

The two Michaels

by BRIAN LOCKHART

It was announced this past week that two Canadian men being held in China have now been charged with spying.

Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, have been officially charged after being 'detained' in China for the past 18 months.

Both men were 'detained' shortly after the December 2018 arrest in Canada of Meng Wanzhou, a top executive in the Chinese tech company, Huawei.

She was arrested on fraud charges at the request of the U.S. government. Ms. Meng was wanted on the charges because of her dealings with Iran.

Both Kovrig and Spavor have been in solitary confinement and suffering from ill treatment by their 'handlers.'

Neither man has been seen by Canadian consular officials since January.

Every country in NATO should be issuing a major protest against the Chinese government. The Chinese detained these two men for bogus political reasons and have now charged them with a serious crime based on bogus evidence.

If it could happen to two Canadians, it could happen to any citizen of every other NATO country.

Holding innocent people as political pawns should not be tolerated by any civilized western country.

Of course the Chinese deny any connection between the two men's detainment and the arrest of Wanzhou. The Chinese deny a lot of things. If it doesn't fit their narrative, they deny.

The Huawei company has long been seen as a front for spying by China's military and its security services.

The Chinese don't like confrontation. They especially don't like people who disagree with the communist regime.

Just ask the guy who bravely stood in front of a column of battle tanks, holding his bags of groceries, and momentarily stopped the military, during the Tiananmen Square pro-democracy protests of 1989.

While that man became famous around the world for what was considered his brave but peaceful protest, the Chinese government tried to censor all images and reports about what was going on there.

The result was the declaration of martial law, and Chinese military firing on their own people, killing hundreds, possibly thousands of people, and wounding thousands more.

The protester has never been identified and his whereabouts are unknown ? of course.

Most likely he was escorted from the square by officials and provided the opportunity to never speak to anyone again.

While modern western countries practise a rule of law developed over centuries, the Chinese practise a 'rule' that means the judicial system will follow the wishes of the communist regime ? not that of any written laws. And don't expect to find out the results of a trial.

The number of people executed by the government is classified as a state secret.

In China, being arrested is pretty much the same as being convicted. If you are charged with a crime, good luck mounting any kind of defence.

Police can arrest you just on suspicion ? they don't need proof.

Even internet access is controlled. If you manage to find a way past the firewall and dare criticize the government, you'll soon find yourself in very serious trouble.

When you have a court system that is not separate, but takes its lead from directives from a central government that dictates what is going to happen, you don't have a real court system.

The conviction rate in China for the charges Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor are facing is 99.9 per cent. The possible sentence ranges to up to life in prison.

In other words, these guys are in serious trouble unless the West intervenes and demands their return.

Every once in a while, you read about some westerner being arrested in Asia for smuggling drugs or some other, usually ridiculous crime.

In that case the attitude is 'don't commit crimes in foreign countries.'

We are all subject to the laws of a country we visit. If you're going to do something stupid like smuggling a bag of cocaine in your suitcase or spray graffiti on a national monument, you're going to find yourself in trouble.

That's no different than a foreign tourist coming here and committing a crime.

When people are charged with a crime for political reasons, that's a whole different story.

So far, the Canadian government is doing little to help two men who are facing serious, bogus charges, in a foreign country.

In a recent press conference, PM Trudeau actually referred to these two political prisoners as 'the two Michaels,' reducing them from being two political prisoners, to some kind of schoolyard pals.

Every NATO nation should be demanding the immediate release of these two men, or next time it could be an American, British, French, German, Belgian, Italian, or Norwegian citizen who is arrested and jailed for reason of political blackmail.