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Russian election-meddling in Canada linked to Arctic ambitions: report

'Perceived as one of Russia's chief adversaries in the Arctic region, Canada is a prime target in the information wars'



The Canadian Press
Mike Blanchfield

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A soldier holds a machine gun as he patrols the Russian northern military base on Kotelny island, beyond the Arctic circle on April 3, 2019. PHOTO BY MAXIME POPOV/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

OTTAWA — A new University of Calgary study is predicting Russian interference in the federal election campaign to serve what it describes as the Kremlin's long-term interest of competing against Canada in the Arctic.

The study's author, Sergey Sukhankin, said in an interview that Moscow's ability to inflict serious damage is relatively low because Canadian society is not as divided as countries targeted in past elections, including the United States presidential ballot and Britain's Brexit referendum in 2016, as well as various attacks on Ukraine and the Baltic states.

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“The Kremlin has a growing interest in dominating the Arctic, where it sees Russia as in competition with Canada. This means Canada can anticipate escalations in information warfare, particularly from hacktivists fomenting cyber-attacks,” writes Sukhankin, a senior **TRE**

and propaganda revealed against Canada in the near future.

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The Kremlin has a growing interest in dominating the Arctic, where it sees Russia as in competition with Canada

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Sukhankin argues that Moscow’s disinformation efforts are designed primarily for domestic Russian consumption, and are not intended to sway Canadian voters.

It is part of a broader Kremlin effort to show the “ugly side of democracy and liberalism” to a Russian audience, and to portray Canada as being unduly influenced by the United States and the “Ukrainian lobby” in Canada, he writes.

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“Russia uses patriotism and this anti-fascist sentiment to convince the domestic audience and Russian-speakers abroad, primarily in Ukraine, Belarus and the three Baltic states, that Russia is the only country to stand against far-right sentiments and nationalism. This is basically used by the Russian side to garner domestic solidarity,” he said in an interview.

Sukhankin’s argument echoes previous warnings about potential Russian interference from the Liberal government, including Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan, and the country’s intelligence agencies.

The government has appointed a group of five senior public servants to guard against foreign election meddling during the campaign. The public servants will be able to brief members of all political parties about potential threats and will have the power to go public during the campaign to sound the alarm against malign acts of interference that they together deem a fundamental threat.

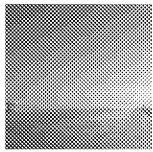
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Canada expelled four Russian diplomats last year in connection with the poisoning of an ex-spy in Britain that has been blamed on Moscow. (The Kremlin denies the charge).

At the time, Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland said the diplomats were intelligence agents who were undermining Canadian democracy.

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As Sukhankin's paper notes, Freeland has been a frequent target of Russian propaganda as part of a broader attempt to brand Canada as "russophobic" and having an "affection for fascism," including a soft-spot for Nazism that dates back to the 1930s.

The goal is to justify Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula — the most serious breach of Europe's border since the Second World War — which President Vladimir Putin has said was necessary to protect "Russian-speakers in Ukraine against their physical extermination," writes Sukhankin.

Russia's disinformation about Canada also focuses on three other areas, according to the report.

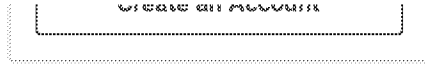
These include ridiculing Canada's military presence in Latvia as part of NATO's deterrent against Russia, portraying the country as a "useful satellite" of the U.S., and calling it a testing ground for "immoral Western values" because of its support of same-sex marriage and legalizing of cannabis.

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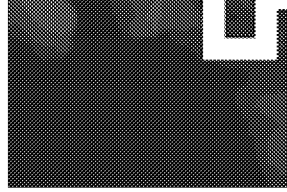
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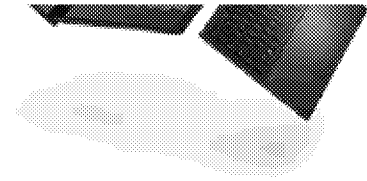
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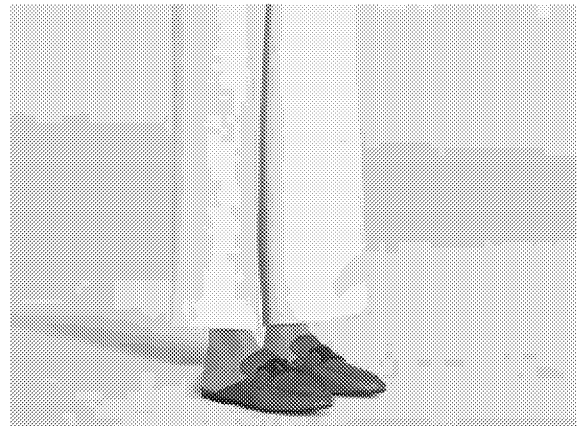


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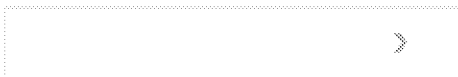
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