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## CANADIAN ARMED FORCES INFORMATION OPERATIONS CAN CANADA COMPETE WITH RUSSIA?

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**JCSP 43 DL**

***Exercise Solo Flight***

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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## **CANADIAN ARMED FORCES INFORMATION OPERATIONS CAN CANADA COMPETE WITH RUSSIA?**

Upon the conclusion of the Cold War, Canada withdrew its brigade from the European theatre, leaving only small exchanges and staffings, such as with the Airborne Warning and Control unit or at SHAPE Headquarters. There were peacekeeping missions in the European theater, but they were largely characterized and dominated by the local belligerents. Russia, marked by its invasion of Georgia in 2008, has continued to become more aggressive and interventionist in its near abroad and beyond. “The Kremlin has changed its [once collaborative] course and opted for a policy of aggressive territorial revisionism, internal authoritarianism and ideological closure.”<sup>1</sup>

This new normal of Russian behavior has seen the invasion and annexation of parts of Ukraine and bellicose actions and threats in the Baltics, both territories that Canada has since deployed. “During the Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2014, the world was confronted by the Kremlin’s most massive and incisive propaganda offensive of the past 70 years.”<sup>2</sup> Four years later there is still no sign of a return to the status quo ante bellum. Regarding the Baltics, and specifically Latvia where Canada has semi-permanently deployed 450 troops, Russia continues to threaten and undermine the civilian authority. It is said that Putin “waits, he postures, and he looks for opportunities, and when he sees weakness, he acts.... Putin has his eye on the Baltics,

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<sup>1</sup> Van Herpen, Marcel, “Putin’s Propaganda Machine”, Rowman & Littlefield. 2016. p 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p 1.

north Kazakhstan, wherever Russians are living in the near abroad. He will wait as long as it takes and he will act decisively.”<sup>3</sup>

Much of the underlying success for such destabilizing activities is due to aggressive and preparatory Russian Information Operations (IO). With Canada now deployed into Russia’s near abroad with a mandate to bring reassurance and stability, it must supply a robust challenge to such activities. However, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) structure and employment of IO is insufficient to meet current Russian IO activity in our deployed theatres of Latvia and Ukraine. Russian IO is sophisticated, well-funded and pervasive. American Major General Wilson Shoffner said "If we don’t win the information fight, then the maneuver fight may not matter because we may not get to it.”<sup>4</sup> IO is key to military success and the CAF must substantially increase its IO capacity in order to meet the demands of the modern security environment, and particularly in theatres of Russian interest.

This essay will examine Russian IO doctrine, capabilities, strategy and employment. I will compare the related aspects the CAF has available. It will conclude with specific looks at the Ukraine and Latvian theatres and what each country can and is able to employ in the IO fight.

Over the past decade, Russian has demonstrated sophisticated and well-funded IO capabilities that have furthered its strategic interests in Central Asia and Europe. It also has demonstrated the ability to destabilize European, Asian and North American countries, publics and political systems. The ability for Canada to meet this threat is currently limited.

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<sup>3</sup> Schoen, Douglas, “Putin's Master Plan: To Destroy Europe, Divide NATO, and Restore Russian Power and Global Influence,” Encounter Books. 2016. p 4.

<sup>4</sup> Shoffner, Wilson, Major General, DCOS COM / RSM. Afghanistan 2015.

In Canadian and NATO doctrine “IO is focused on affecting will, understanding, and capability through military information activities”<sup>5</sup> Psychological Operations (PsyOps), a subset of IO, are “planned activities using methods of communication and other means directed at approved audiences in order to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, affecting the achievement of political and military objectives.”<sup>6</sup> In accordance with NATO policy on PsyOps approval of such campaigns are required at the level of the North Atlantic Council.<sup>7</sup> This council is the political decision making body of NATO’s 29 members where “policies decided in the NAC are the expression of the collective will of all member countries of the Alliance since decisions are made on the basis of unanimity and common accord.”<sup>8</sup> That means that any type of PsyOps must be coordinated and face unanimous consensus approval by the politicians of 29 member countries, which, as we know, often see things very differently. As such, the ability to coordinate and implement coherent effective IO strategies is fraught with bureaucracy and compromise. Were Canada to seek specific messages and campaigns in Ukraine or Latvia, such approval, and compromise is required. Canada, also being an open democracy, sees much reporting and scrutiny of its military activities. Full mobilization of state power containing untruthful and questionable practices is not possible. It has also committed to only “white PsyOps” which is from “an accurately acknowledge source.”<sup>9</sup> Also meaning that it is based on factual information and truthfully indicating the disseminator – NATO, Canada, etc.

Russians, and like all other nations, including Canada, have been employing IO for centuries. However, Russia has a much longer and grander history. In 1839 the book *Lettres de*

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5 NATO, Allied Joint Publication 3.10.1 Allied Joint Doctrine for Psychological Operations, NATO, Brussels. p XI.

6 Ibid. p 1-1.

7 Ibid. p 4.

8 NATO, *North Atlantic Council*. [https://www.nato.int/eps/ic/natohq/topics\\_49763.htm](https://www.nato.int/eps/ic/natohq/topics_49763.htm). Accessed 26 May 2018.

9 NATO, *Bi-SC Psychological Operations Hand Book*, NATO, Belgium. 2015. p 57.

Russie, stated that “lies and deception were an integral part of Russian society”<sup>10</sup> and that “social life is a permanent conspiracy against the truth.”<sup>11</sup> However, “the contemporary Russian propaganda effort has a completely new character”<sup>12</sup>. This new doctrine is best embodied by the work of General Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the Russian General Staff, in February 2013 called New Generation Warfare. In it he talks about “a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace”<sup>13</sup> and says that the conduct of wars has changed as they are no longer declared and, having begun, they move in different and unfamiliar directions.<sup>14</sup>

These actions combine information operations with “cyber warfare, legal warfare, economic war, and any other activities that are directly linked to the designated strategic outcome.”<sup>15</sup> The Russians have proven since 2008 that employing these methods “can, in a very short period of time, throw a stable and thriving state into a web of chaos, humanitarian upheaval, and outright civil war, making it susceptible to foreign intervention.”<sup>16</sup>

While Canada, following the NATO IO doctrine sees collaboration between multiple information bodies, such as Public Affairs, CIMIC, PsyOps and HumInt within a military context, the integration with the full apparatus of state power is absent. Also, equipment is lacking with Brigade Information Activities (IA) cells equipped only with printers, short range radios and loudspeakers.

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10 Marquis de Custine, *Lettres de Russie: La Russie en 1839*, ed. Pierre Nora. Paris. Gallimard, 1957. P 370.

11 Ibid. P 370.

12 Van Herpen, Marcel, “Putin’s Propaganda Machine”, Rowman & Littlefield. 2016. p 3.

13 Mark Galeotti, *The ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’ and Russian Non-Linear War*, (blog in Moscow’s shadows), <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06>. Accessed 27 May 2018.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Chekinov, S.G Col (Res.), Lt. Gen. S.A. Bogdanov (Ret.), *The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War (Military Thought: A Russian Journal of Military Theory and Strategy)*, [http://www.eastviewpress.com/Files/MT\\_FROM%20THE%20CURRENT%20ISSUE\\_No.4\\_2013.pdf](http://www.eastviewpress.com/Files/MT_FROM%20THE%20CURRENT%20ISSUE_No.4_2013.pdf). Accessed 28 May 2018.

Far more aggressive than Canadian doctrine, New Generation Warfare sees a state collapsing through social upheaval before war is declared. Gerasimov states “The very ‘rules of war’ have changed...[through] the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures—applied in coordination.”<sup>17</sup>

“Gerasimov also comprehends that new information technologies have allowed much of this change to occur, [allowing] widespread use of asymmetrical possibilities for reducing the fighting potential of the enemy, particularly through the use of influence operations.”<sup>18</sup> Unlike NATO, or Canada, these activities are decided by Putin, and coordinated from the Kremlin through the military and other state apparatus.

With this underlying history and doctrine, Russia has vastly increased resources and employment since 2008, and particularly 2011. “In the fall of 2013 the newspaper Novaya Gazeta exposed a farm of trolls writing away in a suburb of St Petersburg known as Olgino. There the employees were paid... to post comments on blogs and news articles.”<sup>19</sup> “By the end of 2014 [they] numbered 250. They worked in twelve hour shifts and were required to post 135 comments a day.”<sup>20</sup>

In 2015, a budget “increase of 41 percent was earmarked for RT – the Kremlin’s international cable” and some of these funds will be used to launch German language and French language channels alongside the existing channels in English, Arabic and Spanish.”<sup>21</sup>

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17 Ibid.

18 Balasevicius, Tony, *Looking for Little Green Men: Understanding Russia’s Employment of Hybrid Warfare*, Canadian Military Journal. Volume 17, #3. 2017.

19 Soldatov, Andrei, “The Red Web”, Public Affairs. 2015. p 283.

20 Ibid. p 284.

21 Van Herpen, Marcel, “Putin’s Propaganda Machine”, Rowman & Littlefield. 2016. p 10.

“The new Propaganda unit Rossiya Segodnya, which combines the former news agency RIA Novosti and the radio station Voice of Russia, is treated with even greater generosity: in 2015 its budget will be increased by 250 percent.”<sup>22</sup>

The agency “set up accounts on a Russian replica of YouTube, known as Rutube; on YouTube itself; and on VKontakte (popular Russian language version of Facebook), Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and Odnoklassniki.”<sup>23</sup> “The videos were then picked up by conventional pro-Kremlin TV channels and disseminated domestically and internationally.”<sup>24</sup> Ukraine for instance, saw this activity:

False reports from the east of Ukraine and fake photographs of purported atrocities and victims flooded VKontakte and Facebook. Photographs of casualties from the war in Syria were doctored and resented as coming from the Ukraine provinces of Luhansk or Nonetsk. The trolls claimed the violence was caused by Ukrainian “fascists” and sometimes borrowed images from war movies to make their point.<sup>25</sup>

In Ukraine “the Kremlin is able to make use of the relative openness of the Western media world for the Russian propaganda offensive.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, using the deception and “by exaggerating the negative aspects beyond proportion and mixing them with invented “facts” the Kremlin succeeded in convincing a section of the Western public of its version of the events”<sup>27</sup> of what was occurring in Ukraine.

This is possible because of four developments “the unprecedented generous budgets allocated to propaganda efforts; the profound modernization of the propaganda machinery and

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22 Ibid. p 10.

23 Red Web. P 284-285.

24 Red Web. p 285.

25 Soldatov, Andrei, “The Red Web”, Public Affairs. 2015. p 284.

26 Van Herpen, Marcel, “Putin’s Propaganda Machine”, Rowman & Littlefield. 2016. p 3.

27 Ibid. p 4.



the sophisticate and elaborate psychological know how with which this new information warfare is conducted.”<sup>28</sup> Finally, the “highly professional way, all media - not only TV, radio , and the press, but the internet and social media also – are employed in the promotion of the Kremlin’s message.”<sup>29</sup>

With this capability and capacity “the Kremlin is able to adapt its message with great ingenuity and flexibility to respective audiences in different countries.”<sup>30</sup>

These developments prompted then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton in 2011 to say, that “we are engaged in an information war and we are losing that war.”<sup>31</sup> She concluded that “we are paying a big price” for dismantling international communication networks after the end of the Cold War”.<sup>32</sup>

Amidst all this where is Canada? Currently Canada’s IO capability is resident in a Public Affairs branch located mainly in the Regular Force and an Information Activities (IA) capability resident in the Reserves, and consisting of PsyOps, CIMIC and a coordination cell. Typical IA organizations are 52 personnel strong and located in each of the 110 Reserve brigades. Such organizations are comprised of part time soldiers and are coordinated by cells in Army divisions with a doctrine and training function in Kingston.

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28 Ibid. p 3.

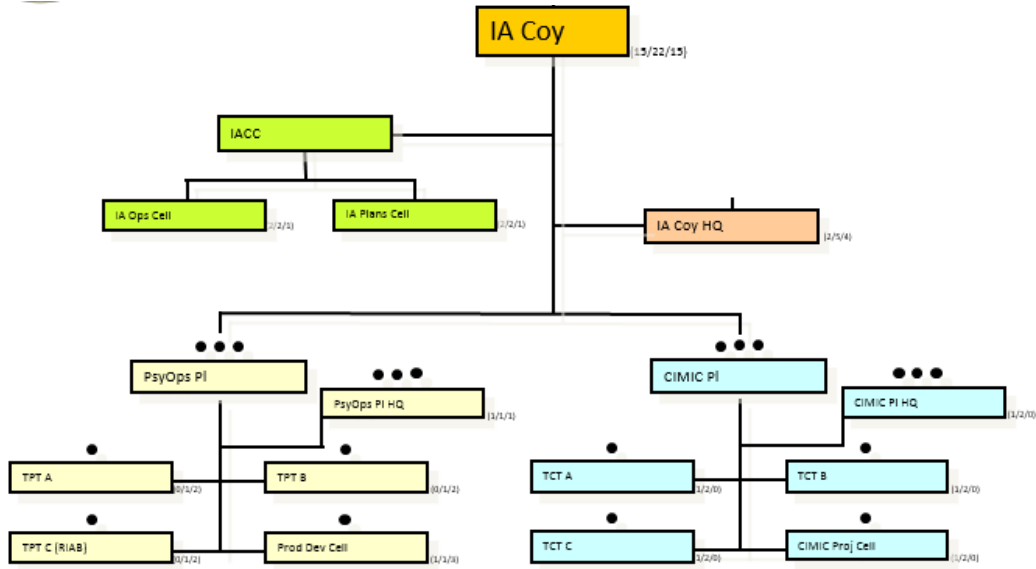
29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid. p 6

32 Van Herpen, Marcel, “Putin’s Propaganda Machine”, Rowman & Littlefield. 2016. p 6.

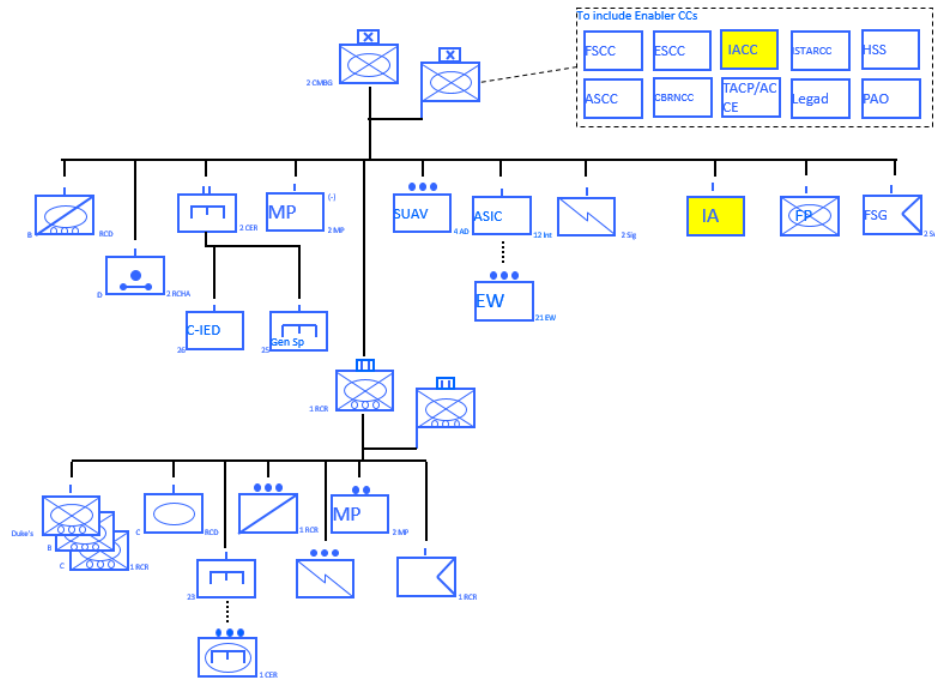
### Reserve Brigade Group IA Structure



Source: 33 CBG Influence Activities Presentation, 2018

IA cells are task tailored and deployed in accordance with the mission requirements. However, the equipment available is limited and by no means comparable with the immense state resources Russia Provides.

### Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group Structure Including IA



Source: 33 CBG Influence Activities Presentation, 2018

Turing to Strong Secure Engaged: Canada's New Defence Policy (SSE), one sees Hybrid Warfare briefly referred to, and only this to say: "The use of hybrid methods presents challenges in terms of detection, attribution and response for Canada."<sup>33</sup> Out of 111 initiatives in SSE, only two relate to the IO challenges Canada faces: # 65, which aims to "improve cryptographic capabilities, information operations capabilities, and cyber capabilities."<sup>34</sup> And # 76, which promises to "enhance existing roles assigned to Reserve Force units and formations, including Information Operations (including Influence Activities)."<sup>35</sup> For the foreseeable future IO will remain principally the realm of an underfunded and underequipped Reserve Force.

SSE does not appear to articulate a sound understanding of the Russian IO threat and the means to counter it, indicating it will "examine its capabilities to understand and operate in the information environment, in support of the conduct of information and influence operations."<sup>36</sup> In other words, while Russia has a clear, operationally proven doctrine and extremely robust capability, Canada must *examine* what capabilities it possesses and try to understand what the Russians are doing.

It appears clear in every respect, doctrine, unity of command, capability, operational integration, that the Russian doctrine, force structure and employment of IO is superior to every comparable Canadian aspect.

Andrei Soldatov, regarded as the single most prominent critic of Russia's surveillance system, says that "Putin is a calculating master of geopolitics with a master plan to divide

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33 Department of National Defence. Strong Secure Engaged, <http://dgpaapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>SSE. Canada. 2017. p 53.

34 Ibid. p 110.

35 Department of National Defence. Strong Secure Engaged, <http://dgpaapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>SSE. Canada. 2017. p 69.

36 Ibid. p 66.

Europe, destroy NATO, re-establish Russian influence in the world, and, most of all, marginalize the U.S. and the West to achieve regional hegemony and global power. And his plan is working.”<sup>37</sup>

“Interventions in Moldova (1992), Georgia (1992, 1994 and 2008) and Ukraine (2014) have followed a common pattern where Russia perceives an oppressed minority, deploys military force to prevent this oppression, and a residual Russian military presence in the state.”<sup>38</sup>

The Russian IO campaigns in Latvian/Ukraine theatres where Canadians are deployed for the foreseeable future are unmatched by Canadian capabilities due to the CAF’s limited resources to adequately respond.

Since 2015 Canada has been undertaking a military training mission in Ukraine under Operation UNIFIER “in response to requests from the Government of Ukraine. The intent is to help Ukraine remain sovereign, secure, and stable.”<sup>39</sup>

In April 2014 Canada offered assets, initially CF18s to Operation Reassurance. The mission subsequently combined Land, Air and Naval assets in such countries as Iceland, Romania, the Baltics and Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>40</sup> The mission is “based on the principles of defence, deterrence and de-escalation meant to reinforce NATO’s collective defence and

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37 Schoen, Douglas, “Putin's Master Plan: To Destroy Europe, Divide NATO, and Restore Russian Power and Global Influence,” Encounter Books. 2016. p 2.

38 Kerckhoff, Enno, *Russia's Near-Abroad Interventions: Crazy Like a Fox*, Canadian Military Journal, Volume 17, #4. 2017.

39 Department of National Defence, *Operation Unifier*. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad/op-unifier.page>. Canada. Accessed 27 May 2018.

40 Department of National Defence, *Operation Reassurance*. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-abroad/nato-ee.page>. Canada. Accessed 27 May 2018.

demonstrate the strength of allied solidarity.”<sup>41</sup> In “June, 2017, a Canadian-led NATO enhanced Forward Presence battlegroup Latvia was stood up during a ceremony at Camp Adazi, Latvia.”<sup>42</sup>

The concerns of the Canadian shortcomings in IO in Ukraine are real. “More than two years after the annexation of Crimea, the Alliance has still not developed a coherent strategy to counter Russia’s hybrid war activities in Ukraine.”<sup>43</sup> Because if this, the Canadian and Allied “inaction has created concern among some NATO members with respect to the Alliance’s resolve to *protect*, while others have openly questioned its ability to *stand up* to the Russians.”<sup>44</sup>

Russian IO has seen sustained strategic reach beyond these theatres which impact future freedom of action in them. “A Pew Research Center study conducted in the spring of 2015 finds that “at least half of Germans, French and Italians say their country should not use military force to defend a NATO ally if attacked by Russia.”<sup>45</sup>

Russia, in aiming to disable European resolve, focuses on France and Germany, called the Moscow – Berlin – Paris triangle. In it, “a majority of Germans have developed a positive view of the Russian German relationship...positive views can be found among parties of the right and the left.”<sup>46</sup> “In France there exists a powerful pro-Russia lobby of French companies with business interests in Russia... [and] the extreme right Front National has become a staunch supporter of the Kremlin.”<sup>47</sup>

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41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Balasevicius, Tony, *Looking for Little Green Men: Understanding Russia’s Employment of Hybrid Warfare*, Canadian Military Journal. Volume 17, #3. 2017.

44 Ibid.

45 Schoen, Douglas, “Putin’s Master Plan: To Destroy Europe, Divide NATO, and Restore Russian Power and Global Influence,” Encounter Books. 2016. p 5.

46 Putin’s Propaganda Machine p 12-13

47 Ibid. p 13.

Turning to Britain, in 2010 “The Independent was bought by the ex-KGB agent Alexander Lebedev and France –Soir was bought by Putin’s banker Sergey Pugachev”<sup>48</sup> in 2014.

Russia meddled in recent American and French elections, the British EU vote, and has been involved in the bolstering of right and left wing groups in numerous nations throughout Europe. “The Kremlin or Kremlin related oligarchs were allegedly implicated in the financing of politicians and political parties abroad. The examples come from Britain, France, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Lithuanian and Estonia.”<sup>49</sup>

With such strategic reach, a robust systemic operational capability for the CAF is called for, particularly in Latvia where it is the lead nation carrying NATO’s flag. However, even there “NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said Canadian troops are being smeared by Russia-backed online propaganda aimed at undermining the Alliance, and it may not be long before Canada sees similar tactics being waged within its borders.”<sup>50</sup> “Russian-linked social media accounts have been spreading false or misleading stories about Canadian soldiers, according to Stoltenberg, such as posts accusing them of bad behaviour or living on Latvia’s dime.”<sup>51</sup>

“A Latvian expert in Russian propaganda against NATO, Col. Ilmars A. Lejins, says every country in the alliance with troops in the region has been targeted, and Canada should expect the internet assault to continue.”<sup>52</sup>

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48 Ibid. p 11.

49 Van Herpen, Marcel, “Putin’s Propaganda Machine”, Rowman & Littlefield. 2016. p 11.

50 Bresge, Adina, *NATO head says Canadian troops in Latvia smeared by Russia-backed online propaganda*, Canadian Press, 19 Nov 2017. Accessed 27 May 18.

51 Ibid.

52 Brewster, Murray, *Old Russian fighters and smartphone hacking: What the Canadian military learned in 2017*, CBC News, 3 Jan 2018. Accessed 27 May 18.

Addressing the issues in the Latvian theatre is essential as the “effective defense of the Baltics depends on reducing vulnerabilities to all forms of Russian aggression. The greater the perceived vulnerabilities of the Baltic countries to a particular form of aggression, the more likely that Russia is to undertake it.”<sup>53</sup> In order to do so Canada and “NATO should pursue the development of a more sophisticated and subtle strategic communication campaign, beginning with support for Russian-language television stations backed by the Baltic country governments.”<sup>54</sup> This is partially important because Russian IO is:

controlled and funded by the state, also has a tremendous influence on Russian speakers in the Baltics. Many observers also note that products on Russian media generally have significantly higher production values than locally produced shows, and that even if Russian speakers do understand the titular language media, Russian television in particular is easier and more enjoyable to watch.<sup>55</sup>

“Analysts outside of the Baltic countries generally agree that low-level nonviolent subversion is currently happening and could intensify in the future, although it will pose limited danger of destabilization.”<sup>56</sup>

Therefore, it is critically necessary that Canada create and deploy an IO capacity that is able to stem the tide and address the vast Russian capability.

The Russian state has crafted over the decades, and honed of late, a sophisticated IO capability that employs all manner of state power to great effect. It is unbound by the necessity of truth or morals, has unity of command and is focused entirely on the interests of the Russian state. Such interests encompass the compromise of NATO, the transatlantic alliance, the EU, western publics, and the continued destabilization of theatres Canada operates in. Canada, as a

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53 Randin, Andrew, *Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics, Threats and Potential Responses*, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, USA. 2017. p 2.

54 Ibid. p 2.

55 Ibid. p 18.

56 Ibid. p 13.

democracy and NATO partner are bound by policies and procedures that will always limit the effectiveness of truthful open IO activities. As such, these comparatively limiting operating parameters call even more so for inversely commensurate effective and coordinated resources.

Unless the Canadian Government, across all relevant agencies, and the CAF, substantially increases funding, coordination and sophistication of our IO capabilities, Russia will continue to enjoy a substantial IO advantage, leading to CAF disadvantages in all phases of war and operating environments. Canada will continue to see degradation in our alliances and the western body politic. It is clear that the military cannot conduct such operations in a vacuum.



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