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JULY 2021

**SITE TF BRIEFING TO SECRET CLEARED FEDERAL POLITICAL PARTIES**

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**CANADA'S FOREIGN INTERFERENCE THREAT LANDSCAPE**

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**Why you should care about foreign interference (FI)?**

- FI is a significant threat to the integrity of our political system, democratic institutions, economy, and fundamental rights and freedoms. Canada has been a target for many years. (U//FOUO)
- FI differs from normal diplomatic conduct or acceptable foreign state-actor lobbying. Active, overt diplomacy and lobbying are healthy parts of democracy. Clandestine or deceptive foreign interference is not. FI threat actors may target you directly or indirectly because you possess information they want; have access to information they want; or are in a position to influence your political party's policies and activities. (U//FOUO)

**What is FI and what are FI threat actors?**

- "Foreign Interference Activity" refers to "activity conducted or supported by a foreign state/actor that is detrimental to Canadian national interests & is covert, deceptive or coercive. The objective is to affect electoral outcomes and/or undermine public confidence in Canadian democratic institutions." FI activities are long-standing, ongoing, systematic, and deeply rooted threats. (S//CEO)
- Overt influence refers to the use of public diplomacy and other means whereby a foreign state openly attempts to influence Canadian policy, the political landscape and/or electoral processes. One goal of overt influence activity can be to affect electoral outcomes within Canada, but because it is overt and transparent, it initiates alternative diplomatic response mechanisms. (S//CEO)
- We are careful to consider whether activity by a foreign state is simply aggressive lobbying in line with diplomatic norms, as opposed to FI threat activity. Distinguishing between the two can be something of a grey zone – as it is not always clear cut where legitimate, overt activities end and where illegitimate, clandestine activity begins. (S//CEO)
- All levels of political power in Canada have been targeted: federal, provincial, territorial and municipal. Political office-holders, candidates, office personnel and other persons with perceived access or influence have been the main targets. (S//CEO)

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SECRET//CEO  
July 2021

- FI is conducted by a wide range of actors including foreign government officials, intelligence officers, proxies, individuals and/or diaspora community members purposefully selected (both witting and unwitting). This range of actors is often referred to as "FI threat actors. (U//FOUO)
- FI threat actors use a range of levers in their influence and interference activities: traditional human intelligence operations, cyber operations and online information operations can be used individually or in combination to undermine democratic processes. (S//CEO)
- As a multicultural society, diaspora communities in Canada are vulnerable to FI activities, and in some cases, are the targets of state-directed threats of punitive measures and at times, violence. Tactics may include threatening, harassing and even detaining family members outside of Canada or refusing to issue travel documents or visas without cooperation. (S//CEO)
- Coerced, or even sympathetic, community members are then used as proxies by foreign threat actors to engage with Canadian decision-makers or undertake activities that would not be appropriate for official representatives in Canada. (S//CEO)
- The rise of social media and web platforms creates new risks and enables influence activity at unprecedented scale and sophistication. These new systems have generated unintended threats to the democratic process, depriving the public of true and relevant information, informed political commentary, and the means to identify and ignore fraudulent information. (S//CEO)

#### Lessons Learned from 2019

- The SITE Task Force (SITE TF) saw no definitive intelligence to indicate that foreign state actors were specifically targeting Elections Canada (EC) or Canadian electoral systems and networks. (S//CEO)
- SITE also saw no evidence of a broad-based foreign state-directed interference campaign in the digital information ecosystem, but noted that determining state attribution in disinformation campaigns was and remains difficult. (S//CEO)
- SITE did observe foreign interference (FI) activities targeting certain ridings and candidates in relation to the election, directed largely from China, and to a lesser extent from India and Pakistan, through the use of human agents. None of the activities met the threshold to pursue criminal investigations. (S//CEO)

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SECRET//CEO  
July 2021**The foreign interference threat environment 2021**

- The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the ability of state actors to engage in foreign interference (FI) via direct human interaction but created opportunities for cyber activities and online disinformation campaigns. As the situation in Canada normalizes, FI efforts will likely resume previous intensity, especially in the lead-up to a Federal Election in Canada. (S//CEO)
- The People's Republic of China (PRC) will be the primary threat actor in an upcoming federal election. Due to tensions in the bi-lateral relationship and PRC activity directed against Canada's Parliament and certain MPs, the PRC may interfere in specific ridings to either support those viewed to be 'pro-PRC', or oppose those viewed to be 'anti-PRC'. (S//CEO)
- [redacted] cyber threat [redacted]  
[redacted] PRC state-linked threat actors are known to have targeted Canadian political institutions within the past two years. (S//CEO)
- HUMINT threat activity remains the most prominent form of foreign interference in Canada. We assess this is unlikely to change ahead of any potential election in 2021. (S//CEO)
- The use of social media platforms by state actors to conduct disinformation and amplification activity has increased globally. This trend is likely to be a factor in a Canadian electoral context. At present, discernable FI activity in the social media space is limited. However, attributing the activity of state sponsored disinformation remains difficult due to the blurring of lines between domestic and foreign disinformation campaigns. (S//CEO)

**Main FI threat actors in Canada****People's Republic of China (PRC)**

- **The PRC is the most significant FI threat actor.** The PRC is highly capable, motivated, and acts in a sophisticated, pervasive and persistent manner in carrying out FI activities against all levels of Canadian government and civil society. These activities emanate primarily through the Chinese [officials](#) in Canada, broader PRC-linked diaspora community groups, trusted contacts, proxies, co-optees and cut-outs (business people, Canadian permanent residents and citizens), staff members of elected officials, and China media language outlets and social media tools. (S//CEO)
- **Why is the PRC Interested in Canada?** The primary goal of PRC FI activities in Canada is to further party-state interests in a manner that enhances the legitimacy and stability of the Chinese

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SECRET//CEO  
July 2021

Communist Party (CCP). To achieve these goals, PRC FI actors seek to target and leverage Canada-related entities perceived to both enable and inhibit CCP interests. While members of the broader PRC-linked diaspora tend to be the focus of PRC FI activities, the PRC is pragmatic and seeks to target and utilize any individual of potential value, using either inducements or coercive means. (S//CEO)

- **PRC FI activities unfold over the long term, occur Canada-wide, and are directed toward all major political parties.** PRC FI threat actors seek to clandestinely and/or deceptively support Canadian candidates, parties, and policies perceived to further or at least not actively oppose the strategic interests of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Targets of China's FI threat activities are often unaware of the Chinese government and CCP's interest in them – though some targets willingly cooperate with PRC FI threat actors. PRC FI threat actors are pragmatic and tend to pursue paths of least resistance. (S//CEO)
- The PRC continues its efforts to cultivate relationships with current MPs and influence their views on issues of strategic importance to the PRC. These efforts are primarily aimed at MPs who are part of the broader PRC-linked diaspora, and/or who represent ridings with a large PRC-linked diaspora community. The PRC is also interested in individuals who are viewed as 'pro-PRC' or 'neutral in key areas (regardless of ethnic background or riding association), or do not openly oppose viewpoints important to the PRC. (S//CEO)
- [redacted] preferred supporters at municipal levels of government and then direct those upwards to provincial and federal levels for long-term cultivation. The PRC covertly directs financial and voting support for favorable candidates, parties, and policies perceived to further China's strategic interests. (S//CEO)
- As COVID-related health, social, and political restrictions begin to ameliorate, based on historical patterns of PRC FI activity [redacted] Chinese activities against democratic institutions will likely increase. (S//CEO)

#### Other important FI actors in Canada

##### India

- **India is actively conducting FI and targets Canadian political figures.** Working through Indian officials [redacted] in Canada, [redacted]

*India engages in a range of activities that seek to influence Canadian communities and politicians in order to advance its political interests.*

[redacted] India is interested in engaging its diaspora in Canada to shape political outcomes in its favour. (S//CEO)

SECRET//CEO  
July 2021

**Russia**

- **Focused on discrediting democracy.** Although Russia has a robust foreign interference capability, it lacks the intent to interfere in Canadian democratic institutions due to a lack of a clear political party to oppose or support. Rather, Russia uses Canadian politics (as well as U.S. and European politics) to advance a propaganda narrative of western democratic hypocrisy. This influences Russian domestic audiences in favour of Russia's current regime. [REDACTED]

(S//CEO)

**Iran**

- **Targeting dissidents and Flight PS752 victims.** Iran targets critics of Iran's regime and individuals deemed to be a threat to the Iranian domestic political status-quo. The relatives of victims of PS752 have been subject to monitoring, threats, and intimidation through a variety of means. These activities are driven by domestic political agendas [REDACTED]

**Pakistan**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SECRET//CEO  
July 2021

**Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism (as well as religious and politically motivated violence)**

- Domestic threats remain outside of the SITE TF’s core mandate; however, by investigating FI in Canada’s electoral processes, awareness of domestic threats is obtained tangentially. In general, a global information environment that is polluted by conspiracy theories, propaganda, and disinformation – propagated by both nation states and non-state actors – sets conditions to erode citizen trust in government and faith in democratic institutions. Rapidly expanding information technology makes it easier for malignant entities to manipulate information. Key observations are as follows:

- **IMVE: Range of grievances used to mobilize/justify violent response.** From both the far-left and far-right of the traditionally envisioned political spectrum, individuals and cells often act without clear affiliation to an organized group or leader. The rhetorical landscape is largely rooted online and is transnational in its resonance.

[Redacted]

[Redacted] (S//CEO)

- **RMVE: Western society is indicted as corrupt.** Most RMVE ideologies of note believe Western society itself is irredeemable. As such, RMVE entities are not currently observed as interested in attacking or influencing elections outcomes as democracy itself is indicted by proponents of these entities. (S//CEO)

- **PMVE: Use of Canada as a permissive environment.**

[Redacted]

[Redacted] (S//CEO)