

## New Camelot: The Unbearable Lightness of Canada's Twenty-First-Century Security Architecture

by Jeffrey Monaghan and Kevin Walby

The Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSEC) is Canada's foreign signals intelligence (SIGNIT) agency. Its closest counterparts are the National Security Agency (NSA) in the United States, the British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) in the UK, the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) in New Zealand, and the Defence Signals Directorate (DSD) in Australia. CSEC's mandate is to encrypt government communications and collect foreign signals intelligence. Until recently, CSEC occupied a non-descript office building in the south of Canada's capital, Ottawa. You would have never guessed that the country's most secretive and powerful security intelligence agency did most of its work there.

Under the banner "Project Camelot," CSEC is erecting a new state-of-the-art technology centre to house its thousands of spies. Taking a cue from ancient British folklore of the mysterious Arthurian castle, the new "Camelot" is an enormous 72,000-square-metre complex with an \$880-million (CAN) price tag. Because the building is the equivalent of a 90-storey skyscraper turned on its side, various proposals for the complex have included a host of luxury items such as hockey rinks, basketball courts, custom-made filtered water fountains, and gas fireplaces in central atriums. While many of these excesses have been repudiated following criticism in the media, the final design remains—like the agency itself—shrouded in secrecy. Aside from the ostensibly wonderful environmental qualities of the building, little is known about the design of this nearly \$1-billion complex.

CSEC claims that the new "Camelot" is needed to facilitate the functionality of intelligence gathering and improve their covert activities. Yet, the extravagance of the new complex will hardly make intelligence more efficient, objective, or reliable; instead, the design of the new "Camelot" springs from a desire to remodel the image of the agency. By examining the plans for CSEC's new "Camelot," we argue that the symbolism of the architecture for se-

curity headquarters has changed significantly in recent decades. Unlike the many bunker-style predecessors, CSEC now demands a symbolically open public profile for its headquarters while, at the same time, it demands greater powers and increased secrecy. In mirroring the paradoxical experience of contemporary "surveillance societies," this new security architecture articulates a spatiality of openness while concealing its role in the shadows of the post-9/11 intelligence world.

### CSEC, A Rising Force

In 1946, CSEC (then called the Communications Branch of the National Research Council) was established after Canada was drawn into collecting SIGNIT with the UK, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand during the Second World War. This alliance was referred to as the British-US Agreement. Since 1961, the agency has been located in the unspectacular Sir Leonard Tilley Building. In 1975, the agency was renamed CSEC and moved under the administrative control of the Department of National Defence (DND). SIGNIT at this time focused on Cold War consulate spying and CSEC worked closely with the NSA in the US. CSEC was (and still is) involved in preventing wiretaps at Canadian consulates, preventing interceptions of communications

on Parliament Hill, and encrypting government computer systems. CSEC staff are trained in encryption, decoding, languages, engineering, and information technology. The secretive nature of CSEC means that as an organization it is subject to inadequate accountability measures. More recently, changes to the *National Defence Act* and the *Anti-Terrorism Act* have sig-

nificantly enhanced the operations of the agency, as CSEC's budget has grown from approximately \$45 million in the late-1990s to over \$275 million by 2010–2011; CSEC's workforce has also doubled from 900 employees in the late-1990s to 2,040 in December 2012.

✓ Fig. 1



While CSEC has been named a "rising force" of surveillance and security in Canada, many of their activities remain highly secret. Gathering data using the *Access to Information Act* (ATIA), newspaper reports, and online publications, we have investigated the publicly known elements of the new "Camelot Project."<sup>1</sup> A leading rationale for the new facility, often repeated by CSEC in internal documents, is "CSEC's major shift in operational focus post-9/11, Canadian involvement in Afghanistan and the explosion in cyber threats to key government communications infrastructure." Now with over 2,000 employees and claims of processing more data on a daily basis than all of Canada's major banks combined, CSEC's security intelligence operations have accelerated, not declined, since the end of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> It is at the intersection of CSEC's expanding security practices and the architectural demands of their new complex that we can investigate the

construction of new "Camelot" as a moment of excess. We contrast the thick, concrete brutalism characteristic of Cold War security intelligence headquarters and federal buildings, with the unbearable lightness of what we call "new security architecture," which deploys the modern tropes of openness and transparency, costly formalities that attempt to distract from the actual, ongoing transformations in the role of security intelligence in federal government.

### The New Camelot: Excess and the Unbearable Lightness of New Security Architecture

In the post-9/11 context, CSEC's dramatic escalation in resources is best appreciated in relation to the dramatic expansion of security bureaucracies at the federal level. Across the public sector, the acceleration of security spending has been staggering: in the 10 years following 9/11, an additional \$92 billion (CAN) in national security

spending has been allotted over and above the amount it would have spent had budgets remained in line with pre-9/11 levels.<sup>3</sup> In this environment of widespread securitization, CSEC has been a major beneficiary in terms of both resource allocation and public profile.

As the mission and purpose of CSEC has greatly expanded, the agency has demanded a new complex to fulfill their SIGNIT duties as well as complement their new profile as Canada's premiere spy agency. A briefing note on the new complex claims that it will "distinguish Canada as a leader among its intelligence [name redacted] allies for this type of showcase facility. Canada obtains enormous benefit from CSEC through this alliance, [redacted]. This project will demonstrate Canada's continued commitment to contributing to its international intelligence partnerships." To fulfill these new responsibilities, CSEC undertook preparations to build its new "Camelot" in the Spring of 2006.

Funded as a Public-Private Partnership (PPP), the project was known originally as the Long Term Accommodation Project (LTAP). Canada's Department of National Defence outlined a comprehensive risk analysis in order to devise a work schedule. The excessive risk analysis added to the extreme cost of the project. Risks were

identified and catalogued through a series of "risk workshops" held in the Spring of 2008 with approximately 30 experts from DND, Defence Construction Canada, Department of Justice (DOJ), CSEC, and industry consultants. Covering a vast array of potential problems that could harm the spy building, the specialists produced a risk matrix containing 170+ risks and grouped these into four categories: 1) Procurement and Approvals risks; 2) Design and Construction risks; 3) Building Services risks; and 4) IT Equipment and IT Services risks. After several years of risk matrix meetings and Monte Carlo simulations, construction finally began in 2012. In designing the new "Camelot," CSEC planning represents what Bent Flyvbjerg calls a "Machiavellian Mega-project," rife with government overspending on top of an excessive original budget.<sup>4</sup>

✓ Fig. 2



CSEC's new venture will result in something resembling the functionality of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) campus in Langley, Virginia, which is excessive in its own right. While CSEC has not been forthcoming about many of the substantive aspects of the Camelot complex, a request for proposals issued by Defence Construction Canada details how the facility space will be split into two main functions: an office area "that generally encompasses the typical open and closed offices, support spaces, meeting rooms, training rooms, etc. required to accommodate management and office administrative functions," and a "Special Purpose Space" that would include areas required for "special operational functions" such as a data centre, electronic labs, computer rooms, fabrication shops, secure areas, as well as facilities like loading docks, building entries, cafeterias.

Original plans for the Camelot Project shown to CSEC employees noted that the complex would be equipped with a hockey rink, basketball and volleyball courts, and a bank. The diagrams also showed hiking trails, as well as a hobby garden (to be used by the spy agency's "Horticultural Society"), coffee bar, cafeteria, kitchenettes and showers. Some items have been dropped, according to CSEC, after media reports and negative public reaction.<sup>5</sup> Yet, while CSEC tries to deflect the excessive cost and amenities within the facility (during these times of so-called austerity), they also promote their need for excesses to lure the best talent. CSEC's new "cutting-edge facility," according to an internal memo, will "[enhance] CSEC's appeal to the best and brightest technical, linguistic, mathematics, computer science, and network defence capabilities experts."

Appealing to the need for more security resources in the context of the "war on terror," CSEC has promoted the Camelot Project as a "one-of-a-kind facility with an adaptable work environment that will enhance CSEC's ability to respond quickly to critical events or attacks and coordinate with multi-agency responses." More specifically, CSEC has promoted the close proximity of the new complex to CSIS—Canada's other spy agency—and a proposed skywalk to link the facilities of the sister spy agencies. "The heads of CSIS and CSEC have committed to a skyway as a symbol

of co-operation between the two agencies at the Blair and Ogilvie location," points out a memo released through the ATIA.

CSEC's "Project Camelot" is a marked departure from the architectural style of security intelligence headquarters and federal government buildings erected in North America during the 1960s. Many state buildings erected during the Cold War in Canada were notable in terms of their brutalist design. As an architectural movement and style, brutalism in Canada was marked by stark exhibitions of almost fortress-like structures, barren surfaces, weight and massiveness.<sup>6</sup> This style of brutalism distinguishes many security intelligence headquarters around the globe, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) headquarters, built in the 1960s in downtown Washington DC. Brutalism makes for blunt, concrete compounds that are intimidating and defensive; it exhibits an symbolic display of force and secrecy typical of Cold War state complexes.

The excessive costs and consumption of public space of Communications Security Establishment Canada's "Project Camelot" are exemplary of what we refer to as the unbearable lightness of new security architecture. Grace, unblemished thin lines, and the use of materials such as glass that indicate openness and transparency mark the new security architecture. The planning documents and promotions for CSEC's "Project Camelot" suggest that CSEC grounds will be open to the public and that they have nothing to hide. This is precisely why the lightness of the design is unbearable: the architecture and its symbolism come at the very moment when CSEC is furtively overreaching into global communications like never before.

Fig. 3 ↗

Fig. 4 →



CSEC's "Project Camelot" is also said to be environmentally friendly. The complex is billed as eco-friendly (where "Nature Meets Technology") and as "a new state-of-the-art technology centre" to support contemporary intelligence-gathering needs. To maximize potential returns (and public dollar savings) through the PPP, the risk determination "was made based on the perceived ability to make assumptions regarding the risk's outcome in terms that could be translated into dollars." While a public sector union representing workers inside CSEC has dubbed the "Taj Mahal" because of its excess, CSEC has emphasized the environmental features of the new building.<sup>7</sup> Camelot is "a modern, intelligent building," claims a promotional guide from Plenary Properties, the private firm who will design, build, maintain, and project finance the complex. Plenary also notes that the complex will employ "innovative design features to ensure that CSEC remains at the forefront of mechanical, electrical, security and information technology." While most of the details of the project have been shrouded in secrecy, CSEC has touted how Camelot will be designed to achieve LEED Gold certification and meet BOMA BEST certification. Celebrating a few solar panels that aim to provide 35 per cent of the energy needed to operate the shipping and receiving room, CSEC can ignore the colossal environmental impact of their enormous facility and claim that the new complex "displays and demonstrates CSEC's commitment to stewardship of the environment by incorporating sustainable design principles and prudent use of natural resources."

Using CSEC's "Project Camelot" as a case study, we can contrast the brutalism of Cold War security intelligence headquarters with the unbearable lightness of what we call the new security architecture, which gestures toward openness and transparency, revealing with these tropes new elements of both security and architecture concerning state complexes. Rather than an architecture of fear that promotes division and suspicion, the new security architecture attempts to counter this intimidating style with an inviting, open design and translucent surfaces.<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, the symbolism of openness communicated by the glass edifice of this security intelligence headquarters pulls a beguiling veil over the clandestine practices that transpire inside.

Functionally, the architectural move toward openness and visibility is inversely proportional to the proliferation of surveillance assemblages we witness today, making the new "Camelot" emblematic of security regimes that function as "a power without an exterior."<sup>9</sup> Yet the regimes of surveillance associated with CSEC and Canada's security intelligence assemblage are accompanied by significant social consequences. Most directly, we can cite the immediate impact that practices of surveillance agencies have had on Arab and Muslim populations in Canada: renditions, secret trials, and racial profiling have been extensively detailed and, given the continued acceleration of security resources, will likely intensify. Secondly, we would point to the expansion of "counter-terrorism" to other realms of policing such as surveillance efforts that target indigenous peoples and various social movements.<sup>10</sup> While CSEC may not have direct involvement in domestic surveillance projects, the architectures of security—both physical and bureaucratic—have facilitated the amassing of vast public resources to cast the lens of the state over an increasing area of the social field.

The renown of King Arthur's Camelot has little to do with stones and mortar; its mythic influence stems from both mystique and eminence, a testament to its power. Likewise, the new security architecture of Project Camelot no longer relies on the fortress-like symbolism that marked many federal state buildings in Canada and the

US. Instead, it is designed as a model of eminence: lightness and visibility are its symbolic hallmarks, transforming a hyper-secretive organization into a celebrated public showpiece. While CSEC now promotes the symbolism of lightness, the shadow of an expanding security state is the indelible imprint of this new regime of governmentality. As "security" increasingly comes to govern the social field, the "New Camelot" stands as a monument to the excesses of the security industrial complex.✕

✓ Fig. 4



#### Figures

- 1 Tilley Building  
Sneaky Buggers... we thought it was a Zamboni Factory! Source: Google.
- 2 Construction of the new "Camelot"  
Making Up New Security Architecture. Source: *Ottawa Citizen*.
- 3 Camelot exterior artistic rendering  
The Public Aura of New Security Architecture. Source: Plenary Group.
- 4 Camelot interior artistic rendering  
The Clean Excess of New Security Architecture. Source: Plenary Group.
- 5 Camelot interior  
More Clean Excess of New Security Architecture. Source: Plenary Group.

#### Endnotes

- 1 Colin Freeze, "National Security 'Up For Sale,' Public-service Union Charges," *Globe and Mail*, 15 January 2011, A8.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 David Macdonald, *The Price of 9/11: Tracking the Creation of a National Security Establishment in Canada* (Ottawa: Rideau Institute, 2011).
- 4 Bent Flyvbjerg, "Machiavellian Megaprojects," *Antipode* 37, no. 1 (2005): 18–22.
- 5 David Pugliese, "A Camelot for Canadian Spies," *Ottawa Citizen*, 9 October 2012, A1.
- 6 Réjean Legault, "The Idea of Brutalism in Canadian Architecture," in *Architecture and the Canadian Fabric*, ed. Rodri Liscombe (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).
- 7 David Pugliese, "New Spy HQ to Get Filtered Fountain Water," *Ottawa Citizen*, 19 December 2009, A4.
- 8 Nan Ellin, ed., *Architecture of Fear* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997).
- 9 François Ewald, "A Power Without an Exterior," in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, ed. T. J. Armstrong (New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 169–175.
- 10 See Jeffrey Monaghan and Kevin Walby, "Making up 'Terror Identities': Security Intelligence and Canada's Integrated Threat Assessment Centre," *Policing & Society* 22, no. 2 (2012): 133–151; and Andy Crosby and Jeffrey Monaghan, "Settler Governmentality and the Algonquin of Barriere Lake," *Security Dialogue* 43, no. 5 (2012): 420–437.

#### Bios

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