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Department of Justice

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Singaporean National Pleads Guilty to Acting in the United States as an Illegal Agent of Chinese Intelligence

Jun Wei Yeo, also known as Dickson Yeo, entered a plea of guilty today to one count of acting within the United States as an illegal agent of a foreign power without first notifying the Attorney General, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 951. Yeo's plea was entered via videoconference before the Honorable Tanya S. Chutkan in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia.

The announcement was made by John G. Demers, Assistant Attorney General; Michael R. Sherwin, Acting U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia; Timothy R. Slater, Assistant Director in Charge of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Washington Field Office; and Alan E. Kohler, Jr., Assistant Director of the FBI's Counterintelligence Division.

"The Chinese Government uses an array of duplicity to obtain sensitive information from unsuspecting Americans," said Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department's National Security Division John C. Demers. "Yeo was central to one such scheme, using career networking sites and a false consulting firm to lure Americans who might be of interest to the Chinese government. This is yet another example of the Chinese government's exploitation of the openness of American society."

"Today's guilty plea underscores the ways that the Chinese government continues to target Americans with access to sensitive government information, including using the Internet and non-Chinese nationals to target Americans who never leave the United States," said Michael R. Sherwin, Acting U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia. "We will continue to prosecute those who use deceptive practices on the Internet and elsewhere to undermine our national security."

"At the direction of Chinese intelligence operatives, the defendant targeted U.S. government employees and an Army officer to obtain information for the government of China. Mr. Yeo admits he set up a fake consulting company to further his scheme, looked for susceptible individuals who were vulnerable to recruitment, and tried to avoid detection by U.S. authorities," said Alan E. Kohler Jr., Assistant Director of the FBI's Counterintelligence Division. "But this isn't just about this particular defendant. This case is yet another reminder that China is relentless in its pursuit of U.S. technology and policy information in order to advance its own interests. The FBI and our partners will be just as aggressive in uncovering these hidden efforts and charging individuals who break our laws."

"Mr. Yeo admitted that he not only provided valuable information to Chinese intelligence, but also that he knowingly recruited others in the U.S. to do the same," said FBI Washington Field Office Assistant Director in Charge Timothy R. Slater. "The tactics Mr. Yeo used to target cleared individuals on professional networking social media sites are just one facet of the full court press China employs on a daily basis to obtain non-public U.S. government information. The FBI urges citizens, especially those holding security clearances, to be cautious when being approached by individuals on social media sites with implausible career opportunities. We are committed to holding those accountable who attempt to work for Chinese intelligence and other adversaries to the detriment of our national security."

“The Diplomatic Security Service is firmly committed to working with the U.S. Attorney’s Office and our other law enforcement partners to investigate allegations of crime and protect our national security,” said Galen J. Nace, Deputy Assistant Director for Counterintelligence of the Department of State’s Diplomatic Security Service (DSS).

As outlined in the statement of offense, Yeo began working with Chinese intelligence officers as early as 2015, initially targeting other Asian countries, but then focusing on the United States. In response to taskings from his Chinese intelligence contacts, Yeo worked to spot and assess Americans with access to valuable non-public information, including U.S. military and government employees with high-level security clearances. After Yeo identified American targets, he solicited them for non-public information and paid them to write reports. Yeo told these American targets that the reports were for clients in Asia, without revealing that they were in fact destined for the Chinese government.

Yeo made use of various social media sites to carry out the taskings given to him by Chinese intelligence operatives. In 2018, Yeo created a fake consulting company that used the same name as a prominent U.S. consulting firm that conducts public and government relations, and Yeo posted job advertisements under that company name. Ninety percent of the resumes Yeo received in response were from U.S. military and government personnel with security clearances, and he passed resumes of interest to one of the Chinese intelligence operatives.

Yeo also used a professional networking website that is focused on career and employment information to carry out the taskings he received from Chinese intelligence officials. Yeo used the professional networking website to find individuals with resumes and job descriptions suggesting that they would have access to valuable information. After he identified individuals worth targeting, Yeo followed guidance he received from Chinese intelligence operatives regarding how to recruit potential targets, including identifying their vulnerabilities, such as dissatisfaction with work or financial difficulties.

The maximum penalty for a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 951 is ten years. The maximum statutory sentence is prescribed by Congress and is provided here for informational purposes. The defendant’s sentence will be determined by the court based on the advisory sentencing guidelines and other statutory factors. Sentencing is set for Oct. 9, 2020 before the Honorable Tanya S. Chutkan.

The investigation into this matter was conducted by the FBI’s Washington Field Office and DSS. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Thomas N. Saunders and Erik M. Kenerson of the National Security Section of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Columbia, along with David Aaron of the Counterintelligence and Export Control Section of the National Security Division. If you suspect you have been the target of a recruitment scheme, contact your local FBI Field Office.

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