

On Foreign Interference (Part I)

In the last five years we have witnessed a growing concern with allegations of foreign interference in Canadian political affairs perpetrated by agents of at least four countries: China, Russia, India and Iran. On September 7th 2023, the Government of Canada established the *Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions*. This Commission is focusing on the interference that China, Russia and other foreign actors may have engaged in, and any impact it may have had on the 2019 and 2021 federal elections. ¹ Again, on September 18th 2023, the Canadian Prime Minister claimed he had credible information linking India to the assassination of a prominent Sikh separatist on Canadian soil. ²

With the exception of Russia (whose relations with Canada had deteriorated after the invasion of Ukraine on February 20th 2014), and Iran (generally considered a “rogue state” by Western allies), Canada’s relations with China and India had been generally good. Globalization of markets had had a beneficial effect on relations with former Cold War enemy states. This all changed after the financial meltdown of 2008, as countries not traditionally in the North-American and/or Western European economic spheres began to retrench and to rebuild their own financial systems.

Of course, Canada is not alone in this recent anxiety about “foreign” interference. The other four members of the “Five Eyes” Intelligence network* have also prompted their respective governments to counteract forcefully against such intrusion by approximately the same four “rogue” states.

At this point, all serious intellectuals should be asking themselves a series of questions:

Q. 1: What does “foreign interference” mean in 2024?

Q. 2: How can anyone accurately gauge “foreign interference” in a world of totally unregulated electronic information, disinformation and propaganda?

Q. 3: What should be the ethical interphase of citizenship and “Intelligence” in a Western style parliamentary democracy?

Let us try to explore each of these questions systematically with the best of the information available to us at this time.

Answer to Q. 1: The definition of “foreign” today does not clearly mean what it meant in 1924 or in 1824. In 1924, the ethnocultural composition of any of the five “Anglosphere” countries here considered * was much more homogeneous than it is today. Canada today is a multicultural nation with a very diverse population, both racially and ethnically. About 450 ethnic origins were reported in Canada’s 2021 Census. ⁴ However, some of the reported individual origins are again each really composed of multiple ethnicities. For example, reporting “Indian” as only one origin in our Census ignores the fact that the nation called India is a conglomerate of dozens of ethnic and linguistic groups with diverse and sometimes conflicting loyalties.

Putting aside considerations of official citizenship status, many first generation –and even some second and third generation– Canadians still preserve a degree of loyalty or sympathy for their former homelands. This is especially and understandably true of those immigrating from countries with thousands of years of history and advanced civilization –such as China and India.

Furthermore, the advance of commercial air travel since 1924 has accelerated the migration of millions of people, and therefore of the cosmopolitization of the planet, so that very few nations today can be truly said to be monoethnic. Once his or her status as citizen is secured, an immigrant living in Canada can travel back to her or his country of origin where he or she may perhaps re-establish connections with the motherland’s institutions and/or authorities, which could later be interpreted as dubious or even dangerous by homologous Canadian ones.

It may be relevant at this point to ask if at any time in the past century has foreign interference in Canadian politics played any role without causing much concern. Putting aside those occurring during wartime –such as the internment of Japanese-Canadians and Italian-Canadians in World War II– some instances of possible foreign influence can be exemplified by the influence of East-European émigrés on Canadian party politics during the Cold War, and perhaps by the mobilization of Ukrainian-Canadians’ political lobbying during the 2015 elections, following the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014.

There is one powerful foreign agent whose interference we have managed to ignore for centuries: I mean the U.S.A. Especially after World War II and the creation of NATO, our political system has undoubtedly been influenced both directly and surreptitiously by American politics and immense economic power, depending on the resilience of the Canadian party in power, and on international events we could not control.

More on this in the next installment and answers to the next two questions.

* P.S. The “Five Eyes” is an Anglosphere intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These countries are parties to the multilateral UK-USA Agreement –a treaty for joint cooperation in signals-intelligence that can be traced back to World War II. Informally, Five Eyes (FVEY) also refers to the group of intelligence agencies of these countries. ³

Written by © Pascual Delgado, April 19th 2024.

¹ <https://foreigninterferencecommission.ca/>

² <https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/20/india/india-canada-hardeep-singh-nijjar-explained-intl-hnk/index.html>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Eyes

⁴ <https://uscanadainfo.com/ethnicity-in-canada/#:>