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Canada expelling diplomat accused of targeting MP Michael Chong's family

Foreign affairs minister tweets statement declaring Zhao Wei 'persona non grata'

[Darren Major](#) · CBC News · Posted: May 08, 2023 3:36 PM EDT | Last Updated: May 9, 2023



Canada expels Chinese diplomat

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Canada has declared Chinese diplomat Zhao Wei 'persona non grata' after days of pressure from opposition parties. The diplomat has five days to leave Canada after being accused of targeting Conservative MP Michael Chong's family living in Hong Kong.

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The federal government is expelling a diplomat accused of targeting Conservative MP Michael Chong's family.

The government has been under intense pressure to sanction Zhao Wei, who reportedly played a role in attempts to gather information on Chong's family in Hong Kong in 2021 following the MP's condemnation of Beijing's conduct in the Xinjiang region as genocide.

"We will not tolerate any form of foreign interference in our internal affairs," Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly said in a statement posted on Twitter.

"Diplomats in Canada have been warned that if they engage in this type of behaviour, they will be sent home."



A government source told CBC that Zhao has five days to leave Canada.

The Globe and Mail, citing a top secret document from 2021, reported last week that the Chinese government was targeting a Canadian MP. An unnamed security source reportedly told The Globe that Zhao was allegedly working on efforts to target Chong's family in China.

The government briefed Chong last week — but Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his cabinet have maintained that the report in question was never shared at the ministerial level in 2021.

Trudeau's national security adviser Jody Thomas said the information was shared with the Privy Council Office (PCO). Trudeau said last week that he'll compel CSIS to share intelligence with the government about threats to MPs in light of the Chong case.

Chong said the government should have taken similar action "years ago."

"The fact is, we've become somewhat of a playground for foreign interference threat activities," he told reporters outside the House of Commons on Monday.

WATCH | MP Michael Chong reacts to expulsion of diplomat



Expelling Chinese diplomat 'shouldn't have taken this long': Conservative MP

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Conservative MP Michael Chong says the government should have expelled Zhao Wei as soon as it knew he was involved in Beijing's reported effort to target his family.

Chong pointed out that community representatives have been warning for years about Beijing targeting diaspora communities in Canada.

"My hope is that this sends a clear message to authoritarian states that these kinds of activities are completely incompatible with being a diplomat in this country," he said.

Chong said he hasn't been in touch with his family in Hong Kong "out of an abundance of caution."

NDP foreign affairs critic Heather McPherson said it was "appalling" that the government took so long to make a decision on Zhao.

- Minister blames 'hostile actors' for Chong controversy but won't say who in government failed to warn MP
- Chong says CSIS report on China targeting MPs was sent to PM's adviser

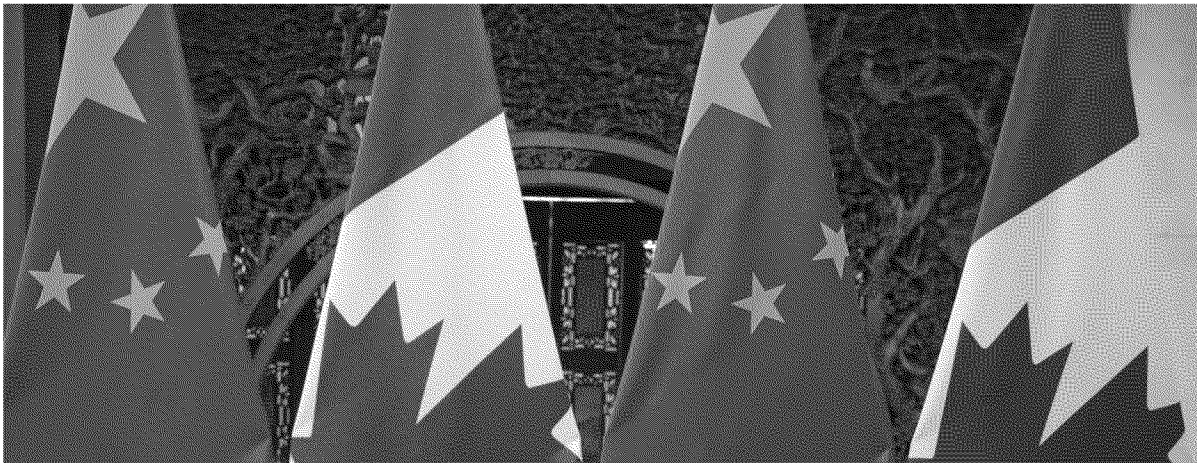
"This is unacceptable," McPherson told reporters Monday. "Taking care of Canadians' safety, making sure that every member in this House can do the job that they need to do, is vital."

During a House committee appearance last week, Joly said the government was weighing the blowback from Beijing that would result from expelling Zhao.

"This decision has been taken after careful consideration of all the factors at play," Joly said in her statement on Monday.

Speaking to CBC News Network's Power & Politics, Liberal MP Rob Oliphant said the government took the time to act "appropriately and carefully."

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Guy Saint-Jacques, Canada's former ambassador to China, expects some form of response from Beijing, but not anything egregious. 'I don't think they will take anyone hostage,' he added, in a reference to the detentions of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor.

"We know there will be ramifications, and so it's the minister's responsibility to act and to act carefully," Oliphant told host David Cochrane.

National security expert Wesley Wark said it can take time to build up enough of a case to expel a diplomat. But given that the government appeared to have information on Zhao dating back to 2021, he said, the decision should have been made sooner.

"It's all unfolded in an unfortunate and, I think, peculiar manner," Wark told CBC.

Beijing promises retaliation

The Chinese embassy in Canada said in a media statement that it strongly condemns the decision to expel the diplomat and denies interfering in Canada's affairs. It promised retaliatory action if the government goes any further.

"If the Canadian side acts recklessly, China will firmly fight back resolutely and forcefully," the statement said.

Wark said he suspects that if Beijing retaliates, it will opt for a "tit-for-tat" response and expel one of Canada's diplomats.

The Conservatives put forward a motion in the House that called for, among other things, the expulsion of diplomats involved in foreign interference. The motion — which also calls for a public inquiry into foreign interference and the establishment of a foreign agents registry — passed Thursday with the support of NDP, Bloc Québécois and Green MPs.

The government has launched a public consultation on a registry and the has left the decision on whether to call a public inquiry up to former governor general David Johnston. The government appointed Johnston as special rapporteur on foreign interference earlier this year.

With files from Raffy Boudjikianian and Tom Parry

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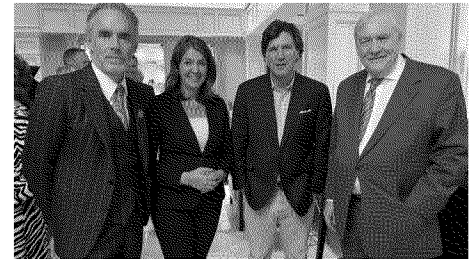
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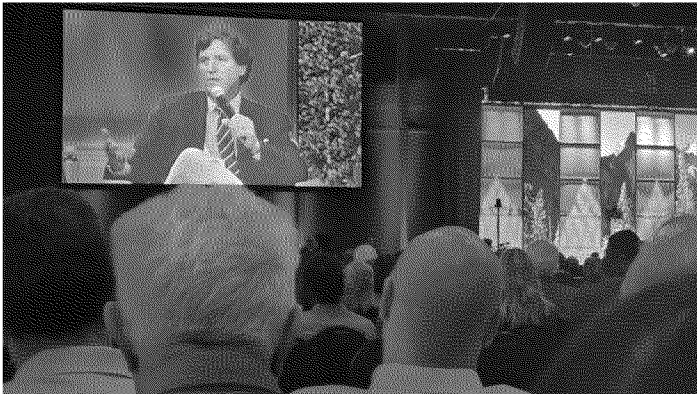
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