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SECURITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SAC) PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS:
A REVIEW

PURPOSE

To review the role and work of the Security Advisory Committee Public Communications Subcommittee (SACPCS).

SCOPE

This examines SACPCS since it was established in April, 1986, and considers its recently expanded focus to include all government security not just counter-terrorism. It looks at possible links with the Intelligence Advisory Committee (IAC) with integrated government communications in security and intelligence the aim. This also responds to the agreement at the June 24, 1987, meeting of the strengthened SAC that "the chairmen of subcommittees should submit terms of reference, work plans and a review of their work, including an indication of problems," to SAC's early September meeting.

BACKGROUND

The strengthening of SAC under the chairmanship of the Deputy Solicitor General with ADM-level members follows a February, 1987, review by Blair Seaborn, Intelligence and Security Co-ordinator. That review, which does not touch specifically on public communications, found that a SAC with senior-level membership, sustained leadership, and a capacity to provide policy advice are indeed needed. It was also felt that while the former SAC had been an effective forum its policy support to the Interdepartmental Committee on Security and Intelligence had been weak.

The review sees SAC as an interdepartmental forum that provides security-intelligence assessment and policy support to ICSI. It says SAC should advise on information security, terrorism and specialty threats, government security policy, and the departmental security officer community. The committee, it says, should also have an interdepartmental capability to produce policy-relevant security-intelligence assessments.

Although SAC was set up in 1972 it was only in the last few years that public communications was emphasized and its importance recognized with the striking of a public communications subcommittee, the membership of which basically mirrored SAC's. The subcommittee reflected a growing government emphasis on

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communications, and a concern about public communications, especially government-media relations, in terrorist and like incidents. Lessons from the Turkish Embassy siege and killing of a security guard in March, 1985, a threat soon after to bomb the Toronto subway system, the Air India crash off Ireland, in June, 1985, with suspected terrorist origins, and the airport hoax at Ottawa in January, 1986, added impetus to work under way at Solicitor General to strengthen communications, especially in counter-terrorism. As well, the government was calling increasingly for more thorough and professional communications throughout the public service.

The demands for sharpened communications continues. An example is the May, 1987, letter from Cabinet Secretary Paul Tellier to Deputy Ministers setting out communications principles. These principles are to ensure the integration of communications with policy formulation and program development and delivery.

When SAC established SACPCS the subcommittee concentrated on contingency planning in counter-terrorism communications and assisting in actual incidents. The committee was also seen as another source of advice and a structure for fast action in an emergency. It was intended that the committee should not meet regularly. It has had two plenary meetings, participated in simulations and exercise, and reviewed several papers in counter-terrorism communications prepared in the Solicitor General Secretariat. Individual committee members have met with the SACPCS chairman on their special concerns. The chairman works closely with the Solicitor General Security Planning and Co-ordination Directorate, an officer of which serves as committee secretary.

It was that directorate that set the stage for a strengthened SAC in suggesting how to get going on the Seaborn recommendations.

The SACPCS continues in the changed SAC but SAC has broadened the subcommittee's focus, from counter-terrorism to include all security.

The major backdrops to this review then are the growing requirements in government communications and security communications needs implicit in the Seaborn study.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This review will recommend (see Annex A) revised SACPCS terms of reference which will take account of the former terms under which SACPCS:

1. Advises SAC on public communications.
2. Prepares communications plans in support of SAC activities.

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3. Assists the Solicitor General and others in terrorist incidents.
4. Develops press lines for possible use in incidents.
5. Develops continuing government-media relations strategies.
6. Provides an interdepartmental forum.

SAC's new terms of reference, which the proposed SACPCS terms will reflect, give the SAC the job of:

1. Identifying issues, consulting and advising departments.
2. Advising ICSI on all security matters, including policies and programs.
3. Identifying security-intelligence analysis requirements for referral to IAC.
4. Establishing subcommittees.
5. Guiding the subcommittees.
6. Reporting, as required, to ICSI.

SUBCOMMITTEE ROLE

SACPCS work, an account of which SAC has requested, shows what the subcommittee can continue to do in its expanded role.

Since it was set up the subcommittee has:

1. Reviewed staff papers on public communications and media relations;
2. Studied and advised on Solicitor General Police and Security Branch communications procedures;
3. Explored improved interdepartmental co-operation in communications, especially between operational centres;
4. Studied improved incident and intelligence management;
5. Discussed and drafted possible media-government guides in terrorist and like incidents;
6. Examined operational guides in terrorist and like incidents;
7. Discussed and participated in counter-terrorism simulations and exercises;

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8. Reviewed government moves in counter-terrorism;
9. Reviewed lessons from Operation Golden Rod;
10. Discussed a paper on government statements during terrorist and like incidents;
11. Considered setting up a special interdepartmental information team that can be called on in emergencies; and
12. Considered the subcommittee's role in counter-terrorism exercises.

POSSIBLE IAC TIES

The government emphasis on communications and the frequency of high-profile crises in which security and intelligence are often common components suggest the need for integrated communications so that security and intelligence angles are not treated separately and inadvertently at cross-purposes. It is tempting to argue that intelligence does not require public communications because it is a secret activity. However, intelligence properly used can substantially improve government communications through more perceptive environmental assessments, the heart of effective communications planning. As well, communications in intelligence can assist the government and departments should there be leaks to the media of classified intelligence information. The preparation of "news-leak" strategies in the face of growing brown-envelope journalism could reduce possible embarrassment and prepare the government for the unexpected. Whether links in public communications are established, SAC and IAC could profit from ties of some kind in communications so that their respective memberships would have a better feel for what's going on in each other's bailiwicks.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Although Emergency Preparedness Canada (EPC) is not a SAC member, EPC was invited to join SACPCS because many of its public communications concerns are the same as SAC's. Public communications in a natural disaster, for example, is similar to such communications in other kinds of crises. EPC and SAC can learn much from one another. This co-operation in communications has extended beyond SAC membership where SACPCS members have participated in EPC activities both at Ottawa headquarters and at Arnprior.

SACPCS ties to EPC are also important because EPC is responsible for overall government public communications planning in national emergencies. SACPCS could have a prominent role to play in supporting EPC and the Privy Council Office Communications Secretariat in co-ordinating public communications in such

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crises. Members can also support one another in departmental emergency planning and profit from EPC knowledge. Conversely, EPC can benefit from SACPCS efforts in public communications.

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

SACPCS comprises members from Transport, External Affairs, Employment and Immigration, Revenue Canada (Customs and Excise), National Defence, Emergency Preparedness Canada, RCMP, CSIS, PCO Communications Secretariat, and Solicitor General Secretariat.

If SACPCS is to mirror the membership of the strengthened SAC then representation would have to be added from Treasury Board Secretariat, Justice and the Communications Security Establishment (CSE). Although CSE is technically represented through DND it could undoubtedly contribute and benefit from subcommittee membership.

Although PCO is represented on the current SACPCS, the subcommittee would benefit from representation from the Security and Intelligence Co-ordination Secretariat. There is dual membership on the current committee where CSIS, for example, is represented by both its directors general for domestic liaison and intelligence assessments.

SACPCS membership is intended to be at the director general level but there has been a tendency to substitute such membership for working-level persons. This sometimes makes sense when the committee is looking at operations but not as useful where policy and other advice is considered.

FEW PROBLEMS

SACPCS has had few problems but that could be because the subcommittee was designed for the management of public communications in an actual crisis and as a forum, mostly for ad hoc rather than continuous advice. As stated, membership level has been a problem and double membership could have become a problem but did not.

WORK PLAN

SACPCS's work plan will complement SAC review of security issues. High on that list are polygraphs, an overview of counter-terrorism, sexual orientation as an aspect of security policy, a review of access to information legislation, and the security-screening backlog. The subcommittee could expand a preliminary communications review already undertaken of the report of the Senate Special Committee on Terrorism and the Public Safety.

David Davidson
Director General
Ministry Secretariat
Solicitor General Canada
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Annex A

PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE

SACPCS's terms of reference will either explicitly or implicitly give the subcommittee responsibility for:

1. Identifying the communications implications of issues;
2. Advising SAC on the public communications implications of its advice to ICSI;
3. Prepare communications plans where appropriate to complement SAC advice, studies and other activities;
4. Provide a forum for discussion of public communications issues of concern to one or more subcommittee members;
5. Assist in the management of security crises such as a terrorist or like incident and assist individual departments in departmental security issues as requested;
6. Maintain liaison with IAC on public communications