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

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, which was discussed at the Deputy Minister Committee on Intelligence Response, indicates that while many of the implicated WeChat accounts are based in China, the RRM found no conclusive evidence of the People's Republic of China (PRC) government's involvement. RRM Canada judges that the PRC government was, at the very least, aware of the campaign and condoned its spread.
- In an effort to be transparent with Members of Parliament about threats to national security, the Privy Council Office and GAC are finalising plans to inform MP Chong of the report's findings. The briefing will include a summary of the report and additional context on foreign interference.
- 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 responsive messaging and an abbreviated version of the report to release to media should the issue be made

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public. GAC plans to share the report with academia, including the new Canadian Digital Media Research Network, which you announced in March 2023.

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 online news accounts circulated articles that featured false or misleading narratives regarding MP Chong on the WeChat platform. The articles disseminated on WeChat were overwhelmingly negative in their description of MP Chong. According to RRM Canada, known media outlets and accounts that are linked to the PRC government were among those who posted information.
- The report asserts that the observed disinformation activity coincided with Canada's designation of Chinese diplomat Zhao Wei as *persona non grata* (PNG), on May 8, and subsequent designation by the PRC of a Canadian diplomat as PNG.
- 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

- The security and intelligence community is endeavouring to be increasingly transparent about threats potentially affecting parliamentarians.
- Following a discussion at the Deputy Minister Committee on Intelligence Response where the report was raised, PCO and GAC are finalising plans to brief MP Chong on RRM Canada's observations and analysis. It is likely that the MP will have broader questions on foreign interference and national security. PCO and GAC are identifying appropriate contextual briefing material.
- Following the briefing, it is possible that MP Chong will make the

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information public. GAC will be prepared with responsive messaging and an abbreviated version of the report which could be provided to media upon request. RRM reports are frequently released to the media through Access to Information requests.

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- GAC is planning a diplomatic engagement with the PRC to indicate Canada's concern with the apparent PRC-based disinformation campaign against a Canadian parliamentarian.
- Whether or not the information is made public following the briefing with MP Chong, GAC plans to share the RRM report and data with academia. Leveraging the academic community to conduct research into foreign interference will advance Canada's understanding of the threat, build expertise in the domain among the Canadian academic community and complement Government of Canada efforts to protect Canada's democratic institutions.

PCO Comment

- Social media tools and platforms enable the spread of disinformation by threat actors, both within and outside of Canada. The scale and pervasive nature of online disinformation is far too great for the intelligence community to identify every instance targeting Canadian Members of Parliament. There is a risk that sharing the analysis with MP Chong could set an unattainable expectation for the security and intelligence community to identify all instances of disinformation against Canadian politicians. In briefing MP Chong and in any public communications, it should be clear that the RRM report represents a snapshot of disinformation targeting Canada.
- 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. GAC engagement with the PRC on a diplomatic level is important to diffuse tensions and register Canada's concerns with the unacceptable nature of this type of activity.
- 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.

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- PCO will continue to work with key stakeholders within the security and intelligence community to implement the steps noted above, and monitor the Government of Canada's efforts to counter the threat of foreign interference and disinformation. PCO, through the Protecting Democracy Unit, will also continue to support the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities in his mandate to lead an integrated government response to protect Canada's democratic institutions against foreign interference and disinformation.

Jody Thomas

Attachment

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

/Walsh