



SECRET

Influence and Interference: distinctions in the context of diplomatic relations and democratic processes

Definitions: interference, malign foreign influence, and foreign influence

According to definitions most recently put forward by Public Safety Canada in its public consultation documents, **foreign interference** can be defined as covert activities perpetrated by a foreign state, or proxy, that are harmful to Canada's interests and are clandestine or deceptive, or involve a threat to a person. This can include, for example, harassment and intimidation of Canadian communities to instill fear, silence dissent, and pressure political opponents. Such interference activities involve foreign states, or person/entities operating on their behalf, attempting to covertly influence decisions, events or outcomes to better suit their strategic interests.

One method by which foreign interference can manifest itself is through coordinated, malign foreign influence campaigns. The term "**malign foreign influence**" is a subset of foreign interference as defined above. It has been used in recent GoC consultations to describe any hostile effort undertaken by or at the direction of a foreign power to influence the government or public opinion through covert or non-transparent means, but using established legitimate and transparent channels. Such activities are intended to shape Canadian government policy, outcomes, or public opinion, without disclosing their foreign government ties.

The terms "foreign interference" and "malign foreign influence" are not to be confused with "**foreign influence**", i.e. overt activities for the purpose of changing or shaping government policy, outcomes or processes – or the public opinion – on behalf of a foreign principal. Advocacy or lobbying activities on behalf of foreign governments, including a range of diplomatic activities, would fall under that category.

Current legal terminology

Under the CSIS Act, foreign interference as defined above is referred to as **foreign influence**, i.e. "activities within or relating to Canada that are detrimental to the interests of Canada and are clandestine and deceptive or involve a threat to any person".

The definition included in the CSIS Act dates back to 1984, and updates to this terminology may be considered in the future – hence the discrepancy with current





common terms in use within the GoC. Similarly, the concept of **malign foreign influence** is not included anywhere in Canadian legislation, resulting in confusion in the interpretation of these concepts.

As such, many interlocutors in the intelligence community will refer to foreign influence per the CSIS Act, when they are in fact talking about foreign interference or malign foreign influence per the terminology that was more recently developed by the GoC, and gaining wider acceptance in the intelligence community.

Foreign interference vs foreign influence

While the definition of foreign interference (or “foreign influence” activities as defined by the CSIS Act) clearly focuses on covert activities, and is distinct from the concept of foreign influence, some gray zones remain. Below is an illustration of the distinction between what is acceptable foreign influence, and what should be considered foreign interference, or malign foreign influence:

Foreign Influence: Exerting influence or advocating on behalf of a foreign state in an overt context is what diplomats, or some lobbyists, would do on a regular basis. Acceptable diplomatic conduct, which would be considered legitimate foreign influence, extends to pressuring, encouraging or convincing host governments in various ways to alter their course of action, legislation or other types of decisions, to advance one’s own national interests or promote one’s values. This is not necessarily a polite sport, nor is it always appreciated by the host government.

Diplomats have a number of tools at their disposal to exert this influence or pressure, which are overt in nature. This includes visits and meetings (specifically, whether a requested visit or meeting would take place), taking position on the host government’s national priorities, coordinated action in multilateral settings to express shared concerns on the actions or policy issues of a certain country, national statements against certain actions, etc. It can also include transparent and legal funding of organizations, including media organizations and journalists, and briefings to elected officials or decision makers in the host country – to promote one’s own interest. All of these tools can be deployed and are considered legitimate tools in the diplomatic toolbox.

To the extent the advocacy is taking place overtly, the fact that we may not like what a foreign government is advocating or the type legislation they are lobbying for in Canada does not make it interference. Canada undertakes similar activities abroad notably through diplomatic activity (see a range of examples highlighted below). As such, even if what the foreign government is advocating for is perceived as being against Canadian national interests, it is not “out of bounds” as part of normal diplomatic conduct. It is the

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government's job to hear these representatives and to say "no" on the basis of a home-grown assessment of what is best for Canada. Similarly, diplomats or other foreign actors expressing views in conversations with political actors in Canada would not be considered "out of bounds". Ultimately, it is up to the host government being lobbied to make its own decisions.

Examples of Canada's foreign influence in other countries:

Advocacy for CETA in Europe: Since 2007 when EU and Canadian leaders first agreed to conduct a joint study on the economic benefits of the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), as well as throughout negotiations and the ratification process of the agreement in Europe and its 27 Member States, Canada has been engaged in advocacy efforts vis-a-vis European governments. Canada's objective is to alter these countries' approach to the CETA in a way that aligns with Canada's interests – notably by amending their domestic legislation, and/or passing legislation through their parliament to ratify CETA within a certain timeframe.

Efforts to deescalate tensions in the Middle East: Canada has consistently used an array of influence tools [redacted] Israel and the Palestinian Authority to deescalate tensions, and convincing them to return to the negotiating table. Tactics notably include: private communication with politicians and security officials, public messaging urging calm, engagement with opinion-shapers and influence-makers, persuading other regional parties to constructively engage, as well as track two programming interventions in support of peacebuilding. While legitimate, this influence is not necessarily welcomed by the host government (e.g. Often, one or the other party will ask Canadians to keep our nose out of these domestic issues).

Efforts to convince Jordan and Israel to secure the evacuation of White Helmets from Syria: When the White Helmets from Syria were facing an immediate threat, Canadian diplomats had to engage an array of contacts (quietly and quickly) across the

Engagement in support of protecting human rights abroad: Canadian diplomats regularly engage in host countries to support a range of advocacy activities and programming interventions to advance Canadian policy objectives and promote Canadian values abroad. This includes for example, women's political empowerment,

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or LGBTQI2+ rights. Advocacy in such cases often requires Canadian diplomats to explain to decision makers

[Redacted]

Advocacy against Uganda’s Anti-Homosexuality bill: In March 2023 the Ugandan Parliament passed the draconian 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Bill that further criminalizes LGBTI persons. [Redacted] Canada has engaged in advocacy efforts. Efforts included public communications to convey Canada’s concerns, as well as [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Influence mapping: To achieve our diplomatic aims, Canadian missions abroad conduct influence-mapping. This includes determining who might be able to sway a particular decision or action, what the pressure points may be, and identifying strategies on how to influence the countries’ decisions in line with Canada’s interests. This can entail direct engagement with decision-makers, [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Lines that Canada never crosses / what differentiates Canada from our adversaries:

While not all of Canada’s influence activities are in the public domain, there is nothing covert about it either.

Canadian diplomats never hide their identity, or their aims, and are not towing one line in public and another in private.

Canada never engages into transnational repression, i.e. intimidating or threatening individuals, or coercing them to take a particular action.

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Foreign interference and malign foreign influence: Foreign interference differs from normal diplomatic conduct or acceptable foreign state actor advocacy. States cross a line any time they, or their representatives, go beyond diplomatic, advocacy or lobbying activities to conduct activities that attempt to clandestinely or deceptively manipulate Canada's open democracy and society, including by threats of any kind.

The threat category is broad. Examples of activities may include bribes of different types, or threats to a politician (e.g. if you don't do what I say, the vote of this or that ethnic group will be taken away from you). These threats can target all levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal).

Another threat activity includes threats to diaspora members (or their family in country of origin, etc). For a number of countries, threats to diaspora fall within wider, state-mandated efforts to advance its interests through transnational repression. These acts in particular aim to impact the ability of diaspora communities in Canada and other countries to exercise democratic freedoms and human rights, and therefore would be considered foreign interference in our democratic processes.

Examples of foreign interference:

- Diplomats of country X stationed in Canada, as well as their proxies, conduct foreign interference operations in support of political candidates and elected officials. These diplomats use a range of tactics including undeclared cash donations to political campaigns. They notably use covert means or threats to convince business owners to hire international students from country X and assign these students to volunteer in Canadian electoral campaigns on a full time basis – to give them insider access and potentially allow them to directly interfere with, or gather insider information on, electoral processes.
- In the context of a Canadian election, a political organization from Country X, known for its use of covert and manipulative tactics towards overseas ethnic communities, uses a Canadian MP as intermediary between itself and diaspora leaders in a given electoral district, in order to purposely defeat another candidate with positions that are not aligned with Country X's views. In order for its candidate to win, it provides undisclosed political donations to the Canadian MP, acting against Canadian electoral rules. The foreign political organization also applies pressure on and intimidates diaspora communities in that district to ensure that they vote for Country X's preferred candidate.
- Diplomats of country X, stationed in Canada, pressure and intimidate Canada-based foreign language media targeted at Country X's diaspora. They instruct

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them to spread disinformation on the platform of different Canadian parties, in order to influence voting intentions of Canadian citizens in this particular district.

Examples of malign foreign influence:

- A diplomat of country X, stationed in Canada, asks a prominent Canadian academic to write an op-ed opposing the Government of Canada's approach to a particular international issue, and urging Canadians to likewise disagree. The academic writes the op-ed and it is published in a widely circulated national newspaper. The academic is also asked to engage with student groups on campus to advocate a viewpoint that is favorable to the foreign government. The academic does not disclose their relationship with the individual employed by the foreign government. As such, the foreign interests being represented in the article, and in the engagement with student groups, are not transparent. The comments cannot be attributed to the PRC government.
- Diplomats of country X, stationed in Canada, leverage their friendly connections with Canada-based foreign language media targeted at Country X's diaspora to spread disinformation on the platform of different Canadian parties, in order to influence voting intentions of Canadian citizens in this particular district.

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