



Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Election Protocol Panel

Tuesday, September 7, 11h00am to 12h30pm via secure CTSN

Objectives

- Review scenarios with other members of the Election Protocol Panel (Panel) for General Election 44 (GE44), discuss the Panel announcement process, and receive a threat update from SITE.

Run of Show

- This meeting will convene members of the Panel to continue the scenario-based exercise for GE44 introduced during the meeting of August 30. Agenda will include: (1) Introductory remarks; (2) Threat update from SITE; (3) Panel discussion on announcement process; (4) Scenario exercise; and (5) Wrap-up.
- Participants will include: Janice Charette, Interim Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet; Nathalie Drouin, Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council and Associate Secretary to the Cabinet; François Daigle, Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General of Canada; Rob Stewart, Deputy Minister of Public Safety; Shelly Bruce, Chief of CSE; David Vigneault, Director of CSIS; and, David Morrison, Deputy Minister and Foreign and Defence Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister. Mike MacDonald, Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet from the Office of the National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister, will replace the National Security and Intelligence Advisor.
- **Departmental Representative:** Dobner/IOL

Key Messages

- It is critical to communicate to Canadians about elections security, explaining both the threats to build awareness and resilience and the actions the Government is taking to safeguard the process to build confidence in Canada's democratic processes.
- The Panel has a high threshold for communicating threats to Canadians. But government departments have their own threshold, as they must weigh the caretaker convention before communicating. This complicates the Government's efforts to communicate with Canadians
- In this context, the media, civil society and academics play an important role in raising awareness.

Context

- **Previous Interactions:** This meeting follows the August 30 meeting of the Panel during which members reviewed scenarios and lessons learned in preparation for GE44, received a threat update from SITE, and discussed the Panel announcement process.
- **Threat Update from SITE:** The Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force (SITE), including RRM Canada, will deliver an updated threat briefing.
- RRM Canada did not observe any significant trends of foreign state-sponsored information manipulation in its monitoring of the broader Canadian digital information ecosystem during the period of August 25 to September 1. The vast majority of content assessed by RRM Canada originated from recognizable Canadian news or information sites (either in English, French, Chinese, or Russian). RRM Canada has validated these findings through its external partners and secondary research.
- Russian state-affiliated and mainstream media continue to cover events in Canada, including those related to GE44, but so far from a neutral perspective and with minimal engagement.
- Chinese state-affiliated media continue to cover Canadian events, with few references to GE44. RRM Canada observed and continue to monitor the following coverage in particular:

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- News sites linked to the Chinese Communist Party continue to push user interest in the topic of Meng Wanzhou's release. This appears to be a continuation of a coordinated campaign, which began with a public petition on August 18 calling for her release. Her trial is described as a case of "political persecution against a Chinese citizen planned by the U.S. and carried out by its accomplice, Canada." The topic continued trending on Weibo, WeChat and Douyin platforms. The news sites did not link the Meng case to GE44 and did not mention any political party or candidate.
- A Hill Times interview with Chinese Ambassador to Canada Cong Peiwu received some attention from Twitter and Facebook users in relation to his statement that some politicians are putting their own "political interests" ahead of the Canada-China relationship. The Hill Times questioned whether this was a reference to the Conservative Party. However, the Embassy of China did not translate Cong's comments on Canadian politicians putting "political interests" over Sino-Canadian relations in its official statement about the Hill Times interview.
- WeChat news accounts in Canada have been posting what appears to be a false story claiming that the Conservative Party leader will ban WeChat if elected. The accounts sharing the story do not appear to be affiliated with Chinese Communist Party media outlets.
- **Mail-in Ballots:** Elections Canada reports that survey data, early in their pandemic planning, indicated that 4-5 million electors could choose to vote by special ballot; they increased their capacity to handle these volumes. As of mid-August 2021, Elections Canada's analysis showed that 2-3 million Canadians might choose to vote by special ballot, most of them by mail. Elections Canada will not produce new official estimates during the election period. They are prepared for the original estimate, will monitor special ballot requests, and will adjust their operations as required.
- **Scenario Exercise:** There are two scenarios that P5 members have already received but have not yet discussed. It is also possible that the Privy Council will present a new scenario, following DM Stewart's suggestion that Panel members consider a scenario that clearly meets the Panel's threshold and work backwards.
- The scenarios are designed to elicit discussion on: 1) developing a common understanding of the thresholds; 2) the mandate of the Panel and other players; and 3) considerations around making an announcement if the threshold is met.
- **Discussion of Panel Announcement Process:** There will be a discussion on the process of alerting the Prime Minister, Elections Committee and the political parties of an impending announcement as per the requirements of the Protocol.
- The Panel will discuss related issues and considerations should an announcement be required. The objective of the discussion is to work through a process for the Panel to follow that would protect election integrity while remaining impartial.
- The discussion will continue where last meeting's discussion left off. A key focus will likely be the recent disruptive protests at campaign events, including a status update, S&I Community issue management, and relevance to the Panel. No advanced material has been provided.
- **Thresholds and Public Communications:** The Panel's threshold for communicating with the public about threats to federal elections is very high. PCO has established a communications framework meant to address incidents that fall below the Panel's threshold but where communication is still in the public interest. However, public communications – while critical for raising awareness, building resilience and reinforcing confidence in democratic institutions – is complicated by Caretaker Convention guidelines restricting the government's ability to speak to media. For example, PCO and CSE have so far refused all elections security-related interview requests by Canadian media, instead referring media to publicly available information online. There has likewise been no press conference or tech briefing on the measures the Government is taking to safeguard elections (note: this was a suggestion made by the CPC Campaign Chair at the Political Party Briefing).
- It is noteworthy that the Conservative Party Leader stated at a press conference on August 26, 2021, that GE44 is vulnerable to foreign interference and that the Liberal Government has not done enough to safeguard the election.

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- In this context, the media, civil society and academics play an important role in communicating to Canadians. For example, the Media Ecosystem Observatory at McGill University has launched the Canadian Election Integrity Coalition – including the University of Toronto, Laval University, Simon Fraser University, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Oxford University, and CPAC – to monitor the online information ecosystem for mis- and disinformation, including foreign state sponsored disinformation, and will be reporting their findings publicly. (Note: RRM Canada is contracting the Media Ecosystem Observatory to provide it with regular reporting on possible foreign state sponsored information operations online but the Observatory's broader initiative, including its public reporting, is outside the scope of the contract.)
- The Department's Communications branch is participating in both PCO's Director General communications table and SITE's working level communications table.

Author's name/division/tel.:

Consulted divisions/departments: PCO

Approving ADM: IFM

Name and symbol of departmental officer attending/tel.:

Attachments:

- RRM Canada Weekly Report

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