

# Trudeau government decided CSIS transcript of MP Han Dong provided no 'actionable evidence'

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This article was published more than 6 months ago. Some information may no longer be current.

The Trudeau government determined that there was no “actionable evidence” after it received a CSIS transcript of an early 2021 conversation between Liberal MP Han Dong and China’s top diplomat in Toronto, according to a senior government source – saying conclusions could not be drawn that Mr. Dong asked Beijing to keep two Canadians in prison for political reasons.

But when the allegations against Mr. Dong surfaced in a Global News report on Wednesday, the MP left the Liberal caucus to sit as an Independent.

On Thursday, he told The Globe and Mail that he intends to launch a defamation lawsuit against Global News, which, citing two unnamed national-security sources, reported the assertions related to Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig. Mr. Dong said he would never advocate that the two Canadians should be kept in jail to benefit the Liberals.

The Prime Minister’s Office and its National Security Office reached out to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service to provide a copy of the transcript after the PMO was first approached by The Globe on the matter 2½ weeks ago, the source said. The Globe is not identifying the source because they were not authorized to publicly discuss national-security matters.

The Globe contacted the PMO on March 3 to ask whether CSIS had alerted Prime Minister Justin Trudeau about a February, 2021, conversation where Mr. Dong

allegedly made the suggestion about the fate of Mr. Spavor and Mr. Kovrig.

The Globe did not report on the alleged contents of this conversation because it was unable to obtain transcripts or a tape recording to authenticate what actually transpired.

Mr. Dong said Thursday that he left the caucus on his own accord to “clear my name and I see no other path.”

He said he is suing Global because, “This is for my family’s honour. The allegations are very serious. They are untrue,” he said of the media outlet. “That is not something that I would say.”

Global News did not specifically respond to the threat of a lawsuit when contacted by The Globe. “Global News is governed by a rigorous set of Journalistic Principles and Practices and we are very mindful of the public interest and legal responsibility of this important accountability reporting,” said Sonia Verma, editor in chief and VP of Global national news, in an e-mail.

Mr. Dong confirmed to The Globe on March 3 that he had a phone conversation with China’s then-top diplomat in Toronto, Han Tao, in February, 2021, that included discussion of Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor but denied he advised Beijing to delay releasing the men.

“I was one of the two participants in the call,” Mr. Dong said in an e-mail. “On that call, I raised the status of Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig and called for their immediate release. At every opportunity before they returned home, I adamantly demanded their release to Canada without delay.”

Mr. Trudeau’s press secretary Ann-Clara Vaillancourt told The Globe on March 3 that the PMO only became aware of Mr. Dong’s conversation with the Chinese consul-general after The Globe reached out for comment. Ms. Vaillancourt said Mr. Dong was not acting as a government back channel.

On Thursday, The Globe asked the PMO why Mr. Dong only quit the Liberal caucus Wednesday rather than weeks earlier after the newspaper first brought the matter to the government.

Ms. Vaillancourt said: “Mr. Dong decided to step aside and sit as an Independent as he works to respond to these allegations. As the Prime Minister underscored last week, whenever he is briefed on intelligence matters, he asks what can be done and what steps need to be followed. Whenever there is action to be taken, we do so.”

The Globe first approached Mr. Dong on Feb. 10 to ask him about the consul-general conversation. At that time, he said he had no recollection of the discussion but said he always called for the release of Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor in any interaction with Chinese diplomats.

He explained that any outreach to the consul-general was either as part of his role as vice-chair of the Canada-China Legislative Association or because of the Chinese New Year.

Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor had been locked up by Beijing in late 2018 in apparent retaliation for Canada’s arrest of senior Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou on an extradition request by the U.S. government. By February, 2021, the pair had already been jailed more than two years.

The two Canadians were released on Sept. 24, 2021, after 1,019 days. They were freed shortly after Ms. Meng was released from house arrest in Canada as part of a plea deal with the U.S. Justice Department.

A national-security source told The Globe in February that Mr. Dong at the time of the conversation with the consul-general was also under surveillance by CSIS because China’s Toronto consulate considered him one of Beijing’s strongest allies and lines of access into Parliament. CSIS’s code name for Mr. Dong is “Scarecrow,” according to the source. The Globe is not identifying the source because they risk prosecution under the Security of Information Act.

“I don’t know what that means,” Mr. Dong said of the code name. “Not for a second do I not consider myself a Canadian.”

In the House of Commons Thursday, opposition MPs united to pass an NDP motion to call for a full-scale public inquiry into Chinese interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections. Liberal MPs opposed the motion and Mr. Dong, now an Independent, voted for it.

In Beijing, meanwhile, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry says “China opposes interference in other countries’ internal affairs.”

“We have no interest in and will not interfere in Canada’s internal affairs,” Wang Wenbin said.

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