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Trudeau Invokes Special Powers to Quell Protests

BY PAUL VIEIRA AND KIM MACKRAEL

OTTAWA—In a highly unusual move, the Canadian government on Monday invoked a series of emergency powers that include limits on public gatherings in a bid to end disruptive demonstrations in the capital city and along the Canada- U.S. border.

The measures, announced by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, represent one of the most striking responses by a Western government against protests by those opposing Covid-19 vaccine mandates and social restrictions in response to the pandemic, and immediately drew fire from some Canadian leaders and civil-liberties groups.

The government also said Monday that the country was extending laws targeting money laundering to capture transactions, including cryptocurrencies, on crowdfunding platforms like GoFundMe.

“It is now clear that there are serious challenges to lawenforcement’s ability to effectively enforce the law,” Mr. Trudeau said at a news conference. “We cannot and will not allow illegal and dangerous activities to continue.”

Mr. Trudeau’s move to invoke emergency powers comes after police on Sunday reopened access to the Ambassador Bridge, which connects Detroit with the city of Windsor, Ontario. Up until late Sunday

night, demonstrators had blocked incoming U.S. vehicles from entering Canada for roughly a week.

Officials said these extraordinary measures were necessary because of the damage done to the economy with the blocking of U.S.-Canada trade. Further, “we’ve seen intimidation, harassment and expressions of hate,” said Canada’s Public Safety Minister, Marco Mendicino, adding that scenes in Ottawa have at times represented lawlessness. “That is one of the reasons why we’ve had to take [this] very careful and deliberate step.”

The prime minister’s decision to invoke the special powers faced sharp criticism Monday from both rights groups and some provincial leaders.

Quebec Premier François Legault said he can understand the sentiment that “enough is enough” in



Traffic flowed Monday over the reopened Ambassador Bridge linking Detroit with Windsor, Ontario. NICOLE OSBORNE/ ASSOCIATED PRESS

is enough for the government to take these extraordinary powers into its own hands.”

Prof. West said Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects civil liberties, but protection isn’t absolute. She said that means rights can be limited and still comply with the Charter.

The measures come into effect immediately but Mr. Trudeau must present his reasoning for using the act to Parliament and hold a vote within seven days. The leader of the New Democratic Party, Jagmeet Singh, said he would support the move, thereby giving the incumbent Liberals enough votes to ensure passage.

Mr. Trudeau said the military wasn’t being deployed against the protesters, and the government wasn’t suspending rights guaranteed under the country’s constitution. He added the measures, which local police forces would enforce, are meant to target specific regions in the country where protests are judged to pose a threat. Mr. Trudeau described the demonstration in Ottawa, which was in its 18th day Monday, as “an illegal occupation.”

City of Ottawa officials say the local police force doesn’t have the necessary resources to quell the demonstration, and have asked the federal

Ottawa but believes the planned measures aren't needed in his province and could be damaging.

"We really need not to put oil on the fire," Mr. Legault said.

An earlier and much more restrictive version of the legislation, called the War Measures Act, was invoked three times in Canadian history. Its most controversial use was in 1970, when Mr. Trudeau's father, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, used the act when he was prime minister to squelch a militant separatist group in Quebec known as the FLQ.

The government said its invocation of the act doesn't undermine Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which came into force in 1982 and protects rights considered essential to preserving a free and democratic society. However, there is a debate about whether the government is overstepping in applying the act to those participating in protests and blockades.

Leah West, a national-security expert at Carleton University in Ottawa, said it is unclear that the current protests—in the capital, Ottawa, and at two border crossings in western Canada—meet the legal threshold of a national emergency. Invoking the Emergencies Act if that threshold isn't met, she said, "sets a precedent that unpopular dissent against the government

government for an additional 1,800 officers. Despite the government's hard line, protesters believe their message is resonating.

"Any government that's ever taken freedoms away from people never gives them back," said Tyler Chiliak, a farmer from western Canada who has been in Ottawa since the Covid-19 protests began.

"It may take a while before we accomplish our goals so to speak. But whether they like it or not things are happening because we are here," he said.

Canadian Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said the country was extending laws targeting money laundering. All crowdfunding platforms and the payment-service provider they use must register with Canada's financial-intelligence agency, and report what they deem as large, suspicious donations. The recent protests had success in raising money on GoFundMe.

"This will help mitigate the risk that these platforms receive illicit funds," Ms. Freeland said. "We know these platforms are being used to support illegal blockades and illegal activity which is damaging the Canadian economy."

—*Vipal Monga and Jacquie McNish contributed to this article.*

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