

UNCLASSIFIED



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: Allen Sutherland, Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet, Democratic Institutions and Machinery of Government.

Commission Counsel examined Allen Sutherland during *in camera* hearings held in July and August 2024. Counsel for the Attorney General of Canada appeared on behalf of the Government of Canada and had the opportunity to examine the witness. The hearing was held in the absence of the public and other Participants. This summary discloses the evidence that, in the opinion of the Commissioner, would not be injurious to 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. Examination by Commission Counsel

- [1] Mr. Sutherland confirmed the accuracy of the summary of his June 13, 2024 interview and adopted its content as part of his evidence before the Commission. Mr. Sutherland also accepted the Privy Council Office (“PCO”) institutional report as an official of the PCO.

1.1 Background

- [2] Mr. Sutherland is the Assistant Secretary for Machinery of Government and Democratic Institutions. In that capacity, he serves a number of functions, including supporting the Prime Minister on issues related to democratic institutions. Mr. Sutherland also supports Minister LeBlanc in his capacity as minister responsible for democratic institutions. Important objectives of Mr. Sutherland’s work on the democratic institutions side include

UNCLASSIFIED

the *Canada Elections Act*, the Plan to Protect Democracy, and the Leaders Debates Commission.

- [3] The Democratic Institutions Secretariat (PCO DI) contains two units: (1) the Protecting Democracy Unit (PDU); and (2) the Electoral and Senate Policy Unit (ESPU).
- [4] The PDU consists of approximately 10 analysts serving three functions: The first is (a) a general research function to reflect the fact that [the protecting democracy space] is a quickly evolving area and that there is not a major common foundation of knowledge. It is therefore important to be current with emerging understandings on how leading academics are thinking about this space. The second function (b) is advancing the protecting democracy initiative, as laid out in general terms in Minister LeBlanc's mandate letter, and providing advice for the whole of government/whole of society approach that the government is trying to develop. The third function (c) is stakeholder relations, which is a very active group charged with engaging groups, whether think tanks, civil society or academia on issues of common interest. The PDU has also started an important initiative to work with the provinces and territories to build understanding at that level. To this end, PDU has developed guidebooks and toolkits to help spread understanding, and PDU is working on a training module.
- [5] The ESPU, also does important work, but is probably less relevant to the Commission. Their foundational job is in relation to the *Canada Elections Act*, which is a very important piece of legislation. Amendments to the *Canada Elections Act* (Bill C-65) are currently at second reading in the House of Commons. The ESPU works quite closely with Elections Canada.
- [6] Regarding the policy work of the Secretariat, PCO-DI develops policy to support Minister LeBlanc's mandate and responsibilities to further a whole of government and whole of society approach to protecting democracy, with an emphasis on interrelations with technology. It does policy work to upgrade the *Canada Elections Act*. PCO-DI has also been doing a lot of work on mis- and disinformation to inform the protecting democracy policy work.
- [7] Minister LeBlanc has responsibilities for different institutions, including the Leaders Debates Commission. PCO-DI provides policy work to advance the English and French

UNCLASSIFIED

debates that Canadians see during elections, which have a very important democratic function.

1.2 The Mandate Letter

- [8] Mr. Sutherland was asked about an email chain from June 2023 respecting the Minister's Mandate Letter which sets out the relevant Mandate Letter Commitments. Mr. Sutherland provided an overview of each commitment. The first listed commitment is to "Protect Canada's democratic institutions, including the federal electoral process, against foreign interference and disinformation." Mr. Sutherland explained that the commitment captures the work of both groups described at paragraph 3. For the ESPU, Bill C-65 contains some elements that address issues around foreign interference and disinformation in the electoral process. Protecting Canada's democratic institutions encompasses all of the work of the PDU.
- [9] The Plan to Protect Canada's Democracy is the major effort to try and ensure a whole-of-government approach in advance of the next federal election. The various reviews that have taken place, including the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference, are given active consideration in the plan's development, including such areas as the future role of the Panel, the support provided through the SITE TF and the outreach to civil society. Its implementation target is in advance of GE45.
- [10] The next enumerated commitment states, "lead efforts to strengthen Canada's democratic institutions by examining the link between technology and democracy." Mr. Sutherland explained that one can see changing tactics by adversaries, and one of the tactics that is front and centre is artificial intelligence. The work towards this commitment considers issues around the interaction between different technological possibilities and what it might mean for threats to our electoral system and democracy. This work very much involves engaging with academics, think-tanks and others. This work is ongoing.
- [11] The third enumerated commitment states, "consider the Chief Electoral Officer's forthcoming legislative recommendations from the 43rd and 44th general elections to support transparency, fairness and participation in the federal electoral process." The development of Bill C-65 is related to this commitment, and it involved ESPU working very

UNCLASSIFIED

closely with Elections Canada. After each election, the Chief Electoral Officer of Elections Canada, Stéphane Perrault, provides a report of his assessment and identifies areas where he thinks improvements can be made. The ESPU engages directly with Elections Canada and provides advice to the Minister in that area.

- [12] The fourth commitment states, “consider the forthcoming report of Canada’s Leaders’ Debates Commissioner on how to improve leaders’ debates and take steps to ensure that they better serve the public interest.” Debates Commissioner Johnston issued a report after GE44. This commitment involves considering that report as part of the future of the Leaders Debates Commission.
- [13] The final commitment states, “work with Elections Canada to explore ways to expand the ability for people to vote.” Mr. Sutherland stated that the government has a strong commitment to ensure voting accessibility, which is a theme in Bill C-65.

1.3 The Relationship between PCO-DI, S&I & IAS

- [14] The intersections between the work that PCO-DI undertakes and the work of the Security and Intelligence Secretariat (“S&I”), the Intelligence Assessment Secretariat (“IAS”) and the office of the NSIA are quite extensive. Notably, the NSIA is a member of the Panel of Five. PCO is not a large department. There are a little over 1000 people at PCO, yet the “core” of PCO, of which IAS, S&I and Machinery of Government/ DI are a part, is perhaps closer to 400.
- [15] Mr. Sutherland works with his counterpart assistant secretary at S&I (Nabih Eldebs) as part of the ADM ESCC (Elections Security Coordinating Committee), which is an active committee that meets approximately every two weeks.
- [16] PCO is involved in the ESCC with Elections Canada. The ESCC is a way to ensure that Canada’s core electoral circuitry is protected against foreign interference. Different national security agencies attend. Mr. Sutherland brings the Democratic Institutions’ perspective to the ESCC, and noted the Minister for Democratic Institutions, whom Mr. Sutherland supports, is the Minister who leads on any proposed changes to the *Canada Elections Act*. PCO-DI works with Elections Canada on that front.

UNCLASSIFIED

- [17] S&I is a co-secretariat with DI on the Panel of 5, so they support each other in developing a rigorous work plan for the Panel. Doing so has become particularly important in light of Mr. Rosenberg's recommendations about the need for the Panel to be in a constant state of readiness.
- [18] S&I is PCO-DI's conduit into the national security agencies. PCO-DI often works through S&I if they have issues to discuss because S&I deals directly with the different national security agencies at an operational level.
- [19] The IAS is a fascinating group. Its staff are deep experts in country relations, so they often have very detailed expert-level understandings of different countries and their motivations. This secretariat attends some of the joint meetings PCO-DI has. Mr. Sutherland has no hesitation speaking and working with IAS leadership.
- [20] PCO-DI also works from time to time on National Security Council work. If there is something touching issues around mis- or disinformation and foreign interference, PCO-DI provides support in that capacity. PCO-DI has a regular, ongoing relationship with the National Security Council Secretariat.

1.4 PCO-DI and Provincial and Territorial Governments

- [21] At Minister LeBlanc's direction, PCO-DI has become more concerned over time about the ways in which democratic processes and institutions at the provincial and territorial level are vulnerable to foreign interference. The way the relationship has evolved is one of outreach to the provinces and territories. For instance, Stéphane Perrault and staff at Elections Canada have relations with their provincial counterparts where issues of foreign interference and issues more generally around electoral security can be raised. CSE has also done some important work reaching out to the provinces because there's a real information gap. Unlike the federal government, provinces and territories don't have their own national security agencies.
- [22] PCO-DI has also reached out to the provinces and territories. Minister LeBlanc recently shared with his provincial and territorial counterparts a toolkit, a guidebook and a compendium of good practices in the foreign interference space. PCO-DI also made

UNCLASSIFIED

available to their provincial counterparts some of PCO-DI's work through the Canada School of Public Service ("CSPS").

- [23] The CSPS is a federal government entity that provides training to federal public servants. PCO-DI is assisting CSPS with a trust series, and some of the training sessions have been opened up to provinces. There have been sessions involving over 2,000 public servants examining issues around trust in government and how to reaffirm trust. This is tightly linked with mis- and disinformation. PCO-DI has asked that provinces be invited to these sessions so the information can get out across the country. Some provinces have participated.
- [24] PCO-DI is developing a training module around mis- and disinformation and strategic communications to help build greater understanding of the impact of mis- and disinformation on the delivery of government services. That training module is expected to be completed by the end of the fall and will be made available to all provinces in French and English.
- [25] In early July 2024, the heads of the public service for each of the federal, provincial and territorial governments held a meeting that was dedicated to issues around foreign interference. Mr. Sutherland was one of the presenters. They shared knowledge of the toolkits, guidebooks and PCO-DI's future plans, with the intent of informing the provinces and territories that PCO-DI was available to provide assistance. Some of the provinces have reached out from time to time, and when they do, PCO-DI tries to give them support.
- [26] PCO-DI is trying to develop civil society capacity and provides support to the Canadian Digital Media Research Network ("CDMRN"). One of CDMRN's primary goals is to provide a real time understanding of what mis- and disinformation looks like in Canada. CDMRN is a civil society collaboration independent from the government that provides, among other things, a monitoring capacity to assess provincial elections. For instance, CDMRN will monitor the upcoming British Columbia (B.C.) election. Should they identify anything, it is understood that CDMRN will advise the province and B.C. citizens. CDMRN, through its predecessor organization (the Media Ecosystem Observatory), has previously monitored elections in some of the larger provinces, such as Quebec and

UNCLASSIFIED

Ontario, and they evaluated the federal election. [Upon review subsequent to the hearing, Mr. Sutherland realized that they had not monitored the Ontario election.]

1.5 Information Sharing with PCO-DI

- [27] Much information or knowledge that PCO-DI receives is open source. This could include information from academics, think-tanks, and reviews or assessments from a national security agency. PCO-DI does not get raw intelligence or operational details, which is subject to the “need to know” principle. PCO-DI does not generally need to know the granular operational details for their policy function. Rather, they need to know the overall assessments. PCO-DI does receive intelligence assessments, which are shared regularly. Most of the PCO-DI staff now have Top Secret clearances.
- [28] Mr. Sutherland agreed that PCO-DI requires an understanding of intelligence trends and the threat landscape for its policy work. Much of the most important information they receive is comparative. PCO-DI examines what other countries are doing and seeing because they may be exposed to something ahead of Canada. That is why it’s important to engage with other countries. Much of the information PCO-DI receives doesn’t come through the national security agencies. Some of it comes directly through engagement with counterparts in other countries.
- [29] When PCO-DI receives intelligence assessments, they look at the existing tools and what the information contained in the assessments means for those tools. For instance, how might the tools be adapted, where do they need to be enhanced, or where do things need to be changed? Essentially, PCO-DI reflects on the assessments and tries to translate them into policy terms, as well as understand what they mean for the Plan to Protect Canada’s Democracy as a whole. In doing so, they consider whether the information changes how they allocate scarce resources.
- [30] Mr. Sutherland said that, despite not receiving raw intelligence, PCO-DI stays on top of what is changing in the threat landscape by engaging regularly with the S&I secretariat and receiving overall intelligence assessments. Mr. Sutherland meets regularly with senior leaders in national security. Additionally, PCO-DI makes a point of being engaged at the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (“OECD”), an

UNCLASSIFIED

international organization that has made reinforcing democracy one of its primary thematic goals. Understanding what is happening internationally helps Mr. Sutherland and PCO-DI more generally understand potential applications in Canada.

- [31] Mr. Sutherland believes that he has access to the information he needs. Mr. Sutherland stated that he did not necessarily want his policy analysts to receive raw intelligence. He wants them to take the best assessments of where things stands, including how the craft is evolving and what it means for protecting democracy. Providing them with raw intelligence could detract from their ability to see the bigger picture. Canada has very capable national security experts whose job is to parse raw intelligence. No information gap exists as long as PCO-DI has relationships with the national security agencies and can engage with counterparts at the policy level. Despite not receiving raw intelligence, intelligence trends and the threat landscape have affected PCO-DI's work quite a bit.

1.6 The Plan to Protect Canada's Democracy

- [32] The first emanation of the Plan to Protect Democracy was approved in 2018. The updated plan was approved in 2021.
- [33] The Critical Election Incident Public Protocol (the "Protocol") changed between 2019 and 2021. Per the Cabinet Directive on the Protocol, an independent assessment report of the implementation of the Protocol was prepared after the 2019 election, which was an instrument to ensure continuous improvement. James Judd conducted a review, and the Protocol was changed to reflect his recommendations. For instance, one change was to explicitly include the word "domestic" into the types of interference, because at the time there was concern about January 6th [the Capitol Hill insurrection] and a recognition that interference can be both foreign and domestic in nature.
- [34] Another development, also inspired by January 6th, was to extend the Panel's remit to the full caretaker period. This meant the Panel would still be in place between the election and the formation of a new Cabinet, should anything happen during this period that might threaten the integrity of Canada's democratic institutions.
- [35] The Canada Declaration for Electoral Integrity Online (the "Declaration") is a voluntary agreement between some social media companies and the Government of Canada. The

UNCLASSIFIED

purpose is to set out responsibilities around integrity and transparency. Its central role is to get social media companies to publicly declare that they are willing to follow the Declaration. Practically, it is an enforcement of community standards and it also establishes an information tie.

- [36] In 2019, four social media companies signed the Declaration: Meta (then Facebook), Twitter (now X), Google, and Microsoft. For 2021, PCO-DI was able to get three more social media companies to sign: TikTok, YouTube, and LinkedIn.
- [37] Mr. Sutherland said that PCO-DI reviewed the Declaration after the 2019 election. One of the things PCO-DI heard from the social media companies was that having the Declaration added profile; it allowed the Canadian members of those companies to say that they had to deal with Canada and that the Declaration means something. Although the Declaration is a voluntary arrangement, it has been useful in the past.
- [38] The Rapid Response Mechanism (“RRM”) was introduced in the Charlevoix Commitment by G7 leaders. It uses open-source information to detect foreign-based interference. During the electoral campaign, RRM is instructed to point its resources at the Canadian scene so that it can detect interference emanating from foreign sources coming into Canada. Some of the issues identified during the elections were detected by RRM.
- [39] As part of his mandate letter, Minister LeBlanc has a responsibility to coordinate an all-of-government approach for the next election. PCO-DI is currently developing a further evolution of the Plan to Protect Democracy. It will look very closely at the commitments in the LeBlanc-Charette report, including those to respond to the Rosenberg recommendations, as well as the changing practices around the world. One changing practice in particular is the growing record of countries actively calling out mis- and disinformation.
- [40] Mr. Rosenberg provided very thoughtful advice on how to raise the profile of the Panel before, during, and perhaps after the election period. He recommended having the Panel up and operational sooner so that it wouldn't get caught flat-footed, and would always be ready to assume its responsibilities. This recommendation has already been implemented. PCO-DI is looking very carefully at the Cabinet Directive on the protocol

UNCLASSIFIED

and how it might be adapted in light of developments PCO-DI has learned of through the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference.

- [41] One of the areas in which considerable thought is being given is whether a potential expanded role for the Panel might make sense; potentially something that would have them take on a role of safeguarding Canada's federal elections as a whole. The Panel's job as currently stated in the Directive is to do one thing: if there's a threat to the integrity of the election, they have a responsibility to let Canadians know what happened and how they might protect themselves.
- [42] There are issues that may not hit the threshold of a threat to the integrity of the election, which, nevertheless, Canadians should be informed of. There may be a broader role for the Panel to coordinate a Government of Canada response so that Canadians can be informed. While the government does not want to be an arbiter of truth and does not want to get in the middle of legitimate democratic discourse, they still want to let Canadians know if there is something concerning, for example, foreign-based interference on social media. Trying to figure out how to do that from a whole-of-government perspective is part of the advice that PCO-DI is currently developing. The target date is to ensure the updated plan is in place and ready for the next federal election.
- [43] PCO-DI is trying to support strategic government communication on issues like mis- and disinformation. They are providing training modules to be made available to communications experts across government to look at issues where misinformation may have occurred. There is a need to build a comprehensive strategy to have communications experts more versed in the need to pre-bunk and debunk mis- and disinformation.
- [44] PCO-DI is learning from British counterparts who have done some interesting work in this space so that false narratives aren't allowed to develop without any sort of counter fact checking. PCO-DI is working actively with government communications experts and CSPS to develop this module.
- [45] PCO-DI has also developed guidelines with government communications experts to develop a whole-of-government approach. That way, should mis- and disinformation

UNCLASSIFIED

occur on an issue basis, there is a Government of Canada response to Government of Canada issues.

1.7 The HASA Strategy

[46] PCO-DI provided input on the development of the HASA strategy.

1.8 Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force

[47] The SITE TF was given the additional responsibility of providing their assessments on by-elections just after the LeBlanc-Charette report was published. This was done as part of the announcement of the by-elections. This was done to provide reassurance to Canadians that the by-elections were safe and had democratic integrity. Using the SITE TF to monitor by-elections has now been done seven times. Doing so has helped normalize the role of the SITE TF because they provide an assessment that is made public, and it has also provided assurance to Canadians.

[48] However, doing so also puts an additional work strain on the SITE TF because it expands their workload. There is a broader theme that protecting Canada's democracy is not just an elections event and not limited to the pre-election period, it's an all-the-time-event, and that requires that the SITE TF have a permanent status. The idea of it moving towards more permanent status is something of potential interest.

[49] Whether additional organizations should be added to the SITE TF is an open question. For instance, PCO-DI currently has observer status, which is something they did not have at first. That status allows PCO-DI to get a bit of a window into what is coming out on the intelligence side, which Mr. Sutherland considers important.

1.9 Political Party Briefings

[50] During GE44, all registered political parties had the ability to participate in general briefings if they provided representatives who had Secret security clearance. The Liberal Party of Canada, the Conservative Party of Canada, and the New Democratic Party all have cleared members. The Green Party may have also had a cleared member in 2019. The general briefings were on issues around SITE TF; how the Panel and the Protocol

UNCLASSIFIED

worked, and who the parties should contact if they had a problem. These occurred in both 2019 and 2021.

[51] PCO-DI was the co-chair of the political party briefings, so Mr. Sutherland would have gone to the briefings and participated as a co-chair, along with the S&I Assistant Secretary. Parties were also welcome to ask for briefings on a one-on-one basis.

[52] In 2021, the SITE TF spoke frankly about the issues related to WeChat. The party members appeared to appreciate that the issue of attribution is really difficult. The source of some of their subsequent criticism appears to be that things weren't clear enough in the briefings and so they may have felt reassured at the time, and then in hindsight, maybe felt less reassured. PCO-DI is committed to try and do a better job with the political party briefings. PCO-DI will be working hard to think through how they can ensure that at the end of the next federal election, the parties are satisfied with the briefings they will have received.

[53] In relation to the difficulties of attribution, one of the areas under exploration is whether there are circumstances where the public could be told when the government sees suspicious activities without being able to fully ascertain foreign interference. The government does not want to be the arbiter of truth, but could possibly make a statement that provides a yellow light for citizens: to warn them to proceed with caution when considering a particular information source. The fundamental challenge is that speed is so essential and so it may not be possible to attribute conclusively within the necessary timeframe.

[54] The second type of briefings occurred when a specific incident of foreign interference was identified, and there was an assessment that a particular party needed to know about that particular incident. These briefings would be held by national security agencies and Mr. Sutherland would not have participated in or necessarily known about them.

1.10 Monitoring the Domestic Space

[55] The RRM is quite a small group. They do their job really well, and so having them perform that job during an election is important. PCO-DI hears from Global Affairs Canada occasionally that they would like another Department or Agency to do the monitoring.

UNCLASSIFIED

That speaks to the need to build additional capacity, which PCO-DI is in the midst of trying to figure out. There has not yet been thinking around concrete options of going with the established group or trying to form another group. The essential dilemma, especially with the by-elections, is that the RRM is doing their job really well but is feeling overly taxed.

[56] Part of what PCO-DI is trying to do is build up civil society whether through resourcing through the CDMRN and spreading awareness, including to think-tanks. There are digital labs throughout the country. There are leading academics who think on these issues, and they can play a really important part in identifying mis- and disinformation. They also have the advantage of not being part of the government.

[57] No other country faces the challenge that Taiwan does. Taiwan relies on civil society to combat mis- and disinformation. They had an election in January of this year where civil society played a very active role in calling out foreign interference from the People's Republic of China. Building up that capacity in Canada so that civil society can do the job that we hope they can do is an important part of the Protecting Democracy Plan.

[58] Ultimately, an informed citizen is Canada's best defence. That starts in the schools and at the provincial and territorial level, and it's one of the reasons why engagement with the provinces and territories is also important. There's no point protecting democratic institutions if we don't build democratic citizens. With social media and the need to think critically, it is vitally important that we continue to build democratic instincts among citizens. Civics classes should be an important part of every province and territory's curriculum. Thinking critically about what people are hearing and seeing is part of being an informed citizen in a modern democratic society. While that has always been the case, the challenge is much higher with social media today.

[59] The Digital Citizenship Initiative ("DCI") has been in place since around 2020. It's had about \$22 million in funding for around 115 projects. A lot of them are community-based. It's an important part of making sure that issues around media literacy thinking are out in the community. It's a mix of academic research and localized community groups. Diaspora groups figure prominently in some of the funding, and will figure prominently going forward. Getting local community leaders seized with these issues is an important way of providing the protections that diaspora groups need.

UNCLASSIFIED

[60] PCO-DI's engagement with colleges and universities is primarily through academics. Canada provides small research contracts to academics, particularly around mis- and disinformation. This allows PCO-DI to obtain leading-edge knowledge while also allowing them to somewhat direct where academics focus their research.

2. Examination by Counsel for the Government

[61] Counsel for the Government directed Mr. Sutherland to a document called "Update on Engagement Opportunities (Fall 2023/Winter 2024)".¹ The document states that, "The Protecting Democracy Unit continues to advance elements of a broader engagement strategy related to protecting democracy, in particular with respect to disinformation. A detailed engagement plan is included for information." The Directors' Coordinating Group on Protecting Democracy led by PCO-DI provides a way to ensure there is cross-fertilization of research between different departments.

[62] The Disinformation Guidebook is a document that helps public servants understand mis- and disinformation and the interaction with strategic communications. It is based on the U.K. Resist model. The Minister shared the Guidebook, the Toolkit, and a compendium of best practices from the Paris call meeting with provinces, territories and municipalities. All of these documents are being translated into eight additional languages to ensure they can be shared broadly with community leaders.

[63] In addition, training modules for public servants are in the process of being developed for the late fall.

[64] Part of PCO-DI's concern is that if a community is disjointed and needs to link together, it needs to share good practices and understandings. One of the ways PCO-DI has tried to promote that is by helping sponsor gatherings of the community. One initiative for doing this is the DemocracyXChange, which occurred earlier this year. PCO-DI sponsored another initiative called Canada Votes. In addition, PCO-DI has done some work with the Council of Canadian Urban Libraries on an interesting project to get into communities

¹ CAN033970

UNCLASSIFIED

through public libraries. Although PCO-DI does not have a lot of money, they continue to fund academic research.

- [65] Counsel for the Government asked Mr. Sutherland about the frequency of intelligence information sharing with PCO-DI. Mr. Sutherland explained that there are groups at the Director and DG level where information is exchanged. Mr. Sutherland also has a good relationship with the S&I secretariat, which is the group that connects to all the national security agencies. Mr. Sutherland does not believe they need additional formal machinery to facilitate the intelligence sharing PCO-DI requires. Further, because Minister LeBlanc is responsible for the protecting democracy initiative, PCO-DI engages across government to invite good ideas for how to protect Canadian democracy. As part of those discussions, issues around what problem is being solved by the proposal would come up naturally.
- [66] Public Safety is responsible for designing and implementing a whole-of-government strategic communications and engagement strategy for HASA. Sebastien Aubertin-Giguère was appointed as the National Counter-Foreign Interference Coordinator.
- [67] Mr. Sutherland confirmed that PCO-DI has never been involved in giving a specific intelligence briefing to a political party. National security agencies deals with detailed raw intelligence. It is not PCO-DI's space.
- [68] Mr. Sutherland returned to the discussion of the involvement of civil society and organizations in cleansing the ecosystem. He explained that he was distinguishing between a role for government and a role for others because not all roles are the right size for government. An independently-operating digital lab who spots something and can call it out can be a more democratic way of having society deal with potential mis- and disinformation. Of course, digital labs may not have access to national security intelligence, and they shouldn't, but there will be instances where they may see something before government. They are also better placed because not everyone trusts government to make decisions in the democratic space.
- [69] The CDMRN is a collection of the different digital labs from across the country. There are 10 organizations or so, and they each act independently, but they share information and

UNCLASSIFIED

they share practices. In an elections context, if something was to occur, and the CDMRN noticed it using their independent mandate, they would call it out.

[70] In relation to the best approach to combat mis- and disinformation, PCO-DI is working on options and working through the information that will be provided to the Minister to inform his decision.

[71] Typically, cross-government initiatives take many months before being ready for government consideration. It is not abnormal or outside of normal timelines that updates to the Plan to Protect Democracy have not yet reached a developed stage. Mr. Sutherland stated there is a balance to be struck between what needs to be implemented now, and what can be dealt with as a response to the Commission's findings.

3. Re-examination

[72] The CDMRN releases information publicly. They have two mechanisms for public release. The first is a situation report, which they are just starting to produce to try and help Canadians. The situation report outlines the state of mis- and disinformation in society. The second is a quicker report or an alert if something noteworthy has happened. One of the main purposes of the CDMRN is to fulfill this role of sharing information publicly. PCO-DI has had direct conversations with CDMRN. CDMRN's work is complementary to that of the Panel, so they came and briefed the Panel to give them a sense of the support that did not exist in 2021 but that will exist in advance of the next election.