

NSC Hearing Final Submission Pillar Society 2024 02 02

The Pillar Society is impressed by the quality and openness of the expert panels and their success in demystifying national security work, particularly concerning the complex declassification challenge we are seized with. Our colleague participants, panellists, and the Commission understand both the Commission and the Government's need to find that comfort zone between unnecessarily jeopardizing the sources and methods of collecting intelligence and the Government's reflexive tendency to keep the lion's share of reporting classified.

In an article published this week in Foreign Affairs magazine, CIA Director William Burns discusses "Strategic declassification," the intentional public disclosure of certain secrets to undercut rivals (like Russia) and rally allies (like Ukraine). Let us look at our declassification exercise as more than transparency to Canadians but an effective tool to counter foreign interference from Canada's adversaries.

Strategic summaries of the redacted reporting are the most effective tool to balance maintaining national security and educating Canadians about the threat. Raw reporting cannot and should not be declassified. It is intelligence, not evidence and is open to a range of misinterpretations. While cynics may question the integrity of executive summaries, the Commission's mandate is not to win over the Deep-State aficionados and - considering the alternatives, as Winston Churchill once said - this may be as good as it gets.

This week, we heard about "third-party reporting" and the "Five Eyes," which are apparently following these proceedings with rapt attention. The Five Eyes alliance has withstood existential threats from Kim Philby to Edward Snowden. They are not—like the eye of Sauron—following these proceedings with grave concern.

Foreign interference investigations are not counter-espionage operations and, for the most part, do not involve foreign intelligence service actors. Knowing the nature of foreign interference investigations in Canada, we doubt there is much third-party information in the reporting. What is there may be corroborative or tangential to an investigation and can be reviewed *ex parte* or excised from a summary.

