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Proposed army spy unit raises worry Critics suspicious of operations 'unknown to Canadians'

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OTTAWA — Critics are raising concerns about a new unit of the Canadian Forces that is charged with collecting intelligence for overseas missions.

Rhiannon Andrews, a Canadian Forces spokeswoman, confirmed yesterday that the military is putting together a new unit to collect intelligence in support of deployed missions.

While the Forces will not confirm details about the unit, such as the number of staff, the total cost or specific areas of involvement, its name is the Human Intelligence Unit, and, given its mandate to support missions abroad, its priority will almost certainly be intelligence relating to operations in Afghanistan.

The Canadian Forces have been involved in such intelligence gathering since the 1990s, Ms. Andrews said.

The Forces confirmed the existence of the unit after news reports this week.

But critics are concerned about how the plans were kept secret, and what type of oversight mechanism will monitor the unit.

Liberal defence critic Ujjal Dosanjh said that while Canadians don't need to know the details of what the new unit will do, they should know that it exists, and who is watching it.

"I would be worried if we didn't know that there was an intelligence operation or operations being set up with millions of dollars at the disposal of the military, unknown to Canadians," he said.

Canadian intelligence-gathering operations generally come under Public Safety Canada or the Department of National Defence. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Canada's spy agency, falls under the mandate of Public Safety Canada. But CSIS is generally not allowed to carry out overseas tracking. The Communications Security

Establishment, Canada's wiretap agency, is under the Department of National Defence. It was created to eavesdrop outside of Canada, but is not allowed to track Canadians at home or abroad.

It is not yet clear what, if any, similar restrictions will be imposed on the Human Intelligence Unit.

Mr. Dosanjh, who sits on Parliament's special committee on the Canadian mission in Afghanistan, said he will bring the issue of the new unit up with his colleagues shortly, before deciding what to do next.

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