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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, October 4, 2017**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Stephen Fuhr**



## Standing Committee on National Defence

Wednesday, October 4, 2017

• (1605)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.)):** Welcome.

My apologies for being late. We have some votes going on in the House, and I anticipate another at 4:35, so you'll probably see us getting ready to move out of here again at that time, but thank you very much for coming.

For the record, I'd like to welcome Marcus Kolga, senior fellow, Macdonald-Laurier Institute, and Andrew Rasiulis, fellow, Canadian Global Affairs Institute.

We'll proceed with you first, Marcus, seeing as you arrived from out of town. You have the floor for up to 10 minutes, and then we'll transfer over to Andrew.

Thank you for coming.

**Mr. Marcus Kolga (Senior Fellow, MacDonald-Laurier Institute, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the committee and Parliament.

It's a great honour to be here to speak with you about Canada's role in NATO, and specifically about information warfare and the serious threat of disinformation.

The sovereignty that we have pooled with our allies is secured by NATO's collective defence. The borders that Canadian Forces are committed to defend in Latvia are, within the context of our defence, equal to those in Canada's Arctic. For Latvian forces, a violation of Canada's Arctic would be regarded as a violation of their own borders.

To support this, Canada has taken an important lead in NATO's Baltic Operation Reassurance. As a framework country for NATO's enhanced forward presence in Latvia, Canada has contributed more than 450 of the 1,138 NATO member country troops.

A decade ago, no one would have imagined that Canadian troops would return to European soil to defend our allied states and deter conflict, nor did anyone predict the isolationist trajectory that the United States has adopted over the past year.

When looking at Canada's role in NATO, we should have no illusions about Vladimir Putin's foreign policy objectives. His goal is to establish his regime status as a superpower and to grow its influence and dominance by destabilizing western democracies and eroding confidence in our systems and institutions.

This active phase of his policy started in 2007 when the Russian embassy in Estonia helped provoke ethnic conflict by instigating and staging mass riots to protest the relocation of a Soviet war monument. The destruction in Tallinn was followed by the first ever state-initiated cyber-attacks when Estonian government, media, and banking web servers were taken offline with denial of service attacks.

The experience that the Kremlin acquired from fomenting conflicts in both Estonia and later in the republic of Georgia would be applied to a much more ambitious Ukrainian project in 2014, when unidentified armed soldiers appeared in the Crimean Peninsula.

The Kremlin mirrored tactics used by the Soviet Union during the 1940 occupation of the Baltic states when Joseph Stalin installed puppet regimes in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and they elected overwhelmingly to join the Soviet Union. In the similar modern Ukrainian case, a sham referendum was staged by the Kremlin in Crimea in 2014, resulting in the literally unbelievable result of 96% support for Crimea joining Russia.

The Kremlin's tactics in Ukraine became popularly known as “hybrid warfare”, combining active measures, *maskirovka*, or “deception” as it's known in Russian, disinformation, and kinetic warfare.

In February 2013, Russia's chief of the general staff, General Valery Gerasimov, declared that political destabilization through non-military tactics, including information warfare, psychological operations, and cyber ops would be the preferred method of winning future conflicts for Russia.

As U.S. analyst Molly McKew has written:

Chaos is the strategy the Kremlin pursues: Gerasimov specifies that the objective is to achieve an environment of permanent unrest and conflict....

This applies to not only individual states like Estonia, Ukraine, the United States, and Canada, but also super and transnational institutions like the European Union and NATO.

The Kremlin objective for NATO is to demoralize, weaken, and disrupt relations with the hope of wreaking havoc on alliance cohesion in order to control neighbouring states.

On the surface, Russian disinformation or active measures may seem like a U.S. or eastern European problem. However, the Kremlin has been manipulating Canadian media for nearly a decade, with Russia Today, or RT as it's known, Sputnik, and Canadian-based conspiracy media outlets and Kremlin proxy organizations and groups.

Recent Kremlin disinformation about Canadian Forces in Latvia demonstrates the raw crudeness that such campaigns take on. In one case, Minister Sajjan's appearance and turban were exploited by pro-Kremlin media in Latvia to stoke anti-Muslim sentiments among Russian-speaking populations. In June, another Russian-speaking outlet used a photo of convicted murderer Russell Williams to promote a negative and manufactured story about Canadian soldiers promoting homosexuality in Latvia.

Here in Canada, articles intended to sow doubt about Canada's mission in the Baltic appear in the mainstream media. A Halifax newspaper and *The Hill Times* have published articles mischaracterizing Baltic freedom fighters who resisted Soviet occupation as Nazism.

• (1610)

The Kremlin's information warfare campaign represents the greatest threat to western democracy and its institutions since the Cold War. It is designed to divide our societies, amplify and aggravate differences, and pit us against each other. It erodes confidence in our own democracy and our cohesion as a nation. Disinformation, designed to disorient and confuse us, undermines our liberal democratic systems, institutions, and processes, including our elections.

NATO has recognized this by establishing a strategic communications centre in Riga. Other nations have developed their own robust defensive "stratcom" centres. A centre for countering hybrid threats opened this week in Helsinki. The Canadian government, to my understanding, has not yet become a member. In 2015 the Canadian government did fund a NATO training program in Riga that teaches advanced counter-propaganda techniques designed to help member states assess and counter Russian propaganda in Eastern Europe.

How do agents of pro-Kremlin disinformation operate in Canada? Whom do they target and how do they do it? My own experience with Kremlin disinformation goes back almost a decade, when in 2008 pro-Kremlin trolls hijacked the identity of my late grandfather, of whose experience in the Soviet Gulag I made a documentary film for Canadian television. A bogus social media account was created with publicly available images, and anti-western and neo-Nazi content was posted to that account. In addition to that account, I received a number of threatening messages, including an email with a photo of a bomb attached to it. Although clumsy and ineffective, the intent was to discredit and ultimately silence my voice.

In 2014, in response to Canada's sanctions against the Putin regime for its illegal annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin placed sanctions against 13 Canadian members of Parliament. One of them is a member of this committee. Another one is the current Minister of Foreign Affairs. While such action may be dismissed as political tit-for-tat, the ultimate intent is to discredit sanctioned individuals in the hope of silencing their voices.

Conspiracy media outlets are often used to publish stories that support Kremlin policies that align with the Putin regime's narrative. One such site is Global Research. It's based in Montreal. The outlet is run by a University of Montreal professor, Mikhail Chossudovsky. They regularly publish pieces about conspiracy theories, including 9/11 truthers, the Bilderberg group, the CIA weather modification

plans, and U.S.-NATO conspiracies to dominate the world. Global Research and Professor Chossudovsky are part of a broader global network called the 4th Media, which includes various Kremlin state-funded outlets, including Russia Today, as well as Syrian state media agency SANA, and others.

In January of this year, just days after Chrystia Freeland was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, John Helmer, a frequent Global Research contributor, posted an article entitled "Victim or Aggressor—Chrystia Freeland's Family Record for Nazi War Profiteering, and Murder of the Cracow Jews". The article featured information about Minister Freeland's grandfather's activities in Nazi-occupied Poland, which were uncovered by Helmer's Polish collaborator, Stanislas Balcerac, who, not surprisingly, also writes for another pro-Kremlin outlet, called Russia Insider. The piece, as Canadian journalist Terry Glavin aptly describes it, mis-characterizes Minister Freeland as "secretly itching to draw Canada into a showdown with Russia because of the seething hatreds she inherited from her Ukrainian grandfather", and as just "dangerous". The piece was later summarized by another Global Research regular, Arina Tsukanova, and was eventually picked up by the Canadian national media. The article was then promoted by Kremlin proxy organizations in Canada, including the Russian Congress of Canada, which loudly demanded Minister Freeland's resignation.

Once disinformation like this has been created, the Kremlin uses a vast set of social media and proxy tools to amplify their narrative. In the United States, we now know that the Kremlin used social media channels to supercharge partisan anger that likely altered the course of the 2016 presidential election. On Facebook alone, over 10 million people viewed Kremlin-connected ads, and Twitter recently shut down hundreds of fake accounts used by Kremlin-linked agents.

In Canada, the Kremlin's anti-western messaging has a wide-open channel into almost every Canadian home through their state media channel, Russia Today, or RT, as it's known. It's available on basic analog cable and is offered on almost all basic news add-on packages by cable and satellite providers, including Bell and Rogers.

In the United States, the justice department has told RT that they must register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. This decision was in part based on a report by the U.S. intelligence community, which identified the dangerous effects of Russian state media in the U.S. Of the Kremlin's influence on the 2016 U.S. elections, the report clearly states the following:

Russia's state-run propaganda machine—comprised of its domestic media apparatus, outlets targeting global audiences such as RT and Sputnik, and a network of quasi-government trolls—contributed to the influence campaign by serving as a platform for Kremlin messaging to Russian and international audiences.

In Canada, the Kremlin uses a network of proxy groups and individuals to communicate its narratives to Canadians, including opinion and decision-makers. Among them are influence agents who veil themselves in academia and belong to seemingly benign organizations, such as Vladimir Putin's Valdai club, which is a group of pro-Kremlin scholars.

•(1615)

Finally, in spring 2016, Natalia Veselnitskaya, the Kremlin lawyer who is at the middle of the current Russia-gate scandal in Washington, also took aim to discredit Russian pro-democracy and Magnitsky legislation activists in Canada on social media. Her messaging resulted in a request being sent by a member of the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, Georgy Fedorov, to the prosecutor general's office of the Russian Federation to investigate a human rights event in Toronto that I organized along with former Justice Minister Irwin Cotler and included the participation of leading Russian opposition leaders Vladimir Kara-Murza, Zhanna Nemtsova, and anti-corruption crusader, Bill Browder. All of this was, again, clearly intended to intimidate and silence Kremlin critics in Canada.

Mr. Chairman and honourable members, democracy and truth in Canada and the western world are under attack, and there is no reason or evidence suggesting any improvement in the near future. Combatting the threat of non-kinetic hybrid warfare is not as complicated as it may appear. It does require funding, and it requires dedicated resources. Disinformation and influence campaigns need to be actively monitored, and we must proactively develop and communicate narratives that challenge propaganda that is aimed at undermining our democracy and that of our allies.

Just as cyber-attacks are aimed at inflicting damage on our communities by crippling and disabling critical infrastructure, information warfare does so by crippling and disabling our society. Our democracy depends on the free exchange of ideas and well-informed public debate. As nefarious regimes try to erode our trust in them, Canada must adapt to these new challenges and adopt a leadership role among our transatlantic allies in NATO and elsewhere to combat disinformation and defend our sovereign democratic systems.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your comments.

Mr. Rasiulis, you have the floor.

**Mr. Andrew Rasiulis (Fellow, Canadian Global Affairs Institute, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

I am pleased to have the opportunity today to provide you with my insight on Canada's role in NATO, specifically our two operations in Latvia and Ukraine. I will also provide you with some thoughts on how these military operations may position Canada to work toward a diplomatic settlement of the conflict in Ukraine.

The Canadian Armed Forces today are actively engaged with two operations supporting NATO missions along its eastern flank. First, Canada has taken a lead role in the establishment of a battalion-sized battle group in Latvia known as Operation Reassurance as part of NATO's enhanced forward presence to deter Russian use of force against NATO territory, which is an article 5 commitment. Operation Reassurance also includes air force commitments of six fighter jets—a six-pack—to provide air protection along NATO's eastern and southern flanks, as well as our naval frigate committed to tasks in the Mediterranean and Black seas. Canada is one of four NATO countries to take such a prominent role. The other three battalion

groups in this deterrence initiative are led by the U.K. in Estonia, Germany in Lithuania, and the U.S. in Poland. This has placed Canada's commitment squarely on the politico military map.

Canada's second operation is a NATO out-of-area training and capacity-building mission in Ukraine. While not a member of NATO and therefore not subject to article 5 provisions of defence and deterrence, Ukraine is a long-standing NATO partner under the auspices of the partnership for peace, or PfP. Within the mandate of Operation Unifier, the Canadian Armed Forces' mission is to assist in modernizing and reforming the Ukrainian military. This operation is keyed to the larger NATO and European Union aim of assisting Ukraine with its declared policy of reform and battle against the Russian-supported rebel uprising in the eastern Donbass. With such a substantive military commitment on Canada's part to NATO, it is appropriate to reflect on why NATO is important to Canadian foreign and defence interests, that is, why NATO and why it matters.

According to NATO's first secretary general, Lord Ismay, NATO was formed in 1949 to “keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down”. Remarkably, by the end of the Cold War in 1991, the Soviet Union version of “the Russians” ceased to be a threat; the Americans had fully stayed the course in their defence engagement of the North Atlantic area, and Germany had unified and become a leading and fully integrated member of NATO and the European Union. This successful outcome did not, however, obviate the requirement for the alliance, nor of Canada's commitment. Rather, a transition period followed the Cold War that involved the expansion of the alliance through co-operation with former members of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. At the same time, Russia, as the successor state to the Soviet Union, felt that its interests in the post-Cold War period had been betrayed and resumed a more aggressive use of military force to reinforce its foreign and domestic interests.

Canadian diplomats were keenly aware in the formation of NATO in 1949 that a key tenet of Canadian defence policy since Confederation had been that Canadian interests are best served as part of a coalition. Originally, as part of the British Empire, Canadian expeditionary forces served in the Nile Expedition, the Boer War and the First World War. In the Second World War, they were part of the British Commonwealth. With the emergence of the Cold War, Canadian interests were served by promoting a North Atlantic coalition which, importantly, mitigated the historical American predilection for isolationism.

Canadian interests, however, went further than provisions for military defence within a North Atlantic coalition. Rather, Canadian diplomats pushed aggressively for article 2 of the Washington Treaty that established NATO. Known as the “Canadian article”, its purpose was to define NATO as more than a defence alliance by including a reference to economic co-operation. While article 2 did not lead to much in and of itself, Canadian interests of economic association and integration within the North Atlantic were echoed in then Prime Minister Trudeau's third option of the 1970s and finally, the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, or CETA, in 2016, under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

●(1620)

Canadian military forces initially deployed to Europe as part of Canada's commitment at the outbreak of the Korean War. Simultaneously, Canadian Forces fought with the UN coalition in Korea and deployed to Europe as part of NATO's deterrent. The European commitment remained generally steadfast throughout the Cold War. Adjustments and reductions were made under Pierre Trudeau, who was skeptical of the need to sustain a Canadian military presence in West Germany. Chancellor Helmut Schmidt leveraged an appeal to Trudeau to keep the Canadian presence, playing on Trudeau's economic third option with the famous quip, “no tanks, no trade”, and Canadian troops remained.

As the Cold War ended, the Canadian military deployments became focused on coalition peacekeeping and then peace support missions. Other than a small, logistical component remaining in Germany in Geilenkirchen, the Canadian Forces consolidated around their permanent bases in Canada.

Canadian policy interests dictated that the Canadian Armed Forces remain engaged in the reform and transformation of post-Cold War eastern and southeastern Europe. NATO established a Partnership for Peace in 1994 with the former members of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. Canada's contribution to this mission was made under the auspices of DND's military training assistance program, MTAP, and subsequently renamed the military training co-operation program, MTCP.

Under the auspices of the MTCP, the Canadian Armed Forces worked alongside NATO allies to promote defence reform and governance with the partner countries. Canadian values were built into these training co-operations and capacity-building efforts. The partner countries differed in the speed and intensity of their transformation and reform. Some chose the path of integration with NATO, while others remained as partners. For example, the Baltic states, including Latvia, eventually became NATO members whereas others—

●(1625)

**The Chair:** Mr. Rasiulis, may I interrupt you for a second. I need to address this.

The bells are ringing. Do we have at least a will to stay for an extra 10 minutes before we adjourn?

**Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** We should definitely hear the witness.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Rasiulis, sorry to interrupt.

**Mr. Andrew Rasiulis:** I have two more paragraphs, thank you.

**The Chair:** We'll stay for an additional 10 minutes.

**Mr. Andrew Rasiulis:** Thank you very much.

For example, the Baltic states, including Latvia, became NATO members, whereas others, such as Ukraine, remained active partners of the alliance as PfP partners.

The dramatic events of 2014 in Ukraine over the issue of greater integration with the European Union and NATO led to active military confrontation with eastern Ukrainian rebels, supported by Russia, as well as the Russian seizure and annexation of Crimea. NATO's military response was twofold: one, to strengthen and reaffirm its article 5 commitment to defend NATO allies through a posture of enhanced deterrence while keeping open the option of dialogue with Russia; and two, to significantly increase NATO training and reform and capacity-building efforts with the Ukrainian armed forces. The Canadian response was in keeping with its traditional foreign and defence interests and effective participation as a firm NATO ally. Both the Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau governments built on the precedents of previous commitments. The Canadian Armed Forces have, therefore, returned to Europe under Operation Reassurance and deployed to Latvia with 450 personnel, where they are the lead nation for the battle group forming a key part of NATO's enhanced deterrence effort.

In Ukraine, the MTCP's capacity-building efforts have been dramatically increased with the deployment of 200 personnel under Operation Unifier. The Canadian Armed Forces' active participation and leading role on NATO's eastern flank continue to serve and promote Canada's interest in achieving greater security in Europe. The efforts in Latvia and Ukraine should be matched now by active diplomacy to achieve an eventual understanding with Russia and return to future co-operation rather than confrontation. In recent weeks, for example, there has been an increased discussion on potential avenues to seek a diplomatic solution to the conflict in the Ukraine.

While the Minsk II process agreed to in early 2015 forms the basis of such diplomacy, the framework itself remains moribund. The fundamental stumbling block for Ukraine is the provision for constitutional reform in Ukraine, essentially decentralizing control of the Donetsk and the Luhansk Oblasts. For Russia, it is the restoration of control of the state border to the Ukrainian government in the whole conflict zone.

To assist the process of conflict resolution, two diversion proposals for UN peacekeeping have been under discussion. In the Russian version, there is the provision for Russian troops being part of the force, similar to the pattern Russia brokered in the post-Soviet conflicts in Moldova and Georgia, essentially trilateral forces, of which the Russians are one of the three. The Ukrainian version is the more traditional UN formula of a force consisting of troops drawn from neutral countries. The two proposals also differ in the areas of the deployment of the force itself. President Poroshenko has asked Canada to consider playing a role in such a force, and the Canadian government is giving due consideration.

These are early days in this discussion, but it offers Canada an opportunity to use its vast peacekeeping experience to play a useful and objective role in conflict resolution.

Thank you for your kind attention.

● (1630)

**The Chair:** Thank you for your testimony.

Given the time we have left, we have time for one question, the seven-minute question, and one spot left. I'll give it to Mr. McKay. If he wants to pass that time around to somebody else, I'll leave that up to him.

Mr. McKay, you have the floor.

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Ironically, Mr. Chair, I am going to do it in an unusual fashion. Normally I ask very short questions and ask for answers, but this time I'm going to read into the record bits and pieces of letters I have received, which I think will be of interest to all colleagues here, and which I think are right on point with what Mr. Kolga's testimony was about.

All of us received from the Russian Congress of Canada a letter dated June 15, a statement of the Russian Congress regarding the "announced adoption of the so-called Magnitsky Act, Bill S-226".

In it they say that it is a "dangerous precedent" and "divisive identity politics" that is "further closing dialogue with Russia" at this time.

In addition, they say that the "Foreign Affairs Committee in the House of Commons heard only one side of the Magnitsky controversy", and it was detrimental to Russia's interests.

They say that Magnitsky was an accountant, not a lawyer—somehow or another that's very important—and that Magnitsky was "arrested and put in a pre-trial detention facility" and "After 11 months...he died".

"The official Russian investigation...did not find any evidence of maltreatment or torture", they say. "The reports of his beating by prison officials...have not been based on empirical or documentary evidence." However, just in case it's possibly true, "several high-level functionaries in the prison system" and the bureaucracy "were fired or demoted".

They go on to say that they won't do it again, because they've changed the law. Then they say that the "death of Sergei Magnitsky was unfortunate indeed".

Like all colleagues, I dismissed this as a bit of a crank letter. After I read that into the record last Monday night in the debate, we got an opinion from the very person you quoted, Mr. Kolga, namely, Natalia Veselnitskaya, who had some dealings with the Trump administration. This sentence is the most incoherent sentence I've seen a lawyer read. I'll read it to you, and if any of us can make any sense out of it, I'd be appreciative. Natalia Veselnitskaya wrote:

Now, a "new Prevezon" on the example of the new "Denis Katsyv" will appear in Canada, "having received a dollar from the blood money stolen from the people of Russia", cases would be initiated, will bring Russian judges and prosecutors on the lists of "non-entry" to Canada, as if they were ever there at all or were going to visit, their mythical assets will be arrested, and the cases will "go out" for years with zero results until the generation of these politicians ready to betray their people and dance to the tune of a transnational criminal group will change.

By the way, we are the politicians who have betrayed our people, which again, you would dismiss as crank nonsense.

Yesterday evening I received a letter from the Russian Embassy, signed by the press secretary, Kirill Kalinin. He references a couple of articles where prisoners have died in Canadian jails, as if these deaths of Canadian prisoners are analogous to the torture and death of Mr. Magnitsky.

So, I would say that it's here, it's present, and it's real, and it's very interesting that we should be having the Magnitsky debate at the same time that we're talking about this very thing.

Mr. Kolga, what are your comments?

● (1635)

**Mr. Marcus Kolga:** Well—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but I am going to have to hold it there. It's unfortunate that we won't be able to engage with you. We might be able to make arrangements to circle back.

However, our parliamentary duty calls, and I'll have to adjourn at this point.

Thank you very much, though, and I appreciate your patience.







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