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SECRETMEMORANDUM FOR THE PRIME MINISTER

c.c.: Jody Thomas, Nathalie G. Drouin

ENGAGEMENT OF PARLIAMENTARIANS ON FOREIGN INTERFERENCE  
THREATS

(Decision Sought/Signature Required)

**SUMMARY**

- Recent media reports have brought attention to allegations of foreign interference during the 2019 and 2021 General Elections, and highlighted that Parliamentarians may be of specific interest to foreign interference threat actors.
- Increased awareness through public communications and tailored engagements is an effective means to counter foreign interference threats. As such, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) has been working with Public Safety Canada to develop advice and options for tailored engagement with current and former Parliamentarians who have been of significant interest to foreign interference threat actors.
- The Minister of Public Safety also intends to send a letter to his parliamentary colleagues in which he will discuss foreign interference threats and offer them unclassified security briefings.
- In addition, PCO recommends to offer classified briefings by Canada's security agencies to leaders of recognized political parties in the House of Commons (i.e., parties with at least 12 elected members, as per the *Parliament of Canada Act*). These briefings would support better-informed policy debate and better position Canada's political leaders to take action to protect themselves, their parties and Canada's national security from specific threats. It would also enable political leaders to read any classified annex of the upcoming report of the Independent Special Rapporteur (ISR).
- To facilitate these briefings, it is also proposed that party leaders be processed for a TOP SECRET security clearance and be briefed on handling classified information. Together, these measures would enable Canada's security agencies to prepare and deliver tailored, classified briefings up to the TOP SECRET level to them as needed.
- If you agree with this proposal, please sign the enclosed letters to party leaders (**Tab A**) advising them of the opportunity for classified briefings. Once received, PCO will liaise with the offices of the party leaders to ensure security forms are

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properly filled out and submitted. Upon receiving clearances, PCO will then work to coordinate the briefings.

- **Do you agree?**

### **BACKGROUND**

- Recent media reports have brought attention to allegations of foreign interference in Canadian democratic processes during the 2019 and 2021 General Elections. These allegations have led to calls for a public inquiry into foreign interference in Canada. Debate on these issues has been ongoing in the House of Commons, including within the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC).
- Allegations in the media suggested that some Parliamentarians have been of significant interest to foreign interference threat actors. While media articles do not always accurately portray intelligence agencies' reports and assessment, some politicians have in fact been wittingly or unwittingly involved in foreign interference attempts with various levels of intensity.
- In order to provide further clarity on the status of the foreign interference threats related to current and former Parliamentarians, CSIS has been reviewing its holdings and has created a list of individuals who have been of interest to foreign interference actors. The list, on which you have been briefed separately, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]. CSIS has initiated threat reduction measures (TRM) in some cases and is working with Public Safety Canada to develop advice for engagement with individuals for whom TRM are not possible or recommended.
- Additionally, on May 16, the Minister of Public Safety issued a ministerial direction to CSIS in which the Minister articulated his expectations as to how threats to Parliament and Parliamentarians would be investigated, mitigated and communicated. The Minister of Public Safety also intends to send a letter to his parliamentary colleagues in which he will discuss foreign interference threats and

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offer them unclassified security briefings, which may take place before the summer parliamentary recess.

### Proposal

- In view of ongoing debates around foreign interference, democratic processes, and growing threats to Canada's national security, it is proposed that, further to the initiatives outlined above, classified briefings be offered to party leaders, or interim leaders, of recognized political parties. In the near term, this would serve to shed light on allegations of foreign interference in political spheres. It would also highlight other threats to Canada's national security, political parties, and parliamentarians themselves.
- Such briefings would support informed policy debate on foreign interference and other national security threats, such as violent extremism. The briefings would better position Canada's political leaders to take action to protect themselves, their parties and Canada's national security. This initiative could also signal publicly that Canada and all Canadian political parties take threats to national security seriously.
- The focus of the briefings would be to provide opposition leaders with information that is not available publicly, or through the regular means by which officials provide unclassified information to Parliament. As such, it is envisioned that the briefings would be typically delivered at the SECRET level, though with the option of going up to TOP SECRET if required. Care would be taken to protect all Cabinet Confidences.
- The briefings would carefully balance the privacy rights of individuals with national security considerations. The *Privacy Act* "permits the disclosure of personal information where, in the opinion of the head of the institution (that is disclosing said information), the public interest in disclosure clearly outweighs any invasion of privacy that could result from the disclosure." As such, personal information related to threats facing or posed by members of the party could be disclosed to the party leader as part of these briefings, as required. Party leaders' awareness of threats affecting or involving the members of their parties in both the House of Commons and the Senate would assist them in proactively taking mitigating measures, which would directly contribute to the public interest. Should specific threats require an operational response from national security agencies, party leaders could be notified after the fact.
- Individual classified briefings would be offered to party leaders exclusively and would be delivered in person in a secure location in Ottawa. This format would allow increased awareness of those key elected officials while protecting classified and personal information. PCO would coordinate the briefings, which would involve senior representation from CSIS and the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), and would take place every four months, or as needed.
- PCO would advise your office of the dates and topics in advance of the briefings. The first briefing would offer an overview of the intelligence community's activities,

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processes and priorities, and would then focus on the foreign interference threat, including in past federal elections. Future briefings would prioritize the most pressing national security topics of the day, potentially including foreign interference and ideologically motivated violent extremism.

- If you agree with this proposal, please sign the enclosed letters to opposition leaders that lays out the initiative, and explains the clearance process as the mechanism to offer them classified briefings. PCO will engage with opposition leaders' offices to ensure that security clearance paperwork is properly filled out and submitted. Upon confirmation of clearances, PCO will coordinate the briefings, in consultation with your office.

### **Considerations**

- As lawmakers and politicians, all Parliamentarians are at risk of being targeted by foreign interference actors and, increasingly, by domestic extremism, as are many of their constituents.
- Should this initiative move forward, party leaders would first have to undergo a security clearance process, the outcome of which cannot be pre-determined. As well, while they would be briefed on receiving and handling classified information, they could claim immunity based on parliamentary privilege were they to divulge classified information during House of Common proceedings.
- Based on the experience of the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force in the context of previous federal elections, some party leaders may choose not to accept an invitation to classified briefings. Nevertheless, offering these briefings to opposition leaders would reiterate our commitment to transparency.
- This approach could also allow classified reports from NSICOP, the National Intelligence and Intelligence Review Agency (NSIRA) and the Independent Special Rapporteur to be shared with party leaders.

Janice Charette

### Attachments

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