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Elections Security Brief for Minister LeBlanc

Remarks:

SLIDE 2: Challenge on an International Scale

[Delivered by either NSIA or Dep Sec McCowan]

- Attempts by foreign states and non-state actors to interfere in democratic and electoral processes are not new threats, nor unique to Canada. Many nations, including our closest allies, have experienced manipulation and interference to varying degrees in their democratic institutions and processes. In the past 10 years, almost 40 nations have experienced manipulation to varying levels – this is a global challenge.

- We need to prepare our citizens and systems to respond to this threat. Governments and citizens have to contend with these challenges and risks while respecting democratic rights and freedoms.

- A 2017 public threat report from the Communications Security Establishment (CSE) identified political parties and politicians, electoral activities, and the media as vulnerable to threats, but also noted that our system has inherent strengths built-in. For example, paper-based ballots cannot be "hacked".

- The 2019 update to this report reinforced that it was very likely that Canadian voters would encounter some form of cyber interference during the 2019 elections. Canadian political parties, their candidates and staff were also identified as a likely target.

SLIDE 3: Protection 2019 General Elections

[Delivered by Dep Sec McCowan – talking points in the Deck]

- <u>Potential interjection:</u> As Ian mentions, the ecosystem supporting this plan was complex and diverse, bringing together 10 different federal departments and agencies. In addition, at the crux of this was the work PCO did to bridge of traditional security partners like CSIS and CSE with non-traditional partners like Elections Canada.

- <u>Potential interjection:</u> I would note that PCO Security & Intelligence Secretariat (S&I) served as the Secretariat to Panel and as part of that work, organized the security community to provide the routine threat updates to cleared members of the political parties. All the parties participated in these briefings, with the exception of the Bloc Québécois, who chose not to have anyone cleared. We received positive feedback by the parties on this experience.

SLIDE 4: Protecting Democracy Ecosystem

[Delivered by Dep Sec McCowan – talking points in the Deck]

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SLIDE 5: Elections Incident Response Architecture

[Delivered by NSIA]

- Conscious of all the moving parts that Ian has just described, of the various players in the ecosystem, of their mandates and of a requirement to coherently support the Panel, an Elections Security Architecture was established by my branch.

- A primary component of the architecture is the **Elections Security Coordinating Committee** (ESCC) structure. These are DM, ADM and DG-level committees, co-chaired by PCO - under the Security & Intelligence Secretariat – and Elections Canada. The DG and ADM levels continue to meet in the off-cycle, to maintain the connections and momentum established.

- Running this out of PCO S&I is deliberately done to bridge the national security community with other key partners, both internal to PCO (Democratic Institutions and Communications) and external to PCO (Elections Canada and the Commissioner of Canada Elections).

- It also feeds into the work of the Panel, ensuring coordination of any incident response, and is underpinned by SITE.

SLIDE 6: CEIPP

[Delivered by Dep Sec McCowan – talking points in the Deck]

- <u>Potential interjection:</u> The Panel was responsible for determining whether a threshold was met, by either a single incident or an accumulation of incidents. They did not observe any activities that met the threshold for a public announcement or affected Canada's ability to have a free and fair election. This assessment was supported by regular intel briefings and monitoring by.

SLIDE 7: SITE

[Delivered by NSIA]

- The Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force, or SITE, was actually created in August of 2018 to improve situational awareness of foreign threats to Canada's electoral processes and help assess and respond to those threats.

- SITE brought together several security and intelligence partners, namely the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and Global Affairs Canada (GAC).

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- It represented the first time an interdepartmental effort was undertaken to collect and use intelligence related to foreign interference.

- And it was a success. We'll get into the details in the threat briefing but procedurally, SITE fed into the Panel, they improved situational awareness of foreign threats and they helped the government assess and respond to those threats.

SLIDE 8: 2019 General Election – Outcomes

[Delivered by Dep Sec McCowan – talking points in the Deck]

- Potential interjection: Before we focus on the threat briefing, there are areas of focus for the next-steps for elections security that I would like us to keep in mind. The first is how elections security fits into the broader, ongoing, strategic discussions on hostile state activity and the second is what we learned in 2019 and how we apply it to future elections.

  - With respect to the former, the broader discussion, work is ongoing to identify gaps in legislation, to categorize tools in terms of how Canada can most effectively counter hostile state activity, to look at the role of strategic communications in calling attention to state behaviour, etc. This goes beyond democratic institutions and includes economic security, critical infrastructure and social cohesion.

  - With respect to the latter, the threat is not going away, or diminishing. We can expect an ongoing need to respond. A couple of important takeaways would be the importance of collaboration and operational coordination.

  - Collaboration: Bringing together the traditional national security community with elections partners, both internal and external to PCO, was a central component of safeguarding GE 2019. The ESCC architecture was key in this effort and operationally this collaboration continues. The networks are built and in place to be leveraged as needed.

  - Operational Coordination: The security community itself coordinated in a new way for GE 2019. The SITE structure and format allowed for broad sharing of intelligence within existing mandates. This structure worked and it worked well. For example, it allowed for quicker assessments and for quicker verifications of respective agency holdings.

  - Finally, I would note that internationally, Canada's approach has been received with much interest in the security community, particularly the Panel, SITE and the political party briefings. We are well-placed to continue this work.

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SLIDE 9: Canada's Ongoing Threat Environment

[Delivered by NSIA]

- What do we know?
- Who are the main threats?
- What happened during the US Election?
- What can we expect and how is this complicated by the current pandemic?

Slide 10: What Do We Know?

[Delivered by NSIA]

- Because of Canada's robust measures for the protections of elections, including a paper ballot system, strong cyber-defenses at Elections Canada provided by the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, and strong campaign finance laws, foreign nations are forced generally into using more traditional means of interference.

- Attempts by foreign nations to interfere in Canadian Democracy begin before the election writ is dropped, often many months or years before.

- Most interference activity is based on the use of Human Intelligence (HUMINT) tradecraft, such as the recruitment of key influencers within a particular community, or through the organization of large groups of like-minded individuals around the support for a particular candidate or issue.

Slide 11: Who are the main threats?

[Delivered by NSIA]

- According to the recently updated SITE threat assessment, China,   Russia and India, pose the largest threats to Canadian democratic institutions, including elections.

- These countries believe they can operate with relative immunity in Canada, though CSIS working with RCMP have ongoing efforts to understand and disrupt these efforts.

- Chinese activity is significant and ongoing, mostly executed by Diplomats and co-opted or covertly established organizations with a seemingly legitimate presence in Canada.

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- China seeks to use the large Chinese-Canadian diaspora to influence the selection of candidates by parties that may be more favorable to Chinese interests, as well as influence local, provincial or federal issues in their favor.

- Russia has shown an interest in general in undermining trust in elections and democratic institutions,

- India

Slide 12: What Happened During the US Election?

[Delivered by NSIA]

- The recent US election was relatively free of interference.

- Where hostile nation state activity was detected, the US Law Enforcement and Intelligence Community reacted very publicly, issuing public indictments against specific individuals and explaining to the public what they were seeing, such as with Russia and Iran.

- CISA declared the election the "most secure election in American history."

Slide 13: What We Can Expect

[Delivered by NSIA]

- Currently, there is no intelligence suggesting ongoing efforts by cyber actors to compromise, modify or damage election-based or democratic institutions-based computer systems.

- The community assesses that China will continue its efforts.
  - These efforts will include attempts to influence or pressure politicians at the local, provincial and federal levels on issues related to China.

- Adversaries will attempt to augment, echo and inflame domestic narratives to sow division or attempt to tilt the public narrative in favor of a specific issue or candidate.

- This is what Iran was attempting to do by masquerading and augmenting the reach of Proud Boys narratives.

- COVID represents an opportunity that could be weaponized through disinformation to change election narratives or influence how voters feel about the safety of polling stations.

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Slide 14: Next Steps

[Delivered by NSIA]

- The Panel of Five is meeting to maintain awareness of the threat environment and be ready to act should there be another election call outside the 4-year normal electoral cycle.

- The Election Security Coordination Committee governance structure is now meeting monthly at the DG and ADM level to ensure ongoing connectivity across PHAC and the S&I community.

- SITE has updated their threat assessment and continues to look for, and assess, what hostile states are doing and how those activities may impact the next election.

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