

Alone in the world?: Making sense of Canada's disputes with Saudi Arabia and China

International Journal

2019, Vol. 74(1) 151–161

© The Author(s) 2019

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/0020702019834652

journals.sagepub.com/home/ijx



Roland Paris

Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of
Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

Canada has found itself in serious diplomatic disputes over the past year with Saudi Arabia and China. The Saudis took issue with the Canadian foreign minister's call to release human rights activists from prison, whereas China was angry at Canada's arrest of a senior Chinese executive on an extradition request from the United States. These incidents should not be viewed as isolated aberrations. Authoritarian regimes seem increasingly emboldened to lash out at countries that displease them, including allies of the United States. But Ottawa has succeeded in rallying considerable international support for its position in the China dispute, suggesting that while Canada may be exposed, it is not destined to be alone.

Keywords

Canadian foreign policy, Canada–China relations, China, Chinese foreign policy, Canada–Saudi relations, Saudi Arabia, Canada–United States relations, US foreign policy, Huawei, extradition, rule of law

China's detention of two Canadians in December 2018—in apparent retaliation for Canada's arrest of a Huawei senior executive on an extradition request from the United States—shocked and angered many Canadians, but it was not an isolated event. Four months earlier, Saudi Arabia had also retaliated against Canada after taking issue with a tweet from Canadian foreign minister Chrystia Freeland calling on the kingdom to release human rights activists from jail. The Saudis expelled

Corresponding author:

Roland Paris, University of Ottawa, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, Room 6053,
120 University, Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 6N5, Canada.

Email: rparis@uottawa.ca

Canada's ambassador, suspended commercial negotiations, pulled their students from Canadian universities, and reportedly ordered the divestment of Canadian assets.

These two episodes made Canada look like an increasingly exposed target. Authoritarian regimes seem to feel newly emboldened to lash out against countries that displease them, including allies of the United States. Perhaps they recognize that under the presidency of Donald Trump, the US has been less inclined to defend its traditional friends. Canada lacks the unilateral capacity to strike back against such assaults, nor does it belong to the European Union, which provides a measure of protection to its members through strength-in-numbers. All of these conditions lower the costs that authoritarian states can expect to pay if they pick on Canada.

Perhaps something else is also at work. Canada is one of a dwindling group of countries that continue to champion liberal values in the world, including human rights, the rule of law, and democratic governance. Some Canadian commentators have criticized Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his government for "preaching" about these values and unnecessarily provoking illiberal countries, whereas others view these commitments as integral to Canada's identity and argue that the government should defend them with even greater vigour. On this score, however, the Trudeau government has not significantly differed from its predecessors. With occasional deviations, Canadian governments have advocated similar values in their foreign policies since the Second World War. The problem today is not that Canada has changed. It is the rest of the world that has changed, leaving Canada as something of an outlier—and a lightning rod.

Did Canada bring these problems upon itself? Freeland's famous (or infamous) tweet could have been more felicitous, but Riyadh bears the main responsibility for the ensuing fracas. The intemperance of the Saudi response bore the hallmarks of the young crown prince, Mohammad bin Salman, who had demonstrated his impulsiveness on several previous occasions, launching a reckless war in Yemen, mounting a diplomatic offensive against Qatar, and by some accounts even detaining the prime minister of Lebanon in Riyadh.¹ The fierceness of the Saudi reaction to Freeland's tweet came as a surprise to most observers, but this type of impulsiveness is, by its nature, hard to predict.

The China dispute was different. Beijing grew angry not at something Canada said, but at the arrest of the Huawei executive. However, short of covertly warning the Chinese executive and enabling her to evade capture—a gambit that would have raised its own serious problems—there was little Canada could have done to avoid China's ire.

1. David Ignatius, "Saudi Arabia forcibly detained Lebanon's prime minister, sources say," *The Washington Post*, 10 November 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/saudi-arabia-forcibly-detained-lebanons-prime-minister-sources-say/2017/11/10/b93a1fb4-c647-11e7-84bc-5e285c7f4512_story.html (accessed 3 February 2019).

The best defence for Canada under these kinds of circumstances is to rally the support of like-minded countries. This can be harder than it sounds. States are generally reluctant to stick their necks out for others, even friends, unless they have a good reason to do so; and with the United States retreating from its traditional role as the world's principal defender of liberal values, other liberal democracies may have apprehensions about becoming targets of retaliation themselves. This sense of vulnerability could explain why none—not *one*—of Canada's traditional partners publicly backed Canada in its dispute with Saudi Arabia. Under previous US administrations, the White House would have likely supported Canada in a quarrel with Saudi Arabia over human rights, but this time US officials pointedly refused to take sides. So did our European friends: although some offered back-channel help, none spoke up for Canada. Not the UK. Not France. Not even Germany, which Saudi Arabia had subjected to similar treatment not long before.

They responded differently, however, to China's detention of Canadian citizens a few months later. The European Union and several of its individual members—including the UK, France, and Germany—as well as the United States, Australia, and others issued statements of concern. It was a display of solidarity suggesting that Canada's diplomatic solitude might not be so profound after all.

These episodes offer some lessons for how Canada might respond to such incidents in the future. Our allies' seeming indifference to Saudi Arabia's broadside caught Canadian officials by surprise. Experience had led them to expect more support, but the world had changed—a lesson that informed their response to the next incident. When China detained the two Canadians a few months later, Ottawa quickly embarked on a global campaign to secure the support of other countries, specifically highlighting the larger issues at stake in the incident.

Duelling detentions

The dispute with China began in December 2018 when Canadian police arrested Huawei's chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou, while she was changing planes in Vancouver.² The US Justice Department had accused her of fraud for allegedly conspiring to mislead several banks between 2009 and 2014.³ Specifically, they contended that she had misrepresented the relationship between Huawei and Skycom Tech, a Hong Kong-based company that did business in Iran in violation of US sanctions. Chinese officials reacted to her arrest with fury, portraying it as a “politically motivated” ploy by the United States to weaken a major Chinese technology

2. Portions of this section previously appeared in Roland Paris, “Canada is on the front lines of challenges to rule of law,” Chatham House, 25 January 2019, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/canada-front-lines-challenges-rule-law> (accessed 3 February 2019).

3. Laura Kane, “Huawei exec accused of fraud for violating sanctions against Iran,” *National Post*, 7 December 2018, <https://nationalpost.com/news/world/chinese-telecom-executive-due-to-appear-in-vancouver-court-for-bail-hearing> (accessed 3 February 2019).

company.⁴ They also threatened Canada with “grave consequences” if Meng was not immediately released.⁵

Regrettably, US president Donald Trump did little to dispel their suspicions, initially suggesting that he might intervene in Meng’s prosecution in exchange for trade concessions from China, even though it was not clear that he had this power.⁶ Caught off guard, Ottawa immediately sought clarification. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other administration officials promptly rebutted Trump’s remarks. “What we do at the Justice Department is law enforcement. We don’t do trade,” assistant attorney general John Demers told a US Senate committee.⁷ In fact, the charges against Meng stemmed from a Justice Department investigation that reportedly predated the Trump Administration.⁸

Meanwhile, Chinese officials took dramatic action. Nine days after Meng’s arrest and just two days after warning Canada, they detained two Canadian citizens in China—Michael Kovrig, a diplomat on leave from the foreign ministry and working for the Brussels-based International Crisis Group, and businessman Michael Spavor—on suspicion of endangering China’s national security.

Chinese authorities must have been aware that incarcerating an on-leave Canadian diplomat, immediately after threatening Canada with consequences, would be interpreted as a hostile message. In the words of Canada’s former ambassador to China, Guy Saint-Jacques, “there is no [such thing as a] coincidence in China” when high-profile arrests are involved.⁹ Beijing’s actions also matched a pattern of previous behaviour. In 2014, Canada had arrested another Chinese national, Su Bin, also on an extradition request from the US. Shortly afterwards,

4. Tonda MacCharles, “China’s ambassador accuses Canada of ‘backstabbing’ in arrest of Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou,” *Toronto Star*, 17 January 2019, <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2019/01/17/china-hits-back-at-freelands-criticism-of-detention-of-canadians.html> (accessed 3 February 2019).
5. Amy Smart, “B.C.’s trade trip to China cancelled over Huawei arrest, Canada warned it could face ‘grave consequences,’” 10 December 2018, <https://business.financialpost.com/news/economy/b-c-s-trade-trip-to-china-cancelled-over-huawei-arrest-canada-warned-it-could-face-grave-consequences> (accessed 3 February 2019).
6. Jeff Mason and Steve Holland, “Exclusive: Trump says he could intervene in U.S. case against Huawei CFO,” *Reuters*, 11 December 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-huawei-tech-exclusive/exclusive-trump-says-he-could-intervene-in-u-s-case-against-huawei-cfo-idUSKBN1OA2PQ> (accessed 3 February 2019).
7. Quoted in Mike Levine, “DOJ ‘not a tool of trade’ in China dispute, official vows, after Trump suggests he might intervene,” ABC News, 12 December 2018, <https://abcnews.go.com/beta-story-container/Politics/doj-tool-trade-chinese-exec-case-official-vows/story?id=59775531> (accessed 3 February 2019).
8. Matthew Goldstein, Emily Flitter, Katie Benner, and Adam Goldman, “How a national security investigation of Huawei set off an international incident,” *The New York Times*, 14 December 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/14/business/huawei-meng-hsbc-canada.html> (accessed 3 February 2019).
9. Quoted in Chun Han Wong, John Lyons, and Josh Chin, “‘No coincidence’: China’s detention of Canadian seen as retaliation for Huawei arrest,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 December 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/no-coincidence-chinas-detention-of-canadian-seen-as-retaliation-for-huawei-arrest-11544619753> (accessed 3 February 2019).

Chinese security agents detained a Canadian couple living in China, Kevin and Julia Garratt, accusing them of espionage.

In fact, the Garratts were not spies, but Su Bin was. He later confessed to breaking into the computer systems of US defence contractors and stealing military secrets.¹⁰ Only after Su Bin had surrendered to US authorities did China allow the Garratts to return to Canada in 2016. The couple reported that during their long detention they had faced daily six-hour interrogations by a team of three men who repeatedly threatened them with execution.¹¹

Although China denied any connection between the Garratts' detention and Su Bin, just as it now denies retaliating against Canada for Meng's arrest, Canadian government officials and independent experts came to believe that Beijing was holding the Garratts to pressure Canada. Indeed, when I raised their case with China's ambassador to Canada on several occasions in 2015 and early 2016—while serving as an adviser to Prime Minister Trudeau—he and his officials routinely responded by mentioning Su Bin.

In other words, Canadians had seen this behaviour from China before, but more disturbing news was on the way. In January 2019, a Canadian named Robert Shellenberg, who had previously been sentenced in China to a fifteen-year jail term for drug trafficking, was abruptly retried and condemned to die—a verdict that the Chinese judges took barely an hour to reach. Specialists in the country's legal system, including some inside China, expressed surprise at the extraordinary circumstances and rapidity of the retrial. Zhang Jianwei, a professor at Beijing's Tsinghua University, wrote that the case raised “the suspicion that the judiciary in China is merely a servant of politics.”¹² Another expert used blunter language: China was using its justice system to conduct “hostage diplomacy.”¹³

Many Canadians reacted with understandable dismay and indignation, not only at China's apparent use of arbitrary judicial measures to pressure Canada, but also at its treatment of the detained Canadians. As of this writing, Kovrig and Spavor have yet to be charged, have faced lengthy interrogations, and are being held in jail cells where the lights remain on twenty-four hours a day.¹⁴ Kovrig has reportedly been questioned about previous work as a Canadian diplomat—a possible

10. United States Department of Justice, “Chinese national pleads guilty to conspiring to hack into U.S. defense contractors' systems to steal sensitive military information,” press release, 23 March 2016, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/chinese-national-pleads-guilty-conspiring-hack-us-defense-contractors-systems-steal-sensitive> (accessed 3 February 2019).

11. Dan Levin, “Couple held in China are free, but ‘even now we live under a cloud,’” *The New York Times*, 1 January 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/01/world/canada/canadian-couple-china-detention.html> (accessed 3 February 2019).

12. Quoted in Nathan Vanderklippe, “Unusual speed of Canadian's death sentence triggers debate in China,” *The Globe and Mail*, 16 January 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-unusual-speed-of-canadians-death-sentence-triggers-debate-in-china> (accessed 3 February 2019).

13. Donald Clarke, “China's hostage diplomacy,” *Lawfare* blog, 11 January 2019, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/chinas-hostage-diplomacy-0> (accessed 3 February 2019).

14. Robert Fife and Sean Silcoff, “Chinese authorities mistreating Canadian detainees, ambassador says,” *The Globe and Mail*, 21 January 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-chinese-authorities-mistreating-canadian-detainees-ambassador-says> (accessed 3 February 2019).

violation of his diplomatic immunity.¹⁵ By contrast, Meng has been afforded due process and was quickly released on CA\$10 million bail. She has hired legal counsel that can challenge the US extradition request before an independent judge. Her father, the founder of Huawei, even thanked the Canadian justice system for treating Meng so well.¹⁶

Rallying rule-of-law countries

From the moment the crisis broke, Canadian officials had few options to resolve it. As long as Meng continued to face possible extradition to the US, China was unlikely to release the detained Canadians. But Meng's proceedings could take months, or even longer. Canada was in a terrible jam.

Learning from the Saudi dispute, Ottawa immediately prioritized building international support for its position. Rather than leaving this task solely to diplomats, Trudeau and Freeland themselves began calling to their counterparts around the world. According to official "readouts" of these calls, they emphasized the importance of upholding the rule of law in the face of China's seemingly arbitrary arrest of Canadians.¹⁷ Indeed, Beijing's behaviour posed a potential threat to the citizens of other countries that happened to displease Chinese authorities. This message seemed to work. As noted above, several countries issued public statements supporting Canada and expressed their concern about the Canadians' detention, with some calling for their release. Trudeau hinted that other countries had expressed similar concerns in private.¹⁸

The Chinese and Saudi broadsides against Canada raised larger questions for the community of liberal democracies. Would they stand together when

15. Campbell Clark, Nathan Vanderklippe, and Les Perreux, "Canada protests China's interrogation of Kovrig over past diplomatic work," *The Globe and Mail*, 16 January 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-canada-protests-chinas-interrogation-of-kovrig-over-past-diplomatic> (accessed 3 February 2019).
16. Canadian Press, "Huawei founder thanks Canadian justice system for treating daughter well," *The Globe and Mail*, 16 January 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-huawei-founder-thanks-canadian-justice-system-for-treating-daughter> (accessed 3 February 2019).
17. For example: "Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks with United States President Donald J. Trump," Prime Minister of Canada website, 7 January 2019, <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2019/01/07/prime-minister-justin-trudeau-speaks-united-states-president-donald-j-trump> (accessed 8 February 2019); "Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany," Prime Minister of Canada website, 18 January 2019, <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2019/01/18/prime-minister-justin-trudeau-speaks-chancellor-angela-merkel-germany> (accessed 8 February 2019); "Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks with the President of France, Emmanuel Macron," Prime Minister of Canada website, 27 January 2019, <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2019/01/27/prime-minister-justin-trudeau-speaks-president-france-emmanuel-macron> (accessed 8 February 2019); and "Secretary Pompeo's Call With Canadian foreign minister Chrystia Freeland," US Department of State, 16 January 2019, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2019/01/288476.htm> (accessed 3 February 2019).
18. On 31 July 2019, Prime Minister Trudeau said that Canadian officials had spoken with "a broad range of countries" that are "very much in agreement, many of them privately, many of them publicly" with Canada's concerns. Embedded video, "Trudeau: China wants Canada to overrule courts and release Meng Wanzhou, but it won't do that," <https://globalnews.ca/news/4913811/trudeau-china-courts-meng-wanzhou> (accessed 3 February 2019).

authoritarian states brazenly flouted international norms? The list of incidents was growing. The audacious 2018 poisoning of Russian ex-spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the UK (and the death of a British citizen who accidentally contacted the poison) appeared to be a case of Russia's extraterritorial score-settling.¹⁹ In 2015, five Hong Kong-based booksellers and publishers disappeared and later reappeared in mainland Chinese prisons. One of them, Gui Minhai, was apparently snatched from his apartment in Thailand.²⁰ In another case, democracy campaigner Li Xin disappeared from a train in Thailand and turned up in a Chinese jail months later, claiming to have returned voluntarily.²¹

In a particularly notorious case in October 2018, a team of Saudi government agents murdered and dismembered the body of dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside Saudi Arabia's consulate in Istanbul. Turkey, the affronted party in the Khashoggi case, has also conducted its own aggressive campaign to silence suspected opponents at home and abroad. Since a failed 2016 coup against his government, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has sought to repatriate supporters of a former political rival whom he accuses of orchestrating the coup. Turkey's deputy prime minister has publicly bragged that Turkish intelligence services have seized at least eighty Turkish nationals from multiple countries.²² In an apparent example of one such attempt, during the summer of 2018 masked men abducted a Turkish educator in Mongolia and took her to a private airplane whose call sign matched that of the Turkish Air Force. She was released only after Mongolian authorities grounded the flight.²³

How other states respond to such incidents is important. When Saudi leaders targeted Canada for punishment in 2018, they may have been counting on the United States and other liberal democracies to look the other way. This turned out to be a correct expectation. We may never know if the non-reaction of other states emboldened Riyadh, but Khashoggi's assassination took place only two

19. British authorities charged two men with the attack, alleging both were active Russian intelligence agents, a conclusion also reached by independent investigators. Ann M. Simmon, "Second U.K. spy-poisoning suspect identified as Russian military doctor," *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 October 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/second-spy-poisoning-suspect-identified-as-russian-military-doctor-1539069356> (accessed 3 February 2019).
20. Oliver Holmes and Tom Phillips, "Gui Minhai: The strange disappearance of a publisher who riled China's elite," *The Guardian*, 8 December 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/08/gui-minhai-the-strange-disappearance-of-a-publisher-who-riled-chinas-elite> (accessed 3 February 2019).
21. Barbara Demick, "Why did China kidnap its provocateurs?" *The New Yorker*, 16 February 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/why-did-china-kidnap-its-provocateurs> (accessed 3 February 2019).
22. Erin Cunningham, "Turkey says its global dragnet has seized dozens of its citizens in 18 countries," *The Washington Post*, 5 April 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/turkey-says-its-global-drag-net-has-seized-dozens-of-its-citizens-in-18-countries/2018/04/05/3e4c144a-38d1-11e8-af3c-2123715f78df_story.html (accessed 3 February 2019).
23. Hannah Beech, "Turkish school leader abducted, and released, in Mongolia," *The New York Times*, 28 July 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/28/world/europe/turkish-school-leader-abducted-and-released-in-mongolia.html> (accessed 3 February 2019).

months later, and the strength of the international reaction to this murder seemed to catch the Saudis by surprise.

This is why a strong, collective response to China's treatment of the Canadian detainees was and remains important. If rule-of-law states fail to push back against China's apparent use of hostage diplomacy, what lesson will Beijing and other authoritarian regimes draw from this episode?

The future of Canada–China relations

The dispute has plunged the Sino-Canadian relationship to its lowest point since the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, or perhaps even since Canada and the People's Republic of China established diplomatic relations in 1970. They are unlikely to improve until Meng's extradition proceedings run their course and the Canadian detainees are released.

However, both countries have an interest in preventing this incident from permanently undermining their relationship. China is simply too important for Canada to shun. It is an emerging great power, already playing a central role in global affairs, and on track to becoming the world's largest economy. The challenge for Canada—and many other countries—is to find a way to work with China in areas of mutual interest while simultaneously pushing back against its aggressive behaviour.

The stakes are significant. How China and the rest of the world interact will reshape the international order, for good or ill. The world's last illiberal great power was the Soviet Union, which waged an existential struggle against the Western alliance, including Canada. The Cold War contest was alarming but relatively straightforward: both sides sought to vanquish each other by using all possible means short of direct military conflict. China, by contrast, abandoned its revolutionary posture in international affairs following the death of Chairman Mao Zedong and refocused its attention on building its domestic economy and minimizing its involvement in international controversies. As then-leader Deng Xiaoping advised in 1990, “hide your strength and bide your time.”

But China's foreign policy has become considerably more assertive and at times belligerent under the current presidency of Xi Jinping, particularly within its own neighbourhood. Chinese authorities have declared—and are now using aggressive tactics to enforce—a sovereignty claim over most of the South China Sea, in spite of the fact that an international tribunal repudiated this claim in 2016.²⁴ In another marked departure from Deng's doctrine of keeping a low profile in international affairs, Xi has taken to touting China as a “great power” and now describes the Chinese authoritarian system as a model for the rest of the world.²⁵ In 2017,

24. China had earlier declared that it would not participate in the case brought by the Philippines to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, or recognize its findings.

25. Chris Buckley and Keith Bradsher, “Xi Jinping's marathon speech: Five takeaways,” *The New York Times*, 18 October 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/18/world/asia/china-xi-jinping-party-congress.html> (accessed 8 February 2019); Zheping Huang, “Xi Jinping says China's

the Chinese Communist Party eliminated term limits for its presidential office, raising the possibility of Xi holding the position for life, and passed a law requiring all Chinese firms to comply with Party directives when asked to do so. Concerns have mounted in a number of countries over reports of Chinese covert political interference,²⁶ pervasive theft of intellectual property by Chinese enterprises and government agents,²⁷ and Beijing's use of strategic overseas investments and state-owned enterprises to pressure other countries into adopting pro-China positions.²⁸ Meanwhile, repression within China of political dissidents and religious and ethnic minorities, including an estimated one million Uyghurs reportedly detained in "re-education" camps, has intensified.²⁹

In short, the Xi regime is becoming more authoritarian at home and more aggressive abroad. Unlike revolutionary great powers in the past, however, China does not seem to have its sights on overthrowing the existing international order. The interconnected global economy is too vital to China's economy and to the survival of the Chinese Communist Party, which would face acute domestic challenges if the country's economic growth were to plunge. China's cooperation has also been essential on a range of global challenges, from financial stability to climate change.

Navigating relations with this unique rising power will therefore require a blend of resolve, restraint, and wisdom: resolve to push back against aggressive Chinese behaviour, restraint to prevent such disputes from escalating out of control, and wisdom to recognize that defending our interests does not preclude cooperating with China in areas of shared concern. Striking this balance will be difficult, but it is essential—and not only for Canada. Periods of "power transition" in the past, when rising powers have challenged the dominance of incumbent powers, have often given rise to major wars.³⁰ Avoiding the recurrence of past disasters will be a historic challenge for both the United States and China for years, if not decades, to come.

authoritarian system can be a model for the world," *Quartz*, 9 March 2018, <https://qz.com/1225347/xi-jinping-says-chinas-one-party-authoritarian-system-can-be-a-model-for-the-world> (accessed 3 February 2019).

26. Bates Gill and Benjamin Schreer, "Countering China's 'united front,'" *The Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (2018): 155–170.
27. Commission on the Theft of American Intellectual Property, "The IP Commission report," May 2013, http://ipcommission.org/report/IP_Commission_Report_052213.pdf (accessed 3 February 2019).
28. Peter Harrell, Elizabeth Rosenberg and Edoardo Saravalle, "China's use of coercive economic measures," Center for New American Security, June 2018; and Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
29. Simon Tisdall, "China's pitiless war on Muslim Uighurs poses a dilemma for the west," *The Guardian*, 15 September 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/15/china-pitiless-war-on-muslim-ughurs-poses-dilemma-for-the-west> (accessed 3 February 2019).
30. Twelve of sixteen power transitions over the past 500 years resulted in systemic wars, according to Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), p.

In light of these considerations, Ottawa should maintain its resolve in the face of China's present bullying and continue to build international support for Canada's position, but it must also maintain open lines of communication with Beijing, while shielding bilateral business ties and cultural exchanges from the diplomatic dispute. This is how to deal with a country that is simultaneously a partner and an adversary.

This would be a difficult policy to manage under the best of circumstances, but the recent escalation of Sino-American trade tensions is a complicating factor. To some extent, it is the cause of Canada's current rift with China; the US indictment of Meng seems to be part of a US crackdown on the illicit behaviour of Chinese companies, and some policymakers in Washington may be secretly pleased that their extradition request has driven Canada and China further apart. There is growing bipartisan sentiment in Washington to punish Chinese practices that are seen to be harming the United States, including Beijing's misappropriation of foreign technology. Canada should support the US effort to change Chinese behaviours that harm Canadian interests, but Ottawa should not subcontract its China policy to the United States. Canada has its own interests, separate from those of our southern neighbours.

If US–China tensions continue to rise, however, Washington might present its allies with a stark demand: Are you with us or against us? This would leave Canada with little policy flexibility on China, since Canada's obvious preeminent interest is to maintain effective relations with its closest ally and largest trading partner. We have already seen early hints of this approach from the US in the renegotiated North American trade agreement, concluded in late 2018. The text of the agreement included a clause effectively threatening Canada with expulsion from the trilateral pact if Ottawa concluded a comprehensive free trade agreement with any “non-market economy,” a clear reference to China.³¹

As it happens, this clause was unnecessary. Beijing's increasingly hardline behaviour was already darkening Canadian views of China—and rightly so. Much has transpired since the Trudeau government was elected in 2015. Although maintaining and expanding bilateral trade with China remains an important goal, no Canadian government would pursue a comprehensive free trade agreement under the current circumstances. Even Australia and New Zealand, which negotiated free trade agreements with China years ago, would be unlikely to seek one today—not only because of US pressure, but mainly because of recent shifts in Chinese behaviour. In any event, the “non-market economy” clause was an unmistakable warning shot from Washington. Canada will have to be very cautious as it manages its relations with both of these great powers, neither of which is likely to do Canada any favours.

It seems astonishing that only a few years ago knowledgeable commentators were arguing that Canadian foreign policy was a “mostly optional” domain of

31. Canada–United States–Mexico Agreement, Article 32.10, <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/cusma-aceum/text-texte/toc-tdm.aspx> (accessed 3 February 2019).

government policymaking, rather than essential to the country's success.³² This was never true, but it is glaringly false today. Canada can no longer rely on others to shield it from a harsher and more competitive world. Navigating the road ahead will require informed, determined, and deft policymaking. Otherwise, Canada will truly find itself alone.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Author Biography

Roland Paris is Professor of International Affairs in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa, Associate Fellow at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in London, and a member of the World Economic Council's Global Futures Council on Geopolitics. Over the course of his academic career, he has served in several advisory positions in the Canadian government, including as Senior Advisor to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. His most recent book, co-edited with Taylor Owen, is *The World Won't Wait: Why Canada Needs to Rethink Its International Policies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

32. *Maclean's* columnist Paul Wells on Twitter: "I like to upset learned gatherings by pointing out that Canadian foreign policy is mostly optional." <https://twitter.com/InklessPW/status/247045129108615168>, 15 September 2012; and Ian Brodie, "Canada disengaging from NATO, the UN and multilateralism? Not a chance," OpenCanada, 25 September 2014, <https://www.opencanada.org/features/canada-disengaging-from-nato-the-un-and-multilateralism-not-a-chance> (accessed 3 February 2019).