

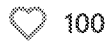
Trudeau Government repeatedly warned on interference from Chinese and Indian diplomats: June 2019 report

Secret NSICOP "Draft Final Report" concluded Ottawa values trade over security



SAM COOPER

JUN 15, 2023 · PAID



100



16

Share



The People's Republic's Embassy in Ottawa.

Intelligence officials repeatedly warned Justin Trudeau's government that China views Canada as a "permissive environment to pursue its interference activities" and Beijing's incursions wouldn't diminish unless Ottawa pushed back, according

to a secret June 2019 report drafted by NSICOP, Parliament's intelligence review body.

But four years later, an investigation by *The Bureau* – including exclusive access to the June 2019 document – finds the Trudeau Government has not only failed to counter a stunning scale of interference involving Chinese diplomats in Canada, but also similar alleged election-meddling from Indian officials “interfering and influencing voting in favour of ... pro-India candidates.”

The Bureau's analysis of NSICOP's June 2019 “Draft Final Report” also suggests that Ottawa's passivity to interference from the world's two most populous nations is because a conflicted government has ignored urgent intelligence – even advised CSIS to scale down sensitive “threat reduction” interventions focusing on Indian diplomats and Canadian politicians – because Ottawa's decision-makers valued trade and political objectives over security concerns.

“India and China are two powerful examples,” the NSICOP report says.

“Foreign policy considerations, which are often clear and immediate (e.g. India will not import pulses [seeds] from Canada), will take precedence over considerations of domestic harms, which are often vague and long-term (e.g. China's activities undermine free speech).”

The June 2019 document quotes from many intelligence memos circulated within Trudeau's government since 2015, including warnings specifically for Trudeau and his former public safety minister Bill Blair. The records also provide evidence supporting NSICOP's recommendation for new Canadian laws including a foreign agent registry.

For example, in 2017, CSIS distributed reports saying China was the “most active and far-reaching perpetrator” of influence operations and “PRC diplomatic staff are identified as active and persistent perpetrators of foreign interference in Canada.”

Again, in 2018, CSIS “clearly stated that Canada faces the same prevalence and gravity of threats as countries that have more publicly addressed it, such as Australia,” NSICOP says.

And so, Trudeau’s Privy Council Office briefed him on measures Canberra took to counter “the threat posed by Chinese authorities and their affiliates to the integrity of Australia’s sovereignty,” the NSICOP report says.

In that brief – *Memorandum for the Prime Minister: New Legislation Proposed by Australian Government to Counter Foreign Interference* – the Privy Council Office explained Australia was tackling “a problem that many critics have long argued has been exacerbated by willful blindness on the part of current and former politicians [and] senior government officials.”

Canberra moved forward with these laws in 2018, NSICOP reported, including new criminal offences for interference and treason that “provide a high degree of specificity on offences and threat activities.”

But as of June 2023 – 31 weeks after intelligence leaks exposed allegations of Chinese diplomats interfering in Canada’s 2019 and 2021 federal elections – the Trudeau Government has not followed Australia’s example.

Canadian Uyghur-rights activist Mehmet Tohti – who has reported to CSIS his own complaints of being threatened by Chinese agents in Greater Toronto – said senior officials in Ottawa too, can be accused of blindness.

“Chinese officials have been infiltrating our system, funding candidates and putting people in all three levels of government for many years,” Tohti said, of findings from *The Bureau’s* investigation. “The problem is from the top of our government, that was willfully blinded, and allowed this to happen.”

Trudeau swept to power in October 2015 promising to renew friendly relations initiated with Beijing by his father Pierre, reversed some of the Harper Government’s caution about investment from China, and continued to press for a Sino-Canadian free trade deal even after signs of Beijing’s hostility increased.

David Mulroney, Canada's former ambassador to China, said Canada is paying the price for Trudeau's policies.

"What shakes me to the core is that I don't believe the Prime Minister's approach to China was based on miscalculation or misunderstanding," Mulroney told *The Bureau*. "I attribute it instead to his shocking ignorance about the nature of the Chinese state and the threat it poses to our country."

The Prime Minister's Office has not responded to questions for this story.

Vancouver Consul General controlled over 100 community groups

For its review of Ottawa's response to foreign interference, NSICOP accessed over 620 intelligence documents – representing 4,300 pages worth of records – from departments including CSIS, RCMP, the Privy Council Office and Global Affairs Canada.

But there were "important gaps in the documents" disclosed by the Privy Council Office, NSICOP said.

In 2019, the bipartisan panel also questioned 17 officials, including CSIS director David Vigneault, in several months of secret hearings. Their final report for Trudeau was submitted in August 2019, two months before the fall election. A redacted version of the report was posted online in 2020.

While China and Russia are named in the public version, for unknown reasons, CSIS's growing concerns about India are completely redacted.

But the 2019 draft report reviewed by *The Bureau* says NSICOP found "ample evidence to support CSIS's assertion that Canada is the target of significant and sustained foreign interference."

"The PRC, Russia and India are the most prolific offenders," the document says.

“In recent years, CSIS observed an increase in Indian threat related activity targeting the Indo-Canadian diaspora [and] government institutions.”

The case of India, a massive democracy and trade partner that perhaps could balance Canada’s reliance on China’s supply chains, clearly raises sensitive contrasts for Ottawa.

While India enjoys “close diplomatic, trade and interpersonal ties with Canada,” NSICOP says that CSIS believes numerous Indian diplomats have been covertly active in Canada since the 1980s.

According to NSICOP Indian Consular officials are maintaining “black lists” of dissidents, controlling travel visas to India as a means to manipulate the diaspora, and recruiting community sources that are “engaging MPs and political candidates to advance Indian objectives.”

Like Russia, India uses the same interference methods – “leveraging certain community groups and local media to exert influence and support for candidates” – that China employs on a much grander scale, according to NSICOP.

Support for candidates, according to NSICOP, can include covert financing disguised by intermediaries that are controlled by Consular officials.

“Foreign states clandestinely direct contributions to and support for the campaigns and political parties of preferred candidates,” the NSICOP document asserts.

It cites CSIS’s findings, including:

- a People’s Republic of China Commercial Consul who “urged particular business leaders to donate” to Canadian politicians;

- a Chinese embassy proxy that directed community leaders to “hand pick” election candidates and promote them within the “greater Chinese community”;
- an Indian Consul in Vancouver that promoted an unidentified politician in the 2015 federal election, and “made a financial contribution to the preferred candidate through a local contact.”

India’s motive for interference, according to NSICOP, is national security, and specifically the belief that Canada isn’t doing enough to address dangers of Sikh extremism – a problem that rocked both nations in the 1985 Air India bombing, “a conspiracy conceived, planned, and executed in Canada,” according to Public Safety Canada.

Grievances were further inflamed by Trudeau’s 2018 visit to India, and the scandal surrounding an alleged Sikh separatist from Vancouver, who was seen traveling with the prime minister’s entourage, even though he possessed a criminal record for attempting to assassinate an Indian politician.

In another jarring finding, NSICOP reports that Pakistan is also running intelligence operations in Canada, for various reasons, “chief among them, to counter India’s influence activities with Canadian decision-makers.”

But the scale, sophistication and pervasiveness of Chinese diplomatic networks and their leverage on diaspora groups concerns CSIS above all other interference threats, according to NSICOP.

Citing an undated brief from CSIS for Trudeau’s national security and intelligence advisor, NSICOP says: “foreign diplomats strive to maintain the illusion that local groups reflect the popular and freely agreed upon opinion of their membership and broader community, when in fact they are directed by officials of their home states.”

This sensitive assessment is underlined with an explosive piece of CSIS intelligence, that found “the PRC Consul General in Vancouver also boasted that she controlled over 100 community groups.”

These groups, also called United Front networks by CSIS, include “PRC businesses, cultural enterprises, the media, Chinese student associations, [and] academics,” the NSICOP report says.

They are managed through China’s vanguard of covert agents in Canada, including “security and intelligence services, the People’s Liberation Army, United Front Work units, and Chinese diplomatic missions.”

Summing up the expanding threat, CSIS reported in 2018, Beijing is targeting “all orders of government,” in Canada, by “leveraging its numerous government and non-government actors, who use overt and covert approaches including bribery, censorship, coercion and co-optation, to exert influence.”

This post is for paid subscribers

+ Subscribe

Already a paid subscriber? [Sign in](#)

© 2024 Sam Cooper · [Privacy](#) · [Terms](#) · [Collection notice](#)
Substack is the home for great writing