

Routine Proceedings

The CSIS Act's provision for an external Security Intelligence Review Committee, the SIRC, reporting directly to Parliament and the Office of the Inspector General reporting internally to the Minister, were key innovations in Canadian security intelligence.

[English]

SIRC with its annual reports to Parliament and the Office of the Inspector General with its annual certificates to the minister played an essential role in helping successive solicitors general exercise their control and accountability for CSIS. Five years after the legislation came into force, a special parliamentary committee examined the operation of the CSIS and security offences acts.

In 1991 in "On Course", the then government's response to the committee's report, the then government committed itself to making an annual statement to Parliament on national security and the tabling of a public report from the director of CSIS. Our system of review and control with its built in checks and balances involving the executive, the judicial and legislative components of government are working well.

In effect, the service has been under constant review and adjustment since inception and this should be reassuring to all Canadians. Indeed in its annual report for 1992-93 which I tabled in this House soon after becoming Solicitor General, SIRC concluded that CSIS "is working within the law and operating effectively".

Today we see a service faced with constant and at times dramatic change in the global security environment. Most notably, I speak of the collapse of the Soviet Union and of the classic cold war model of east versus west that was the overriding preoccupation of the national security system.

Members might well ask whether we are reorienting and streamlining our activities in step with today's security intelligence environment. Yes, we certainly are. Two years ago my predecessor asked the CSIS director to prepare for him an assessment of how the evolving security environment might affect the services mandate over time.

The director was also asked to consider how the service should be structured as a consequence and to determine the resource implications of his recommendations. In his report last year the director concluded that although the bipolar tensions of the cold war, which were terrifying but at the same time reassuring because they were known, had largely dissipated, a multiplicity of new threats and tensions has emerged.

The collapse of the Warsaw pact has been a major factor in allowing the government to judiciously prune the services resources. The services position complement has dropped from a peak of 2,760 in 1992 to 2,366 today, a reduction of 394 positions.

As the spending estimates for the fiscal year 1994-95 show, the CSIS budget is \$206.8 million, down from \$228.7 million last year. In terms of reorientation, the director's review confirmed the course of continuing to reduce the proportion of resources specifically dedicated to counter-intelligence while increasing resources directed to counter-terrorism.

• (1520)

Allow me also to note what the SIRC said on this issue in its annual report and again I quote: "We believe that CSIS is reorienting its activities in a sensible prudent fashion and the result will be a service that acts effectively against the modern terrorist threat to vulnerable highly interdependent post-industrial societies such as their own and which cost the nation less".

[Translation]

Our approach must continue to be prudent and steady. Mr. Speaker.

We have to be deliberate and measured in any change in the apportioning of our security intelligence resources and tough and adaptable in how we target them.

I say this because while the Cold War may well be over, the global situation does not warrant complacency.

Witness the conclusions of the Director in the public report: The member of foreign intelligence services operating against Canadian interests in Canada or abroad remains substantial.

The activities of former Cold War adversaries have generally been reduced, he notes, but they have by no means been eliminated. The recent arrest of a senior employee of the CIA for allegedly selling his country's secrets seems to bear this out.

[English]

The primary threat to Canada is international terrorism and the bulk of CSIS operational resources is dedicated to counter terrorism.

The conspiracy to bomb a Hindu temple in Toronto, the bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York, and the recent terrorist attack against Heathrow Airport in the United Kingdom bring home the point dramatically that open democratic societies offer vulnerable and attractive targets. Members should also know that terrorists are known to plan and raise funds for their operations elsewhere.

The conclusion of the CSIS threat assessment is both sobering and instructive. Terrorists will continue to avail themselves of the latest technology and to feed on the discontent of extremism both from the right and the left.

As the number of flash points grows around the world so do the potential number of threats. For this reason it is incumbent upon us to ensure CSIS has the ability to investigate and analyse threats and to advise the government so that it can take appropriate action.