

## **A Canadian Hostage in Beijing**

***The inside story of the geopolitical crisis that fractured relations between China and the West, tested the US-Canada alliance and forced two innocent men to endure over 1000 days of wrongful detention.***

When the United States put out a secret arrest warrant for a Chinese telecom executive on charges of evading sanctions on Iran, it generated an unprecedented geopolitical maelstrom. Acting on that warrant, Canadian authorities detained Huawei Chief Financial Officer Meng Wanzhou while she was transiting in Vancouver and began legal proceedings to extradite her to the US. In retaliation, the Chinese government seized two Canadian citizens and essentially held them hostage in a ruthless game of high-stakes diplomatic blackmail.

The ensuing standoff took nearly three years to resolve and profoundly darkened Western perceptions of China highlighting the dangers its ruling Communist Party poses to the world.

One of the detainees, veteran diplomat and geopolitical expert Michael Kovrig, will share his inside story of what really happened and why. His tale weaves a human struggle for love, dignity and freedom together with a penetrating analysis of today's China and the challenges it poses to foreign investors.

Chinese state security officers abducted Michael outside his apartment in Beijing on the night of December 10. They brought him to a secret "black jail" and held him for months of solitary confinement, interrogation and false accusations. Months later they formally arrested him on fabricated charges and confined him for a further two years in a detention centre cell through the COVID pandemic. While Michael was cut off from the outside world, he spent his days reading and talking about China with his guards and his cellmates, most of whom were former Chinese officials. In the process he came to a deep understanding of aspects of China's Communist Party and state that few other foreigners ever experience.

In northeast China, another Canadian, Michael Spavor, an expert on North Korea, was detained as a second hostage. They soon become known in the press as the "Two Michaels".

To free the two Michaels, Kovrig's partner Yanmei Xie, his family, friends and colleagues joined in a relentless global advocacy campaign coordinated by his friend and former wife, Vina Nadjibulla. While US and Canadian prosecutors worked toward extradition, and Meng's legal team fought to block it, diplomats and advocates, including Canadian Ambassador to China Dominic Barton, worked behind the scenes to bring both sides to the negotiating table.

Pressured by the advocacy campaign to resolve the crisis, world leaders including American Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping engaged in a clash of wills across the Pacific.

In telling his story, Michael Kovrig not only asks hard questions but also tries to offer compelling answers to complex international challenges. Why, despite decades of deepening relations and economic integration, did China respond in such an aggressive way to Meng's arrest? What is the true nature of the threat from the Chinese Communist Party? What is China's agenda under Xi Jinping and what does that mean for foreign investors? What controls does the Chinese regime exert over publicly listed companies and public markets?

Ultimately, Michael's story of survival and resilience against oppressive and absurd forces offers a wake-up call on the true nature of the Chinese regime under Xi and an inspiration to stand up for principles in a world where democracy is receding.