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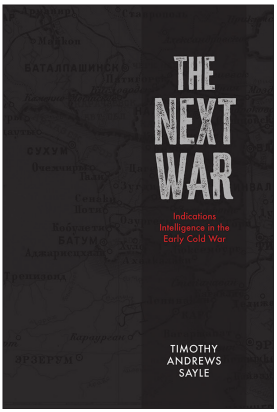

THE NEXT WAR: INDICATIONS INTELLIGENCE IN THE EARLY COLD WAR

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ISBN 978-1-77385-626-1

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The Origins of Indications Intelligence

In the early days of the Korean War, Canada's Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee (JISC) recommended two possible methods for tracking any change in the likelihood of war. The method that was ultimately accepted (and described in the previous chapter) was a series of papers, or appreciations, titled "Imminence of War."

The JISC's preferred option, however, was to develop a system for tracking indications intelligence. Instead of a regular appreciation, this would instead be a method of tracking and cataloguing specific indicators that war might be imminent. The Americans had an advanced indications intelligence system, and the British had a much less-developed version. The American system was premised on a series of "check lists" — that is, a list of things to watch for that, if observed, might indicate preparations for an attack. The items on such a checklist or "indicator list" developed over the Cold War, but they could include observations of the recall of reserves and mobilization of troops, the movement of forces out of regular barracks areas, the readiness of aircraft, and any of the other steps the Soviet Union would have to take before waging war.

In the JISC's 1950 plan, the services' intelligence directorates would track, and then forward, "any items of information which might indicate new trends or developments having significance in relation to the imminence of war."[1] JIS could then prepare "periodic, consolidated lists of these items, add any remarks or recommendations they might wish to make and forward them for the consideration" of the JIC at regular meetings. But in 1950, the Canadian JIC rejected the idea. A few years later, however, the search for indications of

war would become an important component of Canada's efforts to determine whether the Cold War was turning hot.

The development of indications intelligence in Canada was connected to and built on the shoulders of the American indications system. In fact, as will be evident in the next chapter, Canada's indications intelligence system was purposefully integrated and inseparable from the American and British systems. To understand what developed in Canada, it is essential to understand the origins of the indications rooms and Watch Committee in the United States.

US Origins, 1948–1950

Amid the Berlin Blockade in 1948, President Harry Truman received a swirl of competing reports seeking to identify Stalin's goals and what the Soviet Union might do next. "Who," he asked, "is keeping track of all these indications?" While the story may well be apocryphal, 1948 seems to mark the origins of "indications intelligence."[2]

The beginning of indications intelligence is perhaps more closely connected to the period after the March 1948 coup in Czechoslovakia and in the weeks before the blockade, when British intelligence analysts passed on a "check list" of indicators they had developed as a means of assessing Soviet intentions in East Germany.[3] The coup in Prague had led both British and American analysts to look for signs the Red Army was moving to seize Berlin. While the checklist was a British tool shared with the Americans, it seems that American officials then developed a much lengthier list of 112 different indicators. They passed this list on to the JIC (London) which, after trimming down the list of indicators to eighty-one, approved its own paper on the subject "Indications of Russian Preparedness for War."[4]

In early 1949, State Department officials suggested maintaining an ad hoc committee as a Watch Committee "to form a pool for interdepartmental consideration of Soviet intentions for war."[5] The CIA resisted the idea because this was the Agency's task.[6]

While no formal "Watch Committee" was created then, there was some movement to ensure communication of indications intelligence between agencies in late 1949. Member agencies of the Intelligence Advisory Committee (IAC) were asked to designate two members of their staffs as "Check List officers" to "follow evidence bearing on the various indicators in the Check List." The IAC's hope was that the newly appointed Check List officers would "form,

ex officio, an informal ad hoc 'network'" that would meet regularly to consider and report on Soviet intentions.[7] Fundamentally, this network was — in Director of Central Intelligence R. H. Hillenkoetter's words — to "provide timely warning, through the use of certain indicators, of impending Soviet military action in the *near* future."[8]

By January 1950, however, the Department of the Army had determined that the Check List Group was not enough.[9] The Army proposed that the Department of State's proposal for the establishment of a Watch Committee be reconsidered.[10]

In anticipation of an upcoming debate over the meaning and value of indications intelligence, Hillenkoetter noted that the name "Check List Group" conveyed "connotation of merely a collection and file" system and so "Watch Committee" was more appropriate.[11] The State Department supported this idea, arguing that a committee was required not simply to exchange information but to provide "a mechanism whereby all such items of information be juxtaposed, compared with each other, discussed, and jointly evaluated by the members." The value of such a committee was that it would ensure a joint effort was made to answer one critical question: "What are the proper and significant categories of information (indicators) having a bearing on Soviet intentions to make war in the near future?"[12]

An operating procedure for a Watch Committee was drafted in February and March of 1950, "for the purpose of providing timely warning of Soviet military action"[13] and a charter for the Watch Committee was being negotiated when North Korean tanks crossed the 38th parallel in June 1950.[14] By November 1950, the Watch Committee had established its "Watch Room" in a closed area of the CIA's Que Building. It was staffed twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, by a representative who could communicate via teletype with representatives from other agencies.[15]

In autumn 1950, this existing Watch Committee was disbanded and its efforts fused with the US Army Joint Indications Intelligence Committee. The IAC formally established a new Watch Committee with a mission "to collect, evaluate, analyze and report indications of Soviet-Communist intentions of hostile action and it is responsible for issuing a weekly report on Indications of Soviet-Communist Intention of Hostile Action." Going forward, this Watch Committee was "the intelligence body charged with the responsibility of alerting the US Government of Soviet-Communist intention to initiate war."[16]

The early years of Watch Committee work in the US were revealing. The need to operate across departments and agencies was recognized as essential, but it was also difficult to achieve in practice. Those looking for indications intelligence had to consider how far forward they should look: were they preparing estimates or situation reports? And if they were only to report on the current situation, how far back should they look to identify trends and change?

The early days in the US also saw creeping concern that indications intelligence would be subsumed by an instinct to graph, chart, or otherwise mechanically track intelligence. But how else might a watch committee track and measure indications? Officials, especially those in the State Department, worried that any attempt at "selection, formulation, and approval" of so-called "indicators" of Soviet intentions "might lead to a mechanical handling of the watching process." At the same time, they recognized the value of lists for making the "watching process in general 'more systematic.'"[17] The Canadians would share these concerns as they learned more about the US system.

United Kingdom and Canada (1950–1953)

The development of indications intelligence in Canada and the United Kingdom proceeded on a much smaller scale and at a much slower pace than in the United States.

In 1950, the JIC (London) began its regular "Review of the Situation Round the Soviet and Satellite Perimeter," what would come to be known as the "Perimeter Review." This would later become the "Weekly Review of Current Intelligence" discussed below. The weekly review had four primary purposes, but the first was to "identify and evaluate immediately any indicators of Soviet preparedness for war."[18] Thus, as the historian of the JIC, Michael Goodman, has pointed out, the review "included a warning function, something which the JIC would be repeatedly accused of failing to perform effectively."[19] Indeed, as we will see below, this criticism came from allies, too, especially Washington.

By the end of 1951, the Canadian process (if it bears the name) for considering indications intelligence was roughly similar to the British: any crucial intelligence, "including indications of attack" were to be reported at the weekly JIC meeting, and if thought necessary, an emergency meeting of the JIC could be called. This was considered adequate.[20]

In early 1952, the directorate of air intelligence pushed for change. The director suggested that an "organization should be set up to collate and

evaluate" any indicators of war, or if no central organization was created, then one service intelligence agency should be given the responsibility. If the agency revised sufficient indicators, they would alert the JIC, who would in turn alert the Chiefs of Staff.[21]

Between 1951 and 1953, there had been discussions in the JIC and elsewhere as to whether Canada should establish a "War Room," but such a room's function was ambiguous and vague. In May 1953, there was finally discussion of just what function a "War Room" would service in peacetime. A paper prepared for the JIC suggested that the "main intelligence requirement is for arrangements to ensure that information concerning indications of war is centrally collated and displayed."[22] The room, then would be an "Indications of War" room for intelligence use in the Department of National Defence.

A Model for Americans and Canadians (1953–1954)

Separate visits by American and Canadian intelligence officials to US Air Force facilities served as a major impetus for the establishment of a central "indications center" and "indications room" in Washington and Ottawa, respectively.

There is no evidence that Canadian officials knew much about the development of the American Watch Committee and indications system until their visit to USAF facilities in 1953 (described below). They would later learn some of this history from their American allies, and the American system developed in this period had important ramifications for Canadian developments.

Complaints about the US Watch Committee led to a search for new solutions in Washington in 1952. The CIA, sensing a shift in Soviet tactics toward political and economic warfare, urged the Watch Committee to move beyond its military-focused legacy and extend "indications coverage to include the economic, industrial, and political fields."[23]

The issue of tracking indications remained, however. One senior CIA official thought it was time to use "a mechanical device for keeping track of indicators" and displaying the indicators visually. He had been partly inspired by a visit to the US Air Defence Command at Colorado Springs where he had seen the Air Force's "indications board" — a wall-mounted display of indications intelligence. In keeping with the existing concerns about mechanical assessments, he thought the "board alone was incipiently dangerous," and that the key was well-trained people.[24]

A 1953 National Security Council (NSC) report detailing defence and intelligence programs 1953 advised the president that the Watch Committee had made improvements but that "current information on the Soviet Orbit is partial and inadequate. Accordingly, conclusions concerning Soviet and Communist intentions to initiate hostilities at any given time must be tentative generalizations drawn from inadequate evidence." The report stated starkly that there existed "*no guarantee that intelligence will be able to give adequate warning of attack prior to actual detection of hostile formations*."[25]

By the end of the year, the top echelons of the CIA were concerned that the Watch Committee had not adapted to the new Cold War. In October, Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Walter Bedell Smith told the IAC that the world had changed since the outbreak of the Korean War. Now the "probabilities of economic and political aggression, at least for the next few years, overshadow the possibility of military aggression." No longer was "the disposition and movement of troops the only vital question" and the Watch Committee needed to adapt. The DCI proposed the establishment of a high-level committee to examine the issue and nominated Huntington "Ting" Sheldon as the CIA representative.[26]

Sheldon would chair the Ad Hoc IAC Committee (Watch), called the "Sheldon Committee," in an effort to adapt the US watch system. The Sheldon Committee's deliberations were thorough and lengthy, ranging from 1953 to '54. All the IAC agencies participated fully, knowing that the outcome might well, as one analyst put it, "affect future balances of bureaucratic power within the intelligence community."[27] The Sheldon Committee visited Colorado Springs and saw the "elaborate command post and warning center" there. In its final report the committee recommended the establishment of a worldwide indications centre modelled on the Air Defence Command at Colorado Springs.[28]

The Sheldon Committee's work coincided with another significant change in Washington. In October 1953, President Eisenhower signed NSC 162/2, establishing a new Basic National Security Policy for the United States. The policy required, and NSC 162/2 directed, the development and maintenance of an "intelligence system capable of . . . [c]ollecting and analyzing indications of hostile intentions that would give maximum prior warning of possible aggression or subversion in any area of the world."[29] For the first time, the "watch function," was considered "a major intelligence objective."[30]

The year 1954 then saw the establishment of a centralized official Watch Committee (as part of the IAC) and the development of the National Indications Center. This was the end of the beginning, rather than the beginning of the end of the US watch function. It would continue to evolve. Only months after the terms of reference had been established for the Watch Committee, CIA officials pointed out that they needed more information, and not only about the enemy. To provide effective "warning of hostile action," watchers must not only have intelligence regarding their adversary, but also have "knowledge of US or allied operations." Without knowing what action the US and its allies were taking abroad, there was bound to be "false warning" that could be "seriously misconstrued (in either direction)."[31] This was a contentious issue that made it all the way to the president and the NSC. It was also an issue that the Canadians of External Affairs had worried about in the "Imminence of War" discussions: that American action could lead to Soviet reaction.

Ultimately, the NSC agreed to "make fully available to the IAC Watch Committee all significant information and intelligence pertinent to its mission and function . . . without restriction because of source, policy or operational sensitivity." It was to be kept informed of all "significant diplomat, political, military, or other courses of action by the U.S.,"[32] with the president serving as final arbiter in case of disagreement. The US NIC, then, was privy to information not only about hostile action but also about American action abroad. The Joint Chiefs of Staffs' sensitivity about protecting war plans was assuaged, but operational actions were to be passed to the Watch Committee. This would have important ramifications for future co-operation with allies.

Also in 1954, a Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE 11-8-54) assessed that the US watch system could expect to provide "as much as six months and not less than 30 days warning of Soviet preparations for a full-scale ground, sea, and air attack in the event of prior mobilization." This amount of warning time was expected to shrink quickly in the coming years. The US was almost entirely dependent on radar and forward observation stations. Having been stymied by the Soviet counterespionage system, the US had no "adequate penetrations of the Soviet Bloc." By 1957, the estimate warned, there may be "only a few hours or in some cases no specific warning, other than that provided by early warning radar" in case of attack.[33] In an effort to keep the warning window open, all IAC committee members signed a memorandum warning of "serious gaps" in US intelligence of the Soviet

Union, especially "in relation to our ability to determine the capabilities of the Soviet Union to launch nuclear attack against the US," and called for the use of "aerial reconnaissance and photography."[34]

By the end of 1954, the US intelligence organizations had overcome bureaucratic infighting to establish a watch and indications system with access to all source intelligence and information about US operations abroad. In a bid to keep open the rapidly closing warning window, they were preparing to develop new methods of intelligence collection.

It is a curious quirk of history that both American and Canadian visits to USAF facilities sparked a new phase in indications intelligence. In early 1953, members of the Canadian Joint Intelligence Staff visited the USAF Indications of War Room and Command Post. They learned that the USAF directorate of Intelligence had established its own section to deal exclusively with "indications of war" to obtain "all possible early indications of any impending Soviet attack." The JIS staff, impressed by what they saw, urged the JIC to run a "small-scale trial" of a similar effort in Canada to "determine the possibilities of a scheme which was both original and interesting in itself, and possibly of extreme potential importance to the defence of Canada."[35]

The JIC's members responded with mixed enthusiasm in March 1953, with the representatives of the director of naval intelligence (DNI) and director of military intelligence (DMI) the least enthusiastic. The DMI's representative noted that "the amount of original Canadian intelligence" was so limited that any Canadian effort would be of limited value. He assumed that "US co-operation with Canada in this field was questionable."[36] Ivor Bowen of the JIB, however, thought the United States would be willing to co-operate with Canada on any issue related to the defence of North America. Director of Scientific Intelligence A. J. Langley warned that the "difficulty of obtaining intelligence of any type" was so considerable that anything that might "increase our knowledge of the USSR and its possible intentions should be thoroughly explored."[37]

A spring 1953 visit to the USAF Indications Room seems to have influenced both the DNI and DMI officials. They warned, however, that the American project was an "elaborate one which we should not attempt to parallel." Still, the DMI representative suggested that Canada should consider "establishing exchange arrangements with the US" in the indications field.[38] The RCAF representative, who was far more enthusiastic, emphasized the value of the information the US authorities "appeared prepared to provide

us." Group Captain Edwards told the JIC, "We should attempt to obtain this material as it was the essence of all the intelligence obtained by the US intelligence agencies."[39]

Bowen, again, spoke out strongly for co-operation with the Americans in this field. He thought it essential to establish routines for transmitting intelligence, because in a true crisis there remained "the likelihood that, at the critical time, the US authorities would be so occupied that they would overlook keeping us informed."[40] Bowen's argument, that routines and habits of intelligence sharing were crucially important to ensure Canada received information from the US in times of crisis, would play an important role in shaping Canada's approach to indications intelligence going forward.

No decision was made on a Canadian indications program in the spring or summer of 1953 as JIC representatives investigated the American system along "individual channels."[41] By the end of the year, General Foulkes, chair of the Chiefs of Staff, showed "considerable interest" in the idea, and was especially attracted to the idea of an "intelligence briefing room" and exchange and liaison arrangements with the United States.[42] On the CSC's directions, the JIC "undert[ook] a project concerned with 'indications intelligence.'"[43]

The JIS prepared a lengthy memorandum titled "The 'Indications' Project," JIC 89(53) of December 8, 1953.[44] It proposed that every research officer in each of the intelligence directorates and agencies be issued a "master list of indicators." When, in the course of his work, the officer noted any item concerning a subject on the list, he would enter the information on a specially prepared index card and send it on to the JIS marked "urgent." The JIS would screen all incoming cards and prepare a periodical report for the JIC and, if necessary, the CSC. According to the initial plan, the JIS would request researchers to make two copies of each itemized card, one for use in Ottawa and one to be dispatched to the indications room in Washington. The cards received by the JIS for Canadian use would be filed until methods for "visual presentation" of the data were settled upon. [45]

Attached to JIC 89(53) were two master lists of indicators, one entitled "Possible Indicators of Increased Soviet Preparedness for War" and another listing the "Indicators of the Imminence of the Outbreak of War or of Attack on North America." These were lengthy lists detailing hundreds of indicators. Also attached was a template that could be printed on 5 x 8 inch filing cards that the JIS would provide all agencies (if the plan were approved).[46]

Discussion of JIC 89(53) revealed continued suspicion and skepticism of indications intelligence in the JIC. DMI representatives pointed out the "lack of original Canadian sources." They suggested that the delay in receiving, let alone evaluating, intelligence from the US, along with the duplication of work would make a Canadian effort "ineffective."[47] George Glazebrook of External Affairs warned that any Canadian effort would grow to be much more work than expected. But despite a host of concerns, G. G. Crean, the JIC chair, thought the JIC should "go ahead with its Indications Project and thus be prepared to handle any information received from the US National Indications Room in the future."[48] The JIC adopted JIC 89(53) on December 22, 1953.

In March 1954, Crean visited Air Defense Command (ADC) at Colorado Springs to see the indications intelligence project directed by Brigadier-General Woodbury M. Burgess. This was separate from the USAF indications room other JIC members had seen in Washington, DC, but it was the project that had inspired the Sheldon Committee during its contemporaneous work.

Crean noticed that the intelligence staff at the ADC took every item they had evaluated as an "indication" and represented it on a wall-mounted board against an appropriate indicator. Various colours on the board represented the degree to which indications intelligence showed an increased readiness for war: "if there are enough indications plugged in against a particular indicator it will change its colour from yellow to red to black." After six months the board was photographed, and a new board is started, thus achieving what had been described in some quarters in Washington as "memory in depth." Burgess conceded to Crean that his system had certain weaknesses. It was, for instance, "extremely hard to represent visually a political or propaganda situation." It was much easier, however, to represent, visually, increased capabilities of the Soviet armed forces and certain physical items like new airfield construction. On the board, however, "no particular weight was given to any individual 'indication.'"[49]

Crean reported on two principal weakness he saw in the ADC system. In the first place, it simply "does not seem possible to represent by a plug on a board a given political situation and, indeed, a board only lends itself to representing a physical fact."[50] Second, the system whereby indicators were added to a board, seemed to limit "a continuous system of revaluation of given items of intelligence." Indicators might continue to pile up, but not be re-evaluated. The "system could lead to the ridiculous situation where the entire board turned black in colour, thus showing that a war should take place,

but one might well discover that war did not take place because, of course, the board cannot reflect in the final analysis Soviet intentions." Crean echoed the "undesirability," previously voiced by American and Canadian officials, of "falling back too heavily on mechanical aids to intelligence." Before he left the US, Crean met with both Sheldon, who was in the midst of his study, and Park Armstrong of the State Department. Neither of them thought the Air Force's project a "satisfactory method for dealing with the problem of war."[51]

Crean briefed the JIC on his report and told his colleagues that his feelings had not changed: it was "impossible to reduce all items of intelligence to some mechanical system." Nonetheless, he suggested the JIS proceed with establishing its list of indicators and filing systems to be ready for when liaison arrangements were made with the United States.[52] In the spring of 1954, the JIC continued to consider how it might establish an indications project while the JIS reconsidered JIC 89(53).

Bowen, in a March JIC meeting, urged that plans for any indications project should stress the importance of speed. He wanted any procedural documents to be clear that "items of urgent importance should be processed rapidly and, if necessary, discussed at special meetings of the Committee."[53] There may be occasions when it was not wise to wait until the next regular meeting to discuss an indication of war.

By April, the JIC was finally prepared to begin its indications project on a trial basis starting in May. The key component of this trial program was a weekly briefing for the JIC on important "items of current intelligence." The JIS would hold a pre-briefing meeting on Wednesday mornings and then brief the JIC that afternoon, submitting a weekly summary of information bearing on "subjects covered in the lists of 'indicators.'" [54] The JIC would discuss and agree, forming what they called (using the British parlance) "a form of 'perimeter review'" for the chair of the Chiefs of Staff (CCOS) who would be briefed on the Thursday.[55]

A few months after the Canadians established their indications project, the Sheldon Committee reached its final conclusions. The Canadians learned of the significant changes in the US Watch Committee and the establishment of a twenty-person Indications Center.[56] Even before the changes inspired by the Sheldon Committee and NSC 162/2, the Canadians received some copies of both the Watch Committee's report and its special intelligence supplement. The reports, however, were passed directly between American and Canadian cognate partners, for instance the US Army G-2 to the DMI, and

the supplement from NSA to Communications Branch, National Research Council (CBNRC).

Now that the Canadians had their own indications project, and the US Watch Committee had expanded with the establishment of the NIC, these products became more important. Crean wrote to Allen Dulles, the newest director of central intelligence, to make sure, first of all, that the US allowed the distribution of these reports to the full Canadian JIC (that is beyond their initial recipients) and also hoped for more copies.[57]

Dulles kicked the can down the road, noting that the establishment of the NIC had led the US to re-examine "the entire dissemination of the Report and Supplement." He provided Crean with information about the NIC and invited him to visit.[58] This was the first hint that, just as the Canadians were establishing their own system for exchanging indications intelligence with the United States, changes in the US would make that exchange more difficult.

At the same time as Crean was asking Dulles about the exchange of the Watch Committee reports, he was growing concerned about the exchange of intelligence in a crisis.[59] When "C," the head of the UK's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), Sir John Sinclair, visited Ottawa in the autumn of 1954, Crean raised this matter with him.

Crean pointed out that Canada received a significant flow of intelligence from the United States through COMINT channels only. The communications intelligence (COMINT), or signals intelligence, relationship between Canada and the United States (and the United Kingdom) was so deep that this was the one area in which Canada received a regular and direct flow of intelligence information. The extent of the information received through these channels raised concerns for Crean, because he realized that Canada frequently received information from the United States via COMINT channels that it did not receive from any other US source. The quantity of COMINT information, in a roundabout way, caused Crean to worry that the exchange of other intelligence information and analysis between Canada and the United States, and especially between Ottawa and Washington, was quite thin.

Crean was worried that, in a crisis, the United States might choose to act on intelligence information that had not otherwise been sent to Ottawa. He gave the example of air defence: Canada's Air Defence Command at St. Hubert, Quebec, was linked with the American command at Colorado Springs. It seemed possible, even likely, that Colorado Springs might call an air defence alert "without the J.I.C. ever receiving the intelligence information

upon which the 'alert' was based."[60] Crean was clearly concerned that there was no channel for passing time-sensitive intelligence of a non-COMINT nature between national capitals.

It was a matter of "considerable importance," Crean told C, that Canada receive this information "so that we could make our own assessment before operational units were made ready for combat."[61] Crean understood that Canada was already receiving "a great deal of important highly classified information" but much of it was not of an urgent character. It now seemed possible that Canada might "not receive a 'hot' piece of information which might lead to a state of 'alert.'"[62]

This seemed to pique C's interest. He urged Crean to write to his counterpart, Sir Patrick Dean, chair of the JIC (London). Crean sent a letter to Dean, to be passed "by hand of officer only," asking Dean how he viewed the operation of the US system, and how London "would yourselves act with respect to the Ottawa J.I.C. in the event of receiving 'hot information'" in London from non-COMINT sources. Crean intimated that he thought that if the UK JIC were to receive information that led it to hold a "crash" meeting — that is an emergency, unscheduled meeting — it would be appropriate to also send along that piece of intelligence to Ottawa immediately, even before the meeting ended. If there was information "which would indicate that we are on the brink of war," Crean wrote, our systems "should be geared to exchange such information without having to wait for our respective Chiefs of Staff or Governments to inform the other."[63] Dean wrote back to say the British had not considered these points, and "will now do so as soon as possible."[64]

Crean had just described, in brief but in principle, what would over the coming years develop into the Tripartite Intelligence Alerts Agreement. The road to agreement would be a slow and meandering one, but the idea of such a system would receive a major boost from the British in the weeks after Crean sent his letter to Dean.