



LEADING SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE: CURRENT TRENDS AND ESSENTIAL ABILITIES

Date: November 15, 2023

Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On November 15, 2023, Ms. Jennifer Irish, Associate and Program Director of the Executive Security and Intelligence Leadership Certificate program at Telfer Executive Programs of the University of Ottawa, presented *Leading Security and Intelligence: Current Trends and Essential Abilities* at the West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The presentation was informed by structural interviews she conducted with senior leaders across Canada's Security and Intelligence community to inform a refresh of the leadership program offered by uOttawa's Telfer Executive Programs for federal government executives having security and intelligence responsibilities. The key points focussed on the key competencies and skills required of contemporary S&I leaders as they navigate through changes in the community, the evolving global threatscape, and as result of emerging technologies and increased expectations for public accountability.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Ms. Irish highlighted that valued leadership skills and abilities flowed from change within the current security and intelligence community and their implications on trends and threats, innovation and emerging technology, and transparency and public trust. She explained that Canada is unique in the Five Eyes for not having a formally defined intelligence community and for functioning within a system of distributed governance. This underscored the importance of contemporary leaders understanding the operating environment and exercising collaborative leadership that addressed change at the personal relational, structural, and cultural levels. The complexity of current geopolitical trends and threats, and their relevance to policy and operational decision-making means that leaders also need to be able to make

sense of complexity, convey its meaning tailored to the needs of clients to inform decision-making. In a climate of declining public trust, leaders need to brief and communicate for purpose to diverse audiences and leverage effective partnerships with stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Ms. Irish stressed the importance of the role of intelligence in informing decision-making. She shared the definition of intelligence used by the Telfer leadership program as information that is processed and disseminated to a client for the purpose of informing decision-making, stating that this is not a simple phenomenon amidst an era wherein misinformation and disinformation are prevalent and where the needs of decision-makers may not always be clear. The importance of content curation and its credibility is rising alongside the use of established methodologies, high confidence levels, and dissemination to ensure clients may receive high quality information with sufficient confidentiality levels. It is critical to tailor intelligence for clients and, when disaggregating the intelligence cycle, Ms. Irish noted that it starts with requirements and ends with the client in terms of feedback in order to ensure that the product provided has met the decision-making needs of the client.

Ms. Irish explained that, from a national perspective, Canada is taking steps to professionalize analysts and refine intelligence governance. Alongside, an investment to hone leadership skills in S&I is essential. Canadian leaders must show they can excel in distributive governance and work horizontally with review organisations and thus, need a community mindset and acknowledgement of the importance of operating in the context of the community. Current threats are non-traditional, involve extensive areas of expertise and breadth, and require partnership with a broad range of actors, which recently has extended to the private sector. She noted that key barriers to working towards collaboration include culture, a need-to-know versus need-to-share paradigm, building confidence, public trust, diversity and inclusion, and working through artificial organisational divides between collectors and producers.

Turning to the threatscape, Ms. Irish highlighted key trends and threats prioritized by high-level S&I leaders. Geopolitical competition is in flux, as hybrid warfare has extended to involve money laundering, sanctions, and foreign interference affecting economic and democratic security, periodic intervals of extremism and terrorism, highlighting the importance of mitigation and proportionate responses. Evolving trends and threats related

cybersecurity and AI constitute an evolving trend comprising unique opportunities and challenges. She noted that misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation shake the ability to have public discourse, act as existential threats to democracy, and require new mitigation responses. Additionally, the security and intelligence community must preserve public trust given other existential cross-cutting threats such as pandemics or climate change. Many of these cross-cutting threats challenge traditional (Westminster) systems of accountability, which are vertical. Leaders must remain vigilant of multiple domains and collaborate horizontally with partners, while also distinguishing the urgent from the important.

Ms. Irish concluded that the vast nature of intelligence is necessary to address behaviours, structures, and cultures in our actions and strategies, to leverage risk and mitigation analysis, and to develop ways of leading through complexity and crises. Cultural, innovative, and social aspects are underestimated and highlight a need to lead with emotional intelligence. Additionally, intelligence leaders should develop strategies for addressing contemporary challenges and rapid changes, including those in technology, and leading effectively in crisis situations.

In an area of profound changes on multiple levels, senior S&I leaders recognized the need for more investment in the professionalization of emerging leaders, and they saw programs such as Telfer's as filling an important gap and need.

Question and Answer

Leadership is about being capable and imbued with the responsibility to make decisions. What would you propose to be added / changed in high school / university to promote "agency"? With such an emphasis on individualism how do you propose to get to more collective visions?

The upcoming generation is intellectually curious, although we do need to invest more in inner citizenry, especially in youth, in critical understanding. As intelligence professionals, we talk a lot about critical thinking, assessment, and how we analyse, but we also need to look at the other side of the equation. We need to invest in how our clients understand our material. Sometimes we act very inward within the security and intelligence community, use jargon and terms unique to our tradecraft, but I do stress that in this age of misinformation and disinformation, we must invest more in critical understanding, so that our public and youth are empowered to assess information and are empowered on how to harness it.

On September 27, 2023, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced changes to cabinet committees, one of which was the establishment of a National Security Council (NSC) as “a forum for strategic decision-making and for sharing analysis of intelligence in its strategic context.” Are you optimistic about this new NSC helping better coordinate the Canadian S&I community?

I am optimistic about the governance possibilities. This type of governance model has been useful to other Five Eyes partners to provide a point for discussing how to actually use intelligence to inform decision-making. In Canada, there are bodies that discuss intelligence, and separate ones that look at operational decision-making or policy. The advantage of having a national security council is that at a high level, you can integrate those together and it provides a focus for intelligence-led decision making. This needs to be a part of a broader sweep of reform and needs to include ways of integrating intelligence before it gets to the top, which is part of a fuller sweep of other governance changes in the work.. We also need a more nimble intelligence priority exercise that informs decisions, including to meet the longer range needs identified by the new Council

In the complex and interwoven threat environment, how can we best train, prepare, and lead as the next generation of intelligence practitioners?

I think the big lesson is that no one person can be an expert across the jurisdictional and horizontal threats we face. As leaders, we must invest more in constructive sharing and assessment of information, how we prioritise threats and understanding what is truly important—working through organizational and cultural impediments to change.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Key abilities for contemporary security and intelligence leadership include critically thinking and articulating vision; enhancing collaboration and partnership; providing trusted advice and communication; exercising accountability as to advance public trust; leading innovation, change, and organisational transformation; and demonstrating self-awareness, social awareness, and culture.
- Given the changing threat and trend environment and complexity of the security and intelligence operating environment, it is critical to increase focus on horizontal threats, extract information from multiple jurisdictions, and utilise unique mitigation strategies.

- Collaborative leadership is essential for the effective functioning of the intelligence cycle, especially amidst evolving geopolitical threats and trends.
- Leaders need to communicate clearly to provide vital context and strategic advantage and must adapt to client preferences given new public expectations for transparency and accountability for the security and intelligence community.
- The Executive S&I Leadership Certificate at the Telfer Executive Programs (University of Ottawa) provides an opportunity for essential leadership skills and abilities to be explored in an experimental learning environment including simulations, site visits and opportunities to investigate key S&I trends and threats.



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