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Advisor to the Prime Minister

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRIME MINISTER
c.c.: Ian Shugart, Catherine Blewett

JAN 14 2020

SAFEGUARDING THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS

(Information Only)

SUMMARY

- The purpose of this note is to provide you with a summary of elections security related activities that were undertaken to help safeguard the 2019 General Elections (GE 2019). It is also to provide you with an overview of the threat environment in the lead up to and during GE 2019, particularly as it pertains to potential foreign interference.
- Ahead of GE 2019, the Government of Canada put in place a suite of measures to bolster Canada's defence against covert, clandestine and criminal activities by foreign actors intent on interfering in our electoral and democratic processes. This included the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol (CEIPP), administered by a Panel of senior civil servants, and the Security and Intelligence Threats to the Elections (SITE) Task Force, among other initiatives. Additionally, prior to the writ period, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) conducted threat reduction measures (TRMs) for the purpose of mitigating interference activities.
- Pre-election intelligence briefings and monitoring provided a baseline assessment of the threat, suggesting foreign interference would be commensurate to overall interference attempts in Canada. While some instances of potential interference were observed, and some TRMs were undertaken, the Panel concluded that none of these activities met the threshold for a public announcement or affected Canada's ability to have a free and fair election.
- More broadly, it is assessed that the low level of foreign interference in GE 2019 could be due, in part, to the proactive and public stance taken on the issue by the Government of Canada. This includes the CSIS TRMs, ministerial engagement with the media and Communications Security Establishment public reports in the lead-up to the elections, acknowledging the threat of foreign interference.
- With the election now concluded, the focus has shifted to reviewing the effectiveness of measures put in place. Reviews of the practises and processes, some of which will be made public, will help inform future actions with respect to safeguarding Canada's democratic institutions. We will keep you apprised of any developments.

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Background

- Attempts by foreign states and non-state actors to interfere in democratic and electoral processes are not a new threat, nor a phenomenon unique to Canada. Over the past ten years, almost 40 nations have experienced manipulation and interference to varying degrees in their democratic institutions and processes. In light of this ever-growing threat, the Government of Canada (GoC) put in place a suite of measures to bolster Canada's defences against covert, clandestine and criminal activities by foreign actors ahead of the 2019 General Elections (GE 2019).
- A signature initiative established as part of the plan to safeguard GE 2019 was the **Critical Election Incident Public Protocol (CEIPP)**. The CEIPP was designed to ensure coherence and consistency in Canada's approach to publicly informing Canadians during the writ period of serious attempts to interfere with their ability to have a free and fair election. Its administration was overseen by a Panel of five senior civil servants, headed by the Clerk of the Privy Council, responsible for determining whether a threshold for informing Canadians was met, either through a single incident or an accumulation thereof.
- An important, concurrent initiative, created in August 2018, was the **Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force**. Comprised of the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and Global Affairs Canada (GAC), the SITE Task Force improved situational awareness of foreign threats to Canada's electoral processes and helped the GoC assess and respond to those threats.
- In addition to enacting legislative amendments to the Canada Elections Act to prohibit foreign funding, several other noteworthy security-focused initiatives to safeguard GE 2019 included:
 - Offering additional **cyber technical advice, guidance, and services** to Cabinet Ministers and political parties to build their cyber hygiene and security, including the establishment of a 24/7 dedicated hotline by the CSE Cyber Centre to field questions and concerns during the electoral campaign as well as regular unclassified briefings to technical representatives from each registered political party;

- Offering **classified threat briefings to SECRET-cleared members of the five major political parties** (all of whom participated with the exception of the Bloc Québécois) to promote situational awareness, provide direct support and encourage the strengthening of internal security practices and behaviours;
 - Activating the **G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM)** (as the GAC member of the SITE Task Force) to strengthen coordination among G7 democracies in monitoring malign activities by foreign actors in the social media space. The RRM Canada provided open-source monitoring and data analytics based on indicators and thresholds of foreign interference;
 - **Engaging with digital platforms** to encourage the implementation of voluntary measures to increase transparency and combat the spread of disinformation, including signing the Canada Declaration for Electoral Integrity Online. The SITE Task Force also engaged directly with digital platforms to facilitate coordination on operational matters in line with existing mandates; and,
 - **Leveraging CSE's Get CyberSafe Campaign** to build Canadians' awareness of cyber threats and offer ways in which they can better protect themselves.
- Conscious of the many partners within the GoC that support elections and elections security, as well as a need to coherently support the Panel, an Elections Security Coordinating Committee (ESCC) architecture was established. The Privy Council Office (PCO), under the National Security and Intelligence Advisor, co-chaired all levels of the ESCC with Elections Canada. This was deliberately designed so that the PCO Security and Intelligence Secretariat could bridge the national security community with other key partners, both internal to PCO (Democratic Institutions and Communications) and external to PCO (Elections Canada and the Commissioner of Canada Elections).
 - The ESCC underpinned a host of activities and brought together these diverse partners to develop a common understanding of roles, responsibilities and mandates. It ensured a coordinated approach was brought to the classified threat briefings referenced above. Also, as part of the ESCC role, a number of table-top exercises were developed and run at Director General, Assistant Deputy Minister and Deputy Minister-level, integrating the national security community with Elections Canada and the Commissioner of Canada Elections. SECRET-cleared members of the major political parties were similarly exercised on a number of potential scenarios.

Threats to GE 2019

- Pre-election intelligence briefings and monitoring provided a baseline assessment of the threat landscape for GE 2019. These assessments identified several major areas of potential threat including: **cyber threat activity**, as has been directed against other Western elections (supported by the 2017 CSE public threat report and its update in 2019); **HUMINT threat activity**, as it is the most prominent form of foreign interference in Canada; and, **social media platforms being used as a tool by foreign state actors** to conduct and amplify disinformation campaigns.

- During the election period, 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]

to reduce the FI threat posed by the Government of Pakistan

- Also of note and per regular practice, on two occasions (pre-writ and during the writ), GAC sent a notification to all foreign missions in Ottawa reminding them of the obligation to not interfere in the election.
- The preliminary, post-GE 2019 findings from the SITE Task Force suggest 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 elections. China represented the primary foreign interference threat. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

- As such, supported by regular intelligence briefings and monitoring by the SITE Task Force, the Panel did not observe any activities that met the threshold for a public announcement or affected Canada's ability to have a free and fair election.

Reviewing the Safeguards

- With the election now concluded, the focus has shifted to reviewing the measures put in place. As required by the Cabinet directive, a formal evaluation is planned of the CEIPP. An independent report will be prepared, assessing the implementation of the CEIPP and its effectiveness in addressing threats to GE 2019. A classified version will be provided to you and to the National Security Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP), with a public version made available shortly thereafter. It is expected that both reports will be available in the Spring 2020. The NSICOP may resultantly choose to review the security and intelligence community's activities with respect to GE 2019.
- Less formal reviews, "hot washes", and lessons learned discussions, have been undertaken by the ESCC at all levels. The SITE Task Force is also undertaking an internal evaluation with the intent to produce a classified report. Elections Canada is required to produce several unclassified reports, including an after-action report that will be submitted to the House of Commons, and a retrospective report on the conduct of the elections and implementation of legislative changes. The Chief Electoral Officer will also produce a report, likely by mid-2020, which will include recommendations to improve the electoral process. These reviews (possible timings in **Tab A**) will all help inform future actions with respect to safeguarding Canada's democratic institutions.

PCO Comment

- Bringing together the traditional national security community with elections partners, both internal and external to PCO, was a central component of safeguarding GE 2019. The ESCC architecture was key in this effort. Work stemming from this structure was extensive and comprehensive, ensuring coordinated briefings at all levels over many months, including to the political parties. It facilitated coordinated communications, technical briefings and media responses. It designed and executed multiple table-top exercises to build understanding and ensure readiness across the community. And, it established circulation of two daily reports: 1. A classified daily report, produce by the SITE Task Force, and circulated across the national security community, including the Panel; and, 2. An unclassified daily report, produced by the Government Operations Centre, and circulated across the federal government, including Elections Canada, as well as to political parties. This proved to be an important resource in understanding provincial and territorial dynamics affecting the federal election.
- Some of the salient findings from the ESCC evaluation include positive feedback in these aforementioned areas, particularly as it pertains to information sharing and coordination. Challenges that arose during

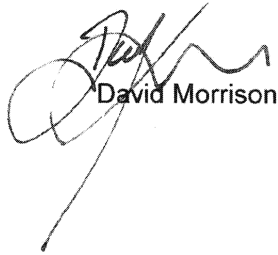
GE 2019 and/or areas where further improvements could be considered include:

- Exploring the role of government in the disinformation and domestic interference space in a way that is conscious and respectful of the privacy, rights, and freedoms of Canadians;
 - Capitalizing on the important role of the Government Operations Centre in establishing links and disseminating information to improve collaboration with the provinces and territories as it pertains to the conduct of elections and information sharing on security issues;
 - Continuing a focus in a non-electoral period on increasing education to build awareness, confidence and resilience on threats to democratic institutions and foreign interference as well as the electoral process; and,
 - Considering the merits and modalities of having SECRET-cleared political party representatives on a more permanent basis.
- PCO will continue to coordinate with partners to ensure work continues in these areas.
 - As it pertains to foreign interference and as referenced above, despite concerns that Canada would be targeted during GE 2019, the SITE Task Force has assessed that there was no foreign cyber threat activity targeting Elections Canada, no significant instances of foreign interference in the HUMINT space, and no significant indications of foreign interference in the digital information ecosystem compromising the integrity of the elections.
 - Arguably, this assessment places the level of foreign interference activity in GE 2019 below the anticipated baseline and potentially below the level of overall interference attempts in Canada. The proactive and public stance taken by the GoC on this issue may have influenced the behaviour of mal-intentioned actors. This public face included Ministerial engagement with the media as well as CSE public reports in the lead-up to the elections acknowledging the threat of foreign interference. While it is difficult to measure the true impact this may have had, strong consideration should be given to leveraging public communications as a key tool in combating foreign interference beyond the election cycle.

- PCO will keep you apprised of any developments, particularly as the various reports on the election are completed.

Attachment

/Xavier



David Morrison