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From: [Canadian Security Intelligence Service](#)

## Speech

December 11, 2023

Thank you for the introduction and hosting at this beautiful iconic landmark overlooking the Forks.

We are fortunate to be here today on Treaty 1 territory, a meeting ground that will outlast us all. I invite those of you joining online to reflect on the territory in which you are participating and listening.

And for those who may be visually impaired, I am just under six feet tall, with gray hair, and brown eyes. And I wish I could tell you before starting this job I had less gray hair.

The Museum represents the values that truly define our country, as a beacon and a global leader in human rights. It plays a crucial role in furthering our actions to honour truth and reconciliation here in Canada.

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This place reminds Canadians of what they already know, deep down: basic human rights are not automatically guaranteed; they must be proactively and actively protected. If we falter, we risk losing everything.

The current geopolitical threat environment is extremely complex.

The rules-based international order is being turned on its head, undermining human rights with alarming frequency.

Ongoing conflicts in Ukraine, in the Middle East, and elsewhere remind us that these concerns are not abstract. Spikes in racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia and acts of hatred here in Canada remind us that our country is not immune.

The fight for human rights is very much alive. Through its exhibits and its ongoing outreach, this Museum plays a vital role in this fight, and so do we at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or CSIS. As Director, I am honoured to represent the people of CSIS who dedicate their lives to protecting Canada and Canadians, by working hard to identify and report on threats to national security.

I'm deeply grateful to speak here today, because I see our institutions as partners. Our roles might be different but we are united in our shared goal of protecting Canadians and respect for human rights.

My message for all our partners and all Canadians today is threefold:

Threats to Canada are increasingly complex, and are intensifying;

A safe, secure and prosperous Canada requires respect for human rights;

National security is a team effort, built on trust and transparency.

To sketch this out further, I'll describe the role of CSIS that is currently playing alongside partners, to protect the safety, security and prosperity of Canada; and defend the rights of Canadians.

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I'll discuss our way forward, in a world where change is constant, inevitable and too often merciless.

But first I'll provide an overview of the threats Canada is currently facing – *who* is targeting us, *how* they are operating, *what* they are targeting; as well as *why* – the bigger picture and motivations of threat actors.

I've previously spoken publicly about how there are a number of countries seeking to advance their interests at the expense of Canada's, and they are doing so right here on Canadian soil.

I've also said the greatest strategic challenges to Canada's sovereignty and democracy are the threats of foreign interference or transnational repression and state sponsored foreign espionage.

Unfortunately, that all remains true. These threats are not disappearing. They're growing. And it's critical that Canadians understand the costs.

However, today I would like to emphasize the *human* aspect – the real harm and violations of basic human rights inflicted on individuals by foreign state actors. There is a toll imposed directly on Canadians, and it is tangible.

This toll comes in different forms. It can erode people's ability to express opinions and speak up without fear of retribution.

Sometimes it can damage the well-earned livelihoods and finances of Canadians and their families.

Other times, it can put individuals in harm's way.

It's perfectly normal for states to build relationships and strategically position their interests abroad.

But it is not acceptable for states to seek influence within our democratic institutions, to suppress the fundamental rights of our people within our borders, or to interfere in democratic processes.

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Truth, accountability and democratic norms are under siege. Lies and manipulation – the markers of authoritarianism – are what we’re up against.

Our adversaries are attempting to use elected officials, public servants, business leaders and academics, often unknowingly, to support foreign state objectives and undermine democracy.

They are setting up overseas police stations, to target and threaten Canadians.

They are threatening the self-determination of Indigenous communities.

They are identifying vulnerabilities within our critical infrastructure to exploit through cyberattacks.

They are stealing the intellectual property of Canadian businesses, universities and governments – the very essence of our future prosperity.

They are spreading disinformation to undermine Canadians’ trust in our institutions.

This behaviour, these actions are completely unacceptable.

When these attacks are repeated and continuous, they begin to chisel away at our sovereignty, undermine the values we hold dear and threaten the basic rights we take for granted: the right to vote independently; the right to safety; the right to be free from threats and intimidation.

Some of our adversaries have virtually no limits to what they will attempt. They have no respect for human rights. They are persistent and we observe their continual and relentless efforts.

Each state uses their own “playbook”. They don’t all use the same tactics, but one of the most objectionable one is when they target Canadians based on their ethnicity or religious background.

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Individuals are harassed, intimidated and threatened. Even in a strong democracy such as ours, their human rights are being violated by foreign governments.

The leading actor conducting these activities is the People's Republic of China – the PRC.

No one should be under any illusion about the breadth of the PRC's efforts to infiltrate our political systems, our private sector, government institutions, universities and communities from coast to coast to coast. This is not just a Vancouver or Toronto issue; it's an "all of Canada" one.

Its apparatus grew even stronger this summer when the PRC passed two new National Security Laws, through which the PRC is able to detain anyone it believes is working against the PRC; control corporate data management practices and intervene in the affairs of private companies; and force nationals working abroad to assist intelligence collection.

The PRC's transnational repression efforts are vast, but one of its most appealing strategies is to use family and friends living in China as leverage. The threats against them are varied: they risk losing their jobs, being arrested, assaulted, or even disappearing.

Take the case of a Chinese-Canadian human rights activist living in Canada, who felt the wrath of the PRC when her family, based in China, was targeted. The PRC took measures against her family and restricted their travel. In turn, her own father asked her to stop speaking out against the PRC.

A shocking turn this year was the dramatic escalation of these kinds of threats from state actors on Canadian soil.

This September, Prime Minister Trudeau delivered a clear and important statement in Parliament that "Canadian security agencies have been actively pursuing credible allegations of a potential link between agents of the

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Government of India and the killing of a Canadian citizen, Hardeep Singh Nijjar.”

CSIS continues to collect information and investigate reports of harassment and intimidation, particularly of Canadian advocates for women’s rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Another common strategy of the People’s Republic of China is to use community leaders as proxies, in order to promote the PRC’s interest as if it were in the community’s interest. Proxies typically include local politicians, as well as unelected leaders of community associations.

These are people with real influence, whom Canadians trust.

The end result is stifling. When a community leader is acting covertly or unwittingly as the voice of the PRC, then that community no longer has a sovereign voice.

In a similar vein, foreign espionage is another PRC threat with implications for everyone.

These types of operations might begin with a simple exchange online: a private message to a Canadian tech professional through a networking site. The initial “bait” might be an offer to travel and present at a global conference, all expenses paid – or an offer to secure lucrative contracts working with global tech companies on emerging projects.

The offer might be enticing, but the true motive is theft: theft of talent, ideas, innovation or intellectual property.

At a moment’s notice, the loss of intellectual property and commercial advantage can evaporate years of hard work.

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Canadian companies risk losing their competitive advantage and faltering, which has broader implications for our economy and cascades into the lives of Canadians.

The academic community is also at risk, especially those working on emerging technologies. And any individuals who wittingly or unwittingly fall prey to these efforts can be threatened, blackmailed and manipulated into continuing to serve the PRC.

Canadian research and innovation is highly coveted. That's why hostile states are intent on stealing it. And we are not alone – our Five Eyes partners and major global economies are all vulnerable.

That is why I joined my Five Eyes counterparts recently at Stanford University to engage technology leaders – in academia, industry and finance – and deliver clear messaging about how the PRC threatens innovation.

Another concern is protecting Canada's Arctic and North. The PRC's strategic, economic and military interests in the North are no longer a secret.

It intends to monitor activities in the North using advanced technologies, while gaining access and attempting to control critical infrastructure, as well natural resources, including critical minerals.

Part of its strategy involves making covert investments into local communities, interfering in decision-making in local governments, and outright theft of critical assets. This compromises Inuit self-determination as well as Canadian sovereignty. Increased foreign presence in the Canadian Arctic and North is persistent and alarming.

Russia remains a significant threat in several ways. For one, it is attempting to meddle in Canada's Arctic and North with similar ambitions and using similar tactics.

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Russia's cyber and disinformation capabilities are also well known and well-documented.

At the moment, much of Russia's efforts are focused on influencing Canadians' opinions on its illegal invasion of Ukraine via disinformation, to squash public support for aiding Ukraine and, ultimately, undermine and perhaps destroy that democracy.

Canada's commitment to Ukraine is clear. We must be wary of Russia's efforts to push us off course.

Russia has desperately turned to third-party countries for support.

For instance, it is using Iranian-made drones against Ukrainian civilians. These drones consist almost entirely of foreign-made parts, including Canadian technology.

Canada isn't supplying these parts wittingly and applies sanctions to prevent this, but Russia and Iran are adept at dodging sanctions in a game of increasingly complex cat and mouse.

I will now turn my attention to terrorism and violent extremism. In the years following 9/11, counterterrorism was the primary focus of our activities.

We made mistakes, resulting in some Muslim and other communities being marginalised. We are learning from our mistakes, and are working with communities to forge a new path built on transparency, trust and teamwork.

Today, Religiously Motivated Violent Extremism – or what we call RMVE – comes primarily from individuals or small groups informally aligned to, or inspired by, DAESH and Al Qaeda (AQ).

Their ideologies can be fluid and the threat increasingly originates with youth online.



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There is a propensity to mobilize to violence quickly, posing a formidable challenge for public safety and security agencies.

We're also very concerned with those engaging in violence motivated by white supremacy, antisemitism, Islamophobia, misogyny and various other forms of hate. We broadly characterize these as ideologically motivated violent extremism, or IMVE, and CSIS now dedicates roughly half of its counter terrorism resources towards that issue.

IMVE is a complex threat often inspired by influencers and fuelled by online echo chambers.

As extreme narratives continue to grow more prevalent online, so too does the potential for radicalization, and ultimately violence.

The most recent deaths by terrorist activities in Canada were all perpetrated by IMVE actors, who too often targeted Canadian Muslims.

The violent attack last June at the University of Waterloo is also a disturbing example of how the threat can materialize.

Our national terrorist threat level, which is set by me, the Director of CSIS based on analysis from the Integrated Terrorism Assessment Center, and it currently remains at "Medium".

However, that does not mean we aren't concerned - far from it.

The Medium designation means that a violent act of terror could occur in the next 12 months, and that a small number of individuals in Canada have the intent and capability to do so.

So, what is it that we are concerned about? Why is it at Medium?

We're concerned about the sharp uptick in hate crimes across Canada, and the marked increase in terrorist and violent extremist threats and rhetoric from extremist actors, many of whom are consuming toxic media online, becoming

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radicalised and may mobilize quickly to violence.

We are concerned about hate fuelled marches colliding with Pride celebrations.

We're seeing global conflicts spill into our borders, including the war between Israel and Hamas. Synagogues, mosques, non-profits, advocacy organizations and businesses are being targeted – and even schools.

There is an increase in violent threats directed toward elected officials, government representatives and journalists.

Hate, fuelled and increasingly mainstreamed and normalized by poisonous online content, is threatening our freedoms – to associate, speak freely, and worship openly, and we know that this threat is felt most acutely by racialised, religious, ethnic or other communities. We need to work together to combat it.

And we have had successes over the past year.

CSIS contributed to the RCMP's arrests of two individuals involved in IMVE-related activities this year.

We also worked with partners to support the successful prosecution of the individual who struck down and murdered members of a Muslim family in 2021.

Just last week, with the critical support of CSIS intelligence, the RCMP arrested two members of Active Club Canada, formerly Atomwaffen Division, on terrorist related criminal charges.

I've spoken at length about threats, and I've spoken about human rights. I'm now going to speak more about CSIS, the work we do alongside our partners, and how we are uniquely positioned to safeguard national security and uphold human rights in our country.

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I'll begin with the core Mission of CSIS: to protect the safety, security and prosperity of Canada and Canadians through trusted intelligence, advice and action.

We obtain intelligence through various means – from open sources, covert operations and exchanges with partners, all of which are subject to rigorous review and oversight.

The method that allows us to truly move forward in our investigations is what we call HUMINT, human intelligence, or the collection of information from individuals – through interviews and human sources. No other agency in Canada can play this role. It is unique to CSIS; if we don't do it, no one else can.

When we are collecting information from human sources, we are uncovering the very roots of the networks that lead to foreign interference, to violent extremism, to intellectual property theft and more.

When we are engaging with individuals we have the ability to probe, to ask questions, to consider responses and then dig a little deeper.

Our very talented people – who are highly trained and dedicated to their work and our Mission – know how to lawfully assess and collect information that you simply cannot find any other way.

It doesn't exist on the Internet. You can't read about it in the news. But it's out there. And it is our job to uncover it.

It's important to note that the intelligence we collect, the advice we provide and the actions we take – all of it is authorized by Parliament in the *CSIS Act*.

The challenge is that our Act was created in 1984, at a time when threats to national security looked nothing like they do now.

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The threats I've described today are more complex and pervasive than ever before.

Technology is driving threats and enabling threat actors; but it also offers new capabilities for intelligence collection. None of this was contemplated in 1984.

That's why on November 24 the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, announced that the government was launching consultations on possible changes to the *CSIS Act*.

These changes, in the words of the Minister "give the Government of Canada another set of tools to detect and disrupt foreign state and non-state actors that attempt to act against our national interest."

When you understand the pervasiveness of threats here in Canada and the human impact of those threats, it becomes clear that national security is much too important to be left to the federal government alone.

At CSIS, it's mission-critical that we build trust among the communities we serve, that we are transparent, and that we focus on partnerships and teamwork, in order to work collectively to combat this web of urgent, complex, and ever-expanding threats.

CSIS has worked very hard in the last few years to be better at what we do by recognizing our own shortcomings. I've already spoken about the external.

Internally, much has been done to make sure the Service is a safe and supportive workplace. But we can and must do more.

I intend to establish a CSIS Office of the Ombudsperson to provide a trusted, confidential and impartial space for employees to openly discuss workplace-related issues or concerns without fear of reprisal.

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We recognise that trust with our employees and Canadians requires transparency. To advance this, we will publish a report on wrongdoing, misconduct and harassment at CSIS annually.

We can't successfully work with our communities without openness, understanding and trust. Systemic racism is real, and it impacts Canadians every day. It alienates people and it divides our country. And I have stated my commitment to combatting racism and discrimination in all its forms at CSIS.

Last year we released our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy and we are working hard every day to implement it. We took the novel step for an intelligence agency of publishing it. This work will lead to a more equitable and inclusive workplace for all employees, but it is also critical to our success in serving Canadians. We have to reflect the people that we serve and we have to ensure all our valued employees have the support they need to successfully deliver our mission.

Finally, we need partners. Enduring partnerships give us strength, and distinguish us from our adversaries.

This means working with our international democratic allies, as well as with business and academic sectors, who are on the front line of Canada's innovation economy.

But most important is our partnership with Canadians.

We have to work closely with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and all other communities where intimidation and coercion is taking place.

CSIS has made commitments to First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. Our goals are to repair trust and enhance information sharing with these communities to effectively identify and mitigate threats.

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The Canadian government built an action plan for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, and CSIS was proudly the first intelligence service among our Five Eyes partners to proactively participate by offering tangible commitments.

CSIS has been sponsoring security clearances for Indigenous partners to be able to share classified information, which will support self-determination.

CSIS has also been providing security briefings to Indigenous governments and organizations, on issues which affect Indigenous safety, security, and prosperity.

We need to engender trust. We need to be mutually transparent. And we need to work collectively, as a team – with every community, with every institution, with every business and with every Canadian – that we can.

As I wrap up, I'd like to re-iterate what I said at the beginning:

Threats to Canada are increasingly complex, and are intensifying;

A safe, secure and prosperous Canada requires respect for human rights;

National security is a team effort, built on trust and transparency.

Adversaries see democracies – including Canada - as vulnerable. What they don't see, or don't understand, is that democracies have advantages and so does Canada.

We have an ardent desire to protect our human rights, and we have a history of working together to enact change. This Museum captures that history beautifully.

The people of CSIS take immense pride in their work and in the role they play to keep Canada safe. Our organization has been a pillar of national security and will remain so.

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But we should be under no illusions of what we're up against. The fight for democracy and human rights is one we cannot afford to lose.

It is our sincere hope that you'll partner with us in this mission. Our country depends on it.

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