



AN OVERVIEW OF THE INTELLIGENCE ENTERPRISE IN CANADA

Date: July 18, 2024

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KEY EVENTS

On July 18, 2024, Dr. John Gilmour presented *An Overview of the Intelligence Enterprise in Canada*. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were that enhanced cooperation and communication between policymakers and intelligence officials will be necessary to bridge a disconnect between the two roles. Further, the current intelligence framework may not be adequately equipped to address non-traditional threats, and restructuring traditional agencies may be unnecessary to tackle evolving issues. Finally, public and private sector partnerships should be strengthened to counter the increasing threat of hybrid warfare.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Dr. Gilmour's presentation highlighted critical gaps in Canada's intelligence enterprise, particularly the disconnect between intelligence analysts and policymakers, and the inadequacy of the current framework in addressing evolving threats like hybrid warfare and non-traditional security issues. He emphasized the need for enhanced cooperation, education, and structural changes within the intelligence community to effectively tackle these challenges. Additionally, Dr. Gilmour stressed the importance of fostering stronger public-private partnerships to leverage the private sector's capabilities in countering modern threats.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Recent events have brought Canada's intelligence enterprise under scrutiny, and questions have been raised about whether the country's current intelligence framework, including the actionability of intelligence assessments and the dissemination of products to the appropriate stakeholders, is adequate.

According to Dr. Gilmour, Canada is facing an expanding and evolving threat landscape that may not currently be fully understood, which negatively affects the intelligence-policy nexus. Some of these new threats, which Dr. Gilmour notes are important to address in the near future, include state-on-state conflict; ideologically driven attacks; hybrid warfare; cyber attacks; espionage; organized crime; domestic shooters; transnational repression, which includes external hit teams like the one seen in the case of Hardeep Najjar; and interference with elections, media and business operations. These issues are often interlinked, increasing their complexity for members of the intelligence and policy communities.

Dr. Gilmour highlighted the expansion of non-traditional threats such as climate, water, food, energy, health, immigration, and supply chain security, but noted that for the past several decades, intelligence organizations have been focusing on more conventional threats. This raises the question of whether traditional organizations like the RCMP or CSIS are best suited to deal with non-traditional threats, which will require specific expertise to fully understand and adequately communicate. Dr. Gilmour suggests that in order to best counter these security issues, intelligence practitioners and products should ensure that they are properly conveyed to policymakers. Additionally, as traditional and non-traditional threats become further enmeshed, Dr. Gilmour suggested that organizational changes, such as those that occurred post-9/11, will be necessary to coordinate and consult on their management. With global partner agencies prioritizing adaptations like these, it becomes increasingly important for Canada to begin providing the training, education, and resources necessary to engage with this shift.

A key threat that Canada's counterintelligence practitioners must adapt to, in the eyes of Dr. Gilmour, is hybrid warfare, which is designed to generate destabilization and uncertainty through a variety of means. Sometimes called asymmetric or gray-zone warfare, it seeks to inflict economic, political and other types of damage without direct attribution to an adversarial state. Given the convoluted nature of the hybrid threat and the complex response required, Dr. Gilmour suggests that counterintelligence efforts, which have traditionally been focused on human targets (i.e. counterterrorism and counterespionage), must be

expanded significantly to address the multifaceted hybrid threats facing our intelligence community.

The current management of intelligence products is another issue the Canadian security establishment is currently facing, described by senior officials as a culture gap not seen in Western partner nations. Recent reviews suggest that there is a disconnect between decision-makers and intelligence professionals; intelligence analysts often don't understand the policy process, and policymakers don't always grasp the actionability of intelligence assessments. According to an unnamed quote, "The intelligence culture in Canada derives from a risk-averse approach to defense and security issues in general. Canada's intelligence community and policymakers have often had to tread a fine line, balancing the need for intelligence to support government operations with a national political culture that has traditionally viewed intelligence with at best with apathy, and at worst with suspicion." Consequently, Dr. Gilmour stated, Canada's approach to intelligence has been defined as "minimalism." Then, citing a recent NSICOP review on foreign intelligence interference, he went on to say that national security agencies have a much lower bar for what constitutes a threat than many policy centers. This results in a consistent disconnect between the gravity of threats outlined in intelligence assessments and the measures taken to counter them. Therefore, not only is there a need to educate policymakers regarding the intelligence enterprise in Canada, but also to increase cooperation between intelligence officials and key decision-makers.

Additionally, as the threat landscape changes, assessing risks becomes more difficult. Consideration of risk is imperative in prioritizing efforts, allocating resources and identifying vulnerabilities, but in order to assess a risk, it must be fully understood. Especially in the case of hybrid warfare and non-traditional threats, the Canadian intelligence community may currently not be equipped to properly assess and anticipate some of these new risks.

In order to effectively address new issues that the Canadian intelligence enterprise is facing, Dr. Gilmour suggests increased cooperation between policy and intelligence functions. He notes that currently, Canada has no equivalent of the U.S. National Security Council (NSC), which helps translate intelligence into policy; the National Security and Intelligence Advisor in Ottawa is the nation's intelligence coordinator, but has no hand in policy. Dr. Gilmour suggested that there could be some benefit for Canada to form a multidisciplinary council like the NSC, made up of lawmakers and security experts, to help bridge the disconnect between intelligence and policy.

Further, the inconsistent relationship between the public sector and government regarding intelligence cooperation must be improved to counter modern threats effectively, said Dr. Gilmour. He suggested that the private sector may actually take the lead on a number of analytical and collection platforms due to timely and advanced technical research and development. As private sectors become increasingly common targets for hybrid warfare actors, this cooperation will become even more important.

Finally, overcoming a general lack of interest on the part of the Canadian public when it comes to intelligence and national security could help bolster the nation's intelligence enterprise. This will require the public being informed of the activities of the intelligence enterprise and the threats that are facing the country. Reports on foreign interference point to a need for amendments and updates to legislation; and challenges in the intelligence-to-evidence threshold will need to be addressed.

Question and Answer

Will recent disagreements between intelligence services and oversight (i.e. CSIS and NSIRA following the latter's report on the former in the spring) impede the intelligence enterprise in Canada or are these disagreements necessary for a more robust and, ultimately, impactful intelligence enterprise?

Oversight and accountability are absolutely key functions in any sort of liberal democracy where intelligence is involved; there's always a concern among the general public that intelligence or national security will be used for nefarious purposes, making oversight of ethics as important as checks and balances on compliance, efficacy, and efficiency.

Do you think in the evolving hybrid threat landscape, given how it evolves at an order of magnitude that might be out of the traditional scope, it might be in the best interest of the IC community to amalgamate the senior leadership with more junior "subject matter experts" (SMEs) who have certain technological acumen to move fast enough, who would serve as an arm of senior leadership, so that they can better advise junior agents on what intelligence to collect?

Instead of approaching the issue from a senior/junior approach, Dr. Gilmour suggested that instead, partnerships between private and public sector officials will be key. This type of collaboration will be essential given that the private sector, which can include the finance, utility, transportation and infrastructure

communities, is likely to be an increasingly common target for hybrid warfare actors in the near future.

Focusing on education, especially toward the younger audience, how can Canada develop and enforce policies that use education as a tool to prevent radicalization among young people? What kind of training and resources should be provided to teachers to help them recognize signs of radicalization and respond appropriately? With the rise of online radicalization, what steps can be taken to improve digital literacy among students to help them critically evaluate information they encounter online?

Education and the response of frontline community members like teachers and religious leaders are a critical element, but a challenge with this is that there's no cookie cutter approach to how an individual becomes radicalized. It could be a traumatic event, family issues, personal grievances, or influence from others; therefore, community leaders must understand each individual's motivations and influences to counter radicalization.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- There is a significant gap between intelligence analysts and policymakers, often due to a lack of mutual understanding. Dr. Gilmour highlights the need for enhanced education and cooperation to ensure that intelligence assessments are fully understood and utilized by policymakers.
- The current intelligence framework may not be adequately equipped to address non-traditional threats such as climate change, cyber-attacks, and food and energy insecurity. Restructuring traditional agencies or incorporating specialized expertise may assist in tackling these evolving issues more effectively.
- Hybrid warfare attacks are becoming increasingly common; to address this, counterintelligence efforts should be expanded beyond traditional human targets to encompass the multifaceted nature of hybrid threats.
- The private sector is increasingly targeted by hybrid warfare actors, and its involvement is crucial for effective threat management. Dr. Gilmour emphasizes the importance of fostering stronger public-private partnerships to leverage advanced technical research and development capabilities in addressing modern threats.

FURTHER READING

Gilmour, J. (2024). DOES CANADA NEED A DEDICATED INTELLIGENCE STRATEGY?. *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare*, 6(3), 110–112. <https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v6i3.6371>

Gilmour, J. (2024). The Socialization Of Terrorism In Canada. *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare*, 6(3), 32–77. <https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v6i3.6327>

Gilmour, J. (2023). Does Canada Need an Overarching Intelligence Review and Reset? In *Canadian Global Affairs Institute*. https://www.cgai.ca/does_canada_need_an_overarching_intelligence_review_and_reset



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