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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: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau was interviewed format by Commission Counsel on June 28, 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 hearings held *in camera* in July and August 2024. It discloses the evidence 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.

Notes to Readers:

- Commission Counsel have provided explanatory notes in square brackets to assist the reader.

1. Interviewee

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

2. Information Flow

2.1 Updates from Stage 1

- [2] Prime Minister Trudeau said that, delivery of intelligence to him now has a more deliberate structure than the process he described in Stage 1 of the Commission’s work.

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Once a week, a Client Relations Officer (“**CRO**”)¹ brings him a package of intelligence. He initials the reports he reads and returns them to the CRO. The CRO is expected to register which reports the PM has read and track his comments. This routine provides a clear record of the products and reports that PM Trudeau reads.

- [3] PM Trudeau compared this to the previous structure where he primarily received intelligence through verbal briefings from the National Security and Intelligence Advisor (“**NSIA**”). One advantage of this previous process was that it allowed him to ask questions and rapidly obtain precise and detailed answers. The CROs that now deliver information to him are knowledgeable and they note his questions and return later with the answers. However, this process is not always as responsive as verbal briefings by the NSIA. NSIA briefings also continue.
- [4] When reviewing intelligence, PM Trudeau often asks about what operational steps intelligence agencies are taking to follow up on the intelligence as appropriate. That said, typically intelligence information is delivered to PM Trudeau to give him information, not necessarily for him to act on. It is for the agencies to take the necessary actions within their mandates.
- [5] PM Trudeau expects to be presented with intelligence that will have a significant and meaningful impact on policy choices and decisions made by the government. Such intelligence may include information about the posture or mindset of Canada’s allies, or national security threats, especially those that may implicate the safety of Canadians. PM Trudeau also wants to be made aware of any intelligence relevant to his responsibilities as leader of the Liberal Party of Canada (“**LPC**”). He receives such intelligence primarily through security vetting procedures.
- [6] Ultimately, PM Trudeau wants to receive any intelligence that the NSIA considers important for him to know. That exercise of judgment is what the NSIA is hired for. He meets with the NSIA or the Deputy NSIA (“**DNSIA**”) once or twice a week. Creating the DNSIA position has been helpful. It provides depth of resources, especially when the

¹ [CROs are Communications Security Establishment (“**CSE**”) employees who are usually responsible for the dissemination of intelligence to senior officials and ministerial offices.]

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NSIA is travelling, and splits between two persons the demanding task of providing national security and intelligence advice to him. PM Trudeau relies on the DNSIA and spoke highly of his performance.

2.2 The “Targeting Paper”

- [7] Commission counsel referred PM Trudeau to the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency’s (“**NSIRA**”) analysis regarding the distribution of a report (the “**Targeting Paper**”) produced by a Canadian Security Intelligence Service (“**CSIS**”) analyst. The report addressed the People’s Republic of China’s (“**PRC**”) “targeting” of Canadian political actors [NSIRA found that the CSIS Director believed that the Targeting Paper should have been provided to the Prime Minister, and that this did not occur].
- [8] As of the date of the interview, PM Trudeau had not yet been provided with the Targeting Paper. Not having read the document, and not knowing the concerns that officials may have had with the Targeting Paper, he was not in a position to comment on whether he should have seen it. He trusts that senior officials judiciously identify the intelligence that he needs to see. From other documents and briefings, he knows that the PRC has identified parliamentarians it sees as foes and other parliamentarians it wants to influence so they will advocate for policies favourable to the PRC’s interests.
- [9] Commission Counsel referred PM Trudeau to NSIRA’s analysis of the tension between differing views of what constitutes foreign interference (“**FI**”) and what constitutes standard diplomatic activity. Counsel also referred to NSIRA’s recommendation “that the security and intelligence community develop a common, working understanding of political foreign interference.” PM Trudeau said he often sees this tension play out as PM, as different actors in government view the activities of foreign entities through different lenses. For instance, officials in Global Affairs Canada (“**GAC**”) know that Canadian diplomats engage with politicians in other countries on particular issues that impact Canada, often in private. For this reason, GAC officials may view certain activities differently than officials at CSIS who may not have this diplomatic experience. Other activities may simply be a feature of democracy. Trying to define every activity as

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either FI or standard diplomatic activity is difficult and may not always take into account all perspectives. Adopting a single working definition of FI might, even if not intended, systematically dismiss some perspectives while giving prominence to others. He cautioned against this result, viewing the debate between various opinions as necessary so that he, as Prime Minister, can come to a fully-informed view of the situation.

2.3 The “PCO Special Report”

- [10] Commission Counsel referred PM Trudeau to the NSIRA’s analysis of the dissemination of a report (the “**PCO Special Report**”)² authored by the PCO Intelligence Assessment Secretariat (“**PCO IAS**”) about the PRC’s FI tactics. [NSIRA found that, despite PCO IAS’s recommendation to provide the PCO Special Report to select Deputy Ministers and Cabinet Ministers, the Report remained in draft form and was not disseminated to these recipients, or to the Prime Minister’s Office (“**PMO**”).]
- [11] PM Trudeau has now read the PCO Special Report. While some details in the Special Report were new to him, its general contents were not. Had he needed further information (for instance, before an engagement with a PRC official), he was confident that this would have been briefed to him at the appropriate time.
- [12] In PM Trudeau’s view, him reviewing the PCO Special Report would not have changed the Government’s response to FI. Even if this specific report was not on his desk, his understanding of the information it contained led to specific policy reforms in response to FI over the past couple of years. These included Bill C-70³ and the preparatory work for that legislation.
- [13] PM Trudeau is confident in and trusts his advisors’ judgment to determine what he needs to know and what information he has already seen.

² CAN003787

³ Bill C-70 received Royal Assent on June 20, 2024 and was enacted as *An Act Respecting countering foreign interference*.

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2.4 The Role of the NSIA

[14] In PM Trudeau's view, the role of the NSIA has adapted to the changing national security environment. It is no coincidence that the NSIA's role has shifted since 2015; threats to Canada's national security have also evolved. A constantly evolving threat requires a constantly evolving response. PM Trudeau does not believe that it would be possible or opportune to legislate in any detail what information the NSIA should pass along to the PM since it is not possible to foresee in advance the different kinds of information and circumstances that will arise in the future. Senior public servants are tasked with determining what information is relevant for ministers or the PM. Their ability and judgment to make these decisions comes with experience.

2.5 The National Security Council

- [15] The PM chairs the National Security Council ("**NSC**"), a Cabinet committee. [The creation of the NSC was announced in September 2023; it first met in October 2023]. The NSC creates a standardized process for bringing intelligence to Cabinet. It also provides the NSIA, who is the secretary to the NSC, with clear authority and responsibility for coordinating the national security community
- [16] The NSC has been an exceptionally useful forum. The NSC structure allows for more in-depth conversations and a real whole-of-government approach to national security. It allows ministers and senior public servants to discuss national security concerns, taking into account a variety of perspectives. The NSC is structured so that ministers and senior officials (*i.e.*, deputy ministers) are all at the table and expected to contribute. This structure allows for better coordination between ministers and deputy ministers, and allows deputy ministers to contribute based on their depth of knowledge, which can often go further than that of the ministers.

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3. Parliamentarians and Foreign Interference

3.1 Briefings to Parliamentarians

- [17] PM Trudeau received a security briefing when he was first elected to Parliament. This briefing included some information about how MPs could be targets of foreign actors but did not include specific or detailed information about FI. However, the briefing and his general awareness were sufficient to raise his awareness when he encountered foreign diplomats, for instance at events.
- [18] At that time there was much less focus on FI and the FI threat differed from that of today. Since then, the PRC has become significantly more aggressive.
- [19] Commission Counsel referred PM Trudeau to paragraph 126 of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians' Special Report on Foreign Interference in Canada's Democratic Processes and Institutions (the "**NSICOP Report**"). This paragraph indicates that the Privy Council Office ("**PCO**") sent two notes to the Prime Minister's Office ("**PMO**") relating to an initiative to brief all parliamentarians on FI – in December 2019 and December 2020. The NSICOP Report asserts that neither of these notes were followed up on by the PM or PMO.
- [20] PM Trudeau never received the December 2019 note. He did not know why, but said that briefing parliamentarians is not within the Government's purview. This falls to Parliament and the security agencies that have the authority to implement the briefings. The Government is not in the chain of authority to implement this measure. This is an example of the distinct functions of the Government and Parliament.
- [21] PM Trudeau would expect his MPs to tell him if they had concerns about any briefings they received. He would also expect the system to know what information MPs received. He is aware that the CSIS briefed MPs in June 2024.
- [22] PM Trudeau is not well placed to say whether the fact that these briefings were delivered in June 2024 and not earlier would have resulted in a knowledge "gap" for MPs. He believes security services are best placed to evolve briefings as the methods

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or risks of FI evolve. MPs' background knowledge of the FI threat to them may also depend on their experience.

3.2 Response to Threats to Parliamentarians

- [23] Commission Counsel referred PM Trudeau to notes from two meetings with the PMO, NSIA and other officials on May 2, 2023,⁴ following a *Globe & Mail* story that leaked intelligence that the PRC was “targeting” MP Michael Chong and his family. PM Trudeau confirmed that the notes aligned with his memory of the May 2 meetings, and that these meetings occurred the day that CSIS also briefed Mr. Chong at PM Trudeau’s request. He understood this was not the first time CSIS briefed Mr. Chong. He personally met with Mr. Chong that day.
- [24] As PM Trudeau remembered it, the intelligence at issue related to potential pressure or sanctions that the PRC could apply to Mr. Chong and suggested that Chinese officials said they should look into Mr. Chong’s family in the PRC. PM Trudeau was not aware of any suggestion of threats to the physical safety of Mr. Chong or his family.
- [25] Commission Counsel asked about a May 15, 2023, memorandum, “Steps Taken to Ensure Awareness of Intelligence Reports Related to Members of Parliament.”⁵ The memorandum speaks of “efforts ongoing to enhance the coordination and dissemination of intelligence, including a standardized process to bring intelligence to Cabinet’s attention.” This memorandum responded to the PM’s instruction that any intelligence about a threat to an MP be elevated to the ministerial level. On May 16, 2023, the Minister of Public Safety issued a Ministerial Direction to this effect.
- [26] The memorandum refers to a “list of MPs” to whom PCO “will provide advice under separate cover.” PM Trudeau did not recall seeing the specific list. However, at various times he has seen lists naming MPs such as Jenny Kwan and Michael Chong, who were reported to have been targeted by foreign actors.

⁴ CAN019500. These notes are erroneously dated May 7.

⁵ CAN021476

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- [27] Commission Counsel referred PM Trudeau to a September 13, 2023, memorandum, “Update – Upcoming Threat Reduction Briefings to Parliamentarians.”⁶ The memorandum explains that Erin O’Toole made a speech in the House of Commons after his briefing on May 26, 2023. That speech caused Public Safety and CSIS to pause further disclosures to parliamentarians until they could develop a governance protocol. The protocol sought to ensure better coordination between impacted departments. It also sought to settle on a process for CSIS disclosures of classified information to elected officials. PM Trudeau said that Mr. O’Toole’s speech was very frustrating because Mr. O’Toole mischaracterized what he had been told and made uncertain intelligence sound more certain than it was. PM Trudeau recalled an issue about CSIS not having shared with the Independent Special Rapporteur all the intelligence disclosed by Mr. O’Toole. This resulted in the Independent Special Rapporteur having to reassess his conclusions in light of the disclosure. After having done so, the Independent Special Rapporteur’s assessment of the intelligence as a whole differed from that of Mr. O’Toole.
- [28] [The Governance Protocol for Threat Disclosures to Parliamentarians (the “**Protocol**”) is attached at pages 14 and 15 of 21 of the September 13, 2023, memorandum. Page 15 identifies “modifications for conflicts of interest” and notes a risk that “individuals involved in this process [the Protocol] have an interest in the outcome.” If CSIS identifies a concern in a case, CSIS “will raise it with Public Safety Canada for agreement on the revised process for that specific instance.”]
- [29] Reviewing this part of the Protocol, PM Trudeau said, in his view, there could be a possibility of a “conflict of interest” when intelligence that can provide an electoral advantage is briefed to political actors. That is the reality in which CSIS operates.
- [30] Because of his dual role as PM and leader of the LPC, it is easier for CSIS to flag concerns to PM Trudeau about MPs in his caucus, especially about security vetting for appointments. However, except for NSICOP members, who are appointed by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the PM, other parties do not have the

⁶ CAN028170.

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same access to intelligence. PM Trudeau referred to the “need to know” principle for sharing of intelligence, and noted that he may not have a “need to know” FI-related intelligence involving members of a different party. It is not for the Government to limit peoples’ choices, beyond the confines of funding and electoral laws. Rather, the leader of the party to which the intelligence relates should know about the FI concern.

- [31] Addressing FI intelligence about members of another party has been a challenge when the other party has no appropriately cleared elected representative. This difficulty also occurs if a party has a cleared representative but its leader is not; in that circumstance, no one within the party has authority to act on intelligence. There is a conversation to be had about requiring every party with official status to maintain a security-cleared representative who can be briefed on FI matters related to their party. This requirement for a clearance should not prevent someone from running because of legitimate political views (such as, for instance, maintaining close relationships with a country that carries out FI activities). At the same time, he is concerned that parties that aspire to form a government have not taken the steps they need to know and act on the FI threat.

4. Policy Reform in Response to FI

4.1 Bill C-70

- [32] PM Trudeau spoke about some of the considerations that informed the development and introduction of Bill C-70. First, he noted that there were potential vulnerabilities that needed to be addressed. He observed that Canada’s approach to multiculturalism encourages diaspora communities to maintain connections to their culture. This approach is a strength, but can also leave diaspora communities here more vulnerable than in other countries to being targeted by states engaged in FI.
- [33] PM Trudeau was also aware of the risk of potential retaliation by foreign states, but said that the government must push back against other states if it wants to curtail FI.
- [34] Finally, PM Trudeau spoke about the possibility of domestic resistance to increased security powers. He was very familiar with this risk, since it was a focal point of the 2015

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election campaign. There was an active debate about the incumbent government's proposal (Bill C-51) to expand the powers of security agencies. The campaign and debates around Bill C-51 taught him that any expansion of security agencies' powers requires time and a thoughtful and careful process to ensure that the Government considers all competing rights and interests, particularly in a minority Parliament. That is why the Government took the time to get stakeholder support for Bill C-70. He noted that once the Bill was tabled, it passed through the Parliamentary process expeditiously. Support for Bill C-70 came from across party lines, at a time when there is a lot of concern about FI, which in his view shows that the Government approached the reforms appropriately. He pointed out that some still criticized the government for moving too quickly.

4.2 The Foreign Agent Registry

[35] PM Trudeau stated that the government had taken due time and care to consider how to enact a foreign agent registry. Concerns around implementing a foreign agent registry are not new, dating back to the McDonald Commission [the Commission of Inquiry Concerning Certain Activities of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Its 1981 report recommended against a registry.] However, there is a growing awareness that a registry is a policy option worth considering, albeit cautiously. In the PM's view, his government has made sure to hold a robust consultation process with communities; it did not propose a registry in a cavalier manner. For instance, the government did not want to simply "cut and paste" a registry law from another country.

5. Specific Suggested Vulnerabilities

5.1 Political Party Processes

[36] PM Trudeau noted that political parties are not unique in their vulnerability to FI from hostile actors. Universities, research institutions and businesses are also targets.

[37] It is important to identify the specific vulnerabilities that it is said that political party processes have, and carefully consider how to best address them. One potential

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vulnerability arises because the eligibility criteria to become a political party member often differ from the criteria to vote. Some eligibility differences (such as the minimum age or citizenship requirements) may be characterized as “loopholes,” but this concern must be balanced against the purpose of the different criteria and the fact that parties made deliberate choices to enact them. Canada is currently experiencing decreased voter engagement. Decreased voter participation in a democracy is in itself a significant threat to democracy. One way political parties address this is by expanding membership rules, which in turn expands the pool of voters in nominations and leadership races. Expanding the pool is also a way to try to engage future voters – those too young to vote or who are not yet Canadian citizens. Broader party membership rules also help to ensure that party policy proposals take into account everyone in Canada, not just those entitled to vote in a general election.

- [38] It may make more sense to improve the tools available to parties to counter FI rather than to require them to change their membership rules. One possible improvement is to ensure that parties designate a member with authority to receive classified briefings. This then ensures access to classified information about FI.
- [39] Political parties in Canada have robust systems for nominations, but PM Trudeau did not rule out the possibility that improvements could be made. In addition, Elections Canada enforces funding rules for nomination contests. Given the large number of ridings and political parties, it would be practically difficult for Elections Canada to assume additional monitoring responsibilities for nomination processes.
- [40] In addition, internal organization and the choice of a candidate in a given riding falls within the purview of the party as a private entity with its own constitution. There are concerns about a government in a free and democratic society possibly deciding who or how someone gets on a nomination ballot for other parties. Every party has the right to choose candidates who reflect its views, even a party such as the Marxist-Leninist party, which may choose candidates who advocate for rapprochement with China or for the appeasement of Vladimir Putin’s Russia. Regulating party processes may deserve more thought but the best course is to equip parties with more knowledge and support when they ask for help.

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5.2 Political Staff

- [41] Ministerial staff receive security clearances.
- [42] MPs' staffs (unlike ministers' staffs) do not receive security clearances. Any potential vulnerability here could be countered through security briefings to MPs and increased education on FI. That said, the threat of a foreign state co-opting staff in MPs' offices is lessened because these MPs do not have access to classified information. As well, any step towards requiring clearances must be balanced against the potential consequences for democracy of having security agencies weighing in on the staff of opposition MPs. If issues with a staff member are flagged, it may be appropriate to inform the leader of that MPs' party, or CSIS might consider threat reduction measures.

6. External Engagement

6.1 Engagement with Provinces and Territories

- [43] Bill C-70 will address current challenges of engaging with provinces and territories on national security issues by expanding the ability of CSIS to share classified information to those outside the federal government. Commission Counsel referred PM Trudeau to a November 29, 2023, memorandum outlining the Yukon Premier's concerns about the lack of consultation with premiers on national security incidents and the inability of security agencies to share classified information with provincial and territorial governments.⁷ PM Trudeau reiterated that Bill C-70 represents a significant step towards addressing concerns and challenges about sharing information. Officials at all levels of government will need to ensure that provincial and territorial governments have the necessary physical and digital security infrastructure for access to classified information.
- [44] A particular challenge in countering FI in a federation is that FI targets (such as natural resources industries or universities) sometimes fall under provincial jurisdiction.

⁷ CAN044456

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6.2 International Engagement

- [45] Canada and its allies face similar challenges, including populist movements challenging the rules-based order and authoritarian states using technology to destabilize democracies. States that engage in FI have had remarkable success using tools developed by democratic societies (such as social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram).
- [46] The international community has responded to FI threats. One example is the creation of RRM, which Canada led during the 2018 G7 Summit, to address threats collectively. Leaders of Five Eyes allies have discussed how they all face the same threat to democracy. PM Trudeau has had more direct and difficult conversations with states that may be engaging in FI.
- [47] International leaders do not see Canada as unique in facing the FI threat. PM Trudeau gave the example of the Baltic states, where Russian FI and disinformation target a large Russian-speaking population. Conversations with officials from these states have led him to understand that some states have a more in-depth understanding of disinformation because of their constant exposure to it.

7. Specific Incidents

7.1 Zhao Wei

- [48] Declaring Mr. Zhao *persona non grata* (“**PNG**”) and expelling him from Canada was within the authority of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. However, PM Trudeau was kept informed of relevant developments. The discussions focused primarily on the timing of the PNG declaration, the threshold for acting and the PRC’s potential response. PM Trudeau first heard of Mr. Zhao during these discussions, but learned that Mr. Zhao’s activities had been of concern for some time.
- [49] The government considers many factors when deciding whether to declare someone PNG. This includes foreign policy and national considerations.

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- [50] In Mr. Zhao's case, Canada needed to respond because of the public attention drawn to his actions. Canada needed to send a message to the PRC that those actions were unacceptable.
- [51] Declaring a diplomat PNG does not happen often. Since this authority falls squarely in the responsibilities of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, PM Trudeau is normally involved only if the country or issue underlying the PNG declaration is particularly significant.

7.2 Hardeep Singh Nijjar

- [52] Following Mr. Nijjar's murder on June 16, 2023, feedback from constituents of certain MPs led them to believe that India could have been involved. They conveyed these concerns to PM Trudeau, who conveyed them to Canadian national security agencies for further investigation.
- [53] Later that summer, PM Trudeau was briefed about India's potential involvement. The Government was determined to investigate these allegations rigorously. A few weeks before the 2023 G20 Summit in India, the Government reached out to its allies to ensure a collective and coherent response.
- [54] PM Trudeau spoke with the Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, during this same G20 Summit. PM Trudeau informed Mr. Modi that Canada knew India was involved in Mr. Nijjar's murder, and that this would likely become public. Mr. Modi asked Canada to share the intelligence it had about the murder.
- [55] PM Trudeau felt he had a responsibility to disclose India's involvement in the murder to the public. PM Trudeau wanted to deter India from similar conduct, and show India, and the affected community, that Canada was taking the matter seriously and that there would be consequences. The Government had also learned that reports of India's involvement might be published in the media, but the primary concern was public safety, that is, to mitigate any further threat to people in Canada. Canadian security agencies had gathered enough intelligence to support the assessment that India was involved in Mr. Nijjar's killing. The Government wanted to denounce India's violation of Canadian

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sovereignty, while also recognizing the importance of maintaining a relationship with India, a significant democratic country, at a time of rising authoritarianism in the world.

7.3 Han Dong

[56] Commission counsel asked if PM Trudeau was provided with any information regarding Han Dong following the 2019 general election. PM Trudeau spoke of three follow up steps the Government took after the 2019 general election:

- a) In the immediate aftermath of the election, the PMO and PM decided during a meeting that they needed additional information about Mr. Dong;
- b) At various times, PM Trudeau and his staff sought additional information about Mr. Dong. In response, security agencies raised concerns about Mr. Dong's relationship with the PRC; and
- c) The Whip of the Liberal caucus suggested that Mr. Dong be appointed to sit on the Special Committee on the Canada-People's Republic of China Relationship. Mr. Dong was not appointed to the committee because of the concerns officials had raised.

[57] PM Trudeau maintained an ongoing awareness of Mr. Dong's case. After media stories based on allegedly leaked national security information (that began in late 2022) identified Mr. Dong as an MP potentially tied to the PRC, Mr. Dong stepped aside from the LPC caucus while he focused on clearing his name.

7.4 WeChat Targeting of Michael Chong

[58] Commission Counsel referred PM Trudeau to a memorandum to him, "GAC Rapid Response Mechanism Report WeChat Disinformation about MP Michael Chong." Counsel also produced handwritten notes from a meeting dated August 3, 2023, that state as follows: "Chong – RRM Wechat, misinfo, disinfo. Speaking to Chong on the 8th." PM Trudeau was aware of the WeChat incident, but did not speak to Mr. Chong about the disinformation campaign.

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7.5 Spamouflage Campaign Targeting MPs

[59] Commission Counsel referred PM Trudeau to an email chain involving the then-NSIA and senior PMO staff discussing a Spamouflage⁸ campaign targeting dozens of MPs, including PM Trudeau. He was aware of this campaign only at a superficial level. He is not informed of every disinformation campaign that targets him because of their sheer number. He did not clearly remember what the campaign involved, but did recall that a distinctive feature of this campaign was its use of false information about PM Trudeau and other MPs to discredit an individual.

⁸ Spamouflage refers to a network of a new or hijacked social media accounts that posts and increases the number of propaganda messages across multiple social media platforms.