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Chair: The Honourable Geoff Regan



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• (1835)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 18 of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, September 23, 2020, the committee is meeting on its study of Canada-China relations.

[Translation]

This is a hybrid meeting, pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on January 25, 2021.

[English]

Just before we get to our witnesses, may I suggest that we set aside the last 15 minutes of today's meeting to discuss the subcommittee report and the work plan regarding the national security dimensions of the Canada-China relations? Does that sound okay?

I'd now like to welcome the Honourable Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, as well as Rob Stewart, deputy minister; Brenda Lucki, commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; John Ossowski, president of the Canada Border Services Agency; David Vigneault, director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service; and Shelly Bruce, chief of the Communications Security Establishment.

Please forgive me if I have mispronounced anyone's name.

[Translation]

Thank you all for being here this evening.

[English]

Minister, please proceed with your opening remarks.

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for your kind invitation to join you here today.

I want to begin by thanking this committee for the excellent work it has been doing since it was created a year ago. We have, of course, been following very closely the work of this committee, and it has been, I think, very helpful in shedding light on the vast multitude of issues involving our relationship with China.

As the chair indicated, I am ably joined today by senior officials from within my department, and also by Ms. Shelly Bruce from the Communications Security Establishment, who I hope will be able to answer any particular questions you may have about the operations of their agencies.

As you know, Canada is home to a very large Chinese Canadian community in every part of the country, and certainly in my city. Chinese people represent a very significant and very important part of the Canadian fabric. We also recognize, of course, that China is a significant actor on global issues of importance to Canada and that it offers some economic opportunities for Canadian businesses.

I want to be very clear that none of my remarks today are intended to be directed towards Chinese Canadian citizens. In fact, I'd like to highlight the number of disturbing and very concerning reports that we've heard from across the country regarding the rise in racist and discriminatory actions directed towards people of Asian origin for no reason other than their ethnicity. This, I think every member of this committee and our government will agree, is abhorrent and wrong. It is unacceptable and it must be denounced in the strongest possible terms.

It is also important that we be very careful with the words we use in this discussion. We are talking about Canada's relationship with the government of China. When it fails to uphold its international obligations, we need, certainly, to be forceful in our response but to be clear that we are talking about the government of China.

No one, Mr. Chair, has forgotten that the Chinese government continues to arbitrarily detain Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. Earlier this week, in his meeting with the Prime Minister, U.S. President Joe Biden expressed his government's support for the two Michaels and committed to working together with us for their release.

We know as well that foreign interference in Canada has become a sad reality for many people. In December, in a letter that I addressed to all MPs here and in the House, which was subsequently tabled in the House of Commons, I took what I think was an important step by publicly outlining the threats related to foreign interference and the critical work of the security and intelligence community in Canada.

This follows steps the Prime Minister took in permitting unclassified, publicly released versions of the NSICOP report to, for the very first time, specifically name countries that are particularly active in Canada, such as the government of China. As an independent review body with a broad mandate, this committee plays a very significant role in national security. Its members include both senators and members of Parliament, all of whom hold top-secret security clearances, which enables them to receive classified briefings and materials related to the conduct of the committee's work.

We will continue, Mr. Chair, to raise awareness so that Canadians, businesses and academics have the information and the tools they need to support themselves while our agencies collect information to support investigations. This is because foreign interference activities of any kind undermine our values and democratic institutions. They threaten our sovereignty, our economic prosperity, and the safety and interests of Canadians. They are unacceptable and they will not be tolerated.

We are actively and carefully monitoring the situation, including identifying new ways in which foreign interference may threaten our country. A number of organizations in my portfolio—CSIS, the RCMP and Public Safety Canada in particular—are involved in work to address foreign interference in all of the forms in which it manifests itself in Canada and around the world. Both CSIS and the RCMP apply the full measure of their mandates in investigating potential risks to Canadian interests, responding to threats, and keeping Canadians safe from harm and intimidation.

CSIS and the RCMP also have reporting mechanisms in place for anyone who would like to report a threat to national security, including foreign interference.

I want to assure the members of this committee and all Canadians that our national security and intelligence agencies and our law enforcement agencies remain ever vigilant in ensuring the interests of Canadians. We are prepared to act, and we are acting against threats to Canadian interests in this country from hostile activities of state actors. We will continue to work closely with our partners domestically and internationally, including the Five Eyes and other allies, on foreign interference.

While foreign interference is top of mind for my portfolio, it is by no means the only issue on the plate.

It's no secret that China is one of the main source countries of fentanyl, as well as the precursor chemicals used to make this highly potent and deadly synthetic opioid. Illegal fentanyl and fentanyl-like drugs are being mixed in with and contaminating other drugs. This continues to be a major driving factor in the overdose crisis that has tragically cut so many lives short in Canada.

CBSA uses intelligence as well as a variety of detection tools, techniques and the latest in scientific technology to prevent cross-border smuggling of illicit drugs, including toxic substances like fentanyl. Over the past four years, the CBSA has made 335 seizures, totalling over 42.2 kg. In 129 of the seizures, China was listed as the source country of those drugs.

For its part, the RCMP has established an organized crime joint operation centre with CBSA and Canada Post to track, identify and take appropriate enforcement action against the importation of

these illicit opioids. In 2017, we passed legislation to permit our officers, with reasonable grounds, to search international mail weighing under 30 kg. The RCMP are also working with international enforcement partners to investigate and to disrupt the illegal importation of precursor chemicals and illicit drugs to Canada. With respect to China, the RCMP, the CBSA and their counterparts have all agreed to collaborate to target fentanyl trafficking.

Let me now, if I may, briefly turn to another issue of interest to this committee. I know that 5G technology has come up in your hearings and that the Government of Canada is certainly under no illusions about the security challenges of that decision—

• (1840)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Respectfully, the minister is over seven minutes, and I do want to make sure we have the time we need for questions. I would be happy if there is unanimous consent to allow the minister to continue in the opening statement, provided that he is prepared to commit to staying through two full rounds of questions.

Otherwise, if he really has to limit his time to an hour, then we need to stop the opening statement and proceed to questions.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I don't think that anything out of the ordinary has happened. We've heard from witnesses before who have taken roughly the same amount of time without—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No, there is a five-minute time limit set.

The Chair: Order. One point of order at a time, Mr. Genuis, please.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It's the chair's prerogative, of course, as to the length of time given to witnesses to make opening statements. I'd leave it to you, Chair, to make a determination, but I know that there have been witnesses in the past who have spoken for longer than five minutes, and my Conservative colleague has never intervened.

The Chair: Thank you, both.

I would ask the minister, then, to come to his conclusion.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As I was saying, Canada already has a high level of cybersecurity for our 3G and 4G networks, thanks in large part to the government's security review program for Canadian telecommunication networks, which is run by the Communications Security Establishment as represented by its director here today.

Mr. Chair, I'll conclude my remarks in the interests of the committee's time. I thank you for the opportunity to be here before you. I look forward to your questions, and we'll do our best to answer them fulsomely.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

We will now begin our first round.

Mr. Paul-Hus, go ahead for six minutes.

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

Good afternoon, Minister and senior officials. I am happy to see you again.

I would obviously like to talk about China. You know that China has a plan for the 21st century. There is talk of economic, technological and military dominance. Our allies also have plans and laws, but Canada does not.

You voted against the motion moved by Mr. Chong asking the government to come up with a robust plan to combat China's interference in Canada.

Considering the urgency of the situation, why did you vote against the motion?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much.

To be very clear, we see foreign interference from any country as contrary to Canadian interests. We are taking very strong action in regard to it.

I'd remind the member of the document that I sent him back in December, which clearly outlined the various things that our government is undertaking to prevent and to mitigate the impacts of foreign interference. I think we've been very clear in calling it out as unacceptable in the actions that were taken.

I'm joined by the director of CSIS, who also, I think, has made very clear the position of the agency with respect to foreign interference from any country and the steps that are being taken to countermand it.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

You say you were clear, but you did not mention Huawei in your document from December. You started talking about this a bit in your remarks, but you had to stop.

We are waiting for a response on Huawei, but we have still not received it. This has been dragging on for two years. You started talking about 3G or 4G networks. We are specifically talking about the 5G network, knowing that the technology is different.

Can we have a firm and clear decision now? Our motion requested a 30-day time frame, but we have gone well beyond that.

• (1845)

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: To be very clear, our government will ensure that Canadian networks are kept safe and secure. We will never compromise the security of Canadian interests on something as important as 5G. Obviously, I won't be talking about a specific company. Our work is not relevant to a specific company; rather, it is to ensure that we take the steps necessary to protect all Canadian interests with respect to the decisions around 5G.

I want to be really clear. We have been unequivocal, and been very clear, that [Inaudible—Editor] certain.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: It's not clear, Mr. Chair.

You say that 5G is important, but you don't want to talk about a specific company. However, we know full well that Huawei is problematic; that's been confirmed by all of our Five Eyes partners. Reports from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service also confirm this. Bell and TELUS have made a decision to no longer do business with Huawei.

Why is Canada waiting to confirm that the government will ban Huawei?

I would like to ask a second question. The federal government recently contributed \$4.8 million in public funding to a partnership between universities and Huawei. How could you let that happen?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Notwithstanding that we do provide support for research in our universities, just to be very clear, we work very collaboratively with our Five Eyes partners. I meet with them and discuss, on a regular basis, the importance of maintaining the integrity and security of our 5G networks going forward. We are very closely aligned to the interests. We will act in Canada's and Canadians' interests. We have never and will never compromise the security of Canadian interests or our networks.

That work is ongoing. There is important work taking place. Our officials are fully engaged in it.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Minister, you know that Huawei is a problem. We all know that it's a problem. That has been confirmed. Huawei even developed facial recognition technology to identify Uighurs. That company is helping the Chinese communist regime find Uighurs, who are then sent to detention camps. It makes no sense.

How can Canadian universities be led to believe it's a good thing to do business with Huawei when we know full well that their intentions are negative when it comes to Canada?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: I want to assure you, my friend, that at all times I and our national security intelligence agencies look out for the specific and very important concerns and considerations of Canadians' security. We will not compromise it. We work very closely with the academic community, with industry and with our Five Eyes partners. We will always be vigilant and protective of Canadian interests.

With respect, I might suggest to you that although I understand your focus on a particular company, the issue is broader than that. We are making sure we do all of the things necessary to protect Canadian interests.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: We are talking about a specific business because Huawei is a problem for Canada and for our Five Eyes partners. We are certainly not talking about Ericsson, as we know we can trust it. We are not talking about other businesses; we are talking about Huawei. Yet you are still unable to confirm that the Government of Canada will ban Huawei from our territory.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: What I can confirm with you unequivocally is that we will always take the steps necessary to protect the integrity and security of our national interests, including our networks. We remain vigilant. That work is ongoing. We have never and will never allow the compromise of the integrity of those systems. We're doing the whole job.

I appreciate your focus on various companies, but quite frankly, all decisions with respect to 5G networks in this country have to ensure that Canadian security is maintained.

The Chair: Thank you. The time is up.

We'll go to Ms. Yip for six minutes.

Ms. Yip, go ahead, please.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Welcome to all the witnesses.

Thank you, Minister, for recognizing the rise in anti-Asian racism and that it won't be tolerated.

I would like to return to the letter you provided, Minister, to all 338 members of Parliament, outlining all the steps the Government of Canada is taking to address foreign interference. I have to say that I was surprised, considering that most of the work done by our national security agencies is really behind the scenes; maybe their public communications could be more prevalent.

In your opinion, while maintaining operational discretion, why is it important to communicate these issues publicly? How does this impact Canada-China relations with respect to national security?

• (1850)

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much, Ms. Yip.

I think the question is a very important one. I will tell you that our national security intelligence agencies and law enforcement—who are ably joining me here today—do extraordinary work. At the same time, I think it's equally important.... I've listened very care-

fully to the important work of this committee. This committee has raised a number of really important issues that I know are also of concern to Canadians, and certainly to our fellow parliamentarians, so I thought it was entirely appropriate and necessary, largely in response to issues and concerns that have been raised in this committee, to provide all of our colleagues, and through our colleagues to provide Canadians, with a deeper understanding of the threat environment that currently exists in this country and to explain to them some of the important work that our national security intelligence agencies and law enforcement agencies undertake on their behalf.

We try, we endeavour as always, to be as transparent and open as we can, although I'm sure this committee will recognize that the security...the intelligence information they gather, their investigative techniques, and so much of their work quite appropriately and necessarily can't be made public and shouldn't be made public as they undergo and carry on with the important work of keeping Canadians safe.

At the same time, I think Canadians need assurance that the government recognizes the threat environment, that we are taking appropriate and forceful action to respond to it, and that we will do everything required to protect Canadian interests. For those Canadians who may be subject to intimidation or inappropriate influence in Canadian society, we want them to know that we're here for them and that we're here to support them. If they need our help, we have the ability and the tools to respond appropriately.

That's why we were public and forthcoming about this. I think Canadians want to know that their government is looking out for their best interests, and through this letter and through all of you, I hoped to communicate that to them.

Ms. Jean Yip: With that in mind, there were many pro-Hong Kong protesters out in British Columbia. They have experienced threats and intimidation from Chinese officials. How can they lodge a complaint?

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much for that.

There are mechanisms, and I'm going to refer that question back over to our officials because they have set up those systems.

Let me also, if I may, take a moment, Ms. Yip, to point out that the activity of every country to influence other countries is pretty routine diplomatic activity. But when it crosses that line of trying to interfere with our democratic institutions, interfere with the lawful activities of our citizens, interfere with our elections, that's unacceptable and we need to stand forcefully to confront it, to refute it, and to mitigate it in every way possible.

I wonder if I might just quickly refer, Mr. Chair, to one of my officials to talk about the process of making that information known to authorities.

Mr. David Vigneault (Director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): I would just say that we have mechanisms to reach out to the communities ourselves, but we also have a 1-800 number where we are referring people to contact CSIS directly, anonymously, to be able to report the activities. We do so to protect the identity of the people reaching out to us. This is one way that exists.

I know that our colleagues at the RCMP also have similar tools, so maybe I can turn to the commissioner.

Commissioner Brenda Lucki (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you.

In any protest, of course, if people are getting intimidated, as soon as that's brought to our attention, there are full investigations. If people have broken any of the laws in the Criminal Code, we will pursue charges in those cases. There are ways to bring these complaints forward, both in person or anonymously through Crime Stoppers, for example.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you.

Should Canadians be wary of using social media that is owned by Chinese companies like WeChat or Weibo or TikTok?

• (1855)

Hon. Bill Blair: I would say yes, there is a legitimate concern that sometimes the information that's publicly available on those platforms can be used by the hostile activities of state actors, and some caution should be exercised.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): I would like to begin by saying hello to the witnesses and thanking them for joining us this evening.

Minister, in another time, we probably would have had an opportunity to come across each other in a federal-provincial conference of ministers of public safety, but that was obviously a different time, as I just said.

Thank you for joining us.

We are discussing extremely sensitive and extremely important topics today. I know that, since this meeting is public, you cannot communicate certain information to us. Perhaps you would want to confidentially send us answers to some of the questions you will be unable to answer orally today.

I would like to put three questions to you concerning the revelation that a Canadian visa application centre in Beijing was being managed by a Chinese company belonging to the Chinese municipal public security bureau.

My first question is very simple: how did we select that company?

My second question is the following: what guarantee do we have that the information gathered from people who use that visa application office—either passports or biometric data—will not be used by the government of the People's Republic of China?

My third question is: what measures must be taken so that the People's Republic of China would not exercise, through that visa application office, control over potential dissidents who would like to leave China?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: We have a number of parliamentary groups, like NSICOP and NSIRA, that are able to receive information from our national security intelligence services that is confidential in nature. However, I very much appreciate your comments about the challenge in a public forum of discussing sensitive matters of security.

Your question is a very important one. We've looked very carefully at this activity. I want to provide you and Canadians with assurances that information is always handled according to our privacy laws. No application or biometric collection data is stored at the visa application centre; all databases containing personal information must, by our rules, be located in Canada. There are also safeguards in place to ensure that personal information is collected, stored and transmitted securely using hard end-to-end encryption. The visa application centres provide only administrative support to IRCC applicants.

I want to assure you that we take the privacy of Canadians very seriously. We're aware of reports that previously an error led to a data breach, but it's important to note that this was through a different VFS client government, on a separate system. I want to assure you that we have our own system, which VFS operates with rigorous safeguards in place.

If there's any more detailed response to that, I would invite the director of the CSE to provide additional insight if she has it available.

Ms. Shelly Bruce (Chief, Communications Security Establishment): Minister, I do not. This is a service that has been provided by the IRCC. We are available to provide advice and guidance on how to protect systems, and that is available upon request.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you, Shelly. We always rely on your expertise. That's why I turned to you, but I appreciate very much that this isn't something you would be directly involved in.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: That's interesting, because the answer we just got was that we respond to requests we receive. So I will ask you the following question.

Has anyone used your services precisely to ensure that the information this Chinese company has collected at this visa application centre is secure? If not, what guarantee do we have that the information is being kept secure and not being shared with the Chinese government?

• (1900)

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: If I may respond to the question on behalf of Ms. Bruce, I have been assured that there are IT safeguards in place to ensure that all of the personal information collected, stored and transmitted on these systems is secure and uses encryption, that VFS only provides administrative support services to applicants, and that all visa-processing decision-making is done by Canadian IRCC officers and not by the company contracted to provide the IT support.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I have no reason not to take your word on it, Mr. Minister, but I find it telling, to say the least, that she said she had not necessarily been approached for advice about it. I must say I'm a little concerned about that.

I want to come back to the questions you didn't answer.

First, how did we come to grant the contract for this visa application centre to this Chinese company?

What led to—

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, excuse me, but your six minutes are up. I must give the floor to the next speaker.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Time really flies when you are in good company, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It does indeed.

[English]

We'll go to Mr. Harris for six minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I just want to follow up, briefly, on Mr. Bergeron's questions.

From what you're saying, Minister, it seems that all these protections were there. Which agency of the government pre-approved this arrangement to hire this company in Beijing? You told us that the full measure of the mandate of all these agencies is applied to protect Canadians. Which agency approved this arrangement that you're defending at the moment?

Hon. Bill Blair: What I'm defending is the work that IRCC does to protect that equipment. I have some difficulty, frankly, answering your question, Mr. Harris, about the origins of this contract. It was signed in 2008—before we were the government—so it's been in place for 12 years now. Its origin and those who actually authorized this contract predate me, my government and, frankly, my knowledge.

What I can tell you is that the procurement processes that were followed.... It is a service provided to IRCC. We follow the normal procurement processes, and I would assume—and I want to make sure it's clear that I'm only able to make an assumption—that those processes were in fact followed. It did take place 12 years ago.

Mr. Jack Harris: That's not much comfort, Chair, for me or for anyone listening, to say you have to assume it was done. It sounds as though you're satisfied that the contract is okay, that it should continue and that somebody has, obviously, informed you of this. Which agency of the government has informed you of this, or are you looking back to IRCC instead of to one of the people who are with us today?

Hon. Bill Blair: It is a system operated by the IRCC. They have advised that the information is, in every case, handled according to Canada's privacy laws. They've also assured us that no application or biometrically collected data is stored at the visa application centre, that all databases containing personal information are located in Canada, and that the information submitted—

Mr. Jack Harris: I've heard all of that. Are you saying that you're personally satisfied with it because they've told you it's okay, or has one of these specialist agencies, with all of the technical aspects and mandates to protect Canadians...and presumably people who might use a facility to get through to Canada to potentially, as has been suggested, do espionage work...that no agency of Canada has done that? We're just relying on what IRCC tells you. Am I right in concluding that?

Hon. Bill Blair: I don't know whether I was unclear. IRCC is actually an agency of Canada.

Mr. Jack Harris: I understand that, but they're not a security agency. They're looking—

Hon. Bill Blair: No, they're not, but they have an IT specialist department that provided assurances, as I said, that the information is in fact secure.

Mr. Jack Harris: Well—

• (1905)

Hon. Bill Blair: There's been no suggestion of espionage or any concern raised. It was only the fact that a Chinese official entity was involved in this company. We sought and received assurances from IRCC that, in fact, the data that was used in that system was secure.

Mr. Jack Harris: We've heard that several times. Is your government totally satisfied with this arrangement and with its continuing in perpetuity?

Hon. Bill Blair: Is that a question, Mr. Harris?

Mr. Jack Harris: Yes. Is that the case?

Hon. Bill Blair: I'm satisfied that IRCC has not identified any concerns. They have provided strong assurances that Canadian data and Canadian interests are well protected in the system they have in place.

Mr. Jack Harris: Minister, you raised another question, about fentanyl. Obviously, Canadians are very concerned about the huge number of opioid overdose deaths in this country, particularly in the last year; 75% of opioid deaths are attributed to fentanyl.

In 2012, the previous government laid off over a thousand Canada Border Services agents in some money-saving thing called DRAP. They haven't been replaced, and yet you say that there have been 335 seizures of fentanyl—42 kilograms of it—but we're still having these huge numbers of deaths associated with fentanyl.

Do you really have enough border security and ability to interdict the incoming fentanyl that's causing all these deaths?

Hon. Bill Blair: There are a couple of things to say in response, Mr. Harris. We know that many of the drugs and the precursor chemicals used in their manufacture are imported into this country and that the source of those is often Southeast Asia and quite often China. I've already indicated that.

We are doing a great deal of work. I have the president of CBSA also online. I can talk about the work we've been doing over the past five years to restore the staffing and budget cuts that were imposed by the previous government under the deficit reduction action plan that they put in place.

I can also talk to you, if we get more time or at another time, about the excellent work that's going on, including our conversations just this week with the United States about re-establishing the cross-border crime forum, which enables strong collaboration between Canada and its closest ally and partner, the United States, in dealing with these issues, particularly the importation of opioid drugs.

Mr. Jack Harris: It's been suggested that perhaps 150 or 160 border guards have been added, instead of the thousand who had been lost.

Hon. Bill Blair: If the chair allows us time, I would invite the president of CBSA to talk about some of the excellent work he's been doing to respond to that.

I'm getting the "time out" signal. I apologize for that. Mr. Harris, I'll happily follow up with you, together with the CBSA president, because the question is a good one.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Now we'll go to the second round.

Welcome to the committee, Mrs. Stubbs. You have five minutes.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Thanks, Chair. It's nice to see you. Hello, everyone.

Minister, the Chinese communist regime engages in cyber warfare against Canada and is harassing Canadian citizens. CSIS says it's "silencing dissent, pressuring political opponents and instilling a general fear of state power no matter where a person is". In October, the U.S. charged eight people for this operation, and in Novem-

ber the RCMP said they were aware of China's operations in Canada but had not laid any charges.

To date, can you tell us how many charges or arrests have been made in Canada in relation to Operation Fox Hunt?

Hon. Bill Blair: To give you an accurate response to that question, I'll invite both the commissioner of the RCMP and perhaps, most pertinently, the director of CSIS to respond.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I think they can address that later. I'd suggest it's something Canadians would really want you to know.

I have a question about this \$4.8-million partnership, tax dollars, between NSERC and Huawei, which you keep referring to as a company but which is of course an arm of China's communist regime.

The Prime Minister said that this partnership was based on "expert recommendations from...top security analysts", but of course Canada's own security analysts advise against allowing Communist Party entities to get Canadian intellectual research. In fact, researchers say that what China's communist regime is looking for is "help from Canada in artificial intelligence, biotechnology...quantum computing, all areas that can help their military".

Can you tell us who advised the Prime Minister that it's okay to partner with Huawei? Also, as the public safety minister, were you aware of this partnership that undermines Canada's public and national security? If not, why are decisions using public funds that affect public safety kept from you?

● (1910)

Hon. Bill Blair: I want to assure you that they're not, of course. The Government of Canada is well aware of attempts by foreign state actors, and in particular the People's Republic of China, to target cutting-edge Canadian research and development efforts. We track very carefully these allegations. There is a process whereby that intelligence is brought forward for review, and there are a number of remedies available to us in law.

I also want to point out that our departments are very actively engaging with universities, federal labs and private companies through the safeguarding science initiative, and we're working with Canadian research and proprietary information to ensure that it remains safe. We lead with the support and collaboration of 10 federal departments and agencies in this initiative. Public Safety has a leadership role, but it's a whole-of-government effort to protect Canadian interests and Canadian intellectual property.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Thanks.

On this issue, you'll know that in September, the U.S. expelled over a thousand "high-risk graduate students and research scholars" from the universities to counter "a wide-ranging and heavily resourced campaign to acquire sensitive United States technologies and intellectual property...to bolster the modernization and capability of its military".

In 2018, as you probably know, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute said that three Canadian universities made the top 10 for publishing papers co-authored by People's Liberation Army scientists.

Can you just tell us, then, since obviously this is urgent, how many foreign national students studying in Canada are linked to China's People's Liberation Army?

Hon. Bill Blair: As one might anticipate, I'm not going to answer specific questions about any intelligence matter, any investigation ongoing or complete, in this public forum.

I'll just provide you with assurances that my officials are here—

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: I'm not asking about investigations.

Hon. Bill Blair: —but I'm sure they'll be very careful about what is disclosed in this forum to you as well.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Oh, I'm sure. I'm quite confident that they would be careful.

I guess on that note, then, in general—not about any specific investigations—do you even know how many foreign students have been ejected from Canada for infiltration of educational research institutions and intellectual property theft?

Hon. Bill Blair: I don't have that information, but we'll certainly get it and collect it for you. I don't want to misrepresent anything in this committee, so we'll make sure we have accurate information in response.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Okay.

In 2017, there were 84 co-publications between Canadian and Chinese researchers with military technologies. Those are notable because they resulted in publications.

The former head of CSIS recommends that the government restrict foreign students from accessing certain whole areas of research in order to protect Canada's interests. As public safety minister, can you tell us exactly what is being done to protect highly sensitive areas of research in Canada from foreign infiltration and theft?

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes. For that answer, I would refer you to the 12-page document I sent to you and all other parliamentarians that outlines, in quite a lot of detail, all the work we are doing to mitigate the risk and concerns around foreign interference in our academic institutions, our industries and in every aspect of our society. I think it's very clearly and comprehensively articulated there, and I would point you to it—

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'm sorry for interrupting. Those five minutes are up.

Now we'll go on to Mr. Fragiskatos, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the officials for being here.

Minister, I have a question about the Xinjiang region of China and goods that have been produced through forced labour by the Uighur minority and by other minorities. What is Canada doing to ensure that such goods do not enter our country?

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Fragiskatos, thank you for the question. It's an important one.

Let me be very clear. We denounce in the strongest possible terms the human rights abuses that are taking place in Xinjiang and against the Uighur people. We have expressed that concern at a number of different international and domestic levels already. There are economic measures that are imposed with respect to goods produced where there have been human rights complaints.

To give you more specifics, if they're available, I'd invite the president of CBSA to talk about how those goods might be managed upon entering the country.

Mr. John Ossowski (President, Canada Border Services Agency): Thank you, Minister.

Certainly we're paying very close attention to this. As the committee might be aware, as a result of the signing of the Canada-U.S.-Mexico trade agreement last July, new rules came into force. The lead department on this one is Employment and Social Development Canada. They're currently doing their work to provide us with reports and that give guidance to my frontline officers to start targeting specific shipments that arrive that might be subject to these new regulations.

• (1915)

Hon. Bill Blair: Also, Peter, if I may add as well, I want to be clear that in Canadian law, all goods that are mined, manufactured or produced wholly or in part by forced labour are prohibited under law from entering Canada. CBSA prohibits such goods from entering Canada when there is sufficient evidence to do so. They may also be subject to a more in-depth secondary examination. CBSA uses a risk-management approach to determine which goods entering Canada require that examination and may be prohibited because they originated in an area where forced labour is being used.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much for that.

Minister, earlier you talked about foreign interference. You gave a number of examples of how foreign interference takes place, and you mentioned elections. Certainly, it is completely unacceptable, any time that it happens to any democracy, when foreign interference affects the stability of electoral systems.

How do you feel about the security of our election system in Canada? Are there threats to it from a foreign interference lens? What has the government done to guard against that as much as possible?

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you again, Peter, for a very important question.

First of all, let me be very clear. I believe the threats are real. We have seen more than ample evidence of the hostile activities of state actors—including the People's Republic of China—attempting to interfere inappropriately and unacceptably in Canadian interests, including in democratic processes in this country.

I want to assure you, although I can't speak of specific incidents or investigations, that our security intelligence services are very mindful of this risk and monitor each situation very carefully. There are also a number of steps that are being taken to mitigate those risks, but to be very clear, we know that the risk is real and we are acting to protect Canadians and Canadian interests from it.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you for that, Minister.

I think I only have about a minute left. I wanted to thank you for your opening statements with respect to the importance of ensuring the personal safety and security of Canadians of Chinese descent. We have seen, since the onset of the pandemic, a very significant increase in hate incidents targeting Canadians of Asian heritage, and specifically Chinese heritage. Minister, anything the government can continue to do to ensure their security is most appreciated.

We've unfortunately had some incidents unfold here in London, and I know that other communities have been affected too. As an MP from London, with a thriving Chinese community, one that has made an enormous contribution to our city, I hope the government continues to persist in efforts to ensure the security of Canadians of Chinese descent.

Thanks.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much.

Hate and intolerance have no place in our society. I'm from Toronto. We have a very large and vibrant Chinese community there as well. I was recently speaking to one of our Chinese citizens, who said that she called her sister on the weekend and urged her not to go out, because she was fearful.

No Canadian should ever be fearful of hatred or intolerance in this country. We all need to stand up against it, call it out and be very careful in our own language as well—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt.

Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron now has the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Bergeron, go ahead.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will try to move things along.

I'd like to come back to the questions I initiated. I would still like to know, how can we be sure that potential dissidents wanting to leave the People's Republic of China will not be in danger because they go through this visa application centre?

Mr. Minister, I must admit that the answers you have given us have done little to reassure me. Perhaps you cannot disclose some information, which I can understand, and perhaps you could simply say that what is troubling is the fact that it's a Chinese company. I

should like to remind you that under the Hong Kong national security law, all Chinese companies are required to help guarantee the People's Republic of China's national security.

For instance, Huawei is known to have shared African Union information when it was approached to work for that organization.

We also know that news came out recently of a data leak from Shenzhen Zhenhua Data Information Technology Co. There is cause for concern if we use a Chinese subcontractor to process the personal information of a certain number of people seeking to obtain a visa to come to Canada.

Please, Mr. Minister, can you reassure me?

• (1920)

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, sir, and let me provide you with two important assurances.

First of all, as I've said, information by our agencies is always handled according to Canada's privacy laws. No application or biometric collection is stored at that centre, and all databases containing personal information must be located in Canada.

I also want to provide you with the assurance that our officials closely monitor those processes to ensure that we are following our own rules and that Canada's stringent privacy standards are being met. This is carried out through inspections and audits to ensure that we are always in compliance with those rules. Those inspections and audits have been taking place. That is monitored by our officials to make sure that there has been no privacy breach of that sensitive data information in these systems.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: We now go to Mr. Harris.

Mr. Harris, you have two minutes and 30 seconds, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

Minister Blair, we have heard, as a committee, lots of evidence from individuals in Canada, mainly of Chinese descent, who have been subject to intimidation. They've tried to get some assistance, and they feel they're getting the runaround. They go to the local police, as you point out, and they are told they have to go to CSIS. They go to CSIS, and CSIS tells them to go to the local police or the RCMP, if they're the local police. There doesn't seem to be any sense that there is any single point of contact, which I think is what some of us talked about as being necessary.

In your letter to us in December, you talked about the RCMP's national security information network, with the 1-800 number. You talked about CSIS having a number or a web form application to report something, yet we were hearing constantly that people get the runaround back and forth. They don't get any satisfaction.

If these are national points of contact... Even last week, there was the case of a Saudi national—a convention refugee who had been in Canada for over a year—who disappeared. One of his friends, who was quite worried about him, approached your department and was told to call the local police. The local police don't have any method of dealing with these kinds of incidents or circumstances.

How is it that this confusion reigns? Is there a national point of contact that ensures that these details are clear? Why is your department sending people to the local police?

Hon. Bill Blair: To be very clear, Mr. Harris, if someone calls and they believe they are at risk and they're threatened, the advice I would give to every Canadian is to call the local police of jurisdiction. If you have an immediate fear for your safety, call 911. We also recognize that some of those situations are not emergent and people just need information and guidance on where to take their concern and their complaint, so the RCMP has established a 1-800 number. As well, CSIS plays a very significant role in following up and investigating these matters.

I will also tell you, Mr. Harris, that in some of the circumstances you described, the information and intelligence and the investigations that are taking place are sensitive, so we're not always able, as I'm sure you could understand, to share—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm very sorry to interrupt. We're at the conclusion of Mr. Harris's time.

We move to Mr. Chong for five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm just going to put my timer on here so that I don't go over.

Thank you, Minister Blair, for appearing in front of our committee.

As the first Canadian of Chinese descent elected to the House of Commons from Ontario, I know first-hand what it's like to be subject to anti-Asian discrimination, and I know all members in the House and on this committee agree with all of us that anti-Asian discrimination is unacceptable.

I don't want to focus on that. Right now, I'd like to focus on the national security and intellectual property risks as well as human rights issues concerning Huawei. CSIS has indicated that China presents a threat to Canada in 5G. It has indicated in the past that it's a threat to our national security and a threat with respect to the theft of intellectual property. There's now a new dimension whereby Huawei is presenting a threat, and that is a threat to our fundamental beliefs in human rights and in the dignity of all people. It's increasingly clear that Huawei is participating in a genocide in Xinjiang province in China. The China cables published by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists reveal that Huawei is

deeply involved in rolling out technology in Xinjiang that is being used to suppress the Uighur people and perpetuate the genocide.

In addition, just two months ago, The Washington Post reported that Huawei is testing AI software that can instantly—within a millisecond—recognize Uighur minorities and alert police for their arrest. The Washington Post obtained an internal Huawei document that outlined how Huawei was working in 2018, just three years ago, with a facial recognition firm to test artificial intelligence camera systems that would instantaneously scan faces in a crowd and, using the leading cutting-edge AI out there, determine each person's sex and ethnicity. If the system detected the face of a Uighur Muslim minority, it would trigger a “Uighur alarm” and the AI system would determine whether to flag that individual for arrest by Chinese police authorities as part of their brutal crackdown. In addition, official documents last year in The New York Times revealed that in one city in China alone, that surveillance system had scanned Uighur faces half a million times in one month.

Just two months ago, as a result of these revelations, a Huawei executive, Tommy Zwicky, vice-president of communications for the company's Denmark office, abruptly resigned because of what Huawei is doing to help facilitate this genocide in Xinjiang province. He said he resigned because it became clear to him the company was failing to take seriously matters of public surveillance and human rights in Xinjiang.

My question is, are you aware of the role that Huawei is playing in this genocide in Xinjiang?

• (1925)

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chong, for a very important question.

Let me be very clear at the outset: The allegations that you've just outlined in your question are unacceptable. They are abhorrent. They are clear human rights violations, and I join you in condemning them in the strongest possible terms. That is completely unacceptable. I am not personally aware of any evidence of the allegations you made, but certainly, my officials here....

I will tell you, though, that it can be very challenging in this forum to discuss any ongoing matter of intelligence or investigation, but with evidence—

Hon. Michael Chong: I have only a minute left.

Hon. Bill Blair: I'll stop.

Hon. Michael Chong: Minister, maybe I'll just ask one quick question. How can the Government of Canada partner, through the granting councils, with a \$4.8-million grant to a company that is using people like the Uighur people as human guinea pigs? Why has the cabinet not issued a directive to the granting councils regarding Huawei to prevent them from partnering with a company with that kind of human rights record?

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you.

I'll try to respond. Listen, we're aware, certainly, of the attempts by foreign state actors, particularly from the PRC, to target cutting-edge Canadian research. We know that there have been a number of instances in which they have attempted to do that. We have taken some very strong steps to protect those institutions and organizations from such interference. With respect, where any organization, government or—

The Chair: Minister, I have to interrupt. I'm sorry about that. Mr. Chong's time is up.

We're now on to Ms. Zann for five minutes.

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Thank you very much

Thank you very much, Minister Blair, for your opening remarks.

I would like to ask you about economic threats to Canada. Recently, I noticed that Unifor's national president, Jerry Dias, made a statement about the Conservative leader saying, "I really love his tough on China talk. It's just such nonsense, because he was the guy that did the deal with China that really gave them the right to sue Canada."

Minister, can you please provide us with some information about what our government is now doing under the Investment Canada Act to guard against investments that could undermine our national security?

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much for what I think is a very important question.

Let me be fair for a moment. I think Canada's relationship with China is different today than it was in 2014. I think we've learned, and the activities of the Chinese government have evolved and modified significantly over time. We've stayed contemporary with that increasing threat, and I can tell you that our national security intelligence agencies, law enforcement...the government uses the Investment Canada Act quite aggressively and appropriately to protect Canadian interests.

Our decisions are based on evidence, data and a careful analysis. We follow the advice of our experts very carefully—national security intelligence agencies that keep us informed about the true nature of risk. We look at ways in which those risks can be mitigated and, where they cannot be mitigated, they are not allowed to proceed.

We have taken, I think, a very aggressive stance in doing what is right to protect Canadian interests, and it is a very well-informed and evolving assessment of the risk environment that continues to exist in this country.

• (1930)

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you. That's good to know, because I know a lot of my constituents are concerned about that.

In your opening statement, you mentioned opioids and fentanyl getting into Canada from China. As we know, this is very serious. It's an epidemic, in a sense—another epidemic in our country. I'm just wondering if you could speak further about initiatives that the government is taking to stop illegal importation, as well as about the work that the CBSA is doing on this file.

Hon. Bill Blair: We have been working really hard to keep some of the precursor chemicals and these drugs out of the country. We passed legislation when we first came into government to give the CBSA greater authority, for example, to search through mail, which was a very unfortunate, common method of importation into the country.

The RCMP is also working very collaboratively with international partners. We do that through a number of different relationships, through the cross-border crime force but also working internationally, because it's a whole global effort.

One of the largest investigations recently completed in Southeast Asia identified an organization that was responsible for literally billions and billions of dollars' worth of drugs being shipped all around the world, including to Canada, and I know the RCMP is fully engaged in those investigations.

We work very closely with not only our Five Eyes partners, but all of our international partners to deal with these things, and we're restoring the resources of the CBSA, some of the tools and technology they need in order to keep these chemicals and drugs out of the country.

Supply interdiction is the first pillar of Canada's national drug strategy, as well as demand reduction, harm reduction and prevention and treatment.

We're very mindful of that responsibility and working diligently to keep those drugs out of the country.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you very much for that thorough answer.

How much more time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have one minute and 15 seconds.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Okay, thank you.

This one is for the CSIS director, Mr. Vigneault.

We know that the pandemic has impacted all of us in all segments of society, and national security threats have continued or even expanded over the past year. Canada is facing new threats to our vaccine supply, as just one example.

Can you provide some overview of how CSIS is adapting to that?

Mr. David Vigneault: I would say that, yes, the pandemic has taken its toll on us, but the men and women of CSIS have found innovative ways to address the new and emerging threats during the pandemic.

For example, we have put outreach to Canadian biopharma companies and laboratories that are subjected to new threats because of the pandemic. These are the people developing vaccines and techniques to protect Canadians and, unfortunately, a number of hostile actors are interested in the same information.

CSIS and CSE put out, for the first time, a joint statement earlier this past year to talk about this threat. We have unfortunately seen a number of our other actors going there, but the outreach is continuing—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Pardon me, but your time is up.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you very much.

The Chair: That's the end of your time, Ms. Zann. Thank you.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us this evening. It was good to have you with us.

We will now go to our second hour, with the officials.

For the first round, we have Mr. Williamson for six minutes, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sorry, Mr. Chair, but I want to raise the point that there were some questions we didn't have time to have answered. I wonder if the minister could provide written follow-up to them. Mrs. Stubbs had some specific questions in terms of numbers.

I just want to note that.

The Chair: We can certainly pass that on to the minister. Thank you very much for that as a point of order.

Mr. Williamson, go ahead, please.

• (1935)

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for being here tonight.

In fact, I'll follow up on my colleague's remark. Could we hear, I think from the RCMP and also CSIS, those numbers for the Fox Hunt, please?

Mr. David Vigneault: We at CSIS have not provided any public numbers about the Fox Hunt operation. I did speak to this operation

in previous public remarks where I talked about the approach. In this case, the Chinese government has been using an anti-corruption operation targeted across the world to unfortunately also target dissidents in other countries. We are aware of a number of these cases here in Canada. It is unacceptable that Canadians of Chinese origin, of any community, would be targeted in such a fashion.

We want to have a public debate about this, which hopefully will give a little bit of an opportunity for people who are subject to such tactics to approach the Canadian authorities, CSIS or the RCMP, and report these issues. We are on alert for that. We are investigating. We are also using all tools at our disposal, including our threat reduction measures.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you.

Commissioner, go ahead.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Since in 2015, when that operation evolved into Operation Skynet, it was encouraged that...they had the Chinese top 100 fugitives they wanted to return to China in exchange for lighter sentences. It was believed that 26 of the top 100 economic fugitives resided in Canada, second only to the United States, which was 40.

Our involvement in this initiative is really restricted to facilitating visits to Canada by Chinese law officials to interview Chinese witnesses or suspects under the terms of the protocol on foreign criminal investigations in Canada, which governs the activities of foreign police in Canada. Only in the event that an investigation results in the laying of criminal charges would we confirm the investigation.

Mr. John Williamson: Okay.

That brings me to a great question we had amongst our committee members here just a couple of weeks ago. Often foreign coercion could not break any laws. Who deals with that? How do you deal with it? The government says, call 911 and prove your case. But what about just political coercion coming from foreign state entities? How do we deal with that as a country so that Canadians and visitors to this country aren't being coerced on campus or in their communities? What's being done on that?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I think Minister Blair said it earlier. Any time anybody is feeling threatened, they really need to report it to their local police. We do have that 1-800 number, but by the sounds of it, we have to do better communication so that the people who feel threatened know that this number exists and they don't get the runaround, as was mentioned earlier. I think we have to do a better job of communicating those sources and making sure that people don't get the runaround.

Unfortunately, there's no one-stop shopping. We always encourage people to go to the police of jurisdiction, because they are the ones who should be investigating any intimidation or coercion. We probably need to do a bit better in communicating our 1-800 number.

Mr. John Williamson: To follow up, Commissioner, it sounds like there's been no active case you can point to where there's been evidence of foreign interference from the Chinese state or its officials that has concluded in any action. Is that correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I don't have those numbers available, but these cases aren't just foreign interference. There are many layers to them, and often they're very long-term investigations that have a bunch of different types of criminal offences attached to them.

I think maybe my colleague from CSIS can talk a little bit more in depth on the coercion portion of that question.

Mr. John Williamson: Actually, I'm going to ask for that response in writing afterwards because I'd like to turn to the Communications Security Establishment just for a quick follow-up here.

Several weeks ago, a Huawei executive said on a national news show that your agency had given them, if not a green light, certainly an amber light that we could manage the risk of Huawei here in Canada. I hear that's not true. Could you clarify that for us? What has your agency said about Huawei, and have you assured the government that it's safe to operate in this country?

• (1940)

Ms. Shelly Bruce: Telecom security is, obviously, very important to Canada, and our mobile networks deserve the very best security that we can offer, so we do work very closely with an organization called the Canadian security telecommunications advisory committee. Together with ISED, Public Safety, CSE and some telcos, we have put together—

The Chair: I'm terribly sorry to interrupt, but the six minutes are up.

We'll have to go now to Mr. Dubourg.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dubourg, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's now my turn to greet all the witnesses here with us. I have already met many of them because I sat on the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, or NSICP. I'd also like to commend you for everything you are doing to protect Canadians, here at home and abroad.

I'd like to ask a question that Mr. Vigneault will likely want to answer.

I don't want to play semantics, but on the NSICP, we too talked about foreign influence, foreign interference, cyber threats and espionage.

Are the Chinese authorities actively engaged in all those activities here in Canada?

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you very much, Mr. Dubourg. I'm happy to see you again in virtual mode.

I will tell you that the Chinese government is indeed engaged in all those activities. As far as diplomatic influence is concerned, these inter-state relations are truly to be expected.

With respect to interference, as I have said publicly, Chinese government entities are interfering with Canadian democratic life. They are interfering with people in Canada using people from China, cyber threats and also people here in Canada, who are co-opted to work with the Chinese government.

It's something we are looking into. With China, but also with other countries, we must absolutely keep our guard up, take very concrete steps to protect Canadians and do it in a coordinated way with our allies.

It's the only way I believe we can protect Canadians.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you very much.

We're aware that many Canadian agencies have different mandates, at home and abroad.

Since, as you say, China has a very strong presence here, please reassure us about information sharing between our various agencies, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the Communications Security Establishment.

Is threat data working properly within Canadian agencies?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Dubourg, I will tell you that our work is never done in that area. Based on my experience over the years, I can tell you that we do a fine job sharing information. Of course, we do have different mandates to which we must adhere. When we have to provide some of our information to law enforcement agencies, for example, we need to go through a whole process. Using intelligence as evidence can become extremely complex at times.

Having said that, we have implemented some very specific initiatives. For example, the RCMP, Global Affairs Canada, Communications Security Establishment and we at CSIS have established the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force. This process, which deals specifically with election-related threats, lets us share real-time intelligence and analysis and provide concrete advice to the government.

Based on our respective mandates, it's also very important that we take concrete and very direct steps to reduce the threat. That includes our colleagues at CSE when they have to block cyber threats, or CSIS, which must take very concrete action to reduce the threat to the democratic process, which affects Canadians.

• (1945)

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you. This will be my last question, because time is running out.

The NSICP came to a certain number of conclusions, but one of them in particular concerns foreign interference. The Canadian government's response to foreign interference is said to be limited. Its engagement is limited in part because we do not have enough people with adequate international security clearances. We have no public strategy to deal with foreign interference, or public reporting like those dealing with terrorism and security.

Have there been any developments since the NSICP released its report in 2019?

Mr. David Vigneault: I will say a few words about it. My colleague Mr. Stewart, from Public Safety Canada, may want to say something as well.

Over the past few years, the work has really evolved, whether it's strategic thinking about foreign interference methods, possible courses of action, coordination of activities, information sharing—as I mentioned on your last question—among Canadian agencies and with those of our allies, to find the best possible ways to protect Canadians.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you very much, Mr. Vigneault.

My time is up. I'd like to take this opportunity to greet the other witnesses as well.

Good evening.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Dubourg.

I will now go to Mr. Bergeron, who has six minutes.

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin by addressing the RCMP Commissioner, Ms. Lucki. She has acknowledged that there may be communication gaps, but I will give her the opportunity to correct some of the gaps.

We have spoken several times tonight about the 1-800 number. It would likely be helpful to better inform those watching or listening tonight if we could provide the entire number rather than just the first three digits. The fact that we don't give out all the information may be the first indication of communication issues.

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: I would love to give you a better answer and give you the full 1-800 number, but unfortunately I do not have that with me. I will send it to the committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: At the right time. So we will make sure that we make it public as part of our discussions in the coming weeks, Madam Commissioner.

I'd like to come back to the visa application centres. It's clear from Ms. Bruce's response that her organization was not really in-

involved in implementing security measures to ensure that the information collected could not be shared with the Chinese government.

Several times during his testimony, the Minister referred to advice he received from his officials. Since that was not the Communications Security Establishment, I would like to know if any of you advised or briefed the Minister on security measures in place at the visa application centres to prevent information from being shared with the Chinese government.

Mr. Rob Stewart (Deputy Minister, Public Safety Canada): I may be in the best position to answer the question, but I can't tell you more than what the Minister has already said.

The information the Minister gave us came from the people at Citizenship and Immigration. They are responsible for passing on the information regarding the process to ensure that their contracts and the systems involved are secure.

• (1950)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you for your answer, but that appears to me to be of concern, to say the least.

So you are saying that departments and agencies of the Government of Canada can contract freely by providing security measures themselves, without necessarily referring to the various federal agencies responsible for national security and intelligence.

Is that correct?

Mr. Rob Stewart: No, not quite.

We have a process for entering into a contract. The process naturally includes policies that take national security into account. Another department, Public Services and Supply Canada, is also responsible for providing guidelines for the process to which I'm referring.

I assure you that national security is taken into consideration in our contract implementation process.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I hear what you are telling me and I thank you for it.

What I find particularly troubling, from what I understand or from what has been said and not said, is that this contract, which was negotiated by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration with a Chinese entity, was apparently negotiated with the advice of Public Services and Procurement Canada but without the advice of the various agencies that we have with us this evening, agencies whose mandate is to take care of intelligence and national security.

Mr. Rob Stewart: As I understand it, that is accurate. However, there is also another factor here.

The contract in China is a subcontract to the contract concluded by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. I'm not totally certain, but I believe that the general contract was before the Department of Citizenship and Immigration as a reference. The subcontractor was not known.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You are telling me that the subcontractor is not known. Is that correct?

Mr. Rob Stewart: It was hired by VFS Global.

The Chair: You have five seconds left, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I think we will stop here. We will come back to this shortly.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

Now we have Mr. Harris for six minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen and Ms. Lucki, for staying on, and Ms. Bruce as well.

I have a question about the dependence of Canadian universities on collaborative research or research funding from the PRC and PRC sources. There are two programs that have been.... Well, one program has changed its name. The thousand talents plan of the PRC, apparently renamed the national high-end foreign experts recruitment plan, has the Government of China involved.

My understanding is that, in 2018, CSIS began warning the universities about the dangers of research collaboration with China. We know that in the United States the FBI was doing a similar program, and charges were laid. There were indictments against American and Chinese academics for alleged fraud because they hid their participation in these plans.

I just want to know, first of all, what kind of advice you were giving the universities. What were you warning them of and what kind of program was it? Also, have you laid any charges? Have any charges been laid—I presume by the RCMP—in relation to this kind of academic work?

• (1955)

Mr. David Vigneault: I'm looking at my colleagues on the screen. Maybe I can start, Mr. Harris, and say a few things about the thousand talents program.

At CSIS, we have been talking both publicly and privately with universities about issues related to how high-end research could potentially be diverted. We are identifying threats that could be from a human perspective when you have individuals who did not declare their true affiliation with different institutions back in their own countries.

We have, in collaboration with CSE, warned about cyber-threats that are always possible. We, therefore, essentially try to provide advice that would make sure that the true "Crown jewels", as we'd say, would be protected.

We also take pains to—

Mr. Jack Harris: You referred to concerns about diversion. Could you say diversion of what? Is it intellectual property?

Mr. David Vigneault: Yes, exactly. It's the diversion of intellectual property. That's where we would have knowledge that is developed here in Canada, which would be surreptitiously brought to another country. Of course, the committee is concerned about China. We are, in fact, also concerned about a number of other entities that may do the same thing.

We also go to great lengths to make sure that we're not painting everybody with the same brush by saying that universities should not be collaborating with foreigners, because that is exactly not the case. We need to have innovation. We just need to make sure that people do it with their eyes wide open. They need to have the right information to protect their intellectual property and to protect what has been funded and will eventually accrue to and create Canada's future prosperity.

This is the line of approach we're taking.

Mr. Jack Harris: Can I ask a question, please, just to differentiate?

Why would you be expressing a fear in relation to research funding from Chinese sources? If some international or transnational corporation is funding research in Canada—which many are, across the country—and intellectual property obviously would be shared with that entity, what is the difference? Why is it that academic institutions like universities need to be warned about this with respect to the PRC?

Mr. David Vigneault: There are a couple of items here. One is that when you have collaborative projects that are funded in part by a foreign company, as you mentioned, the terms should be very clear and transparent about who owns the intellectual property. There should be no ambiguity.

In terms of diversion, when you have researchers.... You provided examples about some arrests in the U.S. These are people who would be involved in different research and would not declare their other affiliations to state entities or military organizations. They would take some of the knowledge and some of the data that is being created through these projects and bring it back to their countries in a way that would likely be a threat to Canada in the future, especially when we look at high-end technology that may have dual-use purposes for both civilian and military applications.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

We did have one representation that the significant funding of researchers in Canada can be used by the Chinese government to influence Canadian researchers in a way to obtain information and transfer it to China. Are you experienced with that as well?

Mr. David Vigneault: Yes, we are. We have seen indications of that. We have seen indications also of how the funding is, in other areas, targeted to push research in an area that will not be contrary to another country's interests. Sometimes it's about protecting the reputation of a country. We've seen that as well.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Harris.

[Translation]

We are now starting the second round.

Mr. Paul-Hus, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Lucki, in March 2020, you mentioned in your report that you did not have enough resources for terrorism, foreign interference and cybercrime.

If we set terrorism aside, do you have the same problem with foreign interference and cybercrime a year later?

• (2000)

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, we are constantly working on foreign interference. It's one of our priorities.

In the national security programme, we have the primary responsibility for investigations of that nature, and obviously we work with our domestic and international partners to investigate those illegal activities where such foreign interference is suspected. We also work with our security and intelligence partners to detect and disrupt the interference activity of these foreign actors. This type of activity can manifest itself in different ways.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Resources were a problem for you. Have you obtained additional resources, or are you at the same point as in 2020?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: We have not increased our resources in this area.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Okay.

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: But in the federal policing program we have the flexibility that if such a file raises itself... For example, when we had the terrorist file in Kingston, we were able—and that's the beauty of the RCMP—to move the experts into the area from across Canada and get those specialized resources into that area to investigate those files.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

Mr. Vigneault, you confirmed earlier that there are many threats. In the case of cyber threats, it has previously been confirmed that the Communications Security Establishment can help to put countermeasures into place. I know that these organizations do not always communicate with each other, but have you set up any collaboration with Special Forces and the Canadian Armed Forces in recent years?

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you for your question, Mr. Paul-Hus.

Yes, we work closely with our colleagues in the Canadian Armed Forces in general and with Special Forces in particular in various

theatres of operations. Of course, these are very sensitive operations that we cannot talk about in public, but we have memoranda of understanding and we work very closely with them.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: But legislation is public by nature. I know that, two years ago, we passed Bill C-59 that laid out some new measures. However, you recently mentioned in your report that the act still presented a number of problems that were making your work more difficult. Can you provide some specifics on what would really make your work easier?

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

The argument that we are making is that technology, national security threats, and attacks on the privacy of Canadians are creating a very complex environment that is always evolving. For the Canadian Security Intelligence Service to be able to fulfil its mandate, it must always be evaluating the powers it has been given so as not to break the law. Clearly, we do our best to abide by the law. So we work with the government, with our colleagues in Public Safety and the Department of Justice to examine some very specific items in the act.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: If you want to send us the points in the legislation that should be improved, it would be very helpful.

In December 2018, you mentioned that some states are financing espionage through the 5G network. Are you still of the same opinion?

Mr. David Vigneault: Yes.

Actually, as my colleague Shelly Bruce said earlier, we have to examine all aspects of technology. In the world of espionage, people are very ingenious. They find ways to seek out the information they want, wherever it may be. So we absolutely have to strengthen our defences everywhere. Given that the 5G network will be in such demand and will be used for so many functions, some innocuous and others very sensitive, we will have to pay attention. CSIS is working jointly with the CSE and its partners to provide warnings and advice to the government on the measures that need to be taken.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I have one last question.

Had you been made aware that those in charge of CanSino Biologics were part of the “Thousand Talents Plan”?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left.

Mr. David Vigneault: Unfortunately, I cannot answer your question directly, Mr. Paul-Hus. I'm sorry.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Paul-Hus.

[English]

We go on now to Ms. Zann for five minutes.

Ms. Zann, go ahead, please.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you.

I want to ask a question regarding the stories of the importation of goods created by forced labour. The minister mentioned it a little earlier, but I want more specifics, please, for instance by ethnic minorities in China such as the Uighurs. Earlier this year, Canada did join our international partners in cracking down on companies doing business with certain firms based in China's Xinjiang province and region, following the credible reports of human rights violations affecting Uighurs and other ethnic minorities in the region.

I'd like to hear a little more about how our Canada Border Services Agency and others work to prohibit such goods from entering our borders. How do you know which goods and parts of goods are made in such a fashion?

● (2005)

Mr. John Ossowski: As I mentioned earlier, Employment and Social Development Canada is the lead government department for labour-related programs. We work closely with ESDC to identify goods that have been produced by forced labour and prevent their entry into Canada.

Generally speaking, all goods entering Canada, including shipments from China, may be subject to more in-depth secondary examination. We use a risk management approach to determine which goods entering Canada require a deeper examination. As the minister said, anything that's mined, manufactured, produced wholly or in part by forced labour—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Do you have a point of order, Mr. Bergeron?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I am sorry for interrupting our witness, but his microphone is too high and the interpreters can't hear him.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. John Ossowski: I'm sorry about that.

Is that better?

Ms. Lenore Zann: Yes.

The Chair: That's much better. Thank you.

Mr. John Ossowski: Anything that's been mined, manufactured or produced wholly or in part by forced labour is prohibited from entering Canada, so obviously we would look into anything, where we have evidence to do so, to prevent its entry.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you.

What about agricultural goods? I heard something about cotton, for instance. Are you aware of any of those kinds of goods?

Mr. John Ossowski: I'm not aware of that specifically. As I said, the program just started as of the signing of the new trade agreement last summer. I'd have to get back to you on that. If there's something specific on cotton, I'll send you a report.

Ms. Lenore Zann: I would appreciate that. Thank you so much.

Director Vigneault and RCMP Commissioner Lucki, this question is for both of you.

We've heard about the challenges your agencies faced quite a while back, in the 2010s, about sharing information with one another, bringing intelligence and completing it into evidence. Time has elapsed since then. I'm just wondering if you could inform us as to how your organizations are working better now to share information on threats that are identified...in order to be held accountable as necessary.

Mr. David Vigneault: Do you want to go first, Commissioner?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I could start, and then I'll pass it over to you because you are very good at this.

We have a working group and we did a complete operational review on intel to evidence between our two agencies. We hired outsiders. There are several recommendations that included different things we can do so that we can use that type of intel for evidence.

I will pass it over to David to go into the specifics of that.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you.

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you, Commissioner Lucki.

It is a very complex issue. We have the rule of law in Canada. We have the right of the people who are accused to have the information known to them. But when we have intelligence and are using very sensitive sources, we also have a need to protect this information. If not, we will not be able to continue to do intelligence operations in the future ourselves or to receive information from our partners.

It is a very complex issue. I would not want to leave the committee with the impression that everything has been resolved.

But under Commissioner Lucki's leadership, we have done a lot of work to push the envelope. The working group that she talked about on the operational improvement review has generated very specific ideas. We have the expertise of a former deputy minister of justice to oversee the work, and one of the leading defence attorneys with the proper clearance to review our processes and challenge both the RCMP and CSIS to go into all of the aspects, including cultural aspects, that will impede the information exchange.

I have to say this is still a work in progress. Unfortunately, more work remains to be done.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

● (2010)

[*English*]

Thank you very much, Ms. Zann.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: We now go to Mr. Bergeron.

You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Let me recap.

If I understand correctly, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, through Public Services and Procurement Canada, negotiated a contract with VFS Global, without involving the intelligence and security agencies to guarantee the security of the information that will be gathered on the ground in Beijing. In addition, VFS Global entered into a subcontract with the Beijing Shuangxian Foreign Service Company.

First, what guarantee do we have that VFS Global looks at the rules on communicating information as rigorously as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Public Services and Procurement Canada? Second, Mr. Stewart, are you aware that VFS Global is financed through a Chinese investment fund?

My impression is that the Chinese now have the process of issuing Canadian visas “all wrapped up with a bow on top”, as they say.

Does that concern you?

Mr. Rob Stewart: At this stage, I think it would be better to provide you with the answer in writing, through the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

The answer would probably be more detailed and would contain all the information that you are asking for, because I took no part in the process of awarding the contracts that we are talking about here.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Nevertheless, should it all not concern you in terms of national security?

Mr. Rob Stewart: The issue of the security of Canadians' information is very important in general. As the minister said, processes are in place to ensure the security—

The Chair: I am sorry to interrupt you, but Mr. Bergeron's time is up.

[English]

We'll go on now to Mr. Harris, for two minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. Harris, go ahead, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to follow up on academic interference and the potential for that. Is your activity with the universities and the research divisions of the universities advisory in nature? Is that simply what you do? Have you actually done any investigations or follow-up? Have there ever been any charges laid or individuals held to account for a failure to follow the expected protocols or rules, or is it simply that you are advising and you are warning? Can you tell us a bit more about that?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Harris, from a CSIS point of view we do two things. In the specific case of academics, we provide advice. We engage with them and provide them with information about the threats they face and about the modus operandi and some of the techniques that can be used to get this information. We have limita-

tions in our ability to provide classified information, however, so we try to find a way that is as explicit as possible.

The other method we use is our national security investigations—our intelligence investigations—and we investigate any aspect of espionage or foreign interference that may be demanded of CSIS. At that point, we would either be using threat reduction measures to mitigate the threat or, if the information reaches a level that warrants it, sharing the information with law enforcement and the RCMP to look at a potential criminal investigation.

It is, if you will, an ecosystem that is quite important to manage. We are careful about how we engage on campuses and in universities. We need to manage academic freedom, but at the same time we have a unique mandate, a unique aperture on the threat, to provide this information to academics. To be very candid with you, though, I would suggest that more remains to be done and better engagement is required.

• (2015)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Williamson, do you have a point of order? I see you have used the “raise hand” function.

Mr. John Williamson: I have a question for Ms. Bruce. Could she respond to my question in writing? I'm looking for her agency's response to the Huawei question, a follow-up. That was it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

Now, at the beginning I asked for members' agreement to take 15 minutes at the end to discuss the report of the subcommittee. I have more members on my list, so I will ask, are there members who have problems with the report of the subcommittee as is? The question would be whether we can adopt it quickly. Does anyone have an issue with the report as is?

I think Mr. Genuis does.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I don't have a problem. I would just like to move that we adopt the subcommittee report and the work plan.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is anyone opposed to this motion?

Mr. Jack Harris: Discussion, discussion.

The Chair: Okay. If we're going to have discussion, it may take.... We won't be able, perhaps, to have the witnesses anymore.

Mr. Jack Harris: I thought we had decided we were going to take the last part of the meeting to discuss this.

The Chair: That's right. I was just seeing if that was avoidable. That's all.

Mr. Harris, you're certainly entitled to discuss it. I thought maybe members would prefer.... If members wanted to just adopt it, it would be possible to keep the witnesses. As that doesn't appear to be possible, I think what I should do is excuse the witnesses.

Do you agree, Mr. Harris? What I'm proposing to do is to excuse and thank the witnesses, and then we'll go on to the discussion of the subcommittee report.

Mr. Jack Harris: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you very much to the witnesses.

[*Translation*]

We very much appreciate the testimony we have heard from you today.

[*English*]

Mr. Chong has a point of order.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, Mr. Chair. On just a very short point of order, I received some evidence today that I wonder if I could submit to you through the clerk. It concerns our study.

I was given it today. It's essentially what newspapers call a "wrap". It was part of the Canadian edition of Ming Pao Daily News, and it relates to foreign interference operations here in Canada. It was essentially a wrap around Ming Pao Daily that lists an individual in Canada, their birthdate, passport number and Chinese citizenship identification number.

I wonder if I could submit that to you as part of our study, through the clerk, so that it could be distributed to members of the committee.

The Chair: Of course, it would have to be translated. I presume it's only in one language at the moment.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes. It's all in Chinese.

The Chair: Let me consult with the clerk on that and we'll see whether we can receive it. If so, I'd be delighted to and see if we can get it translated and distributed to the committee, obviously in both official languages.

Thank you very much for that.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

The Chair: Again, witnesses, I thank you very much for your appearance this evening, and I wish you a good night.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thank you.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you for coming.

The Chair: I'm going to go on now to Mr. Harris in relation to the discussion of the subcommittee report as presented.

Mr. Jack Harris: Yes, I—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Pardon me.

Mr. Chair, on a point of order, it's my motion we're discussing, right?

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Harris, go ahead.

Mr. Jack Harris: I'd better plug in my headphone, because I cut off for a minute.

The Chair: Yes. No doubt the interpreters will appreciate that.

Mr. Jack Harris: I guess what we have simply as a work plan is just.... That is the complete study, I guess. Are we saying now that in what we have before us, the 10 meetings, we've just added the different witnesses? Is this what we're ending up with?

The Chair: I think what the subcommittee report provides for is the first two meetings, and my understanding is—

Mr. Jack Harris: I'm satisfied with the subcommittee.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, my motion was to adopt both the subcommittee report and the work plan.

• (2020)

The Chair: That is correct.

Mr. Genuis has proposed the adoption of both; therefore, the work plan as written would be the one that....

Madam Clerk?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-France Lafleur): It's just to let you know that Monsieur Bergeron wishes to intervene as well.

The Chair: Thank you. I'll put him on the list after Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: I just have a little concern that we're now saying it's the 10 meetings. Of course, the subcommittee had some doubts about all of that and we've never really decided it. We'll be deciding now that it's 10 meetings and that these are the 10 meetings and no others.

I just wonder whether we have canvassed what subjects are to be included, because it's not clear from the work plan. I'm not clear just from the names of the witnesses what areas of this study are being discussed. This is what we were talking about the other day, and we didn't reach any serious conclusion other than that we would have a work plan that we would talk about. However, it's not clear from the work plan, other than the list of witnesses, what areas of the notion of foreign influence we're dealing with. This is my problem.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just to be clear, Mr. Genuis's motion would have us adopt, of course, both the subcommittee report and the work plan. If that were not to pass and we only adopted the subcommittee report, that would leave open the question of the work plan. However, obviously that is not the motion before us. The motion at the moment is to adopt both.

[*Translation*]

The floor now goes to Mr. Bergeron.

He will be followed by Mr. Paul-Hus.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, since we have decided to deal with the two documents together, I would just like to make a comment on the report.

The most recent comments from our Conservative colleagues led us to believe that they were submitting an additional opinion. I would like to let them know that I was disappointed with that. However, I carefully read the contents of their additional opinion and it did not surprise me. That's all I have to say, given that it is their privilege to present an additional opinion.

However, I thought we were going to submit a unanimous report, in a spirit of collegiality. Our Conservative colleagues did not clearly indicate their intention. We found it out afterwards. It's a little disappointing, but not really surprising, given that their most recent comments foreshadowed their intention. I have nothing more to add.

As for the work plan, I must say that I am quite happy today that we have a complete document to look at, unlike the last time. It seems very interesting to me. I really have no problem with the plan we have here. But I would like to make two comments.

I thought we had agreed to hear from Michel Juneau-Katsuya. Mr. Paul-Hus, who is up next, as I understand it, will be able to tell me whether I was dreaming again. I also thought that Ms. Porteous had drawn our attention to a UQAM professor who speaks French and Mandarin and is of Chinese origin, Professor Ting-Sheng Lin. I would agree with adding that witness to our work plan. However, since we would then have to remove a witness from the list, I don't know who it would be. I see the name Paul Evans, from the University of British Columbia.

I am picking Mr. Evans name at random, but could his contribution be more helpful or less helpful than Mr. Ting-Sheng Lin's?

Perhaps the analysts are in a position to enlighten us.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Let me remind the member that our meeting is not in camera and that it is still being televised.

You asked the analysts a question.

Ms. Porteous, are you able to answer it?

[English]

Ms. Holly Porteous (Committee Researcher): Yes and no. I don't feel very comfortable saying, among the potential witnesses who have been put into a block, whether one is definitely better than the other. Certainly, between those two gentlemen, I'm really not in a position to say. Remember that the library also has to go about this in a way that is fair and equitable to all the parties, and to have a proper balance there. I really have to leave that to the committee itself to make a determination in that respect.

However, I do have Mr. Ting-Sheng Lin as a potential witnesses. Just to advise, he has not been left out of the potential lineup, but that's for the committee to decide.

• (2025)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, if I may, I can propose something.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: If I may, I will suggest a solution that could be acceptable for everyone.

At the moment, the 10th meeting has been scheduled. for one hour only. Perhaps we could add a second hour with Mr. Juneau-Katsuya and Mr. Ting-Sheng Lin. As a pair, they would be a little mismatched, but it would allow us to hear each of their points of view.

The Chair: The effect of that would be to reopen the work plan. Our motion is to adopt the subcommittee report and the work plan too. It's not [inaudible].

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: So I will propose an amendment, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay. We will debate the amendment.

Mr. Paul-Hus, the floor is yours to debate the amendment.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: It wasn't about speaking to the amendment, but I can do that at the same time.

I would like to go back to what Mr. Harris said. He mentioned that we had witnesses only. I would like to point out that we also have 10 topics at the start of the document and we can then see a table of the witnesses beside it. So our topics are very clear.

As for the Bloc's amendment to change or to add a witness, I have no problem. I had already mentioned to Mr. Bergeron that Mr. Juneau-Katsuya could be on the list of witnesses. Since his expertise is more in influence operations, we could hear from him when we are dealing with point 4, at the same time as Mr. McGuinety, or even when we are dealing with point 10.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

Mr. Fragiskatos, the floor is yours.

[English]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Chair.

I suppose this is indirectly related to the amendment, if you'll indulge me here for a moment.

I see that we're straying away. We're now debating which witnesses are appropriate and which are not. That's the purview, as we all know, of the subcommittee. Can I suggest what I thought was originally the case, which was that we would have two meetings to begin with and then the subcommittee would meet to finalize a work plan? At that point, once finalized there, it would be brought back to the committee for discussion.

We now have two minutes left in this meeting. I don't think we're going to resolve anything. Can we at least—I put this to Mr. Genuis and maybe he'll consider amending his initial motion—agree to have the first two meetings and leave it at that for now, just so we can get on with things in a meaningful way here? I just see us descending into an endless debate.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Fragiskatos.

I have Mr. Harris next, unless he prefers to ask Mr. Genuis to answer that question.

Mr. Jack Harris: I would suggest that Mr. Genuis answer that question, because I was going to raise the same point as Mr. Fragiskatos. Sometimes Mr. Genuis acts very fast, and it takes a while to realize that he has actually hijacked the meeting.

This was, as Mr. Fragiskatos has said, a report, a work plan, that was supposed to go back to our subcommittee, which is supposed to deal with that, to have it go back there to discuss it. I think he's trying to bypass that entire process. I'd rather that we do what we had planned to do, which was to have the two meetings, have a discussion at the subcommittee as to the full work plan, and then carry on.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Genuis, I apologize. I should not suggest that you're required to answer, but if you wish to, please go ahead.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm very happy to answer, just briefly.

Look, colleagues, I could go through and nitpick based on my own preferences one way or the other in terms of the work plan. The analysts are independent experts who provide us with a work plan that balances a variety of witness suggestions. My suggestion would be that we've had a lot of in camera meetings already this year, so let's move forward.

I'm willing to put aside all of the little disagreements I might have with the work plan and to say let us just adopt what we have so that we can move forward. I put a motion on the floor to do that. It's not hijacking anything. Members are welcome to vote against it if they disagree with it, but I put forward a motion that I think allows us to move forward quickly.

In terms of saying that something is the proper purview of the subcommittee or the main committee, I mean, everything the sub-

committee does comes back to the main committee. All of the decisions have to be ratified by the main committee. I'm suggesting to let us try to maximize the time in the public interest, avoid more in camera discussion and just adopt the work plan. If people don't like that, they can vote against it, but that was my suggestion.

Thank you.

• (2030)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, it is now 8:30. I move that we adjourn the meeting.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, would you take the vote, please?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: The motion is carried. The meeting is adjourned.

Have a good evening, everyone.

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