

For Public Release

PROTECTED B  
Limited Distribution

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRIME MINISTER  
c.c. John Hannaford, Natalie G. Drouin

**GAC RAPID RESPONSE MECHANISM REPORT**  
**WECHAT DISINFORMATION ABOUT MP MICHAEL CHONG**

(For information)

**SUMMARY**

- Global Affairs Canada's (GAC) Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM Canada) was created as part of Canada's G7 commitment to respond to threats to democracies, including disinformation.
- RRM Canada produced a report on June 28, 2023 detailing an apparent online disinformation campaign related to Member of Parliament Michael Chong. RRM Canada identified a network of news accounts on WeChat disseminating false or misleading narratives about MP Chong.
- The report indicates that many of the implicated WeChat accounts are based in China; the RRM report found no conclusive evidence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) government's involvement. However, RRM Canada indicates that the PRC government was, at the very least, aware of the campaign and condoned its spread.
- In response to the RRM Canada report, the Deputy Minister Committee on Intelligence Response agrees that MP Chong should be notified. PCO supports this recommendation.
- Once MP Chong has been informed, GAC will conduct a diplomatic engagement with the PRC to convey Canada's concerns regarding the apparent disinformation campaign originating out of China against a Canadian parliamentarian.
- GAC has prepared a public version of the RRM Canada report that will be releasable to media should the RRM's analysis be made public.
- To further research into foreign-based disinformation campaigns and the threat to Canadian democratic institutions, GAC plans to share

For Public Release

**PROTECTED B**  
Limited Distribution

the RRM report and data with academia.

## **Background**

### *RRM Canada Report*

- Through social media analysis, RRM Canada produced a report on June 28, 2023, detailing what appears to be a coordinated campaign to spread false or misleading narratives about MP Chong.
- The RRM Canada report, "*WeChat Account Activity Targeting Canadian Parliamentarian Suggests Likely State Involvement*", is attached at **TAB A**.
- RRM Canada's analysis details how a network of online news accounts circulated articles that featured false or misleading narratives regarding MP Chong on the WeChat platform. The articles disseminated on WeChat and observed by RRM Canada were overwhelmingly negative in their description of MP Chong, and featured identity-based narratives that portray the MP negatively to readers. According to RRM Canada, among the network are known state-media outlets and accounts that are likely linked to the PRC government.
- The report asserts that the operation coincided with Canada's designation of Chinese diplomat Zhao Wei as *persona non grata*, on May 8, and subsequent designation by the PRC of a Canadian diplomat as PNG, which occurred the following day.
- Given the inherent limitations of RRM Canada's open-source methodology, the report acknowledged that RRM Canada was not able to identify conclusive evidence of the PRC government's role in the information operation.

### *Next steps*

- DMCIR Deputies agreed that MP Chong should be briefed on the disinformation activity directed at him as outlined in the report. PCO supports this recommendation and proposes the following officials be asked to brief MP Chong together and as soon as possible:
  - Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, as the department is responsible for the RRM Canada;

For Public Release

**PROTECTED B**  
Limited Distribution

- Deputy Minister of Public Safety, as the lead department on foreign interference; and
  - The National Security and Intelligence Advisor.
- The following sequence of actions are proposed:
    - Inform MP Chong of RRM Canada's findings in the report, and the other actions the Government of Canada is undertaking to counter the activity;
    - Diplomatic engagement with the PRC to indicate Canada's concern with the apparent PRC-based disinformation campaign against a Canadian parliamentarian, and indicate Canada's desire to engage with WeChat directly to take measures to avoid future disinformation campaigns against Canadians on that platform;
    - Responsive communications activities, beginning with a media statement and including a releasable version of the report, to address any media queries should RRM Canada's findings be made public; and
    - Sharing the RRM Canada report and data with academia for further analysis.

### **PCO Comment**

- While the analysis included in the RRM Canada report is not classified, and is based on publicly available information, the report content is sensitive. The report was intended for the security and intelligence audience and was not drafted to be public-facing.
- The May 2023 *Ministerial Direction on Threats to the Security of Canada Directed at Parliament and Parliamentarians* by the Minister of Public Safety instructs the national security and intelligence community to ensure that parliamentarians are informed of threats to the security of Canada directed at them.
  - RRM's mandate to monitor disinformation in the context of Canadian democratic institutions is limited in scope, and further, Canadian security and intelligence agencies do not have corresponding requirements to monitor this threat. This mandate gap creates a collection and reporting bias in that RRM reporting cannot be corroborated or refuted by other Canadian intelligence. As such, the risk exists of creating a precedent in

For Public Release

**PROTECTED B**  
Limited Distribution

- briefing parliamentarians on incomplete, unverified and unchallenged information.
- Disinformation can be used by threat actors, both within and outside of Canada and on other social media platforms. The scale and pervasive nature of online disinformation is challenging for Canada's security and intelligence agencies to monitor in terms of capacity and authorities. There is the risk that, in sharing the analysis, an expectation is set for the security and intelligence community to identify all major instances of disinformation against Canadian politicians.
  - Sharing the RRM Canada report and data with academia will encourage further research and analysis into the threat of foreign disinformation in relation to Canadian democratic institutions.
- Canada's relationship with the PRC has been strained, and there is a risk of aggravating tensions should allegations of a disinformation campaign be made public. Once MP Chong is briefed on the report's findings, it is possible that he will share the allegations of disinformation publicly.
  - PCO notes that the RRM Canada report does not provide conclusive evidence indicating that the PRC government is responsible for the disinformation campaign directed at MP Chong. Any briefing provided to MP Chong or any public messaging on the report results should clearly indicate that fact, and the information should be appropriately contextualised.
  - PCO will continue to work with key stakeholders within the security and intelligence community to implement the steps noted above.

Jody Thomas

Attachment

**Tab A** – RRM Canada Report, "*WeChat Account Activity Targeting Canadian Parliamentarian Suggests Likely State Involvement*"

Walshe/