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**Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
Senate Committee
Monday, 12 February 2024**

Additional Estimates

**Opening Statement by Director-General of National Intelligence,
Andrew Shearer**

Since ONI last appeared before this Committee, Australia's international environment has become only more complicated – expanding the challenges government faces in upholding our national interests and protecting our national security, and further increasing the demands on ONI and the wider National Intelligence Community.

The attack by Hamas on Israel on 7 October last year, the conflict in Gaza and spill-over into the Red Sea, Syria and Iraq, and the uptick in fighting along the Israel/Lebanon border, have been a major focus. The risk of further escalation in the Middle East remains very real.

This comes on top of existing priorities, including the grinding war in Ukraine.

More extensive and consequential strategic cooperation between authoritarian revisionist powers – such as North Korea's provision of ballistic missiles and ammunition to Russia, and Iran's supply of armed drones to the Houthi – is of increasing concern. These links are shaping battlefield outcomes and moving the strategic dial, in Europe and the Middle East.

Together these developments are undermining deterrence and reassurance – placing even greater strain on the global balance of

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power and the rules-based order it enabled. An order that allowed sovereignty to flourish and economies to thrive, including ours.

This year will feature numerous elections. According to the Economist, more than half of the world's population will cast votes this year. That includes last month's election in Taiwan and this Wednesday's presidential election in Indonesia, among many other consequential elections – injecting even more uncertainty.

Simultaneously, trends relating to technological advances, cyber activity, espionage, foreign interference and transnational crime continue to shape the national security landscape and test our intelligence capabilities and preparedness.

We are seeing our longstanding collective technological edge starting to erode and have to work harder and faster to remain competitive.

And the overlap between national security, economic security, and technology continues to expand as these elements become increasingly intertwined.

These trends are requiring us to work with a growing range of partners across and beyond government.

And we are seeing governments around the world grappling with policy and regulatory responses to many of these challenges – which again highlights that we have to keep strengthening our established international relationships and forging new ones.

The role of intelligence today has never been more crucial.

Together, ONI and the broader National Intelligence Community, are working hard to help the government make sense of a dynamic and very complex operating environment for Australia.

ONI's Open Source function – responsible for collecting, interpreting and disseminating open source information – is expanding and developing new tools and techniques. It works increasingly closely

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with our all-source analytical teams, with NIC agencies and with other partners.

In parallel, ONI continues to strengthen our enterprise-level leadership, coordination, and evaluation of the National Intelligence Community.

In that context we welcome our very constructive interactions to date with the Independent Intelligence Review team.

The Australian Government and Australian taxpayers make a substantial investment in our intelligence capabilities, and ONI is committed to meeting their legitimate expectations of us and ensuring that we continue to help maintain a safe and prosperous Australia.

I would like to close by acknowledging the hard work of all staff across ONI and the wider National Intelligence Community during the past 12 months. From my vantage point today 2024 looks like it will be every bit as demanding. Thank you.

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