

UNCLASSIFIED



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: The Honorable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs

The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc was examined by Commission counsel on March 6, 2024 in an *in camera* hearing. The Attorney General of Canada attended and had the opportunity to examine the witness. On application of the Government of Canada, the hearing was held in the absence of the public and the 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.
- This summary should be read in conjunction with the Institutional Report prepared by the Government of Canada and the unclassified interview summary prepared by Commission Counsel.

UNCLASSIFIED

Examination by Commission Counsel

- [1] Minister LeBlanc confirmed the accuracy of the classified summary of his interview and adopted its content as part of his evidence before the Commission.

Responsibilities in Cabinet – Countering Foreign Interference

- [2] After the 2019 election, Minister LeBlanc became President of the then-Queen’s Privy Council for Canada, which included responsibility for **Democratic Institutions (“DI”)** as part of his ministerial portfolio. At the time, this portfolio was not a standalone government department. Instead, it was supported by a secretariat housed within the **Privy Council Office (“PCO”)**.
- [3] Senior officials in the Democratic Institutions Secretariat at PCO are largely responsible for policy development and program development around election integrity. They were very active in preparing the Plan to Protect Canada’s Democracy, which led to the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol, which set up the SITE Task Force and many, if not all, of the other elements that the government started to stand up to deal with an increasing concern around foreign interference, disinformation and misinformation. This evolved from their understanding of the 2016 American election and the Brexit Referendum. His predecessor, Minister Karina Gould, brought the Plan to Protect Canada’s democracy to Cabinet, which was adopted.
- [4] When Minister LeBlanc became Democratic Institutions Minister, he worked with the Democratic Institutions secretariat to update the Plan to Protect Democracy.
- [5] The Democratic Institutions Secretariat is also the government’s interface with Elections Canada, and the Democratic Institutions Minister is the minister designated as being responsible for the *Canada Elections Act*, so they would have semi-annual meetings with the Chief Electoral Officer. The *Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act* is also part of that portfolio.
- [6] As Democratic Institutions Minister, Minister LeBlanc was not a consumer of detailed intelligence, and certainly not a consumer of intelligence about specific ridings. The intelligence that was shared was more of a general nature about the evolving threat, and

UNCLASSIFIED

measures that they could adapt to meet the evolving threat. It was not intelligence related to specific threat assessments.

- [7] Minister LeBlanc feels that it was appropriate for him to not receive detailed intelligence, even in hindsight, as he was confident that senior officials would brief him about the threat landscape and measures that, in their judgment, would be appropriate to detect, counter or disrupt **foreign interference (“FI”)** activities. He later reiterated that he did not believe he was missing anything.
- [8] As of the summer of 2020, Minister LeBlanc was responsible for **Intergovernmental Affairs (“IGA”)**, another secretariat housed within PCO. Minister LeBlanc had also held this role before the 2019 election but those responsibilities had been temporarily reassigned in 2019 due to illness.
- [9] Though FI was not an area of focus within the IGA portfolio, Minister LeBlanc was occasionally asked to liaise with provincial Premiers in order to offer briefings or support regarding FI from the federal government. His involvement was incidental to the substantive issues being raised, and he primarily acted as a conduit between senior officials and the provincial governments.

Specific Briefings and Incidents

March 12, 2020 Briefing

- [10] Minister LeBlanc recalled a general briefing he had received on March 12, 2020 on the overall threat environment in relation to democratic processes. During this briefing, which Minister LeBlanc described as a “higher-level policy overview”, he recalled that PCO officials informed him that the mechanisms implemented by the Plan had been effective and that there had not been a reason during the writ period in 2019 for the Panel to have made an announcement. He recalled being reassured that the mechanisms and oversight systems had largely functioned well, in PCO’s view. He also recalls that the briefing concluded with the PCO officials saying that there would be some work on reviewing and revising the CEIPP.

UNCLASSIFIED

[11] Minister LeBlanc did not remember being briefed on details of specific constituencies or actors during the March 12, 2020, briefing, but recalled that there was a focus on China as being a principal actor in this space, but not the only actor.

[12] At no time before his preparation for the *in camera* hearing of March 6, 2024 was Minister LeBlanc provided with the SITE TF reports.

[13] Minister LeBlanc did not receive a detailed overview of any FI incidents during the 2019 or 2021 elections until 2023, after allegations relating to FI surfaced in the media.

February and May 2023 Briefings

[14] Minister LeBlanc recalled being briefed by the CSIS Director in February 2023 on FI activities in the 2019 and 2021 election, followed by two further briefings on May 18 and 30, 2023, which had been convened by the Clerk, Janice Charette, where he was briefed by the CSIS Director and other CSIS officials and subject matter experts.

[15] Minister LeBlanc clarified that, prior to the February 2023 briefing, he was aware that the PRC was the principal actor attempting to interfere in Canada's democratic processes. This briefing was the first time that Minister LeBlanc was briefed on the specifics and granularity of those attempts. However, Minister LeBlanc was not able to say with total certainty whether he learned of particular details in either the February 2023 briefing or the May 2023 briefings.

[16] It was at these briefings that Minister LeBlanc was first told about several activities, including:

- a) Disinformation campaigns targeting Mr. Kenny Chiu and Mr. Erin O'Toole. Minister LeBlanc did not remember CSIS officials ascribing an outcome or an impact to those campaigns. He believed he would have remembered had CSIS officials ascribed an outcome or an impact to the disinformation or misinformation. Minister LeBlanc also noted that it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine the precise level of impact of any specific event or piece of information, especially when there were several other significant issues active in the election, such as gun control. No one is able to determine what any particular voter had in their minds when voting.

UNCLASSIFIED

- [17] Minister LeBlanc recalled that the May 18, 2023, briefing included a presentation from a CSIS official who indicated that the PRC had initially wanted to punish the Liberal Party and was shifting to the Conservative Party, before shifting back to the Liberal Party. Minister LeBlanc recalled being skeptical on this point. He remarked that people often take credit for things that happen during an election.
- [18] Overall, Minister LeBlanc would not have expected to receive the same level of granularity regarding FI in the 2021 elections in his role as Minister of DI as he now receives as Minister of Public Safety. Although it is necessary for the Minister of Public Safety to have granular information about specific allegations, the Democratic Institutions Minister does not have operational oversight over any of these agencies, or any authority related to them. The role of the Democratic Institutions Minister is to work with PCO officials, who do have access to intelligence and work with their colleagues at CSIS, to develop policies and programs related to democratic institutions, disinformation/misinformation, and countering foreign interference.
- [19] Minister LeBlanc noted again that he had been briefed in early 2023, as Minister of DI, not because he needed to have an operational view, but rather because issues related to FI had been made public, and he and other Ministers needed to be in a position to be able to be able to talk about those issues.

Examination by Counsel for the Government of Canada

- [20] Minister LeBlanc contrasted his current ability to contextualize intelligence as the Minister of Public Safety to what he received as Minister of DI. Having now worked more closely with senior intelligence officials, he has had opportunities to learn about the broader context of how intelligence fits into governmental decisions. When he was Minister of DI, he would not have known the significance of a piece of raw intelligence as opposed to an assessed piece of intelligence. He noted that assessments have been reviewed by various senior officials in the security community, and may also have benefited from the input of senior officials at Global Affairs Canada. By the time intelligence is included in advice from a Deputy Minister or the Director of CSIS, or is raised at a National Security Council meeting, it is clear how that intelligence has been refined and adjusted, and

UNCLASSIFIED

benefits from the various perspectives that are incorporated by the time it gets to a Minister.

Examination by the Commissioner

- [21] In his current role as Minister of Public Safety, Minister LeBlanc noted that he rarely needs to ask for additional information after he has received a report or a briefing from CSIS, though he has made such a request. Minister LeBlanc noted that he has full confidence that, in the time that senior officials have with him, he will be informed of any significant issues that he needs to be aware of. In most cases, he receives intelligence to be informed, rather than because he needs to approve something.
- [22] Minister LeBlanc also explained that he maintains open and direct communication with agency heads to ensure that they are able to reach him in order to be able to brief him on any issue that they identify as relevant.