FW: Input for ADM SITE Meeting

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Date: Wed, 03 Nov 2021 14:25:18 +0000

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Sent: November-01-21 7:56 AM
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Subject: Re: Input for ADM SITE Meeting

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Thank you Gallit.

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This will be useful. Welcome back and à plus tard.

Le 31 oct. 2021 à 22:11, Dobner, Gallit -IOL < [redacted] @international.gc.ca> a écrit :

Hi Dan, Catherine,

I am just getting back up to speed – lots of action last week and lots more ahead this week!

For the ADM SITE mtg on Monday pm, I understand the agenda will be as follows:

1) SITE TF Deep Dive/AAR (CSE/Lyall King)
2) Election Security Grey Areas (PCO/David MacGillavry)
3) Discussion (CSE/Dan Rogers)

Here are a few notes for each item (with input from the whole RRM team):

1) SITE TF Deep Dive/AAR (CSE/Lyall King)

- Since the last election, SITE has been working on both a deep dive on possible PRC interference/influence efforts (which you kindly approved) and responses to related questions from the Conservative Party. The deep dive was essential to preparing our final observations and After Action report and it stemmed from a request made by USS and other DMs at the last P5 mtg to "come to ground" on what we saw with respect to possible PRC interference/influence.

- There has not been sufficient time to agree on an After Action Report, but Lyall, as Chair of SITE, will provide a broad overview of our observations based on discussions to date. I have not seen this summary myself yet, but will take a look first thing Monday am and flag any issues to you if need be.

- The point to make here is that the current CSIS Act definition for FI does not encompass the tactics and techniques increasingly employed by malign state actors in the information space that pose a threat to democracies, e.g., the use of state media or

the leveraging of diaspora populations – without explicit direction – to shape narratives to their benefit or polarise societies. We saw this kind of well-documented activity in the context of COVID. The questions here are what latitude do we grant a totalitarian state's traditional and social media and when do propaganda and influence become interference in today's digital society where narratives are algorithm-driven and delivered at scale?

2) Election Security Grey Areas (PCO/David MacGillavry)

- This deck examines three grey zones in which the S&I community operated during GE44: (1) FI; (2) domestic vs IMVE; (3) physical security. RRM Canada work principally concerns FI so we have limited our comments to this slide only.

- Important to note that SITE (via RRM Canada) raised the spectre of possible Chinese interference – not only increased media/political attention; SITE was on top of this and it's worthwhile making this point

- Worth discussing what the appropriate operational action is in response to mis/disinformation SITE is seeing in real time; here we need to dig further into communications, and think about how we better leverage public comms as a tool to counter false information. This was not fleshed out in the PCO-led comms strategy and the issue of comms below-the-P5-threshold is unresolved.

- Agree a foreign agent registry would be useful and suggest that it address foreign agents distributing content inside and outside of election cycles.

- Agree attribution would be ideal but this is a major challenge faced by all our likeminded, including those like the US, UK and France who are investing considerably more resources into identifying and responding to FI online. Attribution is a challenge on US platforms like Twitter, where we have even greater visibility than platforms like WeChat. Moreover, we come up against real privacy issues, when we talk about encrypted channels. In short, way easier said than done.

- Absolutely, we need to beef up our monitoring and analytical capacity. The question is who is responsible for ongoing monitoring, analysis and reporting inside and outside of election cycles? With a snap election in October, and another minority govt now in power, the GoC and SITE need to be in a permanent state of readiness (we were actively preparing for GE44 since Jan 2021); RRM Canada is not staffed for this s. 39 - Cabinet s. 39 - Cabinet Confidence

- Finally, here are a few actions the RRM would recommend:
    - Undertake targeted outreach with Chinese SMPs, as Australia did with Tencent ahead of their election (the company appointed a public facing representative for ongoing engagement)
    - Conduct an all-source mapping of the pillars of the Chinese influence/propaganda machine – including a public facing element – to better understand how the PRC influences and interferes in the information space and to raise public awareness and build resilience.
    - Foster – through dedicated funding – a richer non-government ecosystem for monitoring and reporting on foreign state sponsored disinformation.
    - Collaborate with US GEC, NATO, and UK Foreign Affairs initiatives to fund Chinese-language media that provides a viable alternative to PRC/CCP sources and diminishes their hold. This would apply both domestically and globally.
    - Per above, consider a more proactive comms approach, esp in view of increase media/political attention during elections, where FI is below the threshold of a P5 announcement. Actions similar to media briefing provided to US press by various intelligence agencies during the 2020 elections could be considered.

3) Discussion (CSE/Dan Rogers)

Finally, in case we get into lessons learned, I am including again the thoughts my team shared with SITE members re: GE44 lessons learned:

1. **Complex Online Information Environment:** RRM Canada monitoring reflected the pre-election threat assessment, namely that any foreign state affiliated information manipulation will likely 1) be embedded within a broader digital information ecosystem – hiding in plain sight; 2) occur on private/encrypted channels; and 3) play out on opaque social media platforms to which GoC has limited access.

2. **Communications as a Tool to Counter FI:** GoC communications was a challenge throughout GE44, in part due to the Caretaker Convention. For example, the GoC did not proactively communicate plans to safeguard the election as was done for GE43; an updated web site went live without fanfare. As a result, academics, media and the leader of the Conservative Party – presumably unaware of the extensive measures in place – all criticized the GoC's lack of action to safeguard the election. This was a lost opportunity to raise public awareness and build resilience. Similarly, in the context of the Caretaker Convention, it was not entirely clear how incidents below the Panel's threshold but still worthy of public awareness might be addressed. There is a need to be more strategic about both proactive and reactive communications with respect to election security, as communications is a critical tool in the GoC's toolkit for building resilience to and responding to foreign interference.

3. **Support for Civil Society and Academia:** There was no GoC funding available to support academia and civil society to monitor for and report publicly on potential foreign interference in the information environment to further boost awareness and resilience. Vehicles like PCH's Digital Citizen Initiative should be considered.

4. **Roles and Responsibilities:** The role of EC's threat monitoring function needs to be clarified, better framed in existing information sharing practices (thresholds), and squared with that of SITE.

5. **P5**: The opportunity for SITE to meet with and brief the P5 in-person was an improvement on the GE 43 process, allowing SITE members to better understand P5 concerns and target reporting. Debriefs on full P5 meetings would be of further benefit.

6. **Governance framework:** Thrice weekly ESCC meetings did not really engage on the substance of possible FI. Regular ADM SITE meetings would have been useful.

Hope this is useful to you both. See you tomorrow.
Gallit