

‘Be Prepared’: Threats and Readiness in an Evolving Security Reality

Colin Robertson

House Standing Committee on National Defence on February 14th. This is a summary of his remarks before the committee.

In our new Parliament, the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence (NDDN) will be busy this week examining Threat Analysis Affecting Canada and the CAF Operational Readiness to meet those threats. It’s a mouthful, but as Boy Scouts and Girl Guides will appreciate, it boils down to “Be Prepared”. A prepared Forces is a prerequisite to Canadian security.

The work of parliamentary committees does not get much notice but their deliberations help build cross-party consensus on public policy, a key to good governance. In their study of operational readiness, members of the National Defence committee need to keep in mind three overriding considerations:

First, we need to rethink how we look at security.

It’s been 18 years since we last conducted a national security review and the threats to Canada continue to evolve. A good starting point is the excellent recent CIGI report Reimagining a Canadian National Security Strategy with companion studies that include a look at democracy and disinformation, biosecurity, autonomous weapons and our border with the United States. As to the mechanics of a review, look to the United Kingdom’s recent year-long integrated review of foreign policy, defence, security and international development that sets out a strategic framework for achieving the UK’s national security and international policy objectives between now and 2025. Not only is it comprehensive and costed-out, but it all got done in a year.

Ours is a meaner, messier world. In his address outlining his priorities for 2022, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned that the rules-based multilateral institutions that Canada helped engineer and sustain are not fit for purpose. Polling confirms what we can see and hear: our citizens have less faith in democratic institutions. While the election of Joe Biden has

resurrected confidence in US leadership, that trust comes with reservations, especially among Europeans.

The threat index has expanded in recent years to embrace climate change, pandemics, terrorism, poverty and inequality. This devil's brew accentuates state and inter-state conflicts resulting in more displaced persons than at any time since the Second World War. Conflict itself is changing, with hybrid warfare, untraceable cyberattacks, disinformation, drones and mercenaries. A politically polarized US is less willing and able to carry the internationalist burden. A rising, aggressive China and a revanchist Russia have revived great power rivalry and the ideological and systemic divide between authoritarianism and democracy.

Canada's strategic culture is of expeditionary forces being sent abroad, through the Boer War, First World War, Second World War, Korean War, with NATO deployments in Europe and multiple peacekeeping operations. In this century, international deployments have included a decade in Afghanistan and more recently in Mali, Iraq, Latvia and Ukraine.

Deployments should be considered through the lens of our national interests and fundamental values. Before making deployments we always need to ask ourselves: what will we gain; what are the risks; what is success; how and when do we get out?

Our national interests are the security of the country and a stable global rules-based order. Our fundamental values start with democracy. To advance our interests and values we enter into collective arrangements, notably NATO, which is currently reviewing its Strategic Concept — for endorsement by leaders at their June summit in Madrid. For what should be there look at the Alphen Group's recent Shadow Strategic Concept.

Second, our approach to addressing defence modernization is taking far too long to produce useful results.

Operational readiness relies on maintaining and updating our equipment fleet. Government procurement requirements too often handicap industry from getting the job done. The auditor general says our procurement system needs major reform. Other questions persist: given the times and evident increased operational tempo are the budgets sufficient? Are we investing enough in the enablers — digitalization and data management — that will deliver and manage an effective force that can win future wars?

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Operational readiness of our Forces starts with meeting recruitment targets and then ensuring conditions are sufficiently attractive to retain those recruits. We've prioritized cultural change to address sexual misconduct. We also need to look at the terms and conditions of service. Let's think creatively about how we attract, train and grow the kind of talent that can master the technological challenges of our digital age and address new threats like cyber-warfare and disinformation.

We rely on the Forces as first responders to deal with floods, fires and ice-storms and to rescue our long-term care facilities during pandemics. These calls only increase demands on limited resources. Governments — federal, provincial and municipal — should look at creating a corps of volunteers to complement civil defence and disaster relief. The Germans do this well and we should look to them as a model.

Third, changing geopolitics and new threats require a new grand strategy that combines purpose, priorities and budget.

In doing so we need to keep in mind Sir Lawrence Freedman's characterization of strategy as "an ability to look up from the short term and the trivial to view the long term and the essential, to address causes rather than symptoms, to see woods rather than trees."

Canadian strategy has always revolved around the United States. The sundering of British North America with the American Revolution meant that for the Canadian colonies, the new republic was now the threat. This condition prevailed for most of the next century and a half. The threat of "manifest destiny" enveloping Canada, especially in the wake of the Civil War with the battle-hardened Union Army, was a powerful boost to Confederation, along with the construction of the railroad from coast to coast. While we relied on Britain for defence, the looming American presence drove both our national trade and economic policy and the "open door" immigration policy that settled western Canada.

The great change that turned the US from threat to partner and ally, came with Franklin Roosevelt and Mackenzie King. Subsequent governments built on their scaffolding, enhancing and extending defence and trade agreements.

With the removal of the American threat, successive Canadian governments got on with the work of creating a sound economy and political stability at home, necessary prerequisites to playing an active role in international politics.

To balance the preponderant American influence, Canada embraced multilateralism, internationalism, and the rules-based order. Two world wars, involving valour and sacrifice, propelled Canada from colony to nation and thence to a functional middle power. Brilliantly engineered by our diplomats, notably Lester Pearson, Escott Reid, Norman Robertson, and Hume Wrong, the concept of functionalism meant that capacity rather than mere size, should weigh in representation and a voice at the table.

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Balancing the US relationship through active multilateralism has largely guided Canadian foreign policy ever since. In practice, it meant a constant effort to diversify our trade, most recently through the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), while ensuring continued access to the US market with the recent renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), reincarnated as the Canada-US-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA). It has also meant finding niches, such as peacekeeping and human security, where we could be the helpful fixer or a bridge with the developing world through, for example, active leadership in the Commonwealth and Francophonie, where the US was not present.

Secure under the US defence shield through NATO and NORAD, and with access to the US market, our grand strategy, balancing the US and multilateralism, mostly worked. Much depended on the vigour and commitment of prime ministers. Brian Mulroney, who mastered the balancing act, captured the practical effect of this strategy:

“The golden rule of Canada-US relations is very simple. We can disagree without being disagreeable. The Americans are very important to us. We know they are, notwithstanding the differences, our best ally, our closest neighbour, our biggest customer. There is also a rule of global politics – Canada’s

influence in the world is measured to a significant degree by the extent to which we are perceived as having real influence in Washington.”

New threats and changing geopolitics – a less reliable USA, ineffective multilateralism and a broken rules-based order – now obliges us to re-examine and re-think our grand strategy.

At a minimum, the insurance premiums for national security have gone up. We are going to have to find more money for defence and also for the civil instruments of national security. This means more investment in diplomacy, development and in communicating abroad our messages on democracy, multilateralism, and the rules-based order. Military power wins battle but to win wars in today’s world requires both hard power and soft power. In our meaner, messier world Canada needs more of each.

In 2014, NATO governments, including Canada, pledged to meet a target of two percent defence spending by 2024. According to NATO, Canada currently spends 1.39 percent, outpaced by NATO G7 partners the United Kingdom (2.29 percent), the United States (3.52 percent), France (2.01 percent), Germany (1.53 percent) and Italy (1.41 percent).

In terms of development assistance at 0.31 percent of GDP, Canada is also a long way from the 0.7 percent UN target, outpaced again by our G7 partners: the United Kingdom (0.7 percent), Germany (0.73 percent) and France (0.53percent).

We took advantage of the end of the Cold War to reduce defence budgets, confident that we could continue to rely on the American security umbrella. The Americans are fed up with carrying the load and successive presidents have challenged us to do more, especially now that it’s time for NORAD renewal. We claim sovereignty over our Arctic but struggle to exercise it. We need a budgeted blueprint with deadlines. We can learn a lot from Nordic partners like Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland. What will the role of NATO be now that the Arctic is part of the geo-strategic chessboard?

As a trading nation, we depend on freedom of navigation. As a maritime nation fronting on three oceans, we need to ask ourselves whether we have the balance right among our Army, Air Force and Navy. We don’t necessarily have too much Army or Air Force, but we do need more Navy. Our potential adversaries are investing significantly in their navies, especially in the Indo-Pacific. So must we. The new offshore patrol ships perform an important role.

But a deployable, combat-capable Navy requires destroyers, frigates, submarines, with air and logistic support.

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Investing in operational readiness only when we feel pressed and then doing so on the cheap undermines our national interests. Without an overarching strategy and shared cross-party view of our national interest and how to go about advancing and protecting it, we will continue to be late, unprepared and obliged to follow rather than lead.

Parliamentary committees are the unseen and mostly unappreciated workhorses of democratic government. In the new information age where tweets and soundbites move narratives, considered cross-party discussion, drawing on expert testimony, gets little attention. But these hearings and committee discussions behind closed doors do a lot to inform and educate legislators. They also help them come together in support of the national interest.

In an era of hybrid warfare, gray zones and twilight struggles, developing cross-party unity on our security and defence strategy and requirements is essential to sustain support through changes of government. It is the only way we can be sure our Forces will achieve the operational readiness necessary to support our values and national interests.

Putin's Fateful War of Choice

Jeremy Kinsman

Policy Magazine, February 24, 2022

Foreground: Russia has invaded Ukraine, all of it, as naked an aggression as the world has seen since 1939.

The US has for weeks been predicting Russia intended to invade. This unilateral aggression of choice has prompted almost universal condemnation, and severe sanctions against Russia.

Putin seems confident Russia can withstand economic sanctions because of its low debt and very ample reserves (\$620 billion), the strong price of oil and

gas, his presumption China will substitute its economic support (not certain), and proven Russian resilience. But Russia's certain international isolation as a pariah state will be very uncomfortable. Domestic political support for war and its consequences are low. Vladimir Putin's justification on grounds of Russian grievances, past and present, will possibly play much less well than the dictator in his bubble believes.

How did it come to this, a flagrant violation of international law, thorough disruption of international behavioural norms, and of European peace that have governed affairs for three quarters of a century? What do we need to understand about Russia? Where to begin?

Background. "Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner" (To understand all is to forgive all). This classic French aphorism, lifted by both Tolstoy in *War and Peace* and Evelyn Waugh in *Brideshead Revisited*, is a romantic notion. Understanding what makes others tick, especially adversaries, is vital. But in diplomacy, forgiveness is irrelevant. Diplomacy seeks livable, workable, outcomes from clashes of interests, values, and even memory, requiring give and take.

Sadly, for this, diplomacy has succumbed to sheer force, for now.

Understanding where the antagonist, Russia, is coming from is buried in traumas of its murderous 20th century history. Putin cherishes distant 10th century ties, when Vladimir the Great adopted Christianity for the Kievan Rus, foretelling the spread of Eastern Orthodoxy into greater Russia. He implies this suggests Ukraine/Russian issues are "family" matters. But Tolstoy also reminded us each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way (and some can break up violently).

Start instead with the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, which enveloped everybody across the Russian Empire in shared traumatic unhappiness from violent Soviet police-state Communism.

PTSD, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, can affect whole societies. Soviet trauma was suppressed by the immediate need to resist Hitler's murderous invasion and by pride in postwar industrial and scientific accomplishments. But Stalinist persecution of Ukrainian *kulaks* (wealthy farmers), state-created starvation, gulags, and mass purges left cumulative psychological scarring.

Mikhail Gorbachev's transformative programs of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (reconstruction) in the mid-1980s, to undo the police state and to

open up society and the economy, were seen in the US as acceptance of dysfunctional inability to compete in the arms race and the international economy.

The USSR economy could have staggered on several more years. Gorbachev's principal motive was a moral judgment that transformation of Soviet society needed prior relief of the legacy of state crime. In advocating for openness and truth, he isolated Eastern European puppet regimes, enabling mass dissent that exploded in November, 1989, with the breach of the Berlin Wall. The tumble of Communist regimes eviscerated the Warsaw Pact of meaning. At the Open Skies meeting in Ottawa in January, 1990, West Germany and East Germany, (GDR), agreed with the Second World War's occupying powers, the USSR, the US, France and the UK ("two plus four") to negotiate Germany's reunification. It was the beginning of the end of the Cold War.

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NATO ministers next met June 7th, 1990, under Margaret Thatcher's chairmanship at Turnberry Golf Course in Scotland (now owned by Donald Trump). German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher agreed to propose a "Message from Turnberry" to "seize the historic opportunities resulting from the profound changes to help build a new peaceful order in Europe." German Political Director Dieter Kastrup asked his Canadian counterpart, me, to shape the English. Together, with External Affairs Minister Joe Clark's encouragement, we crafted NATO's short message, "to extend to the Soviet Union and to all other European countries the hand of friendship and cooperation." Headlines the next morning signaled the actual end of the Cold War. The euphoria wouldn't last.

Germany's reunification needed prior withdrawal of 400,000 Soviet troops. Chancellor Helmut Kohl offered Moscow massive financial compensation. At a Bush-Gorbachev summit in early September 1990 in Helsinki, Secretary of State James Baker (presented as "my lawyer," by George H.W. Bush) assured Gorbachev that as USSR forces pulled out of East Germany, NATO forces would not move "one inch" to the East. Baker says he meant "into East

Germany.” Gorbachev regrets his that his acquiescence implies he had accepted NATO expansion.

Having myself asked both Baker and Gorbachev in their retirements, I concluded the question was lost in translation at the buoyantly cordial Helsinki summit where, as Baker told NATO the next day, Gorbachev endorsed a UN-sponsored international force to reverse Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait a month earlier. Discussion intensified over Europe’s security architecture in light of momentous changes. Some leaders – Germany’s Genscher, Czech leader Václav Havel – questioned the need for both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

In November 1990, a grandiose Europe-North American Paris summit described as the Cold War peace conference launched Gorbachev’s concept of a European common home, from “Vancouver to Vladivostok.” It created the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In June, 1991, at the post-Gulf War G7 London Summit, Gorbachev’s guest appearance on the veranda of Lancaster House drew officials lunching in the garden below spontaneously to their feet to applaud the man most of them credited with ending the Cold War.

But the summer’s confidence waned as unprecedented transformation challenges arose. In Warsaw, Budapest and Prague, newly empowered political dissidents with scant experience of running anything, much less governments, found that opposition to prior Communist regimes didn’t extend to unity on what to do next. These Western European societies shut in by the Iron Curtain, yearning to re-join Europe, now grasped that satisfying entry requirements of the European Community would be a long and hard road. Havel reversed his inclination to dissolve both alliances, seeing that NATO’s brand offered precious Western identity credentials.

Russian attention was inward. Gorbachev had undertaken emancipation from state Communism without a lucid “Plan B” to transform the economy. No one knew how, least of all Western advisers whose “shock therapy” had triggered economic and social free-fall. An August coup by bitter Communist throwbacks failed, but Gorbachev’s popularity tanked. Rival reformist president of the Russian Republic Boris Yeltsin failed to push him out, so Yeltsin broke up the USSR.

That decision was made December 8th, 1991, at a Belarussian hunting lodge by Yeltsin and Leonid Kravchuk, party boss of Ukraine. On December 20, at

the inaugural meeting of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council – the 16 NATO and nine members of the Warsaw Pact – at which I was present in Brussels, the Soviet ambassador, called repeatedly to the phone from Moscow, relayed his instruction to remove the USSR’s nameplate from the table. We adjourned, believing that NATO’s intrinsic vocation as an alliance organized in hostile opposition to Moscow was over. (It would return.)

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For 20 years, NATO explored a wider role (summarized in the post-Cold War catchphrase “out of area or out of business”), undertaking airstrikes in 1999 to end Slobodan Milosevic’s ethnic cleansing siege of Kosovo. After the attacks of 9/11, Canada moved that NATO for the first time activate Article 5 of its Charter to intervene collectively in response to an attack on an alliance member, launching its long and painful engagement in Afghanistan. In 2011, NATO bombed Moammar Ghaddaffi’s army in Libya as it advanced on Benghazi.

Meanwhile, the USSR’s 290 million citizens broke into 15 separate countries, surprisingly peacefully. Twenty million ethnic Russians opted to stay in non-Russian new republics. Concern for Russian minorities in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, the Baltics, Moldova, and Georgia would preoccupy Moscow for years. To fill the national identity space vacated by Communism, leaders of new republics often drew from established hostility to the USSR, which they easily conflated with the Russian Republic. Russians, who had decisively pushed breaking up the USSR and who had suffered more from the Communist oppression than anyone, resented it.

But they remained engulfed by institutional collapse at home. The Russian Navy’s commander told me when I was serving as Canadian Ambassador to Moscow that he was an out-placement manager. We saw rotting hulks of nuclear-powered ships in Vladivostok. Yeltsin begged for material western assistance. US President Bill Clinton understood the potential costs of letting “ol’ Boris” down but couldn’t move Congress to do much to support Russia. By 1998, amid chaos and corruption, Russian democratic reformers fell decisively out of favour. Meanwhile, in 1999 NATO admitted new members, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland.

The post-Yeltsin battle began. His family turned to Vladimir Putin, reputedly a reliable go-to apparatchik who quietly got things done. He replaced Yeltsin on Jan 1, 2000. His first official foreign visitor was NATO's Secretary general, George Robertson. Putin successfully redressed economic disarray and stabilized politics to public acclaim, telling Russians that what they needed was not another revolution, but a "Great Russia."

But his growing subtraction from recently-gained democratic space increased opposition from professional and middle classes, chafing at their imposed "political infancy." Putin played the popular nationalist card, exploiting what former UK Foreign Minister David Miliband describes as a legacy of Russian humiliation at being treated as the Cold War's "losers," to earn applause for standing up to the West. Western dismissal of Russian positions that NATO's expansion up to Russia's borders violates 1990s understandings as "outlandish" fuelled the resentment.

Putin wanted Ukraine to fail. A successful democratic Ukraine could be mortally contagious to his corrupt autocracy. He is a cynical and highly competitive man who sees democracy idealists as hypocritical, phony US stooges.

Still, most Russians were sufficiently objective to understand that Czechoslovaks, Hungarians, and Poles deserved to re-join interrupted European legacies. Most conceded, too, that the shameful 1940 annexation of the Baltic states into the USSR via a deal with Nazi Germany deserved remedy. The entry of Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Slovakia, etc., was sullenly digested.

But it was always clear that NATO's inclusion of Ukraine or Georgia would cross a red line. Putin manufactured this crisis to protect that line with an unobtainable formal agreement NATO will not expand, though he knows that in reality Ukraine is not joining NATO. He wishes to reclaim for Russia great power influence, and greater Russia/NATO security parity. He believes the "Minsk accords" that meant to stabilize conflict with the rebels of Donetsk and Lugansk and award more autonomy to the Russian-speaking Donbas are hopelessly stalled. He chose aggression against Ukraine for daring to exist.

Putin wanted Ukraine to fail. A successful democratic Ukraine could be mortally contagious to his corrupt autocracy. He is a cynical and highly competitive man who sees democracy idealists as hypocritical, phony US stooges. He prefers believing that a Ukraine subordinate to Putin retain operational features just like Russia's, where corrupt oligarchs call the shots.

His choice of invading Ukraine, inviting death and destruction, and real costs to his own country, raise issues of the Russian leader's grasp of reality and certainly of morality.

Does he represent Russian opinion? The surprise 2014 annexation of Russian-speaking Crimea was popular in Russia but almost destroyed relations with the West. By contrast, military incursion and occupation in Ukraine would find little public support (only 17 percent according to a Levada poll wish the two countries to re-unite). It would isolate Russia for years, whatever Putin's closer but still wary autocratic fraternity with Xi Jinping.

NATO had been ready to address Russian security concerns — on intermediate nuclear weapons, military infrastructure placement, and the bigger picture, before Russia invaded its neighbour. Now, there will be no Summits for Putin with world leaders, probably ever again.

Relations will now enter a nuclear winter of mutual opposition between Putin and the US, the West and even democracy.

We are dealing with the aftermath of momentous events three decades ago. We lazily believed then we were living the “end of history”, heralding universal coalescence around a Western democratic and market-based model. We couldn't know it would almost crash in the financial collapse of 2008 or that an increasingly autocratic Putin would radicalize his hostile behaviour, which in its sociopathic impulses reminds us of the inter-generational effects of PTSD on a vulnerable person, such as Putin.

His distortion of truth and lethal threat to lives for the sake of a demonic dream of repossessing a dispossessed past have, as Masha Gessen writes today in the New Yorker, made it impossible for decent people in Moscow and Kiev. “to live and to breathe.” It must be ghastly for them.

Life may now become ghastly for many more Russians who shrugged their shoulders at Putin's absurd excesses while enjoying new wealth and travel, now about to be curtailed. He is their disgrace, their madman — no other way to put it.

Nonetheless, we need to understand the past and present to meet author F. Scott Fitzgerald's functional test of a first-rate intelligence — when things seem hopeless, to determine to make them otherwise.

Vladimir Putin was who he said he was: The invasion of Ukraine has made clear that the Russian President is all-in on his explicit revanchist ambitions

Gary J. Smith

Globe and Mail, February 24, 2022

Even beyond the superficial details – including their similar height – there are plenty of comparisons to make between Russian President Vladimir Putin and former Fuehrer Adolf Hitler.

Both were viscerally aggrieved about what a previous generation had allowed to happen to their country. Both claimed to want to protect people who speak their country's language, regardless of where those people may reside.

And the world didn't want to believe what either of them said – either in Hitler's Mein Kampf, or in Mr. Putin's speeches mourning the Soviet Empire's collapse or calling for an ideological and security buffer zone for Russia.

Now, with the launch of Russian military action across a broad front of Ukraine, we face the consequences for our failure of vision.

For Mr. Putin, the populist overthrow of the pro-Russian Ukrainian government in 2014, and the mass revolts in Belarus last year against authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko, represented a threat – the further march eastward of democracy, in the form of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. So in December, he demanded an ironclad guarantee that Ukraine would not join NATO, and that its forces would return to where they were stationed in 1997. That would mean removing troops from the 14 Eastern European countries that had joined since then.

Surely, Mr. Putin must have realized all those relatively small countries joined NATO not because they were seeking protection from the United States or Western Europe, but from Russia itself. Who wants to live under authoritarian rule if there is another option? But when his demands were not met, it should not have been a surprise that he would resort to his strong suit: using military force, as he did in Georgia in 2008 and in Crimea and the Donbas region in 2014.

Now, it is clear that Mr. Putin is all-in on his aims to engineer a collapse and replacement of the Ukrainian government and the return of the region to Russian domination and control.

Presumably, given that he does not see Ukraine as an independent country and claims that Ukrainians are Russians' "brothers," he will want to avoid inflicting death upon Ukrainian citizens by bombarding the country's cities.

The Russian public, for the same reason, doesn't want a full-scale war against their fellow Slavs – an act that would create a hatred between the two groups for generations to come. But Russians, like the Soviet and Tzarist publics before them, are unfortunately well-schooled in the authoritarian idea that “silence is survival,” though hundreds of demonstrators have already been arrested across Russia. Mr. Putin has also justified the campaign as an effort at “de-Nazification,” implying the potential for even more draconian measures to come.

The invasion has sparked new strategic developments for the region that Canada and our NATO allies now have to consider. Russian troops are now lodged in Belarus, and they represent chess pieces for Russia to provoke a NATO withdrawal of forces from Eastern Europe. Estonia and Latvia also have to be concerned about the presence of large numbers of Russian speakers in their country, while Lithuania and Poland must be worried that Moscow will demand a corridor to the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea. The former Soviet republic of Moldova, meanwhile, sits just southwest of Ukraine, and Russian forces are already stationed there, in the unrecognized breakaway state of Transnistria.

Canada must also make preparations for the coming outflow of refugees from Ukraine, many of whom might head to Canada, which is home to the world's second-largest Ukrainian diaspora.

Russian cyber-attacks should also be expected in response to international sanctions.

We are now in a dangerous period of brinkmanship. NATO and the West need to show military resolve and unity to blunt Mr. Putin's far-reaching ambitions, but they must also be careful: No one, including Mr. Putin, knows where a major ground war will end, and given that Russia has a nuclear arsenal, his warnings of an “immediate response with consequences never seen in history” against any countries that intervene are concerning.

It is sadly ironic that in the 1960s and 1970s, the goal of the Soviet Union was to solidify postwar borders and prevent German “revanchism” – a belief that Germany would try to take back lands that had been held by German speakers in East Prussia and elsewhere for centuries. Now it is a Russian leader who is revanchist, wanting to roll back modern history. We should have seen it coming.

The Scandal of Roxham Road

James Bissett

Ottawa Citizen on line, February 1, 2022

The opinion piece entitled “Lessons from Roxham Road” published in the Citizen on January 8 by the past and current presidents of the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers is a classic example of misinformation. Whether it is by design or ignorance the article is replete with false information that completely distorts the meaning of the word refugee and Canada’s legal obligations under the United Nation Refugee Convention. The very first paragraph suggests that by allowing anyone entering Canada illegally from Roxham Road, Canada is actually fulfilling an international legal obligation toward refugees. This is not only wrong it is nonsense.

The people entering from the road are not refugees. The 1951 UN Refugee Convention was carefully worded to avoid infringing upon the principle of national sovereignty and the sanctity of international borders. The definition of refugee is narrow and specific; it applies to individuals who are outside of their own country and who fear returning because of persecution for reasons of their nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. The Convention obligates signatories to protect such individuals and not return them to the country of persecution. This is the principle of “refoulement” (driving back or returning.) It is the fundamental obligation of the Refugee Convention which, interestingly, doesn’t demand much more than that from its signatories.

The Convention does not require any state to accept refugees. It certainly does not obligate any signatory to accept people only claiming to be refugees. Its definition does not cover people fleeing from war or natural disasters. It does not include those who are internally displaced in their own country. And take note, it does not condone illegal entry unless coming direct from the country of persecution

Any serious refugee discussion must make a distinction between a refugee and an asylum seeker. An asylum seeker is someone who claims to be a refugee and wants to enter a country for protection. A refugee is someone who has met the UN Convention definition. The confusion between these two definitions has plagued and conflicted the management of our refugee policies for years. A classic example is the article by the two refugee lawyers who one would assume are knowledgeable about refugee law, but who consistently mix the two together.

The problem has been made more difficult because the average citizen doesn’t distinguish between refugees and the thousands of asylum seekers allowed entry into the country to have their claim adjudicated by a refugee panel made up of government appointees. Since the system is complicated and cumbersome it has become overwhelmed by sheer numbers and claimants might often wait years for their hearing while they are allowed to work and receive other costly benefits including, housing, free medical care, free legal advice, appeal rights and the unlikelihood of being removed. The reality is It has become a seriously dysfunctional system.

It has also been a shockingly costly one. We have been accepting asylum seekers readily and in abundance for almost fifty years During that period we have accepted roughly one million of them. For example, in 2002 Canada had asylum claims from over 100

different countries – including people from the USA, Sweden, Switzerland, and other democratic countries. In 2009 there was a backlog of over 60,000 asylum seekers waiting for their hearing. At that time the immigration department estimated that one asylum seeker cost 30,000 dollars to process let alone the costs of maintenance for several years after the hearing.

These costs have been at the expense, not only of the Canadian tax payer, but also of our financial assistance to the UNHCR in its struggle to care for the millions of genuine refugees in camps around the world. This year the UNHCR expects to have to support some 84 million displaced people and refugees. Canada's contribution is between 70 - 80 million dollars. This amount puts us in the tenth ranking after Denmark and the Netherlands and is a fraction of what we spend on asylum seekers. The country that keeps the UNHCR operational is the one disparaged by the two refugee lawyers in their article – the United States, with a contribution of over 1.9 billion dollars.

It is sad but true, that it seems to be a characteristic of our parliament to lack the capacity or willingness to deal with, or even to debate, critical issues of policy that really matter to our country; such as health care, foreign policy, defense, immigration. In the case of asylum seekers reform is difficult. There are too many groups that profit from the broken system: lawyers, refugee agencies, ethnic organizations, churches and others that receive millions helping settle asylum seekers. Our politicians know that reform is desperately needed but since it would be controversial, they choose to ignore it.

Consequently, reform has not come and is unlikely because, more often than not, when a bad system becomes entrenched, remains out of the spot light of public awareness, and has become a rich source of income for hundreds of benefactors it can grow and prosper. This is particularly true when the system is portrayed even by the main stream media as an essential, compassionate, and virtuous policy. Who wants to stop poor “refugee’s from coming to Canada even if they cross our borders illegally? After all, we are told that Roxham road has earned the title of the “path of angels.”

Ottawa shirking duty to help Canadians stuck abroad

Dan Livermore, Gar Pardy, Michael Welsh

Hill Times, January 31, 2022

For the small group of Canadians in Iraq and Syria it is now time for the government to accept its obligations and make the arrangements for their return to Canada.

There is little that is more predictable than the soothing words spoken by Canadian governments when citizens are in difficulty in foreign countries. “We are fully aware”; “we are working to help”; and “we are doing everything to see them back safely in Canada,” are the familiar refrains.

For many Canadians in serious difficulty, the reality is different. Serious problems are not resolved quickly, communications and transportation are often difficult, legal problems are complex and even longer than in Canada to resolve and frequently foreign governments do not see the problems of Canadians as warranting urgent action.

There are daily stories and reminders of such experiences and as recent ones demonstrate they are often matters of life and death. Since the 2015 election of the Trudeau government, there have been three deadly and tragic stories. In these, the actions or lack thereof by the government have contributed to the problems.

Two Canadians, John Ridsdel and Robert Hall, in 2016, were executed in the southern Philippines when the government refused to initiate appropriate and available action to obtain their release from kidnappers. Two other Canadians, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, between 2018 and 2021, spent over a thousand days, illegally, in the prisons of China. Ottawa, once again, refused to initiate appropriate and legal action to see them freed and returned home. It was the action of the United States that led to their release.

Today, nearly fifty Canadian children, women and men have spent over two years in “filthy, deeply degrading, life-threatening and often inhuman conditions” in detention centres in northern Iraq and Syria, in the words of Human Rights Watch 2021 annual report. Again, the Canadian government has refused to take action to have these Canadians returned to Canada.

This, despite the willingness of the authorities administering the detainees to have the Canadians returned. As well, other governments including the United States and allies in Europe and elsewhere have made arrangements for the repatriation of their citizens from the same areas. The United Nations and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs have urged Canada to “pursue all options possible” to repatriate its citizens with the UN placing Canada on a “list of shame” for its lack of action.

So far only a four-year-old child has returned to Canada, initially without her mother, but in the face of court action, the mother was issued a passport and returned home. Who made the arrangements for this child? Not Canadian authorities but a former American diplomat who went to the region and made the arrangements.

Some of these Canadians have now filed an application with the Federal Court seeking relief from the lack of action by the Canadian government. The case is yet to be heard but it is hoped the court will force the government to take the necessary action to have these Canadians returned home using the mobility and legal rights guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The government argues it is too dangerous for Canadian officials to go to the region in order to make the arrangements for the repatriations. This is fallacious - other governments go to the region; international humanitarian organizations operate in the area daily; and the authorities administering the regions are willing and able to assist. But the government maintains Canadian officials are without the ability to do so.

The government's reasons for not helping are specious and are meant to disguise its complete unwillingness to help this specific group of Canadians. They are the reminders of the thousands of foreigners who rushed to the region in support of the early success of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (IS/Desh) in 2014. Countering military action by local governments supported by the United States and Russia put an end to IS in the region.

Thousands of the intervening foreign nationals were killed and thousands of other, especially, women and children were detained. For the most part, only the Canadians have been refused help by their government. In doing so, Ottawa conveniently ignores these persons are Canadians and are legally entitled to the support and assistance.

The government's position finds some measure of public support and, importantly, both the RCMP and CSIS oppose the return of these detainees to Canada citing the impact on their responsibilities. Both organizations have a long history of opposing support for Canadians who have travelled to countries in conflict, some for legitimate reasons and others, like the detainees in Iraq and Syria, for misconstrued or illegal reasons. The RCMP and CSIS ignore the scope within our criminal justice systems for possible punishment in Canada.

Investigations by commissions of inquiry and various court applications provided ample examples of this opposition by the RCMP and CSIS. But tens of millions of dollars have been paid to the victims of this opposition and more is pending. For the small group of Canadians in Iraq and Syria it is now time for the government to accept its obligations and make the arrangements for their return to Canada.

Discretion must not be a cover for discrimination.

Links

Jeremy Kinsman

CTV News, February 26, The War

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CTV News, February 24; INVASION - what now?

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=2389913>

CTV News February 22, Diplomatic Community: the Ukraine crisis goes critical

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=2388734>

CTV News, February 20: The Ukraine crisis on the boil

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=2387510>

CTV News February 15, Diplomatic Community: Is the Ukraine Threat Receding? And Closing Canada's Embassy in Kiev – Why?

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=2382839>

CTV News, Feb 8 - Diplomatic Community: Truckers! The Siege of a City. What's it mean, and what's next?

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CTV News February 1 -- The Beijing Winter Olympics Show - what to expect

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Ferry de Kerckhove

Ukraine, Various outlets

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<https://www.985fm.ca/audio/457385/est-ce-que-le-canada-doit-s-impliquer-plus-en-ukraine>

Roy Norton

CGAI Podcast, February 17, 2022

[Energy Security Cubed: The Ambassador Bridge and Canadian Trade Credibility with Roy Norton - The CGAI Podcast Network | Podcast on Spotify](#)

Ian Ferguson

Heritage Ottawa, February 2022

The Rochon House

https://heritageottawa.org/system/files/newsletters/herottnews_2022_01.pdf