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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 Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister

The **Prime Minister (“PM”)** was examined by Commission counsel during *in camera* hearings held between February 28 and March 6, 2024. Counsel for the Attorney General of Canada attended and appeared for the witness and had an opportunity to examine the witness. The hearing was held in the absence of 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 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 should be read with the 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] PM Trudeau confirmed the accuracy of the classified summary of the interview that Commission Counsel conducted with him on February 27, 2024. He adopted the classified version as part of his evidence before the Commission.

1.1. Threat Landscape – Foreign Interference (“FI”)

[2] PM Trudeau described the evolution of the foreign interference landscape over the course of his time as Prime Minister.

[3] Prior to 2015, as an active politician, PM Trudeau was aware that certain diaspora communities were impacted by their countries of origin in various ways; China, India and Iran were countries that were known to “play about” in politics. In the course of participating in politics, PM Trudeau was aware of various influences over diaspora communities, but not in any formalized way.

[4] After his election in 2015, one of the early things he and his team did was ask for intelligence briefings, including on potential foreign interference. These early briefings were where he and his team became aware that certain countries were active in - not necessarily interfering with, but at least intersecting with - the Canadian body politic.

[5] After that, there was widely suspected Russian FI in the 2016 United States presidential election and in the French presidential election in 2017. In France, top French public officials came out in the middle of the presidential election campaign to state that certain information that was about to come out was in fact Russian disinformation, and that no one should pay any attention to it. That seemed like a very forward-leaning action by French non-political government officials, to weigh in during an election, but in PM Trudeau’s view it was totally warranted, given the active role that Russia was trying to play.

[6] PM Trudeau noted that this incident caused him to reflect on what would happen in Canada if something similar were to happen. He realized that they needed to create institutions to counter that, including the panel on election interference [the ‘**Panel of Five**’] and the **Security and Intelligence Threats to Election Task Force (“SITE TF”)** of security professionals looking at election integrity.

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[7] Over the past eight years, PM Trudeau observed that there have been more activities, more tools used, and more deliberate attempts, in the case of some countries, to advance their own interests, or attempt to sow chaos and undermine institutions and democracies. The latter can be done through “bots”, and various levels of misinformation and disinformation. There has also been increasingly sophisticated use of social media, social networking, and even direct pressures and actions by foreign agents on Canadian soil; not uniquely putting pressure on diasporas, which was always part of the landscape, but now looking to act through diasporas to impact Canadian politics as well. That has been one of the significant evolutions over the past few years.

1.2. Information Flow – PM

[8] PM Trudeau described the evolution of how he received intelligence during his tenure.

[9] In his first years as PM, in addition to regular oral briefings and conversations with **National Security and Intelligence Advisors (“NSIA”s)** and others, PM Trudeau would receive intelligence summary documents fairly regularly – sometimes daily, more often weekly. These would have snippets of intelligence that people thought would be of importance to him.

[10] The briefs were filled with interesting, but not necessarily pertinent, information. PM Trudeau described this as information where there might not be much for him to do other than say “oh that’s interesting, I’m glad our local embassy or security agencies are aware of this and are following up on this.” The information was not such that he could or would necessarily integrate it into either his decision-making or any decisions, proposals, or measures he put forward.

[11] In those first years, PM Trudeau rapidly became aware of intelligence on the state and complexity of the world and how it intersected with Canada. One of the most important things he could do was to take in intelligence, discuss it and ask questions about it, including what it meant and what actions could be taken.

[12] Over the years, as PM Trudeau’s knowledge base and experience with intelligence increased, with actual briefings, updates and meetings with his various NSIAs, the pertinence of the weekly intelligence summary decreased.

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- [13] PM Trudeau emphasized that those weekly intelligence summaries were never considered to be the way the PM was briefed – they were more like background information on what was going on in the world. If anything was particularly pertinent, sensitive, important for Canada, or relevant to an issue with which they were dealing, the summary [also called the “**Prime Minister’s Weekly Intelligence Brief**” or “**PMWIB**”] would not be considered sufficient to inform the PM on a particular issue. PM Trudeau expected, and received, direct briefings from his top intelligence officials on matters of importance. The PM would not be considered “briefed” simply because something was put in a weekly intelligence brief and sent to his office without substantive engagement on the issue.
- [14] PM Trudeau noted that the role of the NSIA has evolved a bit over the years. Each NSIA under his tenure had different ways of working, but they would all brief him and keep him apprised of the issues around security and intelligence that he needed to know about. They would share information from CSIS or CSE, sometimes with CSIS or CSE officials.
- [15] PM Trudeau agreed that the NSIA is his primary source of intelligence. The NSIA works directly for him and coordinates what he needs to receive, whether it is from the RCMP, CSIS, CSE, DND or elsewhere. The NSIA would be the one to indicate if PM Trudeau asked for a briefing, or if he needed a briefing. The NSIA is his primary way of getting briefed on information – sometimes 2-3 times a week, sometimes on an ongoing basis, particularly when he is travelling internationally. The NSIA usually travels with him.
- [16] PM Trudeau is also briefed before an international visit, either incoming or outgoing, or before an international call where there are particular sensitive issues, either with the individual or what is going to be discussed.
- [17] The NSIA is also deeply involved in vetting MPs for different roles, including elevating an MP to parliamentary secretary or a Cabinet role. Effectively everything [*i.e.*, effectively all intelligence] goes through the NSIA before it gets to the PM.
- [18] PM Trudeau explained that intelligence products typically either appear on his desk for his perusal, if he has time set aside for reviewing briefing notes, or sometimes the intelligence products appear at lunchtime while he’s eating at his desk. If he is bringing a binder home with preparation for the next day or documents to sign, sometimes an intelligence

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document is slipped into it. Sometimes he is able to read the products; sometimes he is not –often he doesn't actually receive the documents because he is away, or there is no time in his schedule.

[19] At times, PM Trudeau has to go to a secure facility to review documents, although that is a different category of document. It is rare for him to attend a secure facility to review documents. He attends a secure facility for active briefings and conversations about highly sensitive issues. Other times, a **Client Relations Officer ("CRO")**, will come and either hand PM Trudeau a folder that he can read on-site, and then remove it, or do the same on a laptop or secure device. The frequency with which he is briefed in a SCIF ("**Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility**") varies with what is going on; on average, PM Trudeau estimates that it is 2-3 times a month; sometimes it can be down to 1; sometimes up to 5-6.

[20] PM Trudeau testified that during the lockdown period of the pandemic, he had various secure phones and devices on which he could receive classified briefings. The level of in-person interactions was reduced during that time frame. There were other complex issues that coincided with the pandemic that the government was monitoring carefully, such as the shoot-down of flight PS-752 with well over 100 Canadian travellers on it, the George Floyd riots in the United States, and the ongoing challenge of the two Michaels. He continued to get regular updates, but not in the same paper format as before; there were a lot more verbal briefings. PM Trudeau stressed again that the mode of delivery of intelligence, for him, has always been primarily the same – which is him sitting down and talking through a briefing with intelligence experts. He further noted that information is often given to him with the admonition that he can't talk about any of what he is hearing, he can't take notes, it is just for him to know and to integrate into his thinking.

[21] Most of the time, however, when PM Trudeau receives intelligence, it is not purely "for information" in the sense that even when there is no decision for him to take himself, it is because it still relates to something they are following closely and there might be a decision or an action that will need to be taken quickly at some point as the issue evolves. For instance, PM Trudeau may receive intelligence "for information" to ensure that he is comfortable with a certain step before a Minister signs off on it. For example, there are

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certain delicate intelligence-gathering operations around the world in which Canada requires ministerial approval, and are of sufficient importance that the PM should be aware before the Minister signs off on it.

- [22] But most of the time, PM Trudeau is given information that will have an impact on larger policy. For instance, knowing that a certain country is behaving in a particular way or has certain aspirations is important context, because it may impact on PM Trudeau's interactions with those leaders or Canada's policy towards those countries.
- [23] PM Trudeau notes that from the very beginning it was understood that there were ongoing attempts at influence and interference from certain countries into the country's functioning and its institutions; this was a given. What was important was knowing what actions these countries were taking, and what we were doing to counter.
- [24] One of the ways in which this would come up was if PM Trudeau put forward certain names for elevation to a Parliamentary Secretary role or a minister's role; the security agencies might come back to say they have concerns about that person's behaviour. Very rarely would they tell PM Trudeau not to elevate someone; rather, they might say "it isn't a good idea." The PM would invariably follow that advice.
- [25] PM Trudeau recalled that, early in his tenure, an intelligence agency had mistakenly identified a threat linked to an MP. After PM Trudeau and his office requested further verification of the information, the intelligence agency realized its mistake and reversed its assessment. PM Trudeau stated that he has complete faith in Canada's intelligence institutions; they do incredible work in some very difficult, complex contexts. But he did learn in that moment not to take all information for granted. Part of his role is to ask questions about intelligence and make sure that people are very, very confident in the information they are bringing forward.
- [26] PM Trudeau added that information that would suggest not elevating someone is accompanied by an admonition that the person can't be told about the information – so they are not given the opportunity to defend themselves, because that's the nature of intelligence. So being careful and asking questions and pushing back on intelligence is

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something that he and his team learned a very clear lesson on early on, and in his view it has served them well.

1.3. 2019 Election

1.3.1. General Threat Landscape

[27] Ahead of the 2019 election, the awareness and alertness on the risk of foreign interference was at a constant level. They had seen two major elections in which foreign interference was present, in very specific ways, in the U.S. and France, and they knew it was a reality in Canada. The Government's priority was making sure that attempts at foreign interference and various types of interference did not compromise the Canadian election or Canada's electoral processes.

[28] That is why the government established both the SITE Task Force and the election interference panel of senior public servants [Panel of Five]. The 2019 election was the first time that both these mechanisms would kick in, and they were hopeful and expectant that the mechanisms would be effective.

1.3.2. Nomination Race in Don Valley North

[29] Sometime in late 2019, PM Trudeau was briefed by Mr. Jeremy Broadhurst [who was the Liberal Party of Canada ("**LPC**")'s) national campaign manager at the time] on alleged irregularities in the Han Dong nomination race in the Don Valley North riding. Mr. Broadhurst told PM Trudeau that he had heard a concern from intelligence officials that the nomination process selecting Han Dong as the LPC candidate had been flagged as perhaps of concern, or suspicious, or vulnerable to foreign interference. The concern was that buses of Chinese speakers had arrived at the nomination, or possibly been brought into the nomination.

[30] Mr. Broadhurst assured PM Trudeau that none of the usual mechanisms that are put in place around nominations to ensure that voting happens with integrity – independent oversight, processes for losing candidates to complain, and watchers on site to the processes are all followed – had highlighted any concerns around this particular

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nomination. The central issue of concern was that buses filled with Chinese speakers could have been international students directed by the PRC.

[31] PM Trudeau noted that just having buses filled with Chinese speakers isn't itself a concern. To get people to come out on a Saturday afternoon to vote in a nomination usually requires that you bring them yourself; that is how politics works. PM Trudeau explained that they had asked questions about what if anything had been confirmed, in response to which there were no satisfactory answers.

[32] PM Trudeau said they also asked themselves what options were available to them in terms of a response. The nomination process had delivered a result that was accepted by all involved, including the opponents. The individual was not just a nomination contestant, but a candidate in the election, with their name on the ballot in Don Valley North. The necessary threshold to withdraw that candidate would have to be very, very high. Doing so would also have direct electoral implications, as it would be un-endorsing the candidate as a Liberal member. This act would have significant impacts not just in the riding and the provincial seat count, as it was a riding they expected to win, but also devastating impacts on the individual himself, as he would be publicly removed from the ballot based on allegations of foreign interference.

[33] The information they had did not seem sufficient or certain enough to reach the threshold for them to act on it. They decided not to remove the candidate from the ballot.

[34] PM Trudeau testified that the LPC was aware that nomination races are potential targets for foreign states. In his view, the LPC has developed a lot of experience in running fair nomination campaigns, because they have some very, very intensely contested nominations. He said that building strong, rigorous nomination processes is something that is important to the party.

[35] PM Trudeau noted that CSIS agents, with all their expertise, might not know how nomination processes typically unfold. He said that he and Mr. Broadhurst had perhaps a greater understanding of nomination realities than the agents involved. The buses seemed like a "smoking gun" for some analysts; they were not for someone who works in a political party.

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[36] PM Trudeau discussed intelligence related to allegations of FI in DVN. With respect to one aspect, PM Trudeau noted an error in the reporting he was provided and asked for corrections. PM Trudeau had no knowledge of a document containing this information having been recalled by the CSIS Director in 2019.

1.3.3. Other possible FI incidents in GE 2019

[37] PM Trudeau was not made aware of a threat measure reduction (“**TRM**”) in relation to Pakistan during the 2019 election. Apart from the Don Valley North intelligence, no other incidents of foreign interference were brought to PM Trudeau’s attention at the time of the 2019 election.

[38] PM Trudeau explained that the high-level conclusion brought to him following the 2019 election is that, based on SITE’s work, the Panel concluded that there were no successful, or material, or consequential foreign interference that affected the outcome of the election. That conclusion was reached at both the riding level and the national level.

[39] The fact that there were attempts at ongoing interference in the election by various actors came as no surprise to PM Trudeau. That is why they created the SITE Task Force and the Panel. Nevertheless, the conclusion of those bodies was that the election was not subject to effective foreign interference.

1.4. Inter-Election Period

[40] PM Trudeau did not recall any specific briefings on FI from 2020. He stated that the NSIA told him that while potential foreign interference had been identified in relation to GE43, it was not assessed to have compromised the integrity of the election.

[41] PM Trudeau recalled a briefing on February 9, 2021 with Mr. Vigneault, Mr. Morrison, Mr. Rigby and Mr. Shugart. He received that briefing via phone. It was a very broad briefing, very general in tone, on a number of different things. He did not recall specifically what had been discussed.

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1.5. 2021 Election

1.5.1. Disinformation Campaign

- [42] PM Trudeau was generally aware that disinformation campaigns could be conducted on WeChat and other social media platforms. However he did not receive intelligence on a potential disinformation campaign against Erin O'Toole, Kenny Chiu, or the Conservative Party. He first heard about this in the media because Kenny Chiu was talking about it in the days after his election loss [in the riding of Richmond, B.C.].
- [43] PM Trudeau noted that there were a number of potential targets that social media was going after, including, at various times, him. Particularly in the run-up to the 2015 election, WeChat was filled with things that hurt him with the Chinese community.
- [44] PM Trudeau reiterated that the SITE report and the Panel confirmed that not a single riding was swung by any level of foreign interference in the 2021 election.
- [45] PM Trudeau also noted that the Richmond riding was one that the LPC had won in 2015. The LPC campaigned hard in that riding, they had a great ground game there, and they knew in the 2021 election that a lot of Chinese Canadians had been turned off by Erin O'Toole's particularly aggressive positioning around China. Whether or not there was a Chinese-language social media campaign against him, there was a steady momentum that indicated that the LPC was going to do well with Chinese Canadians, externally to any potential interference by China.
- [46] Until this allegation became public in the media, PM Trudeau was unaware of any intelligence suggesting that the PRC had expressed a preference for a minority Liberal government. He opined that it would be difficult to determine that a state, as a whole, had a preferred outcome for an election.

1.6. Conclusion

- [47] PM Trudeau reflected on the media leaks in 2022 and 2023. He was not aware of the specifics of much of the information that was reported until he saw it in the media. PM Trudeau did not believe that any of that information was information he should have known

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contemporaneously, that he would have liked to have known, or that should have been brought to his attention. He explained that Canada's information and security agencies process vast amounts of data and information and inputs from a huge range of sources of various degrees of reliability; information of various degrees of consequence and import. They are trained and skilled in determining what matters and what needs to be elevated up in order to be able to be acted on. Nothing PM Trudeau has seen indicates that anyone in the system made any significant errors in how they passed things up.

[48] PM Trudeau stated that the government has taken foreign interference very seriously. It put in place mechanisms to combat foreign interference, such as the SITE Task Force, the Panel, the RRM, and others. He sees it as unfortunate that, despite those efforts, the leaks of "tidbits" of potentially misleading information could have the effect of needlessly undermining public confidence in Canadian democratic institutions. He added that ideally, foreign interference should be a subject on which parties should come together, as they do in the National Security Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians ("**NSICOP**"), because we should all want to be able to protect Canadian institutions and democracy from hostile state actors.

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2. Examination by Counsel for the Government of Canada

- [49] PM Trudeau confirmed that he was not briefed on intelligence regarding the PRC's alleged preference for a Liberal government ahead of the 2021 election.
- [50] PM Trudeau explained that while he retains his role as PM during the writ period, he is very limited in the kind of intelligence that he receives. PM Trudeau explained that is part of the reason why they asked for the Panel of top civil servants to process that information and make sure, certainly in regards to the elections, that everything holds. He noted that there were exceptions for which he would be briefed, in relation to a serious and momentous international incident. Subject to those exceptions, he has not ever been, in any real way, informed of intelligence issues by officials during the election campaigns.