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Public Inquiry Into Foreign Interference
in Federal Electoral Processes and
Democratic Institutions

Enquête publique sur l'ingérence étrangère
dans les processus électoraux et les
institutions démocratiques fédéraux

In Camera Examination Summary: A Branch within the CSIS ADR Directorate

Background

A witness (“**Witness 2**”)¹ (from the **Canadian Security Intelligence Service (“CSIS”** or “**the Service**”) was examined by Commission counsel during *in camera* hearings held between February 28 and March 6, 2024. Counsel for the Attorney General of Canada appeared on behalf of the Government of Canada and had the opportunity to examine witnesses. The hearing was held in the absence of the public and other Participants.

Notes to Reader:

- Commission Counsel have provided explanatory notes in square brackets to assist the reader.
- This summary has been produced in reliance on subclause (a)(iii)(C)(II) of the Commission’s Terms of Reference. It discloses the evidence pertinent to clauses (a)(i)(A) and (B) of the Commission’s Terms of Reference that, in the opinion of the Commissioner, would not be injurious to the critical interests of Canada or its allies, national defence or national security.
- This summary contains information that relates to the Commission’s mandate under clauses (a)(i)(A) and (B) of its Terms of Reference. Information provided during the examination that relates to other aspects of the Commission’s Terms of Reference has been omitted from this summary, but may be adduced by the Commission at a later stage of its proceedings.

¹ The identity of this witness must remain secret for national and personal security reasons. The summary will use the pronoun “they” when referring to this witness. This witness is the same person as Witness 2 in the CSIS unclassified interview summary.

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- This summary should be read with the unclassified CSIS Institutional Report prepared by the Government of Canada and the unclassified interview summaries of other CSIS witnesses.

1 A Branch within the ADR Directorate – Examination by Commission Counsel

- [1] Witness 2 presented evidence regarding a branch of CSIS that can be described as the “a branch within the Assistant Director Requirements Directorate” or the “branch”. [The CSIS Representative who testified in camera is referred to as “Witness 2” in the public version of the interview summary].
- [2] Witness 2 confirmed the accuracy of the branch interview summary, which was entered into evidence.
- [3] Witness 2 provided background about their experience and their current position as Senior Intelligence Analyst within the Service. They spent most of their career working for CSIS, where they were an expert on China. Their testimony touched on some People’s Republic of China (“PRC”)-backed foreign interference (“FI”) activities observed during the 2019 and 2021 Canadian federal elections (respectively “GE43” and “GE44”).

1.1 Internal Organization of the Branch within the ADR Directorate

- [4] Witness 2 described the internal structure of the branch within the ADR Directorate, the responsibilities within the branch, and estimated the number of staff. Witness 2 also described the different intelligence products produced by the branch and their intended recipients. Witness 2 explained the branch’s resources devoted to countering FI.

1.2 GE43

1.2.1 Geopolitical context

- [5] Witness 2 discussed the geopolitical context relevant to the 2019 election. Canada was in a new space vis-à-vis its bilateral relationship with China in that Canada had detained Meng Wanzhou and the potential that the Government of Canada might ban Huawei from

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accessing Canada's 5G network. Witness 2 explained that China engages with Canada through the lens of its relationship with the United States. That relationship was more tense in 2019.

- [6] Witness 2 testified that the Service was attuned to the threat of foreign interference, particularly FI directed against political actors or processes like an election. Witness 2 explained that PRC foreign interference doesn't operate on election cycles. Rather, the PRC is constantly working on trying to influence policy-makers.
- [7] Witness 2 identified a number of reasons as to why the PRC would have been interested in influencing Canada. First, Canada is a member of important international organizations such as the G7, NATO and the Five Eyes Alliance. China views these Western alliances a threat to the realization of its own goals. Influencing Canada could be a means to destabilising these organizations. Second, Canada has a certain international presence and reputation that the PRC could seek to leverage in order to try and divide traditional links. For example, if China were to advance a motion at the UN, and were able to get Canada to support that motion, it would carry weight because of Canada's reputation. If they are able to get Canada to support something that the United States does not support, they can create a wedge between us and the United States. Third, Canada is a leading economy with significant natural resources. Canada is also a leader in many technological areas that the PRC has identified as crucial technologies to its own modernization and advancement. E.g. artificial intelligence and quantum. Fourth, Canada is the neighbour of the United States, the PRC's greatest object of interest. This geographic proximity, Witness 2 explained, means that the PRC will try to use Canada as a conduit to the United States in various ways, including in the academic and business sectors. Fifth, Canada is home to one of the largest Chinese diasporas in the world. The Chinese Communist Party ("CCP") believes it speaks on behalf of all Chinese, regardless of citizenship. Since at least the 1990s, Witness 2 explained, the CCP has taken great interest in monitoring and controlling diasporic communities around the world. Since Canada is home to a large Chinese community, Canada is of interest.
- [8] Specific cases of PRC FI Witness 2 testified about an intelligence assessment which assessed that several PRC-linked individuals had worked in loose cooperation with one

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another to covertly advance the PRC's interests ahead of, and during, the 2019 election. These individuals were working for a similar purpose or toward a similar goal but were not coordinated in a traditional, command-control kind of way. This loose coordination and lack of a central command can be explained, in part, due to the way the CCP's United Front Work Department ("UFWD") is structured and how the United Front system operates to conduct FI, including in Canada.

- [9] The UFWD, with the personal involvement of PRC officials, is a CCP body that reports directly to the CCP Central Committee. The UFWD is responsible for coordinating and providing the outlook of United Front work, both within and outside of China. PRC officials in Canada are directly involved in the planning, coordination and execution of United Front work in Canada. United Front links within the Chinese-Canadian communities in Canada are prevalent with varying degrees of transparency.
- [10] Witness 2 explained that United Front work tries to garner support for the CCP of as many people as possible and minimize the number that oppose. This is done by trying to influence, both overtly and covertly, diaspora communities, the Government of Canada and other actors to adopt positions in support of the PRC preferred policies. The UFWD has developed strong ties with Chinese diaspora communities over the years in an attempt to maintain some control over those communities. One means of developing strong ties comes from supporting—overtly and covertly—Canadian officials who are favorable to PRC policies while undermining those who are opposed.
- [11] As a result, diaspora communities can be pressured to vote in accordance with its preference, using sticks and carrots. Witness 2 said that many members of this diaspora community are afraid that the PRC will know who they voted for and do not dare vote against the country's expressed preferences. Witness 2 believes that the PRC's ultimate objective is to condition the response of the diaspora community so that they vote in a certain way without having to be told to. The United Front work that is of concern for CSIS is when it is clandestine, deceptive or threatening.
- [12] Witness 2 testified about certain specific cases of FI observed ahead and during GE43 suspected to be linked to the PRC and the UFWD.

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[13] Witness 2 testified about the activities of an individual assessed by the Service to be a proxy for the PRC. Second, Witness 2 testified about the suspicion that PRC officials, through a Canadian proxy, was connected to support for Han Dong during the 2019 Don Valley North nomination contest.

1.3 GE44

1.3.1 Geopolitical Context

[14] Witness 2 discussed the geopolitical context surrounding the 2021 election noting it was similar to 2019. The global pandemic had a direct link to China and its position in the world and its reputation and the Meng Wanzhou and Huawei situations had not yet been resolved. The bilateral relationship between China and the United States had deteriorated even more.

1.3.2 Specific FI Cases

[15] Witness 2 discussed two specific FI incidents that occurred during the 2021 election.

[16] First, Witness 2 was asked about reporting regarding FI during the 2021 election.

[17] Second, Witness 2 was asked about Service assessed disinformation campaigns targeting the Conservative Party of Canada and Members of Parliament, Kenny Chiu and Erin O'Toole. According to the reporting, the disinformation campaigns intentionally mischaracterized MP. Chiu and his position on China and his proposed foreign agent registry. It also did so for MP. O'Toole and the Conservative Party's position vis-à-vis China.

[18] Witness 2 testified that CSIS could not attribute the disinformation campaigns to a foreign state, but that certain information suggested that the disinformation campaigns may be PRC-backed. The disinformation campaigns originated from groups, many of whom had formal relationship with China News Service, an organization run directly by the UFWD. Much of the disinformation was relayed on Chinese social media platforms such as WeChat (which is run by a PRC company called Tencent). The timing of the disinformation campaigns coincided with the Conservative Party of Canada starting to

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lead in the public polls. MP. Chiu and the Conservative Party of Canada, of which MP. O'Toole was the leader, were known to take vocal positions against the PRC on a number of issues.

- [19] Witness 2 testified that the PRC is entirely party agnostic meaning it has no ideological or partisan affinity to any one party in Canada. The questions asked by the PRC include – who, on a riding-by-riding basis, does the PRC have a relationship with? Who do they believe will be “friendly” or “friendlier” to China and its interests? Who has the best chance of winning? Witness 2 noted that FI tends to be focused more on the Conservative and Liberal Parties of Canada because those are the two parties that tend to win the most seats. That said, the PRC will support anyone that they believe will serve their interests.