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Meeting with CSIS – Foreign Interference Task Force and SITE
 November 9, 2023, 10 a.m. -11 p.m.
 Location: CSIS

Participants

Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS)

- Bo Basler, Director General & CSIS Foreign Interference Coordinator
- CSIS, CSIS; SITE Chair

Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections Canada

- Carmen Boucher, Executive Director, Enforcement
- Louise Panneton, Director of Investigations and Operations
- OCCE, Senior Investigator

Summary

- Basler provided an overview of the SITE Task Force Ecosystem and its evolution over the last few years. Basler noted that SITE was created to respond to challenges such as those of the 2018 election in the USA. The role has evolved and since 2021 SITE is not limited to Foreign Interference but also touches on physical security from CT threats, related to the elections.
- Further to the “public awakening” of the FI threat, CSIS has placed additional resources and created an FI Task Force in large part in order to manage the workload of the multiple reviews and enquiries underway. Evolutions in CSIS organization structure will mean that SITE will join the currently being formed within the Service.
- SITE was created to serve the panel of 5 during the writ period, but was stood up for the bi-elections. Its role didn't end after the elections, as it remains a centralized point of contact for a sort of informal Community of Practice for the Elections. The vision of SITE for the future would be to solidify that role as well. Basler noted that there is an interest in expanding the role of other partners from the electoral ecosystem as well, including Privy Council Office (PCO), Public Safety, ITAC, Elections Canada and OCCE
- Basler noted that the Service is not staffed to take on an unlimited role in this regard and should the reviews results in recommendations to cover off municipal and provincial elections this could have a huge impact.
- Basler stated that the true victims of FI are the diaspora communities who are deprived of their rights as Canadians. Basler noted a particular interest in in this regard. Basler noted has established an electoral security working group.

Roles of partners

- CSIS has taken over as chair of SITE, which is a rotating role. CSIS also has the role of providing analysis of intelligence, including producing unclassified reports.
- ITAC has an expanded mandate with regards to the safety of Parliamentarians, which is playing into the future of its role with SITE.
- PCO's primary role is media relations
- Basler noted that social media plays a huge, ongoing role.

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- Collection of information is ongoing for the Service, so most of its role is prior to the writ period
- Several partners play a role for potential impact, with CSIS having a threat reduction mandate (TRM), and RCMP or OCCE having an enforcement mandate. GAC could be involved in issuing demarches.
- Boucher noted that OCCE has challenges in being an active participant given the confidentiality requirements of our mandate. Basler queried for details and asked whether OCCE would be in a position to provide information on a compromise or threats to the democratic process during an election.
- Basler clarified that the primary role of the panel of 5 is to ensure the integrity of elections. Boucher noted that during an election the primary goal of OCCE is to ensure compliance with the Canada Elections Act, and we have several avenues to do so. Should the OCCE obtain information during an election which indicated an imminent threat to the electoral process, a request for disclosure can be submitted to the Commissioner of Canada Elections under the public interest provision. Disclosures would have to be weighed against the need to ensure political independence and to protect the rights of individuals involved and the possible avenues of investigative action.
- Boucher asked whether, hypothetically, if OCCE had information that it felt it should disclose to SITE, could that information be protected from disclosure. Basler noted that this can definitely be the case, as it would enter the intelligence realm with the accompanying protections. The panel of 5 can be informed of developments with the caveat that it is for information only and not to be further disclosed.
- Basler noted that OCCE may have unique information of high impact.
- Boucher noted that the volume of information received at OCCE during an election may result in information of interest not being triaged upon receipt, which can result in a delay. OCCE does its best to ensure this isn't the case but cannot always identify the importance or predict the outcome of investigative steps.
- Basler noted that the RCMP has a challenge in that it is highly decentralized, and RCMP are trying to improve the coordination with SITE to react more effectively during an election.
- Boucher noted that OCCE has the ability to be more nimble in that it is a very small organization and if something is prioritized for approvals it can move quickly.
- Boucher asked what the steps would be for the SITE role to expand formally. Basler noted that this is currently being assessed but may pass by a committee including the DM Committee for Intelligence Response CIR or the National Security Council.
- Basler noted that the FI Coordinator at Public Safety plays a true coordination role but having received only a small portion of the funding requested, there are insufficient resources to accomplish the role envisioned.
- Basler noted that CSIS intends to hold a tabletop exercise and Boucher noted OCCE interest in participating.

Socialization of OCCE role

- Boucher offered to provide a list of relevant parts of the CEA that can apply to FI. Basler expressed an interest in receiving same.
- Boucher noted that OCCE will be offering stakeholders like the Service a presentation or a workshop on the OCCE role to enable partners to identify information that should result in a

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complaint or a referral, or to identify a development where OCCE may have a unique mandate for impact. Basler and CSIS were very interested in receiving the presentation and CSIS noted that a presentation to SITE participants would be welcome, noting there is a meeting planned for the first week of February. Boucher noted that stakeholders from the Service for such engagement should include litigation branch and possibly the call centre.

- Boucher noted that the CSIS call centre could receive calls during an election which fall under OCCE mandate and should be referred. Boucher noted a desire to engage that section to ensure they are aware of the OCCE mandate and protocol is in place for referrals of tips upon receipt and prior to said tips hitting a compartmentalized space.

Role of classified information

- Basler noted that the flow of information is ongoing and that all partners in the ecosystem need to keep informed on an ongoing basis, to have a baseline. This allows the players to react quickly during an election.
- Throughout the year there are a number of analytical products, classified and unclassified, produced by CSIS and other partners. There are also multiple intelligence reports throughout the year and during an election, as well as the SITE sitreps. These reports are disseminated to SITE members and form the baseline to educate the partners. CSIS noted that each partner must ensure they remain educated on the phenomenon so they can react quickly and assess the status of the situation during an election, per their individual mandates.
- Boucher noted there is work to be done within OCCE regarding One Vision like processes to ensure intelligence is appropriately compartmentalized and does not contaminate investigations.
- Basler noted that the classified documents are disseminated through CTSN and a new, user friendly, pull system (ie the user logs in and pulls the reports assigned to them, or relevant to their mandate).
- Boucher queried whether any of the other partners identified as part of the ecosystem do not have access to a CTSN kiosk. Basler noted only OCCE and Elections are lacking this access.
- Boucher queried as to how much support SITE will provide to partners for said reporting and Basler noted that it is incumbent on the partners to ensure they have the necessary access to secure infrastructure.
- Boucher queried as to whether CSIS could give an idea of the volume and frequency of intelligence the OCCE would receive if it had access to the CTSN infrastructure. Basler noted that the usual systems to pull such statistics would not be effective, because the OCCE has not been actively seeking or receiving this reporting. As such, the number would be an artificially low number and not indicative of potential.
- Basler suggested the best way to get an idea of the reporting value and quantity is to put in the request to receive it, start debriefing the reports and tracking the volume and impact.
- Boucher noted that so far efforts to determine if there is CTSN structure near the OCCE have not progressed and as such, independent access is not imminent.
- Boucher asked whether OCCE could leverage existing CTSN access through the CSIS infrastructure (CSIS) as a dissemination mechanism. Basler noted that his section can flag OCCE as a dissemination client and the dissemination avenue can be done via that existing account, and Basler would be willing to sign off on an account for the pull system. Basler

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can satisfy the CSIS need to know criteria and approve account access. Boucher committed to taking steps to confirm whether this is an option for an interim solution.

Follow-up items:

- Conduct an internal assessment at OCCE as to the feasibility of leveraging the CSIS CTSN infrastructure to have access to classified information, as an interim solution pending more permanent infrastructure access. If determined as a way forward, Basler can satisfy the CSIS need to know criteria and approve account access.
- OCCE would like to participate should a tabletop exercise occur
- Provide SITE with a summary of portions of the [REDACTED] which could apply to FI
- Provide SITE /CSIS with a stakeholder presentation/workshop to sensitize key players to the OCCE role
- SITE to consider whether a presentation by OCCE is appropriate and issue invitation as relevant
- Consider avenues to ensure tip lines are coordinated; possibility of CSIS tip line passing leads to OCCE