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GAC Activities for Countering Foreign Interference

April 2023

Issue

What activities does Global Affairs Canada undertake to proactively prepare against and effectively respond to foreign interference, both during and outside of writ periods?

Activities

- Overall, GAC undertakes activities related to diplomatic engagement and promoting democracy and democratic resilience, not investigating or prosecuting foreign interference.¹ GAC undertakes numerous activities related to countering foreign interference as part of general departmental business (Ministerial mandate letter)² and in response to specific events (Such as the invasion of Ukraine). Responses vary significantly in severity and scale (i.e., demarches versus declaring someone *persona non grata*).

Monitoring, Analysis, and Reporting – Ongoing efforts to maintain and build Canada's knowledge of foreign interference threats.

- Rapid Response Mechanism Canada** – the Secretariat uses open-source data analytics to monitor the digital information environment for foreign state-sponsored disinformation. During federal general elections, RRM Canada supports GAC's participation in the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force. Outside of elections, RRM Canada monitors and reports on Russian and Chinese disinformation and emerging global threats to both GoC and G7 partners.

Multilateral Coordination – GAC works with partners in international fora to collectively develop responses to foreign interference

- G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (G7 RRM)** – a forum for G7+ countries to share information and techniques and identify collective opportunities to counter foreign interference. The G7 RRM currently includes working groups on data analytics, and knowledge building, and proposed new groups on collective response, sub-national interference, and trans-national repression.
- Non-public partnerships** – GAC works with [redacted] to collaborate with like-minded international partners on public strategic communications campaigns related to threats to democracy. [redacted]
- Public Partnerships** – GAC takes part in numerous multilateral fora that are related to, but not solely focused on, foreign interference. This includes the Freedom Online Coalition (which GAC led in 2022), the Media Freedom Coalition, the Summit for Democracy, and others.
- Multilateral Diplomacy and Advocacy** – GAC supports the development of international norms around information integrity at the UN and other fora.

¹ Canada's Security and Intelligence Community (CSE, CSIS, RCMP) have the statutory responsibility to investigate and prosecute unlawful foreign interference and influence activities.

² From the Minister's Mandate letter, December 2021: "Work with partners to develop and expand collective responses to [...] foreign interference in democratic processes."

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Attribution (Naming and Shaming) – Building public awareness about the potential threats of malign activities and actors.

- **GC attribution framework** – a framework to make a recommendation to MINA on whether to speak up publicly in reaction to malicious cyber activity. Canada has formally attributed malicious actions to Russia, China, and Iran over the last two years. Public statements that draw attention to counter-normative state behaviour in cyberspace are part of a broader toolkit of deterrence and response to cyber incidents. The framework involves CSE and Public Safety among other departments. However, during the writ period, it is likely that no attribution would occur under the Caretaker Convention.
- **G7 RRM Annual Report** – the G7 RRM published an Annual Report that in 2022 named Russia, China, and Iran as states that use covert foreign interference activities in the pursuit of their goals, from disinformation campaigns to targeting critical infrastructure.
- **Public (Strategic) Communications** – GAC and other departments are publicly and vehemently countering the Russian and Chinese governments' false claims and disinformation narratives about the war in Ukraine and providing guidance for detecting information manipulation on a growing number of online platforms.³

Diplomatic Responses – Diplomatic responses are guided by the *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* and the *Vienna Convention on Consular Relations*.

- **Writ Period Protocol Circular Note** – in advance of federal general elections, GAC's Office of Protocol send a Circular Note to all foreign missions in Canada, outlining appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and activities under the guise of the *Vienna Conventions*.
- **Acceptance/Non-acceptance of engagement** – decisions by GAC officials impact Canada's bilateral relationships. A choice to not engage countries suspected of interfering in Canadian democracy, or to do so at a more junior level, is one early response.
- **Démarches** – an official diplomatic notice of Canada's disapproval. Canada has demarched the Chinese Ambassador and senior officials repeatedly about concerns related to foreign interference, most recently on February 24, 2023.
- **Persona Non Grata** – the expulsion of a diplomat is a measure of last resort. A *persona non grata* declaration by Canada against a foreign representative carries the risk that a reciprocal *persona non grata* declaration will be made against a Canadian foreign representative at Canada's mission in the foreign state in question. Under the *Vienna Conventions*, Canada does not have to explain its expulsion decision to the sending country, but there are almost always consequences.
- **Sanctions** – targeted sanctions prohibit persons in Canada and Canadians abroad from engaging in any activity related to the property of a listed person or entity.

Programming and capacity building – to support government and civil society partners building resilience to foreign threats to democracy.

- **Targeted Capacity-Building** – GAC engages in targeted capacity-building partnerships and projects. This includes individual projects where RRM Canada analysts have deployed to Eastern Europe to support governments countering Russian disinformation and partnerships, such as the Peace and Stabilization Operations Program (PSOPs)

³ See this webpage: [Countering disinformation with facts](#).

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efforts to work with the UK's Government Information Cell (GIC) to enhance collaboration between the Governments of Canada and the United Kingdom to counter Russian disinformation.

- **Support to Ukraine** – in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Canada announced \$3.8 in new funding to support strategic communications capacity of the Ukrainian government. Additionally, GAC secured \$15M for the multi-donor Partnership Fund for a Resilient Ukraine, which supports the Government of Ukraine's efforts in strategic communications, countering disinformation and strengthen community resilience.
- **Engagement with Academia and Civil Society** – GAC regularly engages with the academic and civil society sectors in Canada and abroad (sometimes leading to projects such as the Partnership Fund for a Resilient Ukraine and others)

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