



Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Election Protocol Panel – New Communications Committee

June 12, 2021, 14:30 – 16:00, Secure number: 377-1230

Conference ID: 123058

Objectives

- The objective of this meeting is to convene the members of the Election Protocol Panel (Panel) to discuss Panel operations during General Elections 44 (GE44) and public communications options and requirements.

Run of Show

- Participants will include: Janice Charette, Interim Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet; DM Nathalie Drouin, Justice Dept; DM Rob Stewart, Public Safety; DMA Mike MacDonald, PCO.
- **Departmental Representative:** Dan Costello, Assistant Deputy Minister, International Security and Political Affairs or Catherine Godin, Director General, Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion could accompany if required.

Key Messages

- Relevant departments should be establishing a communications strategy to communicate with Canadians when an incident falls below the Panel's threshold but is in the public interest. Moreover, protocols should be developed with respect to how we engage a broader set of partners, including civil society and academia.
- Most scenarios that could have an impact on our elections could include both domestic and foreign sources of disinformation and may also have public health considerations if elections are held within a COVID-19 environment. Need to develop methodologies and procedures for triage/assessing reach of various sources of disinformation.

Context

- **Previous Interactions:** This is the Second meeting of the Panel in 2021. The previous meeting focused on Panel Operations during GE43. During that time, the Panel met regularly and received information and threat briefings, including ongoing intelligence assessments from the SITE Task Force, including GAC's Rapid Response Mechanism - Canada
- **Mandates and Triage:** Public reporting indicates that hostile foreign actors have leveraged political divisions and domestic mis- and disinformation for their foreign interference activities within allied and partner countries. As such, disinformation scenarios may have both foreign and domestic components. To this end, a SITE Decision Tree for incident monitoring and reporting was discussed at the DM ESCC meeting on June 29th. While GAC's role on foreign interference is clearly established, the conversation is likely to address cases of domestic interference as well. Thus far, the approach taken has been on a case by case basis, allowing SITE partners to implement their existing mandate.
- Beyond foreign and domestic scenarios, different GoC departments may also have mandates for different responses/actions. For example, disinformation related to COVID-19 or other public health concerns may prompt a public communications response from PHAC/HC. Elections Canada may also have a role if there is an impact to voting.
- Given the potential complexity of most scenarios that could have an impact on our elections, work needs to continue in developing methodologies and procedures for triage, such as the SITE Decision Tree.
- **Public Communications:** The Panels threshold for communicating with the public about threats to federal elections is very high, particularly during a writ period as the Caretaker Convention restricts

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the government's public communications. Relevant departments should be establishing a communications strategy to communicate with Canadians when an incident falls below the Panel's threshold but is in the public interest. Moreover, given the growing movement within civil society and academia to track and analyze disinformation campaigns, protocols might usefully be developed with respect to how we engage a broader set of partners.

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