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Global Affairs reached out to Chinese ambassador over boasts about defeating Tory MPs in 2021 election

Mélanie Joly also confirmed that a Chinese diplomat had their visa rejected in the fall of 2022 because of concerns over foreign interference operations in Canada

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Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly appears before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to answer questions on foreign election interference, on Thursday, March 9, 2023. Joly says Canada denied a visa to a political operative for China last fall. PHOTO BY JUSTIN TANG /The Canadian Press

OTTAWA – Senior officials at Global Affairs of Canada (GAC) reached out to China’s ambassador to Canada, one week after the Globe and Mail first revealed how Beijing had worked to defeat Conservative candidates in the 2021 election.

Jennie Chen, who serves as the Great China division director at GAC, told MPs in a parliamentary committee studying foreign interference that “diplomatic representations” were made to Cong Peiwu on Feb. 24 over allegations of foreign interference in past elections.

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Chen did not go into detail about the representations, and department officials told the National Post that GAC regularly engages with officials from foreign states. **TRE**

Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly also confirmed to the committee that her department had rejected a visa for a Chinese diplomat in the fall of 2022 because of concerns that the individual was being sent to conduct foreign interference operations in Canada.

In response to NDP MP Rachel Blaney's questions on why certain diplomats are allowed to stay despite concerns being raised while this one was prevented from entering the country, Joly admitted it is "easier to prevent" diplomats from entering the country than expelling them. **2**

She added there had been "higher awareness" in regard to foreign interference in past months and had instructed her department to refuse visas to individuals if they had any suspicions that they were linked to China's Communist Party. **3**



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Joly was appearing as a witness as part of the House of Commons standing committee on procedure and house affairs tasked with studying allegations of foreign interference, alongside Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs Dominic LeBlanc and other officials.

Their testimony came right after hours of filibustering from Liberal MPs to prevent Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's chief of staff, Katie Telford, from testifying on allegations of interference in past elections after recent media reports revealed Trudeau's office was briefed on the issue.

Liberals took turns delivering lengthy statements to dismiss the idea of a public inquiry, as asked by all the opposition parties, arguing it would be too expensive and that it would be inappropriate to ask a political staff member to testify in front of committee.

"For heaven's sake, she is the chief of staff to the Prime Minister," said Conservative MP Michael Cooper. "She's the top adviser to the Prime Minister; she is one of the most powerful people in this government."

He added that Telford testifying in front of committees was "hardly without precedent" since she had testified two times previously to speak on the WE Charity scandal and on sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, and that opposition parties would not back down.

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“All opposition parties are united in seeing Ms. Telford appear before committee,” he said.



But the committee really descended into chaos after Cooper mocked Joly’s recent testy encounter with her Chinese counterpart during a G20 meeting in New Delhi last week, telling him that Canada will not accept China’s meddling in Canadian elections.

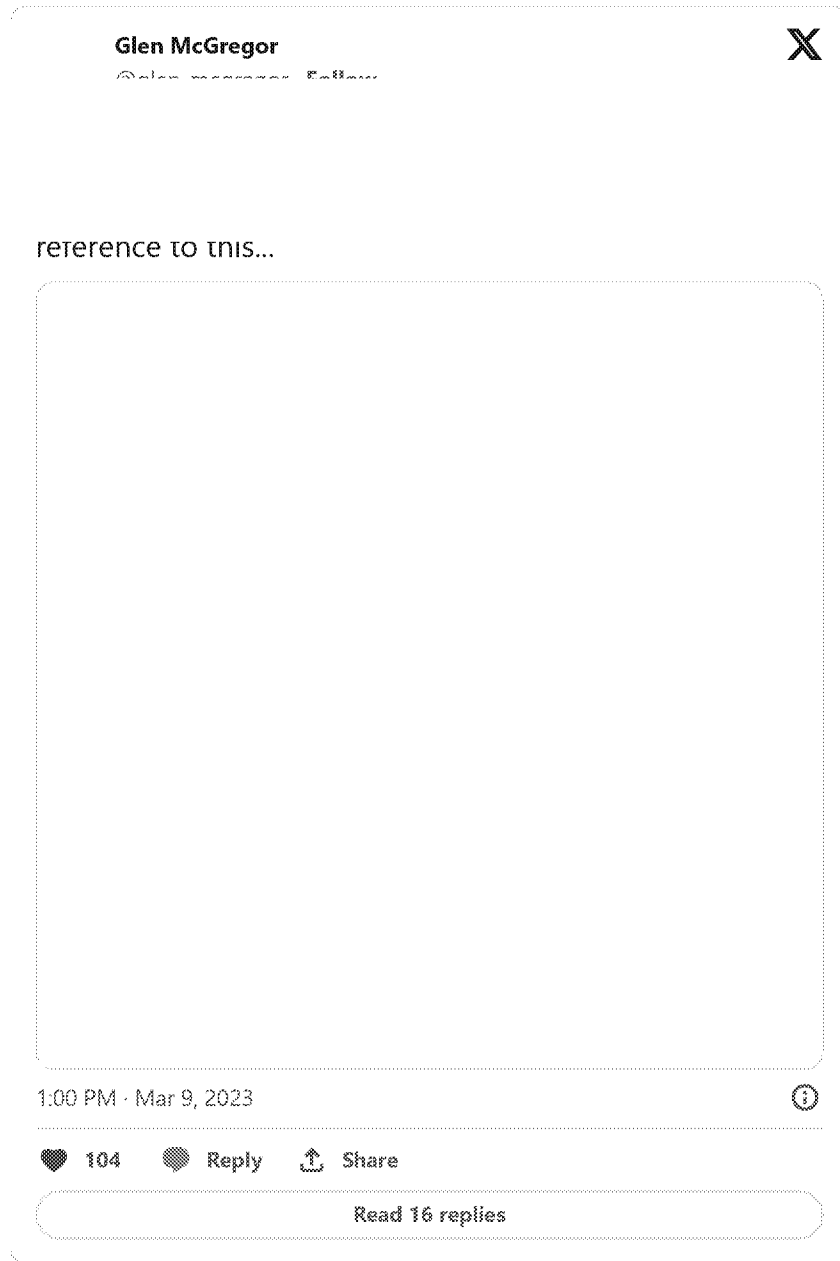
“You’ve talked tough with your Beijing counterpart, so you say. You even stared into his eyes. I’m sure he was very intimidated,” said Cooper.

Joly shot back, saying that Cooper would “know China” since he participated in a paid trip there as a parliamentarian in 2017 and accused him of falling in “China’s trap” in stoking division.

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Liberals and the NDP were quick to condemn Cooper's words which they thought were demeaning and sexist.

"I just want to say, as a woman politician, I remember at the very beginning of my career being asked if I was tough enough to do the job and I think it's absolutely devastating that that sort of frame of reference would be used in this way," said Blaney.

"I believe a minister has a position of power, regardless of gender identity, and that should be respected," she added.

Liberal MP Sherry Romanado said that such words wouldn't have been used when former prime minister Stephen Harper confronted Russian president Vladimir Putin to tell him to get out of Ukraine in 2014, and demanded an apology from Cooper.

The Liberal chair of the committee, Bardish Chagger, concluded by saying there are "a lot of things around this place that makes me puke in my mouth often" and called on the members of the committee to do better.

Cooper sent out a statement late afternoon to push back against accusations of sexism and implied he would have said the same thing if Joly had been a man.

"My comments had nothing to do with the Minister's gender and everything to do with the lack of action by her and her government to hold the regime in Beijing accountable for interfering in our elections and harassing and threatening Canadian citizens," he said.

“My comments apply equally to the Prime Minister and her Liberal predecessors in the role.”

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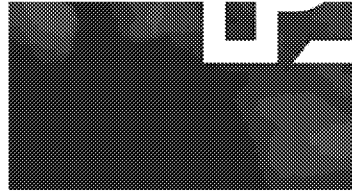
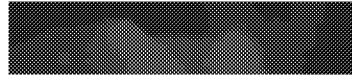
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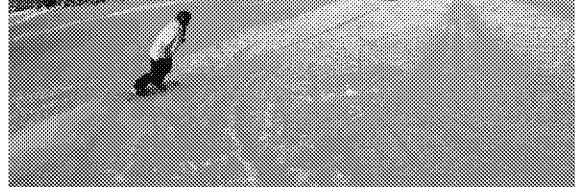
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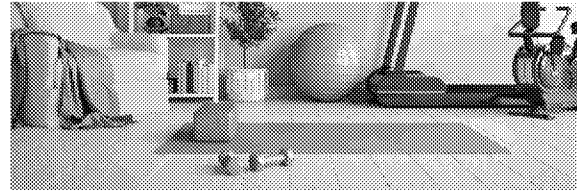
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