste, en annexant d'abord la Crimée et en intervenant en Ukraine, puis ensuite en intervenant en Syrie.

Moscou joue un jeu à deux niveaux. À la maison, ces mesures solidifient l'appui à l'autoritarisme rigoureux appliqué par le Kremlin. À l'étranger, elles inspirent la prudence aux États membres de l'OTAN et de l'UE et, par défaut, le respect envers la Russie. Elles freinent la formulation d'une réaction concertée de l'OTAN et polarisent encore plus les processus démocratiques à l'Ouest, fournissant ainsi à la Russie l'espace politique et stratégique lui permettant de se livrer à des actions soudaines.

La Russie menace l'OTAN, l'Union européenne et toutes les démocraties de la région euro-atlantique de trois façons : par la conduite de manœuvres militaires intimidantes à la frontière de l'OTAN, par les menaces explicites qu'elle fait peser sur les membres de l'OTAN près de leurs frontières – ainsi que sur certains partenaires comme la Suède – et par la distance qu'elle prend par rapport au contrôle des armements et aux accords politiques en place sur la scène européenne depuis les années 1990. Conformément à l'article 5 du traité de l'OTAN sur la défense collective, tous les Alliés sont à risque lorsqu'un pays est menacé.

La menace militaire est combinée à une campagne de guerre de l'information dont l'objectif n'est autre que de fracturer le cadre politique, économique et militaire de la coopération européenne et nord-atlantique. Lorsque l'OTAN et l'Union européenne perdent le soutien du public, la coopération s'effondre et les intérêts nationaux prennent le relais. Dans une Europe fragmentée, la Russie ne peut qu'accroître ses pouvoirs et son influence.

Il est essentiel de comprendre que la Russie cherche à réaliser l'égalité de statut avec les États-Unis et qu'elle est prête à humilier et intimider les membres de l'OTAN pour réaliser cet objectif.

Pour la Russie, le respect découle de la puissance et de la force. L'OTAN n'a pas d'autre choix que de démontrer que les valeurs et les intérêts qu'elle protège méritent d'être défendus en faisant appel à la force et à la puissance militaire. Nul besoin de provocation, mais la réponse doit être tout à fait proportionnelle pour s'assurer que la Russie prenne conscience des limites de ses propres plans et actions. À cet égard, l'OTAN a beaucoup de travail à faire pour renforcer sa capacité de défense et de dissuasion à l'égard de la Russie. La capacité de défense de l'Alliance est très mince et sa capacité à renforcer sa position en Europe de l'Est et dans les pays baltes est encore inexistante. Tant et aussi longtemps que l'OTAN ne constituera pas une menace sérieuse, le Kremlin continuera d'exploiter les occasions de coercition et d'agression.

Introduction

For more than 20 years, US administrations have tried in vain to persuade NATO allies to step up their defence investment in order to keep up with modern defence and international security operations. President Donald Trump has increasingly questioned the politics of solidarity at NATO, and he left this year's summit meeting in Brussels issuing a soft ultimatum for member states: increase military spending or else.

A few days later, Trump did not demand anything from Vladimir Putin but instead conveyed understanding and tolerance of Russia's regime and its foreign policy. Trump's security and trade actions are creating strategic uncertainty even when the common stake in cooperation between the European and North American continents – given China's rise and Russia's spoiler role – is up not down.

Russia has started a new round of empire building, first with annexing Crimea and intervening in Ukraine, and later with the intervention in Syria.

Adding to this uncertainty is the fact that, despite the president's soft approach to Russia, US defence spending, training, and operations in Europe are actually up during the last two years of the Trump administration. The reasons for this disconnect are unclear. What is clear is that this increase is meant to counter Russian actions against the West.

And why exactly does NATO need to counter Russia so strongly? As we argue in this paper, it stems from the sustained Russian challenge to European security and stability. In that respect, the new political dynamics in the White House are more of a distraction than anything else.

To explain why NATO needs to counter Russia so strongly, we only need to turn to various Russian actions, especially since 2014, which pose grave risks to the maintenance of peace and security in Europe. Moscow uses conventional military and nuclear menacing

to ramp up fear, danger, and risk for NATO. The purpose is to intimidate NATO nations and publics to shake their common will and compel them to back away from Central and Eastern Europe. Russia has also launched an information war to influence the European and North American debate about identity politics, nationalism, and multilateral organizations. Indeed, Russia has started a new round of empire building, first by annexing Crimea and intervening in Ukraine, and later with its intervention in Syria.

To shed light on recent Russian actions, this paper will explore the Kremlin's use of conventional and nuclear menacing, and information warfare. What is Russia aiming to achieve at the strategic level with these types of actions? Moscow is playing a two-level game. At home, these actions solidify support for the strict authoritarianism run out of the Kremlin. Abroad, these actions make NATO and EU members cautious and, by default, respectful of Russia. They put the brakes on a common NATO response and further polarize Western democratic processes, thus providing the strategic and political space for Russia to make its sudden moves.

Russia's Mix of Threat and Action

Russia poses a military threat to NATO, the European Union, and to all democracies of the Euro-Atlantic region in three ways. On the military side, Russia has been rebuilding its conventional military capability since 2009. Russia displays its conventional military strength by conducting intimidating military exercises on NATO's border, by making overt threats to NATO members near its borders as well as partners such as Sweden, and by discarding established arms control and political agreements pertaining to the European theatre concluded in the 1990s. Because of NATO's Article 5 collective defence clause, all Allies are at risk when one is threatened. For the three Baltic states, this threat is particularly acute. But, given the Alliance's collective defence pledge and escalation dynamics, the threat extends to all of NATO.

What if Russia breached the national territory of a NATO state and succeeded in deterring or stopping a NATO response? What if Russia denied both air and sea reinforcements to NATO forces? What if it took the wind out of any NATO plan to reinforce its Enhanced Forward Presence troops by means of a tactical nuclear weapon, of which it has a preponderance?¹

The choice between Alliance solidarity and war with Russia is a NATO decision-maker's worst nightmare. Many observers consider the possibility of Russia wanting to cross NATO's territorial line by force so remote as to rule it out. But the unthinkable happens in international politics. As an example, Russia had made several agreements with Ukraine as a sovereign counterpart since 1991 but suddenly decided to use force against it and annex Crimea.

Of note, Russia has acquired the capability to deny NATO forces access to the air and land space needed to reinforce their four Enhanced Forward Presence task forces in the Baltic states and Poland that were set up in 2017. The Russian military is not without problems but has demonstrated a high level of readiness, mobility, and ability to conduct combined operations. Russian professional (rather than reservist) forces are conducting exercises near NATO's new battalions to make it clear that in a clash the NATO forces would be quickly overrun (Golts 2016).

Russia has unleashed all-out information warfare against the democracies of the West – a television and digital onslaught on the liberal democratic values and institutions of multiple Western societies. One part of this onslaught is largely hidden. It is in the cyber domain where Russian probes into Western infrastructure and information systems are commonplace and increasingly bold.

Russian decision-makers understand Western political culture the way an enemy understands its adversary. They prepare the Russian population with mobilizational propaganda. William Zimmerman argues that unlike “normal” authoritarianism, this form of “mobilizational” control by the regime means that not only is opposition to the regime's narrative not permitted, but the

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LATVIA AND CANADA'S RESPONSE

Since the end of the Cold War, the small state of Latvia has taken steps that now put it in Russia's gunsight. First, Riga has insisted on wanting to be an independent and sovereign state. Second, it has joined the EU to speed up its economic growth and to join this community of democratic states. Finally, Latvia has joined NATO to receive the security pledge of larger like-minded states to come to its defence.

Canada, among several other NATO states, rightly supports these Latvian aspirations and last year deployed 450 Canadian troops on the ground in Latvia, in addition to a leadership role of the multinational Latvia battlegroup. Just recently, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced an increase in the troop number to 540 troops, alongside a three-year renewal of the mission until 2023.

Canada will continue to experience this Russian threat quite directly. Canada is not naïve or provocative. It is putting in practice the principle of liberal democracies working together to uphold the right of territorial integrity, democratic process, and individual freedoms. Russian citizens had the latter two rights to some degree for a while in the 1990s and early 2000s but have lost them once again to an authoritarian regime in Moscow.

who feel that modern liberal policies and minority rights are alien to their traditional values and who quickly remember the “good old days” of communism, where political culture was stable and one's pay could be counted on.

Russia's strategic communication warfare is keen to exploit new opportunities. Early in 2018, Russian-fed news information in Latvia launched a story that Canadian troops deploying in NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Task Force in Latvia were driving up housing prices in Riga. According to their narrative, when you invite a rich and decadent NATO ally such as Canada into your country, it results in the destruction of economic opportunities for the local people.

government is actively shaping what Russians should believe (Zimmerman 2014). They are to believe that under Yeltsin they were “conquered” but that under Putin they will be “liberated” (Oreshkin 2016, 21).

Russian information warriors identify several Western weaknesses as opportunities for Russian influence: the decline of the Christian religion and its application in social policy, the waning of absolute moral standards and the rise of ethical relativism, the dominant limelight of controversial minority rights and the necessary curtailment of majority values in Western discourse. They understand that majorities in most European countries feel alienated and that they see multiculturalism and diversity as net losses to majority beliefs. All of these drive identity politics.

Russia has found a rich area of opportunity to stoke this internal Western fire. Majority identity politics is the agenda of the government in Hungary and Poland and of the government-in-waiting in several West European countries. Majority identity politics allow Russian misinformation and information warfare a broad platform of entry into the mindset and direction of Western thought. Just as socialism and class warfare was a powerful Marxist-Leninist tool wielded by Moscow in the 1950s in European parliamentary democracy, so identity politics and nationalist aspirations are today.

Russia's information warfare targets those societies that are most vulnerable to its messaging – specifically, those with significant Russian-speaking minorities in them. These include Latvia and many countries in the Visegrad or Central and Eastern Europe that have large segments of older populations

Yet the facts of the case are clear: only a handful of officers are living in Riga (in modest housing) while the troops are in barracks away from the city.

If a society does not have an independent judiciary and a robust rule of law founded on a constitution that cannot be changed easily, and it does not have accountable government formed out of genuinely free interest groups and independent political parties that run candidates in free elections, the temptation of corruption may overwhelm a governing elite. Here is the point: elites in Central or Eastern Europe who are enriching themselves do not need to keep Moscow away, but they do need to keep the EU Commission, free press, and concerned citizens away as well to confuse and befuddle their own people. Corrupt governing authorities blame Western democratic values for destroying the values of the Hungarian or Romanian people. They portray themselves as the saviours of the political culture while their real motive appears to be enriching themselves at the public trough.

What is the aim of Russia's information warfare exploiting the sharp debates inside Europe? Nothing less than breaking the political, economic, and military framework of European and North Atlantic cooperation. When NATO and the European Union lose public support, cooperation breaks down and national interests take over. In a fragmented Europe, Russia gains power and influence.

Russia also adroitly uses diplomacy, including both economic and military carrots and sticks, to rebuild ties with countries in Central and Eastern Europe, in the Middle East, and Asia. The goal of such action is to tilt them away from Western relations and institutions and create greater dependency on Russia, including direct Russian involvement in the country's security. Some analysts are concerned that Russia is preparing to do so in Libya next.

In a fragmented Europe, Russia gains power and influence.

The Two-Level Game

The root of Russia's decision to embark upon such a sustained and aggressive campaign is twofold. First, the type of political authority or political regime governing Russia today is best summarized by the term *siloviki*.² Literally, *siloviki* means "men of force" (Wilson 2014, 20). This power structure is built upon a hierarchy of elites in control of internal security, the military, and the communications arm of government. Security power is used to keep the power of economic players (oligarchs) under strict control. Economic players, in turn, facilitate the personal enrichment of political appointees in the security realm. An economy of hierarchically-controlled authoritarian enterprises is the result. In his recent book, Timothy Snyder (2018) calls Vladimir Putin the "oligarch-in-chief" (15).³

Russia's authoritarian-oligarchic governance is threatened not by Western armaments, Western Alliances, or Western lust for more territory, but rather in the liberal-democratic demonstration effect. By this, we mean the way political, legal and economic rights and ways of life that are

practiced in most NATO and EU societies. Should this way of life, with its concomitant institutions, spread into the minds and political expectations of Russian elites as well as among the middle-class and working class, the legitimacy of siloviki governance would be questioned. If this Western way of life becomes the aspiration of Russians, no amount of internal security could stop the pressure and the regime would be in mortal danger. Hence, political critics of the Russian regime are sidelined, jailed, or killed.

The second root cause of Russia's revanchist behaviour flows from the siloviki power structure and addresses Russia's international position. Russia's greatest concern is that it is not feared by NATO and the West. In the regime's "power politics" understanding of statecraft, a state that is feared will be subject to little or no foreign attempts to change its regime. In Moscow's understanding, NATO enlargement encroaches, sidelines, and neglects Russia. The same can be said of the colour revolutions on Russia's eastern border and in Georgia, and even by NATO's crisis man-

agement operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Libya as well as the Global Coalition taking on ISIS in Syria and Iraq since 2013. To the Kremlin, all of these are the result of the West perceiving Russia to be weak and unimportant.

Russian policy has at its core the goal to rebuild a reputation as "the bear to be feared."

Russia responds with a combination of hard, hybrid, and sharp power.⁴ Russian policy has at its core the goal to rebuild a reputation as "the bear to be feared." It does so in order to provide stability for the symbiotic relationship between the siloviki and the oligarchs – on the basis of offensive and aggressive policies.

This is not to say that Putin's or the siloviki's foreign policy is simply rational or based on a nuanced perception of how to connect ends and means. Moscow can act impulsively just as other

countries do and may at times harm its own long-term interests. Some argue that the surprise annexation of Crimea was more impulse than strategy (Sestanovich 2014). It is crucial to understand that Russian actions towards NATO are motivated by the need to gain power and respect.

From the 2007 Munich Security conference onward, Vladimir Putin has consistently talked up the need for Russia to be seen as a great power.⁵ This is a public relations campaign at the highest level by which President Putin aspires to restore or reclaim for Russia as much Soviet power as possible. In this view, the Soviet Union was feared and regarded – reluctantly – in the West as an equal to the United States. Fear froze a good deal of international competition between the communist and liberal-capitalist world or at least hemmed it in. It brought forth the idea of peaceful coexistence, and even *détente*. Russia wants to bring back great power condominium as practiced during the Cold War. In this bipolar logic, Russia aims for equal status with the United States and is willing to act against NATO nations in support of that goal (RadioFreeEurope 2017; Isachenkov 2018).

As noted above, Russia's emphasis on modernizing both nuclear and conventional military power could be seen as preparation for territorial warfare. It would be naïve to rule this out. At the same time, modernization can intimidate and instill fear in Russia's enemies. The point is deterring any further Western intrusion of liberalizing and globalizing influences on Russian society. The Putin government is convinced, or rather has convinced itself, that deliberate Western non-gov-

ermental organization (NGO) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) activities are what spreads democratic values. Western actors, in Russia's view, directly plant, propagate, and conclude colour revolutions. Moscow rejects the notion that Western culture, freedom and prosperity might naturally be attractive to the people. In other words, the colour revolutions are not treated as bottom-up societal and global influences, but instead as vanguard activities by the West using NGOs (Ball 2017, 5). Georgia, Ukraine, and the Baltic countries were compromised by this logic. By trickery and deceit, they fell into the Western orbit, according to Moscow.

The government of Russia tries to counter colour revolutions with a variety of means, including the creation of counter populist youth movements (Finkel and Brudny 2012). But there is also an international dimension. No-notice military training exercises and no permission for Western observers means uncertainty. Flying military aircraft too close to NATO ships, too close to national airspace, and flying with the responder turned off signal danger and risk. This deterrence is based on an active posture or demonstration. One could call it the "militarization" of colour revolutions, with Russia effectively telling the West that support for a colour revolution in, let's say Belarus, could lead to military conflict.⁶

In addition, Russia has taken a direct role in influencing what the publics in Europe and North America see and read on their electronic devices. At first glance, one could assume that Russia's information war aims to make the West illiberal and turn the nations of NATO and the EU into authoritarian regimes. However, the siloviki have more modest goals. The more plausible objective is to help fragment these nations and to devalue the role of multilateral frameworks such as NATO and the European Union.

Russian state-directed television and Internet operators wage a 24/7 campaign of news fabrication and news distortion. Part of this takes place in the hidden sinews of communication and governance. Russia's riskiest activity is in the cyber realm – a domain where the escalation steps from digital to kinetic warfare remain uncertain and undefined (Giles 2016, 28; Libicki 2012, 82). Hence, Russia is most assertive in this area because it is least likely to directly provoke physical war while driving home its obvious great-power cyber capabilities.

Communication, command, and control capabilities are especially vulnerable in a 29 nation Alliance. Russia's cyber power thus is calculated to give NATO pause in how strong a stance it takes on Russia.

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Russia's Pretext: the conspiracy of liberalism, the clash of cultures, and the broken promises of NATO

The Russian people did not benefit from an economic “peace dividend” after the Cold War. Even as the European Union, the United States, Germany, Japan, and various international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) helped to sustain the Russian economy and its currency, many Russians did not experience rising living standards. Yet IMF loans in both the early and latter part of the 1990s offered Russia much-needed liquidity. Russia was brought into the G8, and finally into the World Trade Organization in 2011.

However, as President Boris Yeltsin lost his grip on power, a small number of oligarchs systematically stole Russian state-controlled economic assets. The oligarchs were happy to let Western liberalism take the bad rap in public opinion for austerity programs and the decline of social services and income. Classical liberal economists warned that market reforms without genuine property rights and an independent judiciary cannot be successful. But how does one change the political culture, institutions, rule of law, and the nature of wealth distribution in a great historical nation such as Russia?

By the early 2000s, almost all segments of society from the intellectuals to the workers were convinced that liberalism was particularly bad for Russia. Western liberalization seemed a conspiracy by the West to undermine Russia. Russians have a historical expectation of strong government. What they saw instead were a floundering regime and a declining economy.

The West should have undertaken a far greater attempt to help Russia make a real change toward liberal market and political principles. A massive economic aid program was warranted to sustain a long period of slow change, but no European or US Marshall Plan emerged. But did Russian players really want one? Was Russian political culture ready and willing to accept long-term and deep Western involvement in all things political and economic? One cannot help but wonder if a larger Western attempt would actually have provoked an even larger anti-Western backlash.

But this is all water under the bridge now. The tragedy of a lukewarm Western commitment and deeply-held Russian suspicion of the West created a national appetite in Russia not only for a scapegoat but for a strong man to restore Russia's greatness.

The siloviki understand that defending Russia from Western and liberal influences in the name of restoring Russia's pride as a great power supplies a political safety blanket under which to commit kleptocracy. The consolidation of power at home would be understood as a heroic effort to save Mother Russia from further humiliation and exploitation. Russian citizens are under no illusion that their government is clean or benevolent. Historical dread and fear of government in Russian political culture is deep. But so far, the government is able to make Russians fear foreign influence and designs upon Russia even more than their constant repulsion at watching government corruption.

Once an adviser to Putin, Alexander Lukin (2014a) is among the inventors of the “clash of cultures” between Orthodox and traditional Russia on the one hand and the secular progressive West on the other (56). During Soviet days, the story about cruel capitalism and dire poverty in the West was used to explain why Russia should not want Western freedoms. But that line has no traction today. Instead, the current government and media narrative as supported by the Russian

Orthodox Church is focused on protecting Russian values from decadent and perverse Western values.⁸ Western decadence and moral depravity are now the reasons why Russians should not want to be part of the West. Even though Russians today, on average, do not attend church much (Pew Research Center 2014), have high divorce rates (OECD 2016), and systemic trouble with alcohol abuse (WHO 2014),⁹ they consider themselves guardians of conservative values. Individual rights movements and multiculturalism are considered signs of moral weakness.

NATO and the EU as portents of Western values are a big part of the pretext. The false story of how “NATO expansion” happened and how Russia’s more peaceful and visionary alternative (Common European Home) was rejected begins with the “broken promise.” Russia now claims it has no choice but to start conflict with its neighbouring states in order to get the West to stop expanding (Lukin 2014b).

Was Mikhail Gorbachev promised that NATO would not expand beyond West Germany? Russians also argue that both the NATO Summit in London, which extended a hand of friendship to the Warsaw Pact states, and the CSCE summit in Paris the same year, which aspired to find a new European security system, are proof that the West promised to not extend the NATO Alliance framework in the emerging security framework of the Euro-Atlantic area. The problem with both the so-called promise to Gorbachev and the context of the NATO and CSCE meetings is that while the facts Russia alleges are not there, the Russian storyline appears plausible.

Marie Elise Sarotte (2014) has thoroughly researched the alleged promise to Gorbachev. What happened was this: James Baker, as a clever negotiator, had raised the possibility with Gorbachev during the final stages of getting Moscow’s agreement for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from East Germany and rapid rather than slow German reunification, of NATO not expanding beyond West Germany. This meeting took place on February 9, 1990. Having learned of this from Baker, Helmut Kohl in his meeting with Gorbachev added that as far as Germany was concerned such a deal should be on the table. However, at the National Security Council meeting in Washington a few days later, George Bush, the elder, ruled out the concession of no NATO enlargement. What Baker had smuggled onto the agenda, and Kohl and his foreign minister had tried to push a bit further, Bush and the NSC took off. Hence, the proposal was not US policy and was never considered as NATO policy.

Bush’s decision was the right one because both the NATO Treaty and the Helsinki Final Act underlying the CSCE (now OSCE) grant states the right to apply for membership. This cannot be denied them *a priori*, regardless of what the West German Chancellor would like. Some blame lies with Baker and Kohl for luring Gorbachev with things neither man could deliver. At the same time, the Russians are playing naïve, knowing full well that no such US or NATO policy exists and no item in the Two-Plus-Four Agreement concluding German re-unification stipulates that NATO will not enlarge (Moens 1991).

Ultimately, Gorbachev faced a crunch. Germans were uniting with their feet and Britain and France were dead set against a united Germany becoming a neutral state outside of NATO. Gorbachev took the offer of German funding for Soviet troop withdrawal and resettlement and made no final stand on NATO’s future.

NATO enlargement is not a clever expansion strategy but a policy dilemma in which NATO and European governments made the best of a difficult trade-off.

The greater evil would be to say to all states in Central and Eastern Europe that they could not benefit from either NATO’s defence solidarity or the European Union’s economic opportunities. Hence, they could not raise their level of prosperity as their Western neighbours had done since

the 1950s. All of this would be to keep Russia from becoming uneasy about Western governance and market economies moving ever closer to its border.

In this logic, even though Russia itself was ambivalent about how to relate to the West, it would be given back its one-sided control over Central and Eastern Europe. The enormous gap in GDP per capita between the East and the West would continue, but it would be the price of geopolitical stability that Central and Eastern Europe should pay for.

Put in these terms, leaving Central and Eastern Europe out of NATO and the EU would mean, in essence, continuing the Yalta Agreement. It would mean that Marxist-Leninism had ended but that Russia's control of the region should remain. Western democracies would tell aspiring Eastern democracies that they could not join their status.

NATO enlargement was not a strategic grab; it was a moral necessity driven by the aspiration of the peoples of most Central and Eastern European countries to actually be independent of Moscow.

The point is this: NATO enlargement was not a strategic grab; it was a moral necessity driven by the aspiration of the peoples of most Central and Eastern European countries to actually be independent of Moscow. It was not a top-down NATO act.

Slowly, NATO enlarged. GDP per capita in many states rose. Polish and Ukrainian GDP per capita were close in the 1980s, but now Poland leapt ahead.¹⁰ Who could blame Ukrainians for wanting the same? In fact, Ukraine under Viktor Yanukovich ruled out NATO membership and was negotiating an EU Partnership when Russian hybrid operators stepped in. What about Russia's broken promise to recognize a sovereign Ukraine?

And what threat did the new NATO states pose to Russia? Since the late 1990s, NATO has followed its own enlargement principles. The key points were included in the 1997 Russia-NATO Founding Act. These include the following two key phrases: "no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members," and "in the current and foresee-

able security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces" (chapter IV).

The reason NATO has followed these principles so consistently is that no one in the Alliance wanted to increase defence spending. Nuclear weapons in NATO Europe have dwindled down to less than 200 tactical weapons because few believed them to be of much use after the Cold War. And finally, no member state wanted a difficult relationship with Russia because that would pose a direct threat to both NATO and the EU.

Yes, the pledge of collective defence was there, but without stationed forces or military weight to accompany it. NATO's military centre of gravity did not move East. In geopolitical terms, it

was enlargement light. Enlargement entailed access to the decision-making councils, modernization and interoperability programs, and participation in non-Article 5 crisis management tasks. It did not mean NATO moving in and rebuilding a defensive line from the Baltic to the Adriatic Sea. It did not create a new NATO capacity for collective defence where troops are pre-positioned and where reinforcement flows are carved out in plans. NATO member defence budgets – other than the United States – kept going down. Moving towards a “no first use” of nuclear weapons was put on the agenda (but not agreed on). As recently as 2012, NATO’s Defence Posture Review called Russia a Partner and asserted that Russia does not threaten NATO states (Lindley-French et al. 2017).

NATO’s military attention from the mid 1990s onward switched to so-called non-Article 5 missions doing crisis management outside NATO member states area. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan became NATO’s largest non-collective defence mission with more than 100,000 troops at its peak. All this military action was away from Eastern Europe and had nothing to do with Russia. Most of this time, Eastern European members of NATO were pleading with little result inside the Alliance for more attention to collective defence missions and capabilities.

It took NATO two summits (Wales 2014 and Warsaw 2016) after Russia annexed the Crimea and actively assisted war in the Donbas region of Southeastern Ukraine to move the NATO sentiment back to the task of signalling a determination to defend its members. In Wales, the response was mainly in words with the allies affirming that “Russia’s aggressive actions against Ukraine have fundamentally challenged our vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace” (NATO Wales Summit Declaration 2014, paragraph 1). It was not until the year 2016 that real – though still relatively small – changes began to appear partially as a result of Eastern European NATO members pleading for help.

Beginning that year, NATO added small NATO Force Integration Units in various Eastern European countries to pre-position materiel and personnel structures for quick reinforcement. A piece of NATO’s existing Response Force was designated to acquire “very high readiness” status. By 2017, four countries took the lead to assemble battalion-sized forces to move into Poland and the three Baltic states in order to show an Enhanced Forward Presence. Although officially still not called permanently stationed NATO troops, in practice these deployed forces are meant to signal to Russia that if it insists on violating the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, NATO can reciprocate. The four battle groups are multinational to signal that multiple NATO member states are putting the commitment of Article 5 into practice so that Russia should know there is not only a political will but also a *de facto* multilateral commitment to collective defence.

*NATO’s military
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Conclusion: Reducing Russia's Strategic Threat to the West

There is no alternative to what one analyst has called “peace through legitimate strength” (Lindley-French et al. 2017). The preamble of NATO’s treaty cites the nature on which such legitimacy rests, namely military strength as a reflection of the majority of the people expressed in a democratic process based on the rule of law.¹¹ NATO must respond with military power to Russia’s military intimidation campaign.

As Russia deems respect to be a product of power and strength, NATO has no choice but to demonstrate that the values and interests it protects are also worth military strength and power. There is no need to be provocative, but there must be ample proportionate strength to ensure that Russia sees the boundaries of its own plans and actions.

Russia’s information war obliges NATO and EU nations to develop more coherent strategic communication capacity.

To that extent, NATO has a lot of work left in building up its capacity to defend and reinforce its position in Eastern Europe, and in so doing, deter Russian adventurism. Its capacity to defend is paper-thin and its capacity to reinforce is still non-existent. As long as NATO does not pose a serious counter, the Kremlin will continue to exploit opportunities for coercion and aggression.

Russia’s information warfare is a double-edged sword. Once large segments of the public become informed about the deliberate misinformation from a hostile source such as Russia, the gains for the sender decline. The notion of a foreign power interfering in US elections created a strong anti-Russian reaction after 2016. Public hostility to Russia among Americans and Europeans is going up. The “mostly favourable rating” of Russia in US public opinion was in the low 40s before 2014 then fell by

half and is again lower in 2018. When asked “who is America’s greatest enemy?”, Russia went from 2 percent in 2012 to 19 percent (only behind North Korea) in 2018 (Gallup). In Europe, confidence in Putin as a leader is falling and some 41 percent of Europeans considered Russia a threat to their own country in early 2017 (Vice 2017).

Still, aggregate public opinion numbers should not give us comfort. The reason is the reinforcing tendency of polarization and digital information. Polarization allows a devious actor an entrenched audience. Even when repeated cyber intrusions, fake news, trolling and other schemes point to Russian sources, a segment of the population only wants to reinforce what it already believes.

Russia’s information war obliges NATO and EU nations to develop more coherent strategic communication capacity. The first rule is not to respond with counter fake news or counter

dirty tricks. Instead, communicate truth with more resources and with more flexible strategy. Ultimately, even in democracies, national security trumps freedom of speech provided due process is used to eliminate partisan or arbitrary action. Digital sites or methods that are a threat must be blocked.

Finally, Russia's manipulative influence inside Western political debates comes at a time when majority and minority rights are clashing. Interestingly, NATO's founding treaty adds another piece of wisdom in its preamble. I refer to the phrase "Common heritage and civilization of our peoples." Can we define this heritage and civilization in such a way as to find a new balance between minority rights and majority rights? If we dry up the vulnerable debate inside the West on who we are, we rein in Moscow's ability to play foul on our mobiles and in our minds.

About the Authors



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Endnotes

- 1 Dmitry Adamsky (2014) calls this thwarting of a conventional response with a theatre nuclear weapon “regional nuclear deterrence” (92) in “Nuclear Incoherence: Deterrence Theory and Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons in Russia,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37 (1).
- 2 For a description of the concept of siloviki, see Walter Laqueur, 2015, *Putinism: Russia and its Future with the West*.
- 3 While some thought that the siloviki and oligarchs would form an alliance, it turned out the former have established unquestioned control. For an exploration of the idea of alliance, see Andrei P. Tsygankov, 2005, “Vladimir Putin’s Vision of Russia as a Normal Great Power,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 21 (2), page 140.
- 4 “How China’s ‘Sharp Power’ Is Muting Criticism Abroad,” *Economist*, December 14, 2017, p. 13. Though discussed in the context of China, the practice of sharp power precedes China’s recent use of these tactics.
- 5 A recent example is Putin’s 2018 annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, where he bemoaned the fact that “After the collapse of the USSR, Russia, lost 23.8 percent of its national territory, 48.5 percent of its population, 41 percent of the GDP, 39.4 percent of its industrial potential . . . , as well as 44.6 percent of its military capability.” In his speech Putin posits this as the reason why the US did not take Russian “opinions” into account when withdrawing from the ABM Treaty in 2002.
- 6 This is one of the key points made by Nicolas Bouchet, 2016, “Russia’s Militarization of Colour Revolutions,” *Policy Perspectives* 4 (2).
- 7 This fundamental question goes back many decades. See the crucial role of the bourgeoisie in the analysis by Barrington Moore, 1966, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*.
- 8 Some scholars of Russia consider the Russian Orthodox Church, especially the Moscow Patriarchate, as a part of the institutions of governance. See Katja Richters, 2013, *The Post-Soviet Russian Orthodox Church: Politics, Culture and Greater Russia*, pages 6–7.
- 9 The WHO (2014) reports that 17.4 percent of Russia’s adult population suffered from alcohol use disorders in 2010 (second highest globally) (233).
- 10 GDP per capita between Poland and Ukraine was roughly equal in 1990 but the Polish number had grown to four times the size of the Ukrainian in 2012. See Reinis Fischer, 2014, “Ukraine vs Poland by GDP 1990–2012.”
- 11 The second paragraph states: “[The nations] are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.” North Atlantic Treaty, [Preamble] April 4, 1949, 34 U.N.T.S. 243.



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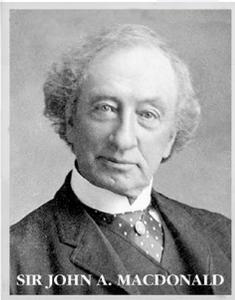
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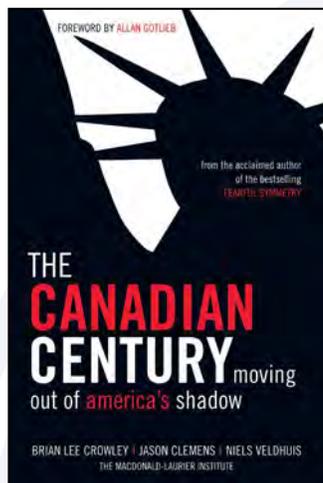
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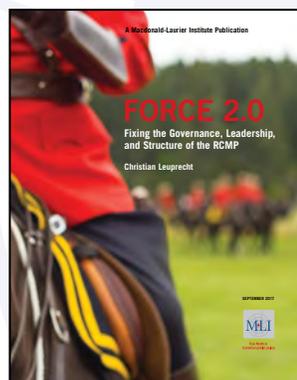
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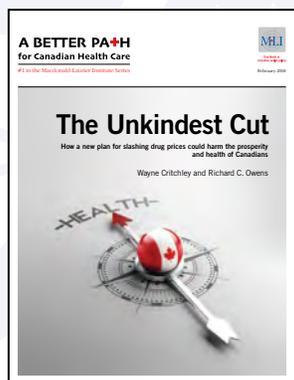
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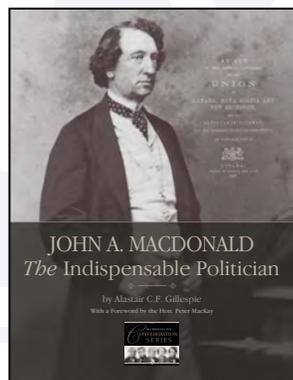
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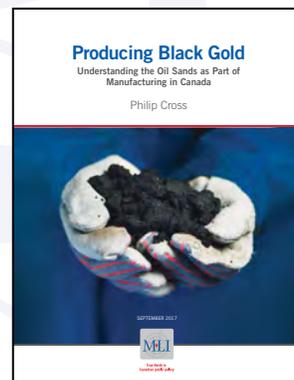
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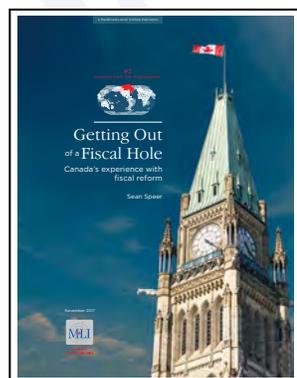
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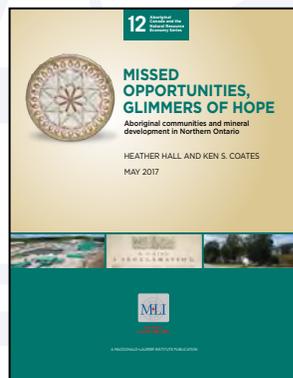
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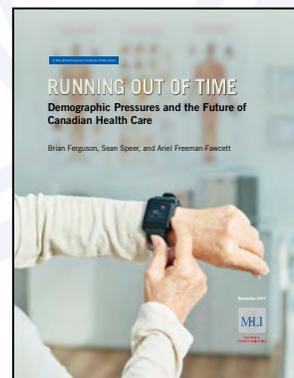
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