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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

Public Summary of the Classified Interview of: CSIS Regions Officials

Senior officials representing three of the regional offices of the **Canadian Security Intelligence Service (“CSIS” or the “Service”)** were interviewed in a panel format by Commission counsel on February 20, 2024. The interview was held in a secure environment and included references to classified information. This is the public version of the classified interview summary that was entered into evidence in the course of the Commission’s *in camera* hearings held in February and March 2024.

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 interview 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 CSIS Institutional Report prepared by the Government of Canada and the public summaries of the *in camera* examinations of CSIS witnesses.

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Background¹

Bo Basler is the **Counter Foreign Interference Coordinator (“CFIC”)** for **CSIS**. Before he was CFIC, he held positions as the Deputy Director General Operations in the CSIS Prairie Regional Office, and then as the Director General of the CSIS **British Columbia (“B.C.”)** Regional Office.

Witness 2 is the Director General for the CSIS Toronto Regional Office. Witness 2 previously served as Deputy Director General Operations for the CSIS Toronto Regional Office.

Witness 3 is the Director General of the CSIS Prairie Office. Witness 3 previously served as the Acting Director General and Deputy Director General Operations Support for the CSIS Prairie Regional Office.

Structure of Regional Offices

B.C. Regional Office

Mr. Basler provided a detailed account of the structure, resources and areas of operations of the CSIS B.C. Regional Office including resources related to countering **foreign interference (“FI”)** threats.

The B.C. Regional Office also has units dealing with India-related matters.

Prairie Regional Office

Witness 3 provided a detailed account of the structure, resources and areas of operations of the Prairie Regional Office. Witness 3 noted that the Prairie Regional Office was structured similar to the B.C. Regional Office. The Prairie Regional Office is responsible for the Three Prairie Provinces and for the Northwest Territories. Witness 3 spoke of the region’s resource allocation related to countering foreign interference threats.

Toronto Regional Office

Witness 2 provided a detailed account of the structure, resources and areas of operations of the Toronto Regional Office.

¹ The identity of these witnesses must remain secret for national and personal security reasons.

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Witness 2 estimated that, during the 2019 and 2021 federal elections, a larger proportion of TR's operations were dedicated to elections-related matters.

Witness 2 explained that, within the Toronto Regional Office, specific employees focus on foreign adversarial states.

Regional Offices and CSIS Headquarters ("HQ")

The interviewees were asked to describe interactions between the regional offices and HQ, and to describe regional office participation in HQ-related matters.

Interactions between the regions and CSIS HQ

Mr. Basler and Witness 3 explained that the regional offices and HQ interact regularly. In addition, the regional offices have regular, virtual or in-person, meetings and exchanges among themselves.

Witness 2 explained that at the Deputy Director General level, there are regular meetings to discuss trends and other intelligence. In addition, the Regional and HQ Directors General meet together bi-weekly, and also with their manager, the Assistant Director, Collection, on a weekly basis. There are no barriers to information sharing during these meetings.

Witness 2 explained that regional reporting is always sent to HQ, but if a report pertains to another region, it will also be flagged to that region. Mr. Basler added that all regional reporting goes into an electronic repository that can be accessed by individuals with the appropriate clearances. Reports can be flagged for attention of particular units, and individuals can also independently search for relevant information within the repository.

Witness 2 was asked to comment on an email chain indicating some disagreement between the Toronto Regional Office and CSIS HQ about the timing of CSIS HQ's generation of intelligence products from FI-related operational reports provided by Toronto Region. Witness 2 did not know why CSIS HQ declined to incorporate the Toronto Region intelligence referenced in this email chain in intelligence reports and to disseminate them within government.

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Witness 2 explained that CSIS HQ is responsible for providing intelligence to the Government of Canada clients and establishing the policy and priorities for sharing intelligence. CSIS HQ views intelligence through a national lens, while the regions tend to focus on intelligence collected and reported within their own region. There are occasional disagreements between the regions and HQ about what intelligence to circulate in a CSIS Intelligence Report ("CIR"). Such disagreements are not uncommon or unique to the FI file.

In Witness 2's view, dialogue between the regions and HQ is a sign that the system is working well. Internal debate is necessary for CSIS to do its job effectively. Witness 2 noted that in the past, CSIS was criticized for a culture of "group think". Witness 2 opined that increased internal dialogues respecting how to approach investigations shows that criticism to be wrong. They also explained that the creation of region specific working groups, described in greater detail below, brought more cohesion between the regions and HQ.

Witness 2 noted movement of employees between HQ and the regions was quite common and even required, in some instances, by CSIS policy before the pandemic. While movement has decreased since the pandemic, conferences, temporary placement of regional staff to HQ to work with their counterparts, and other types of cross-pollination foster open channels of communication between regions and HQ.

ADR Directorate

To improve communications between intelligence officers [individuals responsible for the collection of intelligence] and intelligence analysts [individuals responsible for analyzing the collected intelligence], Mr. Basler explained that CSIS has created working groups responsible for threat activity related to a specific topic or geographic region. These groups combine the operational and analytical functions related to intelligence, and permit intelligence officers and analysts to work together.

Witness 3 added that the Regions send their intelligence to the working groups, who analyse and prepare the intelligence products in formats suitable for Government of Canada consumers.

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Witness 2 explained that the working groups have both intelligence officers and analysts, enabling the members to understand the others' roles, ultimately feeding into both intelligence collection and intelligence analysis.

Regional Participation in Policy and Priority Development with HQ

Witness 2 explained that CSIS HQ develops intelligence requirements, which establish what intelligence the regions should collect. The regions determine how to collect the required intelligence (methods, strategies, etc.). Intelligence priorities originate in Cabinet, are operationalized through Ministerial Directives to CSIS, which then result in direction from CSIS HQ, and finally collection of intelligence through the regions.

Witness 3 noted that intelligence collection differs depending on the region's specific concerns.

Mr. Basler noted that, although priorities come from senior levels of government, the intelligence collected on the ground informs reporting, which is circulated to Government of Canada consumers, who then inform senior officials, who help to set the intelligence priorities.

Regional Offices and Other Partners

Government Organizations

Mr. Basler explained that generally, CSIS HQ handles relations with other Government of Canada bodies (e.g. federal departments, work with CSE, etc.). One exception is CSIS' relationship with the **Royal Canadian Mounted Police ("RCMP")**. While CSIS HQ manages the national relationship with the RCMP, the CSIS Regional Offices also have direct bilateral relationships with the RCMP through **Integrated National Security Enforcement Teams ("INSETs")**. INSETs are made up of RCMP personnel who investigate criminal offences linked to national security, including FI, assisted by CSIS personnel. INSETs are managed regionally.

Witness 2 added that the Toronto Regional Office sometimes interacts with CSE directly. The Toronto Regional Office also deals directly with the **Canadian Border Security Agency ("CBSA")**, the RCMP, the provincial government, and provincial and local police forces.

UNCLASSIFIED**Allies and Intelligence Partners**

Witness 2 explained that the Toronto Regional Office occasionally liaises with allied intelligence agencies, although most interactions with these agencies occur through CSIS HQ. Witness 2 noted that, with the involvement of CSIS HQ, the Toronto Regional Office has met with, and worked with, American partners.

Mr. Basler added that the B.C. Regional Office also works with their American counterparts.

Witness 2 explained that the Regional Offices would not normally work with allies or foreign partners on FI-related matters, given the sensitive nature of FI-related intelligence. FI-related information may affect Canada's global relations, its position on the global stage, and the safety of Canadian sources. For this reason, the Regional Offices handle FI-related matters with extreme sensitivity and seldom communicate the specifics of Canadian FI issues to foreign agencies.

Activities During Elections

Mr. Basler noted that during elections all regions had to work on a condensed turnaround time for reporting on incidents arising during the elections. This timeline was unusual.

Threat Reduction Measures and Protective Security Briefings**Generally**

Mr. Basler spoke on **Threat Reduction Measures ("TRMs")** generally. Mr. Basler described the internal process to develop and implement a TRM.

Mr. Basler noted that a TRM will be implemented by different offices depending on the context. Normally, if the TRM originates from a particular region, that region will implement it. However, if, for example, the TRM requires that a senior official who works in Ottawa be briefed, then someone from HQ may conduct the briefing.

Witness 2 added that generally, the regions will conduct defensive or protective security briefings for **Members of Parliament (MPs)**, unless the MP is in Ottawa. In that case, someone from the Capital Region will conduct the briefing. Mr. Basler noted that such briefings, which were named "protective" or "defensive" security briefings, warn MPs of FI

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threats in general terms and use only unclassified information. Mr. Basler distinguished those briefings from briefings undertaken as part of TRMs, which require the TRM process to approve the disclosure of classified information in the course of the briefing.

Mr. Basler explained that there is no FI-specific TRM “toolkit”. Mr. Basler explained the different types of TRMs and their intended objectives.

Liberal Party Briefing on FI during 2021 election

The interviewees were asked about a specific briefing given to cleared Liberal Party of Canada representatives by the **Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force (“SITE TF”)** during the 2021 election.

Intelligence Collection

Foreign states involved in FI

The Witnesses indicated that India, while a clear second to PRC in terms of the level of FI threat, was an area of focus for more than one regional office. Whereas the PRC’s objectives revolve around gaining influence globally, India is interested in issues that relate specifically to its own interests. All interviewees agreed that the FI by India was corrosive to Canadian democratic processes and to regional community cohesion.

PRC

Mr. Basler explained that in 2019, candidates the PRC disliked received little to no coverage in Chinese-language news media, and would not be invited to Chinese-Canadian community events. The PRC’s strategy was to make these candidates unappealing by rendering them unknown, while heavily promoting the PRC’s favoured candidates. By 2021, the PRC’s strategy had evolved, from passive shunning to active reputational attacks. For example, as in the case of Kenny Chiu, candidates that were not favoured by the PRC were labelled as racist or anti-Chinese.

Han Dong

Witness 2 noted that the Don Valley North riding was a stronghold of the LPC. As such, the main race was for the nomination, not the federal election itself. The rules for the nomination process are governed by each political party, not the federal election.

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Witness 2 explained that before the 2019 election, MP Tan Geng, who was believed to be viewed positively by the PRC, represented the riding. Witness 2 explained that the nomination vote in which Mr. Dong was named as the LPC candidate may have been characterized by several irregularities.