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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ATIP	access to information and privacy
CAF	Canadian Armed Forces
CASIS	Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies
CBSA	Canada Border Services Agency
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
COBRA	Cabinet Office Briefing Room A
CSE	Communications Security Establishment Canada
CSIS	Canadian Security Intelligence Service
DFAIT	Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
DMIA	Deputy Minister Committee on Intelligence Assessment
DMNS	Deputy Minister Committee on National Security
DMOC	Deputy Minister Committee on Operational Coordination
G7	Group of Seven
IAS	Intelligence Assessment Secretariat
ICSI	Interdepartmental Committee on Security and Intelligence
IRG	Incident Response Group
ISED	Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSA	national security advisor to the prime minister
NSC	National Security Council
NSIA	national security and intelligence advisor to the prime minister
NSICOP	National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians
NSIRA	National Security and Intelligence Review Agency
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PCO	Privy Council Office
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SECD	Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs

Executive Summary

The national security and intelligence advisor to the prime minister (NSIA) is one of the most important officials in the Canadian government. The NSIA counsels the prime minister on critical matters of national interest while coordinating a complex security and intelligence community and engaging relevant actors worldwide. No other position in the federal public service can match this combination of responsibilities. The significance of the office has ebbed and flowed over the decades, depending on the individual in the job, the interest of the prime minister and the state of the world. The position has become increasingly complex and demanding, as the definition of national security has expanded and the world has become more unsettled.

This paper is a bureaucratic history of the NSIA. It examines the evolution of the office over the years, the officials who have held the job and the ways in which they collaborated with their colleagues across government to address emerging threats. While not an account of national security in Canada per se, it does touch upon many of the security-related events that grabbed the headlines during these years. At a time when threats to Canada are more serious than ever and our closest allies are no longer inherently trustworthy, a complacent attitude toward national security cannot be tolerated. Exploring the history of the NSIA and identifying ways to improve the office in the future may help Canada chart a path forward in a dangerous world.

Introduction

Judging by our recent history, Canadians might be surprised to learn that "the first priority of the Government of Canada is to protect the safety and security of Canadians both at home and abroad."[1] Even after two world wars, the discovery of multiple Soviet spy rings seeking to undermine our freedom during the Cold War, the return of great-power competition in the twenty-first century, the spread of regional conflicts throughout the globe, deadly public health emergencies, terrorist plots and attacks on Canadian soil, and the growing scourge of organized crime, journalist Murray Brewster could still write in 2023 that "sometimes, when the subjects of national security and defence get raised in parts of Ottawa, you can almost see a look of pained contempt in the eyes of some politicos — as though they're looking at an old man yelling at a cloud" (Brewster 2023). In recent years, revelations of foreign interference in Canadian elections and accusations of foreign state-sponsored murders of Canadian citizens continue to make it hard to believe that the federal government takes national security as seriously as it should.

Every so often, however, Ottawa signals that it might have finally woken up to the emerging threats of the contemporary world. One of the Trudeau government's final acts in the security sphere, the release of a mandate letter for the NSIA in late 2024, gives us hope that we are living in such a time. In the words of national security analyst Wesley Wark, "The prime minister's mandate letter is not business as usual. It signals an important move to make the NSIA more than a coordinator of the security and intelligence community — effectively, to transform the office into the leader of the community" (Wark 2025, 4). Combined with the promise of a long-awaited national security policy, a plan to regularly update Canada's national defence strategy and a new Cabinet committee — the National Security Council (NSC) — chaired by the prime minister, the public empowerment of the NSIA suggests a new gravitas in Ottawa's approach to security.[2] We have, however, seen similar moves before. The history of the office of the NSIA and its predecessors offers a window into the ebbs and flows of the government's approach to national security dating back to the end of the twentieth century.

It is not easy to tell the story of Ottawa's efforts to carry out its primordial responsibility to protect the safety and security of Canadians. The authors submitted 11 access to information and privacy (ATIP) requests when they started this project in June 2024. More than a year later, they have received two partially redacted documents. To understand the evolution of the NSIA position and its antecedents, they have had hours-long conversations with nearly all the office holders as well as with a number of senior public

1 See www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrt/index-en.aspx.

2 A pending review of the NSIA position by the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP) is also hopeful.

officials who worked closely with them. One of the authors also served in the job himself.

What follows is a bureaucratic history of the NSIA position. It examines the evolution of the office over five decades, the senior officials who held the job and the ways in which they collaborated with their colleagues across government to address the ever-changing threats facing Canada. While not an account of national security in Canada per se during these years, it does touch upon many of the security-related events that grabbed the headlines, from 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan to the Freedom Convoy and the conflict in Ukraine.

In the end, this is a story of fits and starts, mirroring that of Canadian national security writ large. Most of Canada's history has seen Ottawa reticent to take national security seriously. War, scandal, domestic crises and, occasionally, prime ministerial interest have been the primary catalysts of change. To date, none of these has brought sustained attention to the subject. The authors are torn as to whether to be hopeful that this time will be different. Canada has taken a lax approach to national security thanks primarily to geography — a perceived "fireproof house" situated far from the world's trouble spots, nestled next door to the most powerful country on Earth. This approach has bred a dangerous complacency that has typically only been shattered when things have gone seriously wrong. The situation today must be one of those times. The combination of threats to Canada's security are greater than they have been since the Second World War. This history of the office of the NSIA opens a conversation about how Canada might chart a sustainable way ahead.

Beginnings

If, as some Canadians like to suggest, Canada became a nation during the First World War, it certainly did not become a serious actor on the world stage for some years to come. After gaining international recognition as an independent signatory to the Treaty of Versailles and a founding member of the League of Nations, Canada spent much of the interwar period avoiding international security obligations. Even the Cabinet processes and structures underpinning domestic and foreign policy decision making remained amateurish and ad hoc until the Montreal-born, Oxford-educated lawyer Arnold Heeney became secretary to the Cabinet and clerk of the Privy Council in 1940 (Heeney 1967).

As one senior official recalled, when Heeney arrived, "There was no agenda, no secretariat, no official present at meetings to record what went on, no minutes of decisions taken, and no system to communicate the decisions to the departments responsible to implement them....After a meeting few knew precisely what had been decided; there could be no confidence that all relevant information had been available or considered; and the accurate transmission of decisions, if it occurred at all, was a happy accident" (Robertson 1971, 489). The exigencies of the Second World War enabled Heeney to formalize rules around Cabinet agendas, minutes and records of decision by the mid-1940s. Cabinet committees supported by the Cabinet Secretariat were introduced as responses to pressing problems, but they were generally disbanded once those problems had been solved (Clark 1984).

This basic structure informed the creation, in 1946, of the Security Panel, a small group of senior deputy ministers coordinated by two officials in the prime minister's department, the Privy Council Office (PCO). The panel was mandated to "advise on the coordination of the planning, organization and execution of security measures which affect government departments, and to advise on other such security questions as might be referred to it" (Royal Commission on Security 1969 [1977], 14).[3] It was a response to the September 1945 revelation by Igor Gouzenko, a cypher clerk in the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa, that Moscow had been running extensive spy rings in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom for more than 20 years (Taschereau and Kellock 1946).

The Security Panel appears to have gradually fallen out of use during the early Cold War years but was reconstituted in 1963 around the same time that Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson modernized the Cabinet committee system. The ad hoc nature of the previous approach to executive governance in Canada was replaced by nine standing committees (as well as the legally mandated Treasury Board Secretariat), through which policy proposals would flow before reaching the full Cabinet for decision (Robertson 1971). Among them was the first-ever peacetime

3 Further details can be found in Whitaker and Marcuse (1994, 163–4).

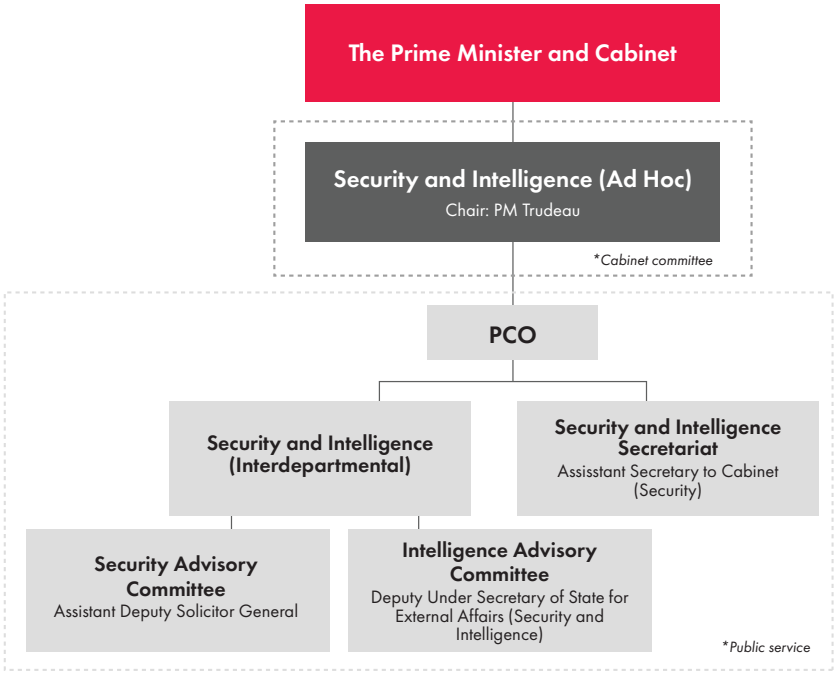
Cabinet Committee on Security and Intelligence. An Interdepartmental Committee on Security and Intelligence (ICSI), chaired by the secretary to the Cabinet and made up of senior deputy ministers responsible for national security files along with the commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), was created to support it.

In 1966, in the aftermath of a series of scandals, Pearson announced a Royal Commission on Security, chaired by a former deputy minister, Maxwell Weir Mackenzie (Whitaker, Kealey and Parnaby 2012). The commission was critical of the "diffuse" nature of the Canadian national security apparatus, spread as it was among the Cabinet committee, the Security Panel, PCO, the departments of the Solicitor General and Justice, and the RCMP. It recommended centralization, calling specifically for a formal Security Secretariat in PCO with "adequate status, resources and staff to formulate security policy and procedures in the context of general governmental policies, and more importantly, with effective authority to supervise the implementation of government security policies and regulations to ensure their consistent application....It would be headed by a director responsible to the Secretary to the Cabinet, and would maintain close links with and be advised by the Security Service" (Royal Commission on Security 1969 [1977]).

Pierre Elliott Trudeau replaced Pearson as prime minister in 1968 before the recommendation could be acted upon. Trudeau had his own vision for how government should make decisions, and it was not consistent with the commission's thinking. His Cabinet structure included a Standing Committee on External Policy and Defence and a Coordinating Committee on Priorities and Planning with nominal responsibility for security. A special Committee on Security and Intelligence, chaired by the prime minister, could also be stood up as needed. Public service support included a deputy secretary to the Cabinet with responsibility for the External Policy and Defence Secretariat, and an assistant secretary to the Cabinet ultimately responsible for the small Security and Intelligence Secretariat (Robertson 1971). Trudeau's changes enhanced the powers of the non-partisan PCO, whose responsibility for coordination among the various committees and government departments became critical (Lalonde 1971).

In 1972, Trudeau was returned to power in a minority Parliament, and Ottawa added two subcommittees to support the ICSI (see Figure 1). The Security Advisory Committee was chaired by the assistant deputy solicitor general and made up of senior public officials in the security sphere

Figure 1: National Security Apparatus under Pierre Trudeau, 1972



Source: Authors.

at the director general level.[4] The Intelligence Advisory Committee was chaired by a deputy under secretary of state for external affairs and made up of similarly ranked officials from across the intelligence community (Commission of Inquiry Concerning Certain Activities of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police 1981).

These new structures were barely sufficient, reflecting the government's ongoing complacent approach to national security in the 1970s. Canada had been dealing with espionage, intelligence leaks and even threats of terrorism since Confederation, but only after the discovery of significant misconduct by members of the RCMP in the aftermath of the 1970 October Crisis did Ottawa consider more significant reforms. Having been blamed, however unfairly, for seriously mishandling the kidnapping and murder of Quebec Cabinet Minister Pierre Laporte by a militant separatist group, the RCMP began to bend, if not outright ignore, the law to prevent a repeat performance. Accusations of break-ins without warrants, forgeries, sabotage and illegal surveillance led Trudeau to establish the Commission of Inquiry Concerning Certain Activities of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (the McDonald Commission) in 1977.[5]

Part VIII of the commission's second report recommended that the prime minister chair a more robust Cabinet Committee on Security and Intelligence that would meet regularly and establish Canada's intelligence priorities annually. It also called for the clerk of the Privy Council, who was double-hatted as the secretary to the Cabinet, to support the prime minister directly on security matters, with PCO and interdepartmental committees coordinating security and intelligence activities across government. The commission found PCO's Security and Intelligence Secretariat to be too small. At the time, it was made up of a security policy advisor and two officers responsible for personnel and physical security within PCO, as well as four officers seconded from the RMCP, External Affairs and National Defence. They supported a modest Intelligence Advisory Committee as well as working groups that prepared threat assessments. The commission would have preferred a more robust Bureau of Intelligence Assessments separate from the Security and Intelligence Secretariat but still housed in PCO to be led by the assistant secretary for security and intelligence. In sum, the Intelligence Advisory Committee would propose intelligence priorities to be approved by the interdepartmental and cabinet committees on security and intelligence. These priorities would then inform the work of the Bureau of Intelligence Assessments, which would use intelligence collected from across government as the basis for its analysis.

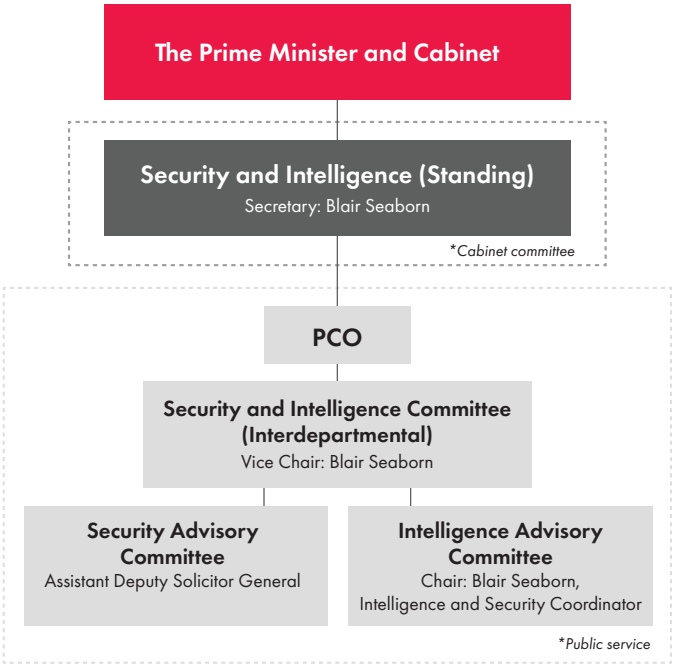
The commission envisioned an external Advisory Council on Security and Intelligence (what became known as the Security Intelligence Review Committee) made up of prominent Canadians reporting to Parliament to oversee and review a new security and intelligence service (the Canadian Security Intelligence Service [CSIS], created in 1984). A joint parliamentary committee of the House of Commons and the Senate would provide further oversight. There were also calls to work cooperatively with the provinces and share as much information as possible with Canadians. Transparency around security and intelligence issues, including parliamentary review and oversight and information sharing, remains a contentious topic to this day (Commission of Inquiry Concerning Certain Activities of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police 1981).

The results of the commission's recommendations were evident in the structure of the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney that took office with an overwhelming majority in 1984. Prime Minister Mulroney chaired a Standing Cabinet Committee on Security and Intelligence. The ICSI remained in place at the officials' level, still supported by a Security Advisory Committee and an Intelligence Advisory Committee. The Intelligence Advisory Committee was supported by an assessment review group tasked with coordinating, collating and distributing intelligence gathered from across the government's relevant departments and agencies to senior decision makers. To socialize these findings across the rest of government at the strategic level, the secretary to the Cabinet chaired a coordinating committee of deputy ministers with security-related responsibilities. He also hosted a broader monthly deputy ministers' luncheon that, while not focused exclusively on national security, did provide additional opportunities to discuss related issues (Clark 1984).

4 Directors general report to assistant deputy ministers, who report to either associate or full deputy ministers.

5 The commission's three reports can be found at https://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/pco-bcp/commissions-ef/mcdonald1979-81-eng/mcdonald1979-81-eng.htm.

Figure 2: National Security Apparatus under Brian Mulroney 1984–1985



Source: Authors, based on Kelly (1987, 56).

Coordinating Security and Intelligence

On January 8, 1985, the government appointed J. Blair Seaborn as Canada's first-ever senior advisor to the Privy Council (intelligence and security coordinator). Seaborn was a military veteran with a graduate degree in political science and history from the University of Toronto. He had joined the Department of External Affairs in 1948, served in postings in The Hague, Paris and Moscow, and supported the Trudeau government's efforts to recognize the People's Republic of China. He left External Affairs at Trudeau's behest in 1975 to become deputy minister at Environment Canada and had last served as the Canadian co-chair of the binational International Joint Commission that addressed issues affecting the waters and waterways along the Canada-US border. Seaborn appears to have been chosen for the new position by Gordon Osbaldeston, the clerk of the Privy Council at the time, for his calm demeanour, organizational skills and subject matter expertise (Manthorpe 1988).[6] One former official from the period referred to him as a "safe pair of hands."[7] His initial outreach included conversations with members of the Security and Intelligence Secretariat at PCO; the leadership at Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSE), Canada's signals intelligence agency; CSIS; and the Intelligence Advisory Committee. Osbaldeston was replaced by Paul Tellier in August 1985, who offered Seaborn additional responsibilities as his deputy. Seaborn declined, claiming he had enough work to do as it was.[8]

That work began on February 1, 1985, as a deputy minister with a salary of $93,640 (about $240,000 in 2025).[9] Seaborn had been assigned four general areas of responsibility (see Figure 2). First, as secretary of the Cabinet Committee on Security and Intelligence and vice-chair of the ICSI, Seaborn advised the

6 Authors' interview with Ward Elcock, July 2, 2024.

7 Ibid.

8 Intelligence and Security Co-Ordinator, Privy Council Office 1985–1989, May 8, 1989, in F2368, J. Blair Seaborn fonds, box 2, file 5, Trinity College Archives, University of Toronto.

9 PC. 1985-10, January 8, 1985, in F2368, J. Blair Seaborn fonds, box 5, file 7, Trinity College Archives, University of Toronto.

prime minister, the Cabinet and the clerk of the Privy Council on security and intelligence policies, programs and procedures, while also taking responsibility for coordinating Canada's security and intelligence community at the officials' level and implementing relevant government directives. These responsibilities included outreach to Canadian allies. Second, as chair of the Intelligence Advisory Committee, he was responsible for monitoring and coordinating intelligence across government as well as preparing comprehensive intelligence assessments for senior government leaders. Third, he was responsible for the policy and operations of CSE, which remained housed in the Department of National Defence. The Department of External Affairs lobbied for this arrangement, concerned that left to its own devices, National Defence might constrain the former's ability to call on CSE. The arrangement with CSE remained in place for the next 25 years. Finally, Seaborn served as the government's director of security operations, responsible for the physical and personal security of the elected senior leadership of the country.[10]

Shortly after his retirement in 1989, Seaborn told the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies (CASIS) that Canada's national security apparatus had vastly improved during his time at PCO. He cited three specific areas of enhancement:

- the intelligence product is better focused on the full range of needs and interests of the government, and is so written as to stress the implications of the analysis for Canada's concerns;
- the consultation and sharing of information among the various players, though not without its lapses, has significantly improved and is coming to be accepted as part of the ethos of the community;
- thanks to the various coordinating mechanisms and the growing ethos of consultation, and to the senior-level person at PCO directly responsible for S&I [security and intelligence] matters, the PM and the Secretary to the Cabinet are better informed and advised on matters of S&I which engage the broader interests of the government.[11]

Seaborn's salary, which had increased from $93,640 to $125,800 during his four years in the job, suggests that the clerk of the Privy Council was not displeased with his performance.[12]

Others, however, questioned the overall progress that had been made on security and intelligence matters. In what appears to be the only comprehensive journalistic coverage of the security and intelligence coordinator at the time, Jonathan Manthorpe wrote of "considerable criticism among knowledgeable people, not of Seaborn himself, but of the government's unwillingness to take intelligence and security matters seriously and especially its reluctance to establish a proper body to assess threats to Canada" (Manthorpe 1988). Manthorpe made explicit reference to a 1987 report of the Special Senate Committee on Anti-terrorism, chaired by Senator William Kelly, which found the Canadian intelligence community to be widely spread and insufficiently coordinated. The committee had recommended a strengthened and expanded Intelligence Advisory Committee within PCO empowered to compel officials from External Affairs, the RCMP, CSIS and National Defence to share intelligence and cooperate in their work more effectively. It also recommended more active involvement by Cabinet (Kelly 1987).

Seaborn was officially replaced by the assistant secretary to the Cabinet (legislation and planning) and general counsel for PCO, Ward Elcock, on May 21, 1989.[13] Elcock also accepted the more senior title of deputy clerk and counsel. It was his first job at the deputy minister level. Elcock came to the position with extensive experience at the centre of government but much less in national security. A lawyer by training, he had worked in the Departments of Justice, Finance and Energy, and Mines and Resources, as well as at the Treasury

10 Role and Mandate of the Intelligence and Security Co-Ordinator, Privy Council Office, November 5, 1987; Role of the Security and Intelligence Secretariat, Privy Council Office, November 5, 1987; Intelligence and Security Co-Ordinator, April 27, 1988, all in F2368, J. Blair Seaborn fonds, box 2, file 5, Trinity College Archives, University of Toronto; PCO (1988).

11 Seaborn's notes for his interventions at the CASIS conference, Ottawa, ON, September 28–30, 1989, cited in J. Blair Seaborn to David A. T. Stafford, October 10, 1989, in F2368, J. Blair Seaborn fonds, box 2, file 5, Trinity College Archives, University of Toronto.

12 Cited in F2368, J. Blair Seaborn Fonds, box 5, file 7, Trinity College Archives, University of Toronto.

13 Canada, Office of the Prime Minister, "Release," May 5, 1989, in F2368, J. Blair Seaborn papers, box 5, file 7, Trinity College Archives, University of Toronto.

Board Secretariat. Given the end of the Cold War and the relative lack of interest in the details and nuances of national security by the Brian Mulroney and early Jean Chrétien governments,[14] Elcock focused less on policy and operations (the Oka Crisis[15] and first Iraq War in 1990–1991 were two notable exceptions) and more on understanding and improving relationships within the national security community. CSIS was just five years old and not yet treated like a full partner by PCO. CSE was similarly undervalued. Elcock was able to improve relations between the centre and the agencies, in particular CSIS, by leveraging his experience at PCO and his access to the prime minister.

While Elcock did not see Mulroney or Chrétien on a regular basis — in his view, the job at the time did not require it — he could access them and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) when required. Nonetheless, neither prime minister had much time for intelligence and even questioned its accuracy occasionally. After reading one intelligence assessment highlighting Boris Yeltsin's drinking habits, for example, Mulroney jokingly raised the report with the Russian president during a telephone call!

The most significant innovation of Elcock's time came as a result of a decision (part budgetary, part related to perceived quality) by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) to end its practice of producing regular short- and long-term intelligence reports. The Chrétien government was committed to restoring the country's finances and Finance Minister Paul Martin did not spare the international portfolios in his mid-1990s austerity budgets. To compensate for the loss of intelligence coming out of DFAIT, Elcock established an Intelligence Assessment Secretariat (IAS) along the lines of what had been recommended a decade earlier by the McDonald Commission.[16] While Elcock's PCO staff of a few dozen people remained relatively small, it did grow with the addition of IAS.

In 1994, Elcock became the director of CSIS and was replaced at PCO by Margaret Bloodworth, another trained lawyer with relatively limited experience in national security but first-rate knowledge of the centre of government. After 10 years at the Canadian Transport Commission (later the National Transportation Agency), Bloodworth had spent her last five years in PCO as an assistant secretary. As security and intelligence coordinator, Bloodworth appears to have been more operationally focused, making twice-yearly trips to the United States and actively coordinating intelligence-sharing activities with Canada's American and British allies. She was still managing tensions among CSIS, CSE and DFAIT, and she served as the primary point of contact during the government's efforts to establish Canada's annual intelligence priorities. These priorities, having been approved by Cabinet, identified areas of focus for the intelligence community to support government decision making. She also continued to develop IAS, doing her best to reverse its perception as the "poor child of intelligence."[17] As for her direct engagements with Prime Minister Chrétien, they were limited.

The security and intelligence community of the late 1990s remained isolated from the rest of government. The clerk of the Privy Council gave security and intelligence coordinators freedom in performing their duties. The coordinators chose their own priorities, responded to events as warranted, travelled to meet counterparts overseas and did their best to add value to a community that remained a work in progress.

As Bloodworth prepared to move on, Canada was basking in the glow of a growing economy and a balanced federal budget. Under Chrétien, Canadians had become more serious about their financial situation but that focus came, in part, at the expense of any significant attention being paid to domestic and international security. The massive cuts to defence, development and diplomacy imposed by Chrétien and Martin

14 The short-lived government of Kim Campbell was more interested, at least to the extent that in its comprehensive government restructuring exercise, it created a new Department of Public Security. The department was immediately disbanded by the incoming Chrétien government.

15 A 78-day standoff in 1990 between Mohawk protesters, Quebec police, the RCMP and the Canadian Army over a proposed development on disputed land in Kanesatake, Quebec.

16 "The Canadian Intelligence Community," n.d. in F2368, J. Blair Seaborn fonds, box 2, file 5, Trinity College Archives, University of Toronto.

17 Indeed, during its early years, IAS was seen by many in the community as parochial at best. For more detail, see Juneau and Carvin (2022, chapter 4).

had left their mark. It would take another crisis for the government to regain its focus.

Ressam, September 11 and Institutionalization

Although Bloodworth was nominally replaced by John Tait as security and intelligence coordinator, he was in poor health, and it was therefore one of Bloodworth's proteges, Margaret Purdy, who largely took over and then officially became her successor two years later in November 1998. Trained initially as a journalist, Purdy had more than 20 years of national security experience. She had begun her career at the RCMP, worked as an advisor to the inspector general at CSIS, overseen security operations in the office of the Solicitor General, returned to CSIS to work in counterterrorism, and then moved to PCO in 1995 to work directly for Bloodworth. Like her predecessors, Purdy assumed the position as a junior deputy minister (a DM 1 in bureaucratic parlance) but was promoted while serving. Unlike her predecessors, who appear to have been selected primarily for their general leadership, coordination and management abilities, Purdy brought a wealth of practical national security experience to the job.

The structure of the national security apparatus Purdy inherited had evolved but not significantly. The Cabinet Committee on Security and Intelligence had been replaced by an ad hoc ministers' meeting on security and intelligence. The meeting was chaired by Chrétien and held at least once per year to maintain its predecessor's commitment to setting national intelligence priorities. Broader discussions of security at the strategic level could also take place through the Cabinet Committee on the Social Union, though these were likely rare. The ICSI persisted under the clerk's leadership and Purdy chaired its executive committee, which met more regularly. Beneath the ICSI at the assistant deputy minister level was an intelligence policy group, chaired by the assistant secretary to the Cabinet (security and intelligence). The Intelligence Assessment Committee maintained its responsibility to coordinate intelligence reports produced across a variety of government departments and agencies (Kelly 1999, chapter 4, table 5). Security and Intelligence and Intelligence Assessment continued to have their own small secretariats at PCO. The former's Security Operations Unit maintained responsibility for the personal security of leading government officials (PCO 1999). Purdy characterized her small staff as being smart, agile and excellent communicators.

While Chrétien's limited interest in intelligence had not changed, Purdy appears to have had more contact with the prime minister than her predecessors. The turning point was probably the case of Ahmed Ressam, a failed Algerian refugee claimant who was arrested in December 1999 at the Canada-US border and charged with planning to bomb the Los Angeles International Airport. He was convicted of a series of terrorism-related offences in April 2001. After the Ressam incident, Purdy's meetings with Richard Clarke — US President Bill Clinton's national coordinator for security, infrastructure protection, and counter-terrorism and the chief counter-terrorism advisor on the US NSC — became more regular and the need to improve national security literacy across the federal government intensified. What had been a largely managerial senior official job became significantly more serious — and stressful.

Perhaps as a result of the evolving climate, Purdy's successor in February 2001 also brought with him notable national security and central agency experience. Richard (Dick) Fadden was a trained lawyer and former naval reservist. He had worked as a foreign service officer early in his career and then in PCO's ICSI. He had spent much of 1998–2000 in the Treasury Board Secretariat as assistant secretary for government operations, where he was responsible for the national security files and budget. He returned to PCO in 2000 as deputy clerk and counsel and later added the title of security and intelligence coordinator. Like Purdy, he began the job as a junior deputy minister and was promoted while serving.

Fadden was in his position for less than seven months before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States transformed the national security landscape. Within weeks, the Chrétien government had established an ad hoc Cabinet Committee on Public Security and Anti-Terrorism, which was chaired by Deputy Prime Minister John Manley and included the solicitor general and the ministers of the Departments of Finance, National Defence, Transport, Foreign Affairs, Justice and Intergovernmental Affairs, National Revenue,

Citizenship and Immigration, and Health (Office of the Auditor General of Canada 2004). A short time later, in December 2001, the government introduced a new federal budget that included $7.7 billion in national security spending to bolster the capabilities of key bodies such as National Defence and CSIS to pursue a broad range of new measures. A former official recalled that Fadden was all but running PCO's — and, by extension, the public service's — national security response during this period with the clerk's full concurrence.[18] This included significant international travel as he coordinated Canada's security measures with Five Eyes[19] partners. In 2002, Fadden became president of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. He was replaced, briefly, by Ron Bilodeau who had more than 15 years of experience in PCO but little direct national security exposure, and then by Robert Wright in the summer of 2003.

Wright was the first economist to hold the position of security and intelligence coordinator. He began his public service career in the Department of External Affairs' Economic Intelligence Unit before moving to the National Energy Board and later to the Department of Finance. Having worked his way up to director of economic development in the Department of Finance, he joined PCO as assistant secretary to the Cabinet (policy and planning). Wright was promoted out of PCO to become the deputy minister of agriculture. When the September 11 attacks took place, he was the deputy at National Revenue, which at that time had responsibility for the Canadian Customs regime. He was therefore a key player in the negotiation of the December 2001 Smart Border Declaration,[20] which was aimed at enhancing security cooperation between Canada and the United States without compromising bilateral trade. Wright maintained his responsibilities for managing border security when he was asked to return to PCO as associate secretary to the Cabinet, deputy minister to the deputy prime minister, and security and intelligence coordinator in June 2003 (PCO 2003). With more than 10 years of experience at the deputy minister level, he was by far the most experienced individual in the position up to that point.

His seniority was critical when, in December 2003, Paul Martin restructured Canada's national security and public safety apparatus upon his appointment as prime minister. American pressure and Martin's own inclination for a more integrated national security community led to the most comprehensive transformation of the Canadian security-related bureaucracy since the Second World War. A new Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness was created, led by Ann McLellan, deputy prime minister and minister of public safety. Among her new responsibilities, McLellan took over the duties of the former solicitor general, including responsibility for CSIS and the RCMP. The Office of Critical Infrastructure Protection and Emergency Preparedness, established by Chrétien and formerly housed in National Defence, was added to her portfolio, as was the new Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), which combined the customs elements of Canada Customs and Revenue, the intelligence and enforcement elements of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the border inspection functions of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The Department of Transport maintained primary responsibility for security across the transportation sector, and a new Cabinet Committee on Security, Public Health, and Emergencies replaced Chrétien's ad hoc Cabinet Committee on Public Security and Anti-Terrorism. The government also formed two external advisory panels: the National Security Advisory Council (which drew inspiration from the President's Intelligence Advisory Board in the United States) and the Cross-Cultural Roundtable on Security, which provided the government with access to the views of Canada's diverse multicultural communities (Whitaker and Farson 2009). To support the new structure, Wright became Canada's first national security advisor to the prime minister (NSA) (Office of the Auditor General of Canada 2004; PCO 2004). It was a position that was becoming increasingly common in other countries, with India and Israel having established their own in 1998 and 1999, respectively.

There was some initial confusion over Wright's accountability structure. Martin wanted the NSA to be a direct report but Wright's official job description established an additional reporting relationship to the deputy prime minister (who chaired the Cabinet Committee on National Security) as well as responsibility for producing Canada's forthcoming (and only, to this date) national security policy, *Securing an Open Society*. That confusion reflected

18 Authors' interview with Malcolm Brown, January 22, 2025.

19 The Five Eyes is an intelligence-sharing partnership between Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

20 *US and Canada Smart Border Declaration* (2001), online: <https://legislationline.org/taxonomy/term/14667>.

Martin's fundamentally different management style. While previous prime ministers had paid limited attention to national security, he took the opposite approach. Wright would hear from him directly almost daily. Martin's heavy engagement created an awkwardness for McLellan but they managed.

Wright's role in drafting the national security policy marked a departure for the newly titled NSA. In Canada, PCO does not usually lead on major policy initiatives. The decision to empower Wright no doubt reflected the prime minister's desire to keep a close eye on the development of the strategy as well as the importance attached to the new position. Indeed, Wright and his team could no doubt invoke Martin's (and McLellan's) name in driving the process forward. The political support enabled a series of tightly held stakeholder consultations that meaningfully affected the comprehensive strategy that was released in April 2004 (PCO 2004).

Wright's approach to the job of NSA set the tone for the next few years. He was not an empire builder. His staff was small but included some of the most talented public servants in Ottawa.[21] He relied on them extensively and drew heavily from his experience as an associate secretary to the Cabinet to manage relations with the senior ministers involved in national security discussions and the development of *Securing an Open Society*. There were benefits to having such a small staff; Wright did not have the resources to micromanage line departments. All he could do was integrate, coordinate and prevent duplication. Although he had no official authority over other deputy ministers and agency heads, his seniority and his direct access to the prime minister and the deputy prime minster, along with the strong relationships he had built across Ottawa during more than 25 years in the public service, smoothed his path. He assembled a committee of deputy ministers made up of the relevant leading national security officials and put a new emphasis on effective governance in the security and intelligence community. Externally, the majority of his obligations and relationships were with American counterparts. He travelled to the United States regularly, meeting with not just his Washington equivalent, but also with senior officials from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency.

When Wright became president of the Export Development Corporation and (then deputy minister of finance), he was replaced as NSA in 2005 by one of his direct reports, the assistant secretary to the Cabinet (security and intelligence) William (Bill) Elliott. The associate secretary part of Wright's job was left vacant as this was Elliott's first appointment as a deputy minister. A lawyer with experience as the chief of staff to the former deputy prime minister, Don Mazankowski, Elliott became deputy commissioner of the Canadian Coast Guard in 1998. He was responsible for safety and security at Transport Canada during the September 11 attacks and reluctantly joined an always intense PCO when Wright returned in 2003. As he later reflected: "PCO was not a place to be enjoyed. It was a place to be endured."[22] Elliott devoted much of the year preceding his promotion to supporting the drafting of *Securing an Open Society* and was involved in efforts (resisted by industry) to strengthen the national security provisions of the Investment Canada Act.

As NSA, Elliott's long-standing relationships across the national security community — ironically developed outside of the security sphere in the early 1990s when he supported Mazankowski as chair of Mulroney's Operations Committee of Cabinet[23] — compensated to some degree for his lack of seniority. He understood how government worked, and he knew the senior public servants operating in the evolving national security space. He was less experienced on issues such as Afghanistan, and his more junior stature in the community of deputies did not help. While Elliott was NSA, Martin established a separate Cabinet Committee on Public Safety chaired by McLellan that met regularly and complemented the prime minister's own Security and Intelligence Committee. Efforts to create a national security committee of parliamentarians failed in part because of growing toxicity in the relationships among Canada's political parties.

When Elliott was appointed associate deputy minister of public safety in the spring of 2006, Stephen Rigby, who had been serving as PCO's assistant secretary (security and intelligence), and Yvan Roy each briefly replaced him in acting capacities before Bloodworth left her position as the first ever deputy minister at Public Safety to become

21 In his conversation with the authors, he referred specifically to the contributions of Graham Flack, who, among other accomplishments, led work on the first national security policy.

22 Authors' interview with William (Bill) Elliott, July 17, 2024.

23 And crossed paths with Wright, Bloodworth, Bilodeau and Elcock, among others.

associate secretary to the Cabinet and shortly thereafter also NSA. Bloodworth's return marked the arrival of a much more senior deputy in a much more senior job than the security and intelligence coordinator position she had held in PCO in the 1990s. Having served as the deputy minister of Transport Canada during the September 11 period, followed by roles at National Defence and then at Public Safety through the development of the 2004 NSP, she was well known and highly regarded across the security and defence community and had already built relationships with colleagues holding similar positions in allied countries.

Perhaps most important, Bloodworth's time at Public Safety had established a division of labour between that department and the office of the NSA with which she was comfortable. Like Wright (and new clerk Kevin Lynch), Bloodworth had clear views of the role of the PCO in the governance and the strategic decision-making process; she preferred to lead a small team focused on coordination rather than policy development and implementation. She saw the NSA's job as threefold: "an advisory role [to the prime minister and Cabinet], a coordination role and an operational role with CSE [as the deputy minister]" (Commission of Inquiry into the Investigation of the Bombing of Air India Flight 182 2010, 27). Bloodworth's arrival signalled, at least symbolically, the end of the post-September 11 period in Canada. The minority Parliament led by Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper shifted the national security focus to a military-heavy expeditionary commitment in Afghanistan. Challenges in coordinating DFAIT, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) led to a PCO task force under David Mulroney — with whom Bloodworth had worked before — taking strategic responsibility for the Afghanistan file while keeping the NSA informed. This approach was an acceptable compromise from Bloodworth's perspective; she did not want PCO to lead tactically or operationally on any issue, but if it had to take on a larger role, better it be through a self-contained task force than her own small team.[24] Still, the arrangement disappointed some of the military leadership, who missed Bloodworth's gravitas and her direct access to the prime minister in the midst of difficult conversations with the other players involved in the Afghan mission.

Under Bloodworth, coordination of the national security community ran through two deputy minister committees, both of which she had been part of in her previous job. The Deputy Minister Committee on National Security (DMNS) persisted but there was also a more exclusive group made up officials from Public Safety, National Defence, CSE, CSIS, the RCMP and Justice that managed the more sensitive issues often involving top-secret material. Bloodworth did not have weekly meetings with Harper but she saw him regularly and got along particularly well with his first chief of staff, Ian Brodie.

The mission in Afghanistan, which cost the lives of 165 military and civilian Canadians, focused and matured the security and intelligence community. Although the military and the diplomatic corps struggled at times to cooperate in the field and therefore created additional work for Bloodworth at home, the relationship between CSIS and CSE improved significantly, as did Canada's security relationship with the United States.

Beyond Afghanistan

Bloodworth had planned to retire in the spring of 2008 but agreed to remain in the position until the fall to maintain bureaucratic continuity during the writ period. When she stepped down, Canada's national security apparatus was in transition. The October 2008 election saw the Harper Conservatives returned with a stronger minority. The prime minister was significantly more comfortable in his role, less interested in Afghanistan and cognizant of the degree to which national security concerns drove his responsibilities. It appears that he had also begun to appreciate the importance of the NSA position.[25] Bloodworth's replacement, Marie-Lucie Morin, was a known quantity to the prime minister. Most notably, she had been the associate deputy minister at Foreign Affairs from 2003 to 2006, and then the

24 That said, she did accept that her executive director of IAS, Vincent Rigby, assume the role of the Afghanistan intelligence lead official to help coordinate intelligence support to the mission following the Sarpoza prison break of 2008.

25 Around this time, Harper also established a closer relationship with his new chief of the defence staff, General Walter Natynczyk.

deputy minister of international trade between 2006 and 2008, when she was responsible for the difficult softwood lumber file and helped lead the government's signature Global Commerce Strategy.

Morin was another lawyer and senior deputy minister with nearly 30 years of experience in the public service, including five years as a deputy, when she became NSA. She joined the Department of External Affairs in 1980 and worked her way up to become the director of the Financial and Business Services Division before spending four years in Moscow as minister-counsellor (commercial) and then four more as Canada's ambassador to Norway. When she returned to Ottawa, she took on several executive positions, culminating as deputy minister of international trade. Although Morin's background was not in the area of traditional, hard-power security, she had served in Indonesia during a period of political instability and in Moscow after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Her time in Norway meant working closely with a like-minded North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) partner and she was involved in the 2006 evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon. Morin's arrival as NSA and deputy clerk responsible for senior public service appointments reinforced the transition of the office from a 9/11 to a post-9/11 environment.

Morin has offered perhaps the clearest and most cogent description of the job at the time. In her view, the NSA position pointed in four directions: "up, down, across and beyond."[26] "Up" meant ensuring that the prime minister was fully briefed on the security environment both in Canada and overseas. Harper was a policy wonk who was curious and read extensively (Juneau and Carvin 2022). Morin was required to provide comprehensive briefing material, including on the critical Arctic file.[27] "Down" implied managing a small but capable staff in PCO. "Across" referred to the NSA's coordination role among senior national security officials scattered across various federal departments and agencies, including in supporting Cabinet committees and in establishing Canada's national intelligence priorities. Morin took this role particularly seriously, reaching out to her deputy minister colleagues across the community almost daily. "Beyond" translated to working not only with Canada's Five Eyes partners, but also with other states with shared security interests, such as France. It was through these relationships that she recognized the growing cyber threat trending throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Morin was not always successful; she failed to convince the government to establish a Cabinet committee equivalent to the UK's Cabinet Office Briefing Room A (COBRA) to deal with national crises.[28] Canada did not establish a select committee of parliamentarians focused on national security and intelligence as she had hoped. The debate over whether the RCMP should continue to be responsible for both federal and contract policing was not resolved, nor did the Harper government carry through on its 2006 election promise to create a foreign intelligence service (both debates continue to this day). She did improve the intelligence assessment process, including by creating the Deputy Minister Committee on Intelligence Assessment (DMIA). She also provided Canadians with one of their first peeks into the work of the NSA through an interview with the defence publication *Vanguard*, an early example of public transparency in the usually secretive world of national security (*Vanguard* 2009). Perhaps most important, Morin's successful efforts at gaining the prime minister's trust seem to have helped pave the way for her successor, Stephen Rigby.[29]

Rigby had majored in public administration before joining the public service. He worked in what was then the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency for the first 25 years of his career, where he crossed paths with Robert Wright. He moved to PCO as assistant secretary to the Cabinet (security and intelligence) in 2005 and briefly served as acting NSA before accepting the position of executive vice-president at CBSA. After a short stint as associate deputy minister at Foreign Affairs, he returned to CBSA as its president in 2008. Two years later, he was back at PCO as NSA.

Rigby ticked several important boxes. He was first and foremost an experienced deputy minister. Through his time at PCO, CBSA and Foreign Affairs, he had built relationships across the national security community. As acting NSA, he

26 Authors' interview with Marie-Lucie Morin, August 19, 2024.

27 Morin's access to the prime minister was made possible by two clerks of the Privy Council — Kevin Lynch and Wayne Wouters — who recognized her value and did not micromanage her affairs.

28 The idea was revisited by a panel of experts at the University of Ottawa in 2015. See McRae et al. (2015). The Trudeau government ultimately created an Incident Response Group (IRG) along similar lines in 2018.

29 One of the authors is Rigby's brother.

had worked directly with the Harper government on the Toronto 18 case — a pair of failed plots by 14 adults and four youths to create an al-Qaeda cell in Canada and bomb the Toronto Stock Exchange to pressure Ottawa to withdraw its armed forces from Afghanistan. He was familiar with the prime minister's leadership style. Rigby lobbied hard for the position. Morin spoke to the clerk on his behalf; Rigby subsequently set out for Wayne Wouters his vision for the job. He foresaw the role of the NSA in the spirit of the recommendations of the 1949 US Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of Government (the Hoover Commission), which advocated the centralization of responsibility for national security in the executive office. Rigby had two goals: to improve the coordination of Canada's security and intelligence community, and to develop a broader definition of national security tied directly and explicitly to national interests. This meant expanding Ottawa's thinking about security to include economic, regulatory and geopolitical issues. As he explained to the Standing Senate Committee on National Security, Defence and Veterans' Affairs (SECD) (one of the rare occasions up to that point when the NSA spoke publicly):

> "National security" can no longer be considered in any narrow sense of the term in association with specific threats within Canada or even at our borders. To speak of national security today is to address a multitude of issues that are complex, interconnected and in constant evolution. Increasingly, Canada's national security interests are manifest on a broad range of foreign policy and defence imperatives.
>
> Security at home is necessarily connected with the rest of the world, not only in the positions and actions that Canada takes beyond its borders, but in those that other states take vis-à-vis Canada in their bilateral relationships with us and investments in the Canadian economy. Canada's approach to security issues is therefore organized around this broader concept of security, and most of our allies have done likewise. (Rigby 2014).

Rigby strengthened and focused the office. While he and his staff supported the government's Cabinet Committee on Foreign Affairs and National Security, he also briefed Harper regularly, sometimes three or four times per week, almost always alone but with an understanding that he would circle back to the clerk afterwards. He had equally strong relationships within PMO. He made clear to the other deputies that the prime minister was his minister and just as he would not reach out to their ministers without their knowledge, they were not to reach out to his without consulting him first. He repositioned the prime minister's foreign and defence policy advisor in PCO, previously an effective equal to the NSA, as a direct report, reflecting his view that national security encompassed both domestic and international elements.[30] When it came to preparing the prime minister for international travel, Rigby provided the strategic-level briefing while the foreign and defence policy advisor added country-specific details and coordinated among the relevant departments. Rigby also shed the NSA's responsibilities for CSE and convinced Harper, however briefly, to establish and personally chair a Cabinet Committee on National Security. Harper ultimately shut down this committee, finding it lacking in value. He preferred to deal directly with Rigby.

At the time, the NSA's responsibilities were split about evenly between domestic and international issues. Like his predecessors, in addition to serving as the principal advisor to the prime minister on national security (and now also on foreign affairs and defence), Rigby was responsible for coordinating the security and intelligence community on an ongoing basis, including its response to domestic crises such as the 2013 Lac-Mégantic tragedy[31] and the 2014 terrorist attack on Parliament Hill.[32] His office also helped support major domestic events such as the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver, BC. Rigby chaired DMNS as well as a smaller, ad hoc group that held weekly meetings focused on trending policy and operational files. When asked by the SECD how he corralled the deputies without any legislative authority, he responded: "I am a senior deputy in the Privy Council, and I am the adviser to the Prime Minister. There is a certain moral suasion that goes with that positioning that, in my humble opinion, I have found more than

30 Under Rigby, then, the NSA was ultimately responsible for three secretariats: Security and Intelligence, Intelligence Assessment and Foreign and Defence Policy.

31 A freight train carrying crude oil derailed and crashed in the town of Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, resulting in an explosion that killed 47 people and destroyed more than 30 buildings in the surrounding area.

32 A lone gunman killed a ceremonial guard at the War Memorial then ran into the Parliament Buildings, where he shot and injured a House of Commons security guard and was subsequently killed by shots from the House of Commons sergeant-at-arms and a member of the RCMP.

adequate to achieve cooperation and a cooperative effort with my fellow DMs" (Rigby 2014). When pressed about any limitations on his ability to coordinate across the community, he responded:

> My convening authorities, such as they are, my ability to convey the Prime Minister's direction and my ability to ensure that people are working within the confines of cabinet direction, I have never found to be limited. I have the ability to call deputies together. I have the ability to ensure that direction is being followed closely. Sometimes, that is tactical; sometimes that is strategic. But I have not found my ability to convene, gather, discuss and, to a certain extent, direct, ever to be compromised either on a full wartime footing or on the extremely important crises across the array of threats that Canada faces today. (Ibid.)

As NSA, Rigby also continued to support the Cabinet process to establish Canada's annual intelligence priorities and liaised on behalf of the broader community with relevant ministers. When it came to public engagement, Rigby supported Harper's view that security policy should be dealt with, not publicly discussed. One journalist later referred to him as "one of the most important, and most secretive, members of the Harper government" (Ling 2015).

Internationally, Rigby was part of what he called a growing "confederacy of NSAs."[33] He spoke to the American NSA regularly as well as to the homeland security advisor. He also engaged with his colleagues in Australia, France, Germany, India, Mexico and New Zealand. To support these conversations, he spoke more often with the chief of the defence staff and other senior officers across the CAF. He was the first NSA to welcome a CAF liaison officer onto his staff. Rigby remains the longest-serving NSA by a considerable margin, retiring from government in 2015 after nearly five years in the position. He had strong views on his successor. Rigby's recommended choice, Richard (Dick) Fadden, duly stepped into the job following his departure.

Fadden returned to PCO after nearly 14 years as a deputy minister.[34] After 9/11, he had taken over the presidency of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, where he dealt with outbreaks of mad cow disease and avian influenza gaining valuable experience in emergency planning. He served briefly as the deputy minister at Natural Resources Canada before leading Citizenship and Immigration for three years. He was appointed the director of CSIS in 2009 and then deputy minister at National Defence in 2013. In many respects, Fadden brought greater national security experience to the job than any previous NSA. He was a pair of trusted hands for a government that was hoping for some measure of tranquility in the security realm ahead of an expected difficult election.

Fadden developed a solid working relationship with Harper and his chief of staff, Ray Novak, but briefed them less often than his predecessor. In addition to one or two bilateral meetings per month, he often joined the clerk of the Privy Council, Janice Charette, for the first half hour of her regular meetings with the prime minister. He did not travel with Harper; the prime minister had developed a trusted relationship with his foreign and defence policy advisor, John Hannaford, so Fadden saw no need (and Hannaford still reported through him). That arrangement also created additional time for Fadden to deal face-to-face with Canada's Five Eyes partners as well as with colleagues in France and Germany. The NSA and NSA-equivalent community continued to grow in size and importance, and Fadden made every effort to leverage it. At home, Fadden played a critical role in budget discussions related to national security, serving as a helpful arbiter in managing the competing priorities of departments and agencies across the community.

Fadden brought a certain procedural discipline to his personal office. Every morning, he held a pre-brief before his meeting with the clerk and other senior PCO staff. He expected written material on the key issues of the day as well as on longer-term matters of concern. He leveraged this information in an effort to convince the rest of PCO to take security more seriously. Rigby's ad hoc committee of senior security deputies and agency heads was formalized as the Deputy Minister Committee on Operational Coordination (DMOC), which remains to this day one of the most important governance bodies in the security and intelligence community. Chiefs of the defence staff who attended DMOC sometimes lamented its lack of a formal, focused agenda and records of decision but other officials praised the committee for these same reasons. DMOC employed

33 Author's (Chapnick's) interview with Stephen Rigby, June 17, 2024.

34 The transition material produced for him can be found at ATIP request A-2024-00155.

a flexible format and encouraged free-flowing conversations that were unusual among deputies. Fadden could share news from the centre, seek views and build consensus, while providing his colleagues with an opportunity to supply updates on their own critical files. A shadow committee at the assistant deputy minister level would meet shortly after DMOC to share information and dispense action items across the community.

Fadden also made a concerted effort to improve PCO's intelligence assessment capabilities. For years, Rigby and his predecessors had criticized the quality and relevance of PCO's assessments. Fadden believed that IAS required "an injection of adrenaline."[35] He brought in one of his former directors-general from National Defence, Martin Green, as assistant secretary to the Cabinet (intelligence assessment), with a specific mandate to pay greater attention to DMIA, originally set up by Marie-Lucie Morin. David Vigneault, a Rigby hire who had served in National Defence, CBSA, CSIS and CSE, stayed on as assistant secretary (security and intelligence). Fadden instructed both to work closely with Hannaford's foreign and defence policy team, which continued to report through the NSA.

To further augment his office, Fadden took on the first-ever deputy NSA. David McGovern was an economist with expertise in energy policy. He had worked at Human Resources and Development Canada, Environment Canada and PCO, where he had been a senior advisor responsible for helping implement Canada's Border Action Plan. He had limited national security experience and had only recently been appointed an associate deputy, but he had a well-earned reputation for strong coordination and people skills. Moreover, the clerk at the time, Janice Charette, believed that too great a gap in seniority had existed between Rigby and his assistant secretaries. A hesitant McGovern agreed to return to PCO.

Fadden did not know McGovern and could not hand him a pre-determined job description. He gave his new deputy responsibility for overseeing physical security, coordinating kidnapping and hostage-taking response, and advancing broader community initiatives. McGovern found ways to make himself useful. In the final months of the Harper government, he worked with the assistant secretaries on a number of practical measures, including installing security gates in government buildings, enhancing security for the government's communications systems and sensitive compartmented information facilities (known as SCIFs), adding secure phones in the offices of all of Canada's provincial clerks, and replacing the windows in the Cabinet room with bullet-proof glass. McGovern also built relationships with security staff in the White House. He and Fadden were less successful in convincing provincial governments to pay closer attention to foreign interference and in increasing the size and capability of Vigneault's secretariat.

Fadden left shortly after Justin Trudeau's government took office in 2015 — his relationship with the new prime minister was professional, but never close — and McGovern replaced him briefly in an acting capacity. The latter, by his own admission, was neither interested in nor particularly well-suited for the permanent role. Not long after, Fadden's official successor, Daniel Jean, became NSA and McGovern joined Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) as an associate deputy minister, where his recently acquired national security experience proved helpful in trying to resolve conflicts between ISED and security bodies such as CSIS and National Defence over the Investment Canada Act. The Trudeau government was determined to increase foreign investment in Canada without compromising national security but this was easier said than done, especially given an increasingly predatory China trying to penetrate critical sectors of the Canadian economy. McGovern helped explain security and intelligence to ISED officials in a language they could understand but the tensions were not easily dissipated. This was reflective of a shift in Canada's approach to security and defence. The *realpolitik* of the Harper government was replaced, at least at first, by an approach to national security that could occasionally border on indifference.

Limbo

The Trudeau government's early thinking about national security was reflected in its attitude toward the NSA position itself. Its greatest value, it appeared, came from mirroring the national security structure of most of Canada's Group of

35 Authors' interview with Richard (Dick) Fadden, July 19, 2024.

Seven (G7) allies. When the government chose Daniel Jean to be Fadden's replacement, they renamed the post as the national security and intelligence advisor to the prime minister (NSIA); "and intelligence" an addition that nonetheless helped differentiate it from the American NSA.

Jean studied social science, international relations and economics at the University of Ottawa and later completed an MBA. Early in his career, he worked at both Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Foreign Affairs. He spent time in Washington focusing on migration, refugee and border security issues, as well as spending time in Haiti. He later worked in the Treasury Board Secretariat with responsibilities for international security and in PCO as deputy secretary (operations). He became deputy minister of Canadian Heritage in 2010 and then the deputy of Foreign Affairs in 2013. While at Global Affairs Canada (renamed for the second time after the amalgamation of Foreign Affairs with CIDA in 2013), Jean impressed senior members of PMO during a briefing in 2016 on an al-Qaeda attack that had killed six Canadians in Burkina Faso (*BBC News* 2016). Jean's approach to national security, which for him extended to the protection of Canadian democracy and economic interests, resonated with Trudeau's government, as did his seniority and experience in crisis management.

Jean received no formal transition briefing upon his arrival in PCO, no doubt, in part, because McGovern had been serving in an acting capacity since Fadden's departure. Other than choosing not to continue with the deputy position after McGovern's departure, the new NSIA made no major structural changes to the national security architecture during his tenure. He continued to manage three secretariats: Foreign and Defence Policy, Security and Intelligence, and Intelligence Assessment. He chaired the weekly meetings of DMOC and the monthly gatherings of DMIA. He also co-chaired with the deputy minister of Public Safety Canada a monthly meeting of deputies with national security responsibilities, attendance at which was determined by the clerk of the Privy Council (NSICOP 2019). In terms of his relationship with the prime minister, by the time Jean became NSIA, Trudeau, like Harper before him, had already established a strong relationship with his foreign and defence policy advisor, John Hannaford. Jean was comfortable with this arrangement, preferring to focus on domestic issues but relying on Hannaford to back brief him. While he travelled occasionally with the prime minister, he devoted more attention to meeting with his own foreign counterparts (H. R. McMaster and Susan Rice in the United States, Mark Sedwill in the United Kingdom). While Jean had no regular, pre-set briefings with the prime minster, he could reach Trudeau or his principal secretary, Gerald Butts, and others in PMO as required.

Jean was a more hands-on NSIA than Fadden had been. He worked extensively with Public Safety Canada on new national security legislation (Bill C-59), one of the Trudeau government's campaign promises that put a greater premium on oversight and review. He helped modernize the way that intelligence assessments were briefed to Cabinet ministers (Juneau and Carvin 2022). He was personally involved in efforts to modernize the authorities of CSE, including in the area of active cyber operations, which was thrust into greater prominence after Ottawa released a cybersecurity strategy in 2018. His approach to economic security was shaped by the need to balance Ottawa's commitment to increase foreign investment (much of which was coming from China) with national security concerns being raised by CSIS, National Defence and other security and intelligence community actors. Again, he was personally involved in efforts to reconcile the two sides. Foreign interference was becoming a more significant issue under Jean's tenure, especially after allegations of Russian interference during the 2016 US election. His work with the minister of democratic institutions, Karina Gould, would be taken up in earnest by his successor.

In 2017, the Trudeau government created the long-called-for NSICOP. The committee provided select parliamentarians with top secret security clearances so they could review and investigate the framework and activities of the national security community but it was not a parliamentary committee per se — the prime minister personally selected its chair as well as its members (after consultation with opposition parties) and reviewed its reports for redactions on national security grounds. The perceived limitations on NSICOP's power frustrated some opposition Conservatives but its reports have nonetheless made a significant contribution to educating the Canadian public about national security.

In terms of Cabinet governance, Jean directly supported the prime minister in his role as chair of the ad hoc IRG, a variation on the COBRA structure

that Morin had advocated and that was established during Fadden's tenure as NSIA to help respond to domestic and global crises.[36] Trudeau liked the flexibility of the IRG structure, which allowed him to vary the membership — both elected and public officials — depending on the situation at hand. It remains in place to this day. As for a Cabinet body focused on longer-term national security issues, the Trudeau government initially showed no appetite.

Jean's involvement in the prime minister's visit to India in 2018 was one of the first times the NSIA was thrust into the spotlight amid a public controversy. After a Sikh extremist who had been convicted of attempting to murder an Indian politician in the 1980s was inadvertently invited to events hosted by the Canadian High Commission in New Delhi, Jean provided a background briefing to reporters suggesting that Indian government disinformation may have been behind the embarrassment. It was a move that generated much public debate, further fuelled later by a report from NSICOP.[37] Coincidentally, it came just before Jean announced his retirement. Although many commentators speculated that the India visit may have precipitated Jean's departure, he had in fact already submitted his papers by the time the story broke, and the government had settled on his replacement.

Greta Bossenmaier graduated from the University of Manitoba with a bachelor of commerce degree and then completed a master of science degree in operations research at Stanford University in California. This rather obscure field of study focuses on using analytical tools to improve management and decision-making processes, particularly in complex systems. After graduation, she joined the Operational Research and Analysis Establishment in the Department of National Defence as a defence scientist. She took a leave of absence from the government to work for the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees in Geneva, Switzerland, and then returned to National Defence. She then moved to the Public Service Commission of Canada and was nominated to join the government's management trainee program, through which she joined Foreign Affairs and International Trade, rising to become chief information officer. Bossenmaier then was appointed as the first chief innovation officer at the newly created CBSA. While at CBSA, she rose to the level of associate deputy minister before serving at the same rank at Foreign Affairs and then replacing David Mulroney in PCO as the deputy minister responsible for the whole-of-government Joint Task Force Afghanistan. There she gained further experience in the centre of government and deepened relationships across the national security and international community. Bossenmaier broadened her experience as senior associate deputy minister at CIDA before being appointed in 2015 as chief of CSE, just as the government was increasingly focusing on evolving cyber threats. This last appointment helped put her on Trudeau's radar.

After more than 30 years of service, Bossenmaier had been clear in her mind that CSE chief would be her last job, but the government convinced her to delay her retirement and become the next NSIA. Before she started, Jean provided her with a comprehensive and structured handover, a rare privilege. Bossenmaier's arrival was not the only significant change within the national security leadership at around the same time. After eight years in PCO, more than four of them as foreign and defence policy advisor to two prime ministers, Hannaford returned to Global Affairs as deputy minister of international trade. He was replaced by David Morrison, a career diplomat who had spent half of his professional life working at the United Nations. Clerk of the Privy Council Michael Wernick retired and was replaced by Ian Shugart who, until his previous job as deputy minister of global affairs, had limited national security exposure.

The government was hoping that the national security file would assume a less-controversial profile after the India crisis. Bossenmaier, with her disciplined and professional management style, prioritized delivery. She had regular access to the prime minister and his chief of staff, Katie Telford, focusing her engagement on ensuring that the head of government was well informed and well briefed. At the bureaucratic level, DMOC continued to be her central coordinating committee and she relied heavily on the Security and Intelligence Secretariat for support. Her travel was generally limited to accompanying the prime minister overseas, while ensuring effective relationships with the still-growing number of NSIA equivalents across the West. Also important were her efforts facing inward: a new emphasis on protecting democracy at home, symbolized by the work of the minister of democratic institutions to prevent

36 Initially, the IRG was also going to offer the government a forum to discuss intelligence priorities but it never served that purpose.

37 See NSICOP (2018).

attempts to undermine Canadian elections. This included the establishment of the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol, the panel of five deputy ministers responsible for its implementation and the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force. Bossenmaier supported a government campaign that encouraged Canadians to improve their cyber hygiene and worked across the security and intelligence community to respond to NSICOP and to the newly established National Security and Intelligence Review Agency (NSIRA), with its mandate to investigate national security activity to ensure lawfulness, reasonableness and necessity. The creation of these two bodies, as well as the intelligence commissioner, placed extensive new demands on the public service.

Bossenmaier had planned to serve as NSIA for 18 months. Nonetheless, when her time came to an end, no successor had been identified. The government had a busy agenda, including renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement with a difficult Donald Trump administration, but the lack of succession planning still reflected the government's relative indifference to the NSIA position. When Bossenmaier retired, David Morrison became acting NSIA, adding to his already full plate as the prime minister's foreign and defence policy advisor and personal representative of the prime minister (also known as Sherpa) for the G7 summit.

A recently released ATIP request provides a rare glimpse into the structure that Morrison inherited.[38] The NSIA had a small personal office of six (minus the CAF colonel that Stephen Rigby had introduced, a tradition ended by Bossenmaier) and a broader senior leadership team of five: his own chief of staff, the foreign and defence policy advisor, and the three assistant secretaries (security and intelligence, intelligence assessment, and foreign and defence policy). He engaged with eight key partners within the security and intelligence community: the director of CSIS; the chief of CSE; the deputy ministers at Public Safety, Global Affairs and National Defence; the chief of the defence staff; and the chairs of NSICOP and NSIRA.[39] A less formal relationship existed with the executive director of the Integrated Terrorism (now Threat) Assessment Centre, which was housed in CSIS but had a reporting relationship both to the NSIA and the CSIS director. The NSIA had four particularly close international counterparts: the US and UK NSAs; the director-general of Australia's Office of National Intelligence; and the deputy chief executive in New Zealand's Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

DMOC remained the "signature NSIA-chaired meeting,"[40] held every Thursday at 3:00 p.m. There was still no formal agenda, nor were documents prepared in advance. DMOC attendees included the foreign and defence policy advisor to the prime minister; the deputies at National Defence, Public Safety, Global Affairs, Immigration and Transport; the chief of the defence staff; the agency heads at CSIS, CSE, the RCMP and CIDA; and the NSIA's three assistant secretaries. The NSIA's chief of staff kept track of commitments and action items. The Deputy Minister Committee on National Security (DMNS) persisted, meeting monthly with the NSIA and the deputy minister of public safety as co-chairs. PCO's Security and Intelligence Secretariat worked with Public Safety to craft a formal agenda and to commission supporting documents. DMNS included everyone from DMOC along with the deputies or executive heads from Justice, the Canada Revenue Agency, Industry, Public Health, Finance, Natural Resources, the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre and Correctional Service Canada. DMIA, chaired by the NSIA, also continued to meet. Its primary responsibility was to consider national intelligence assessments (drafted by the intelligence community) for the prime minister.

The NSIA was implicated in three additional deputy minister committees — Investment Review, China and Cyber — and would attend meetings of the Deputy Minister Interdepartmental Task Force response to hostage-taking cases when they were called upon. The NSIA was also expected to attend a number of regular meetings chaired by the clerk, including PCO operations, the monthly PCO executive and the weekly deputy minister breakfast (which the NSIA occasionally briefed). Finally, the NSIA continued to support the IRG.

In January 2020, Morrison was officially replaced as NSIA by Vincent Rigby (the brother of Stephen). Rigby was an historian by training, having completed a master's degree in military and diplomatic history at Carleton University. His first government job was as a defence and foreign policy analyst at the Research Branch of the Library of

38 ATIP request, A-2024-00158.

39 Curiously missing from this list are CBSA and the RCMP.

40 ATIP request, A-2024-00158.

Parliament before he joined National Defence in 1994. He spent 14 years there, rising to the position of assistant deputy minister, policy. That job made him the primary liaison between the military and civilian sides of the department on defence policy issues and brought him into contact with senior officials in Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Rigby joined PCO in 2008 as executive director of IAS, with additional responsibilities for coordinating the intelligence community's support for Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. He spent three years as a vice-president at CIDA (leaving IAS in 2010 so as to prevent a conflict of interest with his incoming NSA boss, his brother Stephen!) before joining Global Affairs Canada as its assistant deputy minister, strategic policy. Next came two years as associate deputy minister of public safety followed by a brief stint as associate deputy minister of foreign affairs.

Rigby had extensive national security and foreign policy experience. While he was comfortable within the senior ranks of the national security community, he was the most junior deputy minister to become NSIA since Bill Elliott. As he noted humbly in a public lecture at CIGI on June 8, 2021, "I am not the boss of the Deputy Ministers in this community — if anything, they're probably mine! — but my role is to help ensure we work as one integrated team" (Rigby 2021). It did not help that Ian Shugart, clerk of the Privy Council, made the controversial and widely questioned move early on to remove the foreign and defence policy portfolio from Rigby's purview and also remove him as co-chair of DMNS. The first decision meant that the foreign and defence policy advisor to the prime minister once again reported directly to the clerk. As one former senior PCO official later noted:

> Adding FDP [foreign and defence policy] to the NSIA portfolio provided a link between intelligence production, intelligence assessments on international issues, and foreign policy advice. It provided a channel for intelligence input at the highest level of foreign policy management and gave the NSIA a direct link to the prime minister's thinking on foreign policy and experiences and needs in travelling abroad, and more precision on briefing requirements. It raised the value of intelligence assessments, as their production became more closely tied to the PM's diplomatic role and foreign travel. The structure combining intelligence assessment and foreign policy advice created a risk that intelligence assessments could be toned down in some circumstances, but this did not appear to be an issue. The assumption remained that intelligence assessments must be independent in judgement and explicit in addressing conclusions from the intelligence, whether or not their analysis confirms foreign policy judgments. (Fyffe 2020).

Rigby had less seniority and less authority than recent NSIAs. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, he, by necessity, spent much of the next 18 months as a crisis manager, briefing the prime minister and Cabinet regularly on COVID-19-related matters.

As NSIA, Rigby initiated two major changes to Canada's national security posture. First, he replaced DMIA with a new Deputy Minister Intelligence Committee. The subtle change in nomenclature was significant. The former group had focused exclusively on assessed intelligence. The new body also looked at raw signals and human intelligence with the goal of flagging actionable information that might need to be elevated immediately to the political level (Rigby 2023). The intelligence communities of the Five Eyes were producing overwhelming volumes of reporting, including on foreign interference, and Rigby feared that important items might be missed. Senior decision makers were not capable of digesting the entirety of what was being produced, nor did they have the background to differentiate between what was critical and what might have just been interesting. As NSIA he tried, not for the first time, to add discipline to the process of distributing intelligence to senior leaders, though it remained a work in progress by the time of his departure. Again, like several of his predecessors, Rigby lamented the lack of a Cabinet committee devoted exclusively to national security, but his quiet advocacy made little headway in the midst of a pandemic.

Rigby's second significant change was a deliberate effort to increase the visibility of the NSIA in the public realm. At an event in collaboration with CIGI, "National Security Challenges in the 21st Century," he gave a lengthy public speech (mentioned above) and then entertained questions. David Vigneault, the head of CSIS at the time, and Shelly Bruce, the head of CSE at the time, participated in similar events with CIGI in 2021. Rigby opened with a thorough description of his job as NSIA, which he defined as threefold: supporting the prime

minister, convening and coordinating Canada's national security community, and liaising with external stakeholders, whether from other levels of government, academia, the private sector, or abroad through the Five Eyes, NATO and other like-minded states (Rigby 2021; Wark 2022). He also made a strong pitch, risky under normal circumstances but mitigated somewhat by his imminent retirement, for the government to take national security more seriously in a world becoming increasingly dangerous and unpredictable. A video of the talk was posted to CIGI's website, while the text itself was published by PCO. In what was a departure from the approach taken by many of his predecessors, Rigby understood the public as a critical player in the national security realm and made an active and ongoing effort to engage Canadians in a national conversation. This focus on transparency also included recommending to the prime minister that the government release its intelligence priorities (which it now does) and respond publicly to NSICOP reports (still pending).

Rigby performed other aspects of the job much as his predecessors did. He briefed the prime minister on a regular basis — approximately every two weeks — and engaged his colleagues through bilateral and committee meetings. He paid particular attention to the work of NSICOP, keeping an open line with its chair, David McGuinty. He travelled less extensively due to the COVID-19 pandemic but communicated regularly with his counterparts, even taking the lead in establishing a formal Five Eyes NSA body that would meet every quarter.[41] Outside of the pandemic, the continued assertiveness of China, threat briefings to Cabinet, the aftermath of the Iranian downing of Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS752, and ministerial security garnered the bulk of his attention.

The role of the NSIA, particularly during the pandemic, was exhausting, and Rigby retired for health reasons in June 2021 just as he was getting a feel for the job. Again, he was not immediately replaced; this time a permanent replacement was not named for six months. For a government that struggled mightily with the importance of national security, such a gap was not helpful. Once more, it would take a crisis, if not a series of crises, to get its attention.

Policrisis

With Rigby gone, David Morrison once more added acting NSIA to his list of responsibilities. For much of the next six months, he grappled with the Taliban victory in Afghanistan and the corresponding fallout for Canada and its allies. The prime minister ultimately chose a permanent replacement in early 2022 with a significantly different approach to the job. Jody Thomas had joined the Naval Reserve as a diesel mechanic when she was 17 and looking for summer work. After completing a bachelor of arts degree at Carleton University, she became an officer in the Reserve, added a bachelor of commerce to her resume and joined the public service as chief of business planning and administration with Public Works and Government Services Canada's Atlantic Region. She spent 15 years at Passport Canada, rising to the rank of chief operating officer, and then moved to the Coast Guard as deputy commissioner of operations. After four years, she was seconded to PCO to gain central agency experience and then returned to the Coast Guard as its commissioner. In 2017, she was promoted to senior associate deputy minister of National Defence before becoming a full deputy shortly thereafter. She was at National Defence for nearly five years through one of the most difficult periods in the CAF's history. During her tenure, several senior officers, including two chiefs of the defence staff, resigned or stood aside after accusations of inappropriate behaviour. While Rigby was a policy wonk forced into crisis management by virtue of the COVID-19 pandemic, Thomas was a crisis manager through and through. She was one of the most operationally focused NSIAs in the position's history and the least versed in policy.

Thomas entered an office in disarray, just barely being held together and badly bruised by a lack of continuity at the top. She leveraged her convening power to establish a more top-down approach to managing the national security community. Clerk Janice Charette was convinced to re-establish the deputy NSIA position and Thomas grew her office more aggressively than any of her predecessors. In addition to reclaiming and then expanding the size of the Foreign and Defence Policy Secretariat, she also took control of a newly established Emergency Preparedness and COVID Recovery Secretariat, which was supported by a deputy secretary and two assistant secretaries. Although she tried,

41 It failed to take hold after his departure.

she was unable to secure the return of a military colonel to serve as her chief operating officer.

Within two weeks of her arrival, Thomas found herself in the middle of the Freedom Convoy crisis. Initially a protest against vaccination requirements for cross-border truckers, the protest evolved into an aggressive rejection of any and all COVID-19 restrictions and a call for the resignation of Prime Minister Trudeau. In addition to establishing a series of blockades at key border crossings with the United States, protest leaders directed hundreds of vehicles and thousands of people into Ottawa's downtown core, disrupting local businesses and the lives of local residents for weeks. The Trudeau government ultimately invoked the Emergencies Act to restore order. While many applauded the move as long overdue, others accused the government of overreach. Once the protesters had been cleared and the dust had settled, the government constituted a Public Order Emergency Commission to review the legality of its actions. The head of the commission, Justice Paul Rouleau, concluded that the government had met the threshold to invoke the act. Later, another judge in a federal court case against the government — launched by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association — disagreed, finding that Ottawa had exceeded its authority. Canadians generally sided with the government at the time, although Trudeau's popularity, already fragile, suffered.

The lethal combination of domestic and foreign crises — the Freedom Convoy, Ukraine, foreign interference, Chinese spy balloons and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic — made Thomas's experience as NSIA particularly intense. Her direct interactions with the prime minister and his office were more frequent than most of her predecessors, a reflection of the sheer number of emergencies confronting the government at any one time. She found Trudeau to be attentive and a voracious reader, and she found his office to be supportive. She also travelled with the prime minister regularly, especially after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. As NSIA, Thomas lacked extensive foreign policy expertise, but she was able to leverage the experience of Charette, who had recently returned from nearly five years as Canadian high commissioner to the United Kingdom. Adding to this, foreign interference threats carried out at home by China, India (the alleged state-sponsored assassination of a Canadian Sikh in British Columbia) and other state actors meant Thomas had her hands full. Intelligence leaks to *The Globe and Mail* led to allegations that the government had deliberately downplayed attempts by Chinese agents and proxies to interfere with the 2019 and 2021 federal elections. These allegations dogged the government and the security and intelligence community throughout Thomas's term, especially as the Foreign Interference Commission, led by Marie-Josée Hogue, forced the NSIA into the public spotlight.

Perhaps because of her operational background, and perhaps also because of the turmoil of the times, Thomas had a more direct style with her colleagues than many of her predecessors. She later reflected that "you go from having your hand on every lever as deputy minister and having the ability to manage outcomes to essentially being the briefer-in-chief and trying to convene the town to move in certain directions and understanding if they can't, why, and brief that up. It's hard not to own anything. We all like to take the football and run with it and you're often watching it fly over you."[42] She viewed tensions with other deputies as inevitable but always sought, and usually achieved, a solution to any confrontation. Her style resonated more with some senior security officials than with others — the prime minister, who came to rely on her extensively, did not seem to mind, if he knew at all.

In the end, Thomas believes that the security and intelligence community rose to the challenge during her time in the position. The weaknesses brought to light during the Freedom Convoy and foreign interference crises — overly complex governance, lack of a security culture outside the core community, poor coordination of intelligence — can also be found in other Five Eyes and G7 countries. According to her, these problems were being addressed, and the system would continue to improve.[43]

Thomas lasted two years before retiring in early 2024. This time, however, there was a clear succession plan in place. While serving as deputy clerk of the Privy Council and associate secretary to Cabinet, Nathalie Drouin had been involved directly in a number of national security files, including the Freedom Convoy and foreign interference. A lawyer with a graduate degree in business administration from Université Laval, Drouin had little national security experience prior to arriving at PCO but she was well-versed in how government worked at both

42 Authors' interview with Jody Thomas, September 3, 2024.

43 Ibid.

the federal and provincial levels. She had begun her public service career in the Quebec government where she eventually rose to the position of deputy minister of justice and deputy attorney general. She left provincial government for Ottawa when she was named the senior associate deputy minister of the Department of Justice in 2016. She was promoted to deputy minister and deputy attorney general the following year and served four years at the Department of Justice before taking on the role of deputy clerk in 2021. She was there for two and a half years before becoming NSIA.

Drouin insisted on keeping the deputy clerk title along with her new job so the clerk, John Hannaford, appointed a second deputy, Christiane Fox. Over time, Fox and Drouin divided their shared responsibilities so that the former was primarily responsible for the non-security files while Drouin naturally took the lead on all security-related matters.

In November 2024, Drouin was issued the NSIA's first-ever public mandate letter (PCO 2024). Mandate letters are not themselves new, having existed for members of the Cabinet at the federal level since the 1970s (Ie 2023). Not long after the provincial governments in Alberta and Ontario began publishing their letters online in the early 2010s, the Trudeau government did the same as part of its transparency agenda. Trudeau's original minister of public safety, Ralph Goodale, appears to have been the first member of the government to issue a mandate letter to a public servant (the head of the RCMP). One of his successors, Marco Mendicino, issued them to the heads of CSIS and CBSA as well. Drouin was, however, the first public servant outside of the Public Safety portfolio to receive such a letter publicly.

The letter was by far the most explicit articulation of the NSIA's role ever revealed in public. It was timely, given recent national security controversies and the increasingly uncertain and tumultuous international security environment. The government identified public discussions of foreign interference as the reason behind "the need for a stronger, more clearly articulated NSIA position that can oversee and guide the intelligence process from collection and assessment, through policy development, to our response and operational coordination" (PCO 2024). The Hogue Commission's recommendations clearly drove this point home.

The letter was meant to describe and enhance the NSIA's role while increasing transparency and accountability. Drouin was given a public education mandate. She was also tasked with managing the flow of intelligence and analysis into PMO, with coordinating national security conversations across the government and the new NSC, and with organizing the government's response to major national and international incidents with national security implications. In addition to acting as the secretary of the new NSC, she was placed in charge of convening and coordinating the IRG. She was also expected to play a leadership role in drafting a new national security strategy, establishing Canada's annual intelligence priorities, responding to recent inquiries into foreign interference, and coordinating the federal emergency response. It was an overwhelming list of responsibilities.

The mandate letter came almost a year into Drouin's term and she had already been performing many of these duties. Three deserve special mention. The establishment in 2023 of the NSC, with the NSIA as its secretary, was a landmark development. Canada had been an outlier among the Five Eyes for years in lacking a consistent body at the political level to address national security matters through an intelligence lens. The NSC filled this gap. Chaired by the prime minister, it included the ministers of national defence, industry, foreign affairs, public safety, international assistance and justice (Prime Minister of Canada 2025; Rigby and Juneau 2023). Their deputy ministers (including the relevant heads of agencies) also attended committee meetings that initially took place every four to eight weeks. This was not an operational committee. It was meant to address longer-term national security issues at the strategic level. The goal was to increase the literacy of senior Cabinet ministers on current and future security issues through detailed intelligence briefings and to improve the coherence of the government's approach to national security more generally. By including senior officials, the meetings became more policy focused than they might have been otherwise. Anecdotal comments from attendees indicate that the committee was beginning to hit its stride just prior to Trudeau's resignation in January 2025.

The NSIA had also been tasked with developing a successor to Canada's 2004 NSP. This pledge was communicated through an updated national defence policy in April 2024. *Our North, Strong and Free* committed the Canadian government to publishing a national security strategy every

four years, which would include, at minimum, a national defence strategy update, if not also additional updates, to provide Canadians with "an integrated update of Canada's security, intelligence, defence, and diplomatic posture," on a regular basis (Department of National Defence 2024, 15). As in 2004, PCO would take the lead. At the time of writing, that strategy was still under development.

Finally, deputy ministers had complained over the years that the national security governance structure was too heavy and complex. There were too many deputy minister committees (13 at one point) and meetings, and not enough time to focus on priorities. Drouin completed a comprehensive review of the committee structure, reducing the number of committees to a handful, with the focus on DMNS, DMOC and intelligence response.

The departure of Prime Minister Trudeau in January 2025 left national security in Canada at a crossroads. His government's approach to security had been criticized for being slow, reactive, clumsy, grudging and piecemeal — in short, less than serious. But efforts over time to adjust to a changing global threat environment provided a ray of hope. In creating review bodies such as NSICOP and NSIRA, releasing two defence policies with new funding, amending CSE and CSIS legislation, banning Huawei in 5G networks, tightening the Investment Canada Act against economic threats and restricting Chinese academic research in Canada, Ottawa took concrete action to enhance national security. Through the establishment of the NSC, the publication of an NSIA mandate letter and a commitment to release regular national security strategies, the government put in place a more sophisticated, transparent national security framework to set out strategic goals and the means to achieve them. Whether Prime Minister Mark Carney's government will continue efforts to strengthen what remains a relatively weak national security culture remains unclear, as does the future of the NSC and even the timely publication of a new national security strategy. The future of the role of the NSIA is directly linked to all these questions.

The Path Ahead

The NSIA is now one of Canada's most important public officials. Located at the centre of government, the NSIA is neither a deputy minister of a line department nor a typical PCO deputy secretary. The position reports directly to the prime minister.[44] The NSIA coordinates a diverse and complex security and intelligence deputy minister community, and deals, quite literally, with matters of life and death. No other position in the federal public service can match this combination of responsibilities. The significance of the position over the decades has ebbed and flowed, depending on the individual in the job, the attitude of the prime minister and the state of the world. When those three elements have converged — a strong NSIA, an attentive prime minister and a dangerous security environment — the position has gained in prominence.

Each NSIA has approached the job differently, depending on their personality and background and the threats facing the country at the time. Fundamentally, however, the position has remained the same. The NSIA supports and advises the prime minister on national security matters, convenes and coordinates the security and intelligence community ("herding the cats," as one former NSIA put it) and engages stakeholders outside the federal government, from provinces and territories to the private sector and Five Eyes allies. Within these wide-ranging roles, the position has become ever more complex and demanding as the definition of national security has expanded and the world has become more unsettled. In some cases, the position has been double hatted with that of the deputy clerk, an arrangement that seems neither necessary nor wise in current circumstances and given the inherent pressures of the job.

To carry out their roles, the NSIA has had to strike a series of delicate balances. National security is ultimately a two-sided coin with both domestic and international faces. In the early years of the position, NSIAs tended to focus more on domestic issues but that has changed as the international threat environment has become more unpredictable and dangerous. Threats at home often find their source overseas — there is no easy distinction. NSIAs must address both, which means paying close attention to foreign intelligence, working with Global Affairs and the CAF and engaging counterparts around the world. Situating the prime minister's foreign and defence policy advisor under the NSIA was the right move and should continue. Not all matters of foreign policy are

44 The role of the clerk in that reporting relationship depends very much on personality.

necessarily national security-related but the NSIA can show judgment in delegating to the foreign and defence policy advisor when appropriate, while assuming a more assertive role when the threads of international and domestic security must be woven together for the prime minister.

At the same time, much of each NSIA's day-to-day activity has been taken up by emergency management — urgently briefing the prime minister, corralling colleagues, mitigating crises. Little time has been left for strategic thinking. But again, thanks to the establishment of the NSC and plans for a new national security strategy, that could and should change. The job will always have an operational dimension but NSIAs should try to avoid the tactical weeds and devote more time and effort to strategic policy making.

The long-standing tension between secrecy and transparency persists. The NSIA has traditionally worked in the shadows, barely known to the public outside of the few journalists and academics who cover national security issues. The job is by definition secretive, relying as it does on classified intelligence and other clandestine tools. But in recent years, that, too, has begun to change. Consider Vincent Rigby's 2021 CIGI speech, Jody Thomas's frequent appearances before parliamentary committees and commissions of inquiry and Nathalie Drouin's explicit responsibility for public education. The national security community will always need to guard its closest secrets but without the support and trust of the Canadian public, it will struggle to succeed. Ottawa must be more open about the threats facing Canadians and the required responses. The NSIA, as the coordinator of the security and intelligence community, should be a leader in this respect.

While the NSIA has always played an important role in policy and operational matters, the position also includes an intelligence dimension. Canada is the only country in the Five Eyes that combines policy and intelligence responsibilities in this way. The arrangement can be dangerous, as lines between policy and intelligence can become blurred in the hands of the same individual. Traditionally, policy-neutral intelligence informs the decision-making process. The authors are not certain that Canada has the right model. It is worth considering whether the NSIA's intelligence responsibility should be placed elsewhere as it is in the United States with the director of national intelligence. Such a shift might lighten the burden of the job and perhaps help address some of the intelligence challenges that emerged during the foreign interference crisis.

Beyond the balancing acts described above lies a fundamental question: Does the NSIA possess the necessary capabilities and authorities to succeed? Working for the NSIA no doubt attracts the best and the brightest from across government but PCO staff is still relatively small compared to line departments. Most of the NSIAs the authors interviewed believed that keeping the office limited in size was the right approach. The NSIA is, after all, first and foremost a coordinator. Line departments and agencies should do the heavy lifting.

In terms of authorities, most former NSIAs seem to think similarly. The position carries with it a natural weight. It is a senior post at the centre of government with direct access to the prime minister. The power to convene and invoke the name of the prime minister should not be underestimated. Cultivating a close relationship with the prime minister, as both Stephen Rigby and Jody Thomas did, without crossing any political lines, is therefore critical. Being able to convey the prime minister's direction is essential. The mandate letter helps enormously in this respect and should be continued. As Stephen Rigby (2014) indicated more than a decade ago, there is a moral suasion to the role that naturally comes into play with other deputies, even at Public Safety, where tensions have often arisen over the years given the complexity and expanse of the Public Safety portfolio in the national security realm. Assigning the position a legislative mandate might be tempting but would likely not add much weight in the end, especially if a mandate letter continues to be issued by the prime minister. The NSIA has ample carrots and sticks, and while the former may predominate, this is only natural given the need to respect the accountabilities and authorities of other deputies. At the same time, neither PCO nor the clerk has a statutory basis so it would be odd for the NSIA to stand out in this regard.

Identifying clear roles and responsibilities, balancing competing demands, possessing the appropriate capabilities — all these are critical factors in the performance of the NSIA's role. Ultimately, though, the job comes down to the individual. What makes the ideal NSIA? Knowledge and expertise matter. National security is a complex business that cannot be mastered overnight. NSIAs will inevitably learn on the job but the position carries such enormous responsibilities pertaining

to the security of Canada and Canadians that some fundamental grounding in the field is necessary. To appoint an NSIA with little to no expertise in national security is dangerous, especially since the individual might be immediately faced with a crisis. Seniority and experience as a deputy minister are also essential. The job requires a seasoned deputy who understands how government works, has pre-established relationships with their security and intelligence colleagues and knows how to manage issues at the most senior level. Such attributes attract respect across the community and make it that much easier to coordinate and, when necessary, cajole. Finally, personality should not be underplayed. Any senior position in government requires the right mix of character traits but in the NSIA position the ability to stay composed and even-tempered, build consensus among a multitude of different players and remain clear-eyed in the direst of circumstances is paramount.

The authors offer one last observation on NSIA succession planning. On multiple occasions over the years, it has been completely lacking. For a position so important, especially in such precarious times, this is inexcusable. The NSIA position should never be allowed to lay dormant for months at a time. More deliberate succession planning at the political and official levels is critical. At the same time, over the last 15 years, the role has been all but reserved for deputy ministers on the cusp of retirement. There is merit to this approach, as it encourages the incumbent to offer fearless advice to the prime minister. But Robert Wright's experience demonstrates that it is not essential. What is most important is ensuring the right fit in terms of skills, experience and expertise, and giving that individual the appropriate tools to carry out their responsibilities. As the position of NSIA grows ever more critical in a world fraught with uncertainty, the commitment and ability to choose the right person for the job will offer a revealing glimpse into whether future Canadian governments will treat national security with the seriousness it deserves.

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