

**TOP SECRET -**

**File No.: 2800-171  
(TD R523)**

**CSIS'S SUPPORT TO CANADA'S NORTHERN  
PERIMETER SECURITY**

**(SIRC STUDY 2012-03)**

**Security Intelligence Review Committee  
August 2, 2013**

**ATIP version**

**dated: MAR 05 2019**



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Canada's north is undergoing rapid transformations; from the impacts of climate change, to advances in oil, gas and mineral exploration and development, as well as the growth of northern and Aboriginal governments and institutions. Not all of the interest on this vast region, however, is benign: national security concerns in the north – long perceived as a bygone threat of the Cold War – are once again receiving media, academic and government attention. The Prime Minister of Canada's yearly visit to the region is symbolic of the Government's stated intention to assert a strong presence in the north through the development of a capability and capacity to protect and patrol the land, sea and sky within Canada's sovereign territory.

Advancing the Government's northern interests CSIS  
in 2010; this study focuses on the rationale(s) underscoring CSIS's efforts at securing Canada's northern perimeter. In particular, the study examines the extent of the threat(s) as understood by the Service, how resources on this file are managed (at HQ and within the regions), CSIS's liaison activities with relative northern partners,

Although this review was conducted in a traditional *post-hoc* manner (i.e. examining previous CSIS activities), this assessment is also quite forward-leaning in outlook: as with the Government's northern strategy as a whole, it is clear that what CSIS does today in northern Canada is setting the stage for future capabilities. As such, the study makes a number of findings pertaining to the challenges faced by CSIS in trying to effectively collect information on, and indeed from, Canada's most distant and geographically taxing region. The review concludes with a recommendation to help the Service take the necessary steps to better position itself on this priority while it has the luxury of time to do so.

## 2 METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This review examined CSIS's activities in support of government efforts to secure Canada's northern perimeter. SIRC examined how CSIS has positioned itself to collect intelligence on this issue, both at CSIS HQ and at the regional level. In particular, SIRC assessed CSIS's cooperation with domestic partners, participation in multilateral forums, and the various collection activities undertaken to provide the Government with timely and accurate information.

In order to further contextualize the issues observed within documentation, SIRC held a number of meetings with CSIS representatives,

CSIS

liaison efforts with northern government counterparts to remain abreast of important events and/or developments. In order to assess how this approach is working, SIRC travelled to the North West Territories (NWT) and spoke to Government of Canada representatives posted in Yellowknife about their relationships with CSIS.

The study's core review period was from January 1, 2007 until December 31, 2011; however, in order to make a full assessment, a substantial amount of information from 2012 and 2013 was accessed.

---

<sup>1</sup> SIRC is particularly grateful to CSIS

### 3 THE ICE IS MELTING – NOW WHAT?

There is no comprehensive definition of what constitutes the circumpolar north, the arctic, the north, or the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. Each of the eight circumpolar states [i.e. Canada, Finland, Greenland (Denmark), Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States] has its own definition of what constitutes the circumpolar region, the arctic, and the north.<sup>2</sup> Canada tends to differentiate between the 'near north' and the 'far north'. The near north is typically defined as constituting the landmass between 50° and 60° latitude, while the 'far north' is generally regarded as encompassing all areas north of 60° latitude (i.e. the arctic).<sup>3</sup> These distinctions are important for CSIS, as there are different liaison, operational and financial considerations between operating in the near north vs. the far north of Canada.

The debate surrounding arctic definitions is symptomatic of international recognition that the ice & permafrost – the foundations of the arctic's ecosystems – are literally melting away. The effects of climate change have increased accessibility to the north and facilitated natural resource exploration, thereby increasing the possibility that the arctic will eventually become a significant sea lane for commercial travel.<sup>4</sup> These emerging realities have presented all arctic nations with a host of challenges, not the least of which is growing concern over strategic competition related to the arctic, its resources and possible trade routes.<sup>5</sup> How to effectively address these concerns was one of the core motivations behind the 2009 release of the Government of Canada's Northern Strategy.

#### 3.1 The Intelligence Prioritization of Canada's North

Canada's Northern Strategy focuses on four priority areas: exercising arctic sovereignty; promoting social and economic development; protecting the north's environmental heritage; and, improving and developing northern governance. The Strategy notes that Canada is "putting more boots on the arctic tundra, more ships in the icy water and a better eye-in-the-sky" [i.e. referring to a new research facility, deep-water berthing and fuelling facility, the building of a new Canadian icebreaker (among other ice-capable

---

<sup>2</sup> Kyle D. Christensen, "The Arctic: The Physical Environment," Centre for Operational Research & Analysis, Strategic Analysis Section, Defence R&D Canada – CORA, TM 2010-193, September 2010, p.4.

<sup>3</sup> The percentage of circumpolar states' territory above 60° north latitude include: the United States, 15%; Canada, 40%; Russia, 45%; Sweden, 70%; Norway, 82%; Finland, 99%; Greenland (Denmark), 100%; and Iceland, 100%. Refer to Defence R&D Study cited above.

<sup>4</sup> In September 2007, for instance, satellite imaging verified that the Northwest Passage has less than 10% ice coverage, making it "fully navigable" for several weeks of the year.

<sup>5</sup> CSIS document, "Director's Report – 2010/11,"

vessels), and finally, further leveraging the surveillance capabilities provided by the Canadian Space Agency's Radarsat Constellation Mission].<sup>6</sup>

Although not stated explicitly within the Strategy,

**SIRC found that CSIS faced a number of unforeseen challenges following the Government's decision to designate the arctic as an intelligence and security "issue" in its own right.** To begin,

<sup>8</sup> the Service had traditionally not played a significant role in working collaboratively on northern issues.<sup>9</sup> Absent a dedicated arctic portfolio what limited resources were expended on the subject were devoted almost exclusively to investigating longstanding threats

The 2010 forced CSIS to confront a topic which had hitherto been viewed as a fairly low priority.

<sup>6</sup> Government of Canada, "Canada's Northern Strategy: Our North, Our Heritage, Our Future," Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Ottawa, 2009, p.9.

7

8

<sup>9</sup> SIRC was told that CSIS did not begin to play a significant role in until

10



**SIRC found that CSIS's efforts at addressing the Government's northern direction has been difficult to implement due to an additional Government priority calling for fiscal restraint.**

CSIS corporate documentation has underscored that fiscal policy at CSIS has, in recent years, been one of restraint and constraint,

The problem with the resulting curtailment in resources, however, is that it occurred precisely when CSIS was trying to understand the nature of the threat in the north, its complexity and how resources should be focused

Unsurprisingly, CSIS realized that further thought was necessary on how the could be practically addressed with fiscal austerity in mind.

### **3.3 A Change in Direction**

A significant shift occurred within the Government's 2011/12 Intelligence Priorities: CSIS was

When SIRC asked CSIS regional managers

---

about this modification in Government priorities,

21

**As a result of new direction and regional reorganization, SIRC found that CSIS's strategic management of the northern environment is more consistent with the approach taken with other regional responsibilities.** The next section of this review explains how CSIS has managed this responsibility, and what efforts have been made in enhancing liaison and operational activities within northern Canada.

---

<sup>21</sup> SIRC Meeting With Regional Director Generals

February 15, 2013

#### 4 OPERATING IN CANADA'S NORTHERN FRONTIER

Although the north has always been of strategic military importance to NATO and NORAD as the location for both fighting a nuclear war and avoiding one, the Canadian intelligence community has not traditionally viewed the region as a likely operational environment for terrorists due to the harsh climate, lack of high-value infrastructure, and sparse population.

Indeed, the economies of this region are diverse and include vibrant oil, gas, gold, diamond, uranium and potash mining sectors, a strong agricultural base and world-class bio-medical research facilities and universities. This economic development has led to a gradual gradation of threat-related activities either occurring in, or pertaining to, Canada's north. Some of these concerns include:

- **Territorial Disputes:** arctic nations have begun the process of extending their exclusive economic rights under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) treaty based on scientific validation of their continental shelf. This process and other lingering territorial disputes between certain arctic-states have increased the importance of intelligence.<sup>28</sup> As such, the Government of Canada has requested information

#### 4.1 Northern Liaison

---

<sup>28</sup> Canada has territorial disagreements with the United States on the Beaufort Sea and Northwest Passage; and with Denmark on Hans Island and the Lincoln Sea.









## 5 CONCLUSION: PLANNING FOR A MORE TEMPERATE ARCTIC

Currently, however,

Nonetheless, SIRC was encouraged to learn that one year following the regional reorganization,

The RCMP also underscored the importance of maintaining solid liaison relationships with CSIS to effectively facilitate effective information sharing on northern issues.

In reality, what would be considered a routine investigative activity in southern Canada is exceptionally more complex, and costly, to accomplish in the north. Thus, whether or not the activity occurs at all is largely dependent on whether regional the numerous challenges, which include the

---

prevalence of a general (southern) attitude of indifference towards Canada's north; the existence of pressing operational priorities in Canada's south (and overseas); and, financial pressures limiting operational options.

combined with now responsibility, makes prioritizing northern initiatives that much more difficult.

**Although SIRC found that there was general agreement among CSIS managers that the status quo was satisfactory, looking over the longer term (i.e. +5 years), some senior officials believed that a stronger role by HQ would become necessary.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, SIRC recommends that CSIS 'institutionalize responsibility' for northern initiatives by setting out HQ-driven liaison and operational objectives over a multi-year period and ensure that these objectives are sustained with an appropriate resource commitment.** A good place to start may be the facilitation of a CSIS White Paper on establishing a long-term operational strategy for Canada's north, paralleling efforts undertaken prior to the Service's expansion overseas (albeit much narrower in scope). Such an approach would be consistent with the importance the Government places on this issue, and further, would better position the Service to react to national security requirements when (not if) they become more prominent within Canada's northern frontier.

---

<sup>55</sup> SIRC Meeting With Regional Director Generals with Assistant Director Policy,

February 15, 2013; and, SIRC Meeting January 15, 2013.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- SIRC found that CSIS faced a number of unforeseen challenges following the Government's decision to designate the arctic as an intelligence and security "issue" in its own right.
- SIRC found that CSIS's efforts at addressing the Government's northern direction has been difficult to implement due to an additional Government priority calling for fiscal restraint.
- As a result of new direction and regional reorganization, SIRC found that CSIS's strategic management is more consistent with the approach taken with other regional responsibilities.
- Although SIRC found that there was general agreement among CSIS managers that the status quo was satisfactory, looking over the longer term (i.e. +5 years), some senior officials believed that a stronger role by HQ would become necessary.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- **SIRC recommends that CSIS 'institutionalize responsibility' for northern initiatives by setting out HQ-driven liaison and operational objectives over a multi-year period and ensure that these objectives are sustained with an appropriate resource commitment.**