Stand on Guard: Reassessing Threats to Canada's National Security
By Stephanie Carvin
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A Book Review by

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If you ever wondered what national security threat is, why the government cares about them, and why you should too, then *Stand on Guard: Reassessing Threats to Canada's National Security,* written by Dr. Stephanie Carvin, is a must-read book. As a former security analyst at Canadian Security Intelligence Service (2012–2015) tasked with providing threat assessments to high levels of government, Carvin has written this book with authority and urgency. Carvin is an Associate Professor at Carleton University's Norman Paterson School of International Affairs. *Stand on Guard* provides detailed descriptions of how national security threats are tackled in Canada, aligned with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act (CSIS Act), and offers case studies from history and the contemporary period to further demonstrate these issues.

Most of the security threats in Canada occur behind the scenes and are rarely publicized. Thus, the book holds a unique position as it demands more transparency from the agencies themselves and better accountability for legislations and initiatives the government has taken or will take in the future. At the same time, Carvin provides an insider's look at the issues and threats. Violent extremists seek to create fear, panic, and division within individuals. Therefore, to better understand and combat the offline and online threats, transparency is important, as it is grounded in empathy, not panic (p. 263).

In order to understand the threats to Canadian national security, *Stand on Guard* is anchored on the main threats linked to violent extremism, espionage, cyber, and clandestine foreign interference. It is organized into seven chapters (excluding the chapters on Introduction and Conclusion), covering different issues related to national security threats. The format of the chapters: Violent Extremism (two chapters), Espionage, The Economy and National Security, Cybersecurity, Clandestine Foreign Influence, and Disinformation and Threats to Democratic Institutions. Carvin presented several examples on challenges Canada's national security faces and have faced in the past. Since 9/11, the risk of extremism and terrorist attacks has been the most worrying issue when predicting threat-related activities in Canada (p. 56). Another important feature of the book is that it ends with recommendations that emerged from all chapters, including making new institutions work, enhancing transparency, new government partnerships, and Canadianizing national security (see pp. 276-279).

The internet has enabled the surveillance and control of citizens in many parts of the world. Carvin writes, "[t]he disruptive technologies have forced states to choose between seeking absolute

control and accepting greater uncertainty, authoritarian states are choosing the former, and it seems to be working" (p. 227). "Internet Sovereignty" is a major issue to Westerns states, including Canada. China and Russia are the main actors who are not only working to control the internet in their own countries but also exporting software and techniques to the other countries to have control (p. 227). Interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election by Russia represents evidence that there have been significant attempts of foreign interference in the Western countries. I agree with Carvin that the threats to national security in Canada are not widely known, so it is difficult to present many case examples that represent the entirety of the issue. Consequently, some of the examples noted in the book are borrowed from other countries. As mentioned above, foreign interference and threats to democracy were explained through the events from the 2016 US presidential election (Donald Trump and Trumpism). The author further notes that, on the basis of publicly available information, Canada has not suffered a major incident of online clandestine foreign influence at any of the federal or provincial elections between 2016-2019. Although in April 2019, several political parties reported of being hacked by foreign adversaries, however, not much information made it to the public eye (pp. 252-253). It illuminates the recommendation made by Carvin that there is a clear need for transparency between the legislative bodies and Canadian individuals.

"*[T]he internet has provided violent extremist entities with platforms upon which to spread their propaganda and recruit members…*" (p. 224, *italics is added*). I appreciate Carvin's classification of violent extremist threats in Canada, which manifests itself in five ways: attack planning, travel for extremist purposes, facilitation, financing, and radicalization (p. 55). Furthermore, in the *Stand on Guard* violent extremist attacks were classified into four categories: foreign-directed attacks, foreign-approved plots, domestic attacks, and lone actors (see pp. 56-63). Online access/cyber is crucial component of each of these activities (p. 161). These types of attack help Canadians better understand national security threats, which serves as the main objective of the book. However, I believe Carvin go to greater extent in explaining foreign-directed attacks, foreign-approved plots, and lone actor attacks, but barely adds any depth to the domestic attacks. I found that the explanation and case examples on domestic attacks have been lacking throughout the book. She explains the importance of foreign interference, disinformation, and threats to democratic institutions. Even in these chapters, she mainly considers threats of foreign actors, including extremists inspired by Al Qaida and Islamic State, and lacked a discussion of actors of domestic violent extremists who pose threats to democracy such as far-right groups.

I believe that the last three chapters (Chapters 5-7), Cybersecurity, Clandestine Foreign Influence, and Disinformation and Threats to Democratic Institutions, are essential, as the case examples were very timely and important. Foreign influences play an important role in many countries, and Canada is also the target of them. The questions and technologies mentioned in these chapters are also discussed in Chapters 3 (Espionage) and 4 (Economy and National Security). In Canada, economic espionage and spying by foreign actors constitute a serious threat to national security. These threats are more exposed through online means; therefore, cybersecurity, clandestine foreign interference, and disinformation play an important role. It would be advantageous for these chapters to appear at the beginning of the book.

Nevertheless, *Stand on Guard* is a great read to understand the national security threats. Throughout the chapters, the author illuminates that Canadian citizens should have a more empathetic approach to affected communities and entities, a debate over the future of the relationship between national security and the economy, and strategies to improve communication

between citizens and governments of national security. The two main goals the author wanted to achieve through this book was to produce empathy for those who are most affected by the threats discussed in the book and to inform the citizens to understand the key national security threats. I found the first goal was somewhat achieved in the book, though it could have been explored further in the book. Carvin's extensive former experience as an intelligence analyst at CSIS has clearly helped her with the framework that she applies to understanding of the breadth of national security threats. Indeed, *Stand on Guard* is a useful guide for new researchers, students, and Canadians from the general public who want to learn the nature of the security threats facing national security.

About the Reviewer

Karmvir Padda is currently a PhD student in the Sociology and Legal Studies department at the University of Waterloo. She completed her MA in Criminology from Simon Fraser University (SFU) during which she also worked as a research assistant at the Disinformation Project at SFU's School of Communication. Her research mainly focuses on combating online foreign interference (disinformation/misinformation), extremists' use of the internet, right-wing extremism, hate crime, research methods and methodology, and computational social science. Her research is generously supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC CGS-D).

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