

Politics

Chong says CSIS report on China targeting MPs was sent to PM's adviser

Conservative MP says he was told CSIS report was shared with other departments

[Catharine Tunney](#) · CBC News · Posted: May 04, 2023 11:51 AM EDT | Last Updated: May 5, 2023



Conservative MP Michael Chong rises during question period on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Wednesday, May 3, 2023. (Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press)

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New questions about how the federal government handled a reported Chinese government plot to target MPs are being raised after Conservative MP Michael Chong said Thursday that a 2021 intelligence report on the matter was shared with the prime minister's national security and intelligence adviser.

The news contradicts comments Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made Wednesday.

Earlier this week the Globe and Mail published an article, citing a 2021 top-secret CSIS document, saying that China's intelligence agency was seeking information about an unnamed Canadian MP's relatives "who may be located in the PRC, for further potential sanctions."

A national security source reportedly told the Globe that the MP targeted was Chong and that Zhao Wei, a Chinese diplomat in Canada, was working on this matter.

WATCH | MP Michael Chong confronts foreign affairs minister over Chinese diplomat:



MP Michael Chong confronts foreign affairs minister over Chinese diplomat

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After Conservative MP Michael Chong asks her whether the federal government will expel a Chinese diplomat accused of playing a role in trying to target Chong's family, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly

says the federal government is 'accessing different options, including the expulsion of diplomats, because it is important that we take a decision.'

Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly seemed to confirm the reporting Thursday when she told Chong during a committee that "what has happened is completely unacceptable."

The prime minister said Wednesday that the information about Chong was never shared outside of CSIS.

"We asked what happened to that information, was it ever briefed up out of CSIS? It was not. CSIS made the determination that it wasn't something that needed be raised to a higher level because it wasn't a significant enough concern," Trudeau said.

But Chong shared new information during question period on Thursday suggesting that is not true.

The MP said the current national security and intelligence adviser to the prime minister, Jody Thomas, told him Thursday that CSIS shared its 2021 assessment with relevant departments and with her predecessor. Thomas took over the position last year.

"This report contained information that and I and other MPs were being targeted by the [People's Republic of China,]" he said.

"This contradicts what the prime minister said yesterday."



Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly prepares to appear before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to answer questions on foreign election interference, on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, on Thursday, March 9, 2023. (Justin Tang/The Canadian Press)

Chong also called out Liberal MPs for suggesting he had been fully briefed on the matter for years.

While Chong has said CSIS briefed him, he described the conversations as general in nature and said they didn't tell him that Zhao was collecting information about his family.

CSIS has not yet responded to CBC's requests for comment

Ottawa assessing blowback from expelling Chinese diplomat

Joly says her government has summoned China's ambassador and is reviewing the likely consequences of expelling the Chinese diplomat accused of helping to target Chong's family.

"We're assessing different options, including the expulsion of diplomats, because it is important that we take a decision," Joly told the foreign affairs committee Thursday.

But her comments did little to appease Chong, who accused the government of sending the wrong signal to foreign adversaries by not acting more swiftly and decisively on foreign interference.

"We are basically putting up a giant billboard for all authoritarian states around the world that says we are open for foreign interference threat activities on Canadian soil targeting Canadian citizens, and you can conduct these activities with zero consequences," he said.

"That's why this individual needs to be sent packing."

WATCH | Ottawa to weigh consequences of expelling diplomat:



MP calls for Chinese diplomat to be expelled

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Conservative MP Michael Chong is demanding answers and calling for action after a report that he and his family were targeted by China and that a diplomat based in Toronto was part of it.

Joly said the government summoned China's ambassador Thursday morning and is weighing the potential economic, consular and diplomatic consequences of taking punitive steps.

"This is about you, but it's also about the interest of the country," Joly told Chong.

"What we're doing right now as a government is assessing the consequences that we'll be facing in case of diplomatic expulsion, because there will be consequences. I think it's important that Canadians know what we've learned from the two Michaels experience is that, of course, China and the PRC will take action."

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Chong fired back, saying the federal government's first concern should be for the security of its citizens.

"This individual, Mr. Zhao Wei, should be on the first plane out or declared persona non grata," he said.

"Why is this diplomat still here? A diplomat who has more rights and immunities than the Canadians around this table to go around and conduct his foreign interference threat activities. He has diplomatic immunity. He cannot be criminally prosecuted."

Joly said the government's decision "will have the best interest of Canadians and our democracy in mind" and told reporters a decision will be made "very soon."

Margaret McCuaig-Johnston, a senior fellow at the graduate school of public and international affairs at the University of Ottawa, said Zhao should have been kicked out of the country by now.

"He should have gone two years ago," she told CBC News Network.

"Assuming that key people in the government hadn't known two years ago and therefore didn't make the decision, he should have been on a plane on Monday night. The fact that we're sitting here Thursday afternoon and that we're still talking about it is really concerning."

McCuaig-Johnston said that if Canada does make a move, Chinese retaliation can be expected. But she said she doesn't think that payback would be as serious as the arbitrary detentions of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor.

"If there is anything beyond sending a Canadian diplomat home, it might be trade sanctions or something like that," she said.

"Frankly the government of China doesn't get to veto Canadian policy. So we must make our decision and whatever the consequences, we'll withstand that. This has just gone too far."

Chinese officials have threatened, intimidated Canadians: CSIS

Canada's intelligence agency says it knows Beijing officials have travelled to Canada to threaten and intimidate Chinese Canadians and permanent residents into returning to China. That's raising questions about the ability of police to investigate foreign interference.

CSIS tabled its latest annual report in the House of Commons Thursday. In it, CSIS confirms it has known for some time about sub-national affiliates of the

People's Republic of China's police service, the Ministry of Public Security, operating in this country without the government of Canada's permission.

"CSIS has observed instances where representatives from various investigatory bodies in the PRC have come to Canada, often without notifying local law enforcement agencies, and used threats and intimidation in attempting to force 'fugitive' Chinese Canadians and permanent residents to return to the PRC," said the 2022 annual report.



Director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), David Vigneault, arrives at a Special Committee on Canada-People's Republic of China Relationship (CACN) on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, on Feb. 6, 2023. (Spencer Colby/The Canadian Press)

The House of Commons has been seized with the government's response to so-called Chinese government "police stations" operating on Canadian soil.

Conservative MP Michael Cooper faced off with Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino last week during a committee meeting on the issue. He accused the government of taking "no meaningful action."

While the minister repeatedly said the clandestine stations in Canada have been shut down, two Montreal-area community groups under investigation for allegedly hosting secret Chinese government police stations say they continue to operate normally.

The RCMP said Thursday it continues to investigate the "police stations."

"Based on current information, there is no 'police station' related activity being conducted at the previously reported 'police station' locations in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia," said spokesperson Robin Percival.

"It is important to note that some of the activity the RCMP is investigating was occurring at locations where other legitimate services to the Chinese Canadian Community were, or are being, offered."

Mendicino stressed to reporters that police decide to lay charges independent of government.

"There are many provisions under the Criminal Code which may apply, depending on the facts on the ground," he said.

Last month, U.S. authorities announced they had shut down what they referred to as a Chinese police station in lower Manhattan and had charged two American citizens using a legal tool that Canada doesn't have yet: a foreign agent registry.

In other countries, such registries compel people who act on behalf of foreign states to advance their goals to disclose their ties to the governments employing them.

The recent criminal charges laid in the U.S. were against two American citizens who allegedly failed to register their work on behalf of the People's Republic of China.

Mendicino has said the government hopes to bring in legislation to create a foreign agent registry soon after a consultation period ends on May 9.

WATCH | MP Michael Chong says 'the government did nothing' after alleged threats from China:



MP Michael Chong says 'the government did nothing' after alleged threats from China

▶ 9 months ago 4:27

The Conservative MP demanded more details from government on alleged threats from China against his family. 'Who knew what — and when?'

Trudeau said Wednesday he is directing Canada's spy agency to share more information with the federal government about threats to members of Parliament.

A spokesperson from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China denied the allegations.

"We never interfere in Canada's internal affairs and have no interest whatsoever in doing so," said Mao Ning.

"At the same time, we are resolute in defending our sovereignty, security and development interests and opposing actions that interfere in China's internal affairs and harm China's interests."

Expulsions of foreign diplomats by Canada are rare. In 2018, Ottawa expelled four Russian diplomats over the poisoning of an ex-spy in Salisbury, U.K.

In 2012, the Conservative government joined its international allies in a coordinated expulsion of Syrian diplomats after killers allied with the Assad regime murdered more than 100 people, including 49 children, in the Houla region of Syria.

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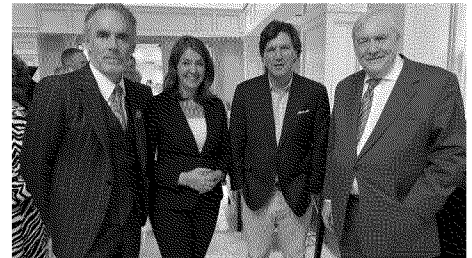
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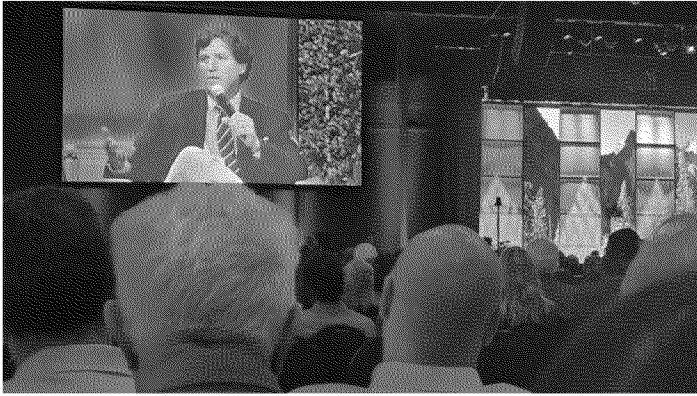
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