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Chair

The Honourable John McKay

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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• (1200)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): If I may, I'm going to bring this meeting to order. This is the 103rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. We have as our guest this morning Daniel Jean, national security and intelligence adviser.

Prior to calling on Mr. Jean, I'm going to ask that all of the camerapeople remove themselves.

Second, there has been some conversation among the members of the committee, and we will observe a moment's silence in light of the tragedy in Humboldt. If you would rise with me, we will be silent for a moment.

[A moment of silence observed]

Thank you.

As I said, our guest this morning is Daniel Jean, national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Jean, you certainly seem to be able to attract a crowd, but you're welcome to the committee regardless. I understand that you have an opening statement. Thereafter, you know the order of questions. With that, I'll call on you for your opening statement.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Jean (National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister, Privy Council Office): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Distinguished members of the committee, thank you for your time.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss with you the facts surrounding the controversy associated with the invitation of Mr. Atwal to a reception hosted by the Canadian High Commission in Delhi during the recent visit of the Prime Minister to India, as well as the background briefing I offered to representatives of Canadian media on February 22 and 23.

I wish to stress that the information that I am providing you today, like the information I shared with the media during the background briefings, is unclassified. While I have access to classified intelligence that can inform unclassified briefings, I always exercise caution on what I share in an unclassified context.

The first notification I received that Mr. Atwal was on the guest list for the Delhi High Commission reception planned in the context

of the Prime Minister's visit to India came through the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service. CSIS received this information on February 21, 2018, at around 8 a.m. from a source, suggesting that Mr. Atwal's presence at the reception would be embarrassing to the Canadian government.

After the CSIS director informed me of the situation just before 10 a.m., I immediately asked our Privy Council Office Security and Intelligence team to contact the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to validate the information. Soon thereafter, we informed relevant officials at PCO, the Prime Minister's Office and PCO officials accompanying the Prime Minister in Delhi.

The RCMP confirmed that afternoon the past conviction for attempted murder on a visiting Minister of State from India in 1986. As Mr. Atwal is no longer considered a security threat by our security agencies, the issue was the controversy that his presence at the event could have generated given the nature of his past conviction. Around the same time, pictures of Mr. Atwal with members of the Prime Minister's delegation taken the day before at a reception in Mumbai and a picture of his invitation to the upcoming Delhi reception started to circulate in the Indian media. At 7:46 p.m., the CBC published a story with these pictures. That was the first article about this in Canada.

Mr. Atwal's invitation was rescinded by the High Commission in India later that night. By mid-morning on February 22, we had assessed what we knew so far about the incident drawing on both the sequence of events, unclassified information available at that stage, and classified information: Mr. Atwal had attended the Mumbai reception and pictures of him with members of the Prime Minister's entourage had surfaced in the media; Mr. Atwal was invited to the Canadian High Commission reception in New Delhi; the Prime Minister had publicly declared that the invitation should not have been extended, and a Canadian member of Parliament, Mr. Randeep Sarai had assumed responsibility for the invitation; in parallel, we had seen inaccurate information in the media and a number of false allegations that suggested that federal institutions had been informed before the trip that Mr. Atwal had received an invitation, had informed staff from the PMO, and that no action to reconsider the invitation had been taken.

[English]

At that time, I made the decision to offer a background briefing to Canadian media on what we knew in order to clarify facts, to answer a number of pressing questions from the media, and to alert them to the inaccurate information being circulated. In keeping with my usual practice, I discussed beforehand my proposal to offer a background briefing and the key messages I intended to deliver with both PCO colleagues and PMO officials.

The PMO communications department suggested a list of journalists I could contact in Ottawa that afternoon and evening in addition to the Canadian media accompanying the Prime Minister in India, who would be briefed the next day.

In the background briefings, I confirmed that I was giving an unclassified briefing on background—*c'est-à-dire*, no attribution by name—and I covered the following points. With regard to the invitation, I indicated that the Prime Minister had acknowledged that this invitation should not have been extended and that the member of Parliament, Mr. Sarai, had taken responsibility for the invitation. I said that the Prime Minister and Mr. Sarai were on the record on these facts and that I would not comment further on that aspect.

On how and when we were informed and the rationale for rescinding the invitation, I said, based on the information I had at that time, that the first notification we received that Mr. Atwal was on the guest list for the Delhi reception came from a source who informed CSIS in the early morning of February 21. I confirmed that we rapidly consulted the RCMP, the agency responsible for handling criminal matters, and notified PCO and PMO officials in Ottawa and Delhi. I confirmed that Mr. Atwal was no longer considered to be a security threat by our security agencies and that the invitation had been rescinded because of the controversy that could erupt given the nature of his past conviction.

I answered a number of questions around security screening for guests at receptions, and questions also around no-fly lists.

I then told media representatives that inaccurate information around the invitation of Mr. Atwal was being circulated. I referred them to the title of an *Indian Express* story published on February 22, which suggested that a Canadian citizen entered India after a 38-year ban as part of the Prime Minister's delegation. I indicated that this was misleading as the individual was not on the official delegation for the visit.

● (1205)

I noted that while the Government of Canada is glad when a Canadian citizen can resolve travel restrictions, the government had not intervened with the Indian government to remove any member of the official delegation from an interdiction to travel to India. I said that questions related to interdictions to travel to India should be directed to the Government of India.

With regard to Mr. Atwal, I said that we understood that after having difficulties travelling to India for several years, he was removed by the Indian government from the so-called blacklist in 2017 and allowed to travel there last summer as someone who is presumably no longer considered a threat, and no longer espouses the cause of an independent Khalistan. Mr. Atwal now meets with Indian diplomats in Canada and Indian officials, which is the normal

process for people who go through the blacklist process. Articles subsequently published in *The Indian Express* and *The Times of India* confirm that information.

On February 24, *The Times of India* confirmed that Jaspal Atwal was reformed, was off the blacklist, and had been engaging with the government for three years. When you read the articles, it explains the number of officials you would normally meet through that process. In the second article—from March 9, the day after Mr. Atwal gave his press conference—the official spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs did confirm that Mr. Atwal had been removed from the blacklist in 2017 as part of a conscious effort by the Indian government of outreach with diaspora who were reformed.

I also described at that time two unfounded allegations made to the media suggesting that the PMO had been informed, days before the trip, of Mr. Atwal's presence on the guest list but that no action had been taken to rescind the invitation. It was indeed reported that CSIS had been alerted days before, and I had informed the Prime Minister's Office. CSIS has no record or recollection of such an earlier alert. CSIS confirmed that the first notification they got came on February 21 around 8 a.m.

An allegation was also made that the RCMP, Surrey detachment, had been alerted several weeks before the trip that Mr. Atwal was on the guest list and had alerted the PMO. Upon hearing the allegation, the PCO contacted senior officials at RCMP headquarters, who in turn contacted both RCMP Surrey and the Prime Minister's protective detail, who then confirmed that no such alert had been received.

With regard to attribution, as reported by journalists who received the briefing, including Tonda MacCharles and Alex Ballingall of the *Toronto Star*, and John Ivison of the *National Post*, what I said was that we had concerns that this seemed to be coordinated misinformation by actors, possibly to exacerbate the faux pas—the fact that an invitation that should not have been made had been made—in order to reinforce the notion that Canada is complacent on the risk of extremism, a perception that has been brought, at times, by Indian intelligence services, and one that we do not share.

Let's look at what the people who were briefed actually said. In the *Toronto Star*:

When the Star had asked those same questions last week of a senior Canadian official who spoke on condition of anonymity, the answer was: "I want to be very clear: I am not saying that the government of India set us up."

However, the official did suggest that there are "people in India" who would benefit from fuelling the controversy over whether the Trudeau government is "complacent on terrorism"—an allegation the Liberal government flatly denies.

In the *National Post*, John Ivison wrote:

I received a briefing from a senior security source last week.... He did not allege the Indian government engineered Atwal's invitations to the events in Mumbai and New Delhi. In fact, he said Sarai was the source of the invitation and either ignored Atwal's conviction because it was 30 years old, or was unaware of his nefarious past.

But he did suggest Atwal was removed from the blacklist by the Indian government—a fact also reported by the Times of India and other Indian media, which claimed it happened in July 2017.

He also alluded to the Canadian Press...upon return, Mr. Atwal had consulted his passport and confirmed that he had travelled. He had stamps in India in January and August 2017.

After I had completed the background briefings by phone with the Canadian media in Delhi on the morning of February 23, the PCO and the PMO communications brought to my attention a story published that morning, which suggested that a Surrey Punjabi media outlet had sent an anonymous tip to the Canadian high commission that Mr. Atwal was going to attend the Mumbai reception and that if the tip had immediately been acted upon, the whole controversy could have been avoided. We immediately queried the high commission. We confirmed that the tip was actually received after Mumbai, before Delhi, and it would not have made any difference.

● (1210)

In regard to the relationship with India, I want to stress that we take the relationship with India very seriously. Beyond sustained efforts to broaden the foreign policy relationship and grow bilateral trade, we also strive to be good security partners. Canada was not spared from violent extremism actions. We remain vigilant to any potential threat and work closely with our Indian partners within the Canadian legislative framework, including the charter.

Over the last year, our security and intelligence agencies have worked constructively to enhance co-operation with their Indian counterparts. Prior to the Prime Minister's visit to India, senior officials from the RCMP and CSIS travelled to Delhi. I met with my NSA counterpart the week before, and he told me how pleased he was with the co-operation of the RCMP and CSIS.

With regard to the invitation to Mr. Atwal, I wish to stress that throughout the incident, on the 21st and 22nd, I made several attempts to connect with my Indian counterpart by phone, and I emailed him to thank him for the good exchanges we had the week before, as well as to express our regrets over the controversy resulting from the invitation and explain that it had been rescinded.

In conclusion, I have now had the chance to share with you all relevant unclassified information that I'm privy to with regard to this issue. As you can see, the background briefing that I offered included both a faithful description of the sequence of events and answered a number of pressing questions from the media. I felt it was important to alert the Canadian media to the misinformation being circulated, notably the unfounded allegations that public institutions—first, CSIS; secondly, the RCMP; and third, our diplomatic mission in Delhi—had been informed ahead of the Mumbai reception that Mr. Atwal was on the guest list and that these institutions had relayed the information to the PMO in time to prevent the controversy. The paper trail will show that all these allegations are false.

Finally, I want to thank officials in the international security and intelligence community, who, as you can see from the sequence of events, did not spare any effort during an intense 48 hours.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jean. I'm sorry to have run you through that gamut in 10 minutes, but we do try to keep to the time limits here.

Madam Damoff, you have seven minutes, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Monsieur Jean, for being with us today and also for sending a letter to the chair asking to appear before our committee. As our chair indicated, you have attracted quite a crowd here today.

You went through a lot of information very quickly for us. I wonder if you can elaborate a bit on why you thought it was important to do the briefing that you did. I know that you spoke about a lot of facts as you went through, but why did you feel it was important to have that briefing with the media to counter the misinformation that was out there?

Mr. Daniel Jean: There were three main objectives to the briefing. The first was—as when you are in a crisis—trying to describe to the media the facts and the sequence of events as best as we knew them at that time. The second was to answer a lot of their questions, and when you look at all the articles that these journalists wrote after that, you can see that I answered a lot of questions on security screening, vetting of lists, and no-fly lists.

The third objective—and it was an important one—was that we could see you had inaccurate information, but you also had what really looked like coordinated efforts to try to create a narrative that was actually using, in an inappropriate way, three respected public institutions, CSIS, the RCMP, and our diplomatic mission in Delhi—at the time of the background briefing, we knew about CSIS and the RCMP, while the third one came later—and suggesting that they had been alerted that Mr. Atwal was on the guest list, they had said to the Prime Minister's Office that this was the case, and that somehow the invitation was not rescinded.

From a public policy standpoint and from a Canadian interest standpoint, it's absolutely correct that the media and Canadians should ask tough questions of the government and the member of Parliament as to how this invitation was extended. It was a faux pas. It should not have happened. I answered a lot of these questions that night, as you can see from the reports from the people who received the background briefing.

In the same way, if you have actors who are trying to fabricate a narrative that is totally untrue and using three of our most respected public institutions to do that, I think there has to be someone who is neutral who can come in and alert the media to that. That's why I did it.

• (1215)

Ms. Pam Damoff: You've mentioned coordinated efforts and have said that there were actors out there who were doing this. You obviously felt that these weren't random tips being given to the media, but that it was a coordinated effort on behalf of certain actors to get this misinformation out there. Is that right?

Mr. Daniel Jean: When you look at the sequence of events, we were first alerted in Ottawa, and then in Ottawa we discovered the tip the *Vancouver Sun* reported on on the 23rd. We had not seen that paper before, because when we called them to talk about Mr. Atwal, they were aware and they thought we were talking about the same thing. But, in essence, when you look at it, we were tipped. Within a matter of hours, pictures of Mr. Atwal with the entourage of the Prime Minister and a picture of his invitation were in the media, and inaccurate information was being rooted at the same time. Then you had what certainly to us in the community looked like coordinated efforts, because it was the same narrative in three different tips that were sent to the media.

The tip about CSIS was first sent to the CBC. It was going to be part of the Terry Milewski story. We were able to repeal that one. Unfortunately, for the *Vancouver Sun*, we didn't have a chance to get back to them on time. The one about the RCMP happened really late on the night of the 21st. Between midnight and two o'clock, we woke up the RCMP. They called their Surrey detachment. They called their PMPD, the protective detail, and they confirmed that information was false. I can tell you that the minute you see the paper trail on the actual anonymous tip, for the *Vancouver Sun* story on the 23rd, which was sent to the high commission, you will see right away that it happened after the Mumbai reception and before the Delhi reception, yet the *Vancouver Sun* was told by the anonymous tipster that it was before Mumbai and it could have prevented the faux pas.

Ms. Pam Damoff: You also mentioned as late as February 23 that the Surrey media outlet was printing a story, and again that happened. Was this continuing that coordinated effort afterwards, or do you think it was...?

Mr. Daniel Jean: When I talked about inaccurate information, there was that story about that other Canadian that came out around the same time, which suggested that after 38 years of being banned, so being on the Indian blacklist, he had been able to come to India because he was in the Prime Minister's delegation. I can tell you that the paper will show that this gentleman was not in the Prime Minister's delegation.

In the same way, when the media in India talked about Mr. Atwal—and initially our media as well—he was being presented as what he was 30 years ago, but at the same time, when we understand India... You understand that I have a huge experience in immigration and the foreign services that serve abroad. India is one of our main source countries. I understand the whole blacklist Indian interdiction process. The minute we saw that Mr. Atwal was in India, we said, well, if he is in India, that means that somehow they have pruned his

name off the blacklist. We started to get some information suggesting that indeed he had travelled to India in August 2017. We have open source information showing that. Also, he actually had received a political decoration in India in August 2017, so we have to assume that somehow the Indian government had removed him.

As you probably know, their initial reaction was that they weren't sure. They checked it out. On the 24th, senior Indian officials, in the same kind of background briefing that I gave, told Indian newspapers that indeed he had been removed. In their process, people meet with diplomats and with intelligence officers and all that, and on March 9 they confirmed that on the record.

Ms. Pam Damoff: It was the Indian government that spoke to the media to say he'd been removed from the blacklist. Is that what you just said?

• (1220)

Mr. Daniel Jean: Indeed, the first story was on February 23, and there was very little. On February 24, there was an extensive story that actually explained really well the process of being removed from the blacklist. Why did they do that? It is part of the Indian government trying to outreach to diaspora that they feel, at some time, were a challenge from their perspective but have reformed. On the ninth of March they confirmed that on the record.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

Mr. Paul-Hus, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Jean, I first want to thank you for being here with us today, and for your service to the Canadian public service. I know that you will be retiring soon, and I hope that after so many years spent serving our country, you will not leave with a feeling of bitterness due to these unfortunate events.

I thank you for your statement. It has clarified certain points, but does not specifically answer our questions. Therefore, I will ask you mine.

Last February 27, the Prime Minister confirmed, throughout his trip through India, that rogue elements of the Indian government were responsible for Mr. Jaspal Atwal's presence at these private events. And yet, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who must certainly have been briefed about the situation, stated that Mr. Atwal's presence was an honest mistake. She apologized to the Indian government. Both those statements cannot be true.

In your opinion, which one of them is true?

Mr. Daniel Jean: Mr. Paul-Hus, my position is quite demanding, and honestly I don't have time to listen to all of the questions that are raised in the House of Commons. However, I did listen to some of the questions which were put to the Prime Minister on this topic. The Prime Minister acknowledged that this invitation should not have been made and that the member who made it had accepted responsibility. The Prime Minister also said that he agreed with the evaluation carried out by the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, the evaluation that I came here to speak to you about today. According to that evaluation, there seemed to have been coordinated misinformation efforts.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: In the beginning, on February 27, in response to a question put to him in the House by M. Andrew Scheer, the Prime Minister confirmed that rogue elements of the Indian government were responsible for Mr. Atwal's presence. The first version came from information we were told was classified. Afterwards, there were other versions, including that of the minister, who said that the invitation came from Canada.

Today, you are giving us unclassified information. The government even asked you to provide a classified briefing session to the leader of the official opposition, but now you are talking about coordinated efforts.

Could you give us some further explanations?

Mr. Daniel Jean: It's quite simple.

Mr. Paul-Hus, if I remember correctly, you are a former military man. I think you would not appreciate references to National Defence or the Canadian Armed Forces being improperly used by people trying to create a false version of the facts for the purpose of making Canada look bad.

This has to be very clear, and I'm going to repeat what I said earlier. As a public servant and a soon-to-be ordinary citizen, I find it perfectly normal that Canadians and the media put difficult questions to the Prime Minister and to the members to try to find out why all of this happened. It's perfectly reasonable that Canadians and the media put difficult questions to officials, and I answered several of those questions that evening.

However, some people tried to create a false narrative by using CSIS, the RCMP or the High Commission. This whole fiasco and controversy could have been avoided. The documents we have will show that this narrative is false. Who better than an objective public servant to tell Canadians that that information is false?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Okay, but who coordinated that?

Mr. Daniel Jean: In the background briefings—without attribution—that I provided, I said clearly that we did not know who these people were. I don't know if they were from the private sector. I am telling you that now, and I have said it before several times, including during a briefing for journalists from the *Toronto Star* and the *National Post*. CTV also said the same thing in its first report on this topic. Individuals from the private sector did this, or, if they were associated with the Government of India, they certainly did this without its permission. The Government of India denies any involvement and I fully accept its explanation.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Fine.

According to the final version of the report, unknown external elements coordinated a message like this for the purpose of muddying up the relations between Canada and India.

Today, you are confirming that you trust the Indian government when it says that this did not originate with it, but you cannot tell us who coordinated that false information.

● (1225)

Mr. Daniel Jean: As I said to the media that evening, I am not in a position to confirm that.

The Government of India has stated that it had nothing to do with this. That is in fact what I said to the media at the information session. Three of the eleven first news reports say that, and many others do not mention it at all.

Mr. Paul-Hus, it's very important to use the correct narrative. I spoke to you about all of the journalists' reports, the ones who were present at the briefing that evening, and none of those reports talk about a diversion. In the reports that were published later, only one, Mr. John Ivison's article, alludes to a conspiracy, but that journalist never stated that there had been a conspiracy. In fact, I quoted this article earlier.

A narrative was developed by people who were not present at the briefing, who did not read the reports, and all of a sudden, there was a conspiracy theory out there. For my part, I don't put much stock in conspiracy theories.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Why are we here today? For almost two months, the committee refused two motions requesting that you come here to enlighten us. We want explanations. Canadians want to know what happened.

According to what I understand from what you said today, someone, somewhere provoked a problem. You don't know who did it, or you cannot tell us.

Why do you think the Prime Minister prevented you from testifying, or did not give us some clearer explanations? We had to wait two months to hear you.

Mr. Daniel Jean: Normally, I only appear when I am asked to do so. If I understand correctly, last March 1, the committee launched a process to ask me to appear, but the process did not yield results. To tell you the truth, I was not even aware of that. As you may know, I often do not have my electronic devices with me in the course of my work. That morning, I wasn't available. I was taking part in a three-hour session with several other people. When I came out, I noticed myself that the papers were talking about this issue. The government later adopted a very clear position which I can completely understand.

I will explain what happened. We indeed had what we needed to adopt a non-classified approach and considered that the media had the right to know that they were being fed false information. However, it's very useful to be aware of the classified information. Since Mr. Scheer is a member of the Privy Council and has a right to that information, my boss, the Clerk, especially when the filibusters were unfolding, stated that he thought we would provide a classified briefing. This was offered in a more formal way via correspondence. Once the Leader of the Opposition agreed to the idea of the classified briefing, I immediately sent a letter to Mr. McKay.

The Chair: Mr. Dubé, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Jean, thank you for being here with us today despite the weather.

I think we have to target our actions accurately. In my opinion, the committee should require accountability from the Prime Minister primarily, as well as the ministers concerned. This has less to do with public servants. That said, there are questions, nevertheless, regarding the process. How does someone come to provide such a briefing? There seems to be some inconsistency between what the government said and what you said during the briefing.

You spoke about the controversy which was stirred up. Was that individual identified because of public relations issues, or was this raised by CSIS for security reasons? I would like that aspect to be very clear.

Mr. Daniel Jean: To be very clear, I will say that a little before 10 o'clock on February 21, the director of CSIS advised me that Mr. Atwal's name was on the guest list. I immediately began searching for information through open sources like Google. Shortly after I obtained information in that manner, I provided it to the people who needed to have it, such as the Privy Council, the Office of the Prime Minister and our people in India.

Then I asked the RCMP to check whether other crimes had been committed since then, to establish that we were talking about the right person, and to confirm his criminal record. This is what we call due diligence. The RCMP and CSIS then specified that this individual was no longer considered a threat. In fact, as you can see, even the Government of India no longer considers him to be a threat, and has removed him from their black list. However, that does not mean that we need to invite him to a reception.

• (1230)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Once it has been established that a person no longer constitutes a threat, the decision to allow him to attend an event or not no longer falls within your purview, or that of the national security agencies.

Mr. Daniel Jean: That is correct.

We then sent the information to Canada's High Commission in India, in New Delhi. The High Commission and the representatives of the PMO over there made the final decision, as they do during a state visit.

Perhaps you would like to know why, given those circumstances, I opted for the briefing.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: The Prime Minister spoke to the media, and you did too, at a briefing without attribution, to correct the facts regarding information that was being circulated.

At what point should there be synergy? Was that synergy present?

Why did you not first allow the Prime Minister to provide the information and explain what was going on, while holding the briefing at the same time? That is what happens in a legislative process, for instance, when a minister tables a bill and provides a technical briefing to journalists; afterwards, the information is provided to the public. However, that synergy does not seem to have been present in this case.

Mr. Daniel Jean: I am glad you asked me that question, Mr. Dubé, because in fact, that synergy was present. As soon as we determined that it was Mr. Atwal who had been invited and that this would be considered a controversial situation, the invitation was withdrawn over there. The Prime Minister was the first to publicly state that that invitation should not have been extended. The member then said that he accepted responsibility for this. My technical briefing occurred afterwards. All of these events were related, sir.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: That means that the Office of the Prime Minister knew that you were going to provide that briefing.

Mr. Daniel Jean: Mr. Dubé, you can read the statement I just gave here.

Officials conduct deep background briefings and do not normally need to.... You mentioned synergy. For all the governments I have served, I have always let the people at the PMO know what I was going to do. I do the same with my communications staff. My position was clear: I firmly believed that too much misinformation had been sent to the media and that it was important to rectify the situation so that Canadians would know the truth.

I agree that a faux pas was made. Furthermore, I completely agree that tough questions should be put to everyone involved. That doesn't mean, however, that false information about three reputable public institutions should be allowed to circulate.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I'm going to continue along the same lines.

In response to a fellow member's question, you said your boss, Mr. Wernick, had suggested that you appear before the committee and send a letter to the chair offering to do so. Is that correct?

Mr. Daniel Jean: That's not quite accurate.

There was a fair bit of stalling. He did not want me to speak to the committee because he thought the Leader of the Opposition should have the full story, meaning classified and unclassified information. As you can appreciate, when I made the decision that night, I had in mind the classified information, but I also had the unclassified information I was able to share with the media. The government felt it was important.

During the period of stalling, the clerk told me that this game of ping-pong had to stop. Those are my words, not his. I offered to give a classified briefing—

Mr. Matthew Dubé: If the request was made initially, it seems to suggest some sort of political arrangement. I don't mean at your hands, since it clearly came from higher up.

Mr. Daniel Jean: There was no political arrangement. The conversation was between the clerk and I, in his office.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: When you liken the situation to a game of ping-pong and a discussion has clearly taken place, it smacks of a political arrangement.

Mr. Daniel Jean: No. We were watching the political game of ping-pong, if you will. We said it had to stop, for the sake of the public institutions concerned. That's when he said he was going to give the Leader of the Opposition a classified briefing, which he did. Once the opposition leader agreed to the briefing, I immediately sent a letter to Mr. McKay, who was about to board a plane.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I don't have much time left, but I'd like to discuss the public relations dimension or, rather, the matter of public accountability.

Why not take the least painful route and prove that everything was copacetic? You gave a presentation, but why not do so initially? It obviously wasn't you who made the decision, but as soon as you found out the committee wanted to meet with you, you seemed more than willing to appear.

• (1235)

[English]

The Chair: Unfortunately, Mr. Jean, you're going to have to work that answer into another question.

Mr. Bittle, welcome to the committee. Go ahead for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Monsieur Jean, thank you so much for being here today. I was wondering if you could expand on the answer, on what you said in regard to doing not-for-attribution briefings under the previous government.

Mr. Daniel Jean: Under the previous government...?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Under the previous government, is that something that—

Mr. Daniel Jean: I don't think I said that, but I certainly can talk about background briefings without attribution.

I think what you meant is that I said in my career I've always—

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I think the honourable member should clarify that Mr. Jean, in the previous government, was not the national security adviser. Is the member suggesting he gave background briefings as national security adviser in the last government, or is he suggesting he did that in another role?

Mr. Chris Bittle: I didn't suggest anything or any role. That is debate. Clearly we can look up on the witness's Wikipedia page his roles in the previous government.

I didn't suggest that, but Monsieur Jean, if you'd be willing to expand on that—

The Chair: Let's confine ourselves to his role in this government.

Mr. Daniel Jean: Just to be clear, what I've actually said is that it is my personal practice when I offer, whether live briefings or background briefings, to always consult with the political side. I've

always done that. Not all officials do that. Also, because you see a lot of confusion in the media, there's a difference between a background briefing that is authorized, where you're bringing facts and information, versus what you sometimes see when officials are talking but are actually releasing information that they should not be releasing, like a cabinet confidence.

Mr. Chris Bittle: You mentioned in your testimony that there is more information behind this, that there is classified information. You also mentioned that there is a classified briefing that has been offered to the leader of the official opposition. To the best of your knowledge, has he accepted or scheduled that briefing?

Mr. Daniel Jean: My understanding is that he has accepted and it has not yet been scheduled. As you probably know, what's happened since that time as well is that the national security committee of parliamentarians has announced that they will do a review of the events and will look at all of these issues, and we welcome it.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Sorry, just for the timeline's sake, at what point was Mr. Scheer offered that briefing, as far as you know?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I am going from memory.

The first offer—and this is where there was confusion—was an email to his chief of staff, and I think this was during the filibuster. Then when there was confusion as to whether or not this had been received, I think the following week there was an exchange of correspondence between the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Scheer is a member of the Privy Council, and he has access to classified information that we, as members of the committee, are not entitled to. In your experience in this or other roles, have you come across another member of the Privy Council who has refused to accept the full story or receive a full classified briefing when given the opportunity to do so?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I'm not going to comment on that because I wouldn't have the references. I'm not going to speculate.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Okay.

Mr. Daniel Jean: I can tell you that in the context of the Afghan detainees, there were a number of members of the opposition, as you remember, who were given the proper classification to be able to review a lot of documents. That is the precedent that we have had in recent years.

Mr. Chris Bittle: You've worked—and I will confine it—as a senior civil servant under different prime ministers. From my point of view it's been unnerving to see the opposition question the motives behind the briefing. Have you witnessed anything like that in your career, questioning the motivation of a civil servant, either to you or to others?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I would prefer not to comment on that, because I don't think it would be appropriate for a public servant.

I would say, however, is that the reason I think that for the last several weeks...and we have to remember that in the last six weeks there have been four weeks of breaks. There have been 13 sitting days in the last month and a half.

Part of the reason we've been having this issue is that I gave the background briefing, and all the stories were there. The word "diversion" doesn't appear once. The word "competency" appears once. John Ivison is saying that's not what he said. There was a narrative, after the trip, that developed that somehow I was either being used as a human shield or that somehow I had crossed my public service values to go and do this.

I think I've been very clear this morning that for a public servant, it is absolutely right for Canadians and media to ask tough questions to the Prime Minister, tough questions to the MP who was the source of the invitation, tough questions to all of us, and also to staff in the PMO who were involved in the whole reception preparation. In the same way, I think Canadians have the right to know when there are people who are trying to create a false narrative using three respected public institutions.

● (1240)

Mr. Chris Bittle: With respect to fabricating a false narrative, do you believe that's continuing? I saw a story that I believe was in the Huffington Post with respect to a meeting being cancelled with, I believe, the external affairs minister of India, and such a meeting was never in discussion. There was no movement towards that. It was an article retweeted by the Leader of the Opposition. Is that fabrication of narrative continuing?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I could not comment on that.

The only thing I know is that we were not aware of such a meeting. They've agreed there would be regular foreign policy ministerial meetings. We were not aware that there was such a meeting scheduled, that such a decision had been made. The Indian high commissioner has confirmed that this is the case.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Okay.

I believe my time is winding down. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bittle.

Just before I turn it over to Mr. O'Toole, you talked about a filibuster. Would you describe what you mean by "filibuster"?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I'm not an expert in parliamentary practice, but I mean the two days when you went through a number of votes, including the vote on having me appear. If I've used the wrong term, I apologize. I have never worked on the Hill.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Mr. O'Toole, you have five minutes, please.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Jean.

Leaving aside for a moment the issue of inaccurate information, which is the bulk of your brief, my first two questions are simple and I'd like yes-or-no answers.

If a Liberal MP had refused to invite Jaspal Atwal to the Prime Minister's events in India, there would be no scandal. Is that fair to say?

Mr. Daniel Jean: You're correct, sir.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Second, the Prime Minister's Office was in possession of this list of people invited by MPs. Leaving aside the

issue of whether that would be vetted, had the PMO taken names off this list, there would be no scandal. Is that correct?

Mr. Daniel Jean: That's correct.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: This is a Liberal scandal, and your insertion into it comes as a result of your concern for inaccurate information. Let me refer you to the Prime Minister's comments on February 22, when he confirmed that he believed Liberal MP Randeep Sarai's version of the events. The Prime Minister said, "The member of Parliament who included this individual has, and will, assume full responsibility for his actions." Within a day of that, you began your briefings with the media.

On February 27, the Prime Minister offered another explanation for Mr. Atwal's attendance, relying on your background information, Mr. Jean. Which version of the Prime Minister's statement is correct, that it was the Liberal MP Randeep Sarai or possibly a conspiracy?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I'm going to go back to Mr. Dubé's question on synergy. It makes it easier to answer your question.

Before I did the background briefing, I spoke to my right arm, who was in Delhi, and I explained what we were going to do. I can tell you the—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Let me stop you there, Mr. Jean, because you said you did your briefing because of inaccurate information. What Global News source suggested there was a rogue Indian government conspiracy to bring Mr. Atwal? I'd not seen that anywhere until your briefing started. What inaccurate information related to Mr. Atwal, apart from just some Indian paper saying he was on an official delegation or not...? You were the first person to suggest this rogue element theory, sir.

Mr. Daniel Jean: To be very clear, what I told the media in the background briefing was that there was what seemed to be orchestrated misinformation. They asked me, and I went out of my way to say very clearly that this was not the Government of India. They asked who it was. I said that they were either private citizens or people from the government who are doing it and are not blessed. That's the clarity on that question.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Let me refer to Mr. Akin's account of your briefing with him:

To answer those questions, the PMO media relations team put us in touch, "on background," with this senior government official. That official...used the opportunity to advance the theory that Atwal's presence at these receptions in India may have been engineered by the Indian government or "factions" within [it]...

The same thing came in a CBC story. It led the story, sir.

Could you table with this committee any inaccurate report in any media source that suggested the rogue element theory before you did? I don't see it in your report today.

● (1245)

Mr. Daniel Jean: Mr. O'Toole, first of all, Mr. Akin was not on the list of journalists I briefed on background on February 22—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Who chose the journalists, sir? Was it you or the Prime Minister's Office?

Mr. Daniel Jean: Can I just finish answering your question? The journalists who were briefed on background on February 22 in the afternoon and in the evening, and on February 23 in the morning, were the ones who were accompanying the Prime Minister. The choice was made by the PMO. That's not something that is necessarily unusual. There was a broad variety.

Mr. Akin was not on this initial list. The reason I spoke to Mr. Akin is that, on February 24, he wanted to bring me on record. I first called Madame Connolly and I asked her, as a Global colleague, if she would ask him to maintain their commitment that it would not go on the record. I did not want to go on record because—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Out of issues of time—

Mr. Daniel Jean: I'm just saying that Mr. Akin did not receive the full background briefing.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: In response to one of the questions, you used the term “we”. You said, “we” didn't get back to the *Vancouver Sun*. Is that the national security adviser or the Prime Minister's media team, sir?

Mr. Daniel Jean: No, what I meant by “we”—

Hon. Erin O'Toole: At times your presentation sounds much like someone.... Correcting inaccurate information that's out there about the Prime Minister should be done by the Prime Minister's Office, not by the national security adviser.

Mr. Daniel Jean: I don't think there would have been much credibility for a political staffer to go and explain that people were using the names of three respected public institutions in an inappropriate way to try to create a narrative that was totally false. That's the rationale. I think I've explained it before.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. O'Toole and Mr. Jean. We'll have to leave it there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Picard, you have five minutes. Go ahead.

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I'll be splitting my time with my colleague Peter Fragiskatos.

Mr. Jean, thank you for the information you've given us today. I have a question for you.

To be a politician is to be misquoted from time to time and to draw criticism and negative comments. I'm going to engage in a bit of speculation, if you'll indulge me. My hunch is that, at the many functions and events attended by a member of the government, some of the participants present may have a more questionable past than others, unbeknownst to the government member.

In light of the fact that being widely criticized comes with the territory as a politician, what prompted you to take action under the circumstances, other than your admirable loyalty to the public institutions involved? Why did you decide to set the record straight in this specific instance?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I have three points in response to that.

Two of the positions I've held at the Privy Council Office have involved crisis management, cabinet secretary for operations and

national security advisor. I have also worked in positions abroad. In Haiti, for instance, I was constantly managing crises during two coups d'état.

During a crisis, it's important to establish the facts as soon as possible, to prevent the spread of misinformation. It's also important to answer technical questions. Furthermore, when misinformation starts circulating, as it did in this instance, the ability to set the record straight is essential.

Over the past two years, we've seen the emergence of what is known as information warfare all over the world. You start with something that is true and add elements that are completely false in an effort to embellish the facts. Like every intelligence and security community around the world, we are examining the issue to figure out how to prevent and combat this type of warfare.

Our analysis clearly shows that, when the information is available ahead of time, it's very easy to call on the media, and that is evident from our interview with Mr. Akin. The analysis also shows that, whenever that step is taken before the situation has played out, the person dealing with the media has to field very tough questions, such as those I'm being asked today.

Afterwards, people all of a sudden realize that that person may have been right. It happened to a predecessor of mine a few years ago. As I told him some weeks back, the outcome brought him vindication.

● (1250)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos, you have about a minute and a half.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Jean, for your many years of public service and for being here today.

Throughout this debate, the argument, the idea, the narrative of foreign interference has appeared. I want to ask you, as national security adviser, a general question on foreign interference—how you feel about it, what it means, how you define it, and the extent to which it poses a threat to Canadian national security interests. Again, please respond in general terms.

Mr. Daniel Jean: In general terms, we're doing a lot of work, as I said. We're doing a lot of work to support the Minister of Democratic Institutions, and we're also doing a lot of work to support the Minister of Public Safety. There is, of course, foreign interference when you are in a situation like an election, but you also have foreign interference in between elections. We are basically trying to understand how this is done.

You had a good example in Canada. It is public, so I can talk about it. It was actually on international organizations. It was on WADA, the World Anti-Doping Agency. Basically, there was an attack by Russian actors whereby they acquired the medical files of athletes who had won Olympic medals, for example, that gymnast who won so many gold medals. They took the fact that these people had medical exemptions—some Canadian athletes did too—and they started to say.... They didn't talk about why they had these medical exemptions. Of course to get a medical exemption to take medication, if you're an Olympic athlete, the threshold is very high. But they didn't put out that part. They just put out the part about the medical exemption, and they said, "You say we're cheating; you're cheating, too".

I think it's very important to have the ability to understand what is fact and what is reality, and when you see that things are not true, to be able to respond in an agile way. I'm really happy that the media are doing more and more of that.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Motz, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Jean, for being here today.

Would it be fair to say that having a national security adviser brief the media is unusual in a circumstance like this, yes or no?

Mr. Daniel Jean: Not necessarily, no. I think that when you have a situation like that, in the heart of a crisis, the national security adviser is right in the centre of it. He's the one who has all the information. Otherwise, I would have had to bring in the CSIS people, the RCMP people, the GAC people. That would have been really complicated.

Mr. Glen Motz: What's interesting is that your predecessor, Mr. Fadden, said on the weekend that he would be the most surprised person in Canada if you alone actually decided to do the briefing. I guess, after hearing you today, he is the most surprised person in Canada.

Mr. Daniel Jean: In all fairness—

Mr. Glen Motz: Do you regret raising the rogue Indian conspiracy theory?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I have a lot of respect for Mr. Fadden. I was actually his right arm when he was the deputy minister at immigration, and—

Mr. Glen Motz: Right. The question is—

Mr. Daniel Jean: —and I'd like to say that it's very difficult to command when you don't have facts in front of you. Now there will be some facts.

Mr. Glen Motz: Again, I ask the question. Do you regret raising the conspiracy theory of rogue Indian elements?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I never raised a conspiracy theory, as I said before. What I said is that there were coordinated efforts to try to misinform, and I said that these were either private people—it was definitely not the Government of India—or if there were people from India, they were acting in a rogue way. That's what I said.

●(1255)

Mr. Glen Motz: Then I heard the Prime Minister, on February 27, in the House of Commons, advancing and suggesting that there were rogue elements within the Indian government, to suggest that.... Who knows what his motivation was to say that, but to say that in the House, he obviously believed there were rogue elements of the Indian government whose motivation was to embarrass the government.

I'm curious to know whether you were rolled out in this circumstance to try to do damage control for the PMO and the Prime Minister.

Mr. Daniel Jean: Sir, at the stage where I am in my career, I don't think I would be trying to do something like that. Second, the easy thing would have been to stay away from it, and of course, Canadians would have had a lot more misinformation implicating public institutions that are respected.

I chose to do the right thing, sir, and throughout my career, I've always done the right thing.

Mr. Glen Motz: I believe you, and based on your record, I would certainly applaud your stellar career.

Now, some time between the 22nd and the 27th, this theory of the conspiracy came forward. Did you brief the PMO or the PM himself on this possibility that there were rogue elements within the Indian government?

Mr. Daniel Jean: First of all, we're not going to discuss classified information here, but what I can say is that, throughout the incident, the Prime Minister was being briefed on both unclassified and classified information.

Mr. Glen Motz: When, then, in this whole series of events, did you advance that there was some fake news out there, as you called it, some false information, some misinformation, and that you wanted to counter that false information? When did you advance that you were going to step forward and set the record straight?

Mr. Daniel Jean: You understand, of course, sir, that the Prime Minister was in India and I was in Ottawa, right?

Mr. Glen Motz: Yes.

Mr. Daniel Jean: I was in India the week before doing hard work for our relationship with India.

That evening, when I proposed to make the background briefing—for the three reasons that I've said—I did speak, as I always do, with officials in the PCO. I spoke to people in the PMO, and I called an official, my most senior official accompanying the Prime Minister. He had already received both the classified and the unclassified information. I explained what I was going to do in terms of the background briefing. So the Prime Minister would have been briefed.

Mr. Glen Motz: Concerning your wish to appear before the committee today, what were your thoughts when that was being stymied by the government?

Mr. Daniel Jean: It's not really for me to judge, sir. As a public servant, as an official, I do not engage in parliamentary processes, tactics. There was a valid reason, and I can certainly appreciate it, and that's why I think it's going to be fantastic that we have a national security committee of parliamentarians, because they wanted the Leader of the Opposition to be able to see what we had in the classified information and then be able to see what we provided to the media.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

The final five minutes go to Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

It's a good segue into my next question, actually.

Mr. Jean, you mentioned that Mr. Scheer had a right to classified briefings, and you mentioned our national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians. This committee actually studied the legislation to form that. That committee has access to confidential briefings, and it sounds as if there would be a lot more in order to put the whole situation in context, that really a classified briefing would give you all of the information.

We appreciate your giving us the unclassified part here today, but I understand you made the offer to Mr. Scheer almost a month ago. You said it was around March 22, and so far he hasn't found time in his schedule. I know he initially refused the briefing, but he has not had time to have that briefing yet.

Just late last week he was sharing fabricated stories on his Twitter feed about meetings and, as it turns out, the story wasn't even true. Both the Indian government and the minister involved on the Indian side have both said, no, there was never a meeting that was cancelled.

I am just wondering. Are you still willing to give the Leader of the Opposition that classified briefing, which obviously would put things into context for him, so perhaps he wouldn't be sharing fabricated stories in social media?

The Chair: I want to caution all members about talking about "fabricated stories" by a colleague. We'll just go with "stories".

Mr. Daniel Jean: In fairness to the Leader of the Opposition, I would say that he took the position that he wanted the unclassified before, and in fairness to the opposition, I would also say that you are back today from a two-week break. As the chair knows, I made the offer to do the briefing and when he called me, after receiving the letter, asking if it needed to be done at that time, I said no, that I thought members of Parliament deserved their break. In fairness, this is how it was done.

Now, the offer is there. He wanted the unclassified to take place. The offer is still there, and that will be with other officials of the

committee on security and intelligence, who have the same assessment that I have on the fact that there were what we perceived to be coordinated efforts to misinform Canadians.

• (1300)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Given the information you have provided to us, it seems to me that the security agencies, CSIS, the RCMP, and the other agencies, actually did their jobs really well, as they so often do.

Would you say that's a fair statement?

Mr. Daniel Jean: I have the privilege, honourable member, to coordinate an incredible group of people, from security and intelligence, to international, to defence. I have these people around my table every Wednesday, and the work they did over that 48 hours, when you look at the sequence of events, to be able to confirm the information, relay it to Delhi, debunk all the false information that was going through.... We woke up the RCMP at midnight on the 21st because some people were trying to fabricate a story that was not true.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I would agree with you. All of us, regardless of party, have a great deal of respect for those agencies and the work they do, and I want to thank you for coordinating that.

There seems to be a lot of terminology that's used that isn't quite right. We keep hearing "rogue Indian conspiracy theory". I just want to reiterate that you've never called it that. You've called it "coordinated efforts". Is that not right?

Mr. Daniel Jean: What I have said is that there were people who were trying to make a faux pas, like something that should not have happened, and tough questions should be asked. They were trying to make that faux pas a lot bigger by fabricating false stories, and my intervention was to debunk that.

On conspiracy, as I said, the word "conspiracy" does not appear in all the stories by the media that I briefed, except for the John Ivison story, which asked why they were saying this, because I never said that.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Right, but we heard that word again today, and I just want to be clear that this is not something you have ever put out there.

Mr. Daniel Jean: That's correct.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

Thank you, Mr. Jean, on behalf of the committee, for appearing here. Indeed, thank you for your years of service to the community.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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