STAGE 2 SUBMISSIONS BY THE SIKH COALITION

BEFORE THE PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN FEDERAL ELECTORAL PROCESSES AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

OVERVIEW

Based on the extensive record before the Commission, it is unequivocally clear that the Government of India poses the single most pervasive and grave threat to Canadian communities, democratic processes, and public institutions.

The Government of India has, and continues, to target Canadian democratic institutions, and the Sikh community in this country using a broad range of tactics of foreign interference and transnational repression. These tactics include sophisticated and pervasive information manipulation campaigns; targeting democratic institutions at all electoral levels and stages, as well as policy formulation and implementation; and finally, utilizing overt forms of violent transnational repression to target dissidents and critics.

India's clandestine operations in Canada are engaged in a much deeper, more calculated purpose beyond simply interfering in elections or media. India seeks to manipulate Canada's democratic processes at various stages to manipulate Canadian policy and public opinion: from media manipulation and cognitive warfare to influencing the makeup of Parliament and the very issues raised in the House of Commons.

Through these operations, India seeks to subordinate Canadian policy to its own strategic interests, silence and repress Sikh political dissidents, and disenfranchise members of the Sikh community from public life more broadly. To achieve this, Indian officials simultaneously *blend* both diplomatic influence efforts with clandestine operations to undermine what they consider "anti-India" positions while promoting "pro-India" narratives and policies in Canada.

India's activities are demonstrably complex and multifaceted which cannot be cleanly separated between foreign interference and legitimate foreign influence or diplomacy. India misuses its diplomatic resources and privileges for illegitimate and illegal purposes. In addition to

the strategic misuse of travel advisories and diplomatic communications, India's diplomats have been directly implicated in overseeing and participating in electoral interference, violent attacks, and other crimes under investigation. These activities reflect state policy set by senior government officials and India's activities must be addressed accordingly.

In response to India's activities, the Government of Canada has demonstrated several vulnerabilities and gaps in its ability to *detect* Indian activities in a timely manner, or effectively *counter* and *deter* India's activities. This was most clearly demonstrated by the RCMP's October 14, 2024 announcement that India unleashed a campaign of violence against Canadian communities across the country for a sustained period of time despite Canadian responses to the assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

Canada's security and intelligence community—and the government as a whole—failed to detect the extent of India's activities until after the assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a pillar of the Sikh community in Canada. This is despite the experiences and complaints of the community for years before this violent attack and specific concerns that were communicated about India's intentions to engage in assassinations of Sikh leadership in the summer of 2022. Those targeted, including Bhai Hardeep Singh, were left to their own devices without any resources or support from security agencies or government bodies.

The lack of decisive action to combat Indian foreign interference in Canada appears to be largely related to the fact that foreign policy considerations are often given greater weight than long-term domestic harms, particularly when the harm remains localized to a minority community. In the case of Indian interference, the lack of a meaningful response from Canada has further led to the continued marginalization of a minority community whose interests, democratic rights, and safety have been compromised in exchange for foreign policy objectives deemed to be of greater importance.

The *de facto* impunity granted to Indian diplomats and intelligence operatives since 2017 at the very least, likely emboldened Indian perpetrators of foreign interference and transnational repression, ultimately paving the ground for the assassination of Shaheed Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June 2023 and the subsequent wave of violence targeting Sikh activists and the general community.

The Sikh Coalition respectfully submits that the Commission should revisit its interim findings on India's foreign interference in order to incorporate evidence received during stage 2 of the Commission which provided a more comprehensive perspective on the nature and breadth of India's threat activities targeting Canada.

In light of this evidence, the Sikh Coalition submits that the Commission ought to seriously consider the security, intelligence, and governmental failures in stopping India's psychological and physical attacks in order to make meaningful recommendations that address the apparent gaps in Canada's national security and policy infrastructure.

A. The Government of India poses the single most pervasive and grave threat to Canadian communities, democratic processes, and public institutions.

The Government of India is in a category to itself in terms of its corrosive and brazenly violent actions on Canadian soil. Only one country discussed before this Commission has been found to be responsible for the assassination of political dissidents on Canadian soil. Only one state has been found to be at the epicenter of a sustained campaign of violence that ravaged communities across the country, subjecting them to multiple homicides, arson, extortion, and other violent crimes¹–supplemented by sophisticated techniques of cognitive warfare to influence public opinion and behaviours in Canada.²

For years, India has misused its diplomatic resources to directly engage in various forms of foreign interference and transnational repression, targeting the Sikh community in Canada with the objective of disenfranchising the community from public life and particularly criminalizing political advocacy for an independent Sikh homeland, Khalistan, or any criticism of the Government of India using the manufactured narrative of so-called "Sikh extremism".³

According to a SITE briefing to the Panel of Five in March 2024, India's interference is: "...one of the ways the (Hindu-centric) GoI gears Canadian politics and messaging towards India's interests, which, conversely, includes countering the influence of Sikhs in Canadian politics." SITE also determined that the Government of India seeks to covertly influence Canadian officials

¹ Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 35, 16 October, 2024, (Hon. Justin Trudeau) at pages 54-56.

² CAN032961 0001, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Analytical Brief – India (20 September 2023).

³ **TSC0000001**, British Columbia Gurdwaras Council & Ontario Gurdwaras Committee, *Indian Foreign Interference Intimidation, Disinformation, and Undermining Canadian Institutions* (March 2023).

at all levels of government to take positions and decisions that are favorable to the Government of India.⁴

On this point, the Commission has received a vast amount of evidence regarding this direct interference with Canada's democratic institutions and policy-making mechanisms. This includes the discrediting and targeting of political party leaders "using materials drafted by Indian intelligence", MPs working to influence Parliamentarians to India's benefit, interference in the leadership race of the Conservative Party of Canada, and the use of proxies to influence policy makers, drawing no illicit funding to candidates, and influencing the very issues that are raised in Canada's Parliament.

These activities are separate from the violent targeted and generalized attacks perpetrated by agents of the Government of India between 2022-2024.9

I. Coordinated Disinformation Campaigns

The evidence presented in the intelligence reports and analyses received by the Commission underscores a clear and concerning pattern of India's foreign interference activities within Canada, targeting not only Canadian democratic processes but also the Sikh community and its political advocacy. This coordinated interference operates through sophisticated disinformation campaigns, media manipulation, and coercive influence tactics aimed at promoting pro-India narratives while discrediting Sikh advocacy and Canadian political leaders perceived as being sympathetic to Sikh issues framed as being "anti-India".

India's disinformation apparatus has a variety of concrete impacts on Canadian communities and democratic institutions. Alongside polarizing and obfuscating meaningful public discourse on important policy issues, India's disinformation machinery is utilized to directly interfere in electoral processes and formulating policy while discrediting and marginalizing the Sikh community. As a result of India's inflammatory and polarizing rhetoric, there is evidence of

⁴ CAN044584 0001, SITE Briefing to P5 (25 March 2024) at page 3.

⁵ COM0000363, National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, *Special Report on Foreign Interference in Canada's Democratic Processes and Institutions* (June 2024) at para 36.

⁶ *Ibid* at para 55.

⁷ *Ibid* at para 73.

⁸ Supra note 5 at para 68

⁹ Supra note 1.

serious social impacts on communities in Canada including the rise of anti-Sikh racism and hate crime as well as reluctance to engage in public life.

Disinformation and Media Manipulation

India has engaged in large-scale disinformation efforts to shape public perception in its favor, both globally and within Canada. According to an undated document on Canadian cyber operations, the Communications Security Establishment (CSE) concluded that "India is using disinformation to project a positive image globally, while targeting specific adversaries," specifically noting that this includes countering advocacy efforts, like advocacy for an independent Sikh homeland, Khalistan. 10 Similarly, a February 2023 Intelligence Assessment by CSIS identifies India as a "primary foreign interference threat actor in Canada," detailing how Indian operatives seek to influence Canadian politicians and institutions to advance pro-India policies and counter perceived threats emanating from Canadian Sikh advocacy. 11 In a heavily redacted paragraph, this document references attempts at "promoting a pro-India narrative in Canadian public discourse (e.g., in media, social media and political discussions" and referencing the "use of disinformation as a key FI tactic against Canada."¹²

These disinformation campaigns are sophisticated and target multiple levels of Canadian society. They include coercing and influencing ethnic media outlets to promote narratives favorable to the Indian government, targeting specific political representatives with negative or distorted coverage, and polarizing communities to erode social cohesion.¹³

An analysis by the Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) in September 2023 further highlighted how Indian media ecosystems coordinated narratives attacking Prime Minister Trudeau, Canadian security agencies, and the Sikh diaspora, amplifying harmful tropes that frame Sikh advocacy as extremist and violent, and even suggesting violence should be used against

¹⁰ CAN041952, Communications Security Establishment, Canadian Cyber Operations at page 4.

¹¹ CAN038232 0001, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *Intelligence Assessment – Canada Towards 2028* (February 2023) at page 4.

¹² *Ibid* at page 23.

¹³ Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 25, 1 October, 2024, (Gurpreet Singh).

supporters of Khalistan. The RRM observed a number of narratives and long-standing tropes that these outlets sought to amplify including¹⁴:

- Canada allegedly "safeguards" so-called "terrorist and extremist forces";
- Canada should use violence against supporters of Khalistan;
- Attempts to discredit Bhai Hardeep Singh's role as a community leader or raising questions about his citizenship;
- And targeting the Prime Minister and Leader of the NDP specifically in order to discredit them based on a number of racialized tropes.

The RRM's report meticulously analyzes these information networks in the context of Modi's increasing authoritarianism—rooted in a "spectacular rapprochement between the BJP and the big families dominating [India's] media scene." The report not only catalogues the major outlets and their parent corporations, but also documents the vitriolic narratives spewed by their representatives including a threatening comment that "India will respond and this response will be disproportionate."

India seeks to use these FI tactics to promote a "singular narrative or consistent message that further its own interest", specifically geared towards countering activities by diaspora communities viewed as anti-national. This includes protests against agricultural reforms in India in late 2021 and lawful advocacy for issues such as an independent Khalistan. The evidence heard by the Commission not only reiterates that India is employing a variety of tools and methods to target Canada's democratic process, but that Indian actors continue to aggressively target the Sikh diaspora in order to marginalize and isolate the community from public life in all its forms.

Global Affairs Canada (GAC) officials confirmed that India has engaged in multiple disinformation campaigns against Canada, specifically noting its "formidable capacity to work with its national media to undertake these campaigns."¹⁷

¹⁴ **CAN025923_0001**, Rapid Response Mechanism Canada Open Data Analysis Report, *Potential Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference following PM Statement on Killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar* at page 1. ¹⁵ *Ibid* at page 3.

¹⁶ CAN047436 0001, SITE TF, Key Points for SITE Briefing to Political Parties.

¹⁷ Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 28, 4 October, 2024, (Weldon Epp) at 166-168.

Targeting Canadian Politicians and Institutions

The intelligence reports show that Indian operatives are "seeking to cultivate Canadian politicians" to further Indian interests within all levels of Canadian government. Heavily redacted sections from CSIS point to concerted efforts by Indian actors to integrate a "pro-India narrative" into Canadian political discourse, both through media and political channels. CSIS also identifies that Indian officials engage in "deceptive, clandestine and coercive interference activities," including issuing false travel advisories and disinformation to depict Canada as aligned to so-called "extremism". These euphemisms are used to target the Sikh community at large.

Canadian intelligence concluded that the Government of India "has also attempted to interfere in Canada's democratic processes by creating and spreading false narratives regarding certain elected officials." This appears to be a reference to concerted Indian efforts to target Sikh elected officials or those deemed to be sympathetic to Sikh issues or otherwise perceived to be inimical to Indian interests. This was reiterated by NSICOP's special report which noted that²¹:

India has also demonstrated the intent and capability to engage in this type of foreign interference through media manipulation. [three sentences then redacted which "described an example of efforts to discredit a political party leader using materials drafted by Indian intelligence organizations"]*******

A 2023 Threat Summary Report concluded that Indian officials "conduct deceptive, clandestine and coercive interference activities targeting the Indo-Canadian diaspora and elected officials at all levels of government in Canada." It particularly notes a 2022 travel advisory issued by India's Ministry of External Affairs citing a "sharp increase in hate crimes, sectarian violence and anti-India activity" in Canada. CSIS concluded that this was a clear example of disinformation.²³

During India's 2020-2021 Farmers' Protest, the RRM also observed increased levels of activity from Indian media ecosystems proliferating misleading narratives, including about the PM's 2018 visit to India; allegations about Canadian 'vote bank' politics attempting to appeal to

¹⁸ Supra note 11 at page 23.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ CAN023184, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2023 Threat Summary Report at page 5.

²¹ **COM0000363**, National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, *Special Report on Foreign Interference in Canada's Democratic Processes and Institutions* (June 2024) at page 18.

²² *Supra* note 20.

²³ *Ibid*.

the Sikh and Punjabi diaspora, depicting the PM as a sympathizer of the Khalistan movement, and that Canada is supposedly a 'hub for terrorists'.²⁴

Cognitive Warfare and Other Psychological Operations

India's foreign interference tactics extend beyond traditional disinformation, with evidence pointing to the use of advanced psychological and cognitive warfare techniques. A September 2023 CSIS Analytical Brief highlighted India's capacity to engage in "cognitive warfare," which involves cyber tools designed to manipulate decision-making processes and public opinion. This warfare is rooted in India's collaboration with international partners to bolster its cyber and cognitive capabilities. This advanced form of aggression allows India to combine psychological manipulation with digital technologies, creating an influence apparatus capable of targeting individuals and communities perceived as a threat to Indian interests. Ultimately, CSIS concluded that "the GoI will likely seek to promote a pro-India and anti-Khalistani narrative in Canada using cognitive warfare techniques [emphasis added]." 25

Embedded within this analysis is another mention of the Indian government's strategic use of its Ministry of External Affairs to issue travel advisories and statements that frame Sikh political advocacy in Canada as an extremist threat. CSIS assessed these actions as part of India's efforts to target Sikh advocacy and promote an anti-Khalistani narrative within Canada.

In his testimony PM Trudeau commented on the objectives of Indian actors who engaged in violence between 2022-204 which indicates the dangerous nature of India's activities and its intention to create certain perception and political pressures. He stated²⁶:

I'd actually say there seemed to be two goals in this. One is, yes, to make Canadians, particularly South Asian Canadians, feel less safe here in their own country, but secondly is actually to help prove a point that India—or, sorry, the Indian Government has been trying to make about Canada for quite some time, that we are a country that doesn't take seriously violence or terrorism or incitement to hatred, this are—is entirely false. But failing an ability to point out how Canada has been supposedly failing to prevent violence, it seems like folks within the Indian Government have decided to create violence and

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²⁴ **CAN016857**, *Rapid Response Mechanism Open Data Analysis: Digital Information Ecosystem Report-December* 2020, 3 February 2021 at pages 2-3.

²⁵ CAN032961_0001, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *Analytical Brief – India* (20 September 2023) at page 1.

²⁶ Supra note 1 at page 189.

unlawfulness in Canada as a way of demonstrating the point that they are trying to make, that there is violence and unlawfulness in Canada. And I think that is exceptionally egregious as an approach to a—as a neighbor—a sovereign democracy.

This *modus operandi* reveals a shocking escalation and layer to India's information manipulation operations. This is not simply a matter of amplifying disinformation to confuse or pressure targets. India *orchestrated a wave of violence*, including homicides, arson, extortions and shootings, in order to *substantiate its own false allegations against Canada* and thereby apply pressure on the Government of Canada to comply with India's own strategic objectives. This is an alarming form of foreign interference unheard of in any other scenario.

Social impacts of disinformation: stigmatizing Sikhs as a whole and polarizing communities

India's disinformation activities represent a sophisticated strategy aimed at discrediting the Sikh community as so-called "extremists" while simultaneously undermining political leaders who are perceived as being somehow sympathetic to Sikh issues. This deliberate campaign not only marginalizes Sikh voices in public life but also has the impact of manufacturing sectarian narratives that serve to polarize Canadian communities or frame political disagreements as sectarian conflict. Such tactics have profound implications for the fabric of Canadian society, as they foster an environment of tension and division that undermines the foundation of multiculturalism. By framing the discourse around Sikh activism in Canada as a threat to societal cohesion, India deflects criticism of its domestic policies and the treatment of minorities within its own borders. The objective is clear: to manipulate public perception and political discourse in a way that aligns with India's nationalistic and pro-Hindutva agenda.²⁷

This includes two layers of social impact. Firstly, the stigmatization and ostracization of the entire Sikh community from public life (as is India's stated objective²⁸) by reifying and amplifying racist tropes projecting manufactured allegations of "extremism" and "terrorism" on the entire community leading to increase anti-Sikh hate and violent attacks in recent years.²⁹ Second, India seeks to falsely align certain political parties and leadership with the Sikh community, and pro-Khalistan advocacy or "so-called extremism", which inevitably alienates

²⁷ Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 24, 27 September, 2024, (Vanessa Lloyd) at page 12.

²⁸ CAN044584 0001, SITE Briefing to P5 (25 March 2024) at page 3.

²⁹ Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 30, 8 October, 2024, (Rob Stewart & Dominic Rochon) at pages 65-67.

other communities—spreading divisiveness and creating an artificial wedge between communities. Evidence demonstrates that this manufactured sectarian tension is actually an intentional political decision.

The impact of such false and misleading narratives cannot be understated. When foreign actors manufacture and amplify divisive narratives, they inevitably shape political opinions and behaviors within the affected countries. In Canada, the massive amplification of GOI-aligned media prior to and during critical political periods, including formal writ periods, creates a fertile ground for these disinformation campaigns to take root. The result is a fractured societal landscape where sectarian tensions are manufactured, undermining the principles of diversity and inclusion that Canada espouses.

The manipulation of narratives to align political figures with one specific community alone is a particularly insidious tactic. By attempting to associate prominent leaders, such as the Prime Minister and the leader of the federal NDP, with the Sikh community and allegations of extremism, India effectively introduces a narrative of tension between Sikhs and Hindus in Canada. This approach mirrors popular polarization strategies employed by India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during election campaigns, where the creation of an 'us versus them' mentality serves to consolidate political power and divert attention from critical issues.

During the 2020-2021 Farmers' Protest in India, Canada's Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) noted that "[b]y late February, and into March 2021, pro-BJP media outlets began to coalesce on a narrative that Indo-Canadians of the Hindu faith are increasingly threatened by Sikh extremists throughout Canada." The effect of this polarizing disinformation originating in India was indeed 'corrosive' to community relations in Canada as noted by a number of witnesses before the Commission. This tension was almost certainly caused, at least in part, by directed disinformation campaigns originating from India which sought to align the Prime Minister and leader of the federal NDP with the Sikh community and alleged sympathies with so-called "extremism" while simultaneously introducing a narrative of tension and insecurity between Sikhs

³⁰ Supra note 24.

³¹ Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 6, 27 March 2024, (Jaskaran Sandhu) at page 141; Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 10, 4 April 2024, (Bo Basler) at page 270; See testimony of Erin O'Toole, Public Hearing Transcript, April 3, 2024 at page 49.

and Hindus in Canada–a popular polarization tactic used in election campaigns by India's ruling BJP.

Former Conservative Party leader Erin O'Toole noted that during the farmers' protests in India in 2020, he perceived heightened tensions between Sikh and Hindu communities in Canada as he was not briefed on India's foreign interference and disinformation operations during this period. This observation underscores the role of directed disinformation campaigns in creating divisions and polarization. Reports indicate that pro-BJP media outlets began to converge on a narrative suggesting that Indo-Canadians of the Hindu faith faced increasing threats from so-called "Sikh extremists".

In 2022, India's travel advisory to Indian nationals traveling to Canada similarly amplified unsubstantiated allegations of sectarian tension.³² This is an example of India's overt diplomatic resources being used to amplify disinformation in order to manufacture illusory tensions that polarize communities.

India's disinformation efforts are designed not only to discredit the Sikh community but also to polarize Canadian society along sectarian lines to deflect political criticism and dissent. By manipulating narratives and targeting political leaders, these campaigns aim to divert attention from India's domestic issues while fostering an environment of mistrust and division in Canada. The ramifications of this strategy extend beyond mere political discourse; they threaten the very cohesion of Canadian communities and the country's commitment to multiculturalism. As such, it is imperative that Canadians remain vigilant against these tactics and strive to uphold the values of inclusivity and understanding in the face of foreign disinformation.

II. Targeting Canadian Democratic Institutions

The evidence presented before the Commission highlights a persistent and troubling pattern of foreign interference by the Government of India (GoI) aimed at shaping Canada's democratic processes and policy decisions in line with India's own strategic interests, particularly with respect to targeting Sikh activists. Intelligence assessments reveal that India's objectives include aligning Canadian policy with pro-GoI positions, specifically in areas where Sikh advocacy or calls for an

³² CAN023184, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2023 Threat Summary Report at page 5.

independent Sikh homeland, Khalistan, appear to challenge India's domestic narratives and priorities. This interference is extensive and multi-faceted, encompassing covert support for political candidates, ongoing influence over elected officials, and targeted disinformation campaigns aimed at different public officials.

A critical intelligence summary underscores India's intent to manipulate Canadian politics by attempting to influence Canadian politicians, including through direct efforts to shape public statements, policy positions, and responses to Parliamentary votes on issues relevant to India's interests. This strategy extends to shaping the composition of Parliament itself, where the GoI has reportedly supported individual pro-India candidates through clandestine means, including interference in leadership and nomination contests. Intelligence further suggests that India may have engaged in the illicit provision of financial support to select Canadian politicians as a means of securing influence over them or ensuring the election of candidates who would be sympathetic to Indian interests. This tactic represents a grave breach of Canada's democratic sovereignty, as it seeks to manipulate electoral outcomes and policy directions covertly. According to the intelligence summary³³:

"The GoI [Government of India] attempts to align Canadian politicians and decisionmakers-including through public statements, policy positions and responses to Parliamentary votes and motions—with pro-GoI positions and policies. Additionally, the GoI attempts to shape the final make up of Parliament through supporting individual pro-GoI candidates, including through interference in leadership and nomination contests [emphasis added]...

A body of intelligence indicates that GoI proxy agents may have attempted to interfere in democratic processes, reportedly including through the clandestine provision of illicit financial support to various Canadian politicians as a means of attempting to secure the election of pro-GoI candidates or gaining influence over candidates who take office.

In a Top Secret briefing note, CSIS identifies India as the "second-most active state actor engaging in FI activities in Canada", noting specifically that India "seeks to covertly influence Canadian officials at all levels of government to take positions and decisions that are favourable to the GoI."³⁴ The briefing explicitly notes that influencing Canadian elections and nominations is "one of the ways the (Hindu-centric) GoI gears Canadian policy and messaging towards India's

³³ CAN.SUM.000030, Canadian Security Intelligence Service Intelligence Summary, *Country Summaries* at page 8.

³⁴ CAN044584, SITE Briefing to P5 at page 3.

interests, which conversely, includes countering the influence of Sikhs in Canadian politics."³⁵ This is an incredibly alarming statement that goes much further than influencing the electoral outcome but actually seeking to disenfranchise and exclude an entire community from Canadian politics as a whole.

Further documentation, reiterates that "next to the PRC, India is the most significant FI actor in Canada." Intelligence assessments caution that this interference requires particular attention due to Canada's evolving Indo-Pacific Strategy, which views India as a key partner in a multipolar global order. Yet, despite these diplomatic overtures, Indian officials are reportedly engaged in "deceptive, clandestine and coercive interference activities targeting the Indo-Canadian diaspora and elected officials at all levels of government in Canada…"³⁶ A June 2023 SITE update noted that³⁷:

India [REDACTED] the second-most active state actor engaging in FI activities in Canada, behind the PRC. While the Government of India's (GoI's) FI activities are [REDACTED] they are nonetheless **persistent**, **pervasive and evolving** [emphasis added]. Indian FI activity is largely focused on the Indo-Canadian diaspora communities; however, the GoI is also opportunistic and will seek to leverage prominent non-Indo-Canadians to achieve India's FI goals, where it suits India's interests. SITE assesses that the GoI seeks to covertly influence Canadian officials at all levels of government to take positions and decisions that are favourable to the GoI. Indian official rely on a network of Canada-based proxy and pro-GoI actors, including community organizations [REDACTED]...

Indian disinformation would be aimed at supporting the election of pro-GoI candidates and undermining the campaign of perceived 'anti-India' candidates, and such GoI actions would be considered deceptive and clandestine activity that is detrimental to Canadian interests.

A number of examples are detailed in the following two pages following the above excerpt although they have been redacted for public release.

³⁵ *Ibid*.

³⁶ CAN023184, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2023 Threat Summary Report at page 5.

³⁷ **CAN040229_0001**, SITE TF, SITE Threat Assessment for Foreign Interference Threats to Canadian Democratic Institutions – 2023 (June 2023) at page 7.

The 2024 NSICOP report also provides important details and information regarding the extent and nature of India's activities targeting Canadian policymaking. This includes an example of an MP who is believed to have worked on India's behalf in some way to influence other Parliamentarians and provided potentially sensitive information to Indian officials.³⁸ NSICOP also notes that it reviewed CSIS information about an Indian proxy who may have transferred funds from India to politicians at all levels of government "in return for political favours, including raising issues in Parliament at the proxy's request."³⁹

In sum, the intelligence evidence presented before the Commission clearly establishes that India's foreign interference activities are extensive, coordinated, and targeted. India's actions, which include covert influence operations, disinformation, and financial inducements, not only seek to reshape Canadian policy but also explicitly seek to marginalize the Sikh community within Canada's democratic institutions. This interference poses a direct threat to Canadian sovereignty, undermines the integrity of Canada's political system, and requires immediate and robust countermeasures to safeguard the democratic rights of all Canadians.

Electoral Interference

The evidence before the Commission reveals a deeply concerning pattern of election interference by the Government of India, which seeks to influence Canadian political outcomes to align with its own strategic interests. This interference spans from manipulating individual campaigns and targeting candidates to orchestrating broader disinformation campaigns that have permeated Canada's political landscape since 2018 at the very least. These activities directly targeted the Government of Canada, including the Prime Minister and members of the Liberal and NDP caucuses, and amplified harmful narratives against the Sikh community.

One of the core tactics used by India involves covertly influencing candidate selection and nominations within Canadian political parties. Public reporting indicates that Indian operatives have wielded influence over which candidates receive party support prior to even becoming party nominees. This influence goes on through attempts to sway party nominations at the electoral

³⁸ **COM0000363**, National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, *Special Report on Foreign Interference in Canada's Democratic Processes and Institutions* (June 2024) at para 55.

³⁹ *Ibid* at page 29.

district level by indirectly participating in these processes. Indian actors also deploy proxies to intimidate, coerce, or incentivize voters, effectively undermining free and fair elections by manipulating the choices presented to Canadians.⁴⁰

This interference included the direct targeting of individual election campaigns and candidates through a variety of means, as well as broader disinformation campaigns between 2018-2021 which would undeniably impact political opinions and behaviors, leading to impacts on the 43rd and 44th elections. The disinformation directly targeted the Government of Canada and the Prime Minister, members of the Liberal and NDP caucuses, as well as amplifying generalized narratives about the Sikh community in Canada.

More details on this threat and Indian activities are provided in the Sikh Coalition's Stage 1 submissions between pages 4-9.

Conservative leadership race

The evidence further details an instance of Indian interference within a Conservative Party of Canada leadership race, as revealed in Paragraph 73 of the 2024 NSICOP report. Although this paragraph was heavily redacted, it references a 2022 CSIS document indicating that India engaged in foreign interference activities related to this specific leadership contest. According to a December 2023 report by journalist Sam Cooper, an October 2022 CSIS Intelligence Assessment described how the Government of India's interference in the Conservative Party's leadership race was part of a broader pattern of political manipulation. The assessment reportedly detailed that an Indian consulate in Canada instructed a leadership candidate not to attend any events hosted by the consulate or Indian community events. This directive was noted as exemplifying the significant control that Indian officials seek to exert over diaspora communities, positioning themselves as gatekeepers between political candidates and community organizations.⁴¹

The language in an October 31, 2022 CSIS Intelligence Assessment closely resembles the language reported by Sam Cooper in a section that is heavily redacted stating: "The Government of India (GoI) has engaged in FI activities related to the leadership race for a political party in

⁴¹ TSC0000013, The Bureau, Indian Proxies Funding Canadian Politicians "At All Levels of Government": CSIS Report (9 December 2023).

Canada." The section ends with "This example serves to highlight the degree of influence some foreign states can have over diaspora communities [redacted]."⁴²

The evidence paints a stark picture of India's interference efforts as pervasive, calculated, and damaging to Canadian democracy at all levels of government—from electoral nominations to general elections and party leadership campaigns. The direct targeting of electoral campaigns and the manipulation of party nominations demonstrate India's intent not only to support pro-India candidates but also to limit access and influence for those perceived as unsympathetic to its interests. By using proxies and coercive tactics, India has attempted to reshape Canada's political landscape in a way that favors its own foreign policy objectives, raising urgent questions about Canada's capacity to safeguard its electoral processes from foreign interference.

Manipulating Canadian Policy: Formulation and Implementation

India's sophisticated approach to foreign interference extends beyond interfering in electoral outcomes and includes activities that target public officials and decision-makers to *implement* Canadian policy and *enforcement* in specific ways that target and criminalize Sikh activism or any other criticism of the Government of India. This is a concerning approach to foreign interference that again subtly blends India's overt diplomatic resources with clandestine interference activities targeting Canada and Canadian communities.

The record demonstrates that Indian diplomats and intelligence operatives are actively engaging in clandestine conduct to ultimately influence Canadian policy makers and various agencies and operative to adopt pro-India positions, particularly to criminalize and prosecute any form of Sikh political advocacy in Canada under the guise of "countering extremism". By conflating any expression of Sikh identity and any form of political advocacy critical of India with "extremism" writ large, Indian officials continue to misuse their diplomatic resources to overtly and covertly persuade Canadian decision-makers and institutions to criminalize and marginalize Sikhs in this country.⁴³

The GoI does not differentiate between these actors engaging in lawful political advocacy and those suspected of using force in the pursuit of an independent state.⁴⁴ Upon a closer assessment of allegations that Canada does not take action against so-called "Sikh extremists", it

⁴² **CAN004985**, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *Foreign Interference and Elections: A National Security Assessment* (31 December 2022) at page 6.

⁴³ Supra note 3.

⁴⁴ CAN.SUM.000007, Canadian Security Intelligence Service Intelligence Summary, Country Summary: India.

is clear these complaints boil down to a demand for Canada to clamp down on the fundamental rights and freedoms enjoyed by Sikhs in Canada—whether they are exercised in the form of pursuing or advocating for an independent state, Khalistan; criticizing India's human rights record; advocating for the civil liberties of Sikhs in Canada; or simply celebrating the Sikh identity.⁴⁵ Members of the community-holding a wide range of political opinions-have been targeted in a number of ways and put in the position to disprove false allegations of "extremism" in order to successfully engage in public life in Canada. This includes a number of Sikh elected officials across party lines, as well as sitting Cabinet Ministers during the PM's 2018 trip to India.⁴⁶

The evidence presented to the Commission underscores a deeply troubling pattern of interference by the Government of India (GoI) within Canadian political institutions and processes. According to intelligence assessments, India is actively cultivating relationships across all orders of the Canadian government with the express purpose of exerting inappropriate influence. This influence is not benign; rather, it is directed specifically at stifling or discrediting any criticism of the Indian government and promoting narratives that serve India's strategic interests. India's intent is to suppress dissenting voices, particularly those who advocate for Sikh rights or criticize India's human rights record.

In their oral testimony, officials from RCMP and GAC both confirmed that India uses its official channels to exert pressure and influence on their Canadian counterparts to criminalize the lawful activities of Sikh activists in Canada. The witnesses testified that India pressures Canadian agencies to criminally prosecute or extradite Sikh activists engaged in *Charter*-protected speech, expression, and activism.⁴⁷

A SITE intelligence document further illustrates India's covert tactics to manipulate Canadian officials at all government levels. The report describes disinformation as a key foreign interference (FI) tactic employed by the GoI, which is strategically used to pressure Canadian

⁴⁵ Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 10, 4 April 2024, 208-220 (David Vigneault) at page 226, lines 10-20.

⁴⁶ COM0000149, House of Commons, National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, Special report into the allegations associated with Prime Minister Trudeau's official visit to India in February 2018 (December 2018) at para 18.

⁴⁷ Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 27, 3 October, 2024, (Mark Andrew Flynn) at pages 56-59; Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 28, 4 October, 2024, (Weldon Epp & David Morrison) at pages 169-171.

officials into countering any activities that India perceives as "anti-India." The document reveals that India actively supports Canadian politicians who endorse pro-India positions while undermining those it views as detrimental to its interests.

The Sikh Coalition's submissions at stage 1 of the Commission specifically details an incident of how this operation functions is outlined at page 16-17. In particular, this looks at the PM's 2018 trip to India and how Indian disinformation operations targeted Canada in order to pressure Canadian agencies to criminalize and take action against Sikh activists in the country, particularly by amplifying allegations of so-called "extremism".⁴⁹

Further reinforcing these concerns, SITE highlights how Indian interference activities aim to protect and promote pro-India narratives, while countering legitimate advocacy by diaspora communities that India deems contrary to its national interests. This interference is not limited to issues directly concerning India; it has also been used to suppress international advocacy on diverse issues, including the 2021 agricultural reform protests in India and support for an independent Khalistan.⁵⁰ By targeting lawful advocacy within the Sikh diaspora and other communities, India's influence efforts are fundamentally at odds with Canadian democratic values, which uphold the right to free expression and political participation for all.

The intelligence findings expose India's coordinated efforts to manipulate Canada's political system through disinformation, coercion, and undue influence. These tactics are deliberately designed to support pro-India politicians, influence Canadian policy in India's favor, and stifle Sikh political advocacy. Such interference not only undermines the integrity of Canada's democratic institutions but also infringes on the rights of Canadian citizens, particularly within the Sikh community, to engage in open political discourse without fear of foreign reprisal or manipulation. The evidence thus highlights an urgent need for Canada to recognize and counter these threats to protect its public agencies and policy implementation from foreign interference.

⁴⁸ **CAN044584**, *SITE Briefing to P5* at page 3.

⁴⁹ **COM0000149**, House of Commons, National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, *Special report into the allegations associated with Prime Minister Trudeau's official visit to India in February 2018* (December 2018) at para 73.

⁵⁰ CAN044569, SITE, Key Points for SITE Briefing to Political Parties at page 7.

III. Transnational Repression

India has been believed to engage in various forms of transnational repression since the 1980s, particularly weaponizing visas and threatening or otherwise intimidating diaspora activists whose families remain in India.⁵¹ Indian officials have engaged in activities that "go beyond the scope of regular diplomatic duties", including the "collection of Canadian political information; dissident monitoring in Canada; interference with Canadian interests, influencing Canadian policy and political leaders and using clandestine sources to influence media."⁵²

Following India's assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June 2023, the RCMP has publicly acknowledged that Indian diplomats have been involved in orchestrating a wave of violence against Sikhs across Canada, specifically targeting those actively advocating for an independent, sovereign Khalistan. The diplomats have been identified as part of an Indian diplomat-organized crime nexus, clandestinely collecting intelligence and information about Sikh activists and then providing that information to criminal gangs to be targeted for intimidation, extortion, and other forms of violence.⁵³

Indian officials used coercion as a means to compel individuals of Indian descent in Canada to act as informants.⁵⁴ The threat goes beyond the denial of visas—families of those targeted face intimidation and potential harm in India, creating a climate of fear and manipulation within the diaspora. This points to a sophisticated and multi-layered operation involving threats, intimidation, and violent reprisals that are deeply entwined with India's diplomatic missions in Canada.

In his testimony before the Commission, PM Trudeau detailed how intelligence pointed to a broader campaign of violence orchestrated by India, extending beyond Bhai Hardeep Singh's assassination. This intelligence was reportedly passed to high-level officials in India, who then directed criminal organizations, including the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, to execute violent acts against these individuals.

⁵¹ Supra note 3.

⁵² CAN003249, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *Canada's Strategy for Countering Hostile Activities by State Actors* (2 September 2020) at page 6.

⁵³ Supra note 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid* at 54-56.

In a press conference on October 14, 2024, the RCMP highlighted that this network was responsible for orchestrating violence, including drive-by shootings and extortion attempts, primarily targeting members of the South Asian community, particularly those affiliated with Sikh advocacy. PM Trudeau confirmed that these violent activities were part of a coordinated effort to instill fear within these communities and demonstrate India's narrative about Canada's inability to prevent violence.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau described a range of alarming methods employed by the Indian government to collect information on targets in Canada, particularly focusing on individuals critical of its policies. PM Trudeau indicated that Indian diplomats engaged in covert operations to gather sensitive intelligence, utilizing clandestine tactics rather than standard diplomatic practices. This intelligence collection involved threatening individuals in Canada with violence or coercion, including threats against their family members residing in India.

India's nexus with organized crime, specifically the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, allowed the Indian government to direct criminal elements to execute violent acts against targets identified by senior government officials, effectively enacting state-directed extrajudicial violence through criminal proxies. PM Trudeau confirmed that he was aware of Prime Minister Modi's public statements boasting about India's violent actions when he stated that today's India doesn't send dossiers to other countries (ie. seek legal cooperation) any longer, but "enters the homes of its enemies" and kills them.⁵⁵

B. Canadian agencies and departments failed to effectively detect, counter, and deter Indian foreign interference and transnational repression

Despite clear evidence of threats and intelligence operations aimed at undermining Canadian sovereignty, it is evident that Canadian agencies and departments have failed to effectively detect, counter, and deter Indian foreign interference.

The RCMP's October 14, 2024 revelations about India's ongoing violence, based out of India's consulates and authorized by the highest level of government, demonstrate that Canada's actions and response failed to deter or counter India's ongoing activities to date. The lack of public

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⁵⁵ Supra note 1 at pages 90-91.

transparency and decisive action to combat Indian activities in Canada until after it was already too late, appears largely related to the fact that foreign policy considerations were given greater weight by Canadian decisionmakers over the long-term domestic harms on a number of occasions.

Foreign policy objectives have been prioritized over effective responses to Indian FI

One significant failure in Canada's approach to foreign interference is the lack of decisive action against Indian intelligence networks, particularly as early as 2017. The Commission has seen evidence stemming from the 2019 NSICOP report, which suggests that Canada failed to dismantle an Indian intelligence network due to foreign policy priorities to export pulses to India and ensure the success of the prime minister's trip to India in 2018.⁵⁶ This prioritization created a vulnerable landscape where Indian intelligence operations could flourish without adequate oversight or response. The implications of such a decision are profound; by sidelining domestic security interests, Canada inadvertently facilitated the very environment in which foreign actors could operate with impunity.

This lack of meaningful response over the course of many years has led to the continued and increasing marginalization of a highly visible minority community whose *Charter* rights have been compromised as a result. The *de facto* impunity granted to Indian diplomats and intelligence operatives appears to have emboldened Indian officials to escalate their clandestine operations, ultimately paving the ground for the assassination in June 2023 and the subsequent wave of violence the country is still reeling from today.

Global Affairs Canada holds disproportionate control over Canada's response to Indian FI

Compounding this issue is the structure of Canada's governmental response to foreign interference, predominantly controlled by Global Affairs Canada. This department's primary focus is on foreign policy objectives, creating an inherent conflict of interest when addressing domestic security issues. The concentration of response mechanisms within a body whose priorities are often aligned with international relations limits the effectiveness of actions taken against foreign interference domestically. As a result, the Canadian government's responses appear reactive rather

⁵⁶ **TSC0000014**, The Bureau, *Indian Consulate Networks Targeting Sikhs in Vancouver Continued 'Unabated' when Ottawa Gutted CSIS Probe in 2017: Top Secret Record* (19 September 2023).

than proactive, lacking the urgency and specificity required to address the ongoing and long-term threats posed by Indian intelligence operations.

A lack of transparency regarding Indian FI diminishes resilience and protection against threats

The history of redactions of public reports concerning India's foreign interference activities underscores a troubling lack of transparency in the Canadian government's approach.⁵⁷ Key details regarding these operations were withheld from the public for years, leading to a significant information gap that hindered community awareness and engagement. This lack of transparency not only erodes public trust but also impedes the ability of civil society organizations to advocate effectively for their communities in light of ongoing threats.

Canadian agencies and decision-makers failed to take threats and concerns seriously

Further, community concerns regarding India's activities have been communicated clearly for years, with specific concerns regarding attempts to target Sikh leadership surfacing as early as July 2022.⁵⁸ Sikh organizations proactively reached out to Minister Mendicino, alerting him of concerns regarding India's role in violence and disinformation in Canada, yet their concerns were met with no response at the time.⁵⁹ Concerns of potential assassinations of Sikh leadership were also communicated to authorities later that same summer.⁶⁰ The absence of governmental engagement or action in response to these warnings exemplifies a broader pattern of negligence regarding the safety of Canadian citizens at risk from foreign threats.

In addition, Sikh organizations published multiple reports detailing India's foreign interference activities, which should have prompted a serious governmental response. Instead, this reporting was met with minimal engagement, signaling a lack of commitment from Canadian authorities to address the identified risks. This disengagement is further evidenced by instances where individuals warned by the RCMP of imminent danger received no support or resources.⁶¹ Targets of transnational repression were left to navigate their perilous situations without security details or financial assistance for alternative living arrangements. This forced them into an

⁵⁷ Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 14, 10 April 2024, pp. 246-250 (Justin Trudeau) at page 249.

⁵⁸ Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 24, 27 September, 2024, (David Vigneault) at page 200-203.

⁵⁹ **TSC0000060**, British Columbia Gurdwaras Council, *Investigation of Foreign Interference in the Murder of Ripudaman Singh Malik* (17 July 2022).

⁶⁰ Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 32, 10 October, 2024, (Hon. Marco Mendicino) at pages 69-79.

⁶¹ Transcript, Public Hearings, Volume 27, 3 October, 2024, (Mark Andrew Flynn) at pages 59-62.

untenable position, where they had to choose between retreating from public life or risking their safety, a situation no Canadian should ever face.

Canadian agencies are not equipped and resourced to monitor Indian disinformation

A critical vulnerability highlighted by RRM Canada is the insufficient familiarity of its analysts with non-Western digital information ecosystems, particularly those of India. This gap in expertise poses a significant risk, as foreign threat actors can exploit this lack of understanding to shape opinions among diaspora audiences in Canada. Without dedicated analysts who are proficient in Punjabi or Hindi, the Canadian government is at a disadvantage in monitoring and countering disinformation campaigns that specifically target the Sikh community and other South Asian populations. Furthermore, the absence of public funding aimed at building capacity to address this gap exacerbates the situation, leaving Canadian agencies ill-equipped to respond effectively to foreign interference and undermining the safety and security of its diverse communities.

Key decision-makers were <u>not</u> informed and briefed of threats emanating from India

Further exacerbating the situation is the timing of information sharing within the Canadian government. Minister Joly of Global Affairs was not briefed on India's foreign interference activities until February 2024, prior to a visit to India, which demonstrates a severe lag in awareness and preparedness regarding ongoing threats. This delay in communication signifies a troubling disconnect between intelligence gathering and policy response, undermining the government's ability to act swiftly and effectively against foreign interference. This is most concerning, particularly given the fact that most of Canada's tools to combat Indian foreign interference were housed in Minister Joly's very own ministry.

V. Canada must implement clear and effective policy changes to effectively combat Indian foreign interference

RCMP witnesses confirmed that recipients of duties to warn are not provided resources or supports whether that be alternative living arrangements or security. Individuals in Canada should not be forced to choose between exercising their *Charter* rights at the risk of death or retreating from public life as this is exactly what those targeting Canada want. The Government of Canada must provide relevant and reasonable supports for individuals who find themselves in these situations.

Second, it is imperative that every individual responsible for attacks and hostile activities is held to account by the Government of Canada and that this is not pulled back by Global Affairs. The temporary disruption of Indian activities is not accountability and is not acted as an effective deterrent.

Third, there must be increased public transparency and reporting of foreign interference activities so threats are not shrouded in secrecy to protect foreign policy interests or subject to media leaks. The use of redactions must be severely restricted and scaled back only to protect intelligence sources or methods, not hide valuable threat information altogether.

Lastly, there must be meaningful changes in Canada's response mechanism to foreign interference to ensure that foreign policy priorities do not dictate Canada's response or trump the serious concerns of targeted diaspora communities. Exporting pulses or building ties with a known hostile state is not worth sacrificing the integrity of Canadian institutions, and definitely not worth the lives of more Sikh activists who continue to be targeted to this day.

VI. Conclusion

Indian foreign interference in Canada has had profound impacts, particularly on the Sikh community, which experiences significant insecurity and a curtailed exercise of Charter rights. This environment of fear and intimidation inhibits individuals from freely expressing themselves or making informed choices regarding their political beliefs and activism. As a result, there is a detrimental effect on democratic participation, as community members may feel compelled to limit their political expression or disengage from public life altogether. This erosion of freedom not only stifles individual voices but also undermines the integrity of public debate, distorting discussions around important issues and hindering the overall democratic process. Consequently, the Sikh community faces an uphill battle in advocating for its rights and interests within a landscape shaped by foreign influence and repression.

These intelligence assessments paint a troubling picture of Canada's ability to counter and deter Indian foreign interference. Despite clear evidence of India's involvement in orchestrated disinformation campaigns, manipulation of Canadian media, coercion of ethnic communities, and interference in Canadian politics, Canada's response has been limited, often reactive, and seemingly influenced by diplomatic considerations that overlook the security and rights of Canadians, particularly those within the Sikh diaspora.

The Commission's evidence highlights Canada's challenges in adequately identifying and confronting these threats. The extensive redactions within intelligence documents and the delayed public response to these actions indicate systemic shortcomings in Canada's approach to safeguarding its democratic institutions. To uphold the civil liberties of all its citizens, Canada must take decisive actions to commit to countering Indian foreign interference and ensure that its responses are transparent, robust, and prioritizes the rights and safety of all Canadians over foreign policy interests.

ALL OF WHICH IS RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED

Dated at Ottawa, Ontario on November 4, 2024

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