

Politics Overshadowing Foreign Influence Threat

Fadden's critics aren't helping Canada or themselves, say panellists

By Matthew Little
[Epoch](#) Times Staff

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PARLIAMENT HILL, Ottawa—CSIS Director Richard Fadden unleashed a political firestorm with allegations Canadian politicians were under the influence of the Chinese and other foreign regimes, but we still haven't learned the lesson.

That was one theme of a forum at 131 Queen Street on Wednesday night. In an office building where Parliamentary committees sometimes meet to scrutinize possible legislation, panellists told attendees about the shadowy world of espionage and the risk of ignoring Fadden's warning.

The Opposition's Position

While the government has stood behind Fadden, the opposition parties have denounced the director as a racist who smeared politicians and Chinese Canadians alike.

A Liberal motion tabled at the Public Safety committee Oct. 27 called for Fadden to resign and apologize for comments given in a CBC interview alleging some municipal and provincial elected officials looked to be under the influence of a foreign regime. Fadden also suggested some agents of influence were recruited while still in university in Canadian schools and that some people didn't even realize they were being used by a foreign power.

But denouncing Fadden's warnings as racist is a betrayal of Canadian interests that Michel Juneau-Katsuya, former head of the Asia desk for CSIS, thinks is aimed at garnering ethnic votes.

Speaking at the forum on Wednesday, Juneau-Katsuya questioned the loyalties of elected representatives who focused their outrage on Fadden rather than any foreign regime that may be trying to undermine Canadian interests.

“This practice is as old as the world, where there are people in power, there will be people trying to get access to them... So why are MPS acting like it does not happen?”

Ignoring the Canary

Juneau-Katsuya said if Canada is naive about the threat, that makes it easier for spies, especially if those inclined to speak out about the danger will be attacked by the people who should push for action.

Overlooked, he said, were the ethnic communities that often feel the brunt of foreign influence exercised in Canada, like Iranians and Chinese dissidents who are subject to coercion, threats and intimidation by foreign regimes. Instead of protecting their constituents, Juneau-Katsuya said some politicians ended up helping tyrannies from abroad.

“Rather than shoot the messenger ... you should look at your own riding,” he advised elected officials.

“I invite you to rethink whose interest you are serving. Rest assured, foreign spies are smiling on you.”

Victims of Silence

Sheng Xue knows what it means to speak out on human rights from within the Chinese community. After witnessing the Tiananmen Square Massacre, she fled to Canada and started calling for democracy in China. Attempts to go back to China years later to visit her mother after her father died were met with detention there and expulsion back to Canada.

It is a threat every Chinese Canadian knows well, she said.

Like the friend who wanted to meet her with but wouldn't talk to her on the phone or come to her house. Instead they met at a coffee shop. When asked why he would not come to her home, he said her house was being monitored by Chinese agents.

“People don't feel safe even though they are living in Canada,” she said.

She went on to recount tale after similar tale. Chinese Canadians afraid to attend protests, public events, or raise their voice about issues in China out of fear they would be forever banned from their motherland or expose their families there to a backlash from the authorities.

It is a lesson most Chinese learned in China, she said. “They have been trained to be very well self-censored.”

It is a concern many Chinese Canadians will quietly raise, though rarely openly. Those who do speak loudly find themselves targeted by the regime. Those who do not, remain afraid, said Sheng.

“The fear is in our heart, it is in our lifestyle. What can we do about that? They have a very strong tie with China, their family, their relatives, their elder, their business.”

Sheng says many feel their lives are more in the hands of the Chinese communist regime than the Canadian government.

Condemning the Critics

For those pushing for a better future for the Chinese people, sometimes the reception in Canada is harder to take than the regime's bullying tactics.

Like Fadden, those who raise a voice for the 1.3 billion Chinese who have no basic human rights often find themselves labelled and dismissed.

"I love China, I am not an enemy of China," said Michael Craig, Chair of China Rights Network, a coalition of China-related advocacy organizations.

"I shouldn't have to say I am not an enemy of China, but I am often regarded as one."

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Craig noted that to criticize the regime is not to attack China and that speaking against rampant abuse of Chinese citizens isn't aimed at disrupting Canada's trade relationship with China—though that is a line frequently used by the pro-Beijing business lobby.

It is also a line that the Canadian government seems more than willing to go along with, he said. "I think it is fair to accuse our federal government of kowtowing to Chinese economic power. I think it is time we said 'wake up Canada.'"

Other speakers at the forum included Clive Ansley, a lawyer who practiced in China for 17 years and was the president of the Canada China Business Council in Shanghai.

After noting that the Chinese Communist Party has killed somewhere between 40 million and 80 million people, more than Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler combined, Ansley described the reception many critics of the Chinese regime get in Canada.

"Critics of the party are often accused of what is indicated to be a crime even worse than the murder of all of these Chinese people, that is, the crime of hurting the feelings of the Chinese people."

Rather than holding the Chinese regime to task for the abuses it is condemned for, those criticisms are twisted into attacks on the Chinese diaspora, said Ansley.

He takes issue with those who conflate the Chinese Communist Party with the Chinese nation, a notion at the very heart of the regime's formidable propaganda efforts domestically and abroad. The Canadian Chinese community is not a political monolith uniformly supporting Beijing and its varied positions, and to say so stifles discussion, he said.

"We cannot allow the Chinese Communist Party and their apologists to restrict the debate in this way. Beware those who purport to speak for the entire Chinese community. . . . In my view, Richard Fadden earned the gratitude of most Chinese Canadians."

He said Fadden shone a spotlight on a serious problem and is now being punished for it.

Questionable Diplomacy

The last person to speak was Grace Wollensak, a representative from the Falun Dafa community, widely held to be the group most targeted by the Chinese regime.

She kept her presentation brief compared to the other speakers but took the time to note the observations of Chen Yonglin, the former consul for political affairs in the Chinese consulate in Sydney, Australia, who defected in 2005 and pulled back the veil on what Chinese consulates are up to.

He told the world that suppressing the activities of Falun Gong practitioners abroad was half of the consulate's work load. He also exposed the regime's favourite way to win over critics, said Wollensak.

“One of the most effective methods used to influence political leaders is to provide them with all-expenses-paid travel to China and lavish entertainment.”

Ansley noted that buffet dinners weren't the only things many visitors swallowed.