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G7 Rapid Response Mechanism
Coordination Unit**G7 RAPID RESPONSE MECHANISMS: Q&As****INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT/AUDIENCE****What is the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism?**

The G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) is a G7 initiative aimed at strengthening the grouping's coordination when addressing foreign threats to our democracies. More specifically, the RRM aims to coordinate efforts identifying and responding to diverse and evolving threats to G7 democracies. These efforts include sharing information and analysis. They also include identifying opportunities for coordinated response. The RRM consists of designated Focal Points from G7 members, including the EU. Each of the Focal Points is positioned to facilitate a response by its own national/organizational structure, according to its own internal processes. In recognition of Canadian leadership at the G7 in 2018, Canada coordinates the RRM on an ongoing basis.

Why was it established, when and by whom?

The RRM was announced by G7 Leaders at the Charlevoix Summit in June 2018. The announcement built on the work by Foreign and Security Ministers undertaken in the preceding months. In the wake of the Salisbury poisoning attempt, the Macron Leaks, numerous attempts to interfere in the elections of a number of G7 countries, and other incidents, the Ministers discussed the nature of contemporary threats to democracy extensively leading up to Charlevoix. In this context, they reached a common understanding of unacceptable actions by foreign actors during a meeting in Toronto in April 2018, articulated under the [Toronto Commitment](#). Building on this work, the G7 Leaders committed to standing up the G7 RRM as a visible and concrete commitment to react to the mounting evidence of foreign interference and challenge its perpetrators.

Why is the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism simply not a network of G7 members' intelligence and national security services, as it mainly deals with information sharing and security threats?

The threats identified by Ministers during their April 2018 Toronto meeting are diverse and go beyond traditional security threats. The illustrative examples they identified are listed in the Toronto Commitment and were grouped under the following three headings: 1) Institutions and Processes; 2) Disinformation and Media; and 3) Fundamental Freedoms and Human Rights. Therefore, it is important that the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism Focal Points leverage different structures and processes, as foreign interference may necessitate the engagement of government bodies that have not been traditionally involved in responding to security threats.

Public budgets are under severe constraint. Is it really a priority to dedicate specific resources to fighting "fake news"?

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The foreign threats to our democracies tackled by the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism go beyond disinformation and information manipulation. The RRM is focused on acts or measures by foreign actors - and states in particular - with the malicious intent to undermine the confidence in, and the legitimacy of, democratic institutions and processes. As such, there is no other existing mechanism which aims to tackle the challenges these threats pose to the democratic debate and democratic institutions, as they weaken and destabilize them. However, the RRM will not duplicate existing national and international efforts.

To whom is the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism accountable?

The RRM is accountable to the elected leaders and officials of G7 countries who are in turn accountable to their electorates.

Why the adjective *rapid*?

The RRM is meant to serve as an efficient mechanism for sharing information and coordinating a response when required. A “rapid” consultation and approval process within and across the G7 RRM network is facilitated by the RRM’s clear protocols and established working relationships among Focal Points or designated G7 officials. The protocols provide predictability in terms of consultation and decision-making processes.

Who are the members of the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism?

The members of the RRM are: Canada, UK, France, United States of America, Germany, Japan, Italy, and the European Union.

**Does the leadership of the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism rotate with the G7 Presidency?
What is the RRM Coordination Unit?**

During their discussions pertaining to the G7 commitment on defending democracy from foreign threats, the Ministers and Leaders agreed that the RRM will be coordinated by Canada on an ongoing basis and does not rotate with the G7 Presidency each year. This decision was made in order to ensure continuity of the mechanism and in recognition of Canadian leadership on the issue prior to and during its G7 Presidency in 2018. The RRM Coordination Unit will work closely alongside G7 Presidencies moving forward. The RRM Coordination Unit is housed at Global Affairs Canada, in the International Security and Political Affairs Branch. The Coordination Unit also supports the RRM Canadian Focal Point.

Does the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism serve only G7 countries? What about other democracies facing similar threats from foreign interference?

Official membership of the RRM comprises of G7 members for now, along with the EU. However, the mechanism envisions collaborating with other countries and the various organizations grappling with the issue of malign foreign interference. The intent of the RRM is to increase the global understanding of the issue. To do this, the RRM members and the RRM Coordination Unit will look to engage with other countries and organizations to gather lessons learned and share information.

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Many liberal democracies have been the target of malign interference campaigns by foreign actors and attempts to undermine democratic institutions and processes. Well publicised examples include the 2016 US elections, Brexit (2016), and the Macron Leaks that transpired during the 2017 French elections. Attempts were also made to meddle in the German elections in 2016. Albeit not a G7 member, Australia passed legislation in 2018 aimed at stemming efforts by foreign countries and foreign agencies to sway Australian opinion in a covert way to influence democratic outcomes. All these examples speak to a trend that is worrying for democracies and that requires a firm international response. The RRM was established as a concrete mechanism by which some of these trends could be better understood, monitored, and addressed in a coordinated fashion.

What are the threats that contemporary democracies face? Are they any different from threats they faced in the past?

The threats that democracies face are diverse and evolving. Some of them are similar to traditional threats like human-based espionage or cultivation of potentially influential figures, but the internet and other digital technologies are reshaping the types and nature of the contemporary threats democracies face. For example, the way malicious actors can leverage contemporary technologies to reach, target, and manipulate large swaths of populations is unprecedented. An emerging challenge in this context is also posed by the application of artificial intelligence-based technologies that automate content and can be used to alter images or speech patterns.

The illustrative examples identified by Ministers during their April 2018 Toronto meeting reflect this reality. The examples they identified are listed in the Toronto Commitment and were grouped under the following three headings: 1) Institutions and Processes; 2) Disinformation and Media; and 3) Fundamental Freedoms and Human Rights. There is however an understanding that contemporary threats to democracy posed by foreign actors evolve constantly and there is therefore a need for agility in shifting the RRM's attention and resources.

Will the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism look at issues of "fake news"? How will the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism assess what is freedom of speech and what is a threat to democracy?

The RRM will address disinformation to the extent that it falls under its mandate. More specifically, "fake news" or preferably disinformation must be deemed to undermine the confidence in, and the legitimacy of, democratic institutions and processes and be perpetrated by a foreign actor and states in particular. The RRM has in place protocols that help to guide its response, including a consultation phase that emphasises assessment and reliance on empirical evidence (in some cases collected through open social media monitoring and analysis).

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Leveraging its global position as a grouping of the world's most advanced economies and long-standing democracies; the RRM will adopt strategic approaches that are consistent with universal human rights and fundamental freedoms and international commitments to peace and security, and that promote equality. Undermining these values would be counter-productive to the mandate of the mechanism.

Is disinformation considered a threat to democracy, or simply an unsavoury element of freedom of expression and our democratic system?

Disinformation is not an exclusively democratic challenge. Disinformation and information manipulation thrive on the whole spectrum of governance systems, from democracy to totalitarianism. It is therefore not necessarily dependent of freedom of expression. The RRM will address disinformation to the extent that it falls under its mandate. Namely, the disinformation would have to be deemed to undermine the confidence in, and the legitimacy of, democratic institutions and processes and be perpetrated by a foreign actor and states in particular. The RRM has in place protocols that help to guide its response, including a consultation phase that emphasises assessment and reliance on empirical evidence.

Is the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism an organized attempt by G7 members to tighten control over the field of information, at the expense of freedom of expression, under the pretext of addressing disinformation?

Disinformation and information manipulation are critical issues, as they can have a profoundly disruptive effect on the cohesion of democratic societies and can increase polarization in them. By addressing them, the G7 members aim to tackle the challenges they pose to the democratic debate and democratic institutions, including as far as freedom of information and expression is concerned. In this regard, RRM commits to an approach that is consistent with the democratic values of respect for fundamental freedoms, human rights, and the rule of law, as well as international commitments to peace and security. It values an open approach, and will work with experts, academics, think-tanks, and other civil society representatives.

Against whom or what is the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism defending democracy? Is it focused on defending G7 members against Russia or China?

The RRM is focussed on acts or measures by foreign actors - and states in particular - with the malicious intent to undermine the confidence in, and the legitimacy of, democratic institutions and processes. The mechanism is not focussed on specific foreign actors and/or states.

What will the potential coordinated response by the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism look like? Will it be binding in any way?

The RRM coordinated response will depend on the context in which a specific malign foreign interference-related activity takes place. The response will be calibrated by G7 members, based on specific circumstances, and the response strategy will follow a set protocol.

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The RRM responses will not be binding. They are coordinated, but decisions to implement any specific additional actions will be at the discretion of national decision making bodies.

What type of information and analysis will the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism share? Will it interact with the public in any way?

The RRM will share unclassified information that brings insight into how malign interference by foreign actors is perpetrated, identified, and effectively countered. This may include sharing reports, analyses, briefs, lessons learned, and other types of documents or information. In addition to information gathered from RRM members, the RRM will work with experts, academics, think tanks, and other civil society representatives to increase its knowledge and capacity pertaining to malign interference in democratic systems.

How is the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism going to defend G7 democracies?

Besides identifying, monitoring, assessing, and sharing information pertaining to malign foreign interference, the RRM will facilitate coordination of a response to an incident or an ongoing activity should one of its members request consideration to undertake a G7 response. The RRM coordinated response will depend on the context in which a given malign foreign interference-related activity takes place. The response will be calibrated by G7 members, based on specific circumstances and the response strategy will follow an agreed-upon protocol. Since the RRM is a new mechanism, it is difficult to be more specific on what a response could look like, but one may reflect on the fall-out of the Salisbury incident for purely illustrative reasons.

Will the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism put fundamental freedoms, human rights, and rule of law aside to address foreign threats?

The RRM will leverage its global position as a grouping of the world's most advanced economies and long-standing democracies. As such, the RRM will adopt a strategic approach that is consistent with universal human rights and fundamental freedoms and G7 members' international commitments to peace and security, and that promotes equality.

Aren't there other international mechanisms that already fulfil the functions described in the mandate of the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism? How does the work of the Mechanism square with the work of NATO, for example?

The RRM is a mechanism to share information and respond as appropriate as a G7 grouping to threats to our democracies. This type of mechanism is currently not in place. It will also not duplicate existing national and international efforts to counter threats. Instead, RRM approaches and initiatives will be informed by multilateral cooperation as well as close coordination with similar initiatives taking place within the context of countering foreign threats and/or malign interference. Care will be taken that RRM efforts and initiatives are complementary to those undertaken by NATO, Five Eyes, and other existing international mechanisms.

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The mission of the mechanism, namely to defend democracy from foreign threats, has ideological undertones. Is it an ideologically-driven endeavour to maintain the control of the international system by a small collection of primarily Western democracies?

The RRM's goal is to assist in defending the integrity of the democratic systems of G7 countries first and foremost. Its approach is practical and focusses on acts and measures by foreign actors targeting specific states. In this context, the RRM aims to strengthen the international rules based system to promote global peace and security. As such, the RRM will adopt a strategic approach that is consistent with universal human rights and fundamental freedoms and G7 nations' international commitments to peace and security, and that promotes equality through the open sharing of information to increase understanding of the potential threats that exist and the evolving tactics and responses that are taking place

Is the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism a round-about way to counter the challenges Russia is posing to the international rules-based system?

While Russia features front and centre in several publicised foreign interference incidents, the RRM is focussed on "acts or measures" as opposed to specific countries. The RRM is focussed on acts or measures by foreign actors - and states in particular - with the malicious intent to undermine the confidence in, and the legitimacy of, democratic institutions and processes.

Will the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism deal with only foreign threats to democracy? What about internal threats? Can the two be dis-entangled?

The RRM will not address domestic threats to democracy. It only focusses on those threats from foreign actors seeking to undermine democratic institutions and processes through coercive, corrupt, covert, or malicious means that constitute a strategic threat, and that undermine the confidence in, and the legitimacy of, democratic institutions and processes.

What has the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism achieved to date?

The inaugural meeting of the RRM took place on November 6, 2018, in Canada. During that meeting foundational documents prepared by the RRM Coordination Unit, including Terms of Reference and protocols pertaining to information sharing and coordinated response were negotiated.

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Canada played a leadership role in conceptualising and establishing the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) during its G7 Presidency in 2018. Seized by the mounting examples of foreign interference in democracies around the globe, Canadian officials worked to bring about a concrete and visible commitment on the part of the G7 pertaining to defending democracy from foreign threats. The RRM was announced by the G7 Leaders during the Charlevoix Summit in this context.

In recognition of Canadian leadership and the need for continuity, Canada committed to coordinating the RRM on an ongoing basis. The RRM Coordination Unit is housed at Global Affairs Canada in the International Security and Political Affairs Branch. It also supports the Canadian Focal Point designated to represent Canada, at the RRM and leverages its policy and data analytical capacity to support the RRM mandate.

How does this fit into Canada's efforts aimed at securing the integrity of General Elections 2019?

Sustained whole-of-government efforts are underway to protect the integrity of Canada's General Elections in 2019 and beyond. These efforts are led by Canada's Minister of Democratic Institutions in collaboration with numerous other Ministers, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The RRM fits within the international pillar of this strategy - pillar aimed at thwarting foreign interference. The RRM's mandate is to strengthen G7 coordination in terms of identifying and responding to diverse and evolving threats to G7 democracies, and identifying opportunities for coordinated response.

Why is Canada taking a leadership role? Is our democracy under threat?

Canadian democracy is not seriously threatened by foreign interference at present. However, Canada takes the recent experiences of other liberal democracies seriously. Moreover, Canada has been a stalwart champion of the democratic system of governance and the international rules-based system. While Canada has not been a prime target of foreign interference activities, it is not immune. An open report by the Canadian Security Establishment on *Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process* speaks to the cyber dimension of the threat, for example. What is called human-based foreign interference is also alive and well. In this context, Canada is putting in place frameworks and initiatives to protect the integrity of the 2019 General Elections and beyond.

What is the role of Global Affairs? Are there not national security agencies that are already mandated to protect Canada against foreign threats?

The role of Global Affairs is to support the commitment of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister to lead and coordinate the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM). The mandate of the RRM is inherently international. Furthermore, its scope includes threats to

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democracies that do not necessarily meet the established national security thresholds set by our security agencies. Because of the diverse and evolving nature of the contemporary threats democracies face, Global Affairs Canada is working closely with a range of agencies and departments, including those in charge of Canada's security.

What is the purpose of the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism's Coordination Unit? Where is it located?

The RRM Coordination Unit will coordinate information sharing among the G7 Focal Points and when required, facilitate coordinated response. The Coordination Unit convenes regular RRM meetings and undertakes systematic engagement with the RRM Focal Points. The Unit also produces reports on threat patterns and trends, and leverages open social media analysis. It works closely with the Focal Point Network and the Focal Point who represents the country holding the rotating G7 Presidency. In 2019, France will hold the G7 Presidency.

Questions around Open Social Media Analysis: Can you share your open social media reports publically?

Some of the reports produced by the RRM Coordination Unit can be shared publically. Others are produced exclusively for the consideration by the RRM. An information sharing protocol and communications strategy is being developed and consulted with G7 members as the RRM is operationalized.

What tools are you using and to what end?

The tools we are using are aimed to help us understand the digital dimension of foreign interference, a dimension that has been increasing in importance. They are open-source software that enables big data analytics.

What data do you collect? Are you handling private information?

The purpose of the open social media analytical work is to better understand the digital context in which foreign interference takes place. We focus on tactics, strategies, and trends pertaining to foreign interference online or what is also known as information operations. We only analyse online interactions that are open. We do not focus on individuals. Therefore, the purpose of the work is not to collect private personal information of users.

Has the Privacy Commissioner been consulted or a privacy impact assessment undertaken related to the activities of the RRM?

The G7 RRM will collect and share information consistent with Canada's privacy laws, as well as the Ministerial Direction for Avoiding Complicity in Mistreatment by Foreign Entities. The information sharing practices of Global Affairs Canada are subject to review by the Privacy Commissioner, the Office of the Auditor General and the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians.

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Can Canadians participate in any way? How can Canadian citizens learn about how is the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism meeting its mandate?

The RRM plans to work with a range of partners from civil society, such as experts, think tanks, academics, and others to gain a better understanding of the challenges democracies face. When possible and appropriate, the RRM will report on its progress and share information with the public.

What has the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism achieved to date?

The inaugural meeting of the RRM took place on November 5/6, 2018, in Canada. During that meeting foundational documents prepared by the RRM Coordination Unit, including the Terms of Reference and protocols pertaining to information sharing and coordinated response were negotiated. The RRM Coordination Unit has also been undertaking international outreach and developing and nurturing domestic government networks to ensure that Canadian engagement in the RRM reflects whole-of-government objectives and officials from across the Government of Canada benefit from information and analysis shared by the Focal Points.

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