

'This was the largest mass murder in Canadian history'

» Not only did federal agents fail to bring terrorists to justice 25 years ago – they still fail today, Mr. Major concluded.

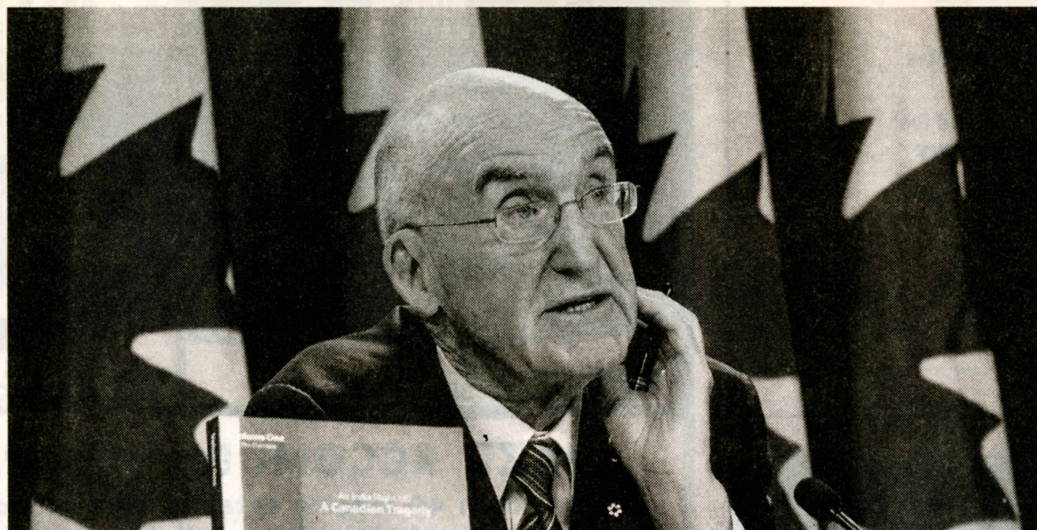
He also criticized the line that federal agents take in dismissing past bungling – “that was then, this is now.”

“The commission rejects that position,” he writes, adding that systemic failings have to be addressed before terrorists attack Canada again.

“There is a need for reform of our institutions which must not have to wait for the urgency that would arise from another terrorist attack.”

Mr. Major lays abundant blame at the feet of the RCMP and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service for botched the probe into the 1985 Air India bombings. He argued that problems and turf wars are systemic in the security agencies, and greatly hamper terrorism investigations today.

“This was the largest mass murder in Canadian history,” Mr. Major said, adding the



Former Supreme Court justice John Major reported that Canada needed a security czar to stop a “cascading series of errors.” CHRIS WATTIE/REUTERS

problems he is trying to address remain urgent matters of life and death.

Calling the findings a “damning indictment,” Prime Minister Stephen Harper promised to respond “positively.” A trio of his govern-

ment ministers said Thursday they will take a serious look at the advice, but they would not commit to specific changes.

With or without the government’s political will, it will be a difficult road for Mr. Major’s

vision to become reality. Mounties, mandarins, and defence lawyers armed with Charter challenges will likely take aim at batting back his most radical ideas.

His provocative findings are already rankling security serv-

ices. Members of Canada’s security intelligentsia are already privately bristling about “mandate creep” being imposed upon them. They suggest Mr. Major is conflating 1984 snafus with present-day realities where spies and police can and do convict terrorists.

Some of the inquiry findings run against recent rulings that have urged greater separation between CSIS and the RCMP – not closer partnerships. “The courts are going to scream bloody murder,” one former federal official said. “There are different lanes in the roadway. We can run things in parallel.”

Margaret Bloodworth, a former national-security adviser at the Privy Council Office, said in testimony during Mr. Major’s hearings that in a parliamentary system, a security czar should be a conciliator, not a boss.

Mr. Major made it clear he disagrees. He said the essential problem with Canada’s

national-security systems is that “no one is in charge.”

Only a vastly empowered national security adviser could force police and spies to work together, he said.

CSIS – a clandestine agency – is too introverted, his findings suggest, and too eager to jealously hold onto potential life-saving information.

Mr. Major says CSIS is beholden to an antiquated “we-don’t-collect-evidence” mentality. Faulting agents for erasing surveillance tapes of Air India’s conspirators, he said the spy service should keep its surveillance records for 25 years at a stretch – and grow accustomed to sometimes producing the recordings in court.

And the problems work both ways: Mr. Major laments that the RCMP views CSIS like a high-minded CrimeStoppers tip line. Too many Mounties, he said, subscribe to a mindset that “the less information we receive from CSIS, the better.”