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Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force

Threats to the Canadian Federal
By-elections – July 2023

Canada 

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Background

On June 18, 2023, the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities (now the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs), announced that the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force (SITE TF) was to provide enhanced monitoring and assessment of foreign interference (FI) threats directed at the Calgary Heritage electoral district by-election being held on July 24, 2023. (U)

The SITE TF met weekly between June 18, 2023 and July 28, 2023 to review and discuss intelligence collection, assessment, and open-source analysis related to FI directed at the by-election. As noted in the June 18, 2023 announcement, the focus of the SITE TF during the by-election period was to assess FI threats; however, the SITE TF also committed to report any observations of threats of violent extremism relating to the by-election. The SITE TF provided weekly situation reports (SITREPS) on both FI and violent extremism threats directed at the by-election to the Deputy Minister Committee on Intelligence Response (DMCIR) from June 30 until July 28, 2023.

Scope and resources

This report covers the SITE TF observations of foreign threat actors' intentions and activities relating to FI as well as any observations of threats of violent extremism directed at the Calgary Heritage by-election with voting held on July 24, 2023. It is based on analysis, reporting and observations – from both classified and unclassified sources – reviewed from June 18, 2023 until July 26, 2023.

SITE TF members and role

The SITE TF consists of representatives from the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS). The SITE TF's role is to help safeguard Canadian federal elections from FI by:

- Providing a clear point of engagement with the security and intelligence community for Government partners engaged in related work.
- Reviewing and focusing intelligence collection, assessment, and open-source analysis related to FI in Canada's democratic process in a coordinated manner.
- Providing situational awareness for Government partners, senior public servants, and other relevant partners.

- Promoting the use of intelligence, assessment, and open-source information analysis in the protection of electoral processes through sharing with partners or, when respective mandates permit, take action to mitigate the threat.

Cyber Security

As the Government of Canada's (GoC) technical authority for cyber security and information assurance and an integral member of the SITE TF, the CSE's Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (the Cyber Centre) supported the federal by-election by:

- Providing the political parties with advice and guidance during a SITE briefing, which was held during the by-election period for the by-elections which took place on June 19, 2023, including an overview of common cyber threats and best practices for IT security.
- Providing enhanced monitoring of cyber incidents for Elections Canada from June 18, 2023 until July 26, 2023.
- Offering political parties a 24/7 Hotline Service to obtain centralized support if party or candidate communications, email, or social media accounts were compromised. The 24/7 Hotline Service will continue to be available to political parties for reporting of cyber incidents until one month after the election. Use of the Hotline triggers an immediate response to minimize damage and restore normal operations.

Foreign Interference

The SITE TF defines foreign interference as: "activity conducted or supported by a foreign state/actor that is detrimental to Canadian national interests and is clandestine, deceptive or involves a threat to a person." In the context of Canadian electoral processes, the objective of FI is to affect electoral outcomes and/or undermine public confidence in Canadian democratic institutions.

Observations on Foreign Interference

The SITE TF monitored for FI directed at the by-election from June 18, 2023 until July 26, 2023. The SITE TF did not observe, at that time, any indication of FI directed at the by-election. No cyber incidents were detected to suggest that any foreign state actors were specifically targeting Elections Canada from June 18, 2023 until July 26, 2023.

Violent Extremism

While SITE TF is focused on FI, both the RCMP and CSIS have mandates and authorities to look at threats of violent extremism. The SITE TF committed to reporting any threats of violent extremism directed at the by-election.

Observations on violent extremism

The SITE TF monitored for threats of violent extremism directed at the by-election from June 18, 2023 until July 26, 2023. The SITE TF did not observe, at that time, any threats of violent extremism directed at the by-election. The SITE TF did not identify any direct threats to the by-election in social media, message boards, chatrooms, online forums or news media relating to the by-elections. No direct threats to any of the candidates, or to the administration of the election were identified.