

REPORT ON THE INDEPENDENCE AND INTEGRITY OF ONA ASSESSMENTS

Key Judgements

1. This formal inquiry (conducted pursuant to section 8(3) of the *Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security Act 1986*), examined the independence and integrity of ONA's assessment work in the 12 months to September 2007. It included a survey and extensive discussions with staff, as well as scrutiny of selected records.
2. ONA's internal culture is one of constructive debate and contestability, and analysts are well imbued with the concept of ONA judgments needing to be independent. There are several internal processes which support independence and integrity in the preparation of assessments and analysts were very positive about these.
3. There was no evidence or indication of improper pressure or attempted direction from ministers or their offices.
4. The general view of analysts is that ONA's assessments are independent and this was also my impression from reading the body of work over the period. One particular assessment was questioned, and I subjected it to close scrutiny including by formal interviews of two senior staff. The sworn testimony to me, and viewing the assessment in the totality of ONA's work on the topic, satisfied me that the assessment had been prepared with integrity.
5. A small minority of ONA staff feel that the careful presentation of some judgements compromises the message intended, but the small number of instances given to me did not prove the point.
6. While confident that ONA had always held its ground, a minority of staff were concerned that on rare occasions policy departments went beyond legitimately robust debate into bullying. The frequency with which this was perceived as occurring is low but the Director-General will emphasise at induction and other suitable opportunities, that staff shouldn't hesitate to raise any concerns with ONA managers if they feel it is occurring.
7. The general practice is for draft assessments to be circulated to all analysts within ONA for comment, but in practice some exceptions are made. The policy should reflect this and be clear on who can authorise exceptions.
8. While the documenting of source information by some analysts is of a high standard, there is room for improvement by others. The Director-General has recently issued revised instructions to analysts on the requirements. Inconsistencies between branches were also apparent in the

new practice of regular internal review of key judgements made in the previous six months, but with the second iteration showing distinct improvement.

9. The actual keeping of records on the development of each assessment was not consistent and I have made a recommendation as to the minimum set I would expect to be available for each assessment.
10. No analyst accessed the formal internal dissent mechanism (in practice available after an assessment is published) in the period covered by this inquiry. Arguably there is scope for some arrangement to ensure senior ONA management is always aware of significant internal differences of opinion prior to assessments being finalised. During the course of the inquiry the Director-General clarified procedures in relation to recording external dissent.
11. National Assessments are seen as independent by analysts, and I had no concerns about ONA's approach to them.
12. I was satisfied that ONA biographies are independent and objective.