
International Affairs

An Attack on the Laws of Sovereignty: Is the Leader of the Opposition Actually up to the Task?

21 January 2024

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On June 18th, 2023, Hardeep Singh Nijjar was shot and killed by two assailants in Surrey, British Columbia (Yousif & Razzell, 2023). Born in India, Nijjar moved to Canada as a refugee in 1997, and became a citizen in 2007 (Yousif & Razzell, 2023). A self-proclaimed Sikh separatist, Nijjar was an advocate for an independent Sikh state named Khalistan, the land currently existing within the country of India (Yousif & Razzell, 2023).

On September 18th, 2023, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced to Parliament, and by extension, the world, that “Canadian security agencies have been actively pursuing credible allegations of a potential link between agents of the Government of India and the killing of [Hardeep Singh Nijjar]” (Trudeau, 2023). As the Prime Minister continued, he called the act a violation of Canadian sovereignty. This is an assertion with which I agree. Any attack by a foreign government on Canadian soil is a violation of our government’s sovereignty and is an issue that should

be treated with utmost seriousness. In this instance, however, one member of the government has failed to recognize the gravity of the situation.

The leaders of each of the opposing parties spoke in response, all condemning the act of violence. However, the one that stands out among the rest is the response made by Pierre Poilievre. In his response, he said “if the allegations are true...” (Poilievre, 2023). Upon first glance, this may not seem concerning; as they are in fact allegations, they have not yet proven to be concretely true. Nevertheless, this comment positioned the Leader of the Official Opposition to question the validity of the Prime Minister’s accusations going forward.

Since the issue was first raised in the 44th session of Parliament, Pierre Poilievre has questioned the accusation’s validity. We should not be surprised; Poilievre takes his role as the Leader of the Official Opposition very seriously, criticizing the Liberal

government and mounting the opposition at every given chance. He demanded that the Prime Minister release to the public the evidence upon which the accusation was founded. In turn, the Prime Minister has denied, stating that “[a]s a country with a strong and independent justice system, we allow those justice processes to unfold themselves with the utmost integrity” (Nichols, 2023). It is possible that releasing the evidence too soon could endanger further intelligence gathering or further operations. Although the Prime Minister providing a vague answer leaves room for speculation, doing so is dangerous. Canadians must be able to rely on our intelligence agencies when they are needed most. If releasing the evidence to the public is not necessary, or would in fact be harmful, then the public must place its trust in our agencies. As a career politician, Pierre Poilievre should understand that foreign relations are a delicate matter, especially when it has to do with the murder of civilians.

As expected, the Government of India has not responded well to Trudeau’s accusations. Shortly after Trudeau announced the allegations in September, India decided to strip 41 Canadian diplomats of their immunity, asserting that they must be withdrawn (Dyer & Major, 2023). Even though Indian immigration to Canada is popular, and

has been encouraged in India, their government began urging their citizens not to travel to Canada (CBC News, 2023). If Pierre Poilievre had attempted to support the current Canadian government during a period as threatening as this, would the Government of India have reacted as strongly as they have? By not supporting the Liberals, Poilievre presents the Canadian government as fragmented. Certainly, as a foreign nation who has carried out the murder of a Canadian in Canada, seeing a fragmented government would only be encouragement to attempt further destabilization. In fact, in one of Poilievre’s routine interviews posted on October 21st, he claimed that Justin Trudeau is at fault for the “soured” relations between Canada and India.

This is not just a game of “he said, she said,” it is a relevant inter-national crisis that will have consequences. India is quickly growing in both population and economic size, which enables it to be more geo-politically powerful than before. If the poster-country for recent economic and political development believes it can get away with assassinating foreign citizens, it encourages other nations to conduct themselves in a similarly illegal fashion. Additionally, due to the growing economic size of India, its influence over the economies of other countries begins

to grow. This includes Canada. The Liberal government has made the Canada-India Free Trade Agreement an important part of their platform. Now that relations have ruptured between the two countries, there is little chance of an agreement happening anytime soon. Not only will this be damaging to Canada's economy, but also its ability to connect with the economies of other eastern countries.

Although the economy has always been an important aspect of Canadian politics, the post-pandemic economic slowdown has pushed it to the forefront. As an election cycle looms with the approach of the 2025 election, the economic impact of Liberal policies will be scrutinized. Allowing India to see Canada's Federal Government so fragmented gives the opinions of foreign countries more influence in the direction of our politics. This undoubtedly gives Poilievre an advantage in the upcoming election, as India's government has stated that its quarrel is with the Liberal Government, and not with Canada as a whole (Robertson, 2023). The Indian Government blaming the Liberals for "souring relations" works in Poilievre's favour, and perhaps this is why he is so openly undermining the sitting government (Robertson, 2023).

Needless to say, it will be interesting to see how the situation further plays out. Both countries have a plethora of cards

up their sleeves that could influence the direction in which the situation develops. Which cards get played next? Only time will tell.

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