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Public Inquiry Into Foreign Interference
in Federal Electoral Processes and
Democratic Institutions

Enquête publique sur l'ingérence étrangère
dans les processus électoraux et les
institutions démocratiques fédéraux

In Camera Examination Summary: David Morrison

Commission Counsel examined David Morrison 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.

1. Notes to Reader:

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

Witness

- [1] **David Morrison** is the Deputy Minister (“DM”) of Foreign Affairs. He was appointed in October 2022. Before this, Mr. Morrison served as the Foreign and Defence Policy (“FDP”) Advisor to the Prime Minister from 2019 to 2022 and as Deputy Minister for International Trade from January 2022 until October 2022.
- [2] Mr. Morrison also briefly served as Acting **National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister (“NSIA”)** after Greta Bossenmaier retired in December 2019 and until Vincent Rigby assumed the role in January 2020. From June 30, 2021, Mr. Morrison again served as Acting NSIA until Jody Thomas assumed the role in January 2022. From July 22 to August 8, 2021, Mr. Morrison took a brief leave of absence. During that period, Michael MacDonald served as Acting NSIA.

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Examination by Commission Counsel

[3] Commission Counsel asked Mr. Morrison questions about his time as Acting NSIA from June to December, 2021.

1. The “PCO Special Report”

[4] Mr. Morrison was asked about the origins of what became known as the “PCO Special Report.”¹

[5] Mr. Morrison became Acting NSIA in late June 2021 and held the position for six months, a period which included the 2021 election. His job as Acting NSIA, which he held concurrently with his regular positions as FDP Advisor and Personal Representative of the Prime Minister (Sherpa) for the G7 Summit, was to advise the Prime Minister (“**PM**”) on national security and intelligence matters. By virtue of that role, he was a member of the Panel of Five for the 2021 election. Because the NSIA’s mandate includes domestic national security matters and includes membership on the Panel of Five, Mr. Morrison began to consume intelligence that he had not previously had access to in his other roles.

[6] In September 2021, Mr. Morrison read CSIS intelligence assessment published in July 2021 about Chinese **foreign interference (“FI”)** in Canada. After reading the CSIS Assessment from July 2021, Mr. Morrison was interested in knowing more about FI by the People’s Republic of China (“**PRC**”) in Canada. He wanted to know more, for example, about what the PRC had actually accomplished through their FI efforts, and what resources the PRC was putting into FI in Canada.

[7] Mr. Morrison also needed more information about PRC FI in Canada in order to formulate advice for the PM on appropriate policy responses, and to properly calibrate the problem against other pressing matters Canada was dealing with at that time. In the fall of 2021, Canada was also dealing with getting Canadians out of Afghanistan during and after the fall of Kabul, the return of Michael Kovrig and

¹ CAN003787.

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Michael Spavor, a budding civil war in Ethiopia where the PM was mediating, Russia amassing troops on the border with Ukraine, and a heavy travel schedule for the PM.

[8] Mr. Morrison asked the PCO Intelligence Assessment Secretariat (“**IAS**”) for more information on PRC FI in Canada to help him better advise the PM. In response, IAS produced what is now known as the “PCO Special Report.”

[9] Mr. Morrison knows from PCO records that he received a draft of the Special Report around December 15, 2021 and gave feedback on it during a meeting with IAS, but he does not recall this meeting or reading the report at that time. Shortly after this, Mr. Morrison was appointed DM of International Trade at Global Affairs Canada and had no further engagement on the Special Report.

[10] Mr. Morrison was asked to comment on the conclusion of the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency that the Special Report should have gone to the PM. Mr. Morrison testified that, now that he has read the last version of the Special Report, he believes that it did not need to go to the PM. He testified that the Report was not specific enough and was not responsive to what he was looking for.

2. Difference between FI and Legitimate Diplomacy

[11] Mr. Morrison also testified as to his view on the difference between FI and diplomacy. He stated that in his view, the PRC response to the House of Commons Motion to declare as genocide the actions taken by the PRC in respect of the Uyghur people in February of 2021 (the “**Uyghur Motion**”) was largely not FI.

[12] Mr. Morrison stated that the PRC put on a “full court diplomatic press”, or contacted everyone they could to try to stop the Uyghur Motion from passing. PRC diplomats called Canadian government officials, including Mr. Morrison himself, and any other contacts they had. They also called members of the diaspora who had contact with MPs, and asked them to speak with their MPs and tell them that allowing the Uyghur Motion to pass would be bad for China. Mr. Morrison’s view is that this is not FI, but legitimate diplomatic activity.

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[13] Mr. Morrison pointed out that the Uyghur Motion passed unanimously, so the PRC's efforts to stop it failed. After the motion went through, the PRC wanted to know more about certain ethnically Chinese Members of Parliament ("**MPs**") (e.g. Michael Chong) who had voted in favour of the Uyghur Motion. Chinese officials asked for research on these MPs to find out more about them. Mr. Morrison's view is that researching politicians is not, in and of itself FI, it is something that all diplomats do. Mr. Morrison stated that it is possible to use collected information in a nefarious way, but the collection of information itself is not FI. Mr. Morrison was not surprised by the PRC's interest in Mr. Chong, given that he was the Opposition Foreign Affairs critic and had sponsored the Uyghur motion.

[14] Mr. Morrison stated that Canada, the US, and the EU had sanctioned four people and one entity in Xinjiang, and then shortly after, the PRC sanctioned Michael Chong.

[15] Mr. Morrison testified that, from his interactions with representatives of the PRC, his view is that the PRC feels totally misunderstood by Canada. He noted that they are trying to rehabilitate their reputation in Canada, which has suffered since the detention of Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig.

[16] The "Targeting Paper," which Mr. Morrison mentioned briefly, is linked to the PRC's attempt to rehabilitate their reputation. Mr. Morrison stated that the PRC is not used to dealing with the legislative branch in Canada, and they are unfamiliar with how it works. They are used to engaging at the executive level, but not directly with the legislative branch. As Canada's stance towards China has hardened, the PRC has found it increasingly necessary to engage at the legislative level. Chinese officials therefore began to engage with people in the legislature to understand who holds what views, and who can be swayed. He stated that such activities are normal for diplomats, and not FI. Persuading or swaying members of a legislature to take positions more favourable to a country's position is part of what diplomats do.

[17] Mr. Morrison contrasted the research done by the PRC in response to the Uyghur Motion, which he did not consider to be FI, with the PRC's response to Canada's declaration of Zhao Wei as *persona non grata* ("**PNG**"). [In May of 2023,

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following the PNG, the PRC sponsored a disinformation campaign online targeting Michael Chong.] This disinformation campaign, an attempted character assassination, could be clearly linked to Chinese websites.

3. Differing Perspectives on FI within the Government of Canada

- [18] Mr. Morrison also testified as to the different perspectives on FI within the Government of Canada.
- [19] Mr. Morrison's view is that CSIS' mandate is to identify and counter threats, so they see activities through a "threat lens," and that the perspective of a diplomat is wider. He stated that the system is stronger because of the robust discussion and differing perspectives, and that he has made an effort to understand the different perspectives in government. He has discussed the difference between FI and diplomacy with analysts at CSIS to try and understand each others' perspectives better.
- [20] Mr. Morrison stated that the best example of an instance of differing perspectives was illustrated by the CSIS reporting in relation to the PRC response to the Uyghur Motion, discussed above. Mr. Morrison said that much of the intelligence he saw on the PRC's response framed the response as FI, when in his view, such activities were legitimate diplomacy.
- [21] Mr. Morrison testified about how he has discussed the topic with senior officials from CSIS. His understanding of CSIS's view is that an overt threat from the Consulate is not necessary in order to make an interaction FI; the power imbalance between the PRC Consulates and members of the diaspora means that coercion is necessarily implied. He disagrees with this, saying if that is the case then all interactions between the Consulate and the diaspora would be FI. If power asymmetry is the test for whether an action constitutes FI, no diplomatic missions could operate in Canada.
- [22] Mr. Morrison stated that mechanisms should be developed within government to reconcile the differing viewpoints. He noted that while ensuring that officials were

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able to understand the perspectives of others is complex, the viewpoints are not irreconcilable.

[23] Mr. Morrison emphasized that he does not believe that the biggest FI challenge for Canada is the “targeting” of parliamentarians for influence. Every diplomatic mission targets parliamentarians for influence. Rather, the real challenge that Canada needs to grapple with is transnational repression in diaspora communities. This is something the Government of Canada needs to learn more about and determine how best to respond.