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## USS DM Meeting on Election Security

November 27, 3pm at 1929 Ogilvie Road

### Objectives

- Understand SITE, Elections Canada and PCO views on efforts to secure the Canadian General Election.
- Provide GAC views on lessons learned and the future of the SITE Task Force.
- Recognize efforts of GoC officials in securing the 2019 General Election.

### Key Messages

#### Identifying Foreign Interference and Measuring Impact

- Increasingly difficult to distinguish between foreign and domestic sources of content and activity online or whether foreign sources are state-directed, e.g., transnational non-state actors play an increasingly important role in Foreign Interference (FI) by sharing polarizing messages in partisan social media echo chambers that amplify disagreement and distort public conversation.
- Also difficult – if impossible – to measure impact of (possible) foreign interference on election, e.g., US Govt has still not determined definitively whether Russia's actions in 2016 compromised integrity of election or UK Govt re: Brexit vote.
- P5 and SITE mandates may need to evolve accordingly.

#### Response Mechanisms

- Need to develop clearer response mechanism for addressing possible instances of foreign interference, e.g., unclear whether GoC has taken any action to date with respect to US online "news provider" Buffalo Chronicle's disinformation, in context of credible media reports it was conducted in return for financial gain and of a public petition calling for RCMP investigation.

#### Cooperation with Non-government partners

- SITE could better leverage partnerships with tech-savvy non-government experts engaged in identifying online disinformation, e.g., Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab, Institute for Strategic dialogue, Graphika, Astrolab, McGill Digital Democracy Project
- Requires clear protocols for information-sharing outside of government during sensitive writ period

#### Communications

- Defending against foreign interference, especially disinformation, requires significant public transparency if governments are to help foster resilient communities.
- Should look at ways to improve communications in run-up to, during and after elections to provide Canadians with better understanding of threats and what we are doing to counter them.

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- PCO served as helpful point of coordination for public messaging but communications were largely limited to single set of agreed talking points throughout writ period and thereafter.

**Future of SITE Task Force**

- Future of SITE should be considered as part of broader GoC effort to establish Hostile Activity by State Actors (HASA) Strategy
- Clear need for body like SITE Task Force going forward: next federal election and, where warranted, some provincial and municipal elections; other dimensions of foreign interference.

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## Context

- This DM Elections Security Steering Committee (DM ESSC) will include DMs+1, SITE members and other GoC representatives. It will include read-outs from SITE, Elections Canada and PCO on the elections security process, lessons learned and next steps. It will be followed by a small reception to recognise the contributions of all those who participated in the process.
- GAC officials have been working with PCO and SITE partners to generate lessons learned from the elections security process. In particular, we are contributing to an internal SITE after action report that we expect will be finalised early in 2020. Elections Canada, Commission of Canada Elections and PCO (both Security and Intelligence and former Democratic Institutions) are also generating reports.
- If this meeting presents the opportunity, you may wish to speak to some of the lessons learned we have flagged above.

Author's name/division/tel.  IOL

Consulted divisions/departments: NIL

Approving ADM: IFM

Name and symbol of departmental officer attending/tel.: IFM or IOL -

Attachments: NIL

[APG]