



**CANADIAN GLOBAL AFFAIRS INSTITUTE**  
**INSTITUT CANADIEN DES AFFAIRES MONDIALES**

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by Hugh Segal  
August 2018

# POLICY PERSPECTIVE

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**R**eflecting constructively on what is next for Canada and NATO is not only about the depth or superficiality of the American president's transactional obsession with who spends how much. NATO's mission is containing the Russian strategic threat to its members in Eastern Europe, the Arctic, the Middle East and North Atlantic, including threats to NATO residents. A rational point of departure requires understanding how successful hostile Russian initiatives have already been. The reality of damage done to NATO members and potential partners cannot be overstated and should not be minimized:

- In Ukraine, Russia used infiltration, false flag tactics, cyber-attacks, virulent disinformation, violence against civilians and electronic hostilities to kill hundreds, down civil air traffic and seize territory (Crimea) in violation of international law;
- In the Middle East, where NATO members have vital national interests, Russian diplomatic and military (Special Forces, land, air and sea) engagement with the regime in Syria supported Bashar al-Assad's endless war crimes, the civilian deaths of hundreds of thousands, the use of chemical weapons, the barrel bombing of children and the forced migration of millions of refugees. Russian forces used civilian bombing runs to test new weapons and continue to prop up the Assad regime;
- Russian collusion with the Iranian regime engaged alliance-building initiatives with Turkey, all seeking to destabilize NATO's Eurasian flank;
- Millions have migrated from the region, precipitating refugee pressure on the EU and NATO;
- Russian cyber-hostilities, disinformation, state troll-sponsored disinformation and blatantly hostile political, social and online media intervention, (including direct financial support of extreme, xenophobic and divisive political forces) have attacked European democracies and distorted the U.K.'s Brexit vote. These actions have also sought to foment the weakening of democratic cohesion domestically and internationally among NATO members, including the United States and Canada, where online Russian tactics have sought to magnify racial and ethnic differences;
- The present 24/7 American media and political obsession with what Russia did or did not attempt on its own or through collusion in the lead-up to November 2016, at some level paralytic to the Executive Branch, is already a massive destabilizing victory for Russian state intelligence;
- President Vladimir Putin's stated "Eurasian culture" goal of destabilizing the West's politics to diminish restraints on his revanchist tactics of broadening territorial, strategic and economic influence and enhanced Russian intimidation, has been measurably advanced;
- Through cyber- and political instruments, Russia is very much at war in eastern and northern Europe from Norway to Estonia, the North Atlantic to Poland, Latvia and



Lithuania, in border zones, in the air, on and under the seas, through economic pressure, diplomatic engagement and the active support of nationalist extremism. Its armed and Special Forces are testing sea lanes, land border proximities and airspace. Russian submarine traffic in the North Atlantic is at an all-time post-Soviet high;



*Figure 1: British military in protective clothing prepare to remove vehicles from a car park in Salisbury, Britain following the discovery of the Novichok nerve agent. (Source: Getty Images)*

- Russia-sourced nerve agents, contrived Interpol “red notices” and other instruments are being used outside of Russia to kill, intimidate and detain opponents of Russia’s illegal and hostile extraterritorial initiatives and domestic corruption;
- With the absence of any NATO or neighbouring country with the intention to attack Russia, the [VOSTOK 2018](#) military exercise planned for mid September is about intimidating eastern and western Europe. The largest exercise since the Cold War, involving three hundred thousand Russian troops - supported by Chinese and Mongolian forces - 1000 military aircraft, 36 000 armoured vehicles, and the entire airborne fleet is a show of kinetic force in support of spreading fear and anxiety. Old style Russian imperialism and authoritarian militarism at its finest.



Whatever the American president's motivation, his decision to use the spending issue as a crude sandpaper assault on NATO's complexion is profoundly helpful to the Putin regime, which has always sought to avoid confronting strong-willed alliances. Putin knows full well that a resolute NATO contributed to the end of the Soviet Union and the last Cold War without a shot being fired. Today, the Putin state apparatus is deployed on TV networks like RT, Russian troll farms and disinformation, in military adventurism in the Middle East, new expenditures on arms and military technology, and political disinformation battles in NATO countries. Putin's apparatus aims at and would benefit immensely from a weakened NATO and a diminished EU. Russia's preferred option has always been to deal with European neighbours on a one-by-one basis.

While a specific kinetic NATO Article 5 military attack on a NATO member has yet to take place since 9/11, certainly the non-kinetic equivalent across a wide range of NATO targets has. Canada's stance inside NATO councils and beyond should be clear and precise on this point. Continued Russian impunity is not an option. It is important to note that Putin's grand plan was ably, if unwittingly, assisted by former president Barack Obama's abdication of his own red line on Syrian chemical weapons. Impunity for Assad meant impunity for Putin. NATO's success in containing Soviet Union adventurism in the past was helped by Soviet understanding that it was not immune from NATO response, including tactical theatre nuclear weapons.

Canada should urge a robust "no impunity" posture on NATO, addressing the new forms of non-kinetic war Russia has unleashed. General Valery Gerasimov, Russia's then-senior military officer, laid out this new Russian battle strategy clearly in 2013. It is tied to creating as close to chaos as possible in competing countries using science, hacking, intelligence, psy-ops, fake news and oligarch financial networks. NATO's greater military depth and capacity have forced Putin's crowd to use asymmetric assets to great effect. A "no impunity" posture should scope, anticipate and be launch-ready with similar non-kinetic NATO attacks on organizations, institutions, media, network and social media infrastructure vital to Putin's power base. Canadian Forces and other NATO allies' forces in Eastern Europe, patrolling the North Atlantic and NATO airspace, constitute a tripwire for a robust response to any Russian border violation. The Russians' non-kinetic battle deployments must be addressed in an engaged and persistent way.

Canada should commit to a multi-million dollar spend directly with NATO and through in-kind tasking of existing Canadian security and intelligence, Special Forces and deployable communications security assets to increase NATO capacity on these non-kinetic, active measure, cyber-defence fronts.

Russia has no incentive to consider treaties on "no cyber first use" or "illegal political intervention in other countries" until it understands the genuine price its society and power structure will face should it not. Working on what those treaties might cover should coincide with robust engagement with the Russian aggressor. Treaties are only attractive to an aggressor, when its aggression is no longer effective.

## ► About the Author

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**Hugh Segal**, a Contributing Fellow of CGAI, is principal of Massey College, chair of the NATO Association of Canada and a Distinguished Fellow at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy and the Queen's School of Policy Studies. He is a former chair of the Senate committees on Foreign Affairs and Anti-Terrorism.

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