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Protecting National Security in Partnership with all Canadians

From: **Canadian Security Intelligence Service**

Speech

Remarks by CSIS Director David Vigneault to the University of British Columbia

May 4th, 2022

Good morning. Before I begin, I would first like to acknowledge that we are gathered today on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam people. I recognize that many of you are listening in different places, and therefore, on different traditional Indigenous territory. As a representative of the Government and as a Canadian committed, like all of you, to the ongoing process of reconciliation, I encourage you to take a moment to reflect on that and acknowledge it.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to Tim and Kai for their kind introduction, and of course for the invitation to deliver these remarks at the *University of British Columbia's Institute for Asian Research* during Asian Heritage Month. I also welcome the exceedingly rare opportunity to wear a tie, something that has become a rarity over the last two years. Most importantly, I would like to commend the Institute for the work that it has undertaken since 1978. Facilitating important research, dialogue, and engagement to enhance our understanding of a range of important domestic, regional, and global issues is extremely important and welcomed. The Institute has delivered and continues to support these objectives; and it is exactly for this reason that I am here today, and why CSIS is proud of the ongoing relationships we enjoy with faculty and students at the Institute.

On many occasions during my time as Director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or CSIS, I have expressed the importance of engaging Canadians in informed and candid conversations on national security and intelligence issues. The threats and challenges we face today change and adapt with little notice and continuously complicate our operating

environment. Canada needs to respond with the same resolve. One of the best mitigations remains to harden the target. In simplest terms, we must bolster our defences and make it as difficult as possible for those who wish us harm to achieve success. This approach requires the mature discussion that I am talking about, and that discussion starts by increasing transparency and building trust.

For our part, CSIS has been working hard to be more open and transparent with Canadians because we recognize that trust is earned. We are making this investment to build strong and meaningful relationships with those we are honoured to protect and whose help we rely upon to carry out our important mission. These issues are too important and far too complex to be left to government agencies alone. We serve all Canadians, all communities, all sectors supporting our inclusive democracy and we must strengthen our bonds to ensure we can protect our wonderful country. I speak to all Canadians when I say that you have a partner in CSIS – a strong and dedicated partner; and we need your partnership as we work towards securing our country and building our collective resilience against the threats we face.

No one in this room, or listening virtually, would be surprised to hear that I believe that we are currently in the midst of a pivotal moment in history. The continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has only accelerated the unpredictability of the current environment. Geopolitical, economic, societal, environmental and technological changes are all converging to reshape the world around us at an accelerating pace. People everywhere, including in Canada, are contending with the human, social and economic impacts of these transformations. These trends are impacting our threat environment, and in turn, CSIS as an intelligence agency.

As authoritarian regimes exploit both conventional and new technological means to expand their spheres of influence and control, democracies are being challenged to preserve our way of life and the rules-based international order. The Russian Federation's unjustifiable invasion of Ukraine and the resulting devastation being inflicted on the Ukrainian people are causing ripple effects across the globe, representing but one telling example. The fight for democracy is one we cannot afford to lose.

The world around us is changing at a dizzying pace, and so too is our country. The democratic values we hold so dear are at risk and trust in our institutions is continuously being undermined. We cannot take our democracy or our institutions for granted. It is exactly for this reason that we need to be as transparent as possible with all Canadians.

The use of social media and other online platforms as vectors of disinformation, misinformation, propaganda and hate spread by both individuals and states continues to increase and accelerate. This type of information manipulation and propaganda can have

serious consequences – eroding trust in our democratic institutions and in reasoned deliberation and science. It polarizes public opinion and amplifies conflicting narratives and messaging.

The combination of major disruptive events like the pandemic, the ever-increasing influence of social media, and the spread of conspiracy theories has created an environment ripe for exploitation by influencers and extremists. This environment has the potential to inspire individuals to commit acts of violence. The threat from ideologically motivated violent extremism, commonly referred to as IMVE, is constantly evolving, fuelled by extreme views around race, gender, power and authority. Both online and in the real world, the hateful rhetoric associated with these ideologies is becoming normalized, and is seeping into the mainstream. The threat from violent extremism, whether it is religiously motivated – think of groups like Al Qaeda and Daesh – or ideologically motivated, continues to represent a serious threat to public safety.

Since 2014, Canadians motivated in whole or in part by their extremist ideological views have killed 26 people and wounded 40 others on Canadian soil. Last year, the Government of Canada added four IMVE groups to its terrorist listings regime and we continue to see an increase in IMVE attacks in Canada and around the world. Lone actors remain the primary IMVE threat, as demonstrated by the tragic attack in London, Ontario in June of last year where four members of the same family were deliberately targeted and killed and another seriously injured, because they were Muslim.

CSIS continues to increase its resources – financial, human, and operational – dedicated to investigating and analyzing ideologically motivated violent extremist threats. While IMVE activity, and the toxic dynamics that enable it, represents a threat to all Canadians, the sense of fear is particularly acute for Indigenous Peoples, people of colour, religious minorities, members of the LGBTQ2+ communities, and other groups traditionally targeted by racism, discrimination and harassment. This is categorically unacceptable and reprehensible. I will not mince words with respect to this threat. There is no place in Canada for Islamophobia, Antisemitism or hate in any form.

The importance of involving civil society in a comprehensive and multidimensional response to the threat of violent extremism has been underscored by leading researchers and practitioners studying and countering this threat. Combatting violent extremism requires a concerted and coordinated effort by intelligence services and law enforcement, in cooperation with civic and community leaders, academic researchers and others.

I can tell you that CSIS has prioritized engagement with community leaders, members and advocacy groups in our commitment to ensure the safety and security of all Canadians. We cannot counter these threats alone. We are aware of the negative experiences that some have had with intelligence and law enforcement services, including CSIS, and how those experiences can resonate in hurtful ways with whole communities. We are aware that we must work to improve these relationships, rebuild trust and strengthen our bonds. I can tell you that the process has been challenging and not always successful. That's no surprise, but I can also tell you that as Director of CSIS, I – and our skilled intelligence professionals – remain committed to diligently and respectfully forging ahead towards building trust with communities across the country and, through a better understanding of our respective needs, meet our common goal of protecting our country and its people.

At the same time that we see worrying trends domestically, we are also heavily focused on the actions of authoritarian regimes worldwide and their impacts on individuals, communities and institutions in Canada.

We cannot ignore the world outside our borders, there is no bubble to protect us. More than ever, we need to understand threats in an international context so that we can better protect Canadians and our interests at home and abroad. We must work collaboratively with our allies to counter these threats to democracy and to our citizens.

One threat avenue used by states who wish to exert inappropriate influence on Canada and Canadians, in order to serve their interests, is foreign interference. Foreign interference is not normal diplomatic conduct or simple lobbying by foreign states. Canada's diplomats work every day to advance Canada's interests, and they do so proudly and openly. Foreign interference, on the other hand, is purposely covert and deceptive. States cross a line anytime they conduct activities that attempt to threaten our citizens, compromise our way of life, undermine our democratic processes, or damage our economic prosperity. These activities are accelerating and they are occurring across all levels of our society and all orders of government.

Our country's fundamental institutions, including our free press, open academia, our businesses and our democratic institutions, are all targets of foreign interference activities. Transparency is the best course of action here, as most of those targeted for foreign interference are unaware. Sharing what we know about tactics and tools and areas where states may conduct hostile activities is increasingly part of our job and we need this to be a partnership with all of you.

On university campuses, foreign states seek to exert undue influence, covertly and through proxies, by harassing dissidents and suppressing academic freedoms and free speech that are not aligned with their political interests.

Similarly, these actors may attempt to influence public opinion and debate in Canada through interference in our press or online media. State-sponsored disinformation campaigns represent one way in which states may use hostile activities to discredit our government institutions, and negatively impact social cohesion.

Elected and public officials across all levels of government, representing all political parties, staff, and public servants are also potential targets of foreign interference. Virtually anyone with input into or influence over the public policy decision-making process – is an attractive target for those looking to advance their interests covertly.

Although Canada's electoral system is strong, foreign interference can erode trust and threaten the integrity of our democratic institutions, political system, fundamental rights and freedoms, and, ultimately, our sovereignty. It is exactly for this reason that CSIS delivers security briefings to elected officials across all orders of government to raise awareness of the threat and provide options for mitigation.

Foreign interference activities directed at our democratic institutions and processes can be effective ways for foreign states to achieve their immediate, medium or long-term strategic objectives, even as they undermine our own. These activities threaten our prosperity, strategic interests, and our national security. Remember when I initially spoke about the uncertainty and ambiguity of the geopolitical environment, foreign interference represents hostile activity that may allow a state to secure a competitive advantage and better position themselves within these rapidly evolving dynamics.

Canada is a country of open political systems, democratic processes, social cohesion, academic freedoms, and prosperity. And this is why people chose to come to Canada. Unfortunately, for these same reasons, Canada is an attractive target for foreign interference. Hostile activity by state actors also targets the fabric of Canada's multicultural society, seeking to influence Canadian communities through threats, manipulation and coercion. Some of these communities are being exploited to advance the interests of the offending state. Foreign states and individuals acting at their direction engage in cyber espionage, spread disinformation via social media platforms and issue threats to silence those who speak-out publicly against them. It should come as no surprise that these threat activities run contrary to Canadian values and freedom, and our national interests.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that much of this activity is taking place in the cyber realm. Our country remains a target of malicious cyber-enabled espionage, sabotage, foreign influence and terrorism related activities. Advanced cyber tools are providing new opportunities to states that may not have historically posed a threat in this domain.

At CSIS, we use the powers outlined in our Act to investigate these threats, but we are also liaising closely with our foreign and domestic partners and with the private sector. Given the pace of growth in this space and the presence of rapidly emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing to name a few, we must forge strong partnerships with businesses, universities and communities to ensure that these transformative technologies are not used in a manner detrimental to our collective national security interests. We have worked hard to build relationships with universities and businesses, but we have much more to do. Again, trust is vital so that there is an understanding on both sides of how we can best work together and why it matters.

Now that I've provided you with an overview of the threat landscape, I'd like to tell you about the ways that CSIS is adapting, modernizing, and evolving to ensure the safety and security of all Canadians. Top of mind in this regard are our efforts to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in our workforce and workplace and to integrate these principles in all we do. CSIS has been working to remove systemic barriers and broaden the organization's understanding, and appreciation of diversity of all types. Recognizing the value of diversity and inclusion in CSIS's practices and policies helps CSIS deliver its mandate more effectively. Building cultural competence and understanding and learning to apply an intersectional lens helps us to better connect with and serve all Canadians.

We are also about to launch a new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy for our organization. This strategy was the result of considerable review and consideration of systemic barriers, discrimination, and racism in the organization and was co-developed with employees. It includes a concrete action plan with measurable objectives and timelines as well as steps to ensure accountability and transparency in implementation. We owe our employees, current and future, the very highest priority in this area, and our leadership team is fully committed to the hard work that needs to be done, on an ongoing basis.

Recruiting and retaining intelligence professionals who reflect the environment in which we operate is essential. We have recently launched an Intelligence Officer recruitment campaign aimed at increasing representation amongst employment equity groups and focusing recruitment efforts across Canada to draw on talent pools outside of the National Capital Region.

Like all organizations, CSIS has also been impacted by the confluence of factors over recent years that disrupted the nature of work and the workplace. Given our unique mandate and high security requirements, our offices remained open throughout the pandemic. As Director, I am incredibly proud of the employees of CSIS, and I would like to thank them for their dedication and service to Canadians. Though this enabled us to continue to deliver on our critical mission, it also raised new complexities. We are currently in the midst of transformative change aimed at modernizing our workforce to respond to these challenges. Since our people still need to come to the office, we are committed to making it the best possible workplace. At the same time, we are working to leverage technology to enable more flexible working arrangements, harness the power of data, and recruit the digital-native intelligence professionals of tomorrow.

And on that last point, here today, at a well respected and valued institution of higher learning in our country, I would like to make a shameless plug to all students. CSIS is a great place to work. Please take a look at our website and follow us on Twitter for job openings and, of course, to submit an application. We offer a plethora of interesting and exciting opportunities that will lead you on a path to a promising future. Apologies, I had to do that – never miss an opportunity.

The supersonic speed of technological change is having a massive impact on us and our world. CSIS needs to make significant investments to capitalize on technology to meet our mission and to equip our workforce of the future. And while technology presents enormous opportunity, it also poses a significant threat to an agency that must protect sensitive sources, information and tradecraft. We must work in partnership with the business community and academia to ensure we are positioned to adapt a data-driven and technology rich future. It is absolutely critical to our collective goal of securing our national security.

At the beginning of my remarks, I focused on the need for us to harden the target. I said we needed to do it together, and that we could only do so successfully if our work was underpinned by strong relationships based on trust and transparency. I then laid out the threat environment and the manner in which we see threats manifesting themselves. In doing so, my objective was to demonstrate that the threats we are facing need to be met with a cohesive, collaborative approach. Building sustained relationships between national security agencies and the Canadians we serve has never been more important. Sometimes this is complicated, and really hard. Sometimes we can't share information or tell our story because

real lives – of our human sources or employees – may be on the line. But I know we must strive every day to continue to build trust with Canadians of all communities and we strive to do this by being as transparent as possible with all Canadians.

We need relationships to be effective. We need relationships to provide the trusted intelligence, advice, and action that help keep Canada safe. CSIS is committed to building a trusting and transparent relationship with you. Please join us in achieving that objective – it is crucial to the continued success, prosperity, and security of our country, for you, for me, for our families, and for our children.

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Date modified:

2022-05-04