

'Two Michaels' come home; extradition case against Huawei CFO dropped by U.S.

Canadians freed after Meng let go

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NEW YORK — Two Canadians detained in China on spying charges have been released from prison and flown out of the country, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Friday, hours after a top executive of Chinese communications giant Huawei Technologies resolved criminal charges against her in a deal with the U.S. Justice Department.

Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor were arrested in China in December 2018, shortly after Canada arrested Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's chief financial officer and the daughter of the company's founder, on a U.S. extradition request.

Many countries labeled China's action "hostage politics."

Trudeau said late Friday that Kovrig and Spavor were headed back to Canada after spending more than 1,000 days in prison. They boarded a plane with Canada's ambassador to China, Dominic Barton.

"These two men have gone through an unbelievably difficult ordeal," Trudeau said. "It is good news for all of us that they are on their way home to their families."

Trudeau called a news conference Friday night, about an hour after Meng's plane left Canada for China.

Kovrig, a Canadian diplomat on leave to work with an international organization, and Spavor, an entrepreneur, had both been convicted of spying by China.

The deal with Meng calls for the U.S. Justice Department to dismiss fraud charges late next year in exchange for Meng accepting responsibility for misrepresenting her company's business dealings in Iran.

The arrangement, known as a deferred prosecution agreement, resolves a years-long legal and geopolitical tussle that involved not only the United States and China but also Canada, where Meng has remained since she was arrested at Vancouver's airport.

As part of the deal, the U.S. Justice Department agreed to dismiss the fraud charges against Meng in December 2022 — exactly four years after her arrest — provided she complies with certain conditions, including not contesting any of the government's factual allegations.

The Justice Department also agreed to drop its request Meng be extradited to the U.S., which she had vigorously challenged, ending a process prosecutors said could have persisted for months.

Meng's attorneys said they fully expect the charges to be dismissed in 14 months. "We're very pleased that in the meantime she can go home to her family," said defence lawyer Michelle Levin.

After appearing via videoconference for her New York hearing, Meng made a brief court appearance in Vancouver, where she has been out on bail and living in her mansion since her arrest. The court released her from all her bail conditions.

Associate Chief Justice Heather Holmes signed the order discharging Meng from the extradition proceeding, vacating her bail conditions and officially closing the Canadian case against her.

“You have been co-operative and courteous throughout the proceedings and the court appreciates and thanks you for that,” Holmes told Meng.

“Thank you, my lady,” Meng answered.

Meng’s lawyers and supporters hugged and applauded as she left the courtroom.

Outside court, Meng thanked the Canadian government for upholding the rule of law, expressed gratitude to the Canadian people and apologized “for the inconvenience I caused.”

“Over the last three years, my life has been turned upside down,” she said. “It was a disruptive time for me as a mother, a wife and as a company executive. But I believe every cloud has a silver lining. It really was an invaluable experience in my life. I will never forget all the good wishes I received.”

Shortly afterward, Meng left on an Air China flight for Shenzhen, China, the location of Huawei headquarters.

Huawei is the biggest global supplier of network gear for phone and internet companies. It has been a symbol of China’s progress in becoming a technological world power _ and a subject of U.S. security and law enforcement concerns. Some analysts say Chinese companies have flouted international rules and norms and stolen technology.

The case against Meng stems from a January 2019 indictment from the Trump administration Justice Department that accused Huawei of stealing trade secrets and using a Hong Kong shell company called Skycom to sell equipment to Iran in violation of U.S. sanctions. The indictment also charged Meng herself with committing fraud by misleading the HSBC bank about the company’s business dealings in Iran. The indictment came amid a broader Trump administration crackdown against Huawei over U.S. government concerns the company’s products could facilitate Chinese spying. The administration cut off Huawei’s access to U.S. components and technology, including Google’s music and other smartphone services, and later barred vendors worldwide from using U.S. technology to produce components for Huawei. The Biden White House, meanwhile, has kept up a hard line on Huawei and other Chinese corporations whose technology is thought to pose national security risks.

Huawei has repeatedly denied the U.S. government’s allegations and security concerns about its products.

Meng had long fought the Justice Department’s extradition request, with her lawyers calling the case against her flawed and alleging she was being used as a “bargaining chip” in political gamesmanship.

They cited a 2018 interview in which then-president Donald Trump said he’d be willing to intervene in the case if it would help secure a trade deal with China or aid U.S. security interests.

Last month, a Canadian judge held off on ruling whether Meng should be extradited to the U.S. after a Canadian Justice Department lawyer wrapped up his case saying there was enough evidence to show she was dishonest and deserved to stand trial in the U.S.

In 2019, two Canadians convicted in separate drug cases in China were sentenced to death. A third, Robert Schellenberg, received a 15-year sentence that was abruptly increased to the death penalty after Meng's arrest.

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