



CAB 2021-22/89
November 3, 2021

CSIS Engagement with Elected Officials on Foreign Interference: An Initiative of National Significance

Key Points

- In the summer of 2021, CSIS embarked on a landmark national engagement campaign with a diverse group of federal Members of Parliament (MPs). This engagement involved the delivery of unclassified 'defensive briefings' specifically designed to better equip elected officials (and, in some cases, their staff) to inform them of the problem of FI in Canada, how to detect FI in practice, and how to create political resiliency against the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) foreign interference (FI) efforts in Canada. (S//CEO)
- [redacted] a Threat Reduction Measure (TRM) concerning FI activities
[redacted]
- [redacted]
[redacted] (S//CEO)
- CSIS received overwhelmingly positive feedback from recipients of these briefings. Recipients repeatedly shared their appreciation for CSIS' engagement, the quality of the material provided, and the overall focus of the discussion. MPs appreciated the candour of the discussions, and many noted all GC MP's would benefit from such briefings to raise further awareness on the problem of FI. (S//CEO)
- There was a general sense among the interviewees that there is a need for more information on FI for all politicians and their staffers, particularly as it pertains to preventative measures against potential threats. Based on the success of the briefing initiative [redacted] CSIS will explore additional opportunities in the future to engage with a broad range of elected officials and their staff to strengthen Canada's democratic institutions and processes. (S//CEO)


PRC-Related Efforts

What was the Briefing Initiative and Why did it Take Place?

From June – August 2021, CSIS successfully met with [redacted] MPs across the country to provide defensive briefings on FI threats with a PRC nexus. [redacted] (S//CEO)

A bulk of these briefings took place in early August 2021, before the writ dropped. MPs were from three political parties: the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC), the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC), and the New Democratic Party of Canada (NDP).

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[REDACTED]
(S//CEO)

[REDACTED] the PRC [REDACTED] as well as PRC-based entities such as the Ministry of State Security (MSS) and the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) United Front Work Department (UFWD),¹ are highly interested in Canadian elected officials [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] These efforts can take place around election cycles, though are not limited to them. (TS//CEO)

CSIS proposed a 'briefing strategy' in advance of the election, given historical concerns about PRC FI and the increasingly aggressive posture taken by PRC threat actors towards Canada in recent years. Based on previous experience with the PRC's FI efforts, CSIS determined that MPs in Canada could benefit from an unclassified and general briefing on FI. The objectives of the briefings were to provide elected officials with a better understanding of FI and FI tradecraft; tools to address perceived FI efforts (e.g., advice on how to respond to FI tradecraft, etc.); and contact information for follow-up if MPs have additional concerns or wish to speak with CSIS in the future. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] (TS//CEO)

What was the Content of the Briefing?

The briefings followed a consistent format across the country. In specific cases, CSIS tailored engagements to account for the subject's familiarity to CSIS and FI. The briefings broadly covered three major topics:

- CSIS' mandate and role in the Government of Canada (specific attention was paid to emphasize CSIS is not a law enforcement agency);
- The definition of FI and what does or does not constitute FI from CSIS' perspective (with a strong focus on the PRC); and
- FI tradecraft and how MPs can protect themselves and their staff. (S//CEO)

CSIS provided briefing recipients two 'placemats' which touched upon the above issues. The placemats provided CSIS' definition of foreign interference based on s.12, 2(b) of the *CSIS Act*, and the briefings indicated that the 'threshold' of FI is crossed when specific activities are clandestine, or deceptive, or constitute a threat to a person (e.g., a foreign government threatening someone in Canada to comply or face consequences). CSIS added that these activities can be within or relating to Canada but must be detrimental to the interests of Canada. CSIS clarified that, per this definition, overt engagement with foreign governments is not FI and therefore is not of concern. One of the placemats contained contact information for the Government of Canada (including CSIS and the RCMP) in case the MP wanted to report an act of FI during the upcoming federal election. (S//CEO)

¹ The UFWD reports directly to the Central Committee of the CCP, and is a Party entity, not a government entity. The UFWD's primary role is to ensure, via its vast network, that 'united front work' (i.e. work to strengthen a united front coalition that furthers the influence and interests of the CCP) is carried out effectively both inside and outside the PRC. While united front work is primarily conceived, implemented and overseen by the UFWD, numerous other elements within the PRC are involved in united front work and foreign interference more generally. (S//CEO)



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[Redacted] (S//CEO)

[Redacted]

[Redacted] (S//CEO)

[Redacted]

[Redacted] (S//CEO)

- [Redacted] (S//CEO)

- [Redacted] (S//CEO)

- [Redacted] (S//CEO)

What did MPs tell CSIS?

[Redacted]

[Redacted] (TS//CEO)

- [Redacted] (TS//CEO)

- [Redacted]



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[Redacted]

(TS//CEO)

- [Redacted]

(TS//CEO)

- [Redacted]

(TS//CEO)

- [Redacted]

(TS//CEO)

- [Redacted]

(TS//CEO)

- [Redacted]

(TS//CEO)

- [Redacted]



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[Redacted]

(TS//CEO)

- [Redacted]

(TS//CEO)

Next Steps

CSIS assesses that based on the outcomes of the engagements so far, all objectives of the briefing strategies (defensive briefings [Redacted] were exceeded. [Redacted]

[Redacted] (TS//CEO)

One of the greatest challenges for MPs appears to lie in correctly identifying FI and recognizing what to do when they believe they are being targeted. Many of the interactions between MPs and foreign officials appear to fall into the FI 'grey zone,' where the nature and motivations of the contact are ambiguous. This increases the challenge of distinguishing interactions that could be legitimate diplomatic advocacy from clandestine and deceptive attempts to cultivate, co-opt and influence MPs. (TS//CEO)

These MP engagements clearly demonstrated that elected officials are growing increasingly concerned with FI and that they recognize that there is a serious FI threat from [Redacted] the PRC. This growing concern is reflective of the need for increased efforts to engage with and sensitize our elected (and appointed) officials as well as their staff about FI, how they are targeted, and how to better protect themselves. Based on the success of this effort, and in the context of the considerable emphasis the PRC, in particular, has placed in attempting to interfere in Canada's democratic processes and institutions, CSIS will be seeking to engage with additional MPs in the coming months. (TS//CEO)

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