

**Statement by the Honourable Michael Chong, P.C., M.P. to the
Congressional-Executive Commission on China**

Washington, DC
September 12, 2023

My experience with the People's Republic of China

I was first elected to Parliament in 2004 and represent the electoral district of Wellington-Halton Hills in Ontario, Canada, where I was raised. Like millions of Canadians and Americans, my parents were immigrants. My mother immigrated from the Netherlands in the 1960s. My father immigrated from Hong Kong in 1952, and I have extended family living in both the Netherlands and Hong Kong. Today, tens of millions of North Americans have family living abroad and who are at risk of being targeted by authoritarian states.

The ties between Canada and Hong Kong are longstanding and deep. During the Second World War, some two thousand Canadian soldiers of the Royal Rifles of Canada and the Winnipeg Grenadiers defended Hong Kongers against a vicious, surprise attack that took place simultaneously as the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941; half the Canadian soldiers were casualties of the ensuing battle. Hong Kong is "Canada's Pearl Harbor". Today, some 300,000 Canadian citizens live in Hong Kong.

During my time in Parliament, I have served in the federal cabinet as President of the Queen's Privy Council, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister for Sport, and have chaired several House of Commons Standing Committees. In September 2020, I was appointed Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs for the Official Opposition and have served in this role since. In our Westminster system of government, my mandate is to hold the Canadian government accountable on foreign policy and to serve as part of a "government-in-waiting".

Several years after Xi Jinping became President of the People's Republic of China (PRC), it became clear the PRC was increasingly violating a number of international norms, laws and treaties. This included violations of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which guaranteed Hong Kongers liberties and freedoms for fifty years from 1997, its detention of Western journalists and its increased military belligerence in the South China Sea. At the time, I voiced my criticism of the PRC, which usually resulted in the PRC embassy requesting a meeting with me to exchange views.

After my appointment as Shadow Minister, my criticisms of the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) increased in response to President Xi's increasing violations of the rules-based international order and repression in the PRC and abroad, including the wrongful detention of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, increasing evidence of a Uyghur genocide, threats to national security and theft of intellectual property. These criticisms were amplified following my September 2020 appointment because my position meant I was speaking and acting on behalf of my parliamentary party.

On November 18, 2020, the House of Commons adopted a motion I introduced ([Opposition Motion \(Foreign policy towards China\)](#)), which called on the Canadian government to “make a decision on Huawei’s involvement in Canada’s 5G network within 30 days” and “develop a robust plan, as Australia has done, to combat China’s growing foreign operations here in Canada and its increasing intimidation of Canadians living in Canada.”¹ On February 22, 2021, the House of Commons adopted another motion I introduced ([Opposition Motion \(Religious minorities in China\)](#)), which recognized the PRC’s actions towards Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims as a genocide.² Both motions received support from members of every parliamentary party. In response to the second motion, and in coordination with the United States and United Kingdom, the Canadian government imposed sanctions “in response to human rights violations in Xinjiang” on March 22, 2023.³

In response, on March 27, 2021, the PRC sanctioned me for the Canadian government’s imposition of sanctions on March 22, 2023, along with the Chair of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Gayle Manchin and Vice Chair of the USCIRF, Tony Perkins.⁴

Subsequently, I concluded the PRC’s sanctions on me, and others were proof of our effectiveness and continued to speak up in defense of democracy, freedom, and the rules-based international order.

On May 1st of this year, I learned through a [report](#) in a newspaper, The Globe and Mail, that a PRC diplomat working out of the consulate in Toronto had, since 2020, been gathering information to further target me and my family in Hong Kong.⁵ The source for the Globe report was an internal July 2021 Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) assessment shared with the newspaper by an undisclosed source. The Canadian government subsequently confirmed the existence of the CSIS assessment.⁶ In response to the public release of this information, the Canadian government declared the diplomat, Mr. Zhao Wei, a “persona non grata” on May 8, 2023.⁷

On August 9, 2023, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (Global Affairs Canada) informed me, and [publicly revealed](#), that I was a target of a disinformation campaign on the Chinese social media platform WeChat between May 4 and 13, 2023. According to the Department’s findings, large volumes of false and misleading narratives about me were shared,

¹ House of Commons, [Vote Detail - 23 - Members of Parliament - House of Commons of Canada \(ourcommons.ca\)](#), 18 November 2020.

² House of Commons, [Vote Detail - 56 - Members of Parliament - House of Commons of Canada \(ourcommons.ca\)](#), 22 February 2021.

³ Global Affairs Canada, [Canada joins international partners in imposing new sanctions in response to human rights violations in Xinjiang](#), 22 March 2021.

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, [Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Announces Sanctions on Relevant US and Canadian Individuals and Entity \(fmprc.gov.cn\)](#), 27 March 2021.

⁵ The Globe and Mail, [China views Canada as a ‘high priority’ for interference: CSIS report - The Globe and Mail](#), 1 May 2023.

⁶ The Globe and Mail, [‘No one person’ responsible for Ottawa failing to warn Michael Chong he was being targeted, national-security adviser says - The Globe and Mail](#), 1 June 2023.

⁷ Global Affairs Canada, [Canada declares Zhao Wei persona non grata - Canada.ca](#), 8 May 2023.

including on my “background, political stances, and family’s heritage” and that the PRC’s role in the information operation is “highly probable.”⁸

These are the reported instances of the PRC’s targeting of me to date.

Transnational Repression vs. Foreign Interference

Transnational repression and foreign interference are terms that are often interchangeable. Generally, transnational repression is defined as authoritarian governments’ extraterritorial efforts to silence, deter, undermine, and threaten dissidents and activists who oppose them. Foreign interference is defined in Canadian law as foreign state “activities within or relating to Canada that are detrimental to the interests of Canada and are clandestine or deceptive or involve a threat to any person.”⁹

PRC’s foreign interference threat activities in Canada

My experience is but one case of PRC foreign interference in Canada. Many other cases go unreported and unnoticed, and the victims often suffer in silence.

CSIS continues to observe PRC foreign interference threat activities in Canada. CSIS has assessed that foreign interference “poses one of the greatest strategic threats to Canada’s national security.”¹⁰ CSIS has stated that the PRC’s foreign interference in Canada is a “significant threat to the integrity of our political system and democratic institutions, social cohesion, economy and long-term prosperity, and fundamental rights and freedoms.”¹¹

Canada continues to be a target of the PRC, which is “seeking to advance their political, economic and security interests to the detriment of Canada’s,” and the threat is a “growing concern.”¹² This has direct implications for the approximate 1.7 million Canadians of Chinese descent living in Canada (4.7 per cent of the country’s population).¹³

PRC foreign interference activities target a variety of diaspora groups in Canada using various tactics. Some of these activities are documented in a [report](#) of the House of Common’s Special Committee on the Canada-People’s Republic of China Relationship titled, *A Threat to Canadian Sovereignty: National Security Dimensions of the Canada-People’s Republic of China Relationship*.

One tactic used by the PRC is to target Canadian university campuses. The Special Committee heard testimony from Chemi Lhamo, who was targeted by the PRC after she spoke up about

⁸ Global Affairs Canada, [Rapid Response Mechanism Canada detects information operation targeting member of Parliament - Canada.ca](#), 9 August 2023.

⁹ CSIS, *Foreign Interference and You*, 2021

¹⁰ Public Safety Canada, [Countering Foreign Interference](#), March 10, 2023

¹¹ CSIS, [Briefing to the Prime Minister on Foreign Interference – Revised Speaking Notes](#), p. 2, February 9, 2021

¹² Public Safety Canada, [Foreign Interference and Hostile Activities of State Actors \(publicsafety.gc.ca\)](#), 20 August 2021.

¹³ Statistics Canada, [The Daily — The Canadian census: A rich portrait of the country's religious and ethnocultural diversity \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#), 26 October 2022.

Tibetan human rights and ran for the 2019 student elections at the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus. She told the Special Committee "she received thousands of harassing comments on social media, including rape and death threats, because of her Tibetan identity" and that they continued after being elected student president.¹⁴ Ms. Lhamo stated her threats were connected to the PRC's mission in Canada and that the Communist Part of China (CCP) "coerces Chinese international students into following CCP party lines and protesting initiatives that are seen as threatening PRC interests."¹⁵

Rukiye Turdush's experience is another example of the PRC's foreign interference on Canadian university campuses. Ms. Turdush is the Research Director of the Uyghur Research Institute. She testified at the Special Committee about the harassment she faced following her talk about the plight of Uyghurs at McMaster University's Muslim Students' Association in 2019. "She stated that the McMaster Chinese Students' Association reported the event to the PRC embassy and published a statement condemning the presentation [...] and] that the PRC embassy in Ottawa later praised students who had protested her talk for their patriotism."¹⁶

Many Chinese international students are coerced by the PRC into participating in the PRC's foreign interference activities on university campuses. Cheuk Kwan, past chair of the Toronto Association for Democracy in China, testified at the Special Committee, "about Chinese international students who were 'compelled' to 'demonstrate against pro-Hong Kong rallies' after threats had been made 'to withhold their government scholarships or harm their families back home if they [did not] comply.'"¹⁷

Other foreign interference tactics used by the PRC include targeting Chinese language media and social media in Canada, as well as the establishment of illegal PRC "police service centres" in Canada.

CSIS has assessed that Chinese language media in Canada, including newspapers, radio and television broadcasters, are targeted by the PRC. In a 2021 briefing note to the Canadian Prime Minister, CSIS explained that "Chinese-language media outlets operating in Canada and members of the Chinese-Canadian community are primary targets of PRC-directed foreign influenced activities."¹⁸

The Special Committee's report on Hong Kong highlighted testimony from Guy Saint-Jacques, former Canadian Ambassador to the PRC, who was "struck by the extent to which Canadian media publishing in Mandarin reflected the views expressed in Beijing during the Meng Wanzhou affair."¹⁹

¹⁴ CACN, [A Threat to Canadian Sovereignty: National Security Dimensions of the Canada–People's Republic of China Relationship \(ourcommons.ca\)](#), May 2023, 19-20.

¹⁵ Ibid, 19-20.

¹⁶ Ibid, 20.

¹⁷ CACN, [The Breach of Hong Kong's High Degree of Autonomy: A Situation of International Concern \(ourcommons.ca\)](#), February 2021, 41.

¹⁸ CSIS, [Briefing to the Prime Minister on Foreign Interference – Revised Speaking Notes](#), p. 9, February 9, 2021

¹⁹ CACN, [A Threat to Canadian Sovereignty: National Security Dimensions of the Canada–People's Republic of China Relationship \(ourcommons.ca\)](#), May 2023, 47.

The report also highlighted the testimony of Victor Ho, former editor of *Sing Tao Daily* (Canada's largest Chinese language newspaper),

[Mr. Ho] provided the example of a half-hour “radio speech” by China’s Consul General in Vancouver on 23 July 2020. According to Mr. Ho, during the speech, which was “programmed in newscast airtime,” the Consul General asked Chinese Canadians to support the National Security Law while also suggesting that there were “very few people in Canada trying to slander” the law and “attempting to cause trouble overseas as well.” In Mr. Ho’s view, the Consul General “treats Chinese Canadians as Chinese nationals, when of course they are not.”²⁰

Chinese language social media is another medium for foreign interference. CSIS has observed “social media being leveraged to spread disinformation or run foreign influenced campaigns designed to confuse or divide public opinion or interfere in healthy public debate.”²¹ The Special Committee’s national security report concluded that:

Disinformation and influence campaigns designed to divide public opinion and interfere with public debate are increasingly being spread through social media. WeChat and other social media applications monitored by the PRC provide a powerful tool for the PRC to censor information, manipulate public sentiment, and to monitor and intimidate diaspora.²²

After assessing recent activity on WeChat in May of this year, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development concluded that it is “highly probable” that the PRC played a role in the information operation” that was spreading disinformation about me.²³ It is estimated that WeChat has over one million users in Canada, and that the disinformation regarding me was viewed by between two and five million WeChat users globally.²⁴ Clearly, the PRC is using social media channels like WeChat as a tool for foreign interference.

As in the United States, the PRC has been documented to have established illegal “police service centres” in Canada, most notably, in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. The PRC describes them as “service stations” that were established during the pandemic to help Chinese nationals with administrative matters, such as driver’s licenses and other documents, and that they are run by volunteers.²⁵ These stations have been assessed by human rights groups as a tool to “threaten and monitor Chinese nationals abroad.”²⁶ This includes coercing persons in Canada back to the PRC.

²⁰ Ibid, 41.

²¹ CSIS, [Foreign Interference Threats to Canada's democratic process](#), July 2021, 6.

²² CACN, [A THREAT TO CANADIAN SOVEREIGNTY: NATIONAL SECURITY DIMENSIONS OF THE CANADA–PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA RELATIONSHIP](#), May 2023

²³ Global Affairs Canada, [WeChat account activity targeting Canadian parliamentarian suggests likely foreign state involvement \(international.gc.ca\)](#), 9 August 2023.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Reuters, [Canada police probe alleged Chinese 'police stations' in Montreal | Reuters](#), 9 March 2023.

²⁶ BBC, [Canadian police investigate Chinese 'police stations' in Quebec - BBC News](#), 9 March 2023.

For example, a U.S. indictment unsealed in federal court in Brooklyn, New York on October 22, 2023, revealed that an individual in Canada was coerced back to the PRC.²⁷

The PRC foreign interference threat activities also target Canada's general elections. In the 2021 election, Kenny Chiu (former Member of Parliament for Steveston-Richmond East, British Columbia) was targeted and was the subject of disinformation. The G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) in the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development observed Chinese Communist Party media accounts spreading a hostile narrative about Kenny Chiu and the Conservative Party of Canada's election platform, saying inaccurately that anyone with ties to China would be "considered a spokesperson for the Chinese government"²⁸ and that "all individuals or groups with ties to China would be required to register."²⁹

The PRC foreign threat activities have also targeted the fundamental right to peacefully protest in Canada. In response to a peaceful rally organized in August 2019 in Vancouver backing Hong Kong's anti-extradition protests, pro-PRC counter-protesters allegedly organized through the PRC consulate in Vancouver threatened those at the rally. Threats were made through social media and in person by pro-PRC counter-protestors.³⁰ Co-founder Cherie Wong of the Pro-Hong Kong group "Alliance Canada Hong Kong" and other pro-Hong Kong activists received threats, including rape and murder.³¹

There have also been suggestions that the PRC paid protesters to support the daughter of Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei, Meng Wanzhou, at her extradition hearing that took place in Vancouver.³²

Recently, the PRC is utilizing a new foreign interference tactic by creating "wanted lists" and offering bounties for the arrest of those living overseas. Last year, the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region placed Victor Ho on a "wanted list" allegedly for violations of the Hong Kong's National Security Law, but in fact for his speaking up in Canada in favour of Hong Kong's democracy and human rights. This year, the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region offered HK\$1-million (USD\$128,000) bounties for the arrest of eight democracy activists based overseas, all of whom are believed to be living in Canada, the United States, Britain and Australia. Out of the eight, at least two have ties to Canada (Dennis Kwok and Elmer Yuen).

²⁷ DOJ, [Six Individuals Charged with Conspiring to Act as Illegal Agents of the People's Republic of China](#), October 20, 2022

²⁸ Unclassified, [G7 RRM Canada](#). p. 1, Monday, October 18, 2021.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ CBC News, ['We know where your parents live': Hong Kong activists say Canadian police helpless against online threats](#), September 10, 2020.

³² CBC News, [The strange tale of the paid protesters supporting Meng Wanzhou at her extradition hearing](#), January 21, 2020.

Responding to PRC foreign interference threat activities

Foreign interference is a complex national security threat to Canada³³ and requires a suite of measures to combat. CSIS has stated that foreign interference can be countered through investigating and monitoring, utilizing threat reduction measures, reducing PRC access to critical economic sectors, conducting stakeholder engagement, publicly “calling out” foreign state actors and prosecuting individuals and entities.³⁴

Foreign interference also requires cooperation among allied democracies. The 2023 report from the Canadian government’s National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, emphasized the need for “cooperation with allies on foreign interference.”³⁵

One area for cooperation should include the sharing of best practices among the Five Eyes intelligence alliance about when to release information to the public about the PRC’s foreign interference threat activities. Often intelligence gathered about foreign interference does not meet the evidentiary standard required to commence a prosecution, yet still constitutes a serious threat that needs to be countered. In those cases, Five Eyes intelligence agencies have advised governments that sunlight and transparency is a tool that can be used. In 2021, CSIS provided a briefing to the Canadian Prime Minister on foreign interference stating, “Canada can make use of a policy that is grounded in transparency and sunlight in order to highlight the point that FI [foreign interference] should be exposed to the public.”³⁶

For example, in 2022 the U.K.’s MI5 went public about a PRC agent in the U.K. Parliament, Christine Lee. MI5 informed the Speaker about the security threat this individual presented, and in turn, the Speaker emailed all members of the U.K. House of Commons, identifying this individual as a security threat.³⁷ Members took appropriate action, cut off contact with this individual, and the integrity of the U.K. Parliament was protected. Sunlight and transparency worked, and the integrity of U.K.’s democracy was ensured.

Transparency in party nominations (primaries) and general elections, including the disclosure of information regarding foreign interference, is particularly sensitive because of the impact these disclosures can have on party nominations and elections. The timely release of information about foreign interference while maintaining the confidence of all political parties and candidates are equally important if we are to protect democracies against foreign interference in the electoral process. Exchanging best practices in this area is another area in which democracies can learn from each other.

Another area for cooperation is exchanging information on effective legislative measures that can be implemented to prosecute PRC agents carrying out foreign interference activities. A foreign agent registry can be a useful tool to combat foreign interference. Recently, the U.S.

³³ CSIS, [Foreign Interference and You \(canada.ca\)](https://www.csis.ca/foreign-interference-and-you), 2021, 2.

³⁴ CSIS, [Briefing to the Prime Minister on Foreign Interference – Revised Speaking Notes](#), p. 11, February 9, 2021

³⁵ NSICOP, [2022 Annual Report](#), p. 17, July 19, 2023

³⁶ CSIS, [Briefing to the Prime Minister on Foreign Interference – Revised Speaking Notes](#), 9 February 2021.

³⁷ The Independent, [Christine Lee: Security warning to MPs over Chinese spying threat | The Independent](#), 13 January 2022.

foreign agent registry was used to shut down a PRC “police station” in lower Manhattan and two individuals were arrested for acting as PRC agents.³⁸

The U.S. has had foreign agent registry (*Foreign Agent Registry Act*) since 1938,³⁹ while Australia adopted the *Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018* in 2019.⁴⁰ This past summer, the U.K. adopted the *National Security Act 2023*, which establishes a registry.⁴¹ The Canadian government has announced it will introduce legislation for a registry but has yet to introduce one.

If the threshold for a registry is too high, then it will not capture the activity needed to be countered. On the other hand, if the threshold for a registry is too low, then it will capture much activity unrelated to foreign interference. Exchanging information on effective legislative models for a registry is an area where democracies can learn from each other.

Translating intelligence into evidence is often difficult but essential if individuals engaged in foreign interference are to be successfully prosecuted. A clear definition of what constitutes foreign interference and establishing clear evidentiary standards that are accepted by the intelligence community and law enforcement alike are critical if those engaged in foreign interference are to be successfully prosecuted.

Foreign interference often takes place alongside corruption, including money laundering and covert enrichment. Enhancing financial transparency through a beneficial ownership registry covering corporations, trusts and real estate is critical to combatting the corruption that often accompanies foreign interference. In addition, freezing and seizing the assets of individuals engaged in foreign interference would serve as a deterrent and remove the profit motive. Best practices and coordination on financial transparency, asset freezes and forfeiture should be shared among allied democracies.

Foreign interference often takes place through the deliberate spreading of disinformation. Democracies should share best practices on how to combat this disinformation while upholding our cherished freedoms of thought, belief, opinion, and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication. Recently, I was part of a parliamentary delegation to the Republic of China (Taiwan), where we met with Audrey Tang Feng, the Minister of Digital Affairs. Taiwan is ground zero for the PRC’s disinformation campaigns, and Taiwan has a well-developed multi-faceted policy grounded in building resilience among Taiwanese society while protecting fundamental freedoms.

Repression with the PRC can also be better countered through better coordination and cooperation among allied democracies. The North American and European Union free trade areas collectively comprise about 43 per cent of global GDP.⁴² This immense purchasing power should be used to counter repression and uphold human rights. Furthermore, Canada is a

³⁸ DOJ, [U.S. Attorney Announces Charges Against Co-Director Of Think Tank For Acting As An Unregistered Foreign Agent, Trafficking In Arms, Violating U.S. Sanctions Against Iran, And Making False Statements To Federal Agents](#), July 10, 2023

³⁹ Foreign Agents Registration Act, [Foreign Agents Registration Act | Foreign Agents Registration Act \(justice.gov\)](#), Retrieved 30 August 2023.

⁴⁰ Australian Government, [Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018](#), April 11, 2019

⁴¹ U.K. Public General Acts, [National Security Act 2023](#), July 11, 2023

⁴² World Bank, [GDP](#), 2023

signatory, along with the U.S. and Mexico, of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA). Article 23.6 of the Agreement requires signatories to ban the import of products produced using labour.

There is evidence that the PRC is forcing the Uyghur minority in Xinjiang province to harvest cotton and tomatoes. Since CUSMA has come into effect, the U.S. has interdicted and seized thousands of shipments from Xinjiang from entering the United States. Canada, conversely, only stopped one shipment of cotton products from the PRC at the border, and these products were later released.⁴³ The Canadian government can learn from best practices in the U.S. to counter repression within the PRC while upholding the rules-based international order.

Canada must work toward a stronger defense and security partnership with the United States, our Euro-Atlantic allies, and democratic partners in the Indo-Pacific region. Canada must look for every opportunity to strengthen these partnerships to ensure meet the challenge of rising authoritarianism and preserve our fundamental freedoms, democratic institutions, and the rules-based international order.

⁴³ The Globe and Mail, [Only shipment Canada has seized on suspicion of forced labour was released after challenge from importer - The Globe and Mail](#), 27 May 2022