

For Public Release

UNCLASSIFIED

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CLERK OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL

c.c.: Nathalie G. Drouin, Pau MacKinnon, Tushara Williams

**ENGAGEMENT WITH PROVINCIAL AND TERRITORIAL OFFICIALS ON
FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

(Information)

SUMMARY

- At the April 18, 2023, Federal, Provincial, and Territorial (FPT) Clerks and Cabinet Secretaries Meetings, the Communications Security Establishment (CSE) and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) briefed on security and intelligence issues of relevance to provinces and territories. Participants agreed that increased collaboration, and intelligence and information sharing are needed. The previous Clerk of the Privy Council agreed to explore options on how to better facilitate collaboration among FPT officials on national security issues, including on foreign interference in electoral processes.
- To meet this commitment, the Privy Council Office will extend an offer to provincial and territorial officials for the Government of Canada (GoC) to provide briefings on elections security. PCO is engaged in discussions with CSIS on the appropriate classification of the briefing.
- PCO recommends offering sessions to officials from Manitoba and the Northwest Territories in advance of their respective legislative elections, to be held in October and November, 2023. **Do you agree?**

Canada

For Public Release

UNCLASSIFIED**Background**

- At the April 18, 2023, Meeting of FPT Clerks and Cabinet Secretaries, the previous Clerk of the Privy Council committed to exploring options on how to better collaborate on national security issues among FPT officials at different levels. She was joined at the meeting by the Foreign and Defence Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister, the CSE Chief, the CSIS Director, and myself. We each provided updates related to our respective mandates. At that meeting, I noted that the development of a whole-of-government approach on foreign interference was underway, and shared high-level details on recent initiatives.

Considerations

- Given significant public and media interest in alleged foreign interference in elections and democratic institutions in recent months, it is expected that provinces and territories will be keen on discussing measures they can take to protect their electoral processes.
- A briefing on elections security could include a threat assessment on foreign interference and cyber security, steps that can be taken to mitigate these threats, and information on how to report suspected foreign interference activities and cybersecurity incidents. It could also touch upon threats relating to Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism (IMVE). Such briefings would build on previous presentations from 2022 to FPT Clerks and Cabinet Secretaries and to Ontario Deputy Ministers, which focused on mis/disinformation, as well as Canada's Protecting Democracy Plan.
- The briefings will raise awareness of these threats, and provide a valuable opportunity for provincial and territorial officials to benefit from advice and connections made with federal representatives. The federal security and intelligence community could learn directly from provinces and territories on how foreign interference affects them, informing the development of policy responses.
- Manitoba and the Northwest Territories are scheduled to have elections in October and November 2023 respectively. The writs for Manitoba's general election were issued on September 5, which introduces a risk that federal briefings could be perceived as influencing a provincial election. Nonetheless, it is still advisable to hold a briefing for Manitoba given that one would be offered to the Northwest Territories..
- A longer-term plan to provide briefings to provinces and territories in advance of scheduled elections will be developed to ensure all jurisdictions have access to the information they need to take action, with sufficient time to implement potential measures to protect their electoral processes. A longer-term plan could also mitigate any "consultation fatigue" that provinces and territories may be experiencing by setting up engagement sessions well in advance.

For Public Release

UNCLASSIFIEDPCO Comment

- PCO supports the provision of briefings to provincial and territorial officials and will coordinate with departments and agencies to identify appropriate participants and materials.
- Stakeholders have previously expressed disappointment with unclassified briefings, as information or advice may not be specific to their respective jurisdiction or threat environment. This could especially be the case in light of foreign interference-related allegations reported in the media at the provincial and municipal orders of government, as well as recent cybersecurity threats. As CSIS is only authorized to provide unclassified threat overviews to external stakeholders outside the federal government, PCO is engaged in ongoing discussions with CSIS regarding the security classification of this briefing.
- Public consultations on FI-related legislative and program proposals are expected to launch in the near term. Public Safety Canada will also undertake targeted consultations with provincial, territorial, and Indigenous stakeholders with regards to the proposed Foreign Influence Transparency Registry.
- A public inquiry into foreign interference may be announced in the near future. PT governments would likely be interested in the inquiry's findings and recommendations, including protective measures that could be replicated at the PT levels. A public inquiry may also study, or hear from experts on issues related to, the extent of foreign interference in electoral processes of other orders of government.
- Federal departments and agencies will offer these briefings to Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, and provide your office with a debrief of any relevant information.

Jody Thomas

Walshe/Chayer/
Webcims: