

# Opinion: As Canada Messes Up Indo-Pacific Strategy, China Has Last Laugh

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Canada has long accused China of meddling in its domestic affairs, and the charges range from election interference to money laundering to counterfeiting and so on. The allegations go as far back as a 1997 report from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), which warned of a collaboration between Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials, criminals, mafia and business tycoons to infiltrate Canadian businesses, to steal intellectual property rights and to interfere in the management of the country. While many of the Canadian accusations, along with the evidence, have been missed by the world media at large, Meng Wanzhou's arrest in 2019 made global headlines. The RCMP, on a warrant from US officials, arrested Huawei executive Meng, the daughter of the company's founder. Meng, the Chief Financial Officer of Huawei, was accused of violating US sanctions on Iran. China retaliated and unleashed hostage diplomacy, arresting two Canadians in China on charges of espionage. The crisis in Canada-China relations lasted till 2021, when Meng's case was dismissed.

In November last year, Canada unveiled its Indo-Pacific strategy with a sharp focus on China. The strategy not just outlines the China challenge with concerns about Chinese strategic and motivated investments, coercive approaches, arbitrary application of laws,

and military capabilities, but it also plans to review all existing mechanisms and structures with China and diversify its investments in the region. The India-Pacific strategy identifies India as a critical partner and delves into specific areas for enhancing cooperation. However, all came to naught as Canada unleashed accusations against India this month, without offering any evidence of New Delhi's role in exterminating a so-called Canadian citizen on its soil. While India has condemned the baseless allegation, and Justin Trudeau hasn't provided any evidence in seven days, let alone concrete evidence, China laughs the last laugh.

As disinformation and propaganda abounds, tracking the most dominant narratives in state-controlled societies with complete surveillance of social media - as is the case in China - becomes useful in order to understand the discourse. The news website of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), even before Trudeau levelled his allegations against India, published several articles on deteriorating ties between India and Canada and noted that Trudeau's visit to India for the G20 summit was extremely low key. It also said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's accusations of terrorist activities on Canadian soil are targeted at India's minority community - the Sikhs. Clearly, the narrative equates Sikhs with terrorist outfits in Canada - something that India has never said. The same website also has articles on the postponement of a Canadian trade delegation to India. While the fact is true that the delegation's visit was postponed, the narrative pushed out again by the articles on the so-called news website is that India was concerned about Sikhs in Canada, which is entirely untrue.

Both Huanqiu and its English version, the Global Times, have come up with several "commentaries" on how the India-US partnership is unravelling, and how India needs to understand it can never be treated as an equal partner by the West. What is implicit is that India should give up its sovereignty-related disputes with China and join hands with it in a campaign against the West. What is conveniently ignored, as is the case in all propaganda, is that India has always preferred to stay neutral, even in the most difficult situations, and has relied on its own strengths to navigate crises in international politics. The "India way", which has time and again been mentioned in the context of the G20, is attempted to be flushed away.

Guancha, a nationalist website based in Shanghai, follows the same narrative as those pushed out by Huanqiu and Global Times, and paints a picture that India's partnership with the West is based only on balancing China and nothing more. China Youth Network, a key central news website sponsored by the Central Committee Youth League of China, while saying Trudeau has provided no evidence against India, remarks that India now joins a group of countries known for assassinating political opponents overseas, drawing a comparison with the Jamal Khashoggi murder.

There are several other state supported Chinese websites and social media accounts which raise the same accusations against India, without evidence, just the way Trudeau has, in the hopes of equating India with China. They seek to propagate the narrative that India and China are no different and that is why India should partner with China rather

than the West. While the strife between India and Canada continues, and the wait for any evidence continues, the possibilities of a rift between India and its partners, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, is cheered heartily by China.

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