

RED SCARE THREE: NOW WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

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Abstract

This article documents the history of united front work in Canada. It demonstrates how the Chinese Communist Party has long been engaged in a persistent campaign of interference in our politics and how the Canadian political establishment has been slow in recognizing this fact. It also seeks to explain why this realization was so slow in coming. Finally, it concludes by offering two alternative visions for how Canada might address this threat now that it has been recognized and makes a brief case for which is preferable.

Introduction

On the 17th of November 2020 a milestone in Canadian history was passed. Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition introduced a motion calling on the government to publicize its decision on Huawei's future role in Canadian telecommunications and—more significantly—devise a plan to counter the foreign interference from, influence of, and intimidation by the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Hansard, 2020). The resulting debate definitively marked the passing of a milestone as it revealed how, for the first time, there was a consensus in the House of Commons that China has been orchestrating such sinister activities in Canada (Hansard, 2020). On the same day, the Leader of the Opposition, Erin O'Toole, described the growing power of the PRC as the greatest current threat to Canada's interests and security (Tasker, 2020). Even the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marc Garneau, —who spoke against the motion—admitted that a new approach would be needed to combat the interference and intimidation that has been going on (Connolly, 2020). Indeed, the whole house agreed on the basic facts of the situation and that *something* needs to be done, current enforcement mechanism and preventative infrastructure are clearly insufficient (Hansard, 2020). There was some disagreement on whether or not *something* will mean new legislation, but the main point of dissension was really only whether a plan ought to be devised in thirty days or as soon as possible (Hansard, 2020). On the 18th of November, all opposition members were joined by some breakaway Liberal members to pass the motion against the governments wishes (Chase & Fife, 2020).

In 2020, the commons united against the government to demand it more actively resist the hostile actions of a foreign great power. Clearly, something major is afoot. The wheels of history are turning. While the timing of the motion took many by surprise, it did not emerge *ex nihilo*. This moment has been a long time

coming. With this essay I will first trace how we got to that moment, and then sketch the ways we might go from here.

How Did We Get Here?

In this section I will be documenting the chronology of how this situation developed: the trajectories and motivations of the dramatis personae at play. I will delve especially deeply into the specific tactical mechanisms that constitute the influence, interference, and intimidation operations in question. These have been documented in sufficient detail elsewhere by numerous sources. No single source so far provides a full contextual context of the situation though, so that is what I will be attempting to offer.

At this point, a reader new to the subject may well be wondering: what reality is this, what are these tactics that have been apparently so well documented? In brief: the PRC has long been and continues to be engaged in a whole-of-society effort to co-opt foreigners and insert Chinese agents into other nations, to manipulate those nations' politics to serve the interests of the PRC, as the remainder of this article will show. This practice, according to Gill and Scheer (2018), is known as united front work and it can generally be defined as:

“activities...that seek to bolster the legitimacy, longevity, and strategic interests of the [Chinese Communist Party (CCP)] by promoting and protecting the Party's image, record, and policy preferences including through monitoring, deflection and suppression of criticism and contrary positions. This kind of united front work is primarily aimed at shaping the political environment within target countries to achieve outcomes favorable to Chinese Party-state preferences, both in its standing at home and its strategic interests abroad.” (p. 157)

It is the awakening of Canadian politics to this reality that we must seek to understand.

Chinese Background

United front work has a long history in China, predating even the PRC. In 1939 Mao Zedong said in a speech that the CCP, armed struggle, and united front work were the three 'magic weapons'¹ that would lead to the triumph of communism in

¹ This translation for *fǎbǎo* (法宝) is decidedly strange and perhaps even misleading. I use it reservedly because it has become accepted in the literature. Since the focus of this essay is on the dawning realization of Anglophone and Francophone politicians, a commonly accepted translation may in the end be more illustrative and important than the actual Chinese phrase.

China (Suzuki, 2019). Under the leadership of Mao, and in the cause of eventual global revolutionary communism, the CCP made the recruiting of overseas Chinese as influence agents a key policy priority (Brady, 2017). In the Canadian context, this policy took the form of “modest support to pro-China Communist groups” as well the establishment of “Canada-China Friendship Associations” to raise awareness around the Chinese communist cause and Maoist political initiatives, as well as making early preparations for the “eventual Marxist revolutionary transformation” of Canada (Noakes & Burton, 2019, p. 415).

After Mao died, when Deng Xiaoping initiated reform and opening up, these same seeds were turned away from the explicit promotion of communism and used instead to promulgate the illusion that the CCP was on course to liberalize politically and convert to human rights (Noakes & Burton, 2019). This mythmaking was instrumental in convincing liberal democracies, like Canada, to provide the PRC with development aid (Noakes & Burton, 2019). Because they were able to convince the world that they were 'on track' for political reform to match their economic transformation, the CCP was able to direct this development aid to those societal sectors whose development would best support their domestic priorities (Noakes & Burton, 2019). These were: strengthening the nation and reinforcing the primacy of the party, to ensure that economic reform would not turn into political change (Noakes & Burton, 2019).

This approach proved highly fruitful and the reform and opening up period saw the PRC develop at a rate that is still unrivaled in history. The tragic events of June 4th, 1989, before the Gate of Heavenly Peace, threatened to derail the viability of this strategy however as democratic nations replaced aid packages with sanctions in their shock and horror (Manthorpe, 2019). This reversal in fortunes shocked the CCP in turn and highlighted for them how, now that the great door to the world had been opened while they had been profiting from overseas, they were also dangerously dependent on foreign good will (Manthorpe, 2019). They therefore increased their efforts at coopting recent emigres and infiltrating foreign governments to make sure the world would not turn against them again (Manthorpe, 2019). The trauma of this period cemented the importance of international perception into the collective consciousness of the CCP leadership. The party therefore increased its focus on turning overseas Chinese into “propaganda bases for China” to increase their ability to control international perceptions of the PRC (Brady, 2017, pp. 3-4).

The importance of united front work was again highlighted in 2007 when the CCP officially embraced Joseph Nye's idea of soft power (Brady, 2017). In recent

years, the real shift occurred in 2014 when current President—and Chairman of Everything—Xi Jinping assumed power over the PRC. That very year he gave a speech on the “importance of united front work, using Mao's term to describe it as one of the CCP's 'magic weapons'” (Brady, 2017, p. 7). The next year he personally supervised the first official conference on the subject in nine years and set up a new “Leading Small Group on United Front Work” (Brady, 2017, p. 7). The significance of this fact cannot be overstated. Under the highly centralized authoritarian model of the PRC—which has become even more centralized and authoritarian under Xi—one can know with certainty that a policy that so receives his personal imprimatur will also receive every effort and resource available.

This observation has also been made by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) who have reported that “united front work has now taken on a level of importance not seen in China since the years before 1949, when the CCP was in opposition” (CSIS, 2018, p. 75). The growing centrality of united front work to the PRC's policy agenda was further evidenced at the nineteenth Communist Party Congress in October of 2017 (Manthorpe, 2019). This was the same congress that amended the PRC's constitution to allow Xi to rule indefinitely and recognized 'Xi Jinping Thought' as having a central guiding role in the nation's philosophy (Manthorpe, 2019, p. 11). It also produced a flurry of internal re-organization with the United Front Work Department (UFWD) swallowing multiple other organizations, gaining an expanded mandate and 40,000 new cadres (Gill & Schreer, 2018). Finally, in 2018, the “Masterplan of Deepening Institutional Reform of the Party and Government” gave even more power and precedence to the UFWD (Suzuki, 2019, p. 89).

This then brings us to the present. The PRC has a President more ambitious than any of his most recent predecessors and more powerful. He has invested and reinvested in the practice of united front work as a central tool for achieving his dream of a China that sits astride the world in its traditional position as the center of all under heaven. From the Chinese perspective therefore, it can be said that the road to global dominance runs through every foreign city, or at least this is what their actions have indicated. Increasingly it seems the CCP is committed monitoring and molding opinions and speech everywhere to bring foreign nations into line in service to the ‘Chinese Dream’.

Canadian Background

As we have seen, the reality of united front work—while it has been growing in force and significance—is nothing new. What is more, Canada has been a target

of united front work since the time of Mao. The question that must be asked therefore, if we are to understand the present moment, is how is this only coming to the fore now? How is it that it took until 2020 and an *opposition* motion for our parliament to recognize the reality of the threat and acknowledge only that something should probably be done?

The literature agrees that the relevant history begins roughly in the 1850s with Protestant missionaries going from Canada to China to save souls (Noakes & Burton, 2019; Manthorpe, 2019). The children and grandchildren of this first wave of missionaries grew up in China in the turbulent years preceding 1949 (Noakes & Burton, 2019; Manthorpe, 2019). Compared to predations of the National Party government and Japanese occupiers, the CCP was able to portray itself as a preferable alternative, despite its Marxist atheism (Noakes & Burton, 2019; Manthorpe, 2019). Many of these children of missionaries eventually returned to Canada and entered government where, being the only people at hand who knew anything about China, they were put in charge of China policy (Noakes & Burton, 2019; Manthorpe, 2019). Thus, the first wave of united front work in Canada met no objection precisely because it was successful: the hands writing the relevant policies had all arrived already sufficiently pink, if not red (Noakes & Burton, 2019; Manthorpe, 2019).

From the pre-PRC years, it is also necessary to note one Dr. Norman Bethune, a Canadian, who died in 1939 from complications following surgical support he had been providing communist forces (Noakes & Burton, 2019; Manthorpe, 2019). Mao gave a speech praising him as a martyr (Noakes & Burton, 2019; Manthorpe, 2019). As incredible as it sounds, these two facts have proven sufficient material for CCP spin-doctors to convince multiple generations of Canadian politicians the CCP has for our entire nation nothing but good will and high esteem (Noakes & Burton, 2019; Manthorpe, 2019). This myth, that the CCP will be forever grateful to an entire country because one foreigner died for them, survives in circulation to this day. In 2010 CSIS claimed that Bethune's legacy “continues to resonate with Chinese and China's leaders” (CSIS, 2010, p. 9). During the commons debate last year, the Honourable Wayne Easter MP cited Bethune as a “leg-up” for Canada given his “place in the Chinese culture and the Chinese mind” (Hansard, 2020, p. 1984). The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs said the name Norman Bethune is “mentioned everywhere” in China and that “he established a relationship that is valued by Chinese people all over their country and is a matter of respect that Canadians hold” (Hansard, 2020, p. 1986). While it is impossible to definitively disprove

this myth, its suppositions do not seem to be supported by PRC policy or actions.² What is significant though is that the Canadian policy community has believed it—or at least continued to entertain it—which has undoubtedly helped to delay their addressing the threat of united front work.

The first step towards the current recognition of the threat began in 1991 when a Canadian consular official in Hong Kong, Brian McAdam, made discoveries regarding serious corruption relating to Chinese emigration to Canada (Manthorpe, 2019). His discovery was covered up, and he was professionally sidelined (Manthorpe, 2019). This left McAdam too agitated to let the matter rest however and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) were eventually moved to dispatch an investigation (Manthorpe, 2019). The investigator, one Corporal Read, found evidence to support both the allegations of corruption and cover-up (Manthorpe, 2019). This led to CSIS becoming involved and a joint investigation was launched, which, in 1997, produced Operation Sidewinder and its two reports.

Sidewinder moved the conversation forwards, to a degree, while at the same time moving it sideways. A first draft was leaked, and it did raise awareness in the public and amongst policy circles of “how Chinese intelligence services and others with close ties to the Beijing regime had manage to infiltrate and influence large areas of corporate and public life” (Manthorpe, 2019, p. 229). On the other hand, the reception it received from government was far from favourable. Following the leak, the Security Intelligence Review Committee (SIRC) investigated the operation and demanded an updated draft. In the end, SIRC “found no evidence of substantial and immediate threat of the sort envisaged in the first Sidewinder draft, no evidence that a threat was being ignored through negligence or design, and no evidence that the government had not been appropriately warned of substantive threats where such existed” (Manthorpe, 2019, pp. 239-240).

From this response it is unclear whether SIRC was unconvinced there was any threat or whether they acknowledged that there was a threat but disputed its immediacy. Additionally, one could also read their response as meaning that the government had been appropriately warned, and was not ignoring the threat, but rather was electing not to respond. In any case, while Sidewinder succeeded in raising the issue, it failed in generating any apparent response. It is also probable, though ultimately unknowable, that the negative government reaction

² Anecdotally as well, it is certainly possible for a Canadian to visit China on numerous academic trips, live there for multiple years, graduate from a Chinese university (having attended all ideological courses required) and never once hear the name Norman Bethune.

Sidewinder generated served to dissuade future investigation into united front work in Canada and contributed to the silence on the issue in the years that were to follow.

Between 1999 and 2006 there were eight halcyon years in the Chinese Canadian relationship, marked by increasingly frequent diplomatic visits and deepening trade ties (CSIS, 2010). The threat of united front work briefly made it back into the conversation in 2007 though when the wife of a Chinese diplomat, Zhang Jiyan, defected to Canada and alleged widespread infiltration and subversion by China in Canadian society, especially targeting Chinese Canadians (Manthorpe, 2019). This incident was insufficient to provoke any substantive response, however.

In 2010, then CSIS director Richard Fadden, gave a speech which included corroboration of Zhang's allegations as well as the findings of the first Sidewinder draft (Manthorpe, 2019). To these general allegations of infiltration, influence, and intimidation, he added the specific charge of multiple elected politicians in Canada actively working to promote the agenda of the CCP (Manthorpe, 2019). This could have been the start of a serious conversation. This would have to wait ten more years though. At the time the political consciousness was not prepared. Back then, the act of voicing the idea of elected officials working to promote a foreign agenda was seen as worse than the possibility it might be true. Fadden was condemned by the Public Safety Committee with some Members of Parliament calling for his resignation (Manthorpe, 2019).

Even within the intelligence community, opinions were still divided on the subject of the China threat. At a CSIS conference in 2009, a question about foreign interference and China was fielded under the assumption that any such interference would be directed *at* China and not be coming *from* the PRC (CSIS, 2010). United front work was nowhere addressed (CSIS, 2010). The publication that resulted from this conference even went so far as to claim that the public perception of China was “perhaps more negative than warranted by reality” (CSIS, 2010, p. 44). Therefore, it seems fair to say that ten years ago there was limited awareness of the situation even inside the intelligence community, little public understanding, and no political recognition.

In 2014 a former CSIS analyst and co-author of the Sidewinder report, Michel Juneau-Katsuya, said that CSIS had uncovered evidence of electoral interference by the Chinese Consulate in Toronto (Manthorpe, 2019, p. 369). Apparently, the consulate had been “sending Chinese students into the homes of Chinese-language-only households and telling residents which candidates the Consulate wanted voters to choose” (Manthorpe, 2019, p. 369). Three years later, in early

2017, a coalition of human rights groups in Canada raised the alarm over united front work again in their complaint over the “harassment and intimidation of individuals in Canada working on China-related activism” (Manthorpe, 2019, p. 28). Neither of these alarms were sufficient to generate a policy response or a widespread conversation.

Indeed, we can see that the possibility the PRC might be a serious threat had not yet penetrated the organizational consciousness of the Canadian government. In June 2017, the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau approved the sale of Norsat, a telecommunications company with Canadian and allied military and security contracts, to Hytera a state-owned enterprise with links to communist security services, despite the clear security risks (Manthorpe, 2019, pp. 314-315). Later that same year, Trudeau fully flew to China in the hopes that he could introduce human rights clauses into a free-trade agreement then under negotiation (Manthorpe, 2019, p. 17). He was immediately and irrevocably rebuffed and so may have begun the current political slide towards reality.

In 2018 CSIS published a report that highlighted the importance of united front work to the PRC's foreign policy, enunciating in particular how united front work was intended to “influence the decision-making of foreign governments and societies in China's favour” (CSIS, 2018, p. 76). It was also specified that united front work included the management and 'guiding' of diaspora communities, as it had been practiced in New Zealand (CSIS, 2018). The report even mentioned how New Zealand was viewed as a model for Chinese foreign policy elsewhere (CSIS, 2018). At that time however, the authors were not yet ready to explicitly and publicly warn again—perhaps still shy from the Sidewinder backlash—that the same is happening in Canada.

Such a warning only arrived on the 10th of November of 2020 when CSIS publicly stated that PRC agents routinely operate in Canada to influence politics, intimidate critics, and generally mold public political discourse to the liking of the CCP (Fife & Chase, 2020). The next week the opposition motion this article began with was introduced and we are brought to the recent past.

Historical Speculation

Having established the historical background to the present moment, on both the Chinese and Canadian sides, it is easy to see how this point has been a long time coming. One obvious question to ask is therefore: why did it take so long? It would seem like there have been multiple opportunities for the conversation to begin, for action to be demanded: why now? It is impossible to say which spark began the reaction that produced the political will required for the public

declarations made last week. It is possible however to speculate reasonably as to what factor or factors dissuaded policy action in the past.

First and foremost, it is undoubtable that many politicians hesitated to engage the issue for fear of appearing racist. In particular, the necessity of distinguishing between recent emigres from China and families who arrived in Canada before the establishment of the PRC requires a delicacy and nuance that may well have been enough to dissuade some from engaging the issue altogether. Charges of potential dual loyalties and foreign infiltration—particularly though not exclusively—amongst a minority ethnic population conjure up troublesome memories of past incidents of racist fearmongering. In this case, the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War comes particularly easily to mind. Such fears undoubtedly provided for some hesitancy amongst at least a few politicians. In that regard it is significant that the defenders of last year's motion were careful to emphasize how they sought to protect Chinese Canadians from the malign influence of the CCP, and *not* protect Canada from Chinese Canadians (Hansard, 2020). It is also likely no accident that the opposition chose the Honourable Michael Chong MP to introduce the motion (Hansard, 2020). The fear of appearing racist is insufficient to explain why the current reckoning was so long delayed however, for two reasons. First as the debate of late 2020 proved, the issue is navigable (Hansard, 2020). Second, we must not overestimate politicians' sensitivities on the issue of race. Many well-known images of our current Prime Minister illustrate this point nicely, though the reader can undoubtedly think of numerous other examples.

There is also, as was previously discussed, the myth of the PRC's alleged affection for Canada and the myth of Norman Bethune. This enduring folly likely aided in allowing policy makers to, not ignore but rather, reinterpret warning signs in a more positive light. After all, if the CCP likes us surely their united front work in Canada is 'relationship-building' and not *infiltration* or *interference*. Such naive optimism conformed well with the parallel piece of foreign policy sacrament which holds: China wants to be like us and the more they see of us the more they will realize it. This absurdity was born, from the expert united front manipulation the CCP engaged in the 1980s (discussed above) wherein they convinced the world they intended to politically liberalize. What is more, despite all evidence to the contrary, faith in the mythical 'power of engagement' lives on. On the 17th of November 2020, the Minister of Foreign Affairs said, "I believe in engagement. Engagement is the only way we can interact and hopefully change behaviour" (Hansard, 2020, p. 1972).

Even when we account for the myth of Norman Bethune and the indelible faith in the power of engagement however, this is still insufficient to explain how it is

the PRC's undermining of Canadian sovereignty has been comfortably ignored for so long. As we have noted, there has long been publicly available evidence of unified front work in Canada. The historical record weighs heavily enough against these postulates of optimism that they would likely have been long ago discarded were there not a powerful incentive to cling to them. In this case, we can see such an incentive and it explains much.

As everyone knows, the Chinese market is massive. Ever since 1961 when the government of Prime Minister John Diefenbaker succeeding in selling “\$422 million dollars” of wheat to China—and never-mind the fact that they also lent them the money—successive Canadian governments have dreamt of the money to be made if only we could export to China freely (Noakes & Burton, 2019, p. 415; Manthorpe, 2019). The CCP knows this—and, for the past several decades, having many options—has been able to acquire the passivity and cooperation of the Government of Canada (Noakes & Burton, 2019). They have achieved this largely by continually teasing market access and an infusion of money that always remains yet one more concession away (Noakes & Burton, 2019). The tradeoff Canadian policy makers have so far always been willing to make is increased access for Canadian exports in exchange for increased acceptance of Chinese acquisitions and influence here (Burton, 2019). The allure of exporting to China is great enough to, if not entirely explain turning a blind eye to united front work, at least explain indulgence in the myths of engagement and Norman Bethune. This indulgence, in turn, suffices to explain the political passivity in this area.

What it does not explain is the apparent—lesser, but still significant—passivity of the intelligence community in this story. The backlash against the Sidewinder leak certainly helps to explain why that was not tried again. Still, it cannot be said that the community made every effort to make their warnings heard, through public channels at least. What efforts were or were not made behind closed doors and in classified briefings will never be fully known. In fifty years, we may get to read around redactions; for now, sources are limited. These limited sources do not draw attention to the threat of united front work in Canada. The 2010 publication discussed earlier makes no mention of united front work or the threats of infiltration, interference, and intimidation anywhere in the section titled “Looking to 2015: What Should Canada Pay Attention to?” (CSIS, 2010, pp. 39-45). Eight years later, New Zealand was listed as a target for united front work, the threat to Canada went unwritten (CSIS, 2018).

Three possible explanations present for this silence. First, such publications as anyone can access and junior academics can reference are likely relatively low on CSIS's list of priorities. It may be that ensuring that they are safe to release is

most easily accomplished by ensuring they are bland, and united front work is inherently spicy. This is unverifiable but believable. Second, the specific individuals charged with assembling these publications may have been unaware of the issue. This seems improbable but possible in regard to the 2010 publication that was based on a conference held in 2009, but unlikely given the high degree of publicity that surrounded Sidewinder (CSIS, 2010). The authors of the 2018 publication had all-but certainly read Brady (2017), at the very least. They must have known. So why did they say nothing?

The most probably explanation for the intelligence community's silence on this issue is two-fold. First, it is unclear who is mandated to deal with united front work. A recurrent point made in last year's debate was that victims of the more coercive forms of united front work are routinely passed between CSIS, the RCMP, and Global Affairs Canada (Hansard, 2020). Some forms of united front work are criminal, but overall, it is an intelligence threat, but it does originate from the other side of the globe. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to think Canada's intelligence community may be suffering from a lack of mandate to confront united front work. Further evidence for this supposition can be seen in the observation that the Australian intelligence community suffered from this condition before new legislation was passed in 2018 (Medcalf, 2018). Second, the intelligence community is mandated more for the keeping of secrets than keeping the public informed. Public disclosures are inherently political and thus politicians' responsibility.

In summary then, Canada has been the target of united front work, in one form or another, for decades. The situation has also been getting continually worse and the decline has accelerated since 2014. While politicians turned a blind eye and the intelligence community passed around an, admittedly hot, potato the PRC grew ever more powerful and ever more ambitious. Its reach grew and its power deepened and now parliament has decided something should be done about the tentacles that penetrate Canadian society. The question remains: where do we go from here?

Where Next?

When we seek answers to this question, we have convenient access to two preexisting case studies in the form of the Australian and New Zealand examples. Both are commonwealth countries and members of the Five Eyes. They are in many ways like Canada, though geographically much closer to China. Both faced the realization that Canada now has before we did and from there their paths diverged. New Zealand has, for the most part, opted to continue business as usual while Australia has taken a much more vocal and robust approach to resisting

united front work. In their experiences therefore we can gain some sense of two possible trajectories which we might choose.

The New Zealand Example

The starting point for the New Zealand case is the National Party government's pre-2017 position of total conformity to CCP preferences (Brady, 2017). This posture of solicitous conformity found expression in two of that government's policies: "no surprises" and "getting the political relationship right" (Brady, 2017, p. 14). "No surprises," meant not allowing any government member or employee to say or do anything the CCP leadership might not like (Brady, 2017, p. 14). "Getting the political relationship right," meant maximizing the intermingling and party-to-party integration with the CCP (Brady, 2017, p. 14). In other words, they gave them everything they might hope to achieve through united front work.

New Zealand's moment of clarity came in 2017 when, right before a general election, scholar Anne-Mari Brady published her conference paper detailing the realities of united front work in New Zealand (Brady, 2017). With this work she not only popularized the terms united front work and 'magic weapons', she also exposed how deep the penetration of the New Zealand state and nation had gone (Brady, 2017). Brady not only explicated the subservient policies of the National Party, she revealed at least one member of the CCP within the National Party caucus (Brady, 2017). These revelations, appearing as they did strategically before an election, contributed to a change in government (Brady, 2018).

The new government was quick to declare that "New Zealand is no longer for sale," without naming any previous buyers (Brady, 2018, p. 73). It also released excerpts of national-security briefings relating to foreign interference, again without explicitly naming any culprits. These declarations aside, the new government of New Zealand has done little to change the realities of their situation. New Zealand did eventually move towards a ban on Huawei equipment in their 5G infrastructure (Dyer, 2019). They also banned some categories of foreign donations to elections (Roy, 2019). These steps do not address the vast bulk of united front work however, nor were they proposed for that purpose. New Zealand has chosen to continue in a largely conciliatory path. As a result, their trade relations with China remain good.

The Australia Example

Of the countries under consideration, Australia was the second to become aware of the threat of united front work and the first to credibly respond. It also has taken the most robust action to date. The relevant Australian chronology begins in 2005 when a Chinese spy, Hao Fengjun, defected to Australia and informed

the authorities there about the extensive degree to which Australia had already been penetrated by united front operatives (Manthorpe, 2019). As with the Canadian case however, this first warning went unheeded. As late as 2014, awareness of the China threat was sufficiently limited that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation was willing to sign a deal wherein they gained increased access to the Chinese market, in exchange for censoring their Chinese-language media everywhere (Walker, 2018).

The next time the issue was raised however, Australia took notice and responded. Between 2012 and 2014 large sums of money were donated by politically connected Chinese in Australia to both major parties (Chai, 2020). This foreign political support was revealed to be problematic when one major donor's support was made explicitly conditional on the parties' silence on the issue of the PRC's claims over the South China Sea (Chai, 2020). It was later revealed that this conditionality of monetary support resulted in Senator Dastyari contradicting his party's line and publicly supporting the Chinese stance on the issue, against his party and government (Chai, 2020).

Meanwhile, in their report on the 2016 to 2017 fiscal year, the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) raised the alarm about growing clandestine influence operations, in Australia, targeting media organizations, diaspora communities and the public at large (ASIO, 2017). In May of that same year: “the government’s most senior Department of Defence official, Dennis Richardson” gave a speech wherein he explicitly denounced China's united front work against Australia, noting that their espionage and intelligence activities in the country were “more than cyber” and especially targeted “Australian Chinese communities” and “Chinese-language media” (Manthorpe, 2019, p. 377). The next month, the head of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) warned that unprecedented levels of espionage and interference threatened Australia's liberties and sovereignty (Manthorpe, 2019; Gill & Schreer, 2018).

At that point, the mounting pile of warnings began to be heeded, and the political winds began to change. In November of 2017, then Senator Dastyari stood down as deputy Senate whip for the opposition in response to the revelation that he had been paid to contradict his party's position on China's nine-dash line (BBC, 2017). In December, the Government of Australia introduced “new draft laws on foreign influence, interference and espionage” (Medcalf, 2018, p. 110). In 2018 the book *Silent Invasion* was published alleging deep penetration by the CCP into Australian politics and academia through community groups and donations (Mao, 2018). This fueled the growing public awareness of the threat of united front work and its reality in Australia. Meanwhile, well-respected investigative journalists were publishing similar findings, noting the impacts of united front

work not only in politics but also noting how the university sector was being infiltrated and academic freedoms curtailed (Manthorpe, 2019; Medcalf, 2018).

Then, in 2019 it was revealed that a Liberal Party MP had previously been a member of a proxy organization for the CCP (BBC, 2019, September). Two months later, Australia was shocked by a case wherein a Liberal Party candidate had been offered funding by Chinese agents to run for parliament on their behalf (BBC, 2019, November; Australian Associated Press, 2019). Having reported their advances to ASIO, he was later found dead in a hotel room, possibly murdered (BBC, 2019, November; Australian Associated Press, 2019). That same month, a Chinese spy defected to Australia and corroborated what were, by then, commonly held beliefs about the omnipresence of Chinese influence and infiltration activities (McGowan, 2019). With the public and politicians by then committed to answering the threat of united front work in Australia, ASIO reported that it had been coordinating with law enforcement to implement the new anti-foreign interference legislation that had by then passed (ASIO, 2019). The organization reported the legislation as being helpful but not a final cure (ASIO, 2019).

Australia was more directly confronted by the hard realities of united front work than either Canada or New Zealand have been so far. While New Zealand also found alleged double agents in its legislature, they have not had to deal with any alleged assassinations. The Australians have also offered the most determined response to the threat of united front activities. The result has been increased sovereign control over their politics, at the cost of the PRC having severely curtailed its trade with Australia in retaliation for its defensive stance, amongst other issues (Hurst, 2020).

Discussion

In evaluating the options before Canada today, two factors must be considered: our trade balance and our geography. On the trade front, we can more easily afford to stand on the principle of sovereignty than could Australia. A lesser percentage of our exports go to China than do Australia's (Manthorpe, 2019). Additionally, we receive less investment from China than Australia does (Manthorpe, 2019). Geographically we are next to the United States and can therefore less easily afford to compromise our sovereignty and conform to the CCP's will. Even if this were an arrangement the Canadian public were willing to continue to accept, and in harsher and harsher degree, there would almost certainly come a point when the American side would no longer accept our being compromised. Just as the PRC seeks to separate Canada from our traditional partner in the United States, so would the United States oppose our pivoting away

(Noakes & Burton, 2019). The current hostage situation that resulted from Canada's arrest of Meng Wanzhou³ represents in small measure the dangers of being a pawn in the struggle between the US and the PRC. In a game of tug-of-war, the rope suffers the most strain when both sides have a firm grip. In terms of plate tectonics, we cannot disentangle from the United States. Therefore, for purely pragmatic reasons, and without addressing questions of principle and morality, Canada ought to attempt to extricate itself from the CCP's prying grasp, recognize the danger of the PRC's united front operations, and commit to resolutely defending its sovereignty, as Australia has done. In late 2020 we had a moment of unprecedented political consensus, awareness, and will when such a policy could have been pursued. Since then, the pressing realities of the pandemic have distracted. Whether or not the threat will be remembered when the pandemic subsides or the nation will have to wait years more for yet another, likely more dramatic, wakeup call remains to be seen.

³ Meng Wanzhou, the Chief Financial Officer of the Chinese telecoms giant Huawei, was arrested on the 1st of December, 2018, by Canadian authorities at Vancouver International Airport. The arrest was executed in response to an American request under the extradition agreement between the U.S. and Canada. Soon afterwards two Canadians, Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig, were detained in apparent retaliation—though the PRC denies this. Canadian exports to the PRC also faced significant disruption, though the PRC authorities again deny the apparent connection. At the time of writing Meng's extradition case is ongoing in Canada. Interested readers are invited to review the extensive media coverage of the case for the most current developments on the ongoing situation.

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