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by John Gilmour

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POLICY PERSPECTIVE

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Does Canada Need an Overarching Intelligence Review and Reset?

In a post-COVID-19 environment and with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Canada's policy-makers charged with a national security remit have renewed their focus on:

- State-on-state conflicts;
- State and non-state generated efforts on behalf of broader hybrid warfare strategies, including cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns;
- Various ideologically driven attacks; and
- Greater public visibility on espionage and influence campaigns by countries with adversarial agendas.

This threat environment has resulted in compelling arguments to securitize a number of policy issues that have historically fallen outside the traditional purview of national security. These include environmental or climate change security, plus energy, food, economic, health, supply chain and migration security. Practitioner and academic communities suggest the time is right to update key policy documents for Canada's national, defence and foreign security. In a perfect world, there would be a timing, narrative and prioritization nexus between all three policies constituting a grand strategy in support of national security, but this remains aspirational.

All such policy, strategy and programs require intelligence for informed decisions to be made.

"Intelligence" means different things to different people. It's a product, a process, an organization, an action. It's protecting your secrets and collecting those of your adversaries (current or potential), the production of day-to-day tactical and operational information and ideally, long-term strategic scanning. Intelligence is necessary to reduce the degree of uncertainty in a given field in decision-making to gain an advantage or identify opportunities, or to identify where one's own vulnerabilities exist. Intelligence strives to help consumers improve their relative position to adversaries and enhance performance at the lowest cost. It seeks to align knowledge with decision-making. And while some view the intelligence enterprise as one of government's more undesirable and distasteful functions, all governments recognize the need for it and are actively pursuing it in some manner.

There are two underlying and compelling reasons why it is time for a broad-ranging and formal review of Canada's intelligence enterprise. First, there is the changing and expanding threat environment on which intelligence is required to inform. Second, recent events surrounding foreign interference in Canada has demonstrated some challenges exist in how intelligence assessments are managed between producers and consumers. A review could examine a range of issues of how intelligence could be better managed between these two communities.

The Changing Threat Environment 2.0

After 9/11, and recognizing the nature of the new transnational threat and facilitation networks generated by al-Qaida (and subsequently IS), a number of federal departments and agencies were tasked with security or intelligence-related mandates where none had existed before. 9/11 and the need for a pre-emptive counter-terrorism policy also pushed the role of intelligence to the forefront. This resulted in the need for greater consultation, co-ordination and co-operation among the expanded network of national security-mandated agencies in the Canadian government, particularly those that collect and analyze intelligence. This led to the establishment of a permanent cabinet committee dedicated to security, the creation of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (now called Public Safety) and the Integrated Threat (now Terrorism) Assessment Centre (ITAC), all forms of intelligence fusion centres at different organizational levels.

Fast-forward to today. If there is an appetite to securitize a number of new policy issues as partner countries are doing – climate change, energy supply, health security, sustained food supplies, key infrastructure, mass migration issues and key supply chains – are traditional intelligence agencies best suited to collect, analyze and inform on these issues? While some non-traditional threats remain state-initiated, others have non-state or non-political origins, including environmental and health security, radical economic fluctuations and natural disasters that are beyond the control or influence of any one government, but that could generate or influence state-centric threats.

A different kind of specialized expertise and knowledge base (likely already in place in certain departments and agencies) in these new areas is required to collect and assess their impact on national security agendas. However, non-traditional departments and agencies are probably unable to adequately assess and inform on national security policy issues. Resources, education and training will be required. New departments and agencies need a mandate to collect, produce and disseminate intelligence assessments linked to these non-traditional issues so as to promote a whole-of-government or whole-of-society response.

On another threat front, the hybrid warfare strategies of countries willing to undermine Western democratic norms and the rules-based international order use different platforms to achieve their objectives – diplomatic, information (influence, propaganda, misinformation and deception), economic, financial and legal, by either state or non-state entities. They present considerable challenges for intelligence communities, as there are no rules and the battle is everywhere.

"Globalization, migration, geopolitical shifts, the changing nature and balance of power, increased digitization and connectivity, and increasing ease of access to technological and social resources have raised vulnerabilities within states and societies to new levels and are changing the security paradigm," states the Multinational Capability Development Campaign.[1] The strategic objectives

[1] Multinational Capability Development Campaign, "Countering Hybrid Warfare 3 Guidance for Planners," n.d., 12, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1037061/MCDC_Countereing_Hybrid_Warfare.pdf.

of hybrid warfare are essentially the same as conventional warfare: to disrupt, undermine or damage the political system and social cohesion of a targeted state through a variety of means.

Intelligence agencies face new challenges as hybrid efforts are purposely designed to be ambiguous and under the radar, making attribution difficult and enabling deniability. This obfuscation makes it hard for targets to gather the information necessary to respond with action before it's too late. Canada needs a multi-agency strategy in which intelligence plays a key role to detect and mitigate against a range of hybrid-warfare methods used by adversaries, to identify what they can and cannot do and the risk and vulnerabilities associated with them in the Canadian environment.

The Management of Intelligence

In Canada, intelligence assessments, whether strategic, operational or tactical, and regardless of the domain they're in, are produced daily for two reasons. First, assessments are produced in response to a request for specific information from a second party. Second, they are produced to alert second parties to a situation that was unanticipated or unknown and that requires a pre-emptive or actionable response by the second party or others. Intelligence agencies don't create assessments for their own benefit. To be of any value, assessments ideally result in an actionable response by somebody. Otherwise, the process from collection to analysis is a waste of time and resources. Of course, the degree to which decision-makers choose to act on the intelligence contained in assessments rests entirely with them and is conditional on a number of factors: the potential impact on other government or agency policies; information obtained from other sources; their morals and values; and, importantly, their understanding of the intelligence enterprise.

A number of recent events regarding the dissemination of intelligence assessments to senior Canadian decision-makers has received considerable attention. This is one of several issues associated with the management of intelligence within the broader intelligence enterprise which could be examined in a formal review. What follows are suggestions and they are not the last word on the subject.

First, to what degree will current consultation frameworks need to be organizationally adjusted to incorporate an expanded intelligence community in Canada, with the inclusion of agencies now charged with examining non-traditional items? What issues will have intelligence collection priority in an expanded traditional/non-traditional threat spectrum? Absent updated and overarching policies for distinct disciplines, foreign policy and defence for example, and recognizing emerging non-traditional issues, how are their intelligence mandates and functions to be co-ordinated and prioritized for a whole-of-government approach?

Westminster principles would probably not allow for creating a director of national intelligence position with direct line management responsibility of intelligence agencies, as the U.S. has. But where is overarching management of intelligence best placed in the Canadian system? What

organization has an in-depth understanding of the various intelligence platforms in Canada, with the desired outcome of the corporate intelligence whole being greater than the sum of the individual parts? How do various agencies' intelligence platforms connect to each other at strategic, operational and tactical levels? How does intelligence bring added value to the decision-making process? Who can make recommendations as to where scarce intelligence resources should best be allocated and how competing agendas can be reconciled? Who can decide what emerging threats require dedicated attention given the vast spectrum of potential areas of concern? Who can identify where innovation in its various guises can support the intelligence enterprise writ large or in specific platforms?

Hidden in the media focus on the Trudeau government's recent cabinet shuffle was an announcement about the creation of a new cabinet committee titled the National Security Council. The Council will be in charge of "overseeing and setting the strategic direction for emerging challenges Canada is increasingly facing and a new forum for ministers to deliberate on and address issues of pressing concern to Canada's domestic and international security."[2] Let's hope the new Council goes beyond performing merely a secretariat function, rubber-stamping bottom-up initiatives, but will instead provide a forum for informed decision-making and debate, ideally considering long-term and strategic temporal horizons. Concerns surrounding transparency and the application of cabinet confidence have been raised in the context of recent events – the trucker convoy and foreign influence, for example. Let's hope the new Council provides a platform for the historical record on decisions, accountability and oversight.

A more fundamental question remains as to whether Council members will understand the role the intelligence enterprise could and should play in the construct of national security policy, whether the topic is national security, defence, law enforcement or foreign or economic domains.

Is there a compelling argument for the national security and intelligence advisor in the Privy Council Office to focus almost exclusively on the co-ordination and fusion of intelligence collection and analysis in the federal government? Should a new and separate entity akin to the U.S. National Security Council, with expertise from a variety of policy centres, manage and assess the impact of intelligence analyses on national security-related policies, strategies and remits, for the Council's consideration?

Other issues connected to intelligence and existing traditional threats have also been identified.

First, should an intelligence review revisit the roles individual departments and agencies play in working with senior elected officials to establish intelligence collection and assessment priorities for the federal government?

Every two years, Canada's intelligence-mandated departments individually submit their recommended collection and assessment priorities to cabinet which provides approved general direction to what an agency's intelligence collection and assessment priorities will be.

[2] Rachel Aiello, "Trudeau is Striking a New National Security Council, But What Will It Do?" CTV, July 26, 2023, https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/new-cabinet-national-security-council-will-set-strategic-direction-for-emerging-challenges-pm-1.6496688.

(Departments and agencies subsequently break down broad cabinet direction into bite-size chunks for management, resourcing and accountability reasons).

The mechanics of this process generally work. The challenge is the degree of attention and discussion (or more the lack thereof) usually paid by cabinet officials or their senior staff to the agencies' collection and assessment recommendations. Information provided by insiders familiar with the process suggests there is typically little if anything in the way of robust discussion or challenge functions in cabinet structures, and agency recommendations seem to be rubber-stamped. It also suggests known threats receive priority. This means that any discussion on identified over-the-horizon threats requiring pre-emptive action, policies or strategies (and therefore discussion about the nature of the emerging threat, and associated risks and vulnerabilities), would get short shrift or no interest or authority. More on this topic later.

Much of this apparent indifference on the part of senior Canadian decision-makers is often characterized as a culture deficit for national security issues in general and the role of intelligence specifically. This, despite the government presumably having "no more important obligation than the protection and safety of its citizens," as per the 2004 national security policy.[3] As Andrew Brunatti has noted, Canada has a "national political culture that has traditionally viewed intelligence at best with apathy, and at worst with suspicion."[4] When compared to other global partners, it seems Canadian decision-makers' understanding of the intelligence enterprise in general and its role in government specifically is not what it could or should be. A historical lack of existential threats to the country's survival, a preference to work through multilateral or multinational security frameworks and Canada's characterization as the peaceable kingdom speak volumes as to why this is likely the case.

Recent events have shown that decision-makers or their staff have difficulty understanding how to read assessments and their probability-based syntax; or worse, key assessments are not examined on a timely basis. Close and sustained connectivity between intelligence producers and decision-makers is crucial if intelligence assessments are to be trusted, relevant and actioned. If there is an inconsistent understanding between agencies and departments of what intelligence can and cannot do, policy-making at both domestic and global levels becomes more difficult, and global partners have difficulty understanding government intentions.

An intelligence-based review could provide the necessary coverage to establish some form of standardized institutional education (not "training") for senior decision-makers – elected or bureaucratic – of the intelligence enterprise: what it is, how it works and how it may serve the mandates of individual departments and agencies. Ideally, such a program would be targeted to senior decision-makers not engaged in intelligence or national security remits.

A review could also reinforce the need for a more formal and sustained framework to produce long-term strategic intelligence. Canadian governments have allowed this crucial intelligence

[3] Privy Council Office, "Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy," 2004: vii, https://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/CP22-77-2004E.pdf.
[4] Andrew Brunatti, *Routledge Companion to Intelligence Studies*, E. Dover, M. Goodman and C. Hillebrand, eds., (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2014), 154.

function to atrophy as traditional threats have been relatively predictable over the past 40 years – espionage and influence, ideologically motivated violence and terrorism and WMD proliferation.

Day-to-day short-term intelligence ("What just happened?," "What's happening?") has become the bread and butter of intelligence-based organizations. As intelligence consumers, policy-makers are more comfortable working in the here and now, as it is easier to respond with something actionable. Overcoming what is described as "the tyranny of the present" requires decision-makers to have a significant maturity and cognizance. However, giving the future short shrift from an intelligence perspective only puts a country's security and other interests at risk.[5]

Contrary to their willingness to respond to current issues, policy-makers have a hard time dealing with the more ambiguous nature of strategic, forward-looking intelligence. It's difficult for them to provide an actionable policy response as the future has a higher degree of uncertainty and actual outcomes tend to hinge on any number of variables. But even an educated guess by intelligence agencies on the probability of events unfolding over the long term, or of emerging and unanticipated threats, is certainly better than governments being forced to adopt a responsive position with a threat staring them in the face and essentially controlling the agenda. And it's important to acknowledge that many of the non-traditional issues being considered are multi-generational in their temporal horizon. How this function should be best accommodated organizationally is a topic of future discussion, but strategic intelligence should probably not be carried out by analysts tasked with assessing current events in parallel. Perhaps it could be done in the Privy Council Office's Intelligence Assessment Secretariat.

An intelligence review could also provide recommendations regarding the recognition of the role private or commercial sectors have in the collection and analysis of threat-based information in both open-source and classified environments. A forthright examination of the public-private relationship should go beyond the view that non-public sectors are merely partners (at times reluctant), and instead recognize that commercial and private entities have demonstrated they are actually leaders in certain domains. They are more responsive with innovative and timely collection and analysis techniques and the application of new technologies such as satellite resolution, UAVs, AI and quantum computing to the intelligence enterprise. In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs,* Calder Walton, a director at the Kennedy School at Harvard University, states: "The future of Western intelligence lies not with governments, but with the private sector."[6] While this may be viewed as something of an over-statement, it nevertheless reinforces the reality that the private sector will have an increasing role in Canada's intelligence enterprise.

An enhanced partnership with the private sector, as well as other levels of government, needs to shift the cultural and institutional foundations in the federal government regarding the capacity and willingness to share sensitive, centrally controlled information across the public and private

[5] J .A. Gentry and J. S. Gordon, *Strategic Warning Intelligence: History, Challenges and Prospects,* (Washington: Georgetown Press), 225.
[6] Calder Walton, "The New Spy Wars: How China and Russia Use Intelligence Agencies to Undermine America," *Foreign Affairs,* July 19, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/russia-china-intelligence-new-spy-wars-undermine-america.

domains in a "need to share" philosophy. This is in response to the concern that too many assessments are unnecessarily overly classified, preventing the distribution of key intelligence to other levels of government and first responders.

An intelligence review should also provide recommendations for a more established and formal feedback process to assess the quality and added value of intelligence assessments policy-makers use. Despite feedback being recognized as a step in the intelligence process or cycle, this has traditionally been an area of ad hoc, anecdotal and inconsistent effort by both assessment producers and consumers. As in any discipline, a number of potential filters are associated with an intelligence feedback process – efficacy, efficiency and compliance, to name three – but it certainly goes beyond merely identifying how many reports were produced within a given period, generally recognized as a poor metric.

Should intelligence be assessed on the basis that pre-emptive measures were put in place to mitigate threats in a timely way, that key intelligence gaps were filled or uncertainties reduced? Can factors that resulted in intelligence shortfalls be remedied – or not? Given the sources of information available to any policy-maker these days, a well thought-out and more formalized feedback regime can point to where intelligence assessments either hit or miss the target. Recent events, particularly the invasion of Ukraine, have shown that for the first time since the 2003 intervention in Iraq, intelligence assessments are being presented in the public domain to justify policy decisions. Should this trend continue, it will be in the best interest of both assessment producers and consumers to maintain an ongoing dialogue on the quality and impact of assessments.

An intelligence review could also provide direction as to how the intelligence enterprise can be better explained through public dialogue. It's probably fair to say most Canadians are ignorant of the respective mandates of intelligence community members. Is it unreasonable to suggest that even the outcome of cabinet-directed intelligence collection and assessment priority-setting processes could be proactively marketed in the public domain instead of being hidden in annual reports? Even if traditional intelligence practices legitimately warrant discretion, policy decisions regarding non-traditional, non-human generated threats associated with the impacts of, for example, climate change, major economic fluctuations or pandemics can be openly informed by government-generated intelligence. This can be done in concert with scientists and experts in industry, academia, the media or civil society groups. Intelligence in these areas can be more clinically or scientifically explained in the public domain, absent much of the politicization of more traditional threats.

Even within the traditional threat environment, a more recent example of the need for this sort of initiative is reflected in a May 2023 report by Alliance Canada Hong Kong (ACHK). A survey it conducted showed that 72 per cent and 64 per cent respectively of respondent politicians and staff indicated they were not equipped with the knowledge, resources and guidelines to identify and

counter foreign state influence and/or interference or disinformation/misinformation activities respectively.[7]

This would also have the advantage of extending the temporal horizon of security issues from a policy perspective, giving greater consideration to the long-term impacts on the country as opposed to a focus by governments on short-term, political-cycle considerations.

Likely the most controversial item in this menu of possible issues for review is the need for Canada's intelligence community to engage in more offensive counter-intelligence initiatives and shaping its own disinformation strategies. In Canada, counter-intelligence is viewed as a necessary defensive process to protect state secrets from exposure, to provide physical security measures, to screen personnel in sensitive positions and so on. Other countries' counter-intelligence also has an offensive component that Canada's intelligence communities have traditionally not chosen to engage in. This involves operations designed to throw the opposition purposely and pre-emptively off track through a planned release of disinformation and misinformation so as to redirect adversaries to adopt investigations or initiatives that lead to nothing but which they believe are meaningful. How the Canadian intelligence community could best plan, approve and implement this goes beyond the remit of this paper, but it would certainly require a cultural shift.

Finally, a dedicated intelligence review could provide a shopping list as to where new or amended legislation or statutes are required to update intelligence mandates, processes, organizations, co-ordination and oversight to meet new or unanticipated threats.

How Is a Review Best Positioned and Characterized?

Given the various drivers for intelligence in the federal government – national security, law enforcement, defence, diplomatic and socioeconomic issues – how should an overarching intelligence review be positioned or characterized? Is a comprehensive review even possible? How is the intelligence enterprise incorporated in broader federal policies – national security, defence and foreign affairs – and is there inferred intelligence interoperability between these policies? If not, should there be, and how is this best reflected?

Like their counterparts in the U.S., U.K. and Australia, Canadian intelligence agencies have internal policies governing their conduct, efficacy and efficiency. External parties often review adherence to those policies. But an informal survey suggests none of those countries has an overarching intelligence policy. Individual agencies produce intelligence strategies that key on the identification of prevailing threats and how collection and assessment priorities align with those threats. But strategies typically don't look at how intelligence is necessarily managed, a core issue for a proposed review in Canada. Would a review conducted by either external or internal resources have the weight, traction and visibility to generate sustained support for the

[7] Alliance Canada Hong Kong, "Murky Waters: Beijing's Influence in Canadian Democratic and Electoral Processes," May 2023, 23-24, https://alliancecanadahk.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/ACHK_Murky_Waters_Bejings_Influence_in_Canadian_Democratic_and.pdf.

recommendations that would result, or would they be tabled and then left on a shelf gathering dust? And if a review cites a number of recommendations, will they be prioritized in terms of their implementation, reflecting a phased approach? Or will a program trying to address all recommendations simultaneously be developed where everything is a priority, with the inherent risk of it stalling or collapsing over time? What approach best enables the ability to match and assess results expected with results achieved?

Regardless of how a review is positioned organizationally and defined, it would ideally provide recommendations for a framework that co-ordinates activities and priorities in an expanded intelligence community to support a unified intelligence enterprise. It would be crafted through a deliberate, collaborative process, ideally providing for a timely review horizon. In short, the review's main outcome and benefit would be better clarity as to the role of intelligence in today's new threat environment. This includes the need to develop some sort of recognized structure that provides direction on how strategic, operational and tactical intelligence in individual departments and agencies is best integrated, and how the federal policy community, other levels of government, local front-line responders and the private sector share and manage intelligence generated at these three levels.

Some of the rationale for a national intelligence review is predicated on the federal government securitizing a number of non-traditional threats described previously, much in the way its intelligence community was charged from a mandate and organizational perspective post-9/11. If this comes to pass, this narrative suggests existing core intelligence agencies are probably not best suited to undertake intelligence-related functions linked to these non-traditional threats, and a number of federal agencies that do possess the requisite expertise in these areas should be tasked with an intelligence mandate. An enhanced federal intelligence community will require some direction to promote the necessary consultation and collaboration from a process, management and organizational perspective, and a framework to prioritize intelligence efforts and financial resources against an ever-expanding threat spectrum and a variety of intelligence-based mandates.

A dedicated review would also address a number of current issues and challenges related to the management of intelligence in the existing intelligence community, not the least of which is the perceived cultural deficit when it comes to key consumers' understanding of the intelligence enterprise.

Intelligence allows decision-makers to assess their relative strengths and weaknesses as compared to an adversary, when to engage in fight or flight responses, when to bargain and even when to do nothing. The intelligence community and capacity in Canada will need to grow in the short to medium term to provide decision-makers with the necessary intelligence and assessments in response to an expanding securitized environment. Agencies with different cultures, procedures and objectives will have to learn to work in harmony for the greater good, and in support of a unity of effort. While some element of flexibility and adaptability is necessary, a formal intelligence review is required to ensure the appropriate mechanisms for consultation, intelligence management, priority setting and resource allocation are understood and in place for an

expanding Canadian intelligence community. This is key in a threat environment where timing for important decision-making is increasingly compressed, and complexities and uncertainties are increasing.

Regardless of how national security, law enforcement, military, diplomatic, social or economic policies are ultimately promulgated, let's hope they will be based partly on informed, insightful and timely intelligence assessments developed within the broader framework that is an outcome of a well thought-out, formal intelligence review.

About the Author

John Gilmour *is an instructor on terrorism, counterterrorism, and intelligence, with the University of Ottawa Professional Development Institute and Carleton University's Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA). He served for 37 years in the federal government, first with Transport Canada as project manager and analyst for airport security programs, then in a post in the Security and Intelligence (Operations) section of the Privy Council Office as a senior policy analyst. He then joined CSIS, serving most recently as the Head of Strategic Planning and Operational Analysis in the Counter-Terrorism Division. John holds a BA from Carleton University, and a MA and PhD in War Studies from RMC. He serves on the Advisory Board of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies – Vancouver, is a Fellow with the Canadian Global Affairs Institute and the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network. He is also sits on the Board of Directors of the Canadian Intelligence Network and is on the editorial board for the Journal of Intelligence, Warfare and Conflict.*

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