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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

## In Camera Examination Summary: Mr. Rob Stewart

Mr. Rob Stewart was examined by Commission counsel during *in camera* hearings held between February 28 and March 6, 2024. Counsel for the Attorney General of Canada appeared on behalf of the Government of Canada and had the opportunity to examine the witness. The hearing was held in the absence of the public and other Participants.

### 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 in conjunction with the Public Safety Institutional Report prepared by the Government of Canada and the unclassified interview summary prepared by Commission Counsel.

### Examination by Commission Counsel

- [1] Mr. Stewart confirmed the accuracy of the classified summary of the interview that Commission counsel conducted with him and Dominic Rochon on February 6, 2024. He adopted the document as part of his evidence before the Commission.

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## Introduction

- [2] **Public Safety Canada (“PS”)** is a department that reports to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. It is divided into several policy areas, including national security, emergency management, and domestic law enforcement.
- [3] Mr. Stewart was appointed **Deputy Minister (“DM”)** of PS in December 2019, succeeding Gina Wilson and Monik Beauregard, who was acting Deputy Minister. He served in this role until October 21, 2022. As DM, Mr. Stewart managed the department and supported the policy work associated with PS’s portfolio of institutions. These institutions include the Parole Board of Canada, the **Canada Border Services Agency (“CBSA”)**, the **Canadian Security Intelligence Service (“CSIS”)**, the **Correctional Service of Canada (“CSC”)**, and the **Royal Canadian Mounted Police (“RCMP”)**. Before working at Public Safety, he worked for 27 years at the Department of Finance. He is currently the DM of International Trade.
- [4] The DM’s role is to manage the Department and the work of the Department, which is policy development associated with the portfolio agencies. Mr. Stewart noted that the Deputy Heads of each portfolio agencies are equivalent in rank to the DM of Public Safety, and each report independently to the Minister of Public Safety. However, he noted that the Deputy Heads all work closely with the Department to achieve their goals and, where necessary, to develop legislation and policy to modify their mandates.
- [5] Mr. Stewart noted that the DM maintains oversight over the portfolio, and to facilitate the operation of the independent portfolio agencies, such that they can execute on their mandates. For that reason, the DM cultivates an effective working relationship with those deputy heads in order to ensure that their organizations are working effectively with the Department. Although he was not a spokesperson for the agencies, or interpreting what the agencies were doing, he was involved in conversations between the agencies and the Minister. Where the Minister asked, the DM could express a view about what the agencies were doing and the issues they were facing.
- [6] Mr. Stewart clarified that there was no reporting relationship between the agencies and the DM and that he, as DM, had no authority over them, including CSIS.

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- [7] Mr. Stewart was asked how his relationship with the Minister of Public Safety differed from the relationship between the Minister and the heads of portfolio agencies. Mr. Stewart answered that he closer to the Minister of Public Safety, though during COVID, “close” was different than in the past. Specifically, face to face meetings with the Minister were less frequent and the Ministers sometimes worked from Toronto. However, he had a privileged ability to contact the Minister and their Chief of Staff.
- [8] Mr. Stewart noted that there is no standard way to deal with a Minister and their staff, and that it varies depending on the Minister and the staff. As a result, Mr. Stewart had a different relationship with former Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Bill Blair and his staff than he did former Minister of Public Safety Marco Mendicino and his staff. He described Minister Mendicino as more “hands-on” than Minister Blair, but that there was no significant difference in his relationships with the two Ministers. He saw his principal role to be to serve the Ministers and make sure they were getting their job done. He tried to work closely with the Chiefs of Staff to ensure that the Ministers were well supported and that there was a flow of information and advice from the department to the Ministers.
- [9] Mr. Stewart also noted that circumstances also varied between the Ministers, due to the challenging roles of the Public Service portfolio agencies. He described it as a constant cycle of managing changing issues in the public domain.

## Intelligence Flow in PS

### General Flow of Intelligence

- [10] The **National Cyber Security Branch (“NCSB”)** was the nexus for the receipt of intelligence within PS. The NCSB had direct access to CSIS and **Communications Security Establishment (“CSE”)** intelligence repositories, as well as access to **Privy Council Office (“PCO”)**-generated intelligence assessments. The NCSB is located in a secure environment and intelligence would flow from there to elsewhere within the department.
- [11] Mr. Stewart and the Minister would each receive a binder of printed intelligence, which included intelligence from CSIS and CSE as well as intelligence assessments from

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international partners like the Five Eyes. The National Security Operations Division (“NSOD”), a unit within NCSB, decided what went to the Minister.

- [12] In terms of how the Minister was provided with intelligence, the NSOD would prepare a binder, put it in a secure bag, carry it to the Minister’s office, and give it to the Minister’s chief of staff. Mr. Stewart did not, generally, see the Minister’s binder, or have any conversations with the Minister or the Minister’s chief of staff about the specific contents of the binder. It would have been the exception for Mr. Stewart to have had any conversation about that intelligence, though where it reached a level of importance, it would generally result in a request for a brief, either by CSIS or the Minister requesting, which he would usually attend. As a result, Mr. Stewart could never say for sure whether the Minister had seen or read any individual piece of intelligence, though he received a copy of all reports that were sent to the Minister. Mr. Stewart understood that the binder he received contained more material than the Minister, due to the need to be judicious given the Minister’s busy schedule.
- [13] Mr. Stewart noted that, if there were concerns or issues arising from the intelligence, he would expect that the Director of CSIS would raise those directly with the Minister. It was not his role, as DM, to raise concerns about intelligence directly with the Minister, though in rare circumstances he might flag intelligence in the context of another conversation.
- [14] Briefings were requested either by the Minister or by CSIS. He usually attended those briefings, in part to ensure the Minister’s awareness of ongoing related PS policy work and provide current context with respect to the agency delivering the briefing, such as recent legal issues before the courts.
- [15] Mr. Stewart estimated that he received about 12 to 20 intelligence products in a binder every two to three days, so forty to fifty documents every week. These documents would have been triaged by NSOD. He noted that the binders would include reporting from many sources. The CSIS reporting would cover all the principal hostile actors, with China having the most flow, but there was a lot about Iran, Russia and other hostile states. As they were proceeding through 2021, there was an increasing volume of information on ideologically motivated violent extremism, which includes both a US and a domestic

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dimension. CSE reporting would be more eclectic, as it would be derived from signals intercepts from around the world.

- [16] Mr. Stewart was unaware of the specific metrics used by NSOD to determine what would be included in his binder. However, he believed that NSOD made these decisions based on its awareness of the department's activities and policy interests and in consultation with the National Security Policy Directorate.
- [17] In addition to the binders received from NSOD, Mr. Stewart would also receive intelligence from a **Client Relations Officer ("CRO")** from CSE, who would bring him a package of reports which would be taken away after he reviewed it. The CRO would also be able to sort through CSE's intelligence to reflect Mr. Stewart's interests.
- [18] He also noted that he received assessments from the Intelligence Assessment Secretariat [at PCO], which produces an extensive range of issue notes on topics like hostile activities of state actors, threats to economic security and geopolitical and geo-economic assessments about other countries and Canada.
- [19] Mr. Stewart described the range of products available from CSIS as including raw intelligence, issue management notes, assessed intelligence and broader reports and placemats. On occasion, intelligence was directed specifically to him by CSIS. He noted that CSE had a similar but smaller range of products, including raw reports of signals intercepts and assessed intelligence.
- [20] Mr. Stewart described FI as not being a "dominant" issue during his tenure, given the many other events and issues happening around the world. Asked for his best estimate as to the proportion of the intelligence he was seeing that related to FI, Mr. Stewart suggested it would have represented "much less" than 25% of the intelligence that he received.
- [21] Mr. Stewart did not think that COVID had a significant impact on the way in which intelligence was being delivered to him. There were fewer people in buildings, but the flow of intelligence, from his perspective, was continuous. Although much of the Department's employees were working remotely, NSOD staff were able to attend in-person to prepare the binders. Mr. Stewart also noted that CSIS was still working in-person through COVID.

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## Tracking Flow of Intelligence

- [22] Mr. Stewart was asked to speak to comments made at page 3 of the Public Safety Interview Summary, in which he and Dominic Rochon stated that “there was no formal system to bring information forward or otherwise act on it,” that, “[a]t the relevant time, there was no system or individual responsible for tracking foreign interference-related activities,” and that the position of Counter-Foreign Interference Coordinator had subsequently been established to help address these issues.
- [23] Mr. Stewart clarified that PS does not have operational lead on intelligence issues. To the extent that specific action needed to be taken in response to intelligence, that would be done by other actors within the system who were operationally responsible. Public Safety had a role in chairing operational committees, but the Department’s role would be to oversee the coordination of that issue, but not to take action or direct others to take action.
- [24] Mr. Stewart noted that the intelligence flow through PS was for their situational awareness and to support the policy work of the department, which was to develop legislation and policy on the systems and frameworks used to deal with national security issues. These issues included how to better coordinate a system, ensure information awareness, and ensure that those responsible for the “so what” of intelligence would receive the information they needed to take action, which is what prompted the establishment of the position of Counter-Foreign Intelligence Coordinator.
- [25] Mr. Stewart described the Department’s role as a convenor of other departments and agencies dealing with national security. Due to the broad set of interested government institutions, that includes not just the national security community but also the economic and social institutions of government, Mr. Stewart stated that PS is very conscious of the challenges of coordinating across the departmental community.

## Interdepartmental Committees

- [26] Mr. Stewart described the following Deputy Minister-level interdepartmental committees:
- a) **DM Committee on Operational Coordination (“DMOC”)**: DMOC is the most senior committee. It is chaired by the **National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister (“NSIA”)** and dealt with issues of operational concern. The committee met at least weekly, depending on the circumstances. DMOC was

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supported by an ADM-level committee which helped inform and prepare DMOC participants [ADM National Security Operations Committee].

- b) **DM National Security Committee (“DMNS”)**: Mr. Stewart co-chaired the DMNS committee with the NSIA. DMNS was focused on policy issues relating to national security. It met every six to eight weeks, and was supported by the ADM National Security Policy Committee.
- c) **DM Cyber Committee (“DM Cyber”)**: Mr. Stewart co-chaired the DM Cyber Committee alongside the head of CSE. DM Cyber was concerned with cyber security and working on a policy framework to protect the Government and Canadian citizens from cyber risk.
- d) **DM Intelligence Review Committee (“DMIRC”)**: DMIRC was created to talk about in-depth intelligence. It met about once per month and had a fairly narrow ambit.
- e) **DM Review Coordination Committee (“DMRCC”)**: DMRCC was created to coordinate and manage the interactions with the National Security Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians and the National Security Intelligence Review Agency.

[27] Mr. Stewart discussed the creation of the Deputy Ministers Intelligence Committee (DMIC) by then-NSA Vincent Rigby. The committee’s original objective was to focus on the intelligence that really mattered and bring it to the fore across the government. It evolved into a body that also discussed the quality of the intelligence and the results of certain assessments.

#### The Different Uses of Intelligence

[28] Mr. Stewart was asked about his prior reference to the “so what” of intelligence. He clarified that he meant distilling intelligence to a degree of relative assuredness about what threats existed or what events were taking place, and determining what actions the government could or should take to address them.

[29] Mr. Stewart also distinguished “building block” intelligence from “actionable” intelligence. He described “Building block” intelligence as raw, time-specific intelligence whose reliability is subject to question, whereas “actionable” intelligence is the transition into a

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product that has enough of specific information that it can be relied on to inform a response.

- [30] Mr. Stewart was also asked to speak about the concept of “Hostile Activities of State Actors” (HASA), which was the term used by Public Safety in their policy work. He clarified that the term “HASA” embraces more activities than just foreign interference. It also includes the different types of risks associated with hostile state actors, including cyber risks and cyber activity as well as economic activity where there are attempts to obtain ownership or control over issues of economic importance to Canada.
- [31] Mr. Stewart noted that the HASA policy that the Department was working on was designed to address such issues, including FI. It included policy, legislation, the governance system, and package was conceived by addressing hostile actors as being active over a variety of areas and issues.

#### Specific Issues Related to Intelligence

- [32] Mr. Stewart was referred to a CSIS assessment that outlined allegations of FI related to the covert activities of several individuals, and asked how that informed the Department’s work on HASA. Mr. Stewart noted that the assessment distilled various pieces of intelligence and concluded with a high degree of assurance there was a risk of FI. Mr. Stewart stated that this assessment validated the policy work they were doing on these issues, as well as informing that policy work.
- [33] Mr. Stewart also saw the assessment as grounds for supporting the Director in his briefings of the Minister and his efforts to address CSIS’ issues around the modernization of their powers. He noted that the CSIS Director was, from the beginning, extremely concerned about foreign interference and was continuously trying to bring it forward in the system as an issue that should be addressed.
- [34] Mr. Stewart said that he took note of issue management briefs because they identified where CSIS was going to take action or an issue CSIS intended to address. Because he received intelligence mostly for his information and awareness, he interpreted an IMU as identifying something CSIS wanted the Minister to know, but they were not of high importance to him.



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Examination by Counsel for the Government of Canada

[35] Mr. Stewart further explained the degree of assurance he had with the CSIS assessment referenced earlier in his testimony.