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JUNE 2023

SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE THREATS TO ELECTIONS TASK FORCE**THREATS TO THE CANADIAN FEDERAL BY-ELECTIONS – JUNE 2023 AFTER ACTION REPORT**

On May 16, 2023, the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, announced that the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force (SITE TF) was to provide enhanced monitoring and assessment of foreign interference (FI) threats directed at federal by-elections being held on June 19, 2023 in the following four electoral districts:

- Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Westmount, Québec
- Oxford, Ontario
- Portage-Lisgar, Manitoba
- Winnipeg South Centre, Manitoba (U)

This report covers the SITE TF activities and observations of foreign actors' intentions and activities relating to FI directed at the June 2023 federal by-elections. (U)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SITE TF met weekly between May 16, 2023 and June 20, 2023 to review and discuss intelligence collection, assessment, and open-source analysis related to FI during the by-elections. As noted in the May 16, 2023 announcement, the focus of the SITE TF during the by-election period was to assess FI threats; however, the SITE TF also committed to report any observations of threats of violent extremism relating to the by-elections. The SITE TF provided daily situation reports (SITREPS) on both FI and violent extremism threats to the by-elections to the Deputy Minister Committee on Intelligence Response (DMCIR) from May 24 until June 21, 2023. (U)

Summary of Key Observations – Foreign Interference

- In the lead up to the by-elections and on June 19, 2023, the SITE TF did not observe any indication of foreign interference directed at the four by-elections. (U)
- No cyber incidents were detected to suggest that any foreign state actors were specifically targeting Elections Canada (EC) in the lead up to the June 19, 2023 by-elections. (U)

Summary of Key Observations – Threats of Violent Extremism

- In the lead up to the by-elections and on June 19, 2023, the SITE TF did not observe any threats of violent extremism to the four by-elections. (U)

DETAILS**Scope and Sources**

This report covers the SITE TF observations of foreign threat actors' intentions and activities relating to FI as well as any observations of threats of violent extremism with respect to the by-elections in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Westmount, Québec; Oxford, Ontario; Portage-Lisgar, Manitoba; and, Winnipeg South Centre, Manitoba, with votes held on June 19, 2023. It is

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based on analysis, reporting and observations – from both classified and unclassified sources – reviewed in the lead up to, and on Election Day (May 16, 2023 until June 20, 2023). (U)

SITE TF Members and Role

The SITE TF consists of representatives from the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS). The SITE TF's role is to help safeguard Canadian federal elections from FI by: (U)

- Providing a clear point of engagement with the security and intelligence community for Government partners engaged in related work. (U)
- Reviewing and focusing intelligence collection, assessment, and open-source analysis related to FI in Canada's democratic process in a coordinated manner. (U)
- Providing situational awareness for Government partners, senior public servants, and other relevant partners. (U)
- Promoting the use of intelligence, assessment, and open-source information analysis in the protection of electoral processes through sharing with partners or, when respective mandates permit, take action to mitigate the threat. (U)

Cyber Security

As the Government of Canada's (GoC) technical authority for cyber security and information assurance and an integral member of the SITE TF, the CSE's Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (the Cyber Centre) supported the federal by-elections by: (U)

- Providing the political parties with advice and guidance during a SITE briefing, including an overview of common cyber threats and best practices for IT security. (U)
- Providing enhanced monitoring of cyber incidents for EC in the lead up to the June 19, 2023 by-elections. (U)
- Offering political parties a 24/7 Hotline Service to obtain centralized support if party or candidate communications, email, or social media accounts were compromised. The 24/7 Hotline Service will continue to be available to political parties for reporting of cyber incidents until one month after the election. Use of the Hotline triggers an immediate response to minimize damage and restore normal operations. (U)

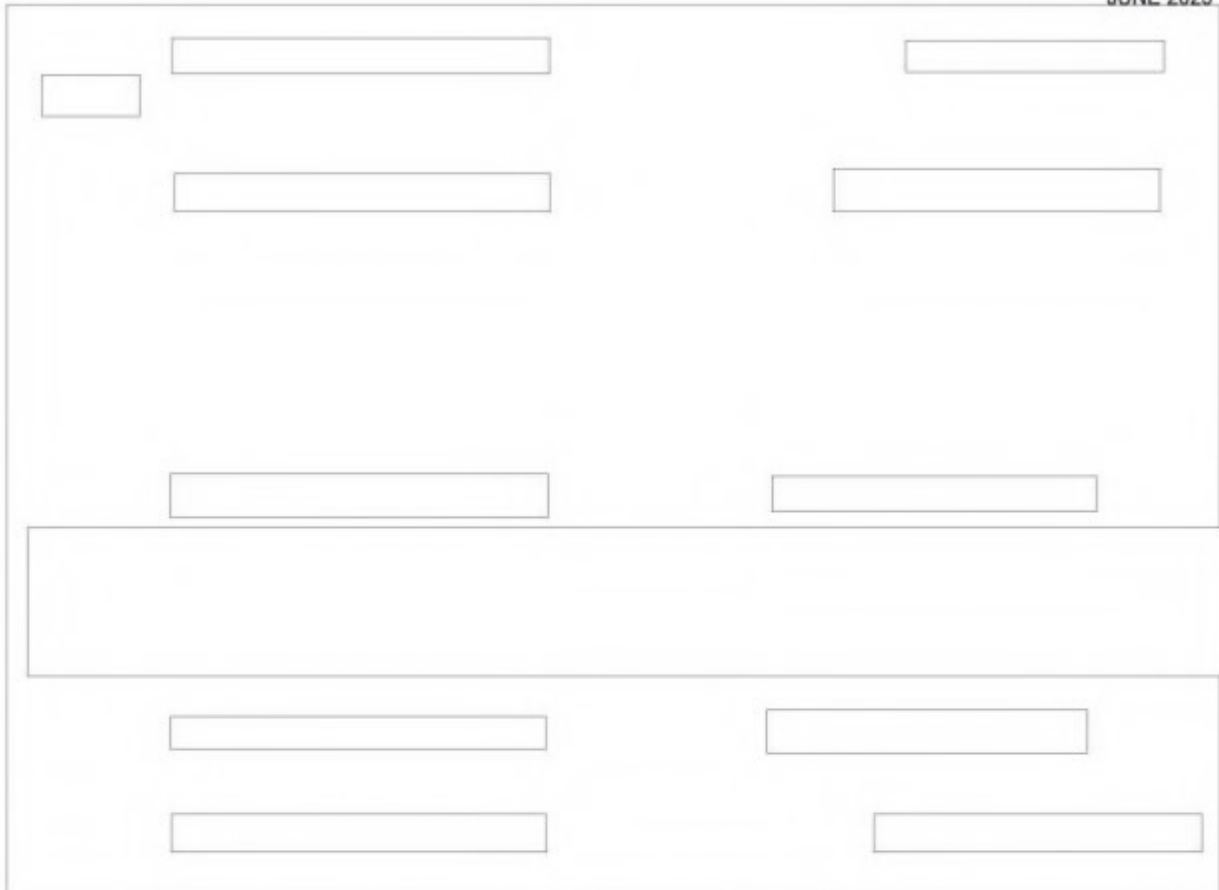
Foreign Interference Defined

The SITE TF defines foreign interference as: "activity conducted or supported by a foreign state/actor that is detrimental to Canadian national interests and is clandestine, deceptive or involves a threat to a person." In the context of Canadian electoral processes, the objective of FI is to affect electoral outcomes and/or undermine public confidence in Canadian democratic institutions. (U)

Detailed Observations on Foreign Interference Actors

For certain foreign states, FI activities are part of their normal pattern of behaviour in Canada and often spike during election periods. The People's Republic of China (PRC), India, Russia, [redacted] Iran and Pakistan have engaged in FI activities in Canada in the past and therefore the SITE TF specifically looked at any FI activities from these foreign states in the lead up to the June 19, 2023 by-elections. [redacted]

[redacted] (S//CEO)



Cyber Security

No cyber incidents were detected to suggest that any foreign state actors were specifically targeting EC in the lead up to June 19, 2023 and on Election Day. The Cyber Centre has not received any calls since the 24/7 Hotline Service was made available on May 30, 2023 for political parties to report cyber incidents. (U)

Detailed Observations on Violent Extremism

While the SITE TF is focused on FI, both the RCMP and CSIS have mandates and authorities to look at threats of violent extremism. For the June 19, 2023 by-elections, the SITE TF committed to reporting any threats of violent extremism directed at the by-elections. (U)

In the lead up to June 19, 2023 and on Election Day, the SITE TF did not identify any threats of violent extremism directed at the by-elections. The SITE TF did not identify any direct threats to the by-elections in social media, message boards, chatrooms, online forums or news media relating to the by-elections. No direct threats to any of the candidates, nor to the administration of the election were identified. (U)

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Daily SITREPs: SITE TF issued daily SITREPs from May 24, 2023 until June 21, 2023 even though SITE TF did not observe any indication of FI directed at the by-elections. This process was very labour intensive and did not add value as there were no observations of FI activity to report. The SITE TF attempted to track readership of the daily SITREPs; however, the response rate was not as high as the SITE TF would have hoped. (U)

Recommendation: During a by-election, the SITE TF recommends that it issue weekly SITE TF SITREPs when there are no observations indicating FI activity. (U)

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