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## Digital Information Ecosystem Report - February 2021

### **Findings**

- Partner reporting indicates that a number of influencers, media outlets and journalists supporting the current ruling political party in India - the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) - worked in concert, likely employing covert or automated accounts, to target a Canadian activist on social media.
- RRM Canada did not observe any indications of inauthentic amplification specifically targeting the
  Canada-led Statement against Arbitrary Detention and parliamentary vote on Uighur Genocide, but
  partner reporting indicates that covert and inauthentic social-media campaigns aimed at undermining
  politicians and organizations critical of China's actions in Xinjiang are underway.

## **Purpose**

This report presents summary findings from research and analysis covering February 2021, aimed at detecting foreign interference (FI) in the Canadian digital information ecosystem. It is the third in a series of monthly reports leading up to the 44<sup>th</sup> Canadian General Election (GE44). This series of reports is designed to establish a baseline of online behaviour to facilitate the identification of anomalies linked to potential FI as the election nears and to alert decision makers to any potential FI activity.

#### Methodology

The report leverages a combination of in-house and off-the-shelf tools to examine publicly available digital platforms and websites for indicators of foreign interference in February 2021.<sup>1</sup> In total, RRM Canada accessed a sample of approximately 2.6 million Twitter posts relating to Canadian politics<sup>2</sup> as well as approximately 5,100 submissions to various Canada-related forums on the Reddit platform.<sup>3</sup> Separately, RRM Canada used the BuzzSumo platform to determine which news articles relating to Canadian politics<sup>4</sup> on Facebook, Twitter,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The scope of the report is limited in terms of access to platforms and data. Currently, RRM Canada has some capabilities to collect and analyse data from Twitter, Reddit, and web domains and webpages, as well as some limited new capabilities on YouTube. Other platforms may limit us from obtaining data or lack commercial/out-of-the-box solutions. Search terms used to collect data can differ significantly between platforms and tools, as each site structures data access differently. RRM Canada also leverages manual, open source investigations and qualitative analysis.

For the purposes of this monthly, RRM Canada accessed the Twitter API to analyse sample tweets through the following query terms: ("general\_pol": "#cdnpoli OR #ekxn44 OR #election44 OR #elexton44 OR #conservative OR #conservatives\*) AND (canada or canadian OR canadian OR canadian OR canadian OR canadian OR canadian OR election OR election OR election OR election OR election OR election OR servative OR #conada OR canadian OR ca

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> RRM Canada accessed all submissions to three communities or subreddits which aggregate issues relating to Canada and Canadian politics. These communities were /r/Canada, /r/CanadaPolitics, and /r/OnGuardForThee.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Buzzsumo search terms included ("Canadian Election" OR "Canadian Federal Election" OR "44th General Election"), ("Bloc Québécois" OR "Yves Blanchet" OR "Yves-François Blanchet"), ("Erin O'Toole" OR "Conservative Party of Canada" OR "Parti conservateur du Canada"), ("Trudeau" OR "Justin Trudeau" OR "Liberal Party of Canada" OR "Parti libéral du Canada"), ("Maxime bernier" OR "Parti poluaire" OR "people party"), (NDP OR NPD OR "jagmeet singh" OR "New Democratic Party" OR "Nouveau Parti démocratique"), and (Canada).

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Pinterest and Reddit received the most engagement. RRM Canada also monitors 462 accounts that belong to Chinese, Russian and Iranian government sources.

RRM Canada's methodology builds on past experience, assessing a set of indicators associated with FI, including: circulation of false, misleading, and polarising narratives; alignment of narratives with the objectives of hostile actors; or unprecedented volume and scope of engagement on a given topic accompanied by signs of coordination and inauthenticity. All RRM Canada reporting is subject to an <a href="ethical and methodological framework">ethical and methodological framework</a>. Partner government organizations and leading non-government partners also inform RRM Canada's reporting.

## February 2021 Baseline

#### Twitter

Of the 2.6M tweets, from approximately 1.4M unique accounts in the February sample, the most shared content came primarily from well-established Canadian sources. Top media source domains shared within our Twitter data analysis are as follows:

- 1. Toronto Sun 26, 768 links;
- 2. CBC 20, 419 links;
- 3. Globe and Mail 16, 606 links:
- 4. The Star 13, 327 links; and
- 5. Global News 12, 191 links.

Some of the most shared stories on Twitter in February 2021 included:5

- Parliamentary vote to declare genocide against the Uighur minority in China;<sup>6</sup>
- An article in the Star by opposition leader Erin O'Toole calling on Canada to petition the International Olympic Committee to relocate the 2022 Olympics out of China; and<sup>7</sup>
- An opinion article on reduced sentences for illegal weapons trafficking in Canada.<sup>8</sup>

## Reddit

RRM Canada also analyzed all submissions to several popular Canada-related forums on the Reddit platform between Feb 1 and 28, 2021.<sup>9</sup> Of the 5,142 submissions in this collection, the most engaged links, as measured by likes (called "upvotes" on Reddit), include the following content:

 A Globe and Mail article reporting on the Canadian parliamentary vote to declare that China is conducting a genocide against its Muslim minorities<sup>10</sup> – 31, 829 upvotes;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Exact number of shares if difficult to measure as Twitter data is less structured compared to other data sources and content can be shared in multiple ways. RRM Canada continues to refine our data aggregation and filtering methodologies and more precise measurements will be included in future reporting.

https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/mps-pass-motion-declaring-genocide-against-uighurs-in-china-despite-cabinet-abstentions-1.5319243

https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/02/16/erin-otoole-china-must-not-be-allowed-to-host-the-2020-olympics.html

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>a</sup> https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/lilley-trudeau-reduces-sentence-for-serious-gun-crimes

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Reddit is a social news aggregation, web content rating, and discussion website. Users submit content to the site such as links, text posts, and images, which are then voted up or down by other users. Once a piece of content is submitted, it can also be discussed among reddit users in a comments section. Reddit is subdivided divided into forums called communities or "subreddits" which aggregate content by topic. For this reporting period RRM Canada downloaded and analyzed all submissions from the r/Canada, r/CanadaPolitics and, r/OnGuardForThee subreddits. Future reports may expand the list of relevant subreddits and user comments will also be accounted for as we continue to refine our methodologies,

<sup>10</sup> https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-parliament-declares-china-is-conducting-genocide-against-its-muslim/

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- 2. A Globe and Mail opinion piece on the need for national dental care plan<sup>11</sup> 25, 545 upvotes; and
- 3. An article from a technology blog claiming that the next vehicle purchase for 70% of Canadians will be electric<sup>12</sup> 17, 719 upvotes.

Of the 5,142 submissions in the February collection, the most engaged links, as measured by user comments, include the following content:

- 1. The above-mentioned article from a technology blog claiming that the next vehicle purchase will be electric for 70% of Canadians 2, 477 comments;
- 2. A Globe and Mail article on vaccine delays13 2, 206 comments; and
- 3. A Huffington Post article on the growing challenge of saving for a down payment for a house purchase in Canada.<sup>14</sup>

#### Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Reddit through BuzzSumo

According to the BuzzSumo analytics platform, the top-shared articles about Canadian politics in February included the following stories:

- 1. The designation of the Proud boys as a terrorist organization;15
- Stories relating to the COVID-19 vaccine rollout and the new requirement to isolate in designated hotels when returning to Canada;<sup>16</sup>
- 3. Prime-Minister Justin Trudeau's call with US President Joe Biden;<sup>17</sup>
- The pariliamentary vote to declare a genocide against the Uyghur people in China; and<sup>18</sup>
- 5. Articles about firearms regulation in Canada.19

## Foreign Government Sponsored Accounts

RRM Canada monitors 462 accounts that belong to Chinese, Russian and Iranian government sources. For the February reporting period, these accounts did not appear to focus on Canada or any Canadian political issues. However, accounts of various Chinese officials were tagged or mentioned by Twitter users commenting on the parliamentary vote to recognize the situation with the Uighur people in China as a genocide.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>11</sup> https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-going-to-the-dentist-should-be-a-right-not-a-privilege-canadians/

 $<sup>^{12}\ \</sup>underline{\text{https://techbomb.ca/sustainability/nearly-70-per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-cent-of-canadians-say-next-vehicle-purchase-will-be-electric/per-cent-of-cent-of-cent-of-ce$ 

<sup>13</sup> https://globalnews.ca/news/7648723/coronavirus-vaccine-delays-liberals-tories-polls-ipsos/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/saving-down-payment ca 601afd00c5b67cdd1a74fb7b

<sup>15</sup> https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the\_americas/canada-proud-boys-terrorist-capitol-siege/2021/02/03/546b1d5c-6628-11eb-8468-21bc48f07fe5\_story.html; https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/canada-labels-far-right-proud-boys-terrorist-entity-n1256615; https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-proud-boys-terrorists-1.5899186; https://www.cnn.com/2021/02/03/americas/canada-proud-boys-terrorgroup/index.html; https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2021/02/03/canada-declares-proud-boys-terrorist-organization/4372307001/https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-why-the-number-of-covid-19-cases-is-dropping-globally/; https://torontosun.com/news/local-

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-why-the-number-of-covid-19-cases-is-dropping-globally/; https://torontosun.com/news/local-news/warmington-man-in-forced-detention-in-a-canada-covid-camp; https://www.cp24.com/news/usa-now-vaccinating-more-people-against-covid-19-in-one-day-than-canada-has-in-total-1.5317891; https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/astrazeneca-approved-1.5929050; https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/travel-restictions-border-1.5911845

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/feb/24/justin-trudeau-says-us-leadership-has-been-sorely-missed-during-first-meeting-with-biden; <sup>18</sup> https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/22/canada-china-uighur-muslims-genocide; https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/kinsella-prime-minister-shame-will-follow-you-after-uighur-genocide-cowardice;

<sup>19</sup> https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/lilley-trudeau-reduces-sentence-for-serious-gun-crimes; https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/gun-owners-facing-legal-complaints-can-have-firearms-seized-without-warrant-under-new-liberal-law; https://globalnews.ca/news/7642893/assault-rifle-buyback-program-canada/;

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Exact metrics are difficult to calculate, however over 1000 twitter users appear to have mentioned Canada and at least one of the official Chinese accounts followed by RRM Canada. Manual review of these posts indicates that the bulk of the content came from users criticizing China for human rights abuses in Xianjiang.

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RRM Canada did not observe any significant indicators of foreign interference in its monitoring of the broader Canadian digitial information ecosystem, as it relates to the major themes identified above.

#### Analysis of Notable Issues of Potential Foreign Interference

## Continued and Evolving Interest in Canada from Indian Media Ecosystems

Throughout the February reporting period, RRM Canada observed continued interest in Canada from various Indian news and alternative media outlets. While the December and January reporting periods focused predominantly on critiques of Prime Minister Trudeau's comments in support of ongoing farmer protests, the February reporting period saw a shift in narratives away from the Prime Minister to a focus on a Canadian activist of Sikh heritage.

On February 2, 2021, climate activist and founder of the Fridays for Future (FFF) movement, Greta Thunberg, singer Rihanna, and a number of other celebrities posted on social media about supporting ongoing farmers' protests in India. By February 4, 2021, Indian media were reporting that New Delhi Police were investigating connections between these celebrity endorsements and a Canadian based advocacy group known as the Poetic Justice Foundation (PJF), PJF founder Mo Dhaliwal, Canada-based PR firm Skyrocket, Canada-based advocacy group the World Sikh Organization (WSO), and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh.<sup>21</sup>

Allegations put forward by pro-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) media<sup>22</sup> revolved around Mo Dhaliwal at the centre of a global conspiracy to sow unrest and division in India. According to these sources, Mo Dhaliwal is a Khalistani<sup>23</sup> separatist, and his network created a "protest toolkit" which was shared on Twitter by Greta Thunberg and Disha Ravi, founder of the Indian chapter of the FFF. According to these pro-BJP media sources, the toolkit was designed to teach protestors how to further divisions and unrest in India. Disha Ravi was subsequently detained by Indian police and questioned over her alleged involvement in the creation and spread of this online protest toolkit.<sup>24</sup> Pro-BJP media sources also allege that Rihanna was paid \$2.5M US for her endorsement through the Canada-based PR Firm Skyrocket with funding coming from PJF and WSO.<sup>25</sup> These sources also attempt to show links between Mo Dhaliwal and Jagmeet Singh, claiming that the NDP leader somehow facilitated Rihanna's tweet in support of the farmers.<sup>26</sup> Other sources attempt to draw links between Rihanna and broader transnational far-right narratives involving conspiracies centred around the former US President Barack Obama and billionaire investor/philanthropist George Soros.<sup>27</sup> RRM Canada also notes that in

 $<sup>^{21} \, \</sup>underline{\text{https://theprint.in/diplomacy/canada-firm-mp-pr-person-suspected-for-farmers-protest-toolkit-tweeted-by-greta-thunberg/599098/} \\$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Indian Prime-Minister Narendra Modi forms the current Indian Government. For more on pro-BJP media see: <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godi\_media">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godi\_media</a> and <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godi\_media">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asian\_News\_International#Propaganda</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> The Khalistani movement is a Sikh separatist movement seeking to establish an independent state in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent which straddles the India-Pakistani border. More can be found here: <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khalistan\_movement">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khalistan\_movement</a>. Mo Dhaliwal is a Canadian citizen and RRM Canada has no mandate to investigate any alleged ties to Khalistani movements.

 $<sup>^{34}\ \</sup>underline{\text{https://nationalpost.com/news/world/indias-arrest-of-activist-tied-to-greta-thunbergs-movement-sparks-outrage-3}$ 

<sup>25</sup> For more details on these allegations see: <a href="https://www.republicworld.com/india-news/general-news/mo-dhaliwal-enlisted-disha-ravi-for-greta-link-planned-celeb-campaign-post-r-day-sources.html">https://www.republicworld.com/india-news/general-news/mo-dhaliwal-enlisted-disha-ravi-for-greta-link-planned-celeb-campaign-post-r-day-sources.html</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> https://www.naradasbuzz.com/poetic-justice-foundation

<sup>27</sup> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HFwZthjxks

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addition to Indian sources, Russian state-linked media outlets RT and Sputnik News have also published articles with similar narratives.<sup>28</sup>

Digital Forensics Research (DFR) Lab<sup>29</sup> reporting indicates that a number pro-BJP influencers, media outlets and journalists worked in concert, likely employing covert or automated accounts, to target Mr. Dhaliwal on at least the following social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. DFR observed this activity between February 3 and February 19, 2021. According to the analysis by DFR, Zee News, ABP News, OpIndia, Republic TV as well as other smaller regional-language only outlets published articles furthering the above allegations and building on the conspiracy theories. These articles were subsequently amplified by prominent pro-BJP influencers as well as the publications themselves via their official accounts on social media platforms.<sup>30</sup>

Mo Dhaliwal also claims that his inboxes were flooded with threatening messages and images of dead Sikhs.<sup>31</sup> Further, pro-BJP social media users reportedly flooded Rihanna's social media feeds with messages in support of singer Chris Brown, who was arrested in 2009 for assaulting the singer.<sup>32</sup>

Although unrelated to the PJF conspiracy outlined above, a Canadian journalist critical of India's press restrictions, and his wife, British Columbia Member of the Legislative Assembly Rachna Singh, also claim to have been targeted by a network of pro-BJP social media accounts. In this case, the accounts were promoting a narrative that Rachna Singh's political campaign was run by Khalistani extremists.<sup>33</sup>

By late February and into March 2021, pro-BJP media outlets began to coalesce on a narrative that Indo-Canadians of the Hindu faith are increasingly threatened by Sikh extremists throughout Canada.34 Despite the increase in these types of articles, at the time of this writing, RRM Canada has not observed a broader campaign to amplify this type of content on social media.

Given the continued strong interest in Canada and Canadian politics by Indian media sources and the potential for the emerging narratives to serve as vectors of foreign hostile activity, RRM Canada will continue to monitor the Indian media ecosystem and is currently working to produce a stand-alone report outlining leading information sources leveraged by the BJP.

# PRC Reactions to the Statement against Arbitrary Detention and Parliamentary Vote on Uighur Genocide

<sup>28</sup> For examples see here: <a href="https://www.rt.com/news/514634-greta-thunberg-india-police-investigation/">https://www.rt.com/news/514634-greta-thunberg-india-police-investigation/</a>; https://sputniknews.com/india/202102211082138606-indians-dont-buy-into-gretas-toolkit--dont-need-bidens-approval-of-their-policies-journo-says/; https://sputniknews.com/india/202102191082125759-english-exam-paper-in-indian-school-calls-protesting-farmers-violent-maniacs-triggers-outrage/; and https://sputniknews.com/india/202102071082003755-kangana-ranaut-blasts-global-conspiracy-to-brutally-divide-india-amid-farmer-protests/

<sup>29</sup> DFR Lab is a team seated within the Civil Society Organization called The Atlantic Council, DFRLab's mandate is to operationalized the study of disinformation by exposing falsehoods and fake news, documenting human rights abuses, and building digital resilience worldwide. For more see here. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/programs/digital-forensic-research-lab/

<sup>30</sup> DFR Lab investigation in support of RRM Canada monitoring

<sup>31</sup> https://globalnews.ca/news/7630748/bc-man-centre-indian-police-investigation-alleged-conspiracy-rihanna-greta-thunberg/

<sup>32</sup> https://www.indiatimes.com/entertainment/celebs/trolls-are-praising-chris-brown-for-assaulting-rihanna-in-2009-can-we-stoop-lower-than-this-

<sup>31</sup> https://globalnews.ca/news/7630748/bc-man-centre-indian-police-investigation-alleged-conspiracy-rihanna-greta-thunberg/

<sup>34</sup> See here: https://www.news18.com/news/india/indians-in-canada-face-threats-from-khalistani-groups-for-supporting-farm-laws-modi-govtexpresses-concern-3439931.html; https://www.opindia.com/2021/02/canada-khalistani-india-coronavirus-vaccines-export-trudeau-government-modireach-out/ ;and https://www.aninews.in/news/world/others/indians-in-canada-urge-burnaby-mp-to-protect-all-citizens-instead-of-supportingkhalistani-movement20210226123422/

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RRM Canada analysed tweets, retweets and likes of 19 People's Republic of China (PRC) diplomatic Twitter accounts for messaging related to the international declaration denouncing state-sponsored arbitrary detention of foreign nationals for political purposes (declaration)35 and the February 22 parliamentary vote on recognising the Uighur genocide. These accounts were selected because of previous RRM Canada and US Global Engagement Center (GEC) observations that some of these accounts had been amplified by suspicious networks of accounts.36

The network of 19 PRC Twitter accounts only produced 5 tweets which generated a relatively sparse 134 retweets and 734 likes during the February reporting period pertaining to the declaration. Along with accusing Canada of arbitrarily detaining Meng Wang Zhou, Chinese officials and state-linked media outlets also claimed that Canada coerced other countries into signing the declaration or including their signature without their knowledge.37 A manual review for Chinese state-linked media outlets rebuking the detention shows little engagement on Facebook, Twitter and Reddit.

The same network of 19 PRC accounts produced 106 tweets referring to the situation in Xinjiang, generating related activity (replies, retweets, and likes) between February 22 (the day the vote occurred) and the end of the reporting period on February 28, 2021. RRM Canada notes that these tweets were not solely in reaction to the vote but also in reaction to recent statements by the US State Department, the United Kingdom and Australia. Manual review indicates that, in addition to the large number of replies, these tweets generated much higher engagement in terms of retweets and likes. While the large amount of tweets over a shorter period and the higher degree of engagement may indicate greater interest from Chinese officials in accusations of genocide, as compared to the arbitrary detention declaration, neither indicates inauthentic or covert activity. In general, the messaging from these accounts involved criticizing Canada, the US and Australia for genocides against Indigenous People, alleging Canadian interference in internal Chinese affairs and stating that accusations of human rights abuse in Xinjiang are a lie. Between February 26 and 28, 2021, the messaging of these accounts focused on inviting people to "verify the situation in Xinjiang by themselves." This change in messaging may be the result of calls for an independent United Nations assessment of the situation in Xinjiang by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet.38

RRM Canada did not observe any indications of inauthentic amplification specifically targeting Canada on either issue. However, GEC analysts have identified a network of pro-PRC social media accounts, active since at least November 2020, which have adopted increasingly sophisticated campaigns Similar 35 On Feb 15, 2021, a coalition of 57 countries supported an international declaration denouncing state-sponsored arbitrary detention of foreign

https://twitter.com/MFA China/status/1363820903184797701; https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202102/1216143.shtml; and https://m.facebook.com/spoxwangwenbin/videos/442958076819430/?refsrc=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F&\_rdr

38 https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/27/un-rights-chief-decries-abuses-in-xinjiang-arrests-in-china

nationals for political purposes. The Canadian led initiative was officially country-agnostic; however, it was widely viewed as a reaction to the detention of two Canadians in China. As details of the declaration came to light, Chinese state news outlets called the declaration "an aggressive and illconsidered attack designed to provoke China." For examples see here: <a href="https://www.reuters.com/article/us-canada-diplomacy-detainees-">https://www.reuters.com/article/us-canada-diplomacy-detainees-</a> idUSKBN2AFONV; https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/18/china-canada-declaration-arbitrary-detention-foreign-citizens; and https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/arbitrary-dentention-kovrig-spavor-garneau-1.5914382

<sup>36</sup> The 19 PRC diplomatic accounts are: @ChineseEmbinUK, @China\_Lyon, @ChinaEmbOttawa, @ChinaCGCalgary, @Chinamission2un, @ChinaAmbUN, @ChinaMissionGva, @PRCAmbNL, @AmbLiuXiaoMing, @AmbCuiTiankai, @ChineseEmbinUS, @AmbassadeChine, @GeneralkonsulDu, @ChinaEmbGermany, @ChnEmbassy\_jp, @AmbCina, @SpokespersonCHN, @zlj517, @MFA\_China <sup>37</sup> For examples see here https://twitter.com/MFA\_China/status/1362575220893122564;

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reporting on a campaign to discredit the UK-based British Broadcasting Corporation for their coverage of systemic rape in Xinjiang internment camps was produced by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI).<sup>40</sup>

Given partner government and ASPI reporting indicating covert and inauthentic social-media campaigns aimed at undermining politicians and organizations critical of China's actions in Xinjiang, RRM Canada will continue to monitor for coordinated information operations aimed at shaping discussions relating to human rights abuses in Xinjiang.

Prepared by: GAC/IOL/RRM Canada Approved: GAC/IOL/Gallit Dobner

Released: 19 Mar, 2021

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/04/chinas-communist-party-ran-campaign-to-discredit-bbc-thinktank-finds