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## **Inquiry into the analytic independence of the Office of National Assessments**

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The Hon. Margaret Stone  
Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security  
under the *Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security Act 1986*

**Public report**

9 January 2017

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## 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This is the fourth inquiry into the analytic independence of the Office of National Assessments (ONA) to be completed by the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security (IGIS) since 2007. The inquiry was not prompted by a particular concern; it is intended as an update to the previous inquiries. As with previous inquiries, it did not address either the accuracy of ONA's assessments or the extent to which they meet the needs of policy officers and Ministers, such matters are beyond the jurisdiction of this office. The earlier inquiries, particularly the 2010 and 2013 inquiries, concluded that ONA had sound systems in place for developing, testing and reviewing its assessments and thus for guarding its independence. Given these earlier findings it was regarded as appropriate for the present inquiry to review a smaller sample of ONA assessments than would otherwise have been the case. Had the review of the initial sample identified any concerns additional sampling would have been undertaken however, as no such concerns arose, it was decided that additional sampling was not necessary.
- 1.2 The assessments and other documents examined in this inquiry indicated that within ONA appropriate procedures continue to be observed. This inquiry, as with its predecessors, found no evidence of improper interference with the independence of ONA assessments. Key factors that contributed to this finding included:
- IGIS staff were able independently to access relevant ONA records to review planning documents, records of consultation, draft assessments and the intelligence relied on to support the sampled ONA assessments.
  - Draft versions of the reports that were reviewed in this inquiry contained comprehensive endnotes used to capture information from both formal and informal sources. All sampled assessment reports referenced source information which often included lengthy commentary on the significance of the referenced material reflecting the analyst's considerations and enabling comprehensive review.
  - ONA policies and practices encourage contestability and there is evidence that staff regularly debate issues constructively. Differences of opinion between analysts are usually resolved by discussion and reports nuanced to reflect developed consensus. ONA has a formal dissent mechanism which, although very rarely used, provides the opportunity for an analyst to formally record their dissent and have it brought to the attention of the Director-General.
  - ONA has a structured system for reviewing key judgements. These reviews are conducted periodically and indicate that ONA critically reviews the assessments it has made.
- 1.3 There was only one substantive change noted by this inquiry: ONA has moved to an electronic record keeping system. Like other agencies that have made this transition ONA faces the ongoing challenge of ensuring that the system is easy to use and that staff consistently save documents and emails in the correct folders so that they can be easily retrieved. It appears that a small number of analysts need additional training and encouragement to comply with record keeping requirements.
- 1.4 There are no formal recommendations arising from this inquiry.