How Canadian Intelligence is Exposed to the Impact of Globalization: A Critical Analysis of the Security Threat of Right-Wing Extremism

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Abstract

It could be argued that Canadian intelligence has been negligent toward the impact of globalisation when assessing the security threat of right-wing extremism (RWE), specifically with the advent of the internet and the significant reduction of the influence of state borders on national policy objectives, and therefore has exposed itself to the potential of intelligence failure. This paper is focused on the state of right-wing extremism in Canada through which it addresses the security question: How is Canadian intelligence exposed to the impact of globalisation? The results of this paper are informed by an in-depth analysis of peer-reviewed articles from Canada, the United States (US), and Europe, as well as Canadian government documents, and newspaper articles, as well as the completion of a key assumptions, check to address bias and better evaluate the evidence found. This paper concludes that it appears likely that Canadian intelligence may not be assessing RWE threats through the lens of globalisation. It could be argued that this creates the potential for intelligence failure. However, there remains one significant caveat. It can be interpreted in Public Safety Canada's latest update that RWE may soon be considered a type of terrorism. If this is the case, the evidence proves that Canadian intelligence may in fact be considering the impact of globalisation in the context of terrorism and therefore would likely implement the same consideration for RWE.

Keywords: Right wing extremism, globalisation, intelligence

This paper addresses the validity of the statement by Shiraz and Aldrich in Dover (2015) which suggests that "intelligence is exposed to the impact of globalisation." The problem identified for this paper

is the potential for intelligence failure due to inaccurate security threat assessments by Canadian intelligence as a result of negligence towards the impacts of globalisation. Therefore, the security question that follows is: How is Canadian intelligence exposed to the impact of globalisation? Canadian intelligence has arguably been negligent toward the impact of globalisation when assessing the security threat of RWE, specifically with the advent of the internet and the significant reduction of the influence of state borders on national policy objectives, and therefore has exposed itself to the potential of intelligence failure. The following analysis is informed by peer-reviewed articles from Canada, the United States (US), and Europe, as well as Canadian government documents, and newspaper articles.

To answer the security question, this paper takes a Canadian perspective on the security threat of right-wing extremism (RWE). This is a relevant topic in the current global political climate, therefore, there is a limited amount of research addressing it. In order to analyze this security threat, there are a few key terms that need to be defined. First, intelligence is information that has been analyzed to inform decision makers (Kelshall, 2018a). Therefore, intelligence failure occurs when there is a surprise (Kelshall, 2018a). Second, Shiraz and Aldrich (2014) define globalisation as the "de-territorialisation without temporal constraints" (as cited in Kelshall, 2018). Therefore, the impact of globalisation "occurs when the individual actor has the chance to act with reference to other people wherever they might be located on the globe and takes the globe as a meaningful frame of reference" (Albrow, Durrschmidt, Eade, & Washbourne, 1994). Lastly, RWE is defined as "a loose movement, characterized by a racially, ethnically and sexually defined nationalism" (Perry & Scrivens, 2016, p. 5).

Arguments

The advent of the internet is a result of globalisation and provides RWE groups with two main advantages that expose Canadian intelligence to strategic warning failure: the creation of a global community and an invaluable tool for recruitment and the sharing of tactics and tradecraft for the purpose of committing violence (Ellis & Parent, 2016, p. 6). A third advantage of globalisation for RWE groups that exposes Canadian intelligence to strategic warning failure is the socialization of states through "the global systems they are embedded in" (Ahmad, 2017, p. 264). For example, there has recently been a normalization of anti-Muslim national policies and other key priorities in the RWE agenda throughout the West (Ahmad, 2017, p. 264).

Counter Arguments & Mitigation/Considerations

There are two main arguments that mitigate the strength of the statement that Canadian intelligence is exposed to the impact of globalisation: King and Leonard (2014) discuss the fact that white power sentiments and pop culture were widely circulated in a number of countries before the onset of globalisation and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) 2014-2016 Public Report (2017) determined that intelligence does consider globalisation in the context of terrorism.

White Power Sentiments and Pop Culture

A key mitigating factor regarding the advantage of the internet in exposing Canadian intelligence is the historical prevalence of white supremacist rhetoric and pop culture in Western states (King & Leonard, 2014, p. 17). For example, white power music became popular in Canada during the 1980s (Perry & Scrivens, 2016, p. 14). In 1993, George Burdi, a white supremacist member of the Canadian branch of the World Church of Creator, created the record label Resistance Records (Perry & Scrivens, 2016, p. 15). Through this and

many other means of distribution, white power music became "a powerful recruitment and retention tool among supremacists" (Perry & Scrivens, 2016, p. 43). Resistance Records was eventually shut down due to Canadian propaganda law which provides an essential limitation to this mitigating factor (Perry & Scrivens, 2016, p. 43). It is important to note that it was through the access of the internet that white power music was eventually able to reach the global audience it has today (Perry & Scrivens, 2016, p. 43).

Globalisation in the Context of Terrorism

A vital counter-argument of the impact of globalisation in exposing Canadian intelligence is the consideration of globalisation as an essential aspect for CSIS in assessing the security threat of terrorism (Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2017). For example, the Public Report 2014-2016 states explicitly that "over the past several years, the globalisation of terrorism, fuelled by elaborate online propaganda videos by extremist groups, has expanded the breadth of radicalization" (Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2017). Furthermore, they pinpoint the promotion of extremist ideology through practices such as training and recruitment (Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2017). These key characteristics of terrorism in a globalised world align directly with the security threat of RWE. A serious limitation to this counter-argument is that CSIS refers to terrorism which currently excludes RWE and focuses solely on 'foreign fighter' (Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2017). While this counter-argument proves that Canadian intelligence does account for globalisation in the context of terrorism, it raises the issue that CSIS distinguishes between RWE and terrorism and therefore does not apply the same intelligence analysis. However, there has been a recent push by the government of Canada in a 2017 report to consider RWE as a "type of radical ideology (that) can fuel terrorism" (Public Safety Canada, 2017). It has yet to be determined if CSIS will

decide to follow the government's lead and designate RWE as a terrorist threat.

Evidence

To evaluate the evidence, a key assumptions check was completed. This technique helps to identify the initial assumptions of this paper and uses the evidence gathered to assess their likelihood of being accurate (The US Government, 2009, p. 7). The results of this technique concluded that the highest supported assumption was that globalisation has created global cyber networks. The least supported assumption was that Canadian intelligence does not account for the impact of globalisation on security threats. This result is primarily due to evidence for the counter-argument regarding globalisation in the context of terrorism. Acknowledging the results of the key assumptions check, there are three main arguments in the context of RWE that prove that Canadian intelligence is exposed to the impact of globalisation.

The Internet: Creation of a Global Community

A key argument for the impact of globalisation, precisely due to the advent of the internet, is the creation and "development of an identifiable global white supremacist community" (Olsson & Perry, 2009, p. 186). Castells (2001) identifies a communitarian culture that aligns with the key characteristics of RWE online groups as "a source and creation of values and social organization" (as cited in Olsson & Perry, 2009, p. 187). The threat that these online communities pose is the radicalization of individuals internationally who can relate to the fears and values espoused by the movement (Perry & Scrivens, 2017, p. 541). For example, multiple Canadian RWE sites have international ties, such as Hammerskin Nation and the Creativity Movement Toronto (Perry & Scrivens, 2017, p. 541). While the online communities themselves may not pose a security threat, their global

connections and radicalization tactics provide a pool of individuals that are susceptible to recruitment.

The Internet: Tool for Recruitment and the Sharing of Tactics and Tradecraft

In addition to the creation of a global community through the internet is the argument that the use of these communities for recruitment and the sharing of tactics and tradecraft poses a significant security threat (Ellis & Parent, 2016, p. 6). For example, Alek Minassian's deadly van attack in Toronto, April 2018, was confirmed through a Facebook post by the accused to have been influenced by the group incel (involuntarily celibate) (BBC News, 2018). Due to the nature of incel, characterized by a loose ideology of misogyny and racism and the promotion of violence, one could identify this group as RWE (Paradkar, 2018). However, it is important to note that incel does not define themselves this way. Instead, they consider themselves to be a community of support for individuals who characterize themselves as incel, which is a "person who is not in a relationship nor has had sex in a significant amount of time, despite numerous attempts" (SergeantIncel, 2017). Another example is provided by a former Canadian white supremacist, Brad Galloway. He confirms in an interview with Ryan Scrivens that RWE groups recruit individuals globally through open access online forums such as Stormfront and that this tactic was helpful in avoiding detection by law enforcement (Galloway & Scrivens, 2018).

The Socialisation of States Through a Global System

A third argument for the impact of globalisation is the pressure to compromise core Canadian values through the socialisation of the global system in order to align politically with allied countries (Ahmad, 2017, p. 264). This identifies a fundamental security threat, as it illustrates an essential avenue for RWE groups to legitimize their cause through policy reform and influence public sentiments (Ahmad,

2017, p. 258). A pertinent example of this is currently taking place globally where Canadian allies are enacting anti-Muslim policies "in the name of security" (Ahmad, 2017, p. 257). This is a result of RWE groups using techniques, such as ethnic scapegoating, in order to promote Islamophobia (Ahmad, 2017, p. 257). A surprising phenomenon that signifies this security threat is the alignment of RWE and jihadist interests, who share the goal of destroying the current liberal international order (Ahmad, 2017, p. 260).

Conclusion

The answer to the security question, how is Canadian intelligence exposed to the impact of globalisation, is provided through the context of the security threat of RWE. The consideration of RWE is supported by the substantial evidence compiled that illustrates that Canadian intelligence does not assess RWE threats through the lens of globalisation and creates the potential for intelligence failure. Key examples, such as the attack by Minassian that was influenced by incel and increase in legitimization of the RWE agenda through national policies, illustrate how globalisation has increased the security threat of RWE and therefore the position of this paper is valid. However, this position also exposes a critical limitation in the security question: How is Canadian intelligence exposed to the impact of globalisation? This is outlined in the counter-argument of globalisation in the context of terrorism, where the evidence proves that Canadian intelligence does consider the impact of globalisation in the context of terrorism. In addition to this is the latest update by Public Safety Canada which seems to suggest that RWE may soon be considered as a type of terrorism and therefore treated as such. If this is the case, assessments of the RWE security threat will consider the impact of globalisation and therefore mitigate the potential of intelligence failure.

Author Biography

Sarah Meyers is a 4th year criminology student with a focus on legal studies. She is also a research specialist with CASIS Vancouver working on the right-wing extremism project. She has academic experience conducting qualitative research, monitoring right-wing forum activity, and writing incident and event briefing notes.

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