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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: Privy Council Office (John Hannaford, Nathalie G. Drouin, Daniel Rogers, Janice Charette, Jody Thomas & Stephen de Boer)

Current and former senior officials from the Privy Council Office (“**PCO**”) were interviewed in a panel format by Commission Counsel on June 21, 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 Reader:

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

1. Interviewees

- [1] Daniel Rogers was appointed Deputy National Security and Intelligence Advisor (“**DNSIA**”) to the Prime Minister and Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, Emergency Preparedness in June 2023. Prior to that, he was Associate Chief of the Communications Security Establishment (“**CSE**”) and Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet (Emergency Preparedness).
- [2] Nathalie G. Drouin is the Deputy Clerk of the PCO and National Security and Intelligence Advisor (“**DC-NSIA**”) to the Prime Minister. She is also the Associate Secretary to Cabinet.
- [3] John Hannaford has been Clerk of the PCO since June 2023. He previously served as Deputy Minister (“**DM**”) of National Resources Canada.

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- [4] Janice Charette served as the Clerk of the PCO between 2014 and 2016 and between March 2021 and June 2023.
- [5] Jody Thomas was appointed NSIA in January 2022 and served until January 2024. Prior to that, she was the DM of the Department of National Defence (“**DND**”).
- [6] Mr. Stephen de Boer became Foreign and Defence Policy Advisor (“**FDPA**”) to the Prime Minister in June 2023. He previously served as Assistant DM (“**ADM**”) in the International Affairs Branch of Environment and Climate Change Canada and as Ambassador to the World Trade Organization.

2. National Security and Intelligence Governance Structure

2.1. PCO

- [7] Ms. Charette explained that she created the position of DNSIA to respond to emerging challenges in national security and emergency preparedness. The volume of work had markedly increased, it pulled the NSIA in many different directions and it required the NSIA to travel abroad frequently. The creation of the position recognized the overlap between the Deputy Secretary, Emergency Preparedness and the NSIA, who were often required to work together on files.
- [8] Mr. de Boer said that the FPDA reports to the DC-NSIA. He explained that FDP is a small Secretariat, and is fairly peripheral in the FI space. He receives information mainly from Global Affairs (“**GAC**”), DND, Public Safety Canada (“**PS**”), and the security and intelligence agencies. He analyzes it to provide advice to the Prime Minister (“**PM**”) on foreign policy. If an FI issue has a foreign policy dimension, his input forms part of the advice provided by the DC-NSIA to the PM.

2.2. Structure of the National Security and Intelligence Community

- [9] Mr. Rogers explained that PCO has recently convened national security agencies and departments to consult internally and submit options to restructure the national security and intelligence governance structure. He stated this initiative was spurred by the increased pace and volume of national security issues and was an opportunity to

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determine if the governance framework was fit for purpose and as efficient as it could be. The proposed options differ but a general consensus exists that some form of streamlining makes sense. One of the main concerns is the frequency and volume of meetings.

- [10] Commission Counsel asked the interviewees about a PCO presentation briefing by Mr. Rogers on different options for restructuring the national security and intelligence structure.¹ Mr. Rogers said discussions on how best to restructure are ongoing and that none of the options described in the presentation have been chosen yet. One aspect of the restructuring is the centralization of committee secretariats. This has led to questions about whether committees should be co-chaired, and if so, by whom. Mr. Rogers stated that his preference is for centralized secretariats; it provides consistency across the committees and streamlines their administration. However, allowing additional agencies to contribute to setting the agenda of committees can lead to richer conversations before discussion at the committee table.
- [11] Ms. Drouin commented on a document indicating PCO S&I recommended against allowing PS to remain co-chair of the DM National Security (“**DMNS**”) committee. This recommendation was not implemented. Ms. Drouin stated PS is a policy department when it comes to national security, and since DMNS deals with policy, it makes sense that PS play a role. Ms. Drouin said she did not feel any tension resulting from PS remaining co-chair; the working relationship remains fluid, regardless of which department chairs or co-chairs the committees. She said streamlining the current structure is the priority, along with the empowerment of ADMs, and noted there are currently too many committees.

2.3. Cabinet

- [12] Mr. Hannaford noted that the National Security Council (“**NSC**”), a Cabinet committee chaired by the PM, represents a significant change in governance of the national security community. He said the purpose of the NSC is to provide a strategic forum and

¹ CAN037056.

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focal point for the discussion of national security issues, with input from senior public service officials. Ms. Drouin explained that, as DC-NSIA, she is the official secretary of the NSC. She described meetings of the NSC as having a policy focus, and said the NSC, as compared to Cabinet, is more of a direction-setting committee than a transactional decision making committee. She noted that it is the only Cabinet Committee that considers both intelligence and policy work. Intelligence packages are put together for and briefings are offered to Ministers and Deputy Ministers in advance of NSC meetings. Ms. Drouin remarked that Ministers are engaging with the intelligence, attending the briefings, and using the intelligence in setting orientation and direction during NSC discussions. The added value of discussing intelligence at the policy-making table has been evident. Ms. Drouin noted the NSC “drives the town” in terms of addressing national security issues.

- [13] Mr. Hannaford added that the NSC has a living agenda and is a part of a fluid cycle where the national security community can raise an issue for direction, implement the NSC’s direction, and ultimately return to the NSC with its assessment and/or new developments on the issue for further direction. He noted that the NSC is an opportunity to have coherent use of intelligence with policy and operational considerations. Ms. Drouin added that departments can also bring these issues to Cabinet for decision through a Memorandum to Cabinet.

3. Flow of Information

3.1. General Description

- [14] Commission Counsel asked the interviewees about a proposal for changes in the dissemination of intelligence within government.² Ms. Thomas said that, as a result of the 2022 media leaks of classified material [a series of media articles that appeared to be based on classified intelligence relating to potential incidents of FI], concerns were identified about the control, handling, and dissemination of intelligence, including control

² CAN028145.

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of readership, and the purpose for reading intelligence (being mindful of the need to know principle), and the eventual destruction of reports. Those issues were a daily topic of conversation between her and Mr. Rogers, who took on the task of improving the management of intelligence. She explained that Mr. Rogers sought to ensure that the intelligence senior officials saw was useful to them and could be actioned.

- [15] Mr. Rogers said he began to have conversations about these topics around the late spring or summer of 2023. He wanted to ensure that agencies were consistent in the way in which they disseminated intelligence to senior officials and that there was a coherent system for tracking the dissemination of intelligence.
- [16] Mr. Rogers said that CSIS, CSE, and PCO IAS now disseminate intelligence mostly via a new government database system. This is gradually replacing [a predecessor system], which some government agencies have used since about 2001. He noted that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (“**CSIS**”), which previously disseminated intelligence reports by email on the Canadian Top Secret Network (“**CTSN**”), now uses the new government database system for intelligence dissemination. The tracking of dissemination, readership and feedback is automated. This is in contrast to intelligence sent by email, where recipients must manually acknowledge receipt or provide feedback to indicate they have read a product.
- [17] Mr. Rogers said that Client Relations Officers (“**CROs**”) [CROs are CSE employees who are in charge of distributing intelligence to senior officials and Ministers’ offices] are also relied on for the tracking and dissemination of intelligence. CROs may print intelligence from CSE’s intelligence dissemination and tracking platform for physical dissemination. This requires them to register the client for whom the product is being printed, and update the platform once the recipient has read the report, including any feedback provided by the client to the CRO.
- [18] Mr. Rogers explained that at PCO, the process for disseminating intelligence to the Prime Minister’s Office (“**PMO**”) is becoming more systematic. Mr. Rogers and Ms. Drouin identify intelligence products from their daily intelligence packages that should be brought to the attention of the PMO, the PM and the Clerk and provide them to CROs. The identified intelligence products are then bundled into a weekly intelligence

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package prepared for the PM and the PMO. The PM reads this package weekly, during a reserved time slot. Mr. Rogers and Ms. Drouin also provide regular (weekly) briefings to senior PMO staff and the PM. Ms. Drouin noted that determining what intelligence should be briefed up among the vast amount of intelligence (approximately 71,000 reports for 2023) produced by Canadian intelligence agencies is a difficult exercise requiring considerable judgment. This function is a fundamental part of PCO's role, since the most precious commodity for Ministers and DMs is their time. As these determinations are judgment calls, they can always be second-guessed. Mr. Hannaford noted that PCO has improved over time at identifying which products need to be brought to the attention of the PMO and PM, and that this triage role is showing real benefits. Mr. Rogers observed that the PM always reads what he and the DC-NSIA point out he needs to read.

- [19] Commission Counsel asked the interviewees about paragraph 160 of the *National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians' Special Report on Foreign Interference in Canada's Democratic Processes and Institutions*. [This paragraph concludes that (i) intelligence agencies sometime remove salient information from intelligence reports in the belief the information is too sensitive or under the impression that the intelligence will nonetheless be compelling and (ii) in some cases, senior officials have requested that intelligence agencies pull back published reports because they believed the information was too politically sensitive.]
- [20] Mr. Hannaford stated that, in his experience, Canada's intelligence apparatus has been working to ensure awareness where it's needed, no matter the sensitivity of the intelligence. Ms. Drouin and Ms. Thomas both said they were not aware of any instances of being told to pull back intelligence due to its political sensitivity. Ms. Thomas added that, as NSIA, she asked analysts to draft intelligence products to achieve clarity and precision, rather than sensationalizing intelligence reports to make them 'catchy' and grab the recipient's attention.
- [21] Mr. Hannaford said that, when the PM travels abroad, he can be provided with access to classified intelligence if necessary. Mr. Rogers said that GAC is able to provide timely

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classified briefings for officials at a number of locations, ensuring that senior officials can be briefed while travelling.

3.2. Specific Incidents

3.2.1. Availability of CSIS Reporting

[22] Commission Counsel asked the interviewees about an email exchange between Mr. Rogers and individuals employed at the PCO Security & Intelligence Secretariat (“**PCO S&I**”), including Ms. Lisa Ducharme. In this exchange, Ms. Ducharme indicates that PCO S&I had not seen a specific CSIS assessment about the murder of Mr. Hardeep Singh Nijjar because IAS was initially not on the distribution list for it, which she stated was “a broader dissemination issue that we hope to solve in the future.” The interviewees were not aware of what the “broader dissemination issue” Ms. Ducharme mentioned was referring to. Mr. Rogers said the distribution of the CSIS assessment about the Nijjar murder was extremely limited given its sensitivity and the serious public security implications should intelligence about the murder get leaked. Accordingly, it did not surprise him that the CSIS assessment would not have been broadly shared. Ms. Thomas added that the dissemination was named distribution only and as close hold as possible due to its extreme sensitivity, so IAS and S&I were not named initially. As confidence in the intelligence increased, the CSIS assessment was shared more broadly. Mr. Hannaford said that, from his perspective, the intelligence concerning the murder flowed remarkably well, though tightly controlled, and moved quickly to the PM.

3.2.2. The “PCO Special Report”

[23] Commission Counsel asked the interviewees about the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency (“**NSIRA**”) analysis of the dissemination of a report (“**PCO Special Report**”) by the PCO Intelligence Assessment Secretariat (“**PCO IAS**”) about the People’s Republic of China’s (“**PRC**”) FI tactics. [NSIRA found that, despite PCO IAS’ recommendation to provide the Special Report to select Deputy Ministers and Ministers, the Special Report remained in draft form and was not sent to them or to the

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PMO]. Ms. Thomas noted that, in conducting their review, NSIRA did not speak with her.

[24] Ms. Thomas explained that, from her perspective, there was nothing particularly distinctive about the PCO Special Report. It was drafted at the request of her predecessor [Mr. David Morrison]. It was a useful primer to drive policy and discussions within the national security community about the threats posed by the PRC, but was not the kind of report that she would have sent to the PM. It was not for decision, and did not change situational awareness or add to what had already been briefed to the PM. The appropriate procedure would have been for it to be distributed through PCO IAS' normal governance process. She emphasized that the NSIA does not and did not formally approve PCO IAS products before their dissemination: PCO IAS makes independent decisions about the dissemination of its products because it is an independent unit. Ms. Thomas noted independence is a critical element of an intelligence assessment shop.

3.2.3. The Targeting Paper

[25] Commission Counsel asked the interviewees about NSIRA's findings on the distribution of a report (the "**Targeting Paper**") produced by a CSIS analyst about the PRC's targeting of Canadian political actors. [NSIRA noted there was a difference in opinion between CSIS and PCO as to the outcome of a meeting to discuss the Targeting Paper in February 2023. According to CSIS, the outcome was a request by the NSIA to produce a shorter and "sanitized" version of the Targeting Paper specifically for the PM. According to PCO, the report in question was not specifically for the PM. NSIRA found the CSIS Director was unaware that the sanitized version of the Targeting Paper, completed in March 2023, had not been provided to the PM, as the absence of follow up about the request left him with the impression the PM had seen it]. Ms. Thomas noted that, in conducting their review, NSIRA did not speak with her.

[26] Ms. Thomas indicated that a first version of the Targeting Paper was drafted in 2021, but that she first saw it in 2023 and had some questions. Given the ongoing media leaks, she had concerns about its broad distribution list and about the names of the

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MPs allegedly targeted being unmasked, which is not standard practice, as this information could be misused if it fell into the wrong hands. She also had questions about the context in which the Targeting Paper was drafted and its contents. As a result, she convened the national security community to discuss the Targeting Paper.

Following these discussions, the Targeting Paper was redrafted with the names of the MPs masked and a reduced distribution list. Ms. Thomas did not see the subsequent draft.

[27] Ms. Charette said there were also different perspectives about the Targeting Paper's significance and, in particular, whether some or all of the activity described in the Targeting Paper constituted foreign interference, or standard diplomatic activity. For example, drawing on her earlier experience as an ambassador, she said that maintaining a list of MPs relevant to a file in which a diplomat was involved is normal behaviour. Engaging in geopolitics requires research in order to know who you need to speak to in order to have influence as a diplomat. The main issue, from her perspective, was not the existence of a list, but rather the diplomat's intended use of such a list.

[28] Noting his experience as a former ambassador, Mr. Hannaford indicated there is no bright line test to distinguish between FI and diplomatic activity. It requires a very context-specific analysis which is why debate about the distinction is important. He noted, for example, that in the context of trade negotiations with another country, Canada needs to know which foreign players have what views, who has influence, and who is friendly to Canada's interests – this is part of having a diplomatic strategy. He also noted, with respect to situations where sanctions may be used, Canadian Missions may compile lists of potential sanction targets. The point being, there is a range of things countries think about doing to gain influence in geopolitics. That is why it is important to consider different perspectives, which the compositions of the DM Committee on Intelligence Response (“**DMCIR**”) and Panel of Five allow for. Ms. Thomas explained that Canada needs to proceed with caution before accusing countries of FI to ensure the accusation is not based on activities that Canada also undertakes abroad, which could put Canadian diplomats at risk.

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[29] Mr. Rogers added that although a differentiation between FI and foreign influence needs to be made at some point, it is not necessary to draw that line in the early stages of intelligence collection. Intelligence about foreign influence is still useful, but would be less relevant to the Clerk or the PM who are typically referred intelligence when a decision is required. Ms. Drouin added that context is important for understanding the significance of foreign influence activities described in intelligence. For example, whether the foreign influence activities occurred during an electoral period, when expectations regarding diplomatic conduct differ, would impact their significance. Ms. Thomas noted that if the Targeting Paper had been brought to the attention of the NSIA in 2021 when the Targeting Paper was originally prepared, it is possible that different action would have been taken. However, she indicated that her concerns about the unmasked names and broad distribution would remain.

[30] Ms. Charette said that when intelligence comes in, there are a range of tools and responses available to the public service. The response is not always to go to the Clerk or the PM. Mr. Hannaford added that this triage function is the purpose of having a governance structure, whose job is to determine what the intelligence stands for and what the appropriate response is. In his view, there is limited use in bringing intelligence to the PM without attaching meaning and significance to it and articulating responses to what the information is thought to stand for.

4. Intelligence Priorities

[31] Ms. Drouin explained that the intelligence priorities approved by Cabinet are not ranked in order of importance, and should be understood as “baskets”. The baskets generally remain the same, but their relative priority and intensity varies over time depending on the attention placed on the issues within them. This allows agencies to adjust their collection efforts under each priority depending on the context.

[32] Mr. Rogers explained that after the priorities are approved by Cabinet, Ministers issue directives to departments and agencies on how to interpret the priorities within their portfolios. ADMs oversee a process which includes the development of requirements in consultation with their clients and analysts. They do this by developing intelligence

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questions to inform collection requirements, guided by the overarching question of “what intelligence would be most useful to the respective intelligence consumer client?” These requirements are more granular, allowing for more targeted and prioritized intelligence collection. Ms. Drouin said the data showed that the number of requirements and requests related to FI had increased slightly compared to past years, and that an upward trend was being seen. Mr. Rogers said that this growth should be reflected in the National Expenditure Review [The National Expenditure Review is a report published yearly by PCO to capture the cost for the intelligence community to provide intelligence to the Government.].

5. The Panel of Five

[33] Commission Counsel asked the interviewees to comment on notes from the April 20, 2023, meeting of the DM Foreign Interference Committee (“**DMFI**”). Ms. Thomas said that the NSIA and PS co-chair this committee. She spoke specifically to bullet points in the notes about how to address FI in between elections. She said that, around that period, it was apparent that the Independent Special Rapporteur (“**ISR**”) was of the view that DMs had a heightened awareness of intelligence related to foreign interference while on the Panel of Five, but he was concerned about how to ensure that level of awareness would be maintained between elections or to ramp up readiness for a snap election, and how to deal with by-elections. Ms. Charette indicated that the discussion captured by the April 20, 2023, notes was focussed on internal reflections that DMs were having to respond to requests and questions from the ISR.

[34] Ms. Charette said this discussion led to further discussions about the appropriate structure to monitor by-elections, and how to provide information and intelligence to Ministers if needed, since ministerial accountabilities remain during by-elections and Parliament is in place. Ms. Charette commented on an undated memorandum to the PM recommending that additional measures be put in place for the upcoming by-elections including activating the Panel of Five; noting that there was a significant level of public discussion about FI at that time, and it was important to maintain public confidence in the by-elections. The PM had asked for advice on measures to be in place for upcoming

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by-elections. The first proposal to the PM was to trigger the Panel of Five for the by-elections, but Ms. Charette noted that advice was later refined to use the DMCIR instead of the Panel.

- [35] Ms. Thomas said that further discussions led to a decision that the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force (“**SITE TF**”) would report to the DMCIR during by-elections. The DMCIR held discussions to determine the type of information or intelligence that would be elevated to Ministers during the by-elections. Ms. Thomas also indicated that any information elevated to Ministers would also be raised to the Clerk. This process of notifying the Clerk was not triggered since no incidents of FI were observed during the June 2023 by-elections.
- [36] Ms. Thomas said this process had been very effective, as DMCIR was already meeting weekly and considering the same type of information it was now receiving from the SITE TF. Ms. Charette said it was understood that the relevant Ministers, who still exercised full responsibilities during the by-election periods, would be responsible for making announcements to alert the public about any FI incident, should it be required.
- [37] Ms. Charette noted that there is a key distinction between general elections and by-elections; by-elections typically only occur simultaneously in a few ridings. Because of this, there is no concrete distinction between the integrity of the election “as a whole” and the integrity of a single election. Ms. Drouin stated that DMCIR has adopted the same approach for the 2024 by-elections.
- [38] Mr. Rogers said that DMCIR received the intelligence that the Panel would have received during the writ period of a general election. Ms. Charette and Mr. Rogers noted that DMCIR does not have the same membership as the Panel of Five; the Justice DM and the Clerk do not sit on DMCIR. However, members of the PCO Democratic Institutions Secretariat (“**PCO DI**”) attend DMCIR during the by-elections period, as they do with meetings of the Panel of Five. Ms. Drouin added that, more broadly, DMCIR has improved governance of national security. All agencies contribute to setting its agenda, which gives its work both a practical and tactical focus.

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[39] Mr. Hannaford said the Panel of Five has also started meeting at regular intervals to prepare for upcoming elections. Meeting topics include SITE TF updates on the threat environment as a standing item, international examples, communications, and engagement outside of government. He expects a significant increase in its activities in the buildup to the next elections. He noted that this is not supplanting the accountabilities of Ministers or the work of DM committees; this is preparatory work for when the Caretaker Convention kicks in.

6. The SITE TF

[40] Mr. Rogers said that CSIS now chairs the SITE TF. While the SITE TF is not formalized as a permanent body, its member agencies cooperate constantly. The SITE TF merely frames that cooperation with a particular focus on elections, and it provides for special procedures during the writ period [for instance, daily production and dissemination of situational reports so that the Panel is immediately aware of any threats to the election]. He said that GAC's Rapid Response Mechanism focuses on monitoring the online space during elections, that it was proper to consider whether this should evolve, and that there were always questions of resourcing and priorities. He also said there were questions about whether a more permanent structure for the SITE TF might better address the evolving threats of mis- and disinformation.

[41] Mr. Rogers stated that PCO has discussed housing the SITE TF in a permanent PCO secretariat. This idea arose as part of the ongoing initiative to modify the national security governance structure. However, the Government has not identified any gaps resulting from the fact that the SITE TF is not currently housed at PCO.

[42] Mr. Hannaford said that this discussion is all the more relevant given the context of the increasing means to convey mis- and disinformation, such as artificial intelligence. He also spoke of the dual threats Canada faces: "classic," human-based, entirely covert espionage; and newer, cyber-based, threats sometimes deployed in part in the open environment. Canada's strategy, including the SITE TF and the Panel of Five, needs to include non-governmental actors with knowledge and resources to counter both threats

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and to contribute to building resilience. Canada may draw inspiration from the experiences of its international partners, including their experiences in recent elections.

7. Engagement with External Stakeholders

7.1. International Partners

- [43] Mr. Hannaford said that Canada and its international partners have similar concerns about FI, and there are international conversations about it at many levels. Cabinet Secretaries in Westminster parliamentary systems have sometimes met to reflect on challenges and pathways to address such threats. Ms. Drouin said that her counterparts (National Security Advisors) in the G7 and Five Eyes Alliance also exchange information on FI. Ms. Thomas added that these conversations have been taking place for a long time.
- [44] Mr. Rogers said that the increased sophistication of the threat means that the help of allies is important for Canada. Mr. Hannaford said that it is understood that, given the overwhelming amount of mis- and disinformation, it is impossible to rebut every false narrative. Instead, the key to combatting mis- and disinformation is to build resilience and to reveal the tactics employed so as to enable the population to better assess the accuracy of the information they receive.

7.2. Provincial and Territorial Governments

- [45] Mr. Hannaford said that engaging with Provincial and Territorial governments with respect to FI has several levels to it. The federal government has certain responsibilities and accountabilities. When the federal government sees information, it considers how to communicate this information without assuming provincial jurisdiction and while ensuring information with sensitive sources is protected. He noted the legislative changes introduced by Bill C-70 and that networks are being built up with provinces and territories, with provincial and territorial colleagues being encouraged to obtain security clearances. The Government encourages capacity building among subnational

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governments. Mr. Hannaford has regular conversations with his provincial and territorial counterparts.

[46] Ms. Drouin said that Bill C-70, *An Act Respecting countering foreign interference*,³ is an important change. It will augment CSIS' authority to share classified information with sub-national governments. The focus is now on building networks and ensuring that officials have the requisite clearances to receive relevant information. Mr. Rogers agreed and gave the examples of defensive briefings CSIS gave to provincial elected officials, and the CSE Canadian Centre for Cyber Security's engagement with provinces. He has observed an increased systematization of the channels of exchange between provinces and the federal government, including at the ADM level, though the structure still has room for improvement. Ms. Charette agreed that there are multiple coordination mechanisms with provinces specific to each federal department. She also noted that the federal government must tread carefully in this area. Engagement usually occurs because the Provincial or Territorial government has invited the federal government to do so.

[47] Mr. Rogers said that this is a rich area for additional reflection and work. In particular, one goal would be to ensure that all provinces have identified contact points and counterparts for the federal government on national security issues. The work would also seek to ensure that sub-national governments can use the information provided by federal officials. Mr. Hannaford added that the federal and provincial governments deal with similar issues, such as mis- and disinformation. Accordingly, it makes sense to pool resources and expertise to work against common threats.

7.3. Political Parties

[48] Mr. Hannaford said that engagement with political parties also has several levels to it. There is a balance to be struck between communicating with political parties and remaining non-partisan. Because parties are private entities, and because of the non-

³ Parliament enacted Bill C-70 as *An Act Respecting countering foreign interference*, S.C. 2024, c. 16. It received Royal Assent on June 20, 2024.

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partisan nature of the public service, government needs to exercise caution before regulating their nomination processes. In the absence of an explicit request to move regulation forward, the public service would be hesitant to engage in policy action on that front.

- [49] Ms. Drouin added that the new offences created by Bill C-70 also capture the internal processes of political parties in some respects. She further noted that the limited security clearance (Secret) of party representatives sometimes prevents government officials from providing sufficiently precise information for the desired message to get across.

8. Legislative Amendments

- [50] Ms. Drouin said that the Foreign Influence Transparency and Accountability Act that Bill C-70 creates will foster transparency and democratic engagement. However, she cautioned against viewing a registry as a panacea. It should instead be seen as another tool for Canada to detect FI and enforce sanctions.

9. Specific FI Incidents

9.1. The Expulsion of Zhao Wei

- [51] The witnesses commented on handwritten notes taken by Brian Clow during meetings on May 2,⁴ 6,⁵ and 7,⁶ 2023. During those meetings, senior government officials and PMO staff, as well as the PM, discussed expelling Mr. Zhao from Canada.
- [52] Ms. Thomas explained that, following the publication of a newspaper article that leaked intelligence about the alleged targeting of Michael Chong's family in the PRC by PRC officials, the Government assessed the concrete actions it could take in response. One option discussed was to declare Mr. Zhao *persona non grata*. Ms. Thomas said there

⁴ CAN019500 [misdated May 7, 2024].

⁵ CAN018000.

⁶ CAN018001.

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was considerable discussion involved as they were wary of this response affecting Canadian diplomats in China. Ms. Charette said that the PRC's retaliatory measure [declaring Canada's Consul in Shanghai *persona non grata*] did not surprise her.

[53] A response that included declaring Mr. Zhao *persona non grata* was within Minister Joly's accountabilities. Because of elevated tensions with the PRC, PCO elected to brief the PM.

9.2. Targeting of Diaspora Members by Russia

[54] Mr. Rogers was asked about a memorandum to the NSIA making reference to the agenda for a DMCIR meeting and specifically referring to a CSIS intelligence product regarding Russian Diaspora. He indicated that he had not seen this memorandum beforehand. He said he was not surprised that the matter was placed on the agenda but that it had not been discussed at DMCIR. Ms. Thomas noted that it is not uncommon for a DMCIR meeting agenda to include more topics than can be covered in that meeting.

9.3. Han Dong

[55] The interviewees commented on a memorandum to the PM, as well as a similar memorandum to Minister LeBlanc, that reference MP Han Dong, and commented on any related discussions.

9.4. WeChat Targeting of Michael Chong

[56] Ms. Thomas identified this as an example of a department raising an issue at DMCIR, which allowed the Government to coordinate a response to a FI threat.

[57] Ms. Charette said the RRM had detected this incident in the context of its enhanced monitoring activities during the by-election period as part of the SITE TF. There were no threats to Mr. Chong's safety but he was the target of a misinformation campaign.

[58] The campaign was discussed at DMCIR. This led to a series of actions that were all carried out: continuing to monitor the situation, informing Mr. Chong, and engaging PRC diplomats to attempt to stop the campaign. Ms. Thomas said she had considered it

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necessary to brief the PM because Mr. Chong was a high profile MP based on recent events, so she wanted to ensure the PM was aware and provided with advice, not just information.

10. Conclusion

10.1. Diversity of Perspectives within the National Security Community

- [59] Mr. Hannaford said that it is critical for government agencies and departments to bring their own, differing perspectives when analyzing the complex factual issues that often arise out of potential FI incidents. It is essential to consider all these viewpoints to arrive at informed decisions. Mr. Hannaford said that the composition of the Panel of Five reflects the importance of considering these inherently complicated sets of facts from different angles.
- [60] Ms. Thomas cautioned that groupthink in the national security space is dangerous. That is why it is necessary for departments to challenge each other; debate is essential to the health of the system which is why some decisions are intentionally dual-key. The NSIA needs to give full consideration to all perspectives. The role of NSIA requires a broad worldview and an understanding of how intelligence is used.
- [61] Ms. Drouin said that tensions between departments or agencies are present in all aspects of government, not only in intelligence or FI work. One of PCO's functions is to help navigate through these different approaches.
- [62] Ms. Charette agreed. Managing competing interests and perspectives to develop public policy is the essence of governing. She said it is difficult to create all-purpose mechanisms or to codify or to develop checklists to mediate these differences of opinions, because so much is fact- and/or context-specific; the underlying facts determine the analysis required to address an issue.

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10.2. Role of the NSIA

- [63] Ms. Thomas said that she sees limited use in building a legislative framework for the role of the NSIA. It could help clarify the directive role of the NSIA, but she did not view this as necessary. Elevating the rank of the position, as the PM did by appointing Ms. Drouin NSIA while maintaining her in her position as Deputy Clerk, was sufficient to illustrate and convey the importance of the position. Mr. Hannaford agreed that this, as well as making the NSIA secretary to the NSC, were positive developments.
- [64] Ms. Thomas said the NSIA's role and work are primarily determined by changing world events, not by a snapshot-in-time list of responsibilities set in legislation. It would be difficult for legislation to spell out a meaningful list of issues that the NSIA is required to address. The unprecedented levels of activity over the past years contributed to shaping the position more than the individuals who had occupied it.

10.3. Canada's National Security Culture

- [65] Mr. Hannaford said that the increasing complexity of the geopolitical environment requires all Canadians to come together to address growing threats.
- [66] Ms. Drouin said the evolution of threats often outpaces that of legislation and policy. For this reason there is a constant need to modernize and improve Canada's national security toolkit. She said that Bill C-70 was a positive step and that she did not believe that Canada was falling behind its Five Eyes allies in its response to FI. Ms. Charette agreed with Ms. Drouin about the need for constant adaptation and said that this requires complex analysis because of the interplay of diverse interests at stake.