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<b>To / Pour :</b> Clerk of the Privy Council	<b>Date :</b> Mar 24, 2023
<b>Subject / Objet:</b>	

**CPC CONCERNS AROUND FOREIGN ELECTION INTERFERENCE 2021 MAR 28 2023**

<b>From / De :</b>		<b>Via:</b>	
Name / Nom	Office / Bureau	Name / Nom	Office / Bureau
	Dir OPS S&I		

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MAR 24 2023  
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Ottawa, Canada  
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE CLERK OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL

c.c.: Daniel Rogers

CPC CONCERNS AROUND FOREIGN ELECTION INTERFERENCE 2021

(For Information Only)

**SUMMARY**

- In September 2021, the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) raised concerns about potential election interference. The CPC contacted Privy Council Office (PCO) officials noting that they saw "a strong case to be made that there was a degree of influence exerted by an outside actor in the Chinese community during the 44<sup>th</sup> General Election."
- The CPC provided PCO with excerpts from social media to support their claims. **(Tab A)**
- PCO provided the information from the CPC, to Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force members for further analysis and assessment. SITE was not able to conclude definitively that there was a clandestine campaign to influence electoral outcomes in the ridings of concern identified by the CPC. **(Tab B)**
- PCO communicated the findings of the SITE assessment to CPC representatives in October 2021. The CPC was not satisfied with the findings and advised PCO that it would likely publicly allege that the CPC was a target of foreign interference activities. These allegations were made public following media coverage of the 2021 election interference allegations in February 2023.
- Walled Soliman has been invited to appear before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC) as part of their ongoing study on foreign affairs.

1.5  
year  
later!

?

Canada

- 2 -

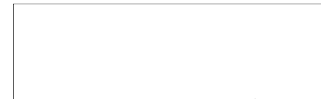
SECRET**BACKGROUND**

- PCO was first approached with concerns of foreign interference by the CPC on September 24, 2021. The election had occurred a few days prior, on September 20, 2021. The CPC provided a document outlining their concerns and suspicions that an "outside actor" in the Chinese community negatively influenced the CPC Candidates' performance in 13 electoral ridings.
- The CPC expressed a concern that there was a proliferation of media content on WeChat and other social media platforms that was anti-Conservative, expressed support for the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC), and suppressed pro-CPC articles. **(Tab C)**
- The CPC also detailed other observed incidents that were suspected indicators of influence, or interference, by the Chinese Government. These included: **(Tab A)**
  - Anti-CPC ads displayed on a digital screen in a Chinese grocery store in one riding;
  - Automated "bots" completing polling surveys;
  - Allegations that "organizers" in specific communities requested and cast ballots on behalf of electors; and
  - Reports of business owners pushing employees to vote for the LPC, and other voter intimidation and influence.
- SITE member agencies conducted analysis of the information under their respective mandates and brought these analyses together to produce a unified SITE Task Force assessment addressing the CPC's concerns. **(Tab B)**
- Global Affairs Canada (GAC), the Communications Security Establishment (CSE) and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) examined all the information provided by the CPC, and conducted additional analysis using information collected under their respective mandates. Based on the available evidence and information, the agencies were unable to conclude that there was a clandestine campaign to influence the outcomes of the 13 ridings identified by the CPC.

- 3 -

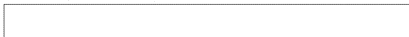
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- On October 22, 2021, PCO met with CPC representatives Walied Soliman (CPC campaign co-chair) and Tausha Michaud (CPC Chief of Staff) to share information on SITE's assessment. During the meeting, PCO shared details regarding the analyses, observed trends and issues of shared concern, and possible future work that could be undertaken to protect elections. **(Tab D)**



Jody Thomas

Attachments



TAB | A  
Onglet

**Party Submitted Data****Email**

**From:** "Michaud, Tausha" <[redacted]@parl.gc.ca>  
**Date:** September 30, 2021 at 1:50:43 PM EDT  
**To:** [redacted]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>  
**Cc:** "Kreviazuk, Lynn" <[redacted]@parl.gc.ca>  
**Subject:** Follow up



As promised, I've attached a document that outlines some key concerns and includes a dropbox link to screenshots from WeChat.

Best,

-T  
Tausha Michaud  
Chief of Staff | Chef de cabinet

### Data

There is a strong case to be made that there was a degree of influence exerted by an outside actor in the Chinese community during the 44<sup>th</sup> General Election. From speaking with campaign teams and regional organizers, we believe this influence negatively impacted our standing in these seats:

#### Metro Vancouver (4)

- Richmond Centre
- Steveston—Richmond East
- Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam
- Fleetwood—Port Kells

#### Greater Toronto Area (9)

- Markham—Stouffville
- Markham—Unionville
- Richmond Hill
- Willowdale
- Don Valley North
- Scarborough—Agincourt
- Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill
- Newmarket—Aurora
- Mississauga—Centre (to a certain extent)

Through message groups in WeChat text-based and news-content style articles were circulated which directly targeted the Conservatives or expressed support for the liberals. From what we've been hearing, these articles have been popping up in all sorts of groups (especially non-political ones). However, when one of our supporters posted some of the pro-CPC articles, they were told their content was "too political" and were removed from the groups.

One example is an article that starts with "Crisis for Chinese Canadians, we need to save ourselves. Stop the conservative extremists from getting in power" another is "The Liberals want your money, the Conservatives want your life", a third is The Canadian version of "Trump"? The leader of the Conservative Party wants to block WeChat and vowed to fight China to the end." Attached you'll find additional examples of other articles that were posted and shared.

As you know, WeChat is the main messaging/social media platform used by the Chinese-speaking community in Canada and is directly controlled by Chinese corporations.

There were also Anti-Conservative ads (without authorization tags) that were displayed on digital screens in a Chinese grocery store in Scarborough—Agincourt (attached).

It's our understanding that the Federal Liberals were not expected to do as well as they did with the Chinese community, and that they did not coordinate this campaign directly.

Files: [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fmasa665p0ezlup/AABEQsfb\\_LI6TPI31pFajABla?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fmasa665p0ezlup/AABEQsfb_LI6TPI31pFajABla?dl=0)

Ultimately, it comes down to voter contact and the ability of a party to get its message in front of as many voters as possible. This works either as persuasion messages, or in the case of specific allegations

from this campaign, dissuasion. It is straightforward for governments to use local contacts to push messages in controlled environments such as WeChat or WhatsApp groups. It is impossible to track these conversations without having a friendly presence in the group. We need to understand and find a way to be present in these chats and in these communities.

In the specific context of the 2021 campaign, there were a couple specific incidents that could be classified as either influence or interference. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we didn't have time to investigate these properly.

1. **Polling Panels & Bots:** We flagged this in an early meeting, and I'd forgotten about it until today. Our systems caught automated 'bots' completing our surveys due to certain patterns in the open text responses. At the time, we thought it was just a bot focused on collecting the \$0.50 survey incentives but these could easily have been malicious. These responses were set aside and we strengthened our processes, but this would be an effective way to change a narrative.

If I were looking to shape party or government policy, stacking these panels with automated respondents to swamp policy questions related to foreign policy would be an effective way to do it. This would be a machine learning problem, but one easily within the capability of certain actors. The media place too great an emphasis on polling without realizing the shortcomings of the panels that underpin this work.

2. **Mail-In Ballots:** This was alleged to be an issue in the recent BC campaign. Organizers in specific communities were alleged to have requested ballots on behalf of electors. These ballots were completed by community bosses and cast on their behalf.

When we received the first list of people requesting mail-in ballots, we noticed surprisingly high numbers in a couple of predominantly Chinese mail-in ballots. Two specific ridings - Richmond Centre and Steveston Richmond East jumped out, as they had comparatively lower numbers of mail-in ballots in the BC election. SRE was also the riding of former MP Joe Peschisolido, alleged to have staff affiliated with the United Front.

If the resources and interest was there, the way to track this would be to check the IPs of those requesting mail-in ballots. This would offer an easy indication of mischief. It would also be possible to confirm that these electors requested the ballot themselves, either with in person interviews or phone calls. If these electors are either unaware, or are afraid of discussing it, it could be an indicator.

3. **Intimidation / Influence:** Most of this would fall into grey areas. Direct contact between foreign agents and electors would be unlikely, but it is easy enough to have Canadian staff employed by shell corporations "volunteering" full time on behalf of local campaigns or candidates. It doesn't even have to be directly affiliated - businesses that are either friendly to a foreign interest or can be pushed to support a cause/candidate will comply. This could mean advertising space, distribution, or soft pushes at community or religious centres.

A focused effort on the ground will find these instances. We received reports from Scarborough of business owners pushing employees to vote Liberal, among other complaints, but these often just hearsay. Given the limitations on in-person contact due to COVID, every campaign was more dependent on digital operations. Chinese control over platforms like WeChat provides



them the ability to limit messages they find uncomfortable, and amplify voices and candidates in line with their objectives.

Without building social listening tools and recruiting additional language skills, it will be very difficult to limit our exposure

**An Aggressive Path:** If I were in their shoes, I'd obtain a copy of the list of electors. I'd match it to data on Chinese controlled platforms, and find individuals in ridings that could be pushed to support a cause or candidate. This would be pushed through local staff pushing messaging on WeChat and other platforms. It could be funded either with cash, or with companies controlled by friendly or persuadable people in the ridings.

TAB | B  
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SECRET//CANADIAN EYES ONLY

19 OCTOBER 2021  
SITE TF ASSESSMENT

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PRC INTERFERENCE IN ELECTION 2021: RESPONSE TO THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

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**What is the purpose of this document?**

- This document has been prepared on behalf of the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force [redacted]. The primary goal of this paper is to respond to the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC's) concerns regarding foreign interference (FI) during the September 2021 federal election. [redacted] (S//CEO)

**How does CSIS define foreign interference?**

- ✓ The CSIS Act defines FI as those activities that are within or relating to Canada that are detrimental to the interests of Canada, and are clandestine, or deceptive, or involve a threat to any person. It is important to note that public and overt diplomatic statements by a foreign government to spread propaganda, or further their state interests, generally do not meet the threshold of 'foreign interference' (unless, for example, there is a clear threat to a person). That said, GAC advises foreign missions in Canada through a diplomatic letter, prior to federal elections, that these missions refrain from interfering in Canada's democratic process. (S//CEO)
- It is important to note that, though mandated to investigate FI, CSIS does not investigate allegations of voter fraud and/or irregularities in voting. CSIS also cannot request certain types of information on individuals without existing investigative authorities and/or warrants. (S//CEO)

**Was the federal election a target for threat actors?**

- ✓ Intelligence indicates that the 2021 federal election was an attractive foreign interference target for hostile state actors. The People's Republic of China (PRC) was particularly interested in this election and looked to engage in FI in specific instances. CSIS has reported all known and suspected interference attempts to the appropriate authorities as required. (S//CEO)
  - ✓ Such attempts were primarily conducted through trusted third parties or 'proxies', and in a manner that is consistent with the PRC's 'united front work'.<sup>1</sup> (S//CEO)
  - ✓ SITE cannot measure the impact of such foreign interference attempts. (S//CEO)

<sup>1</sup> United front work includes a spectrum of overt as well as clandestine and deceptive approaches. This work, which is guided by the United Front Work Department, often takes place in a legal and normative 'grey zone'. United front work involves the co-optation of entities abroad (especially elites) to expand the Party's support base, while marginalizing and silencing opponents. Targets of united front work include diaspora communities, businesspeople, academics, politicians and political staffers, media, and religious communities. The line between 'influence' and 'interference' by the PRC is often intentionally blurred. (S//CEO)

SECRET//CEO  
October 19, 2021

What can SITE conclude at this time about Election-related FI?

- [redacted] SITE cannot decisively conclude that the PRC sought to clandestinely and deceptively influence outcomes in all of the thirteen (13) ridings identified by the CPC. (S//CEO) ✓
- [redacted] SITE also cannot conclusively assess to what extent a foreign government sought to clandestinely orchestrate online and/or media efforts to discredit the CPC, its candidates, or policies with the specific intent to influence the outcome of the election. (S//CEO) ✓
- [redacted] several pieces targeting the CPC were published and shared around the same time on Chinese-language media on separate platforms, including WeChat (a highly censored and monitored platform aligned with PRC national security legislation). [redacted] certain narratives in these articles appear to be consistent with one another. [redacted] the close timing of publication and similar content of these various pieces across several platforms is noteworthy and unusual, [redacted] [redacted] some material mirrors narratives that have been publically presented by the PRC government and the CCP [redacted] (S//CEO) ✓

What did the PRC say openly?

- SITE assesses that the PRC, through [redacted] and its propaganda outlet *Global Times*, was attempting to overtly convince Canadians not to vote for the CPC. This effort was likely motivated by a perception that parts of the CPC platform were 'anti-PRC' and 'anti-CCP', and that a CPC government would not be favourable to PRC state or CCP interests. (S//CEO) ✓
- [redacted] on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the *Global Times* published propaganda material that clearly threatened "counterstrikes" from the PRC if the Government of Canada turned "hawkish words into action". This article also notes that the CPC's views on the PRC cater to a "toxic atmosphere" against Beijing. [redacted] the *Global Times* is an important propaganda arm of the CCP [redacted] (S//CEO)
- [redacted] the CCP and PRC government perceive portions of the CPC's foreign policy platform to be 'anti-PRC' and 'anti-CCP', and that the *Global Times* was likely seeking to signal this point. [redacted] release may have been a response to the upward trajectory of the CPC in public opinion polling prior to the Canadian federal election. (S//CEO)

Manipulating the 'grey zone'

- In some cases, FI threat actors seek to utilize the 'grey zone' between appropriate, overt activities, and illegitimate and clandestine activity. [redacted] [redacted] individuals or groups of concern can have well-established relationships with the PRC's government and/or Party entities and proactively act in a manner that benefit PRC interests given an intimate knowledge of Party-state priorities and a general understanding of issues of concern. By proactively behaving in this manner, individuals or groups of concern invite 'benefits' and the favour of the PRC and CCP.

SECRET//CEO  
October 19, 2021

Canada's lack of a 'foreign agent registry' makes it impossible to legally designate these entities as 'agents' of a foreign government from an FI perspective. (S//CEO)

- It is important to note in light of the above that there is an intended effect when the PRC Ambassador and CCP-affiliated media (such as the *Global Times*) make pointed statements about these topics. PRC proxies that are not yet aware of Party-state preferences often rely on open statements and declarations as signposts for what kind of activities to undertake that are in the interests of the PRC and/or CCP. These groups, which can include entities in Canada, often seek to demonstrate their value to the PRC by then aggressively pursuing a particular pathway of interest. Usually, proxy groups will action state interests by attempting to mobilize diaspora communities to enable a preferred outcome (e.g., through WeChat groups, community events, canvassing, etc.). (S//CEO)
- Furthermore, it is likely that higher authorities in the PRC were supportive of certain articles and narratives of a similar nature that were published or circulated by third parties in Canada on WeChat and other online Chinese-language media. [redacted] difficult to determine whether these actions result from specific state tasking. Often, Chinese-language media outlets and private PRC companies understand the general preferences of the Party-State and seek to satisfy them. (S//CEO)

Summary

- As noted previously, [redacted] the 2021 federal election was an attractive foreign interference target for hostile state actors. The PRC showed particular interest and looked to engage in FI in specific instances. CSIS cannot assess the impact of any potential or actual interference attempts, but has reported them to relevant authorities. (S//CEO)



- [redacted] certain pieces shared common narratives and were unusual in that they were published at around the same time across disparate platforms. These narratives also echoed points that were openly stated by the PRC government and in CCP propaganda. (S//CEO)

- [redacted] This 'grey zone' manipulation is problematic [redacted] (S//CEO)

FI is an issue that transcends election cycles, levels of government, and party lines. The Government of Canada (GC) continues to investigate FI attempts in Canada, with particular attention to those linked to the PRC. The GC is committed to providing stakeholders with timely and relevant intelligence and analysis on this important subject. (S//CEO)

TAB | C  
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Sept 24/21 ① MS Teams meeting where CPC raised a concern

Sept 30/21 ② CPC email with their analysis of issue

Oct 22/21 ③ MS Teams meeting on results of SITE analysis

Begin forwarded message:

From: "MacDonald, Mike" <[redacted]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>  
 Date: October 22, 2021 at 6:06:26 PM EDT  
 To: "Morrison, David" <[redacted]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "MacKinnon, Paul" <[redacted]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Sutherland, Allen" <[redacted]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>  
 Cc: [redacted]@pco-bcp.gc.ca, "Stinson, Sarah" <[redacted]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "MacKillop, Ken" <[redacted]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Tessier, Jean" <[redacted]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Champoux, Elizabeth" <[redacted]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, [redacted]@pco-bcp.gc.ca, [redacted]@pco-bcp.gc.ca  
 Subject: Party meeting - resume

Hi,

We hosted the call with a particular Party's reps late this afternoon to discuss the results of SITE's analysis of the paper they sent to us. We traced through not only the findings of SITE's work, but also some of the future work in the election space, the trends we saw and shared concerns with some of the trends and behaviours.

Simply put they were not happy with the end result of SITE not being able to declare there was organized and covert FI and that our examination of this was completely unsatisfactory. They repeated several times that they are now forced to go public and make statements about the security apparatus not being able to protect Canadians and have no other choice but to come out with a different (tougher?) stance on a particular country. Comments around the fact that the Govt is not taking FI issues seriously and they will need to state this publically were also made.

Reps feel that they can, and need to, continue working directly with SITE to continue addressing issues of FI and want to talk about this publicly. I have asked [redacted] to work with Sarah Stinson to see what is in the Protocol around how long the Party Reps' relationship with all of us, and SITE, can actually continue and was designed to continue. This is key as they feel that they can continue to directly access us, and if that is not the case then this will also negatively impact the situation.

Also, they asked us to think on a Democratic Institutions and Communication level how we could continue working with them and what we could say publicly about this – like for example, we are investigating. They would like a response to this question before the Caretaker ends on Tuesday. AI and Ken: David MacG will connect with your teams on your thoughts about this. AI: reconnecting may be one way to keep the conversation going and avoid some public discourse (if there will be any public discourse).

Thanks Mike

For Public Release

[REDACTED]

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**From:** MacDonald, Mike  
**Sent:** Friday, November 5, 2021 6:59 AM  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** FW: Party meeting - resume

Pls print email. thx

**From:** Morrison, David <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 22, 2021 6:53 PM  
**To:** Drouin, Nathalie G <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>  
**Cc:** Charette, Janice <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>; Adler, Jeremy <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>; MacKillop, Ken <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>; MacDonald, Mike <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>  
**Subject:** Fwd: Party meeting - resume

Nathalie: per my heads up at Ops this morning. I don't think there was any way CPC reps were going to be satisfied given how grey things were. Ken was going to attend the meeting to ensure we have good lines prepared. I will speak with him re any further preps that might be necessary on the comms side.

The question as to whether parties can work with SITE on an ongoing basis, and, if so, whether this would be helpful to understanding or simply result in further frustration, is a good one. We will look into it.

At an appropriate time we may have to revisit our overall approach when so much of what might turn up during an election could be in the "grey zone".

D

-----  
 David Morrison iPhone  
 [REDACTED] (Office)  
 [REDACTED]@pco.gc.ca

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** "MacDonald, Mike" <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>  
**Date:** October 22, 2021 at 6:06:26 PM EDT  
**To:** "Morrison, David" <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "MacKinnon, Paul" <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Sutherland, Allen" <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca, "Stinson, Sarah" <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "MacKillop, Ken" <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Tessier, Jean" <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, "Champoux, Elizabeth" <[REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca>, [REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca, [REDACTED]@pco-bcp.gc.ca  
**Subject:** Party meeting - resume

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TAB | D  
Onglet

**Call with Walied Soliman and Tausha Michaud, CPC****Concerns around Election Interference****General**

- We will always be concerned when other nations attempt to interfere in Canadian democratic processes.
- Not to diminish current concerns, but overall SITE observed a very low level of Foreign Interference, though this does not mean there were not instances where it did occur.
- The Panel of 5 considered EVERY piece of intelligence that was brought to it, looking for clear cases of foreign interference or IMVE threats, but could find no evidence of a campaign that rose to the level of impacting the integrity of the election.
- GAC asked all Governments with Embassies in Ottawa, including China, to remain neutral during the election, and to honour their diplomatic obligations not to interfere.
- It can be difficult to distinguish between legitimate expression online, and the activities of nation states seeking to exploit the information ecosystem to their advantage. To assist, we work with Social Media Companies as well as a number of NGOs and research groups to ensure activity that may be problematic is at the very least brought to the attention of main stream media so Canadian electors can make their own decisions on who to believe.
- SITE agency mandates are always respectful of the rights of Canadians to engage in online discourse. This is why the agencies will need to continue to investigate and examine evidence before they take action.

**Specific Case**

- You may remember at the last two security briefings we held with the parties, SITE highlighted the fact Chinese media had picked up on Canadian media criticism (first published in the Hill Times) and were running stories about the CPC platform and its impact on Canada-China relations.
- These articles appeared between 8 and 15 September, then stopped being a feature of Chinese state reporting on or about the 15<sup>th</sup> of September.
- About this time (15 September), PostMedia also reported on activity on WECHAT that was negative towards the candidacy of Mr. Chiu. This kind of reporting is an important counter-balance to any specific attempt at foreign interference.

• 

[Redacted]

• 

• 

• We will continue working on this issue, to see if more clarity is possible, but there are restrictions.

• 

[Redacted]

**Next Steps**

- We can assure you SITE is actively looking at these issues and the results through the lens of their respective mandates.
- As the results of this election are finalized, operational decisions around further interviews, or other fieldwork, would be made.
- Where further action is warranted based upon the evidence, there are a range of measures available either via diplomatic or intelligence channels, including threat reduction measures where the evidentiary threshold can be met, that can be taken.