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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

Interview Summary: Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister)

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau was interviewed by Commission Counsel on February 27, 2024. The interview was held in a secure environment and included references to classified information. This is the public version of the classified interview summary that was entered into evidence in the course of the Commission's in camera hearings held in February and March 2024.

Notes to Reader:

- Commission Counsel have provided explanatory notes in square brackets to assist the reader.
- This summary has been prepared pursuant to 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 interview 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 **Privy Council Office ("PCO")** and the **Prime Minister's Office ("PMO")** Institutional Reports prepared by the Government of Canada.

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1. Background

- [1] Prime Minister Trudeau became Prime Minister (“PM”) of Canada in 2015 and has served in this role since. He has been a Member of Parliament since 2008.

2. Efforts against Foreign Interference (“FI”) since 2015

- [2] PM Trudeau described the evolution of foreign interference and the Government’s efforts in response to this threat since becoming Prime Minister. The Government has launched several initiatives, such as the **National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (“NSICOP”)** to increase the accountability and effectiveness of intelligence agencies. He noted that NSICOP included members of all parties. Before the creation of NSICOP, there was no oversight of the intelligence agencies by elected officials.
- [3] PM Trudeau noted that the threat of FI became more of an area of focus following the allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. He also identified the 2017 Presidential election in France as a turning point. During this election campaign a French authority learned of Russia’s intent to lead a significant disinformation campaign to discredit President Macron. The authority chose to publicly disclose the information to pre-empt the damage that would be caused. PM Trudeau remembered wondering who that objective authority would be if similar circumstances arise in a Canadian election. He drew a clear link between this event and the creation of the Panel of 5 and the Security and Intelligence Threats to the Elections Task Force (“SITE TF”). PM Trudeau also flagged the creation of the Rapid Response Mechanism at G7 as an effort to protect Canadian democracy from FI.
- [4] Throughout the implementation of these initiatives and leading up to the 2019 election, PM Trudeau noted that he received frequent briefings on FI and was well aware that certain state actors looked at democracy in Canada and elsewhere as a target.

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3. Intelligence Flow to the PM

3.1 Paper Briefings

- [5] At the beginning of PM Trudeau's tenure, he received regular written intelligence products in a binder that was created for him daily. The binder contained other documents, including his daily schedule, notes for approval, and other pertinent documents. He usually received the binder at the end of the day.
- [6] PM Trudeau explained that, now, these products are no longer included in a binder, but are placed on his desk. He reads them when he can. If he is not able to read the document, he trusts that someone else, specifically the **National Security and Intelligence Advisor ("NSIA")**, will tell him if there is something important that he needs to know. If something of note comes up, a specific intelligence product may be brought to his attention. Sometimes he receives oral briefings in a secure room on specific topics.
- [7] PM Trudeau was asked about a Prime Minister Weekly Intelligence Brief ("PMWIB"). He explained this is the type of document that would appear on his desk. He stated he would read the document if it seemed particularly pertinent, and when time allowed. If something of note comes up, a specific intelligence product may be brought to his attention. Sometimes he receives oral briefings in a secure room on specific topics.
- [8] PM Trudeau noted that paper products are not the most effective means through which he receives intelligence. Rather, the primary method through which he receives intelligence comes in the form of updates from the NSIA. The NSIA will tell him that she needs to meet with him. Sometimes the NSIA briefs the PMO staff first, and then the PM. PM Trudeau is always briefed in advance of international travel or calls with international leaders, and the NSIA usually travels with him. He believes that he is well-briefed on issues that matter.
- [9] During the pandemic, PM Trudeau received fewer paper briefing products, but continued to receive regular intelligence briefings and updates. He received briefings and updates by secure phone or secure video-conference.

UNCLASSIFIED

[10] When intelligence is brought to him, it is usually classified at a level that allows it to be set on his desk. He views highly sensitive intelligence products presented to him by a **client relations officer (“CRO”)** on a classified device which is then removed. When asked how often he receives intelligence from CROs, he stated that it depended on what was going on at the time: sometimes he would go two months without seeing a CRO, other times he might meet with a CRO several times a week.

3.2 Role of the NSIA

[11] PM Trudeau relies largely on the NSIA to keep him apprised of what intelligence he needs to know about, and what intelligence he should read. His Chief of Staff, Katie Telford, might also flag intelligence to him directly if she sees him before the NSIA. The Clerk of the Privy Council (“PCO Clerk”) has done the same. However, in both cases, PM Trudeau understands that the NSIA was the source of the update.

[12] The frequency of PM Trudeau’s meetings with the NSIA depends on the circumstances and the NSIA themselves. He meets with Nathalie Drouin [the current NSIA], as he did with her predecessor Jody Thomas, a minimum of 1-2 times per week, and more frequently if something in particular is happening. Briefings are even more common when he travels, as the NSIA is usually with him. This NSIA and the PCO Clerk are the two public servants with whom he interacts the most.

[13] PM Trudeau indicated that he not believe the high turnover rate in the NSIA position has affected his ability to stay informed on important intelligence issues.

[14] PM Trudeau recalled that Richard Fadden and Daniel Jean held the role of the NSIA in earlier years. After Mr. Jean’s departure, PM Trudeau urged Mr. Jean’s successor, Greta Bossenmaier, to consider how to create a more active and connected role for the NSIA. PM Trudeau noted that when Vincent Rigby [Greta Bossenmaier’s successor] was the NSIA, Ian Shugart was PCO Clerk. Given that Mr. Shugart had deep experience in the national security space, he played a more active role on national security issues than other Clerks. PM Trudeau recalled that David Morrison held the role of NSIA temporarily, followed by Jody Thomas, who had done an excellent job in the position and making the role more active, as he envisioned. He further noted that the creation of the Deputy NSIA

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position was a very positive development and commented that both his current NSIA, Nathalie Drouin, and her Deputy, Dan Rogers, are outstanding.

3.3 Information and Briefings on FI

[15] PM Trudeau was asked about the chronology of information he had received on foreign interference, with reference to a series of documents produced to the Commission regarding briefings and memoranda he may have received. The PM noted that in addition to formal oral and written briefings, he often discussed FI in the context of policy initiatives that he and his team were working to implement. He also often received informal oral briefings from the NSIA or the Clerk, which were not recorded.

➤ Briefing to the Prime Minister, People's Republic of China Political Interference in Canada, June 29, 2017 (the PM was provided with another version of CAN002468)

[16] [This is a memorandum prepared by the NSIA, Daniel Jean, in 2017 which details Chinese efforts at interfering in Canadian democratic and political processes. It includes recommendations from the NSIA, including that MPs should be appropriately briefed ahead of international travel. An earlier draft of the memo, with differences in its content, was among the documents whose content was leaked in 2022-23]

[17] PM Trudeau recalled seeing this document and noted that he had initialed it. He confirmed that the advice contained reflects the advice he was receiving at the time. He remembered having conversations about improving MPs' awareness of the FI threat and noted that he would have endorsed this type of security briefing as it reflected a more active posture on threats. He agreed that the NSIA also urged caution in singling out specific countries publicly, given the potential impact on bilateral relations, but noted that countries that crossed the line should be reminded of the potential for consequences.

4. Briefings regarding the 2019 election

➤ Memorandum to the Minister, Update on Threats to Democratic Institutions Threat Reduction Measures—Foreign Interference Activities, August, 22, 2019 (CAN002919)

UNCLASSIFIED

[18] [This is a memorandum prepared by the CSIS Director, David Vigneault, in 2019, which provides an update on the threat reduction measures put in place to address FI.]

[19] PM Trudeau did not recall seeing this document and further indicated that he does not receive this type of document, as it is addressed to a Minister, not to him.

[20] When asked if he had been briefed on the foreign intelligence threat prior to the 2019 election, the PM responded that briefings he had received would have led to his decision to create the SITE TF and Panel of 5 mechanisms, but that he had no recollection of any formal briefings on specific threats in the lead-up to the 2019 election.

➤ FI Efforts Against Han Dong, (CAN000834)

[21] [This document provides an overview, prepared by CSIS, of allegations that the PRC may have acted in relation to the nomination contest in Don Valley North, and confirms that cleared representatives of the Liberal Party received this information on September 28, 2019.]

[22] Jeremy Broadhurst briefed PM Trudeau on allegations relating to the Han Dong nomination in late September 2019. That was the first time PM Trudeau learned of the intelligence respecting Mr. Dong's nomination. PM Trudeau noted that it is difficult to separate what he had heard from Mr. Broadhurst in that conversation from what he learned later.

[23] As Leader of the Liberal Party, PM Trudeau was generally aware of nomination races, particularly when they involve replacing a sitting MP [Geng Tan in this case]. The Liberal Party has an internal process to report irregularities and complaints within the nomination process. By the time a complaint or allegation regarding a nomination race reached him, there would be a body of evidence and a series of conclusions to support it. He noted that it would require a very high bar to overturn a nomination. PM Trudeau could not recall an instance where a nomination result had been overturned because of problems in the nomination process itself, although there are candidates who he has removed for other reasons.

[24] Mr. Broadhurst told him that intelligence had flagged concerns that buses of students had been brought to the Don Valley North nomination meeting. He noted that the allegations

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were concerning, but also remembered asking whether the intelligence agency understood that busing people to nomination meetings was a standard part of the political nomination process. He also remembered that the intelligence was only an allegation, and included no evidence that the people being bussed to the polls were supported by PRC officials. The fact that there were buses of Chinese-speaking people at the nomination meeting did not necessarily corroborate the allegation that the PRC was responsible. Because both nomination candidates were Chinese-Canadian, it would not be unusual to have buses of Chinese-speaking people brought to the nominations. PM Trudeau would have needed more information to act. He asked Mr. Broadhurst if the Liberal Party process had flagged any irregularities or concerns around Don Valley North. Mr. Broadhurst informed him that it had not.

[25] When he was briefed, the only action available to PM Trudeau would have been to overturn Han Dong's nomination. He saw this as a drastic option, and suggested that the threshold for taking this type of action was very high, particularly given the serious consequences for Mr. Dong.

➤ Memorandum for the Prime Minister, Safeguarding the 2019 Election, January 14, 2020 (CAN015487)

[26] [This memorandum was prepared by the NSIA, David Morrison, and sent to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) following the 2019 election. It provides an assessment of the efforts taken to safeguard the 2019 election and notes that, according to the SITE TF, there was no significant instance of FI that compromised the integrity of the 2019 election.

[27] PM Trudeau did not specifically recall having read the document. However, he noted that it mirrored the Panel of Five's conclusion that the threshold for a public announcement had not been met.

[28] PM Trudeau was asked to clarify the distinction between a memorandum "for information" and a memorandum "for decision". A memorandum "for information" means that the PM does not need to make a specific decision in response to the memo (for instance, where an action is being taken under the authority of a Minister). Where a memorandum is provided to him "for decision", the PM must approve or deny the proposed action.

UNCLASSIFIED

- Memorandum for the Prime Minister, Response to the NSICOP 2019 Annual Report, March 3, 2020, (CAN015495)

[29] [This memorandum was prepared by the NSIA at the time, Vincent Rigby. It provides an update on the NSICOP Annual and Special Reports for 2019 and notes that the PM approved redactions to both reports to remove information that would be injurious if disclosed through the tabling process. Pursuant to section 21 the *NSICOP Act*, the Committee must submit to the Prime Minister a report of the reviews it conducted during the preceding year.]

[30] PM Trudeau noted that this document is an unsigned memo, meaning that it would not have been sent to him. However, he remembered approving the release of a public version of the NSICOP 2019 Annual Report. He explained that the public servants propose redactions for his approval; he does not participate in the process of determining what redactions should be made. While elected officials would never suggest redactions, they can push back against the public servants if they believe that the redactions are excessive. PM Trudeau believes that it is important to have national-security redactions applied in a non-partisan way.

- Briefing to the Prime Minister on Foreign Interference, CSIS, February 9, 2021

[31] The PM and his staff received an oral briefing on FI on February 9, 2021.

[32] PM Trudeau recalled attending this briefing by secure phone, while travelling, but noted that he would not have and did not receive the briefing notes. He further noted that not everything in the briefing notes would have been said during the briefing. He recalled this briefing as largely a general discussion of the dangers of foreign interference.

[33] In reading the briefing notes, PM Trudeau took note of CSIS's description of the nominations process as an attractive target for foreign interference because there are "few impediments prohibiting foreign nationals from voting". PM Trudeau observed that there are in fact *no* impediments prohibiting foreign nationals from voting in the nominations process: he explained that this is an intentional decision, to encourage wide participation in nomination races.

UNCLASSIFIED

[34] When questioned on intelligence regarding possible FI impact on other parties, PM Trudeau indicated that he had never been briefed on the particular case mentioned by the Commission. PM Trudeau noted that the public service would generally avoid using an example drawn from intelligence on the business of other federal political parties when briefing him or his staff.

5. Briefings regarding the 2021 Election

➤ National Security Briefings to Parliamentarians, July 22, 2021

[35] [This is a briefing note requesting the PM's approval to have CSIS and CSE provide briefings on cyber threats and FI to Members of Parliament, Senators and a limited number of officials from recognized parties]

[36] PM Trudeau did not specifically recall receiving this note, but did remember having approved the briefings to Parliamentarians and party representatives.

[37] PM Trudeau did not recall receiving any formal briefings on foreign interference in the period leading up to the 2021 Election, however he recalled regular informal conversations on this issue.

[38] During a writ period, PM Trudeau observed that he receives very little intelligence information, generally only if there is an urgent and specific crisis. He gave the fall of Kabul and the ensuing evacuation as an example.

5.1 Allegations of FI

➤ Liberal Party Representatives SITE Briefing, September 11, 2021 (CAN001082)

[39] [This is a summary of the briefing delivered by SITE representatives to the cleared representatives of the Liberal Party of Canada regarding potential interference from the PRC.]

[40] PM Trudeau was first informed of this issue after the election.

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5.2 Allegations of Indian Interference in the 2021 Election

[41] PM Trudeau was not provided with intelligence reports on this topic during the 2021 election.

5.3 Further Briefings

- Briefing to the Prime Minister on Foreign Interference Threats to Canada's Democratic Institutions, October 26, 2022 (CAN015842)
- [Handwritten Notes of B. Clow & Meeting Invitation], October 27, 2022 (CAN017999)

[42] PM Trudeau received an oral briefing on FI on October 27, 2022. [These documents are, respectively, speaking points for the briefing, and notes taken at the briefing].

[43] PM Trudeau recalled this briefing, but had not previously seen the speaking points. This is not the first time that PM has heard of a particular Canadian citizen who was discussed during the briefing as a potential PRC interference actor. PM Trudeau had been aware for many years of allegations that this individual was linked to the PRC.

[44] PM Trudeau noted an error in the reporting concerning this individual and explained this was an example of how intelligence can be erroneous.

5.4 The media leaks

5.4.1 Alleged transfer of \$250,000 from PRC Officials

- Handwritten Notes, November 30, 2022 (CAN017673):
- Briefing to the PM entitled "Foreign Interference", November 30, 2022 (CAN014285)

[45] [These are speaking points for a briefing delivered to PM Trudeau on November 30, 2022]

[46] PM Trudeau explained that he had never seen the CAN014285 document. He noted that, if he had seen it, it would have his signature. He believes that content from it may have been delivered in a briefing he received just before Question Period on November 30, 2022.

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[47] PM Trudeau noted that, given that the briefing in CAN014285 was delivered just before Question Period [as indicated by the Prime Minister's Office Institutional Report, p. 10], it was unlikely that specific allegations or incidents would have been discussed in depth. A pre-Question Period briefing is intended to prepare the PM for the questions he is likely to face in Question Period. Before discussing the leaks with the public, the PM's immediate concern was to determine the facts, if any, behind the allegations in the media, specifically that the PM had been warned about certain things by the intelligence community, were incorrect. He was also concerned about how much he could say to rebut the allegations in the media, given that they sometimes concerned classified information. The PM emphasized that he was very confident that he had never been informed of the so-called 11 candidates or the alleged transfer of \$250,000 before those allegations were leaked in the media.

5.4.2 Allegations of a Disinformation Campaign against Kenny Chiu and Erin O'Toole

[48] PM Trudeau was asked about a media article dated February 2nd 2023. This article concerns alleged PRC interference in the 2021 election, including allegations by Erin O'Toole and Kenny Chiu that they and the **Conservative Party of Canada ("CPC")** had been the victims of disinformation campaigns orchestrated by the PRC]. PM Trudeau expressed the view that Mr. Chiu may have lost his seat, and the CPC, the election, because the LPC had better candidates, ran better campaigns, and because the rhetoric of the CPC towards China had an impact on the ground—not because of a disinformation campaign.

[49] When asked about CAN004495 [notes for a briefing to PMO dated February 21, 2023; the briefing occurred on February 23, 2023.] PM Trudeau had no recollection of being informed of the alleged disinformation campaign at the time of the 2021 election. He understands that the PRC, when it attempts to interfere, is pragmatic and does not systematically favor a single party.

[50] He explained that, from his perspective, these allegations had to be analyzed in the broader electoral Canadian context, which includes robust mechanisms to safeguard the

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integrity of the elections. PM Trudeau noted that all the experts who had analyzed the 2021 election had concluded that its integrity had not been impacted, whether at the national level or the riding level.

6. Conclusion

- [51] PM Trudeau expressed frustration that intelligence had been sensationalized in the media leaks, which was extremely damaging to the confidence of Canadians in the democratic process. He observed that it was particularly frustrating because the current government has put in place robust mechanisms to detect and combat FI, yet the government is painted as negligent in the media. PM Trudeau also considered that the leaks illustrate the dangers of drawing conclusions based on a single piece of intelligence, without sufficient context, and without any analysis of its reliability.
- [52] The leaks had not affected PM Trudeau's trust in the information flow systems in place. As PM, he relies on a process driven by subject matter experts and civil servants who assess what information needs to reach elected officials, including him. This is a necessary funneling process: it is normal for the PM not to be made aware of every specific incident or allegation of FI. By the time intelligence reaches his desk, it should generally be considered credible and significant by the civil service apparatus.
- [53] PM Trudeau noted that there is always room for improvements and that the public inquiry process, along with NSIRA review, the NSICOP review, and others, will assist in bring more accountability to the process.