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## Executive summary | *sommaire*

- The expansion of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) influence in Canada has a significant geostrategic dimension. To its south, Canada has the world's longest undefended border with the United States, and it borders Russia to its north. It is therefore in the People's Republic of China's (PRC) interest to weaken Canada's alliance with the US and the Five Eyes intelligence consortium through investment in the country.
- The Chinese state has acquired ownership of Canadian mines and energy resources on terms that are not reciprocal for Canadian investment in natural resources in China. China has also bought Canadian firms specializing in high tech to gain access to advanced Canadian technologies. It also collaborates with Canadian researchers working in areas of key interest to the PRC and engages in traditional espionage. Recently, Canada has moved to restrict Chinese investment in critical minerals mines, and it has expelled some Chinese firms in the sector.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2012, China signed a Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement with Canada. In addition to posing a threat to Canadian national security, the agreement is also seen as a threat to Canada's sovereignty regarding its labour and environmental regulations.<sup>2</sup>
- Approximately five percent of the Canadian population, or about 1.77 million people, identify their ethnic origin as Chinese. The PRC plays on "immigrant guilt," or perceived duties to one's country of origin, to foment divided loyalties. The PRC conflates this bond with the ancestral motherland with its own goals. Some Chinese Canadian members of parliament, at both the provincial and federal level, have recently resigned over allegations of improper relations with the PRC.
- Propaganda campaigns by Chinese diplomats and other proxies of the PRC have proven largely unsuccessful. China's diplomatic efforts also aim to reduce Canada's cultural and economic dependence on the US. The PRC's long-term and patient co-optation of Canada's political and corporate elite has found fertile ground in 'Canadian nationalist' political culture. The influence of

Chinese money means that while the PRC's efforts to cultivate soft power have been mostly unsuccessful in Canada, and in fact may have led to a negative response (as recent opinion polls indicate), money is still an important factor in China's use of economic leverage to further its influence in Canada's China policy.

- Canadian news organizations tend to be suspicious of Chinese motives in Canada. This is particularly true after highly classified intelligence leaks highlighted the malign activities of some Chinese diplomats. These reports focused public attention on China's Ministry of State Security (MSS) and the United Front Work Department (UFWD).
- Nevertheless, there is legitimate concern that, if China continues to consolidate its position in Canada through covert, corrupt, and coercive influence operations, Canadian democracy will continue to be eroded. Still, there is increasing political will to resist Chinese influence operations in Canada by raising awareness of the pervasive and corrosive nature of PRC operations on Canadian democratic institutions, national security, and sovereignty; and to implement legislative measures to curb Chinese interference in Canada's domestic politics. **MLI**
- L'influence grandissante du Parti communiste chinois (PCC) au Canada revêt une dimension géostratégique importante. Au sud, le Canada partage avec les États-Unis la plus longue frontière non défendue du monde et, au nord, il est bordé par la Russie. Par conséquent, il est dans l'intérêt de la République populaire de Chine (RPC) d'investir au pays en vue d'affaiblir l'alliance Canada-États-Unis et le consortium de renseignement « Five Eyes ».
- L'État chinois a acquis des mines et des ressources énergétiques canadiennes à des conditions sans équivalent pour les investissements canadiens dans le secteur des ressources naturelles en Chine. Cet État s'est également porté acquéreur d'entreprises canadiennes spécialisées dans la haute technologie afin de mettre la main sur nos technologies de pointe. La Chine mobilise aussi des chercheurs canadiens travaillant dans des domaines d'intérêt majeur pour la RPC et se livre à des activités traditionnelles d'espionnage. Récemment, le Canada a instauré certaines mesures visant à limiter les investissements chinois dans les mines de minéraux critiques et a fermé ce secteur à certaines entreprises chinoises.
- En 2012, la Chine a conclu avec le Canada un accord de promotion et de protection des investissements étrangers (APIE). En plus de la menace qu'il fait peser sur la sécurité nationale du Canada, cet accord est également considéré comme un risque pour la souveraineté du pays sur le plan des réglementations en matière d'environnement et de main-d'œuvre.

- Environ cinq pour cent de la population canadienne, soit quelque 1,77 million de personnes, s'identifie comme étant d'origine chinoise. Pour alimenter les divisions, la RPC joue sur le sentiment de culpabilité ressenti par l'immigrant, c'est-à-dire sur sa perception des devoirs qui lui incombent face à son pays d'origine. La RPC confond ses propres objectifs et la loyauté envers la mère patrie. D'ailleurs, certains parlementaires canadiens d'origine chinoise, tant au palier provincial que fédéral, ont récemment démissionné en raison d'allégations de relations inappropriées avec la RPC.
- Les campagnes de propagande menées par les diplomates chinois et certaines personnes de confiance de la RPC se sont révélées être en bonne partie infructueuses. Les efforts diplomatiques de la Chine cherchent également à réduire la dépendance culturelle et économique du Canada à l'égard des États-Unis. La cooptation patiente et de longue haleine exercée par la RPC sur l'élite politique et économique du Canada trouve un terrain fertile dans la culture politique du « nationalisme canadien ». L'argent chinois signifie que même si les efforts déployés par la RPC pour cultiver son « soft power » (pouvoir d'attraction) influent peu sur le Canada, suscitant même une réaction négative (comme l'indiquent de récents sondages d'opinion), cet argent demeure à la base du levier économique dont se sert la Chine pour accroître davantage son influence sur la politique du Canada à son égard.
- Les organes de presse canadiens ont tendance à se méfier des intérêts chinois. C'est particulièrement vrai depuis que des fuites de renseignements hautement confidentiels ont mis en lumière les activités malveillantes de certains diplomates chinois. Ces informations ont attiré l'attention du public sur le ministère chinois de la Sécurité d'État (MSS) et le département du travail du Front uni (UFWD).
- Néanmoins, on peut légitimement craindre que si la Chine consolide encore sa position au Canada au moyen d'activités d'influence secrètes, malveillantes et coercitives, la démocratie canadienne continuera de s'éroder. Néanmoins, la volonté politique de résister aux activités d'influence de la Chine au Canada se fait de plus en plus forte grâce à la sensibilisation à la nature envahissante et corrosive des activités de la RPC sur les institutions démocratiques, la sécurité nationale et la souveraineté du Canada; et la mise en œuvre de mesures législatives visant à limiter l'ingérence de la Chine dans la politique intérieure du Canada. **MLI**

## Introduction

**Chinese political influence in Canada** has a significant geostrategic dimension. Canada has the world's longest undefended border with the United States to its south and borders Russia to its north. Canada is also a member of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance, a G7 member state, and key US ally in the continental defence of North America. Weakening Canada's ties to the US and the Five Eyes through massive investment in Canada is, as such, in the PRC's interest. Moreover, the PRC, which now defines itself as a "near-Arctic state," has a keen interest in the Canadian north and has proposed a "Polar Silk Road" through Canada's Arctic.<sup>3</sup>

Canada's current leadership has tended to downplay the CCP's role in coordination of the PRC Party-state-military-security-industrial complex. For example, it serves China's geo-strategic interest to foster the view among Western countries like Canada that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is an equivalent counterpart to our own state militaries, simply an armed force serving the mandate assigned to it by the political representatives of the popular will. This strategic deception applies to Chinese external depiction of all its CCP-dominated institutions. Notably, in external propaganda, particularly in foreign languages, China's National People's Congress (NPC) is made out to be the supreme organ of state power and the equivalent of democratic legislatures throughout the world.<sup>4</sup> In reality, however, the NPC plays a relatively minor role in China's political structure, where the supreme organ of state political power is without question the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CCP.

This propaganda smokescreen over the true nature of the Chinese regime and the attempt to depict China as a nation whose political structure is normatively equivalent to that of liberal democracies is a critical element of

the PRC's strategy to fulfill its ambitious international agenda. In this regard, the Canada-China Legislative Association<sup>5</sup> continues exchanges between Canadian parliamentarians and members of China's rubber-stamped NPC. As this paper shows, the Canadian government has ignored the relationship between the CCP's extensive UFDW operations in Canada and China's geostrategic agenda. One former agent from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), Canada's domestic intelligence agency, avers that every Canadian federal government since the 1980s has "been compromised by agents of Communist China" and estimates that only 30 percent of the Chinese diplomats posted in Canada are engaged in legitimate diplomatic work.<sup>6</sup>

## Political influence through elite capture

**China seeks to influence Canadian** policymakers by arguing that its purchase of mines and energy companies benefits Canada.<sup>7</sup> Canada comprises the second-largest landmass on the planet and is an important source of minerals and energy resources essential to China's economy. Canada is a reliable source of raw material because of its well-developed infrastructure, predictable regulations and taxes, an adherence to the rule of law to protect contracts, and a stable political environment. Accordingly, the PRC's Party-state-military-security-industrial complex has been highly successful in its attempt to capture Canadian elites.

Shortly after the government of current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau assumed power in 2015, it reversed a decision by the previous prime minister, Stephen Harper, not to sell a Montreal-based high-tech company specializing in fibre-laser technologies to China. The Trudeau administration's decision, made against the advice of Canadian security agencies, green-lit a Chinese state-owned company's acquisition of the firm, whose work applies to laser-directed weapons.<sup>8</sup> Later, despite Pentagon security concerns, the government approved the sale of a satellite technology company, whose products are used by the US and Taiwanese militaries, to China.<sup>9</sup>



Research for this paper suggests that influential Canadians who curry favour with the PRC by urging their government to approve policies favouring China receive financial inducements to do so:

- they receive income from the CCCP via board memberships or other paid associations;
- they receive income from Canadian companies doing business with the Chinese government;
- they are associated with law firms that represent Chinese or Canadian companies that do business with the Chinese government; and
- they receive income from think tanks that receive funding from China-associated sources, such as Canadian companies working with the Chinese government.

Canadians strongly oppose engaging with the PRC on Beijing's terms.<sup>10</sup> People who benefit materially from PRC-related concerns are induced to support the PRC agendas for Canada. That includes support for think tanks at the University of British Columbia, the University of Alberta, and the Munk School at the University of Toronto. The Asia Pacific Foundation (APF) leads Canada's six-member China Research Partnership (CRP) that was set up in 2017, a move much praised by the then Chinese ambassador to Canada at the time. Besides the APF, this Research Partnership is composed of:

- the Canada-China Business Council;
- the Canada-China Institute for Business & Development;
- the China Institute at the University of Alberta;
- the Institute of Asian Research at the University of British Columbia; and
- the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto .

All six institutions have pushed for Canadian engagement with the PRC.

In contrast to the US and the U.K., Canada has not enacted effective legislation restricting the transfer of classified technologies to agents of a foreign state. Consequently, despite detaining some suspects, Canada has not successfully prosecuted Canadians who have transferred sensitive technologies to the PRC.<sup>11</sup>

The Canadian government also turns a blind eye to PRC harassment of Canadian and Chinese citizens in Canada, in violation of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Canadian government has been reluctant

to address this problem, presumably due to pressure from domestic corporate interests who fear alienating the Chinese market. Amnesty International Canada has produced two reports in the past six years detailing Chinese state harassment of democracy activists, supporters of the rights of Tibetans and Uyghurs, and others.<sup>12</sup>

“ *The Canadian government also turns a blind eye to PRC harassment of Canadian and Chinese citizens in Canada.* ”

Despite the Trudeau government’s obstruction, Canada’s political opposition has continued its push to call China to account for human rights violations. Trudeau’s Liberal Party opposed the establishment of a Commons Special Committee on Canada-China Relations in 2019 but, as a minority government, they could not block the creation of this committee against a united vote by opposition parties in Parliament. Yet in August 2020, just before the Committee was about to release a report calling for Canada to provide safe harbour for at-risk Hong Kong activists, and just as a Foreign Affairs subcommittee was set to issue a report on the Uyghurs (calling for Chinese officials to join Russian, Venezuelan and Saudi officials on the Canadian Magnitsky sanctions list), the Trudeau government prorogued (i.e., suspended) Parliament, resulting in the burying of the reports and the termination of the China Committee.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the opposition parties remained determined not to allow these matters to drop regardless of the government’s apparent desire to appease PRC concerns. After Parliament reconvened, the opposition parties forced the reestablishment of the Special Committee, and the abovementioned subcommittee issued a report concluding that the PRC’s policies toward Uyghurs constituted genocide.<sup>14</sup>

## Shaping Canada's information space

**The CCP uses various tactics** to influence Canadian public perception and the country's information space. Much of this is accomplished through close relationships with highly influential individuals in business and government, as well as appeals to “responsibility to the motherland” among ethnic Chinese groups in Canada, including elected officials.

The Canadian government has also tried to influence perceptions among Canadian citizens about the importance of its relations with the PRC as a policy priority.<sup>15</sup> Senior government-level collaboration with Canadian businesses, which have lucrative ties to Chinese business networks in the Public Policy Forum (PPF),<sup>16</sup> has sought to provide an alternative to mainstream media coverage of China. Canada's mainstream media has often been critical of the government's engagement with China on what it sees as the PRC's terms: Canada too often has demonstrated “friendship” with China by not vigorously raising human rights issues and by looking the other way when China reneges on its commitments to the international rules-based order in trade and diplomacy.

In June 2017, PPF launched a two-year examination of Canada's relationship with China, promising “a valuable injection of fresh ideas and understanding.” The first forum included 35 participants, about half from the Chinese Research Partnership and the others from senior levels of the Canadian civil service and business. The Canada-China Business Council, to which many participants in the forum have connections, is dedicated to facilitating trade and investment with China. Its founding members include the China International Trust and Investment Corporation, an arm of the Chinese government. The vice-chair of the Bank of Montreal Financial Group, Kevin Lynch, a former clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet (making him, at one time, Canada's most senior civil servant), was co-chair of the Consultation. He was also a director of the China National Offshore Oil Corporation, the state-owned enterprise that controversially acquired the Canadian energy company Nexen in 2012.

The document about the consultations includes such statements as:

- China today reflects its own history and unique institutions, so its values and practices differ from Canada's;

- the West should accommodate international rules and institutions to meet China’s values and interests;
- rather than focusing on human rights, emphasize environmental, social, educational programming, and governance collaboration with the CCP;
- make Canadians aware of the important economic benefits offered by strong relations with China; and
- use media to shape public opinion by pitting trade against human rights. There is a need to counter this with a nuanced and sophisticated alternative discourse.

Public policy should not be dictated by public attitudes.<sup>17</sup>

These points align with the views of the Chinese embassy and consulates in Canada. As Ralph Weber of the University of Basel has put it, they are “important nodes of coordination and communication in the effort to silence critical voices and normalize China as a legitimate source of normativity in the global arena.”<sup>18</sup>

Approximately five percent of the Canadian population, or about 1.77 million people, identify as ethnically Chinese<sup>19</sup> according to Statistics Canada. The CCP seeks to play on immigrant guilt to foment divided loyalties and to emphasize the Chinese “motherland” and ancestral bond, which is identified with the goals and purposes of the PRC. This can extend to ethnic Chinese politicians who use their positions in government to benefit Beijing. One salient example is that of retired Ontario cabinet minister Michael Chan, who famously said, “for me, it is how I am able to bridge Canada and China. I can be in a position to promote both jurisdictions for the benefit of the people.”<sup>20</sup> The large population of Canadians of Chinese origin, many of whom are recent immigrants educated and exposed to media in the PRC, offer a significant opening for the CCP in Canada. It goes without saying that Chan was democratically elected to represent the interests of his Canadian constituents, not to concomitantly promote the interests of a foreign country.<sup>21</sup>

In April, Toronto’s *Globe and Mail* newspaper reported that at least 130 Canadian Alliance of Chinese Associations, whose leadership is hand-picked by Beijing, are currently operating in Canada. Some, such as the Canada Toronto Fuqing Business Association, state on their websites that they were set up under the guidance of the UFWD.<sup>22</sup> These associations have served as



fronts for PRC “police stations” in Canada and are involved in harassment operations against critics of the PRC. Only in 2023 was someone finally charged with harassment, after menacing pro-democracy activists.<sup>23</sup>

This kind of behaviour is not uncommon in Canada. Politicians, the RCMP, and CSIS have all acknowledged that Chinese agents have spent years harassing and threatening residents of Chinese origin, including Canadian Uyghurs, Tibetans, Hongkongers, PRC students, and dissidents. Yet the government has been slow to move against any of the Chinese agents in Canada by charging them in court, bringing forth its first charges just this year. The government has also been hesitant to send complicit diplomats back to China.

## Interference in Canadian democratic institutions

**Starting in the fall of 2022**, Global News, of Canada’s Global Television Network, and the *Globe and Mail* published a series of reports based on leaked classified intelligence assessments. The leaked documents alleged that China threatened the integrity of Canada’s democratic institutions. They detailed Chinese government interference in Canada’s political system across the country and at all levels of government.<sup>24</sup>

The leaker published an anonymous opinion piece in the *Globe and Mail*, providing the following explanation for their actions:

*When I first became aware of the significance of the threat posed by outside interference to our democratic institutions, I worked – as have many unnamed and tireless colleagues – to equip our leaders with the knowledge and the tools needed to take action against it. Months passed, and then years. The threat grew in urgency; serious action remained unforthcoming. I endeavored, alone and with others, to raise concerns about this threat directly to those in a position to hold our top officials to account. Regrettably, those individuals were unable to do so. In the time*

*that passed, another federal election had come and gone, the threat of interference had grown, and it had become increasingly clear that no serious action was being considered. Worse still, evidence of senior public officials ignoring interference was beginning to mount. . . I hoped that by providing the public with information I believe to be in the interest of all Canadians, we as a country would begin a much deeper conversation about what it is that we expect of our government.*<sup>25</sup>

The leaks and the subsequent op-ed dominated Canadian political debate for several weeks. In chronological order, these revelations are:

- **November 7, 2022:** Canadian intelligence officials warned Prime Minister Trudeau that China was targeting Canada with a vast campaign of foreign interference, which included illegally funding a clandestine network of at least 11 federal candidates running in the 2019 federal election.<sup>26</sup>
- **December 21, 2022:** Beijing used an extensive network of community groups to conceal the flow of funds between Chinese officials and members of an election interference network, as part of an effort to advance China's political agenda in the 2019 federal contest.<sup>27</sup>
- **February 8, 2023:** The office of the prime minister's national security and intelligence advisor wrote a memo at the request of Trudeau's chief of staff. The memo warned of election interference by Chinese agents, reading: "recent reporting indicates that Chinese diplomats are aware that Canadian officials with whom they have contact are being scrutinized for potential conflicts of interest." The document also noted China was meddling in Canada's domestic politics before the 2019 election: "Chinese foreign influenced espionage acts against elected officials and public servants in Canada is well documented." A copy of the memo was sent to the Privy Council Office clerk.<sup>28</sup>
- **February 13, 2023:** Trudeau and senior aides were warned on at least two occasions that government MPs should be cautious in their dealings with former Ontario Liberal cabinet minister Michael Chan. Chan allegedly has ties to China's consulate in Toronto and has held meetings described as "clandestine in nature"

with Chinese consulate official Zhao Wei, who is described as a “suspected intelligence actor.” CSIS has a dossier on Chan that contains information on his pro-China activities in the 2019 and 2021 federal election campaigns and his meetings with suspected Chinese intelligence operatives.<sup>29</sup>

- **February 17, 2023:** CSIS assessments indicate that China employed a sophisticated strategy to disrupt Canada’s 2021 federal election campaign. Chinese diplomats and their proxies backed the re-election of Trudeau’s Liberal Party – but only to another minority government – and worked to defeat Conservative candidates considered unfriendly to Beijing. PRC tactics included disinformation campaigns, undeclared cash donations, and the use of Chinese students studying in Canada as campaign volunteers for Liberal candidates. The classified reports reveal that China’s former consul general in Vancouver, Tong Xiaoling, boasted in 2021 that she helped defeat two Conservative MPs. The CSIS reports were shared among senior government officials and Canada’s Five Eyes intelligence allies<sup>30</sup> Some of this intelligence was also shared with French and German intelligence services.<sup>31</sup>
- **February 18, 2023:** In early 2022, Chinese diplomats quietly issued warnings to friendly influential Canadians, a community it relies on to build relationships and to gather information from MPs. China advised its friends to reduce contact with politicians to avoid being caught up in foreign-interference investigations.<sup>32</sup>
- **February 20, 2023:** China instructed its consulates and visa offices to alert Beijing to prominent Canadians planning to visit China. The leaked documents reveal that the Chinese government targeted Canadian politicians, officials, and business executives using blackmail, bribery, and sexual seduction. The PRC even enlisted the Bank of China in its foreign-influence activities. This is part of a broad Chinese strategy to interfere in Canada’s democracy and gain influence over politicians, corporate executives, academics, and vulnerable Chinese Canadians. One key goal of this activity is to obtain political, economic, scientific, and military intelligence. Another goal is to neutralize or co-opt Canadian critics of Chinese policies, including those who speak out against the repression of

Uyghurs and Tibetans, the crackdown on free speech and democracy in Hong Kong, and China's claims to sovereignty over Taiwan. In a December 2021 report, CSIS explained how the CCP uses three colour-coded political interference tactics to influence Canadians. Blue refers to sophisticated cyberattacks on targets' computers, smartphones, and hotel rooms for possible blackmail. Gold refers to bribes, while yellow is what CSIS described as "honey pots" – how the CCP employs sexual seduction to compromise a target.<sup>33</sup>

- **February 25, 2023:** Three weeks before Canada's 2019 federal election, national security officials allegedly gave an urgent, classified briefing to senior aides from Prime Minister Trudeau's office, warning them that one of the candidates running for Trudeau's Liberal Party, Han Dong, was part of a Chinese foreign interference network. The source says that Dong, who subsequently won his seat in Toronto's North York district, is alleged to be one of at least 11 Toronto-area candidates supported by Beijing in the election. Sources say CSIS also believes Dong is a witting affiliate in China's election interference networks. Three sources with knowledge of the investigation said Dong was nominated in place of sitting MP Geng Tan as the 2019 Liberal candidate in a manner the service found suspicious. CSIS allegedly had intelligence that Beijing preferred Han Dong to Tan: "The Consulate was not pleased with Geng Tan's performance."<sup>34</sup>
- **February 28, 2023:** China appears to have targeted Trudeau after he became Liberal leader in 2013. Beijing's plan involved donating a significant sum of money to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, a charity set up in honor of his father, himself a former prime minister of Canada. CSIS intercepted a conversation in 2014 between an unnamed commercial attaché at one of China's consulates in Canada and billionaire Zhang Bin, a political advisor to the government in Beijing. Zhang also helps promote China's interests around the world. The two discussed the federal election that was expected to take place in 2015 and the possibility that the Liberals would defeat Stephen Harper's Conservatives and form the next government (as would end up happening). The source said the diplomat instructed Zhang to donate C\$1 million to the Trudeau



Foundation and told him the Chinese government would secretly reimburse him for the entire amount.<sup>35</sup>

- **March 8, 2023:** Two intelligence reports, from 2019 and 2022, respectively, raise questions about what senior federal officials knew about the alleged funding by a foreign interference network and how seriously the Trudeau government took the warnings. A special report prepared by the Intelligence Assessment Secretariat of Canada's Privy Council Office was date-stamped January 2022. The memo was finalized, suggesting it was to be read by Trudeau and his senior aides. The report asserted that Chinese officials in Toronto had given money to a group planning to interfere in Canada's 2019 election: "A large clandestine transfer of funds earmarked for the federal election from the PRC Consulate in Toronto was transferred to an elected provincial government official via a staff member of a 2019 federal candidate."<sup>36</sup>
- **March 10, 2023:** Vincent Ke, a member of Ontario's Progressive Conservative government since 2018, served as a financial intermediary in CCP election interference schemes described in two separate Privy Council Office intelligence reports. Ke received around C\$50,000 of part of a larger disbursement from the Chinese Consulate in Toronto in the C\$250,000 range that was channeled to China-supported candidates through intermediaries.<sup>37</sup>
- **March 22, 2023:** Liberal MP Han Dong, who is at the centre of Chinese influence allegations, privately advised a senior Chinese diplomat in February 2021 that Beijing should not free two Canadians, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, (or the "two Michaels") detained in China (likely in retaliation for the earlier apprehension of Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou in Vancouver, British Columbia) until after the 2021 general election, so as to reduce the likelihood of the Conservative Party defeating the Liberal government.<sup>38</sup>
- **May 1, 2023:** China sees Canada as a "high-priority target" and employs "incentives and punishment" as part of a vast influence network directed at elected officials, business executives and diaspora communities in the country, according to a top-secret intelligence assessment by CSIS. The report, titled "People's Republic of China Foreign Interference in Canada: A Critical National Security Threat,"

lists several examples of Chinese interference operations aimed at eroding support for the opposition Conservative Party. It notes that CSIS reporting from 2021 indicates that China's intelligence service, the MSS, "has taken specific actions to target Canadian MPs" who are linked to a February 2021 parliamentary motion condemning Beijing's oppression of Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities. The motion, which was adopted unanimously, declared China's conduct to genocide.<sup>39</sup> The spy agency said an MSS officer sought information on an unnamed Canadian MP's relatives who might be in China. This, the CSIS report said, "is almost certainly meant to make an example of this MP and deter others from taking anti-PRC positions." A national security source said the MP targeted was Conservative MP Michael Chong and that Zhao Wei, a Chinese diplomat in Canada, was working on this matter. The CSIS report presents an overview of Chinese government foreign interference in Canada, ranging from investigating the Conservative MP's relatives in China to harassing a Chinese student in Canada who supported Hong Kong's democracy movement. The report warned that Beijing is the "foremost perpetrator" of foreign interference in Canada. Its agents are not concerned about repercussions, the report says, because, for example, Canada does not have a foreign influence registry, unlike the US and Australia. It is not known whether elected officials in Canada had access to the report, which was produced by the agency's Intelligence Assessment Branch and dated July 20, 2021, several weeks before the federal election campaign got under way.<sup>40</sup>

- **May 4, 2023:** Conservative foreign affairs critic Michael Chong told MPs that Trudeau's national security advisor informed him that the 2021 intelligence report about China targeting his family was circulated beyond CSIS. The report, he said, even reached the desk of Trudeau's national security advisor. This version of events contradicts what the prime minister told reporters the day before, when he said the spy service didn't feel the report met "a threshold that required them to pass it up – up out of CSIS."<sup>41</sup>
- **May 12, 2023:** CSIS has a significant file on Chinese consulate official Zhao Wei and, since 2020, has shared that information with Global Affairs Canada, which has the authority to expel

foreign representatives for non-diplomatic activities, according to two national security sources. Zhao was allegedly responsible for keeping track of known opponents of the CCP in the Greater Toronto Area, including Falun Gong practitioners and others. Zhao and his proxies took pictures of dissidents, monitored their events, documented their identities and sent the information to China's secret police, the MSS. Zhao was also seen meeting in Toronto with Liberal staffers, including an assistant for International Trade Minister, Mary Ng. Zhao asked some of those aides to keep their MPs away from pro-Taiwan events, according to the source. CSIS had a file on Zhao when he arrived in Canada in 2018. The information in the file came from US intelligence agencies and the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), Canada's signals and cyber intelligence service.<sup>42</sup>

- **May 12, 2023:** Canada's spy agency drew up a list of MPs for briefings on Chinese political interference. It contacted two opposition MPs more than a week after Conservative MP Michael Chong was informed that he and family members in Hong Kong were targets of Chinese intimidation. CSIS contacted former Conservative leader Erin O'Toole, who was a candidate for prime minister in the 2021 election, and New Democratic Party (NDP) MP Jenny Kwan, an outspoken critic of China. O'Toole had family who lived in Hong Kong until 2021.<sup>43</sup>
- **May 19, 2023:** Canada's spy service sought an electronic and entry warrant to monitor former Ontario cabinet minister Michael Chan in the lead-up to the 2021 federal election, but it took several months for then-public safety minister Bill Blair to sign off on the clandestine surveillance of the Liberal Party powerbroker. The four-month delay left little time for CSIS to get the approval of a federal judge and to figure out the best ways to plant bugs in Chan's cars, home, office, computers, and mobile phones before the election campaign got under way. Some within the spy agency suspected the hesitancy was because of Chan's role as a major organizer and fundraiser for the Liberal Party.<sup>44</sup> Blair subsequently released a statement on Twitter that "the reporting by the *Globe and Mail* is factually incorrect."

These revelations caused an uproar in the House of Commons, becoming the focus of two major parliamentary studies: “Foreign Election Interference” in the House of Commons Procedure and House Affairs Committee and “Foreign Interference and Threats to the Integrity of Democratic Institutions, Intellectual Property and the Canadian State” in the House of Commons Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics Committee.<sup>45</sup> These committees summoned several experts, cabinet ministers, senior officials at Global Affairs Canada, CSIS, the Privy Council, and the Prime Minister’s Office, among others. Nevertheless, every time the committee got to the more cogent aspects of Chinese interference activities, government officials under cross examination said they could not respond with detail because they cannot discuss Canadian state secrets. This attitude has contributed to the impression of an arrogant, highhanded government approach that seems intended to stymie Canadians’ demand for answers.<sup>46</sup>

“ *This attitude has contributed to the impression of an arrogant, highhanded government approach.* ”

On February 23, 2023, Trudeau held a press briefing to say he was satisfied with the parliamentary committee hearings examining the past two election campaigns, noting “I applaud the work by parliamentary committees to monitor the situation.” He said he would not hold a public inquiry, as requested by former chief electoral officer Jean-Pierre Kingsley. Kingsley had stated that an independent inquiry was necessary because the Chinese interference operations outlined in leaked secret and top-secret CSIS reports threaten to undermine public confidence in the electoral system. He said Canadians must be able to “trust that the electoral process is not being tampered with by a foreign government.”<sup>47</sup>

The Canadian government eventually announced multiple measures in response to public pressure:



- **March 5, 2023:** Trudeau initiates two closed-door probes into Chinese election interference to be reviewed by a special rapporteur. The National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP), which reports directly to his office, will study China's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections. He also said the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency (NSIRA), which oversees the RCMP and federal spy agencies, will examine how investigations into Chinese election meddling have been handled. The special rapporteur, an eminent and impartial individual to be named at a later date, will review the reports from the two organizations and make recommendations. The Prime Minister said he would accept those judgments even if they include a call for a public inquiry. "The independent special rapporteur will have a wide mandate to make expert recommendations on protecting and enhancing Canadians' faith in our democracy," Trudeau said. "The independent rapporteur will make public recommendations that could include a public inquiry or some other independent review process." Trudeau said he spoke to the heads of both security panels to "underscore that Canadians need to have faith in their institutions and deserve answers and transparency," and asked them to begin "urgent work on foreign interference within their mandates." NSICOP is not a committee of Parliament, although it includes MPs from all major parties and several senators. Its reports are sent to the Prime Minister's Office, which can redact sections for national security reasons. The committee, which meets in secret, has examined foreign interference in past reports, which experts say have been largely ignored by the government. NSIRA also meets in secret and releases an annual report to Parliament.<sup>48</sup>
- **March 10, 2023:** The Government of Canada launches public consultations on a Foreign Influence Transparency Registry in Canada.<sup>49</sup> However, the effort has faced strong resistance, particularly over concerns it could lead to anti-Asian racism. Some critics have even compared it to Canada's 1923 *Chinese Exclusion Act*, which excluded Chinese from immigration to Canada until it was repealed in 1947 – these comparisons were amplified by the fact that preparations for commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Act's

passage were underway at the time.<sup>50</sup> This was a red herring promulgated by vested constituencies. After the Australian *Foreign Influence Transparency Act* of 2018, there was no indication that it led to a surge of racism in that country.

- **March 15, 2023:** Former Governor General of Canada David Johnston is appointed Independent Special Rapporteur.<sup>51</sup> This decision was heavily criticized because Johnston is a friend of the Trudeau family and has close connections to China. As president of the University of Waterloo, he helped establish its Confucius Institute, and he has an honorary doctorate from Nanjing University, which he has referred to as his “second home.” Johnston has visited China many times, and three of his daughters attended Chinese universities.<sup>52</sup> Johnston was a member of the Trudeau Foundation.<sup>53</sup>
- **March 22, 2023:** Han Dong resigns from the Liberal caucus to sit as an independent MP in the House of Commons.<sup>54</sup> Dong subsequently filed a C\$15 million lawsuit against Global News over articles alleging he was a “witting participant” in a Beijing-backed foreign interference network. While Han admits to meeting privately with China’s Consul General in Toronto in February 2021, he denies advising the Chinese government to delay releasing Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig from custody until after the general election (which was in fact the case).<sup>55</sup>
- **March 23, 2023:** The House of Commons passes a motion demanding that any Chinese diplomat implicated in “affronts to Canadian democracy” be expelled. The motion also called for Parliament to establish a foreign agent registry along the lines of the American and Australian models, for a national public inquiry into foreign election interference, and for Ottawa to shut down Chinese “police stations” operating in Canada. On all four points, the vote passes with 170-150 in favour, with the Liberal caucus voting against the motion.<sup>56</sup>
- **April 11, 2023:** The head of the Trudeau Foundation and its board of directors resign because of the political backlash following news that the Chinese government, not a Beijing billionaire, made a large financial gift to the foundation.<sup>57</sup>

- **May 8, 2023:** A Chinese MSS agent and a member of China’s diplomatic staff at the Toronto consulate is declared “persona non grata” a full week after his malign activities were revealed in the media. The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister insist the delay was because Canada had to “carefully weigh” the potential impact on “economic interest, consumer interest and also diplomatic interests” of his expulsion.<sup>58</sup>
- **May 17, 2023:** Almost four years after two scientists were fired from Canada’s highest-security laboratory, the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, the government announces that a panel of MPs and judges have been tasked with examining redacted and unredacted documents pertaining to the incident. In July 2019, scientists Xiangguo Qiu and her husband, Keding Cheng, were escorted out of the Winnipeg lab for reasons officials described as “relating to possible breaches in security protocols.” The two, both Chinese nationals, subsequently returned to China. Then Public Health Agency of Canada president Iain Stewart and Liberal MP Patty Hajdu, who was the health minister at the time, said the pair’s firing had nothing to do with the fact that Qiu oversaw a shipment of Ebola and Henipah viruses to China’s Wuhan Institute of Virology in March 2019. They also said that there is no connection between the shipments and Covid-19, which is believed to have emerged in China’s Wuhan Province in late 2019. But the government insisted that documents related to the firing, and the transfer of viruses to a research facility in Wuhan, are too sensitive to hand over to the Commons Special Committee on Canada-China relations. The government’s refusal to share these documents led the House of Commons to issue its first formal rebuke of a non-MP (Stewart) in nearly 110 years. That came after MPs voted to invoke a rare set of powers to discipline or potentially even imprison people. A sergeant-at-arms brought Stewart into the House of Commons, where he was reprimanded. House of Commons Speaker Anthony Rota called the situation and resulting disputes over authorities an “unprecedented situation.”<sup>59</sup>

On May 23, 2023, the “First Report – The Right Honourable David Johnston, Independent Special Rapporteur on Foreign Interference

– Democratic Institutions” was released.<sup>60</sup> Its main conclusions can be summarized as follows.

Viewed in full context, with all the relevant intelligence, several leaked materials released to journalists that raised “legitimate questions” turn out to have been misconstrued in some media reports, “presumably because of the lack of this context.” The report continued:

*The allegations [published in the news media] have caused significant misunderstandings and contributed to a discourse of distrust. The security agencies have therefore worked with me to ensure that I am able to tell the public as much as possible to restore public trust.”*

Johnston found that there is “no convincing evidence” to support allegations that the government failed to act on specific instances of foreign interference in the past two federal election cycles, but the report also identifies some “substantial gaps” in communicating intelligence. “There is evidence that significant communications problems contributed to the intelligence failing to reach the minister of public safety relating to the Honourable Michael Chong and other MPs with family in China, but there is no reason to believe it was intentional.”

The report also found that “[i]rregularities were observed with Dong’s nomination in 2019, and there is well-grounded suspicion that the irregularities were tied to the PRC Consulate in Toronto, with whom Dong maintains relationships.” However, the special rapporteur said he could not find evidence that Dong knew of said “irregularities,” or that China was backing him. There is clear evidence Han Dong privately visited the Chinese consulate in Toronto to discuss the detention of the two Michaels with Chinese diplomats, but “he did not suggest to the official that (China) extend their detention.”

“The PRC has leveraged proxy agents and has tried to influence numerous Liberal and Conservative candidates in subtle ways,” the report continued, confirming the reports of at least 11 compromised people (but stopping short of naming names). Johnston nevertheless held that there was no conclusive evidence of a “network” of ties between these individuals or that they were consciously acting to further Chinese goals. The report indicated that “limited intelligence” supports the notion that the Chinese government intended to send funds to seven Liberal and four Conservative candidates, but there is



no intelligence suggesting any of them actually received that money. “Some of the candidates are well-integrated with Chinese Canadian community organizations,” Johnston adds. “There is nothing inherently suspicious about this, as it is common for political candidates to rely on community support.”

Johnston concluded there should be no public enquiry on foreign interference because “a person leading a public inquiry would be unlikely to learn more about who knew what, when, and what was done with it, than has been made available to me.” Adding, “Duplicating this effort would not be productive and would lead to delay in addressing the issues.” Furthermore, Johnston argued that the sensitivity of the intelligence material means that a public inquiry would have to be held in secret. “The commissioner would be left in the same position as I, reviewing material in private and unable to provide any greater transparency than what I am able to provide to Canadians in this report.”

“ *The report’s conclusions, including its confidential annex, should be reviewed by NSICOP and NSIRA.* ”

The report’s conclusions, including its confidential annex, should be reviewed by NSICOP and NSIRA. Those bodies should report publicly if they reach different conclusions. Johnston also suggested that opposition party leaders should get security clearances to read the classified annex, but the leaders of the Conservative Party and Bloc Québécois have both refused clearance to read the annex on the grounds that they would be constrained by secrecy laws and, in effect, silenced from sharing any pertinent information from the annex with Canadians.<sup>61</sup>

The former leader of the opposition, Erin O’Toole, who had called for a public inquiry, claims that Johnston only called to meet him *after* the report had already been sent out for translation into French language.<sup>62</sup>

Members of the Canadian diaspora community who say they are being harassed by Chinese agents and well-nigh everyone else – saving the Prime Minister, his staff, and colleagues – have criticized the special rapporteur’s

report for its non-response to the alarming allegations in the leaked intelligence.<sup>63</sup> After a CSIS briefing, O’Toole told the House of Commons “The [Chinese] communist government’s ideal outcome is to have its critics pull their punches and turn a blind eye” to create “a chilling effect on our parliamentary democracy.” Members and senior advisors of the government “are being willfully blind to attacks on our parliamentary democracy,” O’Toole warned.<sup>64</sup>

The Prime Minister has said he will follow Johnston’s advice to not call a public inquiry on Chinese interference, adding that, following the release of Johnston’s report, Han Dong could now return to the Liberal caucus.<sup>65</sup> In September 2023, Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc announced the creation of a broader public inquiry into allegations of foreign interference by nations like China and Russia, to be led by Marie-Josée Hogue, a judge who sits on the Québec Court of Appeal.

## Pushback against China’s economic geostrategy for Canada

**Gradual awareness of the PRC’s** malign intentions has led to greater skepticism about the benefits of selling key Canadian assets to China. While the PRC has successfully captured some elite members of the Canadian community, and shaped policy decisions, its ability to translate this into geostrategic influence in Canada via large-scale investment in Canadian natural resources and infrastructure has been limited.

In 2013, the Conservative government approved a US\$15.1 billion takeover of a Calgary-headquartered energy producer Nexen by the China National Offshore Oil Corporation. Then-prime minister Stephen Harper indicated that, under normal conditions, Canada would not permit China to buy whole companies operating in the resource sector, though the PRC would be welcome to acquire minority stakes in these companies. At least one credible party has speculated that this stymied PRC plans to go on a buying spree totaling as much as US\$200 billion.<sup>66</sup>

In 2018, Trudeau's Liberal government turned down an application by the China Communications Construction Company to purchase AECON holdings, Canada's largest privately held construction company. AECON built critical infrastructure, including a nuclear power plant, and bid to expand the Gordie Howe Bridge linking Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit, Michigan.<sup>67</sup>

Two years later, the Trudeau government refused Shandong Gold's offer to buy TMAC Resources, a gold mine in Nunavut with a port on the Northwest Passage, close to NORAD facilities.<sup>68</sup>

Canada banned Chinese tech giant Huawei from Canada's 5G network in May 2022 amid growing awareness (and pressure from Washington) that using Huawei would give China enhanced capability for cyber-espionage and the potential to disable critical infrastructure in Canada.<sup>69</sup> However, Huawei continues its research in collaboration with Canadian universities, though the government is concerned about potential national security threats stemming from that work.<sup>70</sup>

Following a national security review, Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne ordered in November 2022 that three Chinese resource companies to sell their interests in Canadian critical mineral companies.<sup>71</sup> This order was soon followed by the release of the "Canadian Critical Minerals Strategy: From Exploration to Recycling: Powering the Green and Digital Economy for Canada and the World," a government document that notes the importance of Canadian supply chains for rare earths as a balance to China's dominance of this essential component of a high-tech future.<sup>72</sup>

These decisions were, ultimately, political. The details of the national review process that led to the Chinese state being refused access to critical Canadian sectors and thereby denied the potential for economic leverage over Canadian political and strategic decisions (not to mention the opportunities for espionage and further co-opting of influential Canadians) have not been made public.

Canadian news coverage supported restrictions on sales to Chinese companies. Public anger at China's arbitrary arrests of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, its decision to terminate agricultural contracts with Canada worth tens of millions of dollars, its "wolf warrior" diplomatic statements, human rights violations in Hong Kong and genocidal policies in Uyghur regions, all contributed to the public's souring on China. The PRC's attempts to drown out criticisms of China in the Canadian public discourse have mostly

failed. Public opinion surveys show the PRC's favourability among Canadians in the low double digits, even dropping into the single digits in some polls.<sup>73</sup>

However, due to the high degree of PRC elite capture among Canadian policy makers,<sup>74</sup> it is possible that China's failure to expand its influence through massive investment was the result of political calculations by Canadian officials with an eye on winning future federal elections.

## Canada's factional debate over future relations with China

**Despite growing awareness of PRC** influence efforts in Canada, the government's reaction to it, as well as policy changes meant to counter it, have been anything but uniform. In fact, Ottawa's response has often seemed contradictory, lacking a cohesive strategy. This could reflect different corners of the government being pulled in different directions.

In February 2021, the Government of Canada issued a Declaration Against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations that was endorsed by 59 countries, including Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom.<sup>75</sup> Since the declaration implied a denunciation of the arbitrary detention of the two Michaels, Beijing's response was understandably cool.<sup>76</sup> Shortly thereafter, the House of Commons voted unanimously that Beijing's mistreatment of Uyghur Muslims constituted genocide, with an amendment asking Canada to call on the International Olympic Committee to move the 2022 Winter Olympics from Beijing "if the Chinese government continues this genocide." Trudeau and his 36 cabinet ministers abstained from voting on the symbolic motion.<sup>77</sup> In March 2021, Canada had joined the US, EU, and U.K. in sanctioning four Chinese officials and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps over PRC policies toward the Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims.<sup>78</sup>

Liberal-appointed Canadian Senator Yuen Pau Woo has called for a compartmentalization of Canada-China relations, rather than a decoupling. Senator Woo argues that rational economic decision-making should inform

the Canada-China relationship, and he opposes political sentiment that might restrict PRC state-owned enterprises from setting up shop in Canada. Woo says that Canadians are “grumpy” about China, but that this is not permanent. For his part, John Baird, a former Conservative minister of foreign affairs, has urged Canada not to try to embarrass Beijing for political points. He avers that Canada needs more leadership and “less pandering to the orchestra” in Canada’s China policy.

Baird and Woo’s perspectives are consistent with the Chinese government’s policy of asking foreign governments to join it in “setting aside differences and seeking common ground.” In other words, the PRC hopes that Canada will ignore a wide range of concerns, including:

- espionage and interference operations by Chinese agents in Canada;
- security concerns over Chinese state acquisition of critical Canadian enterprises;
- China’s domestic policies of genocide and violations of UN human rights covenants;
- expansion of territorial claims in the South China Sea and elsewhere;
- military intimidation of Taiwan;
- debt-trap diplomacy and other abuses of international security norms through the Belt and Road Initiative.

The Chinese offer seems to be: ignore the above in exchange for the promise of better access to our 1.4-billion-person market. If you play ball, we will reduce non-tariff barriers to create fair and reciprocal market access.<sup>79</sup>

China, however, is not clear about how it plans to engage with key Canadian business leaders to advance its political interests. The state is explicit: Chinese companies prefer not to do business with companies from “unfriendly” nations. Many of those who publicly support PRC goals turn out to have lucrative relationships with Chinese state-owned enterprises or the Canadian companies (or their lawyers) who work with them.<sup>80</sup>

Most Canadians are strongly in favour of preserving their nation’s sovereignty, national security, and international role as a middle power in a multilateral rules-based order against Chinese state malfeasance (both at home and abroad). However, the distinctive nature of Canada’s parliamentary system, particularly when the ruling party controls a majority of seats in the House of Commons, concentrates power in the Office of the Prime Minister

with minimal effective checks and balances. Consequently, in the four years that typically elapse between federal elections,<sup>81</sup> the government tends to be more attentive to lobbying by elite interest groups than to popular opinion, whose ability to translate into voting behaviour is long deferred between general elections.

Given all this, there are legitimate concerns that, as China increasingly consolidates its position in Canada through covert, corrupt and coercive influence operations, Canadian democracy will continue to decay. Raising awareness of the pervasive and corrosive nature of PRC operations on Canada's democratic institutions would help strengthen popular will to resist Chinese influence operations. At present, there is a great deal of suspicion regarding PRC engagement with the Canadian elite, but this has not become a determining factor in how Canadian people cast their votes. In electoral choices, domestic political considerations trump concerns over foreign policy. Communicating that this is of urgent concern for Canadian democracy is a critical issue for Canada.

## Conclusion

**As is the case in** many countries around the world, PRC belligerence, foreign influence operations, and flagrant human rights violations against its own people have led to a sharp decline in favourable public perceptions of China. Allegations of interference in Canada's elections, Beijing's use of sanctions against influential sectors of the Canadian economy, the theft of high-tech intellectual property, and the retaliatory kidnapping of Canadian nationals has been covered extensively by both Canadian and international media and attracted public attention.

Such attitudinal changes and growing awareness have not resonated with much of Canada's academic and business elite, who continue to push for cordial relations with the PRC, with indifference toward the CCP's corrosive effect on the global rules-based order. Business leaders' influence on politicians, and the CCP's efforts to cultivate ties with (or co-opt) politicians from both the



governing and opposition parties, has resulted in policy gridlock in Canada. This, combined with efforts to portray remedial measures and laws designed to address malign influence as racist and excessive, has prevented the government from taking the necessary steps to protect its residents. Consequently, Canada remains a laggard in many respects when it comes to protecting its institutions, democracy, and citizens from the transgressions of the PRC government.

Journalists and policy analysts continue to monitor the PRC's activities in Canada and, in doing so, continue to raise public awareness, which has the potential to turn into votes in future elections. Some of those working in Canadian intelligence agencies, such as CSIS, might have decided to leak classified material because of frustration with their ability (or lack thereof) to effect change. **MLI**

## About the author



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He has published extensively on Chinese and North Korean affairs and Canada-China relations and has been commissioned to write reports on matters relating to Canada's relations with China for agencies of the Government of Canada. Charles is a frequent commentator on Chinese affairs in newspapers, radio and TV. **MLI**

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