

We're caught in the middle

EDITORIAL

CANADA IS INFURIATED, and rightfully so.

John McCallum, Canada's ambassador to China told Chinese press there was a solid legal case that could help Meng Wanzhou avoid extradition to the United States to face charges that she played a role in her company's avoidance of U.S. trade sanctions on Iran.

Ms. Weng, chief financial officer of Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd., was arrested by Canadian authorities and has since been freed on \$10-million bail and is residing in a Vancouver house she owns while awaiting a trial on the extradition request that's expected to last months.

Meanwhile, China has arrested two Canadians on specious grounds and imposed a sudden death sentence on a third Canadian who had earlier been found guilty of drug trafficking and sentenced to 15 years.

Mr. McCallum's comments led to his dismissal, four days later, at the request of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Canada has persistently pushed back at China's criticism of the Weng arrest but Mr. McCallum's comments made the federal government's position confusing, as ambassadors typically discuss the official perspective of their regime. This also undermined the integrity of the entire legal process.

Mr. McCallum essentially went off the rails by discussing his personal opinion, and at one point did apologize.

Chrystia Freeland, our minister of foreign affairs, told The Globe and Mail that Mr. McCallum was fired because he expressed views that were contrary to those of the federal govt.

As we see it, Mr. McCallum should have stuck to the script instead of speaking his mind on an already tense relationship between two powerful nations, the U.S. and China.

To some, his comments made it seem like Canada might simply send Ms. Weng home to China, which is not the case.

Canada and China's relationship was already complicated by United States President Donald Trump essentially declaring a trade war with Beijing. This just added more fuel to the fire.

Mr. McCallum was also quoted in Vancouver's Star Metro as saying it would be great for Canada if the U.S. dropped the extradition request and said that if a deal was made with the U.S. it should include the release of the two Canadians China had detained.

Former diplomat Michael Kovrig and entrepreneur Michael Spavor were both arrested, with the Chinese government feeling aggrieved over the arrest of Ms. Weng. The pair were reportedly accused of somehow endangering China's national security.

This was followed by a Chinese court's decision to impose the death sentence on Canadian Robert Schellenberg.

Canadian officials are working to overturn the death sentence of Mr. Schellenberg and negotiate the release of Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor. Jim Nickle is now Canada's acting ambassador in Beijing.

Canada's ambassador to the U.S., David MacNaughton, told The Globe and Mail that Canada has voiced anger and resentment at being caught in the middle, with its citizens suffering because of American actions.

Canada is left walking on eggshells in a trade dispute between the Trump administration and China.

In the circumstances, we don't need to be ticking off anyone else.

Further complicating the matter is increasing U.S. pressure on Canada to follow its lead in barring Huawei Technologies from assisting Canadian cable networks in developing 5G high-speed internet services.

The issue there is whether Huawei, owned by the Chinese government, might provide equipment that could be used for high-tech espionage.