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Government of Canada
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRIME MINISTER
c.c.: Janice Charette

CLAIMS OF FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTION

(For Information)

SUMMARY

- In the period leading up to the 2019 federal election, the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force prepared briefings and identified several major areas of potential threat that would be monitored during the election period.
- During 2019, some potential foreign interference activities were identified and addressed through CSIS threat reduction measures prior to the writ period.
- The SITE Task Force's findings after the 2019 election suggested that, although some potential foreign interference activities were identified, it was assessed to not have compromised the integrity of the election. China represented the primary foreign interference threat of the activities identified. These findings were affirmed in the final SITE After Action Report.
- PCO searched its holdings and engaged security and intelligence partners to identify instances when briefings on suspected foreign interference in the 2019 General Election were provided to you. This search identified a single PCO information note dated January 24, 2020 (Tab B). CSIS also briefed you once on attempted foreign interference in the 2019 general election, on February 8, 2021.
- Since the 2019 election, a number of reviews and enhancements have been made to safeguard elections against foreign interference including updates to the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol (CEIPP), election security governance, and information sharing with partners in and outside the national security community. An independent review of this protocol is currently being finalized in the context of the 2021 federal election.

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BACKGROUND

What Was Known & When

- **Pre-2019 Election:** The Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force (SITE) prepared briefings and monitoring to develop a baseline assessment of the threat landscape for GE 2019. These assessments identified several major areas of potential threat that would be monitored during the election period including: cyber threat activity; HUMINT threat activity, as it was the most prominent form of persistent foreign interference in Canada; and, social media platforms being used as a tool by foreign state actors to conduct and amplify disinformation campaigns. The level of foreign interference around the 2019 election was measured against this baseline.

- During 2019, some potential foreign interference was identified and addressed through CSIS threat reduction measures (TRMs). Just prior to the writ period, CSIS conducted TRMs aimed at potential interference activities [redacted]

the information under the redaction is about a TRM taken to reduce the foreign interference (FI) threat posed by the Government of Pakistan

- **January 2020:** The preliminary, post-GE 2019 findings from the SITE Task Force suggested that although some potential foreign interference was identified, it was not assessed to be at a level that could have compromised the integrity of the election. Of the activities identified, China represented the primary foreign interference threat.
- **July 2020:** The final SITE After Action Report affirmed these initial findings when concluding the following on the 2019 General Election (TAB A):
 - Foreign interference activities targeting certain ridings and candidates in relation to the election were directed largely from China, and to a lesser extent from India and Pakistan [redacted]
 - None of these foreign interference activities were assessed to be part of a broad-based electoral interference campaign and did not have an impact on the outcome of the election;

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- o No evidence to indicate that foreign state actors were specifically targeting Elections Canada or Canadian electoral systems and networks (cyber threat activity);
 - o No evidence of broad-based foreign state-directed interference campaigns in the digital information ecosystem, but noted blind spots in determining state attribution and distinguishing between foreign and domestic disinformation campaigns (social media platforms);
 - o None of the activities met the threshold to pursue criminal investigations.
- These conclusions stand today (2022).
 - The RCMP has a mandate to investigate any criminal activity related to interference or influence in Canada's electoral system. The Commissioner recently confirmed publicly that no activities observed at the time met the threshold to pursue criminal investigations.
 - More broadly, it was assessed that the low level of foreign interference in GE 2019 could have been due, in part, to the proactive and public stance taken on the issue by the Government of Canada. This included the aforementioned TRMs, ministerial engagement with the media and Communications Security Establishment (CSE) public reports in the lead-up to the elections, acknowledging the threat of foreign interference.
 - To specifically address the claims of foreign interference published in the media, [] analysis of the attempts to interfere in GE 2019 (VAB E). The analysis provides specific instances of influence attempts involving candidates and their staff. As noted previously, these attempts were not assessed to have successfully changed the outcome of the election.

Briefings to the Prime Minister

- PCO searched its holdings and engaged security and intelligence partners to identify instances when briefings on potential instances of suspected foreign interference in the 2019 General Election were provided to the Prime Minister (PM).

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- This search identified a single PCO information note to the PM dated January 24, 2020 (TAB B). It summarized measures to protect the election against foreign interference as well as a summary of preliminary SITE observations stated above. It did not include details on potential specific cases of foreign interference in or around the election.
- CSIS also conducted an exhaustive search of briefings and products on this issue (TAB C). Their records indicate the PM was briefed once on foreign interference in the 2019 election, on February 8, 2021. CSIS reports this brief reiterated SITE assessments that there was not a broad based clandestine campaign which imperilled a free and fair election. The Prime Minister was provided details on allegations of potential instances of Chinese foreign interference related to the Don Valley nomination process.
- The CSE and RCMP were also consulted and indicated that all information and briefings were provided as part of the SITE construct. They did not deliver any briefings to the PM on potential foreign interference issue.
- A briefing on the upcoming GE 2019 was provided to Minister Gould, then Minister of Democratic Institutions, on April 4, 2019. This reportedly included a discussion on the allegations regarding [redacted]

[redacted] Subsequent briefings were also provided to Minister LeBlanc in March and October 2020, following his appointment as President of the Privy Council Office and Minister of Democratic Institutions. These reiterated the SITE conclusions that while potential instances of foregoing interference attempts may have been observed in GE 2019, they were not broad based and did not affect Canada's ability to have a free and fair election.

Experience Since 2019

- Since GE 2019, a number of reviews and enhancements have been made to safeguard elections against foreign interference including updates to the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol (CEIPP), election security governance, and information sharing with partners in and outside the national security community. The most prominent improvements include the following:

- *Updates to CEIPP Cabinet Directives:* CEIPP made applicable to all future general elections; alignment of the Protocol's application period with the Caretaker Convention (vs. Writ period); explicit provision for the Panel to consult with the Chief Electoral Officer, as appropriate; provision for political parties to alert security agencies of incidents that could threaten a free and fair election (note parties availed themselves of this option in GE 2021); recognition of the Panel's ability to examine domestically-driven interference as well as receive info from sources other than security agencies, at its discretion.
- *GE 2021:* SITE monitoring, briefings, and discussion of potential instances of foreign interference amongst the Panel shared similarities with 2019 (TAB D). SITE's December 2021 after-action report assessed that the People's Republic of China (PRC) sought to clandestinely and deceptively influence Canada's 2021 federal election. This activity was pragmatic in nature and focused primarily on supporting individuals viewed to be either 'pro-PRC' or 'neutral' on issues of interest to the PRC government and Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Like in 2019, the Panel determined that such efforts did not jeopardize a free and fair election.
- An Independent Review of the CEIPP in the context of GE 2021 is being conducted by Morris Rosenberg. It is currently being finalized, and once complete will provide opportunities to further strengthen election security measures against foreign interference threats and the Government's protecting democracy plan.
- *PCO Commitment*
 - Attempts by foreign states to interfere in Canada's internal affairs occur both during and outside of election periods. These activities are often persistent and long-term, aiming to influence our democracy, our politics and our society. It should also be emphasized that this phenomenon is not unique to Canada.
 - The CEIPP was established to carefully monitor attempts at foreign interference in federal elections given the major impact a successful foreign interference operation could have on Canadian democracy.

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During an election, the Panel should and would inform Canadians in the event of a threat to the electoral process when deemed warranted. Any such decision to announce would need to be carefully weighed against the risk that making an announcement could have a greater impact on the outcome of the election than foreign attempts to change the outcome of an election.

Jody Thomas

Attachments (5)

MacDonald