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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 fédérales

Interview Summary: Marco Mendicino

Member of Parliament (“MP”) and former Cabinet Minister Marco Mendicino was interviewed by Commission counsel on February 23, 2024. The interview was held in a secure environment and referenced 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 with the Institutional Reports prepared by the Government of Canada.

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1.1 Background

- [1] Mr. Mendicino served as the **Minister of Public Safety (“Minister of PS”)** from October 26, 2021 to July 26, 2023. Prior to his career in politics, he worked as a lawyer. He was elected as the MP of Eglinton–Lawrence in 2015, and served as the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship from 2019 to 2021. MP Mendicino served as the Ontario Caucus Chair, a role he held between 2015 and 2017. He was also the Ontario Campaign co-chair during the 2019 federal election, and served on the National Steering Committee for the Liberal Party of Canada during the 2021 federal election.

2.1 General Description of Public Safety

- [2] Mr. Mendicino stated the paramount responsibility of the Minister of PS is to keep Canadians safe. The Minister is accountable for the **Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (“CSIS” or “the Service”)**, **Royal Canadian Mounted Police (“RCMP”)**, **Canadian Border Security Agency (“CBSA”)**, **Correctional Service of Canada (“CSC”)**, and **Parole Board of Canada (“PBC”)**. As Minister, Mr. Mendicino saw it as his responsibility to ensure these agencies did their job.
- [3] When asked about his relationship with the Deputy Minister of Public Safety, his Chief of Staff, and the heads of agencies he oversaw during his tenure, Mr. Mendicino stated these relationships were kept close to facilitate flow of information to his office. He noted that his relationship with the heads of each of the five agencies is laid out in statute, and he ensured that each of the agency heads felt able to reach out to him directly as Minister. This happened as needed, and he recalled one occasion during the 2022 Convoy in Ottawa [the Convoy was a group of individuals who travelled to Ottawa to protest COVID-19 policies] when RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki reached out to him directly to discuss the Convoy.

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- [4] As Minister, **foreign interference (“FI”)** was a top priority. By 2021, there was a sense that FI was pervasive and a growing challenge. The topic came up in both daily and weekly briefings. As Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship, he was aware of the national security threat posted by FI in Canada. Mr. Mendicino used as an example of an FI threat the potential exploitation of Canada’s international students’ visa program.

2.2 Information Flow

2.2.1 Briefings on FI

- [5] Mr. Mendicino recalled briefings he received early into his tenure as Minister of PS. The briefings covered FI, and in particular, FI relating to the **People’s Republic of China (“PRC”)**.
- [6] At this early stage of his tenure, he was absorbing information on the FI threat. The key takeaway for him was that the overall results of both 2019 and 2021 elections were not compromised. He also recalled wanting to know more about actions taken to mitigate the threats.

2.2.2 FI during the 2021 Election

- [7] Mr. Mendicino said that it was during a briefing on December 13, 2021 that he learned of a specific FI matter which had occurred during the 2021 federal election.

2.2.3 CSIS Subject of Interest

- [8] Mr. Mendicino was briefed on intelligence concerning the activities of a CSIS subject of interest near the end of 2021 or the beginning of 2022.

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2.2.4 Erin O'Toole and Kenny Chiu

- [9] Mr. Mendicino noted that, until the briefing of December 13, 2021, he was not aware of the Chinese-language media activities potentially aimed at discouraging Canadians from supporting the Conservative Party of Canada, party leader Erin O'Toole, and another candidate, Kenny Chiu.

2.2.5 Han Dong

- [10] Mr. Mendicino was not aware of the intelligence surrounding Han Dong's 2019 nomination as the Liberal candidate for Don Valley North, before becoming Minister of Public Safety. He noted, however, that organizing diaspora communities and bussing potential voters to polling stations are ordinary campaign practices. He could not recall the date he first became aware of the Han Dong allegations.

2.2.6 India

- [11] Mr. Mendicino was briefed on Indian FI in 2021. While he would have asked whether action was required on his part, generally speaking, this briefing would have been for situational awareness only.
- [12] He noted that there is some sensitivity in how Indian FI is reported in the security and intelligence community. For example, the term "Khalistani extremism" is very charged language, and in some cases, may trigger backlash within the community. He referenced certain reports which provoked a response because of the language used.

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2.2.7 Russia

[13] Mr. Mendicino was briefed on Russian FI as Minister of PS. The main concern relating to Russia was the threat of cyber-attacks and intimidation of Russian diaspora communities. He noted that Russian FI is mostly opportunistic, and that he understood that while Russia had the capabilities to interfere with Canada's elections, doing so did not appear to be a top priority for them at the time.

2.2.8 Kenny Chiu

[14] Mr. Mendicino was referred to reporting related to Conservative MP Kenny Chiu and the 2021 federal election. MP Mendicino was briefed on this issue, but did not recall seeing this particular piece of reporting.

[15] Mr. Mendicino underscored that the overall results of the 2021 election were not compromised.

2.3 Other Intelligence Reporting

[16] Mr. Mendicino was referred to a 2021 report regarding PRC FI activities regarding the 2021 federal elections. He could not remember if he was briefed directly on this intelligence report.

[17] Mr. Mendicino was also referred to another piece of intelligence regarding potential interference during the 2021 election. He could not recall being briefed on this issue, but said it was possible a briefing had occurred. He expressed skepticism at the activity reported.

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2.5 Meeting on May 18, 2023

- [18] Mr. Mendicino was referred to a set of notes¹ indicating that he was present at a meeting during which the media leaks were discussed on May 18, 2023. Mr. Mendicino remembered the meeting, and indicated that the meeting was called to update various Ministers on PRC FI as a result of the media reporting of the leaks. He noted that a CSIS subject matter expert was present to provide relevant context.
- [19] The meeting participants reviewed the accuracy of the information reported in the media, including inaccurate claims that the PRC had transferred \$250,000 to select federal election candidates.

¹ CAN017676.