

For Public Release

UNCLASSIFIEDMEMORANDUM FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE
ADVISOR TO THE PRIME MINISTERNATIONAL SECURITY BRIEFINGS TO PARLIAMENTARIANS

(Decision Sought)

SUMMARY

- S&I was asked to develop options to offer national security briefs to parliamentarians. Several approaches can be envisioned, and some could be pursued in parallel.
- If directed, S&I will prepare a decision note for the Prime Minister requesting his support for:
 1. An unclassified briefing by the Director of Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and Chief of Communications Security Establishment (CSE) to all parliamentarians on foreign interference and cybersecurity.
 2. A classified briefing for opposition leaders from recognized parties on the same subject. To do so, we would seek PM support for granting security waivers to the opposition leaders.
 3. Sending a letter to the House Leader, Government Representative in the Senate, Minister of Public Safety and Minister of National Defence authorizing them to coordinate the briefings.
- **Do you agree?**

Background

- S&I was asked to develop options to offer national security briefs to Members of Parliament and Senators. The intent at this stage would be to include a briefing by the Director of CSIS on foreign interference in combination with a brief from CSE on the National Cyber Threat Assessment recently released. Other presenters and subjects could be considered in future iterations.
- The National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians has recommended (first in its Special Report into the allegations associated with Prime Minister Trudeau's official visit to India in February 2018 and then again in its 2019 study of the Government Response to Foreign Interference) that "[in] the interest of national security, members of the House of Commons and the Senate should

For Public Release

[APG]

UNCLASSIFIED

be briefed upon being sworn-in and regularly thereafter on the risks of foreign interference and extremism in Canada.

- More recently, the President of the Queen's Privy Council, when appearing before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on November 17, 2020, offered that national security officials could provide a briefing to the committee on disinformation and foreign interference as it relates to Canadian democratic institutions. The briefing has not yet been scheduled.
- A number of different approaches could be considered, each with pros/cons. Furthermore, these options are not mutually exclusive and could even be combined.
- Unclassified virtual briefing to Members of Parliament and Senators. CSIS already has a brief prepared on foreign interference that could be delivered on short notice (**Tab A**). Given the COVID situation, this should take the form of a virtual video teleconference to which all parliamentarians would be invited. Such an event would be comparatively easy to organize. Security Operations (SECOPS) has recommended that the office of the House of Commons Sergeant-at-Arms would likely be the lead for coordinating the briefings, given their role in parliamentary security. Moreover, including all parliamentarians would improve general awareness of security issues within the House and Senate. However, the information provided might have less impact due to the classification, and any discussion might be limited by having parliamentarians from opposing parties and groups on the same call.
- As an alternative, separate briefings could be offered to each party caucus in both Chambers. This approach could improve the caliber of discussion by encouraging more open participation by parliamentarians, although the coordination would be less straightforward and there would be some risk that the process could be perceived as somehow favouring one party over another. For the sake of efficiency, S&I would recommend inviting the Green caucus (three members) and independent Members of Parliament (MPs) (three members) to a single event.
- Classified briefing for opposition party leaders. A SECRET-level briefing could have a greater impact, as it could serve to highlight more specific risks and allow for a more frank discussion. SECOPS has advised that within hours of receiving direction from the PM, they could issue waivers to all party leaders to permit them to receive SECRET-level information. This would avoid the delays and potential sensitivities of asking leaders to submit to a security clearance process. S&I recommends organizing one briefing with simultaneous translation or two separate briefings (one in each official language) to

For Public Release

[APG]

UNCLASSIFIED

which all party leaders would be invited, rather than briefing each individually, to avoid any perception of partisan bias.

- Classified briefing to Cabinet members. A separate briefing to Cabinet members could be offered in parallel to the other options. By virtue of their position and the Privy Council Oath, security clearances would not be an issue and this briefing would be relatively easy to organize.

Next Steps

Should you agree, S&I would prepare a decision note for the Prime Minister requesting his support for:

1. An unclassified briefing by the Director CSIS and Chief CSE to all parliamentarians on foreign interference and cybersecurity.
2. A classified briefing for opposition leaders from recognized parties on the same subject. To do so, we would seek PM support for granting security waivers to the opposition leaders.
3. Sending a letter to the House Leader, Government Representative in the Senate, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and Minister of National Defence authorizing them to coordinate the briefings.

PCO Comment

- If successful, S&I believes this initial briefing could serve as a model for subsequent briefings, including on extremism as recommended by the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP).
- PCO Legislative and House Planning (LHP) has recommended that the Government House Leader and Government Representative in the Senate inform the Speakers of the House and Senate of the briefings and seek opportunities for CSIS and CSE to consult in advance with the appropriate security officials of the House and Senate Administration to ensure the briefings are coordinated with any security activities undertaken within the House or Senate.

Mike MacDonald

Enclosures