



How Thick is Our Security Blanket?

**“hot topic” security luncheon speech
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**at the
8th Annual Privacy & Security Conference**

**“Identity Management & Information Protection
in the Digital World:
Can We Meet the Challenge?”**

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Slide 1 Title page

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

As Chief of Police, I am accustomed to speaking to audiences about

- law enforcement,
- the laws under which police work,
- the multiple challenges of community safety,
- strategic priorities in policing and security,
- the constraints and realities of police budgets, and
- the opportunities that make policing such a rewarding and enriching profession.

Today I am taking a giant step out of my comfort zone.

And I don't have a security blanket with me.

Slide 2 Knit one, purl one

Today I am going to talk about knitting.

Yes, you heard me.

There was a time, not so long ago, when we were persuaded that real men eat quiche. Then it was cappuccino, and Portobello mushrooms.

I'm not afraid to tell you that I've had more than one slice of quiche. I enjoy a cappuccino from time to time, and I can barbeque a fine Portobello.

In my profession, we try to remain on top of the issues and trends that are sweeping the globe, our continent, our nation and our individual communities.

The trends that interest us most are those related to our safety and security.

And so, personally, I haven't picked up the tools of another recent trend that is sweeping North America.

But more than one source says that the knitting is the new trend. It is gaining momentum in all age groups and genders, and particularly among men.

Airlines allow passengers to knit during flights. It calms them down. There is now a guide on the etiquette of knitting during meetings.

Now, the connection between knitting and security is not immediately obvious, and I understand if you are sceptical at this point.

But let's consider knitting as a metaphor for security.

People are drawn to knitting because

- it increases their sense of well-being and reduces internal turmoil,
- it allows them to create something unique that suits their need, and
- it produces something tangible, formed by connecting assorted bits and pieces into a cohesive whole.

When we consider protecting ourselves from the threats to our security, we find many of the same things:

- the basic human need for an individual and collective sense of well-being,
- something that is shaped to meet our specific threat situation, and
- an output that is shaped from a variety of inputs (information and criminal intelligence, for example).

Slide 3 Challenges in information technology

This annual conference is a significant annual event that brings government policy-makers, practitioners, technology experts and the corporate sector together to deliberate pressing issues around privacy and security.

The relationship of these two basic human needs is an ongoing and fluid interaction.

We often describe it as a balancing act, with the challenge of achieving equilibrium.

Usually, our discussions at this event centre around the threats to personal information, and the means of making that information secure.

These challenges are huge. We are reminded daily of the growing threats to our individual, community, national and global safety and security through a multitude of criminal activities.

- Today we see sophisticated counterfeiting, not only of currencies but also of documents, such as fake passports that allow criminals and terrorists to breach borders.
- Consumers are warned to be vigilant about identity theft, which results in credit card frauds, mortgage frauds, and many others.
- Corporate laxity in the handling of personal information, and insufficient security measures to protect information holdings, can have disastrous results when financial information ends up in the wrong hands. Public

confidence in the security of electronic business transactions is being eroded.

- Our children's window to the world, through the Internet, exposes them to threats even inside the safety and security of their own homes.

I am going to take a slightly different angle, and focus on the protection of information for reasons other than personal privacy, and some of the issues around information protection as it relates to our safety and security as a nation.

Slide 4 Politics of information protection

In the policing and national security realms, there is no such thing as too much information. Information is the life-blood of our work.

A complex system of analysis distils raw information into criminal intelligence.

Collecting information, handling it, analysing it, and sharing it among

- elected and non-elected officials,
- law enforcement, and
- national security agencies

is a current challenge that preoccupies our governments and every organization that has a public safety mandate.

But how much information is enough, and how much is too much?

Who determines what information can or should be shared? How do we decide with whom, and when?

What information do we protect, and from whom?

What do decision-makers do with this information?

What is the basis of those decisions?

Let's add to this debate the public dimension. Important questions arise about

- what the public has the right to know,
- what the public needs to know,
- who makes these decisions, and
- how these determinations are made.

We can start by recognizing that perfect security is the ideal. This ideal cannot be achieved. We cannot protect ourselves against every threat. There is no security blanket large enough to cover us and tuck us in.

The United Kingdom decided long ago that terrorist attacks could not be allowed to shut down normal life. In the aftermath of every recent terrorist event, normalcy kicks in rapidly. The regular rhythm resumes.

We have many stakeholders in the area of information protection. There are many compromises made in deciding what information to disseminate, and what to hold close.

Some believe that, in the absence of a direct attack on Canada, we may be underestimating the threats that face us. There is a reason why.

It is because we are protected from key information that is known only to security experts and governments.

Similarly, information is protected from those who are deemed non-essential consumers of the facts, assumptions and hypotheses that it may contain.

A determination has been made by governments, police and security agencies, who tiptoe on a fine line between

- informing the public about the assessed risk to their safety and security, and
- alarming the public with information about threats they cannot see and feel powerless to overcome.

As a result, most people feel more threatened by specific events that are taking place in the streets of their own communities, than they do by the possibility of a terrorist attack.

This makes it very difficult for the average person to evaluate the adequacy of our current security measures.

Governments re-assure citizens with announcements of funding directed to more, greater, technologically-advanced and security measures. We are all subject to onerous security procedures, which we accept as the cost of doing business these days.

However, the effectiveness of those measures and procedures is sometimes called into question by inside “whistle-blowers”.

The Senate Committee on National Security examines Canada’s state of readiness for terrorist incidents and breaches of national security.

The Committee regularly concludes that our preparedness is inadequate. It warns that the different levels of government are poorly coordinated to respond to emergencies.

Even within the federal domain, the numerous departments with public safety and national security responsibilities face challenges of working together.

The Committee has pointed to holes in our security blanket, despite the efforts of successive governments. Many compare our arrangements to a patchwork quilt, whose pieces are not all aligned or securely joined to one another.

Frank P. Harvey, Professor of International Relations at the Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, Dalhousie University, has written extensively about global terrorism and international and national security policy.

He has asked some provocative questions about our approach to security.

Among the issues he raises is the relationship between our sense of safety and security, and the freedoms we have been prepared to sacrifice.

He notes that spending on security is matched by a loss of personal freedom. But there is no guarantee that the measures now in place are adequate to protect us.

No elected official wants to downplay the risk of a security attack, out of fear that one might occur during his or her watch. No one loses votes by calling for more security.

As a result, Professor Harvey states, “controlled panic” is the position any reasonable office-holder would take on the issue of security.

Slide 5 Ethical considerations

The politics of information protection have many implications.

The security versus privacy balancing act is one we constantly struggle to achieve.

We want evidence that the increasing expenditures in information-gathering, data analysis systems, processes, training, equipment and technology are resulting in increased security.

We have placed our safety in the hands of those with the knowledge and expertise to create a security blanket.

Within the ongoing debate about security, is another discussion among police chiefs and senior executives. This debate centres on the ethics of information protection.

The relationship of trust between police and governments is exemplified in our efforts to achieve national safety and security. Governments must be assured that turf wars or particular interests among agencies do not compromise joint work.

All practitioners are bound, as a matter of ethics, to put safety and security foremost.

The relationship of trust between police and community is an essential ingredient to community safety and, by extension, national security.

The community is the source of information that becomes intelligence. It is where leads originate. It is where fear is experienced and where the effect of terrorism will be felt.

Police grapple with many ethical considerations around information relating to the safety and security of our communities and our nation.

As professionals, we are obliged to “speak truth to power”. This means not mincing the truth, not diminishing our assessment of risk, and not underestimating our capacity or our requirements.

This is consistent with our responsibility to provide input to our governments on policy and resource matters relating to public safety and security.

It is also consistent with our ethical code, which obliges us to

- “advance the cause of public safety ... vigorously and with foresight”, and
- to be a wise steward of public resources that are entrusted to police services.

So what is the issue here?

In speaking to our political leaders about the safety and security situation—both its risks and our capacity to prevent and respond—we have a professional and moral obligation to speak the truth as we understand it.

Like elected officials, we cannot take the risk of underestimating the threat. On the other hand, telling it like it is brings forth other dynamics.

Some elected officials perceive police assessments of resource needs as a self-serving means of increasing police budgets on the back of the security priority.

The dilemma for police, and for other law enforcement officials, is to communicate sufficient information to accurately convey the risk, without compromising the integrity of the information or its use.

Our communication with the public is equally fraught with ethical dilemmas.

Our public wants assurances that all is well, that matters are well in hand, and that police and other officials are duly prepared for an event of magnitude.

As police we are highly conscious of the effect that fear of crime has on the public's confidence and sense of personal safety and security.

Like political leaders, police walk that fine line between speaking the truth and inciting alarm.

One of my colleagues, chief of a major Canadian city, tells us about appearing on a radio talk show. In the course of the conversation, he remarked that, if listeners knew what he did about the threats to their safety and security, they—like him—would not sleep well at night. He spoke the truth.

But, as you can imagine, this caused considerable alarm among the listening audience, the police governance board, and the media. The chief moved quickly into damage control.

Slide 6 Choices: cables or lace?

This brings us to the choices we must make in crafting our response to safety and security threats.

From my perspective, as a Chief of Police and President of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, our responsibility is clear.

We are not the ones making the decisions about the safety net. We do not make the choices from the many options and variations.

Let me return to my figurative knitting.

Governments make the decisions on whether the security blanket will be made of cables—dense, thick and difficult to penetrate—or lace—airy, light and porous.

As police leaders, our responsibility is to speak the truth to decision-makers.

This means accurately assessing

- the risk,
- our capacity and ability to respond,
- our strategic priorities, and
- our resource, technology and expertise requirements.

Our responsibilities lie on many fronts.

We have a duty to advocate legislative reform where we see that changes would strengthen our ability to respond to threats.

We have an obligation to inform governments of the resource allocation need to meet our responsibilities.

It is imperative that we advise on policy improvements that would enhance our operations.

For police leaders, two factors predominate:

- advancing the cause of public safety trumps all other considerations, and
- sound stewardship of our safety and security resources is a paramount trust.

Slide 7 Creating the right security blanket

I will now turn the knitting needles over to governments, whose challenge is to create the right security blanket for our communities and our nation.

It is this security blanket that practitioners such as police will wrap around our communities.

What does the right security blanket look like? What needs must it meet?

These are the tough decisions that our elected officials make.

They make these decisions with input from many stakeholders, and especially from police, other law enforcement, and national security officials.

They gauge the public appetite for stronger measures and increased expenditures.

We all accept that total and utter security is impossible. We recognize that we cannot, realistically, prepare for every kind of threat that we might face, in every place where it might occur.

And we recognize that, apart from our input, political considerations will influence the decisions that governments make.

Our responsibility is to ensure that this input is frank and forthright, and that we are fearless in providing our advice.

The question posed by this conference is “Can we meet the challenge?”

I’m not sure. The risks are great, our capacity is limited.

We can determine the possibility of a threat of magnitude only with

- the best intelligence available to us and
- the most prudent protection of that information.

What I am sure about is that the challenge of protecting our security lies with us all. We each have a part in the risk management around safety and security.

We have a role in deciding the size and shape of our security blanket. We have a voice in its weight, how closely spaced its stitches are, and how many holes penetrate the fabric. We have the means of deciding who, what and where it will cover.

It is a work in progress.