



INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE

35 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BQ

PRESS RELEASE

The Intelligence and Security Committee's Annual Report for 2010-2011 was laid before Parliament today by the Prime Minister.

Commenting on the Report, the Rt. Hon. Sir Malcolm Rifkind MP, Chairman of the Committee, said:

“The majority of the Committee's time during the reporting period was spent examining the work of the three intelligence and security Agencies and the wider intelligence community. The Report therefore covers the whole range of the Agencies' activities, including matters such as the 2010 Spending Review, cyber security and the Olympics. The UK intelligence machinery has a justifiably proud history and strong reputation among its partners around the world. The Committee has been impressed by the dedication, professionalism, and commitment of those members of the intelligence community it has met. While the Report highlights some problems or concerns, they should not detract from our view that those working in this field continue to excel at a tremendously challenging task.

The Committee has also this year conducted a root-and-branch review of its role, structure, remit and powers. The Report therefore also covers our proposals for reform of the Intelligence and Security Committee, to provide more effective, credible and transparent oversight of the UK intelligence community.

In the 16 years since the Intelligence and Security Committee was established there have been a number of changes within the intelligence community, and the work of the Committee has evolved to take account of these. We pay tribute to our predecessors for their success in this regard. However, public expectation in terms of transparency and openness has increased significantly during this time, and we must ensure that the Committee now has the powers and remit that are necessary to provide reassurance to the public and to Parliament. It is essential that we are able to provide credible reassurance that, consistent with necessary secrecy and security, the Agencies operate in the public interest.

After a thorough review during the course of this year, we have concluded that the current arrangements are significantly out of date and it is time for change. The *status quo* is unsustainable. We have therefore produced proposals designed to increase accountability, transparency and capacity for oversight of the intelligence community. In particular, we are recommending that:

- Instead of being appointed by the Prime Minister, the ISC should become a Committee of Parliament, with the necessary safeguards, reporting both to Parliament and the Prime Minister;
- The remit of the Committee should be amended to reflect the fact that the ISC has for some years taken evidence from, and made recommendations regarding, the wider intelligence community, and not just SIS, GCHQ, and the Security Service;
- The Committee's remit should be amended to reflect the fact that it is not limited to examining policy, administration and finances, but encompasses all the work of the Agencies, including operations;
- The Committee must have the power in future to require and not just, as at present, request information to be provided by the Agencies. Any power to withhold information should be held at Secretary of State level, and not by the Heads of the Agencies; and
- The Committee should have greater research resources at its disposal.

The Government's forthcoming Green Paper on the protection of intelligence material in the courts provides an excellent opportunity for change. We therefore believe that our proposals should form the basis for the relevant sections of the Green Paper and are so recommending to the Prime Minister."

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Report details the work of the Intelligence and Security Committee from October 2010 to May 2011.

2. The Committee's membership is as follows:

The Rt. Hon. Sir Malcolm Rifkind, MP (Chairman)	
The Rt. Hon. Hazel Blears, MP	The Rt. Hon. Paul Goggins, MP
The Rt. Hon. Lord Butler KG GCB CVO	The Rt. Hon. George Howarth, MP
The Rt. Hon. Sir Menzies Campbell CBE QC, MP	Dr Julian Lewis, MP
Mr Mark Field, MP	Lord Lothian QC PC

3. The Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) was established by the Intelligence Services Act 1994 to examine the policy, administration and expenditure of the Security Service, Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). The Committee also examines the work of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), the Assessments Staff and the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office, and Defence Intelligence (DI) in the Ministry of Defence.

4. The Committee is a cross-party Committee made up of nine Parliamentarians from the Lords and the Commons. The Prime Minister appoints ISC Members after considering nominations from Parliament and consulting with the Leader of the Opposition.

5. For reasons of national security the ISC reports to the Prime Minister, who publishes the Committee's reports. Whilst the full version of the Committee's Report, including sensitive material, is submitted to the Prime Minister, material that would damage national security is blanked out ('redacted') from the published version. This is indicated by *** in the text.

The intelligence and security Agencies may request the redaction of sensitive material in the reports which, if published, would damage their work (for example by revealing their targets, methods, sources or operational capabilities). The Committee considers these requests for redaction in considerable detail and the Agencies must demonstrate clearly how publication of the material in question would be damaging before the Committee agrees to redact it. The Committee aims to ensure that only the bare minimum of text is redacted from its reports and believes it is important that Parliament and the public should be able to see where material has been redacted, rather than keeping this secret. This means that the published versions of the Committee's reports are the same as the one sent to the Prime Minister: there is no separate 'secret' report.

6. The ISC is currently hosted by the Cabinet Office for administrative convenience, but is operationally independent. The Committee sets its own agenda, and can call Ministers, the Heads of the intelligence Agencies, and other officials to give evidence. The Committee determines how and when it conducts its programme of work: this gives the Committee the freedom to pursue every avenue of inquiry to its satisfaction.

7. Publication of the Government's Green Paper on Security and Justice, which will contain proposals for reform of oversight of the intelligence and security Agencies, is expected in the autumn.

8. Copies of the Committee's Annual Report 2010-2011 (Cm 8114) can be purchased from TSO for £20.50. The Report can also be found on the ISC's website: <http://isc.independent.gov.uk/>

9. The Government's formal response to the Committee's Report is expected to be published in the autumn.