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CANADA

Iran's growing influence may be missed as inquiry begins, experts warn



By **Touria Izri** • Global News

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WATCH: The long-awaited public inquiry into foreign interference in Canada's democratic processes is now underway in Ottawa, where allegations against China, Russia, Iran and India are all under scrutiny. David Akin reports – Jan 29, 2024



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The highly anticipated **public inquiry** into foreign election interference is set to begin Monday, examining how countries like China, Russia and India may have tried to meddle in Canadian democracy.

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But some national security experts warn **Iran's** growing influence may be missed, despite how far the regime has **"spread its tentacles"** in Canada.

"Any country on which we have substantive information of engaging in **foreign interference** should be included," Dick Fadden, former head of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, told host Mercedes Stephenson in an interview with *The West Block*.

"To ignore Iran, given the public information we have about Iran, will just raise questions the (commission) won't be able to answer," added Fadden who is expected to testify at the inquiry on Wednesday.

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Justice Marie-Josée Hogue, a Quebec Court of Appeal judge, leads the probe and will have just three months to produce her findings on one of Canada's most complex national security challenges. Her interim report is due May 3, with a final report due by the end of the year.

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The commission's terms of reference instruct it to examine how China, Russia and other "foreign state or non-state actors" may have tried to influence the 2019 and 2021 federal elections.

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On Wednesday, **India was added to the list.** The commission requested records related to that country and allegations of interference on Canadian soil.

But Iran has not been mentioned outright, despite deepening concerns about its attempt to intimidate Iranian Canadians.

A Global News' investigation by the current affairs program **The New Reality** suggested associates of the Iranian regime were operating in Canada, including some who threatened Iranian diaspora communities in the country.

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Last November, **the RCMP acknowledged** it has received "reports of foreign interference being committed by or at the direction of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

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A **2019 report** from the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP) wrote Canada's "close allies and like-minded states" are worried about Tehran's growing reach.

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"Notable concerns included Russian and Chinese political interference activities and their efforts, along with those of Iran and Turkey, to influence and intimidate ethnocultural communities," reads the report.

Fadden warns Canada's public inquiry may not be able to dig deeply into Iran, and other facets of foreign election interference, because of the commission's tight deadline.

"I think (Hogue) is operating under a timeframe that makes it almost impossible to deal with all the issues substantively," he said.

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Both he and Vina Nadjibulla, vice-president at research and strategy at the Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada, agree Canada is playing catch-up and is years behind allies when it comes to tackling the issue.

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“We have been much slower in both recognizing the real threat that foreign interference is to our democracy and our way of life,” Nadjibulla told Mercedes Stephenson on *The West Block*. “This is not an exercise just to have an inquiry. We need to see real changes to be able to defend ourselves better against these threats, which will persist in the coming years,” she said.

To Fadden, a more realistic time frame to conclude the inquiry, is a year, possibly a year and a half.

“We’ll probably be in an election then and nobody will be paying a great deal of attention. But we’re not going to have many opportunities to deal with foreign interference,” he said. “I don’t understand why it took the government so much time to accept that we needed a public inquiry.”

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