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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

## Public Summary of Classified Interview of: Canadian Security Intelligence Service ADR Directorate Witnesses<sup>1</sup>

Officials from the **Canadian Security Intelligence Service (“CSIS” or “the Service”)** were interviewed in a panel format by Commission counsel on February 23, 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 the Commission’s *in camera* hearings held in February and March 2024.

### Notes to Reader:

- Commission Counsel have provided explanatory notes in square brackets to assist the reader.
- This summary has been produced in reliance on subclause (a)(iii)(C)(II) of the Commission’s Terms of Reference. It discloses the evidence pertinent to clauses (a)(i)(A) and (B) of the Commission’s Terms of Reference that, in the opinion of the Commissioner, would not be injurious to the critical interests of Canada or its allies, national defence or national security.
- This summary contains information that relates to the Commission’s mandate under clauses (a)(i)(A) and (B) of its Terms of Reference. Information provided during the interview that relates to other aspects of the Commission’s Terms of Reference has been omitted from this summary, but may be adduced by the Commission at a later stage of its proceedings.

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<sup>1</sup> The identity of these witnesses must remain secret for national and personal security reasons.

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- This summary should be read with the CSIS Institutional Report prepared by the Government of Canada and the public summary of the *in camera* examinations of CSIS witnesses.

## Background

CSIS is Canada's national civilian intelligence service. Its core mandate, as set out in section 12 of the *CSIS Act*, is to "collect, by investigation or otherwise, to the extent that it is strictly necessary, and analyse and retain information and intelligence respecting activities that may on reasonable grounds be suspected of constituting threats to the security of Canada and, in relation thereto, [...] report to and advise the Government of Canada." A branch within the **Assistant Director of Requirements ("ADR")** houses, for efficiency and effectiveness, personnel performing several functions related to the collection, assessment and reporting of information relevant to the **People's Republic of China ("PRC")**, including political foreign interference.

**Witness 1** is a Director of this ADR branch.

**Witness 2** is a Senior Intelligence Analyst in this ADR branch.

**Witness 3** is an Intelligence Analyst in this ADR branch.

## General Information

Witness 1 provided a detailed account of the ADR branch structure, resources and areas of operations.

Witness 1 noted that the ADR branch does not necessarily deal with all threats related to the PRC. Some threats are addressed by other branches of the Service.

The ADR Branch and Foreign Interference ("FI")

Witness 1 described the evolution of the Service's approach to intelligence related to the PRC, leading to the reorganization within the ADR branch. As part of its national program management function, the ADR branch identifies the intelligence priorities for regional offices with an intelligence led and data-driven approach. The roadmaps provide the regional offices with feedback about their collection activities. Witness 1 stated that the

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ADR branch has identified political FI as one of the most significant threats posed by the PRC, along with espionage and economic threats.

Witness 2 noted that FI had always been an area of focus for CSIS, but that the Service also needed to prioritize its work because of its limited resources, even within the FI threat.

### Cooperation within CSIS and with other governmental agencies

Witness 1 noted that the ADR branch introduced a framework to improve its coordination with the regional offices and CSIS headquarters, to implement the intelligence priorities and requirements identified by the Government. He noted that some of the regional office based employees who performed analytical functions and focused on China cooperated frequently with ADR branch intelligence analysts. Those employees had more of a tactical focus. Witness 1 also explained that CSIS HQ regularly cooperates with Global Affairs (to better inform the geopolitical context in which the ADR branch operates) and the Communications Security Establishment (for more tactical or operational purposes). The ADR branch also collaborates in roundtables that include more actors from the intelligence community (as opposed to punctual cooperation only with a single partner), such as with foreign agencies from the Five Eyes Alliance.

Witness 2 stated that the ADR branch also facilitated the dissemination of intelligence to the **Security and Intelligence Threats to Election Task Force (“SITE TF”)**. Witness 2 did not attend SITE TF meetings during the 2019 election, as those meetings were restricted to senior officials. Witness 2 participated frequently in SITE meetings in 2021 and later (such as when the SITE TF was reconvened for by-elections). Witness 2 also provided SITE TF with analytical support as needed, including drafting reports. Witness 2 did not directly provide information to the Panel of 5; rather, the SITE TF decided whether information met the threshold to be brought to the attention of the Panel.

Witnesses 2 and 3 described the concerted efforts for the 2019 and 2021 elections to gather, analyze, and disseminate FI intelligence quickly, relative to the normal turnaround times between collection and reporting.

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Witness 1 noted that the ADR branch could participate in briefings of senior Government officials when requested by the recipient of the briefing. The briefing agenda was usually set by the requesting officials. The ADR branch also prepared speaking points for senior CSIS executives ahead of a briefing, and might attend the briefing in a support capacity.

### Dissemination of Intelligence by the ADR Branch

Witness 2 explained how intelligence is disseminated by the ADR branch. Witness 2 explained that the ADR branch's role in the dissemination of intelligence products to specific individuals or agencies depends on the purpose of the product.

Requirements Officers determine whether to issue a **CSIS Intelligence Report ("CIR")**. Intelligence analysts could also be asked to comment on or further contextualize a CIR. Other intelligence products, which provide a more comprehensive report- are subject to a more flexible process, in which analysts might be directed by a superior to prepare a report, or might propose topics for self-directed analysis.

If a specific agency or recipient requested an ADR branch product, the requesting entity would typically be the recipient. The ADR branch analyst could suggest further dissemination of the product to other recipients, but they did not have the final say on the dissemination pool. When the ADR branch created a product of its own initiative, the analyst who had created the product could suggest recipients based on a pre-set dissemination matrix. Witness 3 observed that upper management or senior CSIS executives would sometimes need to approve the dissemination of products based on particularly sensitive intelligence.

Witnesses 2 and 3 were asked about an internal CSIS email exchange following a meeting between the CSIS Director and staff from the **Prime Minister's Office (PMO)** sometime after 2022. In this exchange, CSIS employees discussed changes to an assessment concerning possible PRC interference in the nomination race for the LPC candidate in the DVN riding.

Witness 2 explained that they believed a report concerning the Don Valley North nomination contest was recalled at the request of the **National Security and Intelligence Advisor ("NSIA")**. Witness 2 noted that it was not common for the NSIA to request the

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recall of a report. Witness 3 recalled having taken part in a post 2022 meeting with PMO staff, the Prime Minister, the Clerk of the Privy Council, the NSIA and the Service's Director. Witness 3 explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss, after the media leaks, all intelligence regarding Han Dong. Witness 3 stated that the corrections in the assessment identified in the email exchange were based on that meeting and were for internal CSIS purposes only.

Witnesses 2 and 3 explained that they analyzed political activity through an intelligence lens. As a result, events or practices (such as political support) that may seem innocuous or common practice could take on another dimension. Witness 2 said that it could be challenging to convey their concerns to other agencies and persons who adopt a political perspective and analysis of events. For instance, Witness 3 explained that, in itself, the practice of organizing political support is not problematic. However, CSIS could be concerned, for example, with the potential involvement of the PRC, including via proxies, in organizing this support. The subtlety and nuance of PRC FI activity, which is often a series of activities rather than a single act, compounds these difficulties in conveying concerns to other government officials.

### CSIS Responses to FI

Witness 1 discussed the Defensive/Protective Security Briefings provided to Parliamentarians in the lead-up to the 2021 election. Witness 1 explained that the briefings were implemented to address a CSIS identified need to inform elected officials of the threats posed by foreign actors. Witness 1 noted that the way in which CSIS could raise FI awareness within government evolved over time. Witness 1 gave examples of alerts issued against entities or individuals, and of the Defensive/Protective Security Briefings, which allowed CSIS to raise awareness regarding FI without giving specific information (such as *e.g.* the foreign actors involved). Witness 2 echoed that **threat reduction measures ("TRMs")** were sometimes used to communicate classified information with a view to reducing the FI threat.

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## Specific Case Examples

### Threat Actor During the 2021 Election

Witness 2 noted that an actor assessed to act as a foreign state proxy had supported campaigns in a handful of different ridings.

Witness 2 explained that this actor's FI activities were an example of the difficulty in conveying the seriousness of FI threats. While the actor's activities might appear legitimate, the relationships and activities more clearly became a national security concern based on context.

### FI in the 2021 Election

Witness 2 assessed that the PRC's interference in a federal campaign contributed to the margin of a candidate's victory, but did not have a decisive impact on the outcome of the election in the riding. Witness 2 explained that the analysis of the impact of PRC FI in an election must consider several data points, such as the size of the Chinese community in a riding and the margin of victory. Witness 2 distinguished this candidate's election from the Don Valley North nomination in 2019 or the election in the riding in which Kenny Chiu ran. It was noted that even if FI did not directly lead to the election of a given candidate, that interference could nonetheless have an impact on the relationship with that candidate, and by extension the communities they represent. For example, foreign interference by the PRC could affect a candidate's actions while in office if they felt indebted to the PRC for assisting in their election.

### Political Preference

Witness 2 reflected on the evolution of the PRC's political preference, explaining that the PRC was "party-agnostic" – its objective is to contribute to the election of the individuals (regardless of party) that, in its opinion, will better serve its strategic interests. For example, the PRC will support candidates from multiple parties in the same election. The sense that the PRC's preferred outcome was a minority government formed by the LPC may mean that the LPC was perceived in that election as being more PRC-friendly than the **Conservative Party of Canada ("CPC")**. Those reports do not mean that the PRC's efforts were focused only on promoting LPC candidates. Efforts were also being made to build relationships with the CPC to soften the party's stance towards the PRC.

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Witness 2 opined that the PRC's activities are problematic because they are not limited to usual diplomatic channels and processes. Witness 2 described the PRC as operating in a grey zone between "overt" and "covert" activities. The ambiguous nature of the PRC's activities, as well as the background knowledge required to understand their subversive nature, make it challenging to combat their FI threat. Witness 2 emphasized that the Service should have more tools to combat FI. For instance, foreign interference is not a criminal offence, and the *CSIS Act* is outdated.

Witness 3 added that the PRC and United Front Work Department's tactics were based on grooming and subtly incentivizing agents and proxies to perform tasks without being directly asked. This can make it difficult to attribute foreign interference to the PRC. Witness 3 highlighted that CSIS was also limited in the actions that it could take based on intelligence because of operational risks. Witness 3 described instances where CSIS knew that an activity was conducted on behalf of a foreign state but could not act on that information.