



## **CHANGES TO CANADA'S NATIONAL SECURITY INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Date:** November 20, 2025

*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 20, 2025, Mr. Rob Mendoza presented *Changes to Canada's National Security Structure* at the 2025 West Coast Security Conference. The presentation examined governance reforms to Canada's national security and intelligence infrastructure in the post-pandemic environment. In this context, transparency initiatives, legislative modernization, institutional trust-building measures, and the debate surrounding the establishment of a Canadian foreign human intelligence capability were also explored.

### **NATURE OF DISCUSSION**

The COVID-19 pandemic was framed as exposing institutional vulnerabilities, intensifying public distrust, and highlighting structural gaps in Canada's national security governance. In response, reforms in recent years have sought to emphasize transparency and accountability. At the same time, national security is increasingly understood as encompassing economic resilience, technological sovereignty, border integrity, and institutional legitimacy. Within this broader reconceptualization, a central question remains whether Canada can continue to rely on allied foreign intelligence collection in an era of strained alliances and intensifying strategic competition.

### **BACKGROUND**

Mr. Mendoza noted that emergency authorities, rapid policy shifts, and widespread disinformation during the pandemic contributed to declining institutional trust. National security institutions – traditionally opaque by necessity – were particularly affected by skepticism surrounding accountability and oversight.

In response, Canada introduced three significant governance reforms. First, the creation of a Cabinet-level National Security Council of Canada (NSC) in 2023 addressed long-standing fragmentation in strategic decision-making. Previously reliant on dispersed coordination mechanisms, national security deliberations now occur within a centralized forum involving ministers and deputy-level officials. The NSC enhances collective oversight and executive accountability while elevating national security as a visible Cabinet priority.

Second, the public release of Canada's Intelligence Priorities marked a largely unprecedented effort towards transparency. While operational specifics remain classified, the publication signals an effort to restore institutional "social license".

Third, the mandate letter for the National Security and Intelligence Advisor (NSIA) was made public, clarifying expectations regarding intelligence coordination, allied engagement, and public trust-building. Mr. Mendoza described this as a shift toward institutional clarity, enabling civil society and academia to better understand executive-level responsibilities.

Legislative modernization has also accompanied governance reforms. Amendments to the Investment Canada Act (Bill C-34) strengthened the government's authority to review foreign investments potentially posing risks to economic and supply-chain security. The Foreign Interference and Security of Information Act (Bill C-70) introduced a foreign influence transparency registry. The Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act (Bill C-12) allocated increased funding to modernize border security and counter organized crime and financial illicit activity.

In Mr. Mendoza's view, a central unresolved issue is Canada's lack of a dedicated foreign human intelligence service. As the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) holds limited foreign investigative authorities under judicial oversight, Canada relies heavily on Five Eyes partners for overseas HUMINT collection. Mr. Mendoza argued that information sovereignty increasingly requires independent assessment capabilities, particularly in sensitive domains such as Arctic security and foreign interference. He emphasized that Canada's oversight architecture – including the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP), the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency (NSIRA), and the Office of the Intelligence Commissioner – provides a foundation for responsible expansion.

Mr. Mendoza concluded that contemporary intelligence capability is inseparable from sovereignty. As geopolitical competition intensifies, Canada must determine how it will assume greater responsibility for independent intelligence collection and analysis.

### **Question and Answer**

*What specific strengths does CSIS bring to the Five Eyes, and how might intelligence cooperation evolve?*

Arctic proximity: Canada provides monitoring and intelligence coverage in the Arctic – an area of increasing importance due to Russian military activity, climate change, and emerging shipping routes. Northern SIGINT infrastructure: Canadian collection facilities historically monitored Soviet communications across the Arctic and Northern Eurasia. Northern American access: Canada sits between the U.S. homeland and the Atlantic/Arctic theaters, providing early insight into transatlantic and polar developments. Canada plays an important role in monitoring diaspora communities connected to global conflicts, tracking foreign influence operations targeting Western democracies, and contributing insight into transnational extremist networks operating in North America. This intelligence is especially valuable as many threats originate/transit through Canada before reaching the U.S. or Europe.

Additionally, Canada often plays the role of a trusted intermediary in intelligence diplomacy due to its ability to maintain dialogue with states that may distrust Washington or London, its strong relationships with NATO/Commonwealth partners, and its global perception as being less politically dominant than the U.S. Due to this positioning, Canadian intelligence reporting can sometimes bridge diplomatic gaps inside the alliance.

*In Canada, multiple agencies and departments work on similar threat sets at once. How do we ensure collaborative systems exist for information sharing across departments?*

In Canada, operational-level information sharing has long been effective. However, structural coordination at the Cabinet level requires strengthening. Expanding collaboration beyond federal institutions to include provinces, municipalities, academia, think tanks, and industry stakeholders would also improve collaborative systems.

### KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- The COVID-19 pandemic exposed structural fragmentation, outdated legislation, and weaknesses in Canada's national security culture that contributed to declining public trust.
- The creation of the National Security Council centralized Cabinet-level coordination and improved accountability.
- Public release of intelligence priorities and the NSIA mandate represent meaningful transparency reforms.
- Legislative amendments (Bills C-34, C-70, and C-12) expanded authorities to address economic coercion, foreign interference, and border vulnerabilities.
- Canada's lack of a dedicated foreign HUMINT capability raises sovereignty concerns and warrants serious institutional consideration.

### FURTHER READINGS

Mendoza, R. (2023). PROFESSIONALIZING AND STANDARDIZING INTELLIGENCE PRACTICE IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL SECURITY. *The Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare*, 5(3), 152–156. <https://doi.org/10.21810/jicw.v5i3.5187>



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