



## **DOES CANADA NEED A DEDICATED INTELLIGENCE STRATEGY?**

**Date:** November 13, 2023

*Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.*

### **KEY EVENTS**

On November 13, 2023, Dr. John Gilmour presented *Does Canada Need a Dedicated Intelligence Strategy?* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The key points discussed were the magnitude of religiously motivated violent extremism as a global threat, the magnitude of domestic-based terrorism or ideologically motivated terrorism as a threat to North American state security, and the implications and increased likelihood for radicalization that may occur due to Canada's response to global security conflicts, including the Israel-Hamas war.

### **NATURE OF DISCUSSION**

Dr. Gilmour's presentation categorized terrorism and extremism into global and North American issues, with a focus on possible impacts on future terrorist threats due to the Israel-Hamas conflict and implications of lacking counterterrorism measures in Canada. Law enforcement agencies are experiencing increased challenges as white supremacy groups and right-wing extremists gain exposure through social media and develop legitimacy in the narratives of political parties—more so in Europe. In the U.S, domestic-terrorism and threats to different communities and the stability and legitimacy of the federal government have been identified through a formal domestic counter-terrorism strategy. Canada's main enforcement gap is a lack of formal definition differentiating terrorism and hate crime violence, the latter lacking a formal statutory or judicial framework.

### **BACKGROUND**

Dr. Gilmour outlined intelligence gaps within Canadian intelligence policy and provided background on the variations in the threat environment between Canada, the U.S., Europe, and the rest of the world, noting that, within the international arena, religiously motivated terrorism still represents the most

significant threat in terms of number of attacks and lethality. The Sub-Saharan region in Africa is acknowledged to be the current epicentre of terrorism, with the withdrawal of longstanding U.S. and French resources adding to instability, creating opportunities for terrorist groups to fill the resulting vacuum. Furthermore, national security communities are questioning whether new leadership within groups like Al Qaeda will continue to focus operating in local environments or if attacks against the “far enemy” will again be a part of their broader strategic direction. Dr. Gilmour explained that intelligence and national security agencies have demonstrated a historical inability to predict the focus of extremist groups and their future motivations.

Dr. Gilmour stated that in Canada and the U.S., white supremacist and far-right extremists constitute the highest levels of attacks, noting that the US has formally separated domestic terrorism from global terrorism with the release of its national strategy for countering terrorism in June 2021, making it among the first of countries to make this distinction dogmatically. One of Canada’s formal documents for outlining the terrorism threat in the country, *Threats to the Security of Canada to and Canadian Interest* (CSIS, 2019), outlines definitions of xenophobic or gender-based violence as comprising an unprecedented nexus with terrorism, which has sparked significant discourse on whether these attacks can be considered as terrorism and by extension whether they constitute issues of national security. Dr. Gilmour stated that the CSIS Act captures terrorism on a generic level and does not provide a formal description of national security, instead defining threats in relation to the security of Canada. These threats include politically, religiously and ideologically motivated violent extremism. Though the documents incorporate a high level of focus on the right wing / white supremacist threat, Canada does not have a statutory or criminal code mechanism for hate crime violence—instead, the majority of attacks that are deemed as hate crimes by law enforcement agencies fall under mischief or incitement in the Criminal Code. In cases where charges for mischief or incitement fall short, there is a concern that terrorism charges are being used as a proxy for hate crime violence in the absence of a more program formal judicial and enforcement framework when it comes to hate crime violence.

Dr. Gilmour concluded that across the modern threat environment, we see domestic attackers engage in ideological convergence, resulting in a patchwork of supremacist beliefs and posing challenges for law enforcement in forming mitigation strategies.

### KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- White supremacist and right-wing extremism narratives are gaining more exposure and legitimacy in political parties in Europe, more so than even the U.S. But religiously motivated terrorism is still an

ongoing and sustained threat in Europe in parallel, creating prioritization challenges.

- The *risk* associated with the threat of IMVE violence in Canada is somewhat unique given Canada's norms and values and historical and cultural aversion to this form of violence, when compared to the US.. However, there is a need for greater understanding of the threat and associated risks in Canada as it evolves.
- Terrorism in general has widely been deprioritized and is in competition for national security resources against other threats like espionage, influence and interference and state-on-state conflict.
- Canada's support to Israel amidst the Israel-Hamas war may give rise to the resurgence of self-radicalization and religiously motivated terrorism due to increased antisemitic attitudes and a disdain for Western governments. Historically, Canada's foreign policy has been the primary motivator for those engaged in RMVE attacks in Canada.

### FURTHER READING

Gilmour, J. (2021a). Does Canada have anything in the way of a strategic warning intelligence culture (and does it need one)? *Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare*, 4(2).  
<https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v4i2.3623>

Gilmour, J. (2021b, July). *Does Canada Need a New National Security Policy?* Canadian Global Affairs Institute.  
[https://www.cgai.ca/does\\_canada\\_need\\_a\\_new\\_national\\_security\\_policy](https://www.cgai.ca/does_canada_need_a_new_national_security_policy)

Gilmour, J. (2022, March). *Strategic Miscalculations Regarding Ukraine and the Failure of the Rational-Actor Model*. Canadian Global Affairs Institute. [https://www.cgai.ca/strategic\\_miscalculations\\_regarding\\_ukraine\\_and\\_the\\_failure\\_of\\_the\\_rational\\_actor\\_model](https://www.cgai.ca/strategic_miscalculations_regarding_ukraine_and_the_failure_of_the_rational_actor_model)



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