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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: the Honourable Bill Blair, Minister of Defence

The Honourable Bill Blair, in his capacity of former Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, was examined by Commission counsel on March 6, 2024 in an *in camera* hearing. Counsel for the Attorney General of Canada appeared on behalf of the Government of Canada and had the opportunity to examine the witness. 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.
- This summary should be read in conjunction with the Public Safety Institutional Report prepared by the Government of Canada and the unclassified interview summary prepared by Commission Counsel.

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1. Examination by Commission Counsel

[1] Minister Blair confirmed the accuracy of the classified version of the summary of his interview and it was entered in evidence.

1.1. Role of PS Minister in Countering FI

[2] Minister Blair spent 39 years as a police officer in the City of Toronto, holding various positions, including Chief of Toronto Police Service from 2005-2015. He was elected as a Member of Parliament in October 2015. In the summer of 2018, the Prime Minister appointed Minister Blair as a Member of Cabinet- Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction. He was appointed Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness after the 2019 election. In that role, Minister Blair was responsible for matters of public safety, national security and emergency management.

[3] Minister Blair had ministerial oversight responsibility for a number of federal agencies, notably **Canadian Security Intelligence Service (“CSIS”)**, the Parole Board of Canada, the Correctional Service of Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency and the **Royal Canadian Mounted Police (“RCMP”)**. Each of these agencies, as mandated by their respective legislation, reported to him directly. One of the ways in which Minister Blair exercised that oversight was by way of Ministerial directive.

[4] Minister Blair also indicated that the **Deputy Minister (“DM”)** also maintained oversight of the work of the agencies. Minister Blair worked closely with the Deputy Minister of Public Safety and then, in part through the Deputy Minister, but also directly with the agency heads described immediately above. Initially, Gina Wilson held the role of Deputy Minister, but was soon succeeded in that role by Rob Stewart

[5] One of Minister Blair’s responsibilities was to be made aware of matters of national security, including foreign interference, by the agencies, particularly the RCMP, CSIS and others, and the Deputy Minister. He was also responsible for authorizing CSIS warrants,

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based on the recommendation of the Deputy Minister and the Director, to go forward to a Federal Court judge for approval.

- [6] He was briefed fairly regularly by the CSIS Director throughout his tenure. He recalled taking action in December 2020. In response to a Parliamentary motion, he tabled a 12-page report in Parliament on political interference and the **Hostile Activities by State Actors (“HASA”)** in December 2020, and it included all forms of foreign interference. Minister Blair’s intent was to raise awareness about the issues of the impact of foreign interference on a number of important institutions, Canada’s political infrastructure, judicial systems and other matters. That was done very much in concert with the CSIS Director. Minister Blair believed that the report talked about the importance of making Parliamentarians and Canadians aware of the impact of foreign interference, and particularly the hostile activities of certain state actors, notably, the People’s Republic of China (“PRC”).
- [7] Minister Blair continued that he felt it was important that all Parliamentarians and all Canadians have an understanding of the hostile activities of state actors. Sometimes, those activities can be covert. Sometimes they are difficult to recognize, but their influence and the negative impact they can have on important Canadian institutions can be quite insidious. He believed that raising public awareness and attribution of some of that interference is one of the reasons that he made a conscious decision to specifically name China in that report. Minister Blair referenced the geopolitical climate, which included the two Michaels being held in China and Meng Wanzhou’s extradition matter. It was something of a complex environment, but he thought it was important to make sure that Parliamentarians in particular, as well as all Canadians, had an understanding of the fact that this interference is taking place, not just in Canada’s political institutions, but more broadly in society.
- [8] Minister Blair explained seeing an evolution over time of misinformation and disinformation. The activities of hostile state actors sometimes are not always easy for Canadians to recognize, and bringing to their attention that this activity was taking place,

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attributing it to particular state actors such as the PRC was important to share. That is why they tabled the public report. The CSIS Director was also making a number of public pronouncements in alerting Canadians to the threat so that they could take action to recognize interference when it takes place, and to begin to give them information on what they could do in order to protect themselves.

1.2. Flow of Information

- [9] While Minister Blair received intelligence from the RCMP and the Communications Security Establishment (“CSE”), the intelligence sharing was primarily done through CSIS. He received information from the Director of CSIS and his senior staff about matters of national security intelligence at a certain level. He has clearance for access to top secret levels of national security intelligence, and that information would be shared with him by the Director of CSIS. Matters of Secret and Top Secret (and levels above Top Secret) would be shared in a SCIF [Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility] by the CSIS Director, where he would be briefed and documents would be placed before him.
- [10] Deputy Minister Stewart did not brief Minister Blair on intelligence matters directly. The Deputy Minister would occasionally be present in the SCIF with the Director or the Deputy Director from CSIS. Top secret materials were not emailed. Top Secret material would be presented by the Director. If he happened to be in Toronto and information needed to be shared, he would attend at a SCIF there, where documents were shared with him. Occasionally, the Director and his staff would appear on video, and occasionally he would just be given reports to read. His Ministerial staff would notify him that CSIS wanted him to attend the SCIF.
- [11] Minister Blair testified that when he was advised that there were Top Secret documents that CSIS wanted him to see, he would be notified by and briefed by CSIS. That message would be routed through Minister Blair’s chief of staff, who controls his calendar.
- [12] Minister Blair also noted that he authorized a number of warrants. In each case, he would be asked to go into the SCIF, where he would be presented with a binder containing all

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relevant materials, which he reviewed thoroughly in order to ensure that the warrant application met the statutory requirements. It usually took 2.5 - 3 hours to review. He approved each of the applications put before him, but he tried very hard to fulfill his responsibilities to make sure that he reviewed that material thoroughly.

2. Examination by Counsel for the Government of Canada

[13] The report that Minister Blair tabled in Parliament in December 2020 was also addressed as a letter to each of the 338 members of Parliament, which he had sent to them directly to ensure that it came to their attention. The report/letter contents were consistent with information that he received from CSIS and other agencies.