

Feds Should Quit Stalling and Release All Secret Docs to Foreign Interference Inquiry

By Conrad Black

The [refusal of](#) Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to [release unredacted documents](#) requested by the inquiry investigating foreign meddling in Canadian elections and democracy is part of a disturbing pattern of retaining an unjustified level of secrecy in these matters, since some of the proportions of Chinese interventions in Canadian elections came to light last year.

As if in a perfect counterbalance of the irrational haste with which the prime minister startled Parliament and the country by accusing the government of India of prompting the assassination of a Canadian citizen, he has conducted a prolonged foot-dragging and dissembling operation in respect of the role of the People's Republic of China in certain recent Canadian elections. Obviously, there is an argument for confining the most sensitive of these intergovernmental abrasions to the discretion of diplomacy, at least up to the point where it is necessary in the national interest to inform and arouse public opinion about the unsatisfactory state of affairs that may have developed. However, there is no excuse that has been made public up to now for the [prime minister's outburst](#) against the government of India.

The whole question of Canada's relationship with the Sikhs is very complicated and not easily understood by those who are not knowledgeable of the intricacies of the question. The Sikh separatist element is very much a minority of the Sikh community in India, but is much more widely embraced in the Sikh community of Canada.

There is no equivalence of community of interest or political compatibility between Canada's relationships with India and with China. India is a substantially English-speaking country, and despite its uniqueness because of its size and traditions, it is a democracy that changes governments in free elections and generally accepts freedom of expression and assembly. The People's Republic of China, on the other hand, is a totalitarian dictatorship, and practically nothing officially stated by the regime or any statistic published by it can be believed. The nation of China commands respect as the only country in the world that has been a great power, ceased to be a great power through decadence and dissipation, and returned to that status, and it has done this several times. We desire excellent relations with that country, but we cannot overlook the fact that the current regime is explicitly challenging the presence of the West generally in the world and conducts its foreign and strategic policy with a conspicuous disregard for interstate civilities such as are normally and consistently practised between Canada and its co-founder of the [Commonwealth of Nations](#), India.

Readers will recall that when revelations came to public notice of Chinese regime-directed interventions in several Canadian parliamentary elections and in a mayoral election in Vancouver—and that there were attempts to influence Canadians politically by visiting various inconveniences and harassments upon their relatives resident in China—the federal government finally, and with inexplicable or at least unexplained reluctance, agreed to green-light the investigations of committees and agencies charged with these matters. It also attempted to establish a former governor general as, in effect, a censor who would determine what it was appropriate to reveal to the public. This wheeze was shot to pieces by the other parties and even some Liberals as inadequate public airing of a serious question involving the sovereignty and political integrity of this country.



Justice Marie-Josée Hogue speaks about the interim report following its release at the Public Inquiry Into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions, in Ottawa on May 3, 2024. (The Canadian Press/Adrian Wyld)

A new inquiry was set up under the Foreign Interference Commission chaired by Justice Marie-Josée Hogue last September. At that time, the

public safety minister, Dominic LeBlanc, said that the commissioner [would have full access](#) to secret documents, and specifically “to all relevant cabinet documents as well as all other information she deems relevant for the purposes of her inquiry.”

However, we recently learned that a substantial number of requested documents have been redacted to reduce materially their significance, and an additional number has been withheld completely in the name of retention of confidentiality of cabinet papers. That is a well-established guideline for non-disclosure, but it is contrary to what the minister on behalf of the government promised. And presumably there would be a method of releasing all of this material to Justice Hogue, who could, in discussion with the government, determine where it was appropriate to have a seal of confidentiality over explicit disclosure to a broader readership.

All of the opposition parties, and therefore a majority of members of Parliament, have taken issue with this government backpedalling. The commission and the government are negotiating, and Justice Hogue has a strong position both in

requiring specific performance with Leblanc's promises and in having at her back an apparent parliamentary majority. This begs the question of what would possess the government to box itself in like this, and it invites the supposition that it has something to hide that it had promised to reveal.

Unearthing this sort of information is the purpose of establishing the commission. The greater the gap that there appears to be between the strongly asserted public interest in learning of foreign interference in our political process and the government's desire to conceal a full knowledge of that subject, the greater the level of public skepticism that will arise about the government's conduct and motives.

It has been necessary at every stage to drag the government, grumbling and dissembling and now backtracking with very feeble excuses—and this from a government which, as its outburst against the Indians demonstrated, is elsewhere not only loose-lipped but trigger-happy. Everyone, including sensible Liberals, should encourage Madame Justice Hogue to get all of the facts and then release to the public a summary of them, withholding only those matters that she and her commission by non-partisan criteria consider should remain confidential in the national interest.

The longer the government continues with this evasiveness, the more damage it will do to its own credibility.

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