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# CSIS warned Trudeau about Toronto-area politician's alleged ties to Chinese diplomats

**ROBERT FIFE** > OTTAWA BUREAU CHIEF

**STEVEN CHASE** > SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY REPORTER

OTTAWA

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Former Ontario Liberal cabinet minister Michael Chan, in 2013.

GALIT RODAN/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and senior aides were warned on at least two occasions that government MPs should be cautious in their political dealings with former Ontario Liberal cabinet minister Michael Chan because of alleged ties to China's consulate in Toronto, national-security sources say.

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The Canadian Security Intelligence Service has a dossier on Mr. Chan that contains information on his activities in the 2019 and 2021 federal election campaigns and meetings with suspected Chinese intelligence operatives, according to the two security sources. The Globe and Mail is not identifying the sources, who risk prosecution under the Security of Information Act.

Mr. Chan, now deputy mayor of the city of Markham, told The Globe that he is a loyal Canadian and accused CSIS of character assassination, saying they never once interviewed him about his alleged involvement with the Chinese consulate.

“Your own statement to me about a recent briefing by CSIS to Prime Minister Trudeau, serves only to ignite xenophobia and cause continued, unwarranted and irreparable damage to my reputation and the safety of my family,” he said.

He added: “CSIS has never interviewed me regarding their false and unsubstantiated allegations. However, I am aware that they have conducted intimidating interviews with my friends and acquaintances and then instructed them to keep their mouths shut.”

Mr. Chan, 71, was elected as a regional councillor in Markham's Oct. 24 election last year and, as the councillor with the most votes, he also became deputy mayor. In 2018, he retired from provincial politics, where his last post was minister of international trade for Kathleen Wynne's Liberal government. He has been a key organizer and fundraiser in Ontario's Chinese-Canadian communities for the federal and provincial Liberal parties.

CSIS has observed Mr. Chan meeting in the past years with Chinese diplomat Zhao Wei, whom one source describes as a “suspected intelligence actor,” and Beijing's former vice-consul-general Zhuang Yaodong. CSIS believes Mr. Zhuang handled security files out of the Toronto consulate, the source said. Mr. Zhao's code-name for Mr. Chan is “The Minister,” the source said.

In 2019, Mr. Chan had a number of meetings with Mr. Zhao that were described in a CSIS 2020 briefing package as “clandestine in nature” and were allegedly election-related, the source said. In that same year, CSIS observed Mr. Chan and an associate meeting with Mr. Zhao and Mr. Zhuang at a Chinese restaurant.

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Mr. Chan said in his statement to The Globe that his meetings with Chinese consular officials are not unusual for politicians. He also said that he met frequently with consular officials from many Asian and Southeast Asian countries in 2019 relating to business activities abroad.

“Meetings to discuss business and trade between Consular officials and Canadians, politicians or otherwise, are a common practice,” he said. “Just in case you were not aware, I met a few days ago with the Deputy Consul-General from China in Toronto and Mr. Wei Zhao.”

The source said Mr. Zhao, who came to Canada in 2018, has also been observed meeting with a number of constituency staffers for Liberal MPs in Toronto, including an assistant for International Trade Minister Mary Ng. Some of those aides were asked by Mr. Zhao to keep their MPs away from pro-Taiwan events, according to the source.

CSIS Director David Vigneault flagged Mr. Chan's return to public office during a fall 2022 briefing that he delivered to the Prime Minister and his national security adviser, Jody Thomas, on Chinese election interference. He cautioned that Liberal MPs should be vigilant in their dealings with Mr. Chan, according to two other sources. The Globe is not identifying them because they were not authorized to speak about sensitive matters.

In that same briefing, Mr. Vigneault said China's consulate in Toronto had targeted 11 candidates from the Greater Toronto Area, a mix of Liberals and Conservatives, in the 2019 federal election, the sources said. But the sources said the CSIS director told Mr. Trudeau there was no indication China's interference efforts had helped elect any of them, despite the consulate's attempts to promote the campaigns on social media and in Chinese-language media outlets.

The Globe has previously reported that Mr. Chan had been on CSIS's radar, stretching as far back as 2010, because of alleged close ties to the Chinese consulate. He had also been involved in community events with leaders of the Confederation of Toronto Chinese Canadian Organizations, considered one of the consulate's unofficial lobby groups.

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In a 2019 briefing for the Prime Minister's Office, one of the national-security sources and a government source say, security officials also flagged Mr. Chan's Chinese consular connections soon after he was recruited by Ms. Ng to serve as her campaign co-chair in that year's federal election.

In the 2019 briefing, security officials told senior PMO staff, including Mr. Trudeau's Chief of Staff, Katie Telford, that Mr. Chan should be on "your radar" and that "someone should reach out to Mary to be extra careful," according to one source. That security briefing also dealt with foreign interference, tactics and Chinese tradecraft, the source said.

Ms. Ng told The Globe that no one from the PMO told her to steer clear of Mr. Chan, who also co-chaired her 2017 by-election campaign when she replaced veteran Liberal MP John McCallum. The Prime Minister opened the Markham-Thornhill riding for Ms. Ng, who had earlier served as his director of appointments, by naming Mr. McCallum as Canada's ambassador to China.

Mr. Trudeau later fired Mr. McCallum after he criticized the American request for Canada to detain and extradite Huawei chief financial officer Meng Wanzhou.

In the interview with The Globe, Ms. Ng said that Mr. Chan never actually took up the role of campaign co-chair in 2019 because, she said, there were other capable volunteers to help.

"We were working with so many members of my community – the Chinese members of our community, Tamil members of my community, Muslim Canadian and Jewish Canadians – so really it was really a cross section of people. So the campaign, you know, it just was working as it was and I felt very supported by a lot of people who were on the ground," she said.

She added: "I haven't talked to Michael in quite some time."

A confidant of Ms. Ng said the MP quietly dropped Mr. Chan as co-chair after public comments in the late summer of 2019 where he condemned Hong Kong pro-democracy demonstrators and supported China's crackdown on them, attributing the protests to alleged manipulation by foreign actors. Mr. Chan agreed to step aside because he did not want his comments to reflect badly on Ms. Ng, the confidant said.

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The Globe is not naming the confidant, who was not permitted to publicly discuss the matter.

“Your statement to me regarding Mary Ng’s campaign is utterly false,” Mr. Chan said. He did not elaborate.

The confidant also said that Ms. Ng’s assistant, who used to work for Mr. McCallum, likely met Mr. Zhao at Chinese-Canadian community events, often frequented by Chinese consulate officials. He stressed, however, that Ms. Ng has avoided meeting Chinese consulate officials since she became Trade Minister in 2021. She became Minister for Small Business in a cabinet shuffle in 2018.

Ms. Ng received the necessary vetting to obtain a security clearance to serve in cabinet in 2018 when she became Small Business Minister.

In the 2017 by-election campaign, then Chinese consul-general He Wei gathered Chinese-Canadian media at the consulate and urged them to support her election, saying they needed a friend like Mr. McCallum in Ottawa, according to one of the security sources. Ms. Ng’s confidant said she was not aware of the intervention by Mr. He, now a senior official in China’s Foreign Ministry.

CSIS has repeatedly warned that China has been conducting foreign interference operations in Canada, including efforts to influence the political process.

On Thursday, Adam Fisher, CSIS director-general of intelligence assessments, told the House of Commons committee on procedure and house affairs that Beijing uses a variety of means to influence the political process, including attempting to get information from unwitting politicians.

“They are not necessarily relying on trained agents. They use cutouts. They use proxies. They use community groups. They use diaspora organizations and community leaders,” he said.

Cherie Henderson, CSIS assistant director of requirements, also noted that states like China will funnel money directly to proxies.

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“They will use whatever avenue they can to achieve their objectives,” she told the committee, which is studying alleged Chinese interference in the 2019 election.

In June, 2015, Mr. Chan was the subject of a [Globe investigation](#), which revealed that CSIS was concerned that the then-minister may have grown too close to the Chinese consulate in Toronto, prompting a senior official to formally caution the province about the minister’s alleged conduct in a 2010 briefing.

Around that time, then-premier Dalton McGuinty dismissed the CSIS warnings as baseless. When The Globe brought the allegations to Ms. Wynne in 2015, she also dismissed them. Mr. Chan wrote in 2015 that “there is a persistent theme that there is a perceived risk that I am under undue influence and that I am an unwitting dupe of a foreign government. This is offensive and totally false.” Mr. Chan has steadfastly denied the assertions made by Canada’s spy agency.

He brought a libel action against The Globe, but the case has not gone to court.

In his recent statement to The Globe, Mr. Chan said the 2015 article was “especially egregious and disheartening for someone like myself who has always put the interests of Canada and Canadians first and foremost, and who has a long, true record of exemplary public service.”

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