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**CSIS'S DISTRICT OFFICE ACTIVITIES AT TORONTO AND  
VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS**

**(SIRC STUDY 2008-06)**

**Presented by  
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, a number of aviation-related terrorist attacks have resulted in considerable discussion about the most effective means of ensuring aviation security. The 1985 bombing of Air India flight 182 and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 are two of the more prominent events that have propelled the issue of aviation security to the fore. More recently, incidents such as the attempted bombing of a commercial aircraft by Richard Reid (commonly known as the shoe bomber), as well as the arrest of eight British citizens for allegedly planning to blow up as many as ten air planes over the Atlantic, including two Air Canada flights, further underscore the prominence of this issue.

In response to these events, the Federal Government has adopted various measures to improve aviation security. These include enhanced security measures for aircraft and airport construction, screening people and goods entering restricted areas of the airport, requiring air carriers to provide basic information on specific passengers or flights, assigning undercover police officers to Canadian aircraft and increasing the number of front-line investigative personnel. Although this is not an exhaustive list, it is indicative of the multi-layered security framework that characterizes the Canadian aviation context.

The Service (CSIS) plays an important role within this increasingly complex security environment by participating in a number of security screening programmes (e.g., Visa Vetting, Passenger Protect and Restricted Area Identification Card screening)<sup>1</sup> and by providing security intelligence to airport partners, such as law enforcement and border security agencies. CSIS has sought to maximize its information sharing with aviation stakeholders by establishing Airport District Offices (DO) at Vancouver, Toronto, international airports.

CSIS personnel located at DOs provide investigative support to their Regional and Headquarter (HQ) counterparts by conducting interviews,

They

also provide advice to airport security partners,

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<sup>1</sup> The Visa Vetting program refers to the screening of nationals or current residents from certain countries suspected of assisting terrorists, while Passenger Protect refers to the Government's specified persons list the purpose of which is to prevent individuals who may pose a threat to aviation security from boarding a flight. Restricted access refers to Transport Canada's Transportation Security Clearance which is aimed at ensuring that those persons who have access to restricted areas pose no national security threat.



Past SIRC studies have examined aspects of CSIS activities that impact the airport environment through reviews of several programs managed under the Security Screening Branch, including the Passenger Protect Program, the Port of Entry Interdiction Program and the Airport Restricted Access Area Clearance Program. These reviews, however, did not examine the Service's direct functions within the airport environment.

This Study examines two Airport DOs: one at Pearson International (PIA) and the other at Vancouver International (YVR).

Service employees working within these environments have the unique responsibility of collaborating with numerous airport stakeholders to ensure that Canada's key aviation infrastructure remains secure.

## 2 OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

This review examines the nature and scope of activities at CSIS DOs at Pearson International Airport (PIA) and Vancouver International Airport (YVR). In particular, the review assesses how these DOs manage their airport-related responsibilities, including how each Office fits within the aviation security framework, how they support their airport partners and CSIS Regions and how they reinforce CSIS's national security agenda through outreach efforts.

The review period was January 1, 2006 to December 31, 2007.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

SIRC's review of PIA and YVR DOs relied on several information sources, including:

- operational messages related to PIA and YVR during the specified time frame;
- information entered into
- Desk Plans.

These documents were reviewed to determine the types of Service-related activities conducted at each airport. In addition, SIRC met with PIA and YVR DO personnel at their respective airports, to gain insight into the nature and scope of the Service's role.

## 4 UNDERSTANDING THE AIRPORT ENVIRONMENT

To appreciate the nature and scope of Service activities at Pearson (PIA) and Vancouver International Airports (YVR), it is necessary to consider the size of the environment and to grasp the complexity of the numerous agencies responsible for managing aviation security. The following section will describe this environment as well as the role played by CSIS.

### 4.1 Pearson International Airport (PIA)

Toronto's PIA is Canada's principal airport serving more than 30 million travellers in 2007, representing one-third of the total national air traffic. PIA provides service to 79 air carriers who in turn supply services to 37 domestic, 83 transborder (between Canada and the U.S.) and 100 international destinations. Additionally, PIA is the fifth largest entry point into the United States and is the key site for connecting flights within Canada. PIA is ranked third in North America in terms of international passenger traffic with more than half (56%) of its passenger traffic being international.<sup>3</sup>

PIA employs more than 45,000 employees, many of whom have access to restricted areas at the airport. This environment has many features of a small city with a dedicated on-site fire department, police force, and up until one year ago, a medical clinic that was solely for the benefit of airport employees.<sup>4</sup> Projections for PIA growth indicate that passenger capacity is expected to increase to 36 million by 2010. During the two-week period of the 2010 Olympics, passenger traffic is expected to increase by 40% over 2007 levels.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Memo to the Economic Development Committee from the Director of Economic Research and Business Information, "Issues and Opportunities: Greater Toronto Airports Authority/ Toronto Pearson International Airport", date accessed February 27, 2009, p. 1. from: <http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2008/ed/bgrd/backgroundfile-10673.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> SIRC Memo, "PIA Briefing", January 15, 2009, p.1.

<sup>5</sup> Greater Toronto Airport Authority, "Aviation Activity and Forecasts", December 2007 section 3.1.



## 4.2 Vancouver International Airport (YVR)

YVR is Canada's gateway to the Asia-Pacific region. Although it is not as busy as PIA, YVR's international and transborder traffic growth has been relatively larger than PIA's over the past seven years.<sup>6</sup> In 2007, YVR served almost 18 million passengers.

Additionally, this airport provides service to 69 air carriers that have non-stop services to 26 transborder (between Canada and the U.S.) and 38 international destinations.<sup>7</sup> Similar to PIA, YVR is a large employer with just under 27,000 employees. YVR is expected to experience growth in cargo and passenger travel over the coming decade and is currently preparing for the 2010 Olympics when 250,000 visitors are forecasted to arrive in Vancouver over a two-week period.

## 4.3 Security at Canadian International Airports

The overall responsibility for Canadian aviation security falls to Transport Canada (TC) and is governed by regulations issued under the *Aeronautics Act*. However, the day-to-day applications of airport and air carrier security measures are shared among a number of entities, including TC, the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA), municipal, provincial and federal police, private security firms, as well as air carriers and cargo operators. The number of enforcement bodies and agencies involved in policing and security at Canadian international airports has led some critics to describe the system as "fragmented."

As an example of this complex security environment, PIA law enforcement agencies include the Peel Regional Police (PRP) Force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and private security firms contracted to secure specific areas of the airport. In addition, the Canada Border Security Agency (CBSA) interviews passengers deplaning from international flights, oversees the clearance for immigration and customs/excise programs and cross references travellers before they arrive in Canada to determine if

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<sup>6</sup> YVR and PIA Passenger Statistics enplaned and deplaned passenger statistics (2000 through to 2007). Date accessed February 27, 2009 from: [http://www.gtaa.com/local/files/en/Corporate/Statistics/Passenger\\_Traffic-1008-10.pdf](http://www.gtaa.com/local/files/en/Corporate/Statistics/Passenger_Traffic-1008-10.pdf) – and: [http://www.yvr.ca/pdf/authority/statistics/december\\_2008\\_Pax.pdf](http://www.yvr.ca/pdf/authority/statistics/december_2008_Pax.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Vancouver Airport Authority, "Annual Report 2007." Date accessed February 27, 2009, from: [http://www.yvr.ca/authority/whowere/annual\\_report\\_online\\_2007.asp](http://www.yvr.ca/authority/whowere/annual_report_online_2007.asp).



any individuals pose a risk to national security.<sup>9</sup> CATSA contractors provide security screening functions, including pre-board screening of passengers and their carry-on luggage, screening of checked-in baggage and random screening of persons with restricted access passes (e.g., food caterers, flight crews, maintenance crews). Finally, air carriers are responsible for ensuring that security standards are maintained on their flights and with their crews.

#### 4.4 CSIS's Role in the Airport Environment

The Service's role within this complex airport environment is principally a supportive one, with \_\_\_\_\_ to respond to inquiries from their airport partners. Service DO personnel provide advice to law enforcement agencies in response to any security breach or criminal incident perceived to be related to national security. Additionally, airports are entry points which can be used by persons who threaten national security. In order to secure these entry points, CSIS provides Port of Entry Services to CBSA immigration officers as they screen passengers entering Canada. When CBSA Officers have national security concerns \_\_\_\_\_ they may choose to call upon Service DO personnel for their advice. The Service supports CBSA in these instances

\_\_\_\_\_ These relationships are reciprocal, with each partner gaining access to unique perspectives and sources of information.

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<sup>9</sup> American Homeland Security Officers are also present at PIA and YVR performing customs, immigration, and cargo inspections to clear travellers destined for the United States. These officers are given limited authority to perform customs, immigration, and cargo inspection to clear travellers destined for the United States.

plans are tested and revised

Additionally, disaster management

## **5 STRENGTHENING CSIS INTERNAL COMMUNICATION**

In addition to supporting the day-to-day activities of government airport stakeholders and providing essential Port of Entry Services, CSIS DOs respond to requests for assistance from the Regions and HQ,

In order for DOs to provide assistance to their counterparts, there must be clear lines of communication between DOs, Regions and HQ. The following section will examine how this internal communication could be strengthened.

### **5.1 Communication with CSIS HQ and Regions**



knowledge of how to contact DOs and which Office to contact in a given circumstance would increase the efficiency and efficacy of CSIS internal liaison. **SIRC found that some CSIS personnel were unfamiliar with procedures on how to contact Airport District Offices directly, and uncertain as to which Airport District Office to contact** This lack of knowledge leads to unnecessary additional calls and time that could be critical if the request is urgent.

## 5.2 Communication Between Airport District Offices

DO support for Regional and HQ investigations results in constant communication between airport offices in relation to tasking requirements. These Offices have more in common with one another than they have with their local CSIS regional counterparts. For example, both Offices deal with the same airport stakeholders, must contend with similar daily issues and work within comparable environments.

Despite this affinity, **SIRC found that there was little opportunity for District Offices to work together on issues that are both mutually relevant and common.** For example, each DO is developing their own performance indicators, a task that could be jointly undertaken to ensure standardization and best practices. Further to this, the DOs may benefit from the opportunity to visit each other's operations to learn from one another and collaborate on solutions to common problems. During the review period, neither Office was able to exploit such an opportunity.

**SIRC recommends that Airport District Offices be afforded opportunities to collaborate on common goals (e.g., performance indicators, outreach efforts) and review one another's operations to enhance their own activities.**

## 6 LIAISON CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

In addition to close working relationships with government security partners, Airport DOs also develop close ties with non-governmental stakeholders,

The  
next section outlines the challenges encountered and successes gained by DOs in fostering these relationships.

Challenges occasionally arise in maintaining these formal and informal relationships.

## 6.1 Outreach Efforts

The strong relationships between CSIS DO personnel and airport partners (government and non-government) are developed and maintained through Service outreach efforts which include ad-hoc briefings and presentations. These briefings are initiated at the request of the Service's airport partners when they perceive a need (e.g., new front-line employees, novel threat-related issues). The end goal of these briefings is to increase awareness of national security issues generally, and specifically, to establish close working relationships between CSIS DO personnel and front line employees who request their advice.

These sessions provide Service DO personnel with the opportunity to make themselves more accessible to front line employees. By reinforcing the Service's mandate to airport employees, it is hoped that they will make more informed decisions and consider national security issues when screening passengers, dealing with a breach or criminal incident or when they observe irregular behaviors at the airport. Enhancing airport employees' knowledge of potential national security threats increases the likelihood that they will take the appropriate action and call upon the Service for advice.

Over the two-year review period, both Airport DOs were frequently invited to share their knowledge with front line employees. Both Offices noted an increase in calls seeking the Service's advice following these outreach initiatives.<sup>20</sup> However, these ad-hoc briefings were developed by each DO independently, despite working with common stakeholders. The Committee believes that both DOs would benefit from a joint review of these initiatives to determine the best practices. A joint review could consider the following: target audience, briefing content(s), feedback, impact and whether or not these liaison efforts should be conducted on a routine, rather than an ad-hoc, basis. This work could be undertaken as part of any efforts by the Service to facilitate collaboration between DOs.

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<sup>20</sup> SIRC Document, January 15, 2009, p. 9, and SIRC Document, January 23, 2009, p.12.



## 7 STRENGTHENING DISASTER MANAGEMENT PLANS

The following section details a policy gap noted by SIRC following a review of the Service's disaster management plans. If not addressed, this gap could impact CSIS operations at the airport. SIRC observed that the Service had developed disaster management plans to ensure that essential national security services are maintained in the event that CSIS Regional or HQ offices are rendered inoperable. As noted in section 4.4, these plans ensure that those services considered essential will be operational within a defined period of time following a disruption.

The benefits of developing and maintaining formal disaster management plans include: enabling the DOs to manage their responsibilities from a secondary site; providing unimpeded access to operational databases; and ensuring continuity of communication with CSIS HQ and Regions and key airport partners. Documentation and testing of a disaster management plan would address any transfer of DO responsibilities to an alternate site, and detail what human and technical resources are necessary to ensure essential services within the specified period.<sup>22</sup>

## 8 CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The multi-layered aviation security system in Canada is supported by PIA and YVR CSIS DOs. Through constant contact with airport stakeholders, these Offices are able to transfer information to Regional and HQ counterparts, and act as conduits for information collection and sharing among airport partners. The effectiveness of this communication system is dependent on strong relationships. SIRC observed that both DOs spent considerable time and effort in developing and maintaining contact with their government and non-governmental airport stakeholders.

Prior to the establishment of Airport DOs, access to CSIS intelligence by airport partners was not formalized. Moreover, the effectiveness of the Service's airport-related activities was more difficult to manage from Regional Offices that are located far from the airport environment. The full-time presence of DOs at the airport reinforces the Service's national security mandate by providing airport stakeholders with readily available access to CSIS expertise. In turn, the DOs development of strong relationships with these airport stakeholders ensures that the Service has access to information and contacts in order to conduct successful operations. It is the Committee's hope that the findings and recommendations in this report will help to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the Service's contributions to aviation security.

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- SIRC found that some CSIS personnel were unfamiliar with procedures on how to contact Airport District Offices directly, and uncertain as to which Airport District Office to contact
- SIRC found that there was little opportunity for District Offices to work together on issues that are both mutually relevant and common.



### SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- SIRC recommends that Airport District Offices be afforded opportunities to collaborate on common goals (e.g., performance indicators, outreach efforts) and review one another's operations to enhance their own activities