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## Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions

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### Commission request for summary information on briefing to Erin O'Toole

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*This document has been prepared by the Government of Canada for the purpose of the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions. It responds to a specific request by the Commission for an unclassified summary of information regarding a briefing given to a former Member of Parliament by CSIS officials and should not be used as the basis for understanding any other topic. This document discloses only information that would not cause injury to the critical interests of Canada or its allies, national defence or national security.*

*The following summary was released in Protected B format to Erin O'Toole. With his consent, this document is now unclassified.*

#### Summary of Key Messages

On May 26, 2023, CSIS officials met with Erin O'Toole to inform him of the PRC's threat of foreign interference involving him.

The MP was informed that the Service was legislatively prohibited from sharing classified information except to the federal government except in very specific circumstances, and that it would be invoking its threat reduction mandate in order to lawfully conduct the classified briefing.

CSIS advised that it had reasonable grounds to believe that foreign interference activities directed towards Mr. O'Toole by the PRC's Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and their proxies constitute a threat to the security of Canada, and that this briefing would be provided to sensitize Mr. O'Toole to the specific nature of the foreign interference threat facing him.

As a number of foreign interference channels rely on being able to operate covertly, this briefing would provide Mr. O'Toole with the necessary information, including classified information, to help him identify threats he may be facing now or may face in the future.

With a better understanding of PRC foreign interference methodology and tradecraft, Mr. O'Toole would be better able to reduce the effectiveness of such threats in the future, enabling him to respond and resist foreign interference efforts by reporting them to CSIS and other authorities, or by taking other protective measures.

CSIS provided Mr. O'Toole with CSIS' assessment of the narrative appearing in the media. CSIS added that the narrative is damaging to the public trust in our democracy. CSIS asked that, given there were currently four bi-elections in process, out of respect

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for those contests, Mr. O'Toole should take steps so that today's discussion does not become part of the political narrative that may impact those elections.

CSIS provided a caveat to Mr. O'Toole that CSIS normally places on its information when sharing it with partners. Although this is for when CSIS shares intelligence in written form, the principle remains the same. CSIS does this so that it is clear to everyone, what the intended purposes of sharing the information is and how it can be used. CSIS asked that Mr. O'Toole respect this caveat and read the following:

"CSIS information is for your own awareness and consumption and cannot be re-purposed for other outcomes or interests, such as legal proceedings or sharing with other individuals in private or public settings without consulting with, or receiving written permission from CSIS. While we adhere to Access to Information requests and the Privacy Act, CSIS's standard practice with information requests and with partners is that we reserve the right to protect our information under Section 38 of the Canada Evidence Act or other applicable legislation to protect it."

CSIS further emphasised the importance of keeping the information confidential.

CSIS explained that in the context of the CSIS Act, Foreign Interference (FI) activities are clandestine or coercive in nature and are conducted by foreign diplomats, intelligence officers, state proxies and co-optees including key members of diaspora communities.

CSIS added that FI activities may increase leading up to and following elections, but also occur outside regular election cycles (i.e. some states play 'the long game'). CSIS continues to investigate FI activities of Hostile States on a daily basis.

CSIS advised that Chinese Communist Party (CCP) United Front Work is primarily coordinated by the United Front Work Department (UFWD), which is directly subordinate to the CCP Central Committee, a body of approximately 200 individuals who represent the apex of political power in the PRC. For the PRC, FI is undertaken as United Front Work (UFW), through which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seeks to coopt, reorient, or silence non-party elites (e.g., those with perceived influence). This occurs both within and outside of China, to adopt or otherwise support Party narratives and policies, or at the least to not actively oppose them.

The current head of the UFWD is a member of the CCP Central Committee's Politburo, which is a smaller body who runs the PRC on a more day-to-day basis. The Politburo is a more accurate equivalent to Canada's Cabinet.

The official Cabinet-equivalent in the PRC system is the PRC State Council, but the State Council has no real decision-making power, it is more of an implementation body. In other words, UFW is perceived as essential to the survival of the CCP and, as a result, UFW is managed and directed by the highest levels of the CCP leadership.

CSIS provided information concerning who the PRC targets for interference operations.

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The CCP uses UFW to build coalitions, networks, social groups, and relationships with these non-party entities and mobilize them for political support.

CSIS proceeded to explain how in the context of UFW, 'target' is a word used to denote a general interest in an individual. Actions used to 'work on' a target (i.e. targeting someone) can range from overt, direct diplomatic engagement, to the use of proxies or the engagement of PRC security and intelligence services.

CSIS explained how it collects intelligence in accordance with its mandate, as outlined in the CSIS Act. CSIS possesses a variety of tools, warranted and non-warranted, that includes human sources, technical means, and general data collection, which are used to collect intelligence, in compliance with CSIS internal processes and procedures, as well as the legal framework delineated by the Federal Court.

CSIS emphasized that at no time has it collected intelligence indicating a physical threat to Mr. O'Toole or his family, here in Canada or elsewhere. If it had, it would have engaged the RCMP urgently and Mr. O'Toole would have been made aware.

CSIS shared its assessment of how Mr. O'Toole may be perceived by the PRC.

CSIS advised that online / media activities have been observed that were aimed at discouraging Canadians, particularly of Chinese heritage, from supporting the Conservative Party of Canada and Mr. O'Toole in particular. CSIS shared that there were also indicators of potential coordination between various Canada-based Chinese language news outlets as well as PRC and CCP news outlets, but that it was not clear that this online activity was a PRC-directed FI campaign.

CSIS also provided information regarding the PRC's preference regarding party leadership and how this may have been messaged to members of the Chinese-Canadian community.

CSIS also shared an assessment of the residual risk of PRC-directed interference activities.

CSIS added that, as mentioned in the public domain, it has undertaken a number of defensive briefings to elected officials in the past at all three levels of government. The core message of these briefings remains unchanged:

That as long as Mr. O'Toole is an elected official and/or publicly advocates for issues that are viewed by a Foreign State as counter to their national interests, he would remain on their radar for potential influence or interference operations.

That it is critically important to protect himself, his electronic devices, adopt sound travel practices and have a trusted outlet to relay any concerns. Trust your instincts. CSIS can be that trusted outlet to identify security concerns or suspicious incidents.

CSIS summarized by stating that, given Mr. O'Toole's position as an Elected Official, he should expect that the PRC is building an evergreen research file on him, his close

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associates and his public or private positions towards what they view as their national interests.