

## **“Sharp power” and its impact on Canada: Canada’s increased vulnerability to China**

Values that define Canadians and our nation are under threat due to China’s awakening as a cyber superpower. Canadians are vulnerable; the Government of Canada (GC) is vulnerable; your universities, healthcare and workplaces are vulnerable. The Communist Party of China (CCP) can manipulate and distort education systems, culture, and media using sharp power in Canada and worldwide. What is most concerning is that the Canadian Government enables China’s behaviour by failing to act. Instead, the GC prefers appeasement and diplomacy; this inaction permits the continued growth of sharp power and risks Canadians’ safety and security.

### **Sharp Power**

The term ‘sharp power,’ initially conceived in 2017, references a covert and manipulative international affairs approach. The rapid build-up of sharp power in authoritarian regimes, particularly in Russia and China, presents a dire threat for democracies, especially when referring to the younger democracies in Latin America. Sharp power strengthens cyber power, giving regimes the ability to infiltrate and precipitate society’s divisions, creating vulnerability. The vulnerability allows authoritarian regimes to strike when a nation is weakest, anonymously and clandestinely. Sharp power permits the regime to significantly influence individuals’ values and shape public opinion in the regime’s favour, exemplified in the action of Chinese diplomats accusing democracy activists of propagating division.

### **China as a Cyberthreat**

Sharp power in the form of cyber tech has reached new extremes as an apparatus of censorship and surveillance, presenting threats not only in Hong Kong but around the globe. Notably, there have been significant actions (implementation facial recognition software, Corporate Social Credit System) taken to increase state surveillance, which the state promotes as an enabler of “public order” or “national security.” At its best, China’s growth in sharp power has the potential to reinforce its development and protect its interests; at its worst, China is using its sharp power to eradicate, detain and silence both Chinese and international entities.

A significant part of China's growth as a cyber threat occurs because the world is buying Chinese tech. The sharp power that initially emerged in Hong Kong is spreading worldwide, evoking vulnerabilities in the world’s most robust democracies. With Xi Jinping’s election as General Secretary of the CCP, the Chinese government called for an assertive relationship with the United Nations and increased nationalistic policy. China has also ramped up the use of technology in implementing human rights abuses. According to the United Nations definition, the most egregious of these abuses constitute ethnic genocide against the Uighurs Muslims. President Xi Jinping’s policies emphasize the exportation of Chinese technology; one cannot help but wonder about the privacy and security concerns this places on buyers of Chinese tech?

Ottawa announced it is partnering with Chinese tech giant Huawei, regardless of security concerns. Huawei, which by all of the Five Eyes excluding Canada is banned, is feared due to its undeniable ties with the CCP. Giving the company access to strategic digital infrastructure presents risks of spying and infiltration into users’ lives. Although Huawei

has denied any involvement with threatening the cybersecurity of users, neither the United States nor Australia will risk the exposure of authorizing Huawei as a supplier. Still, the Canadian Government continues to allow the purchase and usage of Huawei products.

## **Silencing Canadians**

China is directly silencing Canadians through a sharp power intimidation campaign conducted by Chinese officials. Almost three years ago, Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor were taken captive in China based on trumped-up espionage charges in retaliation to the lawful detention of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou. In January, the Michaels were granted greater access to their families for the first time, demonstrating Canada's increasing vulnerability to China's growing influence. In 2018, Chinese officials threatened a Canadian Chinese dissident upon visiting China; threats included blackmail if any reporting were to occur in the Canadian Press. In the summer of 2020, before the Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights and Subcommittee on Canada-China Relations, witnesses pleaded with government officials to end the Chinese intimidation campaign against human rights advocates in Canada. Witnesses also stated that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms 1982 protects all people in Canada and suggested the Chinese Embassy in Ottawa may have violated the witnesses' Charter rights. In 2020, China implemented a sweeping security law to silence protestors while reducing Hong Kong's independence and increasing subservience to Beijing. The law introduced by decree and therefore bypassing Hong Kong parliament applies to, as per Article 38, non-permanent residents outside of Hong Kong who are not permanent residents of Hong Kong; to be clear, that is practically everyone on Earth. Recently, the Chinese Consul General in Vancouver, Tong Xiaoling, warned Canadians to conduct themselves properly instead of disrupting the China-Canada relationship, threatening potential consequences for anti-CCP propaganda. Xiaoling cited Article 38, which is in direct conflict with Section 2 (b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Canadian government remains obsequious towards China.

## **Canada's Next Move**

Acting in appeasement, the Canadian Government has allowed the growth and infiltration of the CCP's sharp power to permeate into the lives of Canadians and our sacred institutions. With the most recent acceptance of Huawei cyber technology into Canadian Universities and the Liberal cabinet abstaining from voting on Chinese detention centres, Ottawa is enabling the growth of the Chinese firewall and all the consequences, both known and unknown, that come with it. When keeping the current federal government's track record in mind and Canada's pre-existing vulnerability to cyberattacks, one may suggest you do not hold your breath for change. Nevertheless, Canada's Government desperately needs to act to ensure our fundamentally Canadian values, which inspire those at home and abroad, are kept safe and secure for generations to come.

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