

# Full transcript: Trudeau on Putin being 'problematic,' possible pullout from Saudi deal

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OTTAWA – Prime Minister Justin Trudeau describes Russian President [Vladimir Putin as “problematic,”](#) and said Canada is looking into how it could end its export of light-armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia.

This was revealed as part of a year-end sit down with Evan Solomon, host of CTV’s Question Period.

When asked how he’d describe Putin in one word, that was the word Trudeau chose. And when it came to another controversial world leader—Mohammad Bin Salman—Trudeau said Canada continues to demand answers from him over the death of a journalist, and is “engaged with the export permits to try and see if there is a way of no [longer exporting these vehicles to Saudi Arabia.](#)”

During the wide-ranging interview, Trudeau also spoke about how the so-called “China clause” in the new NAFTA deal is actually [“significantly” changed](#) from what the U.S. first proposed, and states that there will be “unintended consequences” for Canada and other countries as the result of the clash between the two economic mammoths, the United States and China.

The prime minister also offers new perspective on his [own MeToo moment](#), what he thinks when he reads U.S. President Donald Trump’s tweets, and states why no work has been done on his [official residence, 24 Sussex Drive.](#)

Here’s a full transcript of the interview, edited for clarity.

**Host of CTV’s Question Period Evan Solomon: Prime Minister Trudeau, great to see you. Welcome to Question Period.**

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau: Great to be here.

**Let's start with China. Top of the agenda, obviously. Canada detained the CFO of Huawei, the large Chinese telecom company. Now China has detained two Canadian citizens, do you believe that the Chinese government detained those citizens in retaliation for what Canada's done?**

We're taking the situation very seriously. We're engaging with China, talking to the appropriate authorities and providing consular assistance to the families. But all through this and through whatever happens around the world, Canada stays consistent with the rule of law and with applying our judicial system, and we always will.

**They've demanded the release of the Chinese citizen. Have you talked to President Xi [Jinping] or any Chinese officials and demanded the release of the Canadians?**

We have engaged with the Chinese officials to determine what exactly conditions are they being detained under? Why are they being detained? We're asking questions because we take seriously situations like this.

**The Chinese ambassador said in an article in The Globe and Mail that this was premeditated, that our system is not independent, that we have now chilled relationship again, have you formally demanded the release of the Canadians?**

We are asking for understanding of why these Canadians were detained? What charges are they under? What is the information that has led to them being detained, because this is a situation we take very seriously, we apply the rules. And I know we're in a time where there are a lot of countries behaving differently around the world. Canada and Canadians expect me to stand up for the rules, to apply the rules, to apply an independent, judiciary, and respect that, and that's what we do.

**Are you concerned more Canadians are going to be detained by the Chinese?**

We continue to be concerned about the situation Canadians are in all around the world, and our responsibility is to do everything we can to keep them safe today, tomorrow, and the next day, and that's how we behave in a consistent way.

**They're livid, they said there's chilled relations. Is the relationship between China and Canada chilled?**

The relationship with China has always been complex for Canada. We look to create jobs and economic growth in Canada by engaging with the world's second largest economy, and we always stand up consistently for human rights, the rule of law in China and around the world, and we're going to continue to do that.

**Okay, but they're threatening serious consequences. They're saying that our judiciary is not independent, that we're American puppets in all this... They keep acting. When are we going to stand up for our Canadian citizens?**

Stepping back, one of the things that we have to understand is when there is a conflict like this, like there is between the United States and China, where we're talking about an escalating trade war, we're talking about significant clashes between the world's two largest economies. There are going to be unintended consequences all around the world, including in Canada.

What we need to do is make sure that we continue to stay standing up for Canadians, stay strong in our values, project those values around the world. And yes, stand up for Canadians as we are doing right now.

**There are real concerns that Huawei, the telecom company at the heart of this is an agent of the Chinese state or can be used as such. Our Five Eyes partners, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, even Japan have said that Huawei should not be part of the backbone of our next generation of wireless, what they call the 5G. They've blocked them because they're concerned. Your former national security advisor, Dick Fadden was on this program saying you should do the same thing. He is the former head of CSIS as well. Will you block Huawei?**

I listened to the current head of CSIS and our current agencies, agency heads and our extraordinary national security apparatus. They make recommendations about how we move forward. Yes, obviously, the world has seen and we share concerns around various aspects of vulnerability or potential vulnerability in our in our internet and communication systems.

And that's why we take appropriate measures, but we will make those decisions based on the recommendations of our security agencies, not based on politics.

**Okay, but do you consider Huawei, and you've seen how the Chinese are acting on this, do you consider that they are a threat to our national security, and therefore you're concerned if they became part of our 5G network?**

The determination of the threat they represent is something that we entrust with our professionals in our intelligence and security agencies. And that is very much who we work with, and we listen to, to determine how best to protect Canadians, both in their physical security and their cyber security.

**Two last things on China, you've been pushing for a free-trade deal with China, we're looking at Canadians getting plucked off the streets, we don't know where they are, they're not necessarily respecting the rule of law. How do you promote free-trade with a country like China when they're threatening Canada, and they don't respect the rule of law.**

I think we understand that the world's second largest economy and growing is somewhere that Canadians have to be engaged with. And this has been a challenge with China and with many countries around the world for a long time that we have to engage economically for the sake of jobs and economic growth.

But we need to do so in a way that is true to our values and stands up for Canadians' interests, and getting that balance right is complex; has been made more difficult by recent trends in the world but is something that we will consistently do in a thoughtful, responsible way.

**You keep saying we've got to reply the rule of law, especially to this case, but Donald Trump, the president of the United States openly said we might intervene in the case of Meng Wanzhou, the CFO of Huawei, if I can get a better deal with China. He instantly politicized the situation. Did he undermine Canada and your position?**

Well listen, I can't speak for what happens in other countries. But in Canada, we take very seriously the rule of law, we will apply and protect the independence of our judiciary, because that's what

Canadians expect and that's what the world expects from us.

**But did he undermine that position by politicizing it? It looked like he did.**

Again, when you have conflicts like this between the United States and China, there are real unintended consequences for the entire world that we're very much worried about.

Signing a new trade deal with the U.S.



**You talk about the potential of being caught in the middle of that trade war between China and the U.S. When we signed what, let's call it the new NAFTA deal, one of the controversial sections was that the United States gets essentially a veto over whether Canada does a free-trade deal with China. Many believe that was an infringement on our sovereignty, why did you sign that?**

That was actually the first ask, that was the opening position that the Americans wanted, and we actually changed that clause significantly. So what it means is when one of the NAFTA partners signs a free-trade deal with China, or if we do, we have to keep the others apprised of what's in it. That's all it says.

**If it's so benign why did they want it so badly? Because they did want it.**

Political reasons.

**What does that mean?**

They're engaged in very difficult negotiations with China around a potential and escalating trade war.

**Doesn't it tie your hands if you want to now go make a deal with China? The United States has got their thumb on you and say, 'you are in our sphere of influence, you better show us everything that you're doing.'**

Similarly, if the U.S. decides to negotiate a trade deal with China, they need to apprise us on it. I think that's fair and certainly the relationship between the United States and Canada and Mexico is close enough that we should be apprising our nearest and best neighbors of how we're moving forward in a thoughtful way.

**To be fair, they're the ones that keep threatening to pull our free-trade agreement, we don't.**

No, wait a second. NAFTA is a deal that any member, any party can walk away from on six months' notice for any given reason. Because they don't like the wording of our new anthem, them or they don't like whatever it is. They don't have to give a reason why they would walk away, as we saw the president threaten a few times.

So this is not any new element within a deal. You asked why we signed it; we signed it, because it secures good jobs and stability in the Canadian economy with our largest trading partner. This was a big thing to sign a free-trade deal with the U.S. at a time of protectionism in the U.S. and we are ensuring certainty for Canada.

**It was a new element in the deal, but let's go to another element of the deal. Andrew Scheer keeps accusing you of capitulating by signing that deal, saying you shouldn't have signed that deal without getting rid of the steel and aluminum tariffs. Why did you sign a deal when those tariffs, not only are they still here, but Donald Trump is tweeting out I'm 'tariff man.' It doesn't look like they're going anywhere.**

A couple of things. First of all it's a bit rich for the Conservatives to be talking about that because Stephen Harper a few months ago said we should sign a deal, any deal, trade with the U.S. is too important. We disagree and that's why we held out and we negotiated very stringently to protect Chapter 19 for example, to protect our cultural exemption and ensure that it applies to digital platforms.

We made sure that we were protecting supply management for example. Yes we had to make concessions for our dairy farmers, on our dairy farms, but we protected supply management. We got a good deal.

**But the tariffs are still there. You've got to tell Canadians when you're going to get rid of them because that's a Sword of Damocles over this.**

Yes, the tariffs are hurting Canadians, they're also hurting Americans. Mr. Trump's tariffs and the counter tariffs we brought in are doing what tariffs do which is driving up prices for consumers on both

sides of the border and causing difficulty for businesses. And that's why we're working with businesses in the United States, members of Congress, governors who are very much working with us to convince the government of the United States to remove those tariffs.

**I guess the criticism is that you gave up your leverage. Once you sign, your leverage is done.**

On the contrary, the United States is now going to be going through their ratification process over the coming months with a house that is controlled by the Democrats. There are a lot of people in that house who are very worried about the impact that President Trump's tariffs have on their communities, on their industries and they are very much aligned with us on wanting to remove those tariffs.

**Although he keeps tweeting he is the 'tariff man,' so he doesn't seem to be backing off. Donald Trump has undermined the NATO agreement. He's criticized the NATO alliance, the Paris accord, the climate accord, a lot of international alliances and treaties that you openly support. Is Donald Trump a destabilizing force in the world?**

I think what Canadians expect me to do is have a constructive relationship with whomever is president of the United States and I've demonstrated that I'm very capable of standing up for Canadians' values, Canadians interests, while engaging in a way that seeks common ground with our nearest neighbour and closest trading partner.

**How do you? I mean he's insulted you on Twitter, you know, and I know you don't take that stuff, personally, but he has done it. How do you read his tweets? We're all reading his tweets every day. Do you take those seriously and literally?**

I think they are part of the communications coming from the White House, from the president, and they need to be, they need to be noted. I think we all make our determinations on how we take them. My job is to make sure that no matter how I feel, or how I personally might react, that everything I do is standing up for Canadians and promoting Canadians' interests and values, and that's what I do.

**One last thing, have you picked up the phone and called President Trump and said, 'Hey, don't do that again' about this China thing? ... Have you called him?**

No, we engage regularly on a broad range of issues and we haven't spoken on this one yet.

Pipelines and Alberta's oil crisis





**Pipelines, got to talk about pipelines. The Trans Mountain pipeline, your government bought it for over \$4 billion. Bill Morneau was on this program, your finance minister. He said the shovels will be in the ground for construction season. That's past, when will the shovels go in the ground?**

The Federal Court of Appeals came forward and said that we need to do a better job of consulting with Indigenous peoples and getting the science, particularly in regards to the environment, right on that. So we're going back to the process to try and make sure that we can get it right, because one of the most important things, even more important than just any one pipeline, is a process whereby we can get big projects approved and built.

Yes Canada is moving forward on the knowledge economy, on innovation, but we're also always going to be a country that relies on natural resources and getting these projects built the right way matters, and that's what we're doing.

**But they're not getting built, in any way. Are they going to be built in the next construction season?**

We're working through the blueprint that the Federal Court of Appeals put forward to try and make sure that it gets done the right way and that's the approach that we can take. Now, there are folks out there who says we should we should simply legislate this, or we should override the courts.

The fact is the approach of trying to marginalize Indigenous voices and ignore the environmental concerns, was what Stephen Harper tried for 10 years and he couldn't get things built.



**The concern is that your bills, like Bill C-69, these pipeline assessment bills, because they're so onerous that they're going to ensure nothing ever gets built, that they'll be suffocated under a series of virtuous assessments that leads to nothing.**

I've heard that concern from many people. We've actually sat down and talked with those people about what's in C-69. First of all, you have to understand C-69 is an improvement over the existing environmental assessment that Stephen Harper put in place in 2012, which failed to be able to get license to build projects.

So what we've done is we've done one project, one assessment. We're getting rid of some of the doubling that happened at the provincial and federal level, we're making it clearer, we're making tighter timelines that we'll be stuck to.

We're doing the kinds of things that investors and business have asked for to get clarity. So, things can get done so they can know whether or not to move forward with the project, that's what we're doing.

**Meantime, your former ally Premier Notley in Alberta is very angry, they call it crisis. It is a crisis.**

It is a crisis.

**One other way to go is to say—and this would hit a couple things—stop importing 80,000 barrels of oil a day from Saudi Arabia for Canadians in the east, and reignite the Energy East pipeline. That would help Alberta, that would help the refineries in the east and you could actually get off a dependence on Saudi Arabian oil, why not do that?**

First of all, the situation that Albertans are going through now is of extreme concern. They're being hit with a differential that is a discount on Canadian oil that is really, really hurting them, and that's why we've been working with the Alberta government, with Alberta industry to try and support people and we're going to continue to be there, we're looking at a broad range of solutions.

**The pipeline is a solution. They don't want EI, they want a job and a pipeline.**

Yes, but in order for a pipeline to come online this week, it would have had to be started effectively under the previous Conservative government and we know that didn't happen because they didn't have the right approach on pipelines.

Albertans need help now, next week, next month, and we know that pipelines and even rail cars are a medium-term solution. We are working very hard on making sure that the [Enbridge] Line 3 gets in place by next fall, which is what we're aiming for because we've approved that.

We're working forward, we saved the Trans Mountain expansion by buying the Trans Mountain expansion pipeline. Now we have to move forward in the right way on it.

**OK, so just real quick answers then, are you open to revitalizing an Energy East pipeline?**

There is no project on the table. The proponent has walked away.

**But if the government came forward to de-risk it as you did with Trans Mountain, maybe you'd get a proponent?**

You can't de-risk in an absence of a project and there is clarity that under the current approach, there is no support for pipeline through Quebec.

**Indigenous people just want to know, and very importantly, do you the prime minister believe Indigenous people need to give consent, which is a veto for a pipeline, or just consultation, is it consent?**

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples talks about free, prior, and informed consent, and the consent process is about engaging substantively and listening to the concerns. Now you're never going to get unanimity on any project. I'm prime minister not because I was unanimously elected by all Canadians, but because we have a system that came forward with a consensus, you know, through our processes that I would serve as prime minister for this mandate.

**So consent's not a veto?**

No.

The future "price of pollution"



**OK, your most controversial policy is carbon, and maybe it's your signature policy. Three years ago, the entire country was red, you know, or orange, except for Brad Wall... You got a lot of buy in on this. Now there's what they call 'the resistance.' Frankly there's been a Liberal wipeout across the provinces, a lot of them have flipped blue, or NDP in British Columbia. Are you listening to the provinces? A lot of them don't want your price on carbon, will you change it or will you impose this backstop on them?**

I'm listening to Canadians. Canadians see the number of wildfires, of droughts, of floods that we're getting every summer. The real concerns about the transformations going on our planet with climate change, and concerns about the future of our kids and our grandkids, and at the same time worries about where their jobs are going to be coming from? Where our kids' jobs are going to come from? Canadians are worried about that. They know we need to act.

One of the problems, and the fundamental problem and economists say this, and climate scientists say this, and experts say this: is that pollution is free and so we have too much of it. So we are putting a price on pollution, so that people pollute less, while at the same time helping families through this transition.

**There are two problems with that. The first question is, despite the targets that your government has set—which are the same as Stephen Harper—even the Environment Commissioner says you are not going to hit the Paris targets. You're still falling short, raising the question, are you going to even put a steeper price on carbon if you were re-elected in order to hit those targets?**

The price on carbon we have put forward actually increases every year, and we are confident we are going to hit our Paris targets.

**How are you confident? Nobody else thinks you're going to make the targets.**

Actually, that's not true. There's a lot of people who know that we're going to meet those targets with the current plan as well.

**With the current plan you think you're going to meet the target?**

We know that the combination of putting a price on pollution, of investing record numbers in clean energy, in renewables, we're making massive investments in supporting communities' and families' move towards a lower carbon economy, creating good jobs, looking at lower emission vehicles. There is a package of things, not just a price on pollution, but a whole range of things we can do, not just to fight climate change, but to create a cleaner economy in a way that is affordable for Canadians.

**When you say a price on pollution, you don't use the word carbon tax anymore. Maybe it's a political reason?**

Well that's what it is. Carbon emissions are a pollution, and we're putting a price.

It's also a carbon tax.

You can you can call it what you like. But the idea is that we are no longer making pollution free.

**But there in is the second question. Consumers say well, the price of gas for me is going up, but under Justin Trudeau's plan big emitters get an 80 per cent exemption. So it's almost free for the big emitters, certainly not free for the consumer.**

That's actually not true. We are putting stringent limits on the large emitters because everyone needs to do their part, but you know, you're right. The Conservatives are trying to pick away different pieces of our plan, and misrepresenting it in all sorts of ways and that's fine. That's the nature of politics.

But the question we have, the question you had for Andrew Scheer when he was on, was: 'What is his plan?' In 2019, if someone wants to be prime minister of this country, one of the fundamental responsibilities is to build a cleaner economy for the future and he has demonstrated a complete unwillingness, not even to not present a plan, but to actually admit that there is a problem.

**OK but the last question on your plan is these rebates. People are going to get money back. How does that change behaviour? If I do the same thing and then I'm getting more money back, what is my incentive to change my behaviour? For a lot of people it seems illogical.**

Indeed, but it's not. It actually works if you put a price on pollution. If someone chooses to change their behaviours, they still get the money back and they save money by changing their behaviours. And we get to move forward in a concrete way in a plan that the Nobel Prize winning economists have pointed out will reduce our carbon emissions and fight climate change, effectively.

Balancing the federal budget



**Let's move quickly through a couple of key election issues. Deficits, you broke your deficit promise in the last election. You said we'd have a balance by now; we're \$19 billion [in deficit]. Does Justin Trudeau believe that balancing the books is not important? Clearly on you have no plan to balance.**

We take very seriously the idea of fiscal responsibility, and we know that there's people concerned about fiscal responsibility and our approach. We have a very different approach than the Conservatives did. We believe that putting money in infrastructure, putting money in the pockets of middle-class Canadians actually help grow the economy and it has. We've got the lowest unemployment in 40 years, we've created 800,000 new jobs, we are showing a growing economy.

After 10 years of anemic growth. Now, I get that there are concerns about whether we are fiscally responsible and politicians will say all sorts of things on either side. So let's look at the objective experts, the top bond holders in the world, the ratings agencies that actually lend money to countries like Canada, so that we can invest, have rated our fiscal plan "AAA" they have total confidence in our capacity to move forward responsibly, because every single year we are reducing our debt as a share of our whole economy in a way that is better than just about any other country in the world.

**I was under the impression that on sunny days you fix your roof, and what's happening is you're deficit spending to create growth. Those are all true numbers but foreign direct investment is down productivity is down.**

No, no, sorry. You can't just take a piece of it Evan.

**But that's an incredibly important part of our economy.**

Foreign direct investment is up across the economy, a little down in the oil patch, and that is significant, and we are working on that. But let's not misrepresent how well our economy is doing.

**The concern is what happens when we hit a recession. If you're running \$19-billion deficits now, your fiscal capacity to deal with a rainy day is got to be worse.**

Actually, that's not true. And for two reasons. First of all, the ratings agencies have given us that "AAA" because they are confident in our ability to withstand shocks in the future if they come. Secondly, when Canadians have better jobs when they have more education, when we have when we have solid infrastructure or more housing, Canadians do better. Even if there are difficult times in the economy. That's the choice we made to invest in our communities, to invest in our future. And that's what's giving Canadians confidence.

**The election's coming up. Will you call an early election or will you rule that out?**

No, we will have an election on the fixed election date of Oct. 21, I believe it is.

**What is the biggest... what will the ballot box question be in this election?**

It'll be who has the right plan to ensure a better future for Canadians.

**Biggest challenge in the year ahead?**

Continuing to connect with Canadians and demonstrate that a thoughtful reasonable approach to solving our problems is better than the politics of fear, division, of stirring up populist anger and not really providing answers that are longer than fit on a bumper sticker.

**Part of the election will be about trust the last election. The last election you promised election reform, you broke the promise. You promised balanced budgets, you broke the promise. Why should people trust you?**

We committed to growing the economy a way supports for Canadians. We have done that. After 10 years of the lowest growth rate since the Great Depression under Stephen Harper we've created strong growth in Canada. We've helped millions of Canadians with things like the Canada Child Benefit. We've invested in infrastructure, we've moved forward on reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in real ways. We are delivering on the very ambitious promises we made to Canadians.

**Let's look at one of the promises, which is "Canada is back," you used to say that a lot. But just look at Saudi Arabia, with the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, many attribute Mohammad Bin Salman, MBS, the crown prince, was responsible for that. We haven't canceled the \$1 billion light armored vehicle contract to them. We're still importing 80,000 barrels of oil a day and we didn't put him on the sanctions list. Is that what it means to be "Canada is back"?**

The murder of a journalist is absolutely unacceptable and that's why Canada from the very beginning had been demanding answers and solutions on that. Secondly, we inherited actually a \$15-billion



contract signed by Stephen Harper to export light-armored vehicles to Saudi Arabia. We are engaged with the export permits to try and see if there is a way of no longer exporting these vehicles to Saudi Arabia.

Rapid fire questions



**All right, here's some rapid fire questions. Hardest moment in the last year?**

Leaving my family for long trips at any given moment.

**World leader you best get along with?**

Probably Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand. She's an excellent, excellent person and a strong progressive.

**One word to describe Donald Trump?**

Unpredictable.

**One word to describe Vladimir Putin?**

Problematic.

**Sussex Drive. Renovate it or tear it down and rebuild it?**

The problem with that is it's not a decision the prime minister should be making. It's a decision that Canadians need to reflect on.



## **Biggest regret?**

This year, the India trip. There were good things that came out of it, but.

## **What about it do you regret?**

I think there were lots of things we'd do differently. I think the good things that came out of it were overshadowed by headlines.

## **The MeToo moment, that has been a defining feature of the last generation or the last number of years. Being a feminist has been a core value to you and your government. Do you think when there was an allegation against you from a long time ago, but it came up again, do you think you held yourself to the same standard that you have held others to?**

Yes, I do. And I think it was really important to share in a thoughtful way my reflections on this in a way that left space for the woman to be supported and believed in how she came forward, and for us to understand the lessons that need to be learned about how our behaviors can be interpreted and experienced in very different ways.

## **Immigration is going to be a big issue, and the border. What will you do to stop the asylum seekers from coming over the border in Canada. Many attribute your tweet to that. What will you do to stop that?**

I think we have been engaging substantively with communities in the United States likely to think that there is a shortcut into Canada. We're demonstrating and letting them understand that no, anyone who crosses the border legally or illegally, irregularly or regularly, gets a full security screening, goes through the entirety of our security process and if they are not genuinely fleeing for their lives, they will be sent back to their country of origin.

## **Prime Minister, the last question I've got is about the most important thing to Canadians: health care. There's two fundamental issues. First is pharmacare.... Will you put on the table a national pharmacare program?**

Well, we understand how important health care is. That's why we move forward on historic investments in mental health and in home care for our seniors as a commitment last time. This time we have asked a panel of experts, led by Dr. Eric Hoskins to look at pharmacare in Canada and make recommendations for us early in the new year on what way we can move forward to go at this problem, that yes Canadians are extremely worried about, and we will act.

## **Campaign will be nasty or good? Friendly or nasty, or what is it? Is it going to be like the U.S.?**

From my perspective, it's going to be a very positive campaign. The others will make their decisions about how they run their campaigns.

**Prime Minister, thank you for taking the time. We really appreciate it and we know you're at home here in the science lab.**

It's great to be here. Great to be back in the classroom.

**Thanks a lot.**

Thank you Evan.