

A Brief History of the RCMP Security Service (and CSIS)

Canada's first secret service was created in 1864, shortly before the end of the American Civil War. Its purpose was to watch for organized attempts to disturb the public peace. After the civil war, the secret police force (probably less than a dozen agents) was maintained, partly due to concerns that the Fenian Brotherhood's (Fenians) activities might spill over into Canadian communities that lay near the border with the U.S. By 1870, there may have been as many as fifty agents employed watching (and infiltrating) the Fenians, and on both sides of the border. Their ability to provide advance notice of the three Fenian attacks between April and June of 1866 (at Campobello Island, N.B., Ridgeway/Fort Erie, ON, and near Pigeon Hill, QC) demonstrated the service's value. Meanwhile, the assassination of Thomas D'Arcy McGee in 1868, underscored the continuing threat, leading Prime Minister John A. Macdonald to create the Dominion Police (DP), within which was contained the secret service. To the Fenian threat was added that from South Asian radical movements, and then another that arose from the Russian Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

While the Dominion Police was mostly active in Eastern Canada, the RNWMP had conducted some security and intelligence activities in Western Canada around the time of the First World War (1914 - 1918) as did the Canadian military. It was in 1914 that the RNWMP was authorized to employ its first official secret agents. Ultimately, the Dominion Police was merged with the RNWMP to form the RCMP in 1920. With this consolidation, domestic security activities were conducted by the Criminal Investigation Branch (CIB) using, at first, largely the same officers for both criminal and security work. A framework for formal Secret Agent positions (within the CIB) was established by Commissioner Perry in 1919. In this era, the service had to contend with "the presence of large immigrant communities from enemy nations resident in Canada, the need for secrecy about the war effort, and resistance to compulsory military service..." (Whitaker *et al.*, 2012), plus the labour revolts of 1917-23. It was also during this period, that the RCMP forged a close working relationship with Canada's armed forces (and also with the Americans' FBI). In fact, the Defence Committee of Canada (1920), and 12 subsequently-formed local defence committees plus a Subcommittee on Intelligence (Joint Intelligence Committee, 1922), comprised representatives from the army, navy, air force, and RCMP. By 1939, if not sooner, the RCMP had established a close liaison with the British MI5.

A post-war advisory Security Panel (successor to the Joint Intelligence Committee) was created in 1946, following the defection of Soviet embassy clerk Igor Gouzenko, and his exposure of the extent of Soviet spying within Canada. Also in 1946, the RCMP began to separate the security functions from the CIB, with the creation of Special Branch, which was to focus on such matters as intelligence-gathering, monitoring, and counter-intelligence. Special Branch was modelled after Britain's Security Service (MI5), and fully separated by 1950.

In November, 1956, the Special Branch was renamed Security and Intelligence Directorate. According to Sawatsky (1980) and Whitaker *et al.* (2012) it had four branches comprising the former Special Branch sections: 'A', for security screening, 'B', for counter-espionage, 'D', for counter-subversion (or anti-communism), and 'C' for administration. In 1970, the Security and Intelligence Directorate was renamed Security Service, and a counter-subversion – counter-terrorism G Branch was added. As it turned out, G Branch was short-lived, and in 1976 (following the FLQ Crisis) was absorbed into D Section. Other sections

present in the 1970s included: 'E' for electronic surveillance, 'F' for files, 'H' for China, 'I' for physical surveillance, 'J' for bugging, and 'L' for informants. There is some mystery about 'K' Section. According to Sawatsky (1980): "As far as is known, there is no K Section. For some reason the letters jump from J to L. One Security Service member theorized that K Section may exist but plays such a minor role that nobody knows about it. 'Either that,' he joked, 'or it exists and is very important'."

To this point, the Security Service and its predecessors had operated without a clear mandate from the federal government. This was addressed, to some degree, by a Cabinet Directive of March 1975, to the effect that "the security service was authorized to 'maintain internal security by discerning, monitoring, investigating, deterring, preventing and countering individuals and groups in Canada where there are reasonable and probable grounds to believe that they may be engaged in or may be planning to engage' in: espionage/sabotage; foreign intelligence activities or foreign-influenced activities in Canada; violent governmental change; terrorism; or 'the use or the encouragement of the use of force, violence, or any criminal means, or the creation or exploitation of civil disorder' to accomplish any of the above" (Whitaker *et al.*, 2012). As a Cabinet Directive, this amounted to ministerial guidelines suggesting government approval for a wide range of actions that could fall outside the law, but without providing legal authority or immunity. Although the Director of the Security Service provided internal guidance that "members of the Security Service must act within the limits of the guidelines and within the limits of the law" (Whitaker *et al.*, 2012), the impracticality of doing so in many situations created a conflict of interest that persisted for as long as security intelligence remained within the RCMP.

The Security Service was absorbed by the new and independent Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) in 1984. CSIS, for its part, was given more specific direction than its predecessors had received (at least officially), and it was made clear that CSIS would target threats to 'national security' but would not target threats to 'national unity' (Whitaker *et al.*, 2012). Also, since CSIS does not have law-enforcement responsibilities – or powers - the RCMP has had a continuing role in criminal law enforcement related to national security. Although the early relationship between CSIS and the RCMP was at times strained, it improved post 9/11, and cooperation was enhanced by the creation of Integrated National Security Enforcement Teams (INSETs) and Integrated Border Enforcement Teams (IBETs) (Whitaker *et al.*, 2012).

References

- Hewitt, S., *Riding to the Rescue. The Transformation of the RCMP in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1914–1939*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2006.
- Hewitt, S., "Cold War Counter-Terrorism: The Evolution of International Counter-Terrorism in the RCMP Security Service, 1972–1984," *Intelligence and National Security*, 33(1) 67-83, 2018.
- Kealey, G.S., "Spying on Canadians. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police Security Service and the Origins of the Long Cold War," University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2017.
- Sawatsky, J., "Men in the Shadows. The RCMP Security Service," Doubleday Canada, Toronto, 1980.
- Whitaker, R., Kealey, G.S., Parnaby, A., "Secret Service Political Policing in Canada from the Fenians to Fortress America," University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2012.