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Assessing Canadian Intelligence Literature: 1980–2000

For a relatively small country that does not have a very large intelligence establishment, Canada has produced quite a sizeable literature on such matters. Produced mainly in the past twenty years, it essentially dates from the period when revelations began that the Security Services of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) had been involved in illegal activities. The resulting scandal produced a Royal Commission of Inquiry, the McDonald Commission, and the establishment of review institutions. While Igor Gouzenko's disclosures of Soviet involvement had drawn some public and academic attention to espionage matters in Canada in the late 1940s, the Security Service controversies of the late sixties and seventies marked the real beginning of a spate of publications in the field.

AUTHORS

Relatively few Canadian intelligence insiders have written about the topic. John Starnes, the first civilian head of the RCMP Security Service, has contributed several articles and opinion pieces and written some novels. Some insiders also contributed to something of a debate during the 1980s and 1990s about whether or not Canada should create a foreign intelligence agency (Starnes, 1987; Finn, 1993; Hensler, 1995). Probably

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the best known insider to write about the Canadian intelligence system is Mike Frost, a disgruntled former employee of the Communications Security Establishment (Frost, 1994).

Relatively few biographies of, or autobiographies by, intelligence insiders have been published. William Stevenson wrote an account of his career (Stevenson, 1976), and has been written about (MacDonald, 1999). Much more recently, Starnes wrote an account of his time with the Security Service (Starnes, 1998). Relatively few intelligence biographies are in print, including the account by Leo Heaps of Hugh Hambleton's espionage activities (Heaps, 1983), John Sawatsky's account of the Leslie James Bennet affair (Sawatsky, 1982), and William Lowther's account of Gerald Bull's efforts to build "superguns" (Lowther, 1991).

Much of the intelligence writing in Canada has been performed by academics, as might be expected. The university study of intelligence is, indeed, quite healthy in Canada, and many scholars belong to the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies (CASIS), which has held annual conferences and special conferences for some 20 years. Those who write about security and intelligence matters are mainly historians by training. (Among them are David Stafford, Wesley Wark, Stuart Farson, Jack Granatstein, Ken Bryden, and David Charters.) Some political scientists, such as Reg Whitaker, Ned Franks, and Geoffrey Weller, and a few from other disciplinary backgrounds, have written about intelligence. Very few non-Canadian academics write about Canadian security and intelligence topics, although various aspects of Canada's review and oversight system have attracted some attention (Ryan, 1989; Hanks, 1989).

Numerous journalists have written books about intelligence in Canada (Sawatsky, 1980 and 1982; Littleton, 1986; Cleroux, 1990; Sallot, 1979, Kashmeri and McAndrew, 1989), and some have contributed chapters or articles in academic publications (e.g., Sallot, 1989). Some of these contributions to the literature are well researched and useful, but others are hardly the result of true investigative journalism. But the production of these books does not signify that several journalists specialize in covering the intelligence services in the manner of the United Kingdom's Chapman Pincher. Most journalists who write about intelligence matters do so only occasionally; and while the pieces on intelligence will often be written by those who are relatively knowledgeable, such as Jim Bronskill, Jeff Sallot, or John Sawatsky, they are just as likely to be written by others who clearly have little knowledge about the Canadian intelligence community or intelligence work in general. Journalistic coverage of the field suffers from the same drawbacks that it does elsewhere: it is spotty,

concentrates on the occasional scandal, and does not follow up a particular issue. Unfortunately, intelligence also seems to be a field where many of the less experienced journalists become a little “silly” in that they endlessly repeat supercilious comments or jokes about “spooks.” This might be tolerable if the journalists in question revealed a knowledge of the structure and the working of intelligence but, by and large, they tend to reveal just the reverse. Moreover, many of their items are laced with comments that reveal antipathy toward intelligence agencies.

Official government publications relating to security and intelligence in Canada used to consist largely of Royal Commission reports or inquiries that appeared in the wake of periodic scandal. The first of these was the Taschereau-Kellock Commission of 1946 that dealt with Gouzenko’s revelations of Soviet espionage in Canada (Canada, 1946). In 1966, Prime Minister Lester Pearson established the Mackenzie Royal Commission on Security when the abilities of the RCMP were seriously questioned because of its investigations into a series of scandals which shook the government, and when questions were being raised in Parliament about security clearance procedures and surveillance techniques used at various universities (Canada, 1969). The next major Royal Commission, the McDonald Royal Commission (Canada, 1981), was appointed following revelations that the RCMP Security Service had been transgressing the law, with its officers planting bombs, burning barns, stealing documents, intimidating sources, and the like. The McDonald Commission report was itself detailed and lengthy (three volumes), but it led to a series of background studies that were some of the most useful sources of material on the Canadian intelligence community to have appeared to that date (e.g., Edwards, 1980; Franks, 1980; Friedland, 1980).

Increasingly, official government publications have become a useful source of information about intelligence matters in Canada. This is especially true since intelligence review or oversight agencies began issuing reports. Perhaps the most useful are those issued since 1984 by the Security Intelligence Review Committee (SIRC). Its annual reports are relatively detailed, and provide an insight into the world of CSIS, and to some degree, Canadian intelligence generally, that was not to be had previously. In addition, SIRC has published some unclassified special reports, including one on official languages and staff relations within CSIS (SIRC, 1987). Somewhat frustratingly, although SIRC lists all of the special reports that it has written, now some 116, at the end of its annual report (SIRC, 1989:72–78), the vast majority of them remain classified as Secret and Top Secret. Since 1997 the Commissioner of the Canadian Security Establishment (CSE) has issued annual reports. Much less detailed than

the SIRC reports, they nevertheless contain some valuable information (CSE Commissioner, 1999). The five-year review of the CSIS Act also produced some useful material, notably in the form of the report of the special House of Commons committee to review the act (House of Commons, 1990), and the somewhat negative governmental response to that report (Solicitor General, 1991). More recently, the Office of the Auditor General of Canada became involved in review and issued a report on control and accountability within the Canadian intelligence community (Auditor General, 1996). The intelligence community also now produces publicly available documents on a regular basis. These include the annual statement on national security made to the House of Commons by the Solicitor General (Solicitor General, 1998), and the annual reports of CSIS (CSIS, 1999). The CSIS produces a periodic publication, *Commentary*, each issue consisting of an article about a matter of topical interest.

Since Canada does not have permanent House or Senate review or oversight committees similar to those of the United States, the amount of material on security and intelligence coming from Parliamentary sources is limited. Franks (1980) pointed out that until 1980 there was virtually no discussion of security and intelligence matters in Parliament, so Hansard or committee reports were of little use to an investigator. More recently, however, the Justice Committee and a sub-committee dealing with national security matters have had some discussions that are on the record. In addition, the efforts of Senator William M. Kelly have led Canada's Senate to produce two useful reports on terrorism and efforts to combat it in Canada (Kelly, 1987; Senate, 1999).

Notably, public policy research groups are not among the authors of intelligence literature in Canada. In a marked contrast to the situation in the United States, public policy research groups in Canada have paid virtually no attention to matters of security and intelligence. In fact, the only public policy group publication that comes to mind is one produced by the Institute for Research on Public Policy in 1979 (French and Beliveau, 1979). Regrettably, also, few efforts have been made to compile bibliographies of the intelligence and security field in Canada, and the existing ones are now a bit dated (Flem-Ath and Roy, 1986; Farson and Matthews, 1990).

Finally, there are not many authors of spy fiction in Canada. Some notable exceptions include John Starnes, Anthony Hyde, Heather Robertson, William Deverell, and Ian Adams (1977). In fact, Starnes has lamented that in Canada "there seems to be no literary tradition of spy literature of the kind that existed in England for so many years." (Starnes, 1990:210).

But some Canadian academics, such as Wesley Wark (1990) and David Stafford, have been interested in analyzing spy literature. In fact, Professor Stafford's *The Silent Game* (1988) serves as a very useful introduction to the genre.

THEMES AND PERIODS

Several major themes have dominated Canadian security and intelligence literature over the past twenty years. Certain periods of Canadian history draw steady attention, particularly World War II (e.g., Bryden, 1993; Stafford 1986), the Cold War (e.g., Whitaker, 1994 and 1997; Granatstein and Stafford, 1990), and the events surrounding the Quebec Liberation Front (FLQ) crisis, the creation of the McDonald Commission, and the creation of CSIS. Indeed, the illegal (and allegedly illegal) activities of the RCMP's Security Service in the pursuit of information on perceived subversive forces in the land, especially Quebec separatist elements, led to the raising of questions regarding the nature of "subversion," the limits of the law, and the best means of ensuring adherence to those limits. These questions have remained dominant in Canadian literature on intelligence.

A second theme has been the appropriateness of a separate, civilian intelligence service, and the new agency's difficulties, both internally with staffing, and externally in its relations with the RCMP. Internal matters include the agency's recruitment policies, the friction between new recruits and transferees from the RCMP Security Service, the francophone issue (SIRC, 1987), and gender representativeness. The external relationship between the new civilian service and the RCMP has drawn a lot of attention, especially in the media and in some review agency reports. This is not surprising, in view of the apparent seriousness of the rift, and the lingering suspicion that part of the reason might be that no prosecutions have yet been made in relation to the worst incident of terrorism that Canada has experienced—the Air India bombing.

Another major theme has been the rise of review and oversight of the intelligence services, the nature of the oversight process, and its extension to cover both CSIS and the CSE. This aspect includes the major legislative and executive inquiries into the intelligence community (esp., Canada, 1981), background studies prepared for these inquiries (e.g., Franks 1980; Edwards, 1980; Friedland, 1980), as well a wide range of academic articles (e.g., Farson 1991, 1995, 1996; Weller, 1988, 1997, 1998). Associated with these have been other discussions of the role of Parliament in this process (House of Commons, 1990; Solicitor General, 1991).

While not exactly a theme, the concentration of interest has been on particular people or incidents. In terms of people, the prevailing fascination seems to be with individual spies and moles or possible moles, including Gouzenko, Herbert Norman (Adams, 1999; Barros, 1986; Bowen, 1986), Leslie James Bennett (Sawatsky, 1982), Hugh Hambleton (Heaps, 1983), Paszowski (Kilgour, 1994), and others. In terms of incidents, the FLQ crisis has received a huge amount of coverage. The Central Intelligence Agency's experiments in brainwashing also received a lot of attention in the Canadian press, and has been the subject of at least one book (Collins, 1988). The Air India bombing has received considerable media attention, and resulted in at least one book (Kashmeri and McAndrew, 1989).

Some attention has been paid over the past few years to the matter of whether or not Canada should have a foreign intelligence service. Canada is one of very few Western powers not to have such a service, and the issue has produced a modest debate in the academic literature (Starnes, 1987; Finn, 1993; Hensler, 1995).

Increasingly, modest attention is being paid to "new" intelligence issues. Economic espionage (and efforts to prevent it) is getting increasing media coverage, and has begun to stimulate articles (Porteous, 1994) and at least one book (Potter, 1998). Health and intelligence and security issues are beginning to get greater coverage, both in the media and academically (Price-Smith, 1997).

Some Canadian authors have written about other countries, though for the most part their concentration has been domestic. Robert D'A. Henderson has published several items on intelligence in South Africa (e.g., Henderson, 1995); David Charters on Palestine, Kevin O'Brien on the U.S. CIA, and the Soviet Union's KGB (O'Brien, 1995); Geoffrey Weller on Scandinavia (Weller, 1998 and 2000) and Australia (Weller, 1999). Relatively few Canadian authors have published single pieces that are comparative. Exceptions include O'Brien's comparison of CIA and KGB covert political actions, and my article comparing Inspectors General of Security and Intelligence (Weller, 1997). The tendency has been to contribute pieces on Canada to volumes that deal with several countries.

MOTIVATIONS

Writing about the motives of authors is difficult because they are rarely stated openly. Many of the academics who write about intelligence seem to be motivated by a combination of two things. The first is simply an interest in, or fascination with, the field. The second is a clearly implied feeling on

the part of some that they are performing a kind of public and academic duty by writing about an area that is normally out of the public view, and where the exercise of democratic controls is now deemed necessary. This second motivation, readily seen in some of the books written by journalists, is also evident in the aims and objectives of CASIS, to which many academics and some journalists belong.

Other motivations are less benign. Some of the media coverage is, and some of the journalistic books are, clearly sensationalistic and presumably intended to help sales. Some of the insider accounts have a touch of self-justification, while others seem motivated more by revenge (Frost, 1994). Then, too, a left-wing genre clearly asserts that security and intelligence agencies should not exist, and that in any event, they are the tools of control of the capitalist state (Dawson, 1980; Dion, 1980).

PUBLISHING OUTLETS

No Canadian book publishers specialize in the area of security and intelligence in the way that the United Kingdom's Frank Cass does. Consequently, that Canadian authors are well represented on the Cass list, including Wark, Charters, Farson, and Stafford, is not surprising. Books on intelligence published in Canada are spread among the various publishing houses.

The Canadian journal literature is also a bit scattered. Only one Canadian journal specializes in security and intelligence matters—*The Journal of Conflict Studies* (formerly, *Conflict Quarterly*), published by the Centre for Conflict Studies at the University of New Brunswick. *The Journal of Canadian Foreign Policy*, as a part of its editorial policy, especially invites authors of articles on security and intelligence topics to submit their works. The percentage of the articles on intelligence topics that it publishes is not great, but it has had some useful contributions on certain topics, such as those by Hensler (1994) and Finn (1993) on the question of Canada's creation of a foreign intelligence service. Apart from this, intelligence literature is scattered around Canadian academic journals, including *Canadian Public Administration* (e.g., Weller, 1988).

Canadian authors tend to place their articles in either the major British journal in the field, *Intelligence and National Security* (e.g., Archdeacon, 1996; Charters, 1998; Porteous, 1994; Wark, 1996; Whitaker, 1996 and 1997) or the major American journal on intelligence matters, *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* (e.g., Henderson, 1995a, 1995b, 1997; O'Brien, 1995, 1996; Porteous, 1995; Weller, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000).

Some articles by Canadians on intelligence can be found further afield in journals such as *Scandinavian Studies* (Weller, 1998).

CLEAR GAPS REMAIN

Although the output of literature on Canadian security and intelligence topics is now relatively sizeable and of generally good quality for a small country with a truncated intelligence establishment, some clear gaps in the literature are evident. The heavy concentration is on CSIS and the matter of oversight, and very much less on other elements in the intelligence network, such as military intelligence, signals intelligence, and the intelligence activities of various other government departments. And very little appears in print on the internal workings of the agencies, or of the place of intelligence in the overall policy process.

But new topics seem to be emerging, such as economic intelligence (Potter, 1998) and health intelligence (Price-Smith 1997), and old ones, such as intelligence review, are of continuing strength. Can the Canadian academic output on intelligence be maintained in the long haul? Few courses on the topic are currently offered in universities, and even fewer programs of study contain an intelligence component. This, combined with the fact that many of the better known authors are beginning to reach retirement age, gives rise to some concern.

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