

CSIS had kept tabs on expelled Chinese diplomat Zhao Wei for 3 years

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Chinese diplomat Zhao Wei was expelled from Canada for interfering in politics.

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The Canadian Security Intelligence Service has a significant counterintelligence file on Chinese consulate official Zhao Wei, and since 2020 has shared that information with Global Affairs Canada, the department with the authority to expel foreign

representatives for engaging in non-diplomatic activities, according to two national security sources.

Mr. Zhao, who was ordered to leave the country earlier this week for interfering in Canadian politics, became a target of CSIS physical surveillance in 2019, according to one national security source, to whom The Globe and Mail has granted confidentiality because they risk prosecution under the Security of Information Act.

The source said Mr. Zhao was responsible for keeping track of known opponents of the Chinese Communist Party in the Greater Toronto Area, including Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghur human rights activists, Hong Kong pro-democracy activists and supporters of Tibetan and Taiwanese independence.

Mr. Zhao and his proxies took pictures of dissidents, monitored events held by them, documented their identities and sent the information back to China's secret police, the Ministry of State Security, the source said. The source previously described Mr. Zhao to The Globe as "a suspected intelligence actor."

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

A person who is close to Ms. Ng said the minister's assistant likely met Mr. Zhao at Chinese-Canadian community events, which are frequented by China's consular officials. The Globe is not naming the person, who was not permitted to discuss the matter publicly.

CSIS already had a file on Mr. Zhao when he arrived in Canada in 2018. The information had come from U.S. intelligence agencies and the Communications Security Establishment, Canada's signals and cyberintelligence service, according to a former national security official, who can't be named because they risk prosecution.

CSIS began sharing sensitive information on Mr. Zhao with Global Affairs Canada in 2020, the two national security sources said. They added that the department has a list of diplomats that could be considered for expulsion because of their involvement

in foreign interference and “threat” activities outside of their regular diplomatic duties.

Dan Stanton, a former manager in counterintelligence at CSIS who is now the director of the national security program at the University of Ottawa’s Professional Development Institute, said CSIS would have reported the information on Mr. Zhao’s activities not only to Global Affairs, but also the Privy Council Office and possibly others.

Global Affairs “needs to know who does what in Canada,” Mr. Stanton said. “And if the person is deemed a national security threat, they would know that. Whether they react to the reporting or read it is their business. It’s not like there is a great big red star beside his name.”

Guy Saint-Jacques, a former Canadian ambassador to China, said this type of CSIS intelligence is “shared on a need-to-know basis, so very few people have access.” The list of troublesome diplomats is regularly updated, he said. Global Affairs has its own threat assessment and intelligence services.

“Obviously, CSIS must have a very thick file on Zhao,” he said. “If CSIS had its druthers, a good number of people on that list would have been expelled a long time ago.”

Conservative MP Michael Cooper said the government should have expelled Mr. Zhao well before this week.

“This is a Prime Minister that is supposedly regularly briefed on national security matters and reads everything, and nothing is supposedly held back from him,” Mr. Cooper said. “The Prime Minister would have had to know about this. And upon learning about this, steps should have been taken to have him sent back years ago.”

The Globe reported on May 1 that Mr. Zhao had been part of an effort by Beijing to intimidate Conservative foreign affairs critic Michael Chong and his family members in Hong Kong after the MP sponsored a parliamentary motion in 2021 to condemn China’s treatment of its Uyghur Muslim minority group. A week after the Globe report, Foreign Affairs Minister Mèlanie Joly declared Mr. Zhao persona non grata.

Beijing retaliated by expelling Canadian diplomat Jennifer Lynn Lalonde, consul of the Consulate General of Canada in Shanghai. China's embassy in Ottawa has accused Canada of breaching international law by expelling Mr. Zhao, saying it was acting based on anti-Chinese sentiment.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who has been criticized for being slow to act against Chinese interference in Canada's democracy, has said CSIS failed to brief him about the targeting of Mr. Chong. Mr. Trudeau has said he will require the spy agency to share this type of information with him in the future.

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Mr. Zhao has until Saturday to depart for China. He is the third Chinese diplomat to be expelled from Canada since 1977, when two Chinese officials were sent home for trying to infiltrate a Sino-Canadian organization. Another diplomat quietly left the country in 2010 because of spying allegations, according to Mr. Saint-Jacques.

In January, The Globe reported that CSIS had observed Mr. Zhao in meetings with former Ontario Liberal cabinet minister Michael Chan, who is now the deputy mayor of Markham, Ont.

In 2019, according to the first national security source, Mr. Chan had a number of meetings with Mr. Zhao that were described in a CSIS 2020 briefing package as "clandestine in nature" and election-related. In that same year, CSIS observed Mr. Chan and an associate meeting with Mr. Zhao and Beijing's former vice-consul general, Zhuang Yaodong, at a Chinese restaurant, according to the source. CSIS believed Mr. Zhuang handled security files out of China's Toronto consulate, the source said.

Mr. Chan told The Globe in January that he is a loyal Canadian, and that meetings with Chinese consular officials are not unusual for politicians.

"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."

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