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Public Inquiry Into Foreign Interference  
in Federal Electoral Processes and  
Democratic Institutions

Enquête publique sur l'ingérence étrangère  
dans les processus électoraux et les  
institutions démocratiques fédéraux

## Interview Summary: Marta Morgan, Natalie Drouin, Gina Wilson

Three members of the 2019 **Panel of Five (the “Panel”)** were interviewed by Commission Counsel on February 14, 2024. The witnesses were Marta Morgan, Nathalie Drouin, and Gina Wilson.

### Notes to Reader:

- Commission Counsel have provided explanatory notes in square brackets to assist the reader.
- This summary has been produced in reliance on subclause (a)(iii)(C)(II) of the Commission’s Terms of Reference. It discloses the evidence pertinent to clauses (a)(i)(A) and (B) of the Commission’s Terms of Reference that, in the opinion of the Commissioner, would not be injurious to the critical interests of Canada or its allies, national defence or national security.
- This summary contains information that relates to the Commission’s mandate under clauses (a)(i)(A) and (B) of its Terms of Reference. Information provided during the examination that relates to other aspects of the Commission’s Terms of Reference has been omitted from this summary, but may be adduced by the Commission at a later stage of its proceedings.
- This summary should be read with the Unclassified Institutional Reports prepared by the Government of Canada and the Interview Summary prepared following the interview with officials from the 2021 Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force.

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## 1. Background

- [1] The 2019 Panel of Five (the “Panel”) was a group of five senior public servants brought together under the **Critical Election Incident Public Protocol (the “Protocol”)** during the writ period to monitor the integrity of the **43rd General Election (the “Election”)**.
- [2] The Panel’s mandate was to monitor for incidents that had the potential to impact the integrity of the Election and to determine whether any such incident met the “threshold” to make a public announcement. The Protocol established the “threshold” as follows: “a public announcement during the writ period would only occur if the Panel determines that an incident or an accumulation of incidents has occurred that threatens Canada’s ability to have a free and fair election.”
- [3] The Panel was comprised of: The Clerk of the Privy Council, who acted as Chair, the **National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister (“NSIA”)**, the **Deputy Minister (“DM”)** of Justice and the Deputy Attorney General, the DM of Public Safety, and the DM of Foreign Affairs.
- [4] The Panel received regular briefings from the **Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force (“SITE TF”)** and national security agencies on emerging national security threats and potential threats to the integrity of the Election. During the Election, the Panel members were as follows:
- a) Marta Morgan, who was Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs;
  - b) Nathalie Drouin, who was Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General;
  - c) Gina Wilson, who was Deputy Minister of Public Safety from May 31, 2019 until September 9, 2019. Monik Beauregard, an Assistant Deputy Minister of Public Safety, replaced Ms. Wilson as a member of the Panel of Five for the remainder of the 2019 election period. Ms. Beauregard was interviewed at a later date;
  - d) Greta Bossenmaier, who was the NSIA. [Ms. Bossenmaier was examined during an *in camera* hearing held in March 2024];

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e) Ian Shugart, who was Clerk of the Privy Council. Mr. Shugart has since passed away.

[5] The Panel made decisions on a consensus basis. The Chair of the Panel did not have a veto.

## 2. Structure and Operation of the Panel

[6] Ms. Drouin explained that key international events, mainly the United States 2016 Presidential Election and the "Macron leaks" during the 2017 French Presidential Election, underscored Canada's need to protect and defend its electoral systems and processes. As a result, the Government of Canada established the Panel through the **Cabinet Directive on the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol ("Cabinet Directive")** in June 2019. The best way to equip voters, Ms. Drouin added, is to inform them of incidents that threaten Canada's ability to have a free and fair election.

[7] Ms. Drouin explained that before sitting on the Panel, in her role as Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General, she was not receiving national security intelligence on a regular basis before sitting on the Panel. Ian Shugart, then Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary of the Cabinet and Chair of the Panel, made clear that her role as a sitting member of the Panel was to bring a justice lens to the decision-making table and to bring her view as an "outsider" to the **Security and Intelligence ("S&I")** community.

[8] Ms. Wilson explained that as Deputy Minister of Public Safety, she consumed a great deal of national security intelligence daily. She leveraged her experience when exercising her judgement as a Panel member.

[9] Ms. Morgan had been a regular consumer of national security intelligence in her previous Deputy Minister role, albeit not directly related to election interference before her appointment as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs in May 2019. After her appointment, she sought briefings from the **Canadian Security and Intelligence Service ("CSIS")** and from the **Rapid Response Mechanism Canada ("RRM Canada")** team to inform her role on the Panel.

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### 3. Panel Meetings

- [10] The three interviewees explained that the main goal of the Panel's first meetings was to allow the members to develop a common understanding of the Cabinet Directive. They wanted to build internal consensus around the Panel's role in applying the threshold within the existing structures designed to protect Canada's election and democratic processes. They also acquainted themselves with the roles and responsibilities of other key players like SITE TF and Elections Canada, given that this was the first election in which the structure established by the Protocol operated. Ms. Morgan emphasized that their preliminary discussions were really "grounded" in the Cabinet Directive, their foundational document.
- [11] The interviewees agreed that the Panel's early meetings centered on the appropriate interpretation of the threshold. Ms. Drouin explained that following these discussions, Panel members worked through hypothetical scenarios to determine, as a group, whether the threshold had been met. These scenarios included "injects" which added changing elements to various scenarios. These scenarios were intended to help the Panel build consensus around the appropriate implementation of the threshold.
- [12] The Panel also received preliminary briefings on "baseline information" from the SITE TF, from the heads of the national security agencies (CSIS and the **Communications Security Establishment (CSE)**) and from the **Democratic Institutions Secretariat at the Privy Council Office ("PCO") ("PCO-DI")** (led by Allen Sutherland). They were briefed on the threat level and on various tactics used by foreign actors to conduct **foreign interference ("FI")**, including human intimidation, cyber threats, and mis / disinformation.
- [13] The Panel learned that the People's Republic of China ("PRC") was a sophisticated player. Ms. Morgan shared that the Panel was also given information on Russia and its ability to engage in cyber attacks and conduct disinformation campaigns on social media.
- [14] The Panel also met with the Chief Electoral Officer early in their mandate to determine how the Panel would engage with Elections Canada, and to discuss each body's roles and responsibilities.

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#### 4. Protocol and Threshold

- [15] The Panel interpreted the threshold for informing the public of a threat to an election to be very high. The members were aligned on interpretation. Ms. Drouin explained that any public intervention from the Panel during an election had the potential to be seen as the Panel exerting “influence” or “picking a side”. She added that the Panel required a “pretty high confidence” that foreign interference was being conducted. When interpreting the threshold, Ms. Wilson explained that the members all read incoming intelligence differently, based on their respective backgrounds.
- [16] The Panel did not come to a conclusion/consensus as to whether the impact of the incident(s) on the election should be considered on a riding by riding basis or on a national basis. The Panel considered incidents of FI at the riding level, but they were not confronted with an incident of alleged FI that came close to reaching the threshold, even at the riding level. The Panel therefore did not have to confront the issue.
- [17] Ms. Drouin acknowledged that it is difficult to assess the impact of FI on an election. It is extremely challenging to assess whether a particular tactic impacted a voters’ intentions, and how many voters may have been impacted, given that there are many variables to assess the reasons for someone’s vote.
- [18] When assessing the degree of confidence officials have in the intelligence information, Ms. Drouin explained that the Panel looked for elements of corroboration, amongst other things. They were mindful of how the CSIS Director, David Vigneault, described his level of confidence in the intelligence. The Panel members could also ask Mr. Vigneault or other heads of agencies for more information.
- [19] Ms. Drouin explained that an “ecosystem” already exists to protect Canada’s election and democratic processes. The Panel monitors the ecosystem throughout the election period, which includes, amongst other things, the S&I Community, Elections Canada, and civil society, and assesses whether the ecosystem can correct itself in response to an identified issue. The Panel can suggest that the security agencies engage in discussions on possible measures that ought to be taken, but as a Panel do not have the authority to direct them. The Protocol noted the existing authorities of the national security agencies

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and their role during the writ period. A Panel public announcement is a measure of "last resort".

## 5. Flow of Information

### 5.1 Pre-Writ / Writ Period

- [20] The Panel operated only during the election itself (the writ period), even though their initial meetings occurred before the writ period. The Cabinet Directive puts into practice the principle, known as the "caretaker convention", that the government is expected to exercise restraint in its activities during the election period, except where a routine decision or "urgent" action that is in the "national interest" needs to be taken. Ms. Drouin explained that the flow of information to Ministers is usually significantly reduced during the writ period as the Ministers are expected to limit themselves to routine decisions and addressing emergencies. This results from convention and the risk is in the political realm, not in the legal realm. Ministers can always decide to do something even when the advice is that they should not.
- [21] The Panel's role is to ensure that incidents of FI that have a significant effect on the integrity of the election are addressed through a public announcement when the threshold set out in the Protocol is met. Because the 2019 election was a fixed date general election, the Panel engaged in pre-writ communications on its mandate and the preparations that needed to be put in place prior to the election. By contrast, the date of the 2021 election was not fixed. In 2021, the Panel therefore had a less defined window in which to prepare and communicate with the public about the Protocol.
- [22] Panel members received relevant information through daily SITE TF briefings, which were provided to them directly, and through briefings at the Panel's weekly meetings. To the best of their recollection, the interviewees remembered receiving some of the intelligence underlying SITE TF's daily reporting, called **SITREPs** (e.g., CSIS intelligence products). The members could always ask questions and request additional intelligence.
- [23] Generally, Panel meetings began with weekly updates from the SITE TF or from the national security agencies. The CSIS Director often briefed the Panel with the SITE TF. Panel members did not receive written copies of the Director's talking points for his oral

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briefings, which may not have aligned exactly with what he shared verbally. Ms. Drouin opined that it would have been helpful to have received a written copy of these notes.

[24] After the initial briefings, the Panel generally asked questions and identified areas to monitor or discuss at future meetings. After the briefings, the SITE TF or agency representatives would leave the meeting so that the Panel could deliberate alone, accompanied only by Allen Sutherland from PCO-DI and PCO Communications. The briefings became more detailed in the lead-up to the writ dropping. Ms. Wilson recalled that the Panel was receiving more information on a specific riding in Toronto, Don Valley North, and Pakistan.

[25] The Panel did not reach out to anyone beyond the SITE TF, CSIS or CSE to obtain further information about potential FI. As Ms. Drouin explained, these were already the key players engaged in protecting Canada's election and democratic processes. Through the NSIA, the panelists had a relationship with the **Deputy Ministers Operations Committee ("DMOC")**. The Panel did not have a direct link with the **Deputy Ministers Elections Security Coordination Committee (DM ESCC)**, nor did the Panel engage directly with political parties, although others did. After the writ was issued, the Panel continued to discuss and assess numerous hypothetical scenarios in order to consider, as a group, where the threshold lies.

## 6. Specific Incidents

### 6.1. Eleven Candidates

[26] Panel members could not recall whether they had seen certain CSIS documents relating to an alleged network of eleven candidates conducting FI activities in Toronto. Ms. Drouin did not recall hearing the name of an individual named in these documents before the 2023 media leaks. The Panel was aware of allegations that there was some financial support for candidates in Toronto in 2019, but the Panel did not attribute the activities to a "network". Ms. Drouin did not recall hearing about the eleven candidates before the leaks.

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## 6.2. Don Valley North

[27] The Panel recalled discussing allegations of FI in the nomination process in Don Valley North. They noted that the name of the candidate involved in those allegations was not used in their briefings.

[28] The Panel members also considered whether alleged interference in a nomination process fell within their mandate. Ms. Drouin believed that issues in the nomination process were more of a consideration for the affected political party, not for the Panel. The Panel agreed that the allegations around Don Valley North, were, at that time, the closest illustration of the PRC's attempts to interfere in the Election.

## 6.3. The Buffalo Chronicle

[29] The Panel devoted considerable time to discussing the media disinformation about Prime Minister Trudeau being published in the Buffalo Chronicle. This incident was an example of a situation that the Panel monitored, and which fell below the threshold. The Panel learned about mainstream media efforts to debunk the story through RRM Canada briefings, and felt that the situation had ultimately resolved itself without their intervention. They agreed with the description that this was a positive example of the ecosystem "cleansing itself". From the Panel's perspective this incident did not require further attention.