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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 19 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, in accordance with the motion adopted by the House on 25 January 2021.

[English]

Before we get to our witnesses, I'd like to inform committee members that 30 minutes have been set aside at the end of today's meeting to discuss committee business, including the subcommittee report, which essentially contains the draft work plan regarding the national security dimensions of the Canada-China relationship.

Since we're going to have bells at eight o'clock, I'll see if there is unanimous consent to keep going until 8:15 to have some discussion on that subcommittee report.

I would now like to welcome the witnesses.

We have Rob Stewart, deputy minister of Public Safety Canada; Brenda Lucki, Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; John Ossowski, president of the Canada Border Services Agency; David Vigneault, director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service; Shelly Bruce, chief of the Communications Security Establishment; and Scott Jones, head of the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security.

[Translation]

I thank you all for being here tonight.

[English]

I've been advised that there will not be any opening remarks as tonight's discussion is a continuation of our last meeting with the minister.

[Translation]

We will start the first round of questions.

Mr. Paul-Hus, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

I would first like to ask Mr. Vigneault some questions.

Mr. Vigneault, in your speech on February 9, you said that the current legislation allows the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or CSIS, to provide advice to government, but that it limits its ability to provide useful advice to key partners. I've had discussions with university presidents who told me there is no real interaction.

Is this one of the problems with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act?

Is there anything that prevents you from addressing presidents directly, for example?

Mr. David Vigneault (Director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Thank you for the question, Mr. Paul-Hus.

I will mention a few important points here. First of all, we work very closely with universities in different ways. We work with the presidents, but also with the people who are responsible for research and development.

We also work with organizations such as U15, a consortium of Canada's leading research and development universities, to provide them with advice and guidance.

The issue that is raised relates to section 19 of the act. This provision ensures that we cannot disclose classified information outside of government.

We give universities information and guidance, but there is a limit to how much advice we can give them.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: You say you give information to the government, but is the government allowed to pass on the information, or must it keep it under wraps and leave people in the dark?

Mr. David Vigneault: At that point, Mr. Paul-Hus, secret information is not disclosed. However, we can suggest avenues of reflection and mention areas of risk to be mitigated, particularly with regard to hiring, cybersecurity measures, and measures to be taken with regard to contracts.

We therefore maintain a close dialogue. However, we have been asking for several years to be able to engage in much more intense dialogue.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you very much.

You also mentioned earlier that the activities of companies in almost all sectors had been compromised and that these companies had suffered losses due to cyber attacks. We can think of companies in the fields of health, pharmacology and artificial intelligence, among others.

Does the Chinese People's Liberation Army play a role in sophisticated operations?

Mr. David Vigneault: As you can imagine, there are certain details I cannot give you here. But I can tell you that the government and various agencies, including CSIS, are working to protect the country from these threats. Some states, including China, which was mentioned in the past, are using every tool at their disposal to come after Canada's secrets and those that relate to our modern economy.

• (1840)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I will ask the question differently.

Does China have sophisticated capabilities that exceed the defence tools of Canada or other Western countries?

Mr. David Vigneault: Several states have very sophisticated tools, both technical and human, for espionage and interference. We mentioned that China was one of these countries. There are several others, unfortunately, that have the ability, the interest and, sometimes, the opportunity to conduct espionage in Canada.

The measures we take must be one hundred per cent effective. We must always block everything. It is a constant battle, a constant struggle. We are playing a kind of cat and mouse game. We are trying to find the next place where information will be stolen. This is what we are doing with our partners in the Canadian government and the Five Eyes countries.

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

Ms. Lucki, some Canadians are being attacked, threatened or harassed on the Internet.

What are the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's IT infrastructure and capabilities for investigating these online crimes?

[English]

Commissioner Brenda Lucki (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Any time there is any type of threat to people through intimidation, we ask them to report that to the police of jurisdiction. Obviously, if they're in immediate threat, we would ask that they call 911, if it's grievous. Otherwise, like I had mentioned in the previous meeting, we have a 1-800 number that we work through.

We also do some monitoring on social media to ensure that when there are such things as threats against people on the social media platforms we follow up with those, and we work with that.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: How many officers do you have in Canada dedicated to online crime?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: In national security in total, we have 600 resources, and that covers the entire gamut of the types of in-

vestigations we do. Of course, each and every one of those investigations touches on the cyber portion of the investigations, but they aren't specific to cybercrime specifically.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

Mr. Vigneault, did you brief the minister on the Uyghur genocide?

Mr. David Vigneault: Unfortunately, I cannot disclose the content of my discussions with the minister, but we are well aware of the situation.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Now we go to Mr. Fragiskatos for six minutes, please.

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

Thank you, officials, for your work, and for being here tonight. It is deeply appreciated.

My question is for the CBSA.

Tell us about the work that is being done to prevent fentanyl from coming into Canada from China.

Mr. John Ossowski (President, Canada Border Services Agency): Obviously, we work with all of our partners here in terms of looking for leads to help us target shipments that might be coming into the country. Working with the Chinese government, the RCMP had reached out a couple of years ago looking to list certain precursor chemicals.

Unfortunately, folks are fairly creative and they're looking for new ways to create this stuff all the time. My lab, which actually examines the stuff that we seize, at one point a few years ago was finding a new analog every two weeks. It's something that is, as my colleague just said, a cat and mouse game, and we're always looking for things.

We've done things with investments in terms of designated examination facilities at the ports of entry so we can get very quick analysis of something, but we continue to look for precursor chemicals. Obviously, we've had some success. In fact, in 2020, we seized 5.8 kilograms of fentanyl, which is about 2.9 million fatal doses. The seizures go up and down all the time, but with the rise of e-commerce, we're paying particular attention to that particular route.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Ossowski, do you have figures to compare what has been seized since the government put in place stronger measures a few years back, I believe under Minister Goodale at that time, and what the situation was before those reforms?

• (1845)

Mr. John Ossowski: I'd have to go back. I can certainly provide a written report on that, if you're referring to when the legislation came in for under 30 grams to open mail, and pill presses—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Exactly, yes.

Mr. John Ossowski: I can go back and provide that report.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It would be great if you tabled that with the committee.

I believe this next question is probably best placed with the CB-SA, although others might want to put their point of view forward as well.

How can Canadians be assured that goods and other products that are being produced in the Xinjiang region of China are not entering Canada? Obviously, there are deep concerns about the ongoing genocide. There are concerns about forced labour. Obviously the government has acted and Minister Blair spoke to this last week. I just want more information and perhaps you could enlighten the committee on that.

Mr. John Ossowski: Certainly.

As I recall mentioning at a previous committee appearance, we started with this as a result of the Canada-U.S.-Mexico trade agreement last summer. The first thing we needed to do was work with our colleagues in ESDC, Employment and Social Development Canada, to put the legal framework in place to allow the sharing of information properly.

I really underline the importance of having those good processes in place to make sure that we have defensible decisions at the end of the day. We've been working with that legal framework.

One complaint has been received. Unfortunately, it didn't have any evidence associated with it.

We're building that capacity right now. We're working with the other partner departments on this one to do exactly as you say.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: We frequently hear concerns about the security of our universities, the scientific work that takes place at our universities and whether that is subject to interference of some type.

How do officials feel about the security of work that is being done by researchers on campus at the present time?

Mr. John Ossowski: I'm not sure whom you're directing the question to.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I am directing it to officials. I think there are overlapping areas here, but perhaps I'll direct it to CSIS to be specific.

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

As I mentioned earlier in my answer to Mr. Paul-Hus, CSIS and also our partners in the national security community are quite involved with universities to provide them with advice.

We are also working closely with them not just on the protection of research, but also on the potential interference on campuses in terms of academic freedom and potential threats that the students coming from abroad may feel from different countries.

We have areas of different threats that we are concerned with on campuses. We are engaging with different levels. Some of it is done bilaterally and some of it is done through committee work.

In a country like Canada where there are advanced universities and cutting-edge research is taking place, this is an area that is very attractive for a number of actors who may have ill intent.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Is there an appreciation, Mr. Vigneault, on the part of universities that this particular Chinese regime is of an entirely different nature from regimes in the past?

Mr. David Vigneault: I can't speak for all universities, but I can say that this is an ongoing discussion. I can see that we've been having a different dialogue over the last year or two with universities. We are realizing, like everybody else, that there is a new intent in the regime in China.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Lucki, do you have the toll-free number that Canadians and Quebecers can call if they are being pressured by representatives of the Republic of China?

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thank you for that question.

I didn't have the number the last time I was here. It is 1-800-420-5805.

It's displayed on both our public main RCMP page and the national security website. It's actually been fairly effective. We get 120 tips per day, on average. We follow up with all of them.

It's probably noteworthy that we find that as the volume of the tips increases, the threat percentages significantly decline.

Sorry, I just heard somebody asking a question.

• (1850)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I was just saying that I didn't have time to note the number. I'm sorry.

[*Translation*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: It is 1-800-420-5805.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you very much.

During his appearance before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on February 22, the representative of VFS Global stated that there were two parts to the security clearance process for employees subcontracted in Beijing. One part is the responsibility of VFS Global, and the other part is the responsibility of the government of the country with which the contract was signed. In this case, it is Canada.

Ms. Lucki, can you tell us which agency in Canada is responsible for conducting security clearance checks on employees of Beijing Shuangxiong Foreign Service Company, the subcontractor working with VFS Global on visa applications in Beijing?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: If the question is directed to me, I cannot speak directly to that company. I can only speak to what we do, from an RCMP point of view, on all contracts. We review them to determine the appropriate level of security of the contracts, and the company and related employees—

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I am sorry to interrupt you, Ms. Lucki.

Is your organization responsible for verifying the security clearance of this subcontractor's employees in Beijing? If not you, who is responsible for checking the security clearance?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: According to the VFS Global representative, Canada performs a security check. Who performs security checks here?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: I can't answer that question. I can only talk in relation to—

Mr. Rob Stewart (Deputy Minister, Public Safety Canada): Monsieur Bergeron—

Commr Brenda Lucki: —the RCMP specifically.

Public Works has an agreement with us, though, to conduct law enforcement record checks in support of their mandate, so we may in fact do some of that on their behalf. But I can't speak specifically to the area you're speaking about.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: That's very interesting.

Yet the VFS Global representative told us that part of the security checks were carried out by Canada. In addition, Michèle Larose, a spokesperson for Public Services and Procurement Canada, stated in an article published in *The Globe and Mail* a few days ago that only VFS Global performed security clearance checks on its subcontractor's personnel, and that the federal government did not do so.

Are we to understand that VFS Global, which is financed by a Chinese investment fund, is the only company that can check the security clearance of employees working on visa issuance in Beijing?

[English]

Commr Brenda Lucki: I'll pass that to my colleague from Public Safety.

[Translation]

Mr. Rob Stewart: Mr. Bergeron, you have raised an important point, but I think it is better that we answer your question in writing.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: That's fine.

Mr. Richard Fadden, Mr. Vigneault's predecessor, recently told *The Globe and Mail* that the fact that there is a Chinese government entity with a link to Immigration Canada suggests that the entry of potential cyber spies could be smooth.

Since my time is running out, I will certainly have the opportunity later on to put the question to Mr. Vigneault.

Mr. Vigneault, this is a scoop: you can prepare yourself accordingly.

● (1855)

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

[English]

We'll now go to Mr. Harris for six minutes, please.

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

Let me follow up briefly on Mr. Bergeron's questions.

We did have questions about this when the minister was before us. We talked about who in the security service had approved the use of this particular subcontractor for the visa services in Beijing, and the minister advised us that this was all done before this government's time, back in 2012. But I understand that these contracts have been renewed since then, particularly in 2018, and I believe in 2015 as well, and would have required some due diligence to be undertaken at that time.

Were any of the agencies present involved in any way in carrying out these due diligence efforts to ensure that the contracts being renewed were in compliance with security concerns?

I'm taking the silence to mean that nobody present can answer that question.

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Harris, this is David Vigneault from CSIS.

We are not in the position to provide specific details of exactly how and on what we provide advice, but I can assure you and Canadians that CSIS and other security partners are involved in the process of providing security and threat advice to government agencies on an ongoing basis. We do that to make sure the proper authorities can then determine what would be appropriate mitigation measures to take place. We try to do this work on an ongoing basis because the threat continues to evolve.

Mr. Jack Harris: I understand that and I understand that the answer given the last time was, "We do it when asked."

My question, then, would be: Were any of the agencies asked to participate in any security check with respect to the visa contract in Beijing since 2015, shall we say, or in 2018, or at any other time since 2012?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Harris, from a CSIS point of view, I cannot, unfortunately, provide you with the specific details of how and when we have provided this advice. I can tell you, however, that we are engaged with our partners at Immigration, PSPC and others across the government to provide advice on security threats to allow our partners to develop appropriate mitigation measures.

Mr. Jack Harris: That's a very general comment. The question was whether or not your agency had provided any security information or security advice with respect to the visa application centre in Beijing. Can you answer yes or no to that, please?

I know you respond when asked, but the question that was before the committee the last time was about whether or not something happened. We got a very passive answer, which was not of much comfort, as I pointed out. I don't think you're giving me much more comfort now.

Can you answer the question, yes or no?

Mr. David Vigneault: Unfortunately, Mr. Harris, I cannot provide specific details of the type of advice and on what subject we are providing to our partners.

Mr. Jack Harris: You seem to be hiding behind the fact that you can't tell us whether or not you gave advice about this. Was your agency in the position to do that? Was there any opportunity for you to do that?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Harris, I have mentioned that we have been working with IRCC and PSPC in the context of many different ventures. We have been providing advice to agencies, but unfortunately, I cannot provide you with the specifics in this open context.

Mr. Jack Harris: That's a very obtuse answer, sir. I thought the minister was much more forthcoming the last time to suggest that nothing had been done. We were told it was only done when asked and nobody had asked. I don't know why that can't be repeated here tonight, if it is indeed true.

Let me turn to another question. We're talking about foreign interference. We talk about foreign influence. We talk about espionage. Perhaps you're the best person to answer this question, Mr. Vigneault, because of the nature of your agency's work.

Can you distinguish between foreign influence, foreign interference and espionage? They seem to be talked about in a different way. Is there a hierarchy here of what might be legal, what makes it illegal and what makes it subject to prosecution?

Could you try that one, or is there someone else who is better able to answer that?

• (1900)

Mr. David Vigneault: From a CSIS point of view, our act speaks to foreign influence as a threat, but colloquially, this is what most people consider foreign interference. That is using covert and coercive means when trying to accomplish an objective.

When we have those characteristics, of a coercive and covert approach, CSIS can intervene and investigate the threat to national security. As you probably know, Mr. Harris, CSIS does not lay charges or take enforcement actions.

You're absolutely right to say that foreign influence and espionage are parts of a continuum. Interference is when you have those elements of coercion and—

The Chair: Thank you.

Excuse me. Sorry about that, but Mr. Harris's time is up.

We will go now to the second round.

We will hear from Mr. Williamson for five minutes.

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

Thank you, all, for returning.

Commissioner, I think you were about to give us some interesting indications of the tip line, but you were not able to complete your thought. This was about the 120 tips a day. You were just saying, "As calls have increased, the percentage of" and we didn't hear the rest of your statement. Could you finish that for us, please?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, basically what I was going to say that was noteworthy was that, as the volume of the tips increases, the threat percentage significantly declines. What I mean by that is that significantly fewer tips are deemed relevant to national security or to law enforcement matters.

We examine them all. We tend to get a lot of tips that aren't relative to national security or law enforcement. Those are not followed up on by our agency. If they are applicable to any other agency, we would pass them on.

Some of it is just information. People might feel, for example, a threat, and if it doesn't meet the threshold of a criminal offence, then we normally can't deal with it in that sense.

Mr. John Williamson: Okay, I might come back to that, but let me ask you first, when you look into these cases that are investigated further, are threats coming from members of the diplomatic corps, from visitors without any official standing here from a mission or from other Canadians?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Unfortunately, I don't have the statistics on where they are generated from. I simply have the number of tips that we have received on those lines.

Mr. John Williamson: Could you speak to them more broadly? Is the tendency more likely to be someone from a diplomatic mission, a visitor or a citizen?

Commr Brenda Lucki: If we did have that information, I couldn't share that with you. Sorry.

Mr. John Williamson: Okay. You mentioned that, if the calls aren't related to national security or law enforcement... We'll put aside national security for a second. What are the parameters of a kind of threat? I think you said law enforcement or maybe you just said the law. What would those kinds of infractions look like when an investigation would continue?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Sometimes, if they don't reach the realm of national security, we might pass that information on to the police of jurisdiction if it was a Criminal Code type of uttering threats or something like that, but if it isn't in the national security realm on that tip line, it would be referred to the police of jurisdiction.

Mr. John Williamson: Okay, thank you.

I have a question for Mr. Vigneault from CSIS.

I'm just going to make a comment about something that my colleague Mr. Harris said when he was suggesting the other day that, if what the minister had said was true, why can't it be repeated? I would suggest that perhaps it was not true. He was busy finger-pointing to a previous government and not dealing with the problem in front of him.

What department would we speak to if we wanted to have answers around this immigration office in Beijing that is being operated by the police authorities of a foreign country? Is it Immigration? Who would we talk to about the operation of that facility?

• (1905)

Mr. David Vigneault: I'm looking at my colleague, Mr. Stewart, if he wants to take the question.

Mr. Rob Stewart: The contract is overseen by and under the auspices of the Public Services and Procurement department, but they work hand in glove with the department that is the beneficiary of the contract, and that is by IRCC, so the two of them together would provide a response to any questions concerning the contract.

Mr. John Williamson: Okay, Mr. Chair, do I have 30 seconds?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. John Williamson: Is anyone able to say that they believe Huawei should be permitted to operate in Canada? I don't need a long explanation as to why they shouldn't, but who has confidence that Huawei should be allowed to operate in this country?

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I had a great answer.

The Chair: Your time is up. Thank you very much.

We will go on.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dubourg, you have five minutes.

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

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the witnesses here tonight and thank them for coming. I also understand that when we talk about national security and public safety, it's a little more difficult for witnesses to get into details. Nevertheless, we want to make sure that Canadians are well protected.

Since we started this meeting, we have been talking about people receiving threats or immigration. I will start with the latter.

At the end of last year, I think in December, Minister Mendicino introduced measures to attract students and to make it easier for them to obtain permanent resident status. I think Mr. Ossowski is well aware of that.

Since the announcement, has the program been working well? Are there any security issues related to people moving to Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. John Ossowski: Our role with respect to those programs that are administered by IRCC is to do the security screening. For anyone who applies for a permit of permanent residency or temporary resident visas we would work with our other security partners to provide the assurance that there's no security issues that they need to be concerned about.

I would just say that since those announcements were made, obviously the travel restrictions have made it so that people aren't actually arriving in the country. The work is continuing behind the scenes, and once we get past that place, the people who we have no concerns with would be allowed to enter the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: You are quite right, Mr. Ossowski: the pandemic has delayed this process.

Let us now return to the security aspect and the first questions asked by my colleagues about people who feel threatened.

Ms. Lucki, you said that at times you had received more than 120 reports and that you passed this information on to the police if it concerned them.

Is the security system well integrated? Do you receive the reports first?

If all the elements of the security structure work together, we have an integrated system that protects Canadians.

• (1910)

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: What I can say is that outside of the tip line we have an integrated approach to national security. We work very closely with CSIS. We work with CSE. We work with, of course, CBSA and the cyber side with the cybersecurity centre. We do our utmost to be integrated. We have meetings together. We share information when possible. At the working level, often there are people working side by side and they are embedded together in the same offices. That's to make sure there's a seamless transition, because in these investigations, sometimes everybody has pieces of the same puzzle and we have to make sure that we share those. That's the integrated approach that we use.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: I wanted to hear you say that and I thank you.

As you know, I met several of you when I was on the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, and I know how you operate. Unlike the latter committee or other agencies that do not always have the opportunity to reassure Canadians, the present committee allows us to speak publicly, and I wanted to hear you say that security measures are in place to protect Canadians.

Mr. Chair, you're indicating that I don't have much time left. Perhaps I will have the opportunity to come back to this later.

Thank you, and thank you to the witnesses.

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

I now give the floor to Mr. Bergeron for two and a half minutes.

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

I am counting on you, Mr. Stewart, to ensure that we get the written answers that were promised to us at the last meeting and again today.

Mr. Vigneault, what do you say to this statement by your predecessor that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is doing business with a Chinese government entity, which is certainly an entry point for potential cyber spies?

This brings me to a second question which I will take the liberty of asking you at the same time.

I assume you are aware that VFS Global was subject to personal information leaks in the UK in 2015. Did this information cause Canadian authorities to be concerned about continuing to do business with VFS Global, given that the contract was renewed in 2015 and in 2018?

Finally, on February 9, the Prime Minister announced an investigation into the process. Where are we with this investigation process?

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron, for your question.

It is very clear that the Chinese government has several vectors that can lead to the interception of information. Sophisticated states around the world have a number of ways of getting cyber espionage information and bringing a human factor into the transmission chain. It is this kind of information that we need to understand.

We give the threat information to our partners, who must determine the best measures to mitigate the threat. We work with our intelligence security partners and with our partners and friends around the world. It's always a very complex element, but that's why we work closely with our partners.

With respect to your question about the VFS Global leaks, I am sorry, but unfortunately I cannot answer it. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada would be in a better position to answer it.

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, you have 10 seconds.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Can anyone enlighten me on the process announced by the Prime Minister?

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time is up.

[English]

We go now to Mr. Harris for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

I have a question. I guess it's first of all directed towards the Communications Security Establishment.

I'm referencing the December 2018 CSE press release relating to China's Ministry of State Security being behind a 2016 compromise of what were called "managed service providers" in Canada and elsewhere.

Can you first of all tell me, when you're referring to managed service providers, who are you referring to, and whether or not China's Ministry of State Security breach resulted in access to client data stored by these providers?

• (1915)

Ms. Shelly Bruce (Chief, Communications Security Establishment): Chair, thank you very much for the question.

CSE has two main roles that are very complementary.

One of them is in the foreign intelligence side, where we look for the motivations, intentions, capabilities and activities of foreign actors, including foreign cyber-threat actors, whether they're state or non-state. We also have the mandate to act as the cybersecurity centre for the Government of Canada and raise that cybersecurity—

Mr. Jack Harris: Can you be more specific to the question, please? I have only a very limited time and I'm looking for some answers that might be helpful.

Ms. Shelly Bruce: I'm sorry. Of course, those two mandates come together to put us in a position where we can see certain things, and when it makes sense with the government, we can attribute certain activities to actors that would otherwise go undetected.

I have with me today the head of the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, who can talk a little bit more about managed service providers and what role they play in the supply chain and the ecosystem for different organizations.

Mr. Jack Harris: I'd like to know about this particular investigation and the result of it.

If Mr. Jones is here, I guess he can provide that information.

Mr. Scott Jones (Head, Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, Communications Security Establishment): Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

When we're talking about managed service providers, it's really the people that many companies rely upon to provide those services which makes them a very lucrative intelligence target.

In the case that you mentioned, where the government chose to do an attribution, it was to draw attention to the fact that this had been done and led to significant compromises for companies around the world. This is something we joined in with our allies, to both advise in terms of how to raise the bar, but also to raise awareness and to draw attention to the fact that this was something of concern in terms of the breadth of the activity.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Mr. Harris's time is up.

Mr. Genuis, you have five minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, but I believe Mr. Chong was to be ahead of me. Is that correct?

The Chair: Sure, sorry. Pardon me, I'll go to Mr. Chong in that case.

Thank you very much.

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

My first question is for the Communications Security Establishment.

Last November you named China for the first time as one of the greatest strategic threats to Canada. You warned of the developing cyber capabilities to disrupt our critical infrastructure. What is your view of Huawei Technologies Canada being allowed to build out the core of Canada's 5G telecommunications infrastructure?

Ms. Shelly Bruce: Thank you very much for the question.

At this point, the Communications Security Establishment is one of many organizations that are contributing to a government-wide study to assess—

Hon. Michael Chong: I understand that. My question, then, is: When will that study be completed?

Ms. Shelly Bruce: This study is under way, and when the government is prepared to make a decision, then I'm sure the answer will be known to that. I don't know if—

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. The previous minister of public safety indicated in May 2019 that a decision was going to be made before the 2019 election. He then indicated in July of that year that a decision would be made shortly after the 2019 election. We're now a year and a half since the election and there's still no decision yet.

People are wondering how long this study is going to take, because the government has continually said it's studying the issue. We've been studying it for years now.

I guess maybe a different way to ask the question is: Has the CSE completed its study, and it's just with the cabinet now for further study, or are CSE and other elements of the Canadian security establishment still studying this?

Ms. Shelly Bruce: As you can appreciate, it would be inappropriate for me to speak about advice and guidance that we are giving to the government on any of these matters.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay, so maybe this is a more specific question. What is your view of Huawei providing network switches for the core of the network that connects four national data centres under the Compute Canada Federation?

Ms. Shelly Bruce: I can speak more broadly to the program that is running right now under the security review program. That really is related to the distribution of equipment and security in the 3G, 4G and LTE space, if that's of interest, because there is a—

• (1920)

Hon. Michael Chong: No, I'd like to get to specifics of Huawei.

Maybe I'll ask Mr. Vigneault of CSIS.

Several years ago, Mr. Vigneault, I believe in December 2018, you warned of increasing state-sponsored espionage through 5G networks. While you didn't explicitly mention China, you identified 5G mobile technology as one of the five critical areas of threat that Canada is facing. Do you still hold that view?

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair and Mr. Chong.

We have been referring to a number of threats. The threat environment, unfortunately, is getting more complex and more complicated. The number of threat actors and their capabilities are increasing. Yes, any advanced technology and advanced communications networks are lucrative targets, as my colleague said, so we are indeed concerned about the integrity.

Hon. Michael Chong: One thing that's a bit confounding for those of us who are following this issue closely is that we know that CSIS talks regularly to Canadian universities and business organizations about state-sponsored threats to Canada. For example, last August, Canadian universities were warned about using Alibaba for Zoom-type technologies. Last August, they were also warned about the thousand talents program. You mentioned 5G as being a threat from foreign actors. Clearly, there's only one country and one company that is the embodiment of that threat.

Yet, last month one of the elements of the Government of Canada, NSERC, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, awarded an almost \$5-million grant to partner with Huawei in Canadian universities. NSERC says that it doesn't see a problem with the grant. Canadian universities have indicated that they've not been warned against working or collaborating with Huawei, that they've not received any direction or guidance from the federal government in this regard.

Has CSIS given guidance to Canadian universities about the 5G threat?

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair and Mr. Chong.

CSIS is not in the business of giving guidance to universities. We work with them in collaboration. We provide them with as much information as possible—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt, but Mr. Chong's time is up.

I'll now go to Ms. Yip for five minutes, please.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, everyone, for returning to the committee.

Mr. Stewart, last week, Minister Blair acknowledged the rise of racism and violence directed towards Canadians of Asian descent purely because of their ethnicity. In your opinion, how important is it for public figures and communication products to avoid blanket statements and declarations that can marginalize entire communities?

Mr. Rob Stewart: I would not be a position to share my opinion with the committee, as I give advice to the minister, but I can represent the minister's view, which is that it is extremely important for Canadian public figures to emphasize that this is inappropriate behaviour and it is divisive and dangerous to our society.

Ms. Jean Yip: What can be done to reassure Asian Canadians to feel safe, especially in light of the rise in anti-Asian racism of 715% in B.C.?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I can—

I'm sorry. Go ahead, Rob.

Mr. Rob Stewart: I was going to say that it is a very important fact that when we talk about a threat as it emanates from China, it's to be laid at the door of the Government of China, not the people of China. Making that point and making it very clearly is very important.

Commissioner.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, I was simply going to add that whether we're talking about a threat in the national security space or just a threat in general, which we've seen with the onset of COVID, it's so important for people to come forward to report that to their police of jurisdiction. I know that in the Lower Mainland that is mostly the RCMP. It's really important for people to feel that they can go to the police of jurisdiction to report it, because that's the only way that we will be able to deal with it adequately.

Ms. Jean Yip: Has there been a rise in investigations by the RCMP on this matter?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I can't say for sure specifically on intimidation. I know that for COVID specifically, there's been a rise in mental health calls and there's been a rise in domestic violence, but I haven't seen any statistics that show a rise in intimidation or threats.

• (1925)

Mr. Rob Stewart: I could perhaps add that the government has an anti-racism strategy, of which the Department of Public Safety is a part, and the role we play there is in programming and providing grants and contributions to organizations to counter racism.

Ms. Jean Yip: Are there specific programs towards the Asian community?

Mr. Rob Stewart: I can't answer that question, but I can answer you in writing.

Ms. Jean Yip: I look forward to seeing your response.

Ms. Lucki, you have mentioned that it's important for people to report the incidents. However, some Asian Canadians feel that they can't come forward because they feel that their statements are not—I don't want to say not taken seriously—effective, I guess, in terms of what the police or the RCMP would be looking for. Can you provide some clarification on that?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes. I can say that we take every complaint of threats and intimidation seriously. Obviously, in our space, it's about Criminal Code infractions, so it's important that it meet that threshold. If people fear... Of course, with intimidation and threats, there's always a fear attached to those types of crimes, but

we do have, for example, Crime Stoppers and we do have the tip line.

It's very important, because sometimes people just don't feel safe to report those. That's why we have those anonymous types of areas where they can do so, or they can go through the tip line and not be anonymous if they'd like. They don't have to go to a police station, for example.

Ms. Jean Yip: Has there been an increase in foreign interference investigations by the RCMP?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I won't say specifically. It's very hard. These are not investigations that people call in. These are self-generated investigations, usually, where we get certain pieces of information, and we proactively would go and investigate that.

The Chair: This concludes Ms. Yip's time.

This also concludes our first panel.

Witnesses, on behalf of the members, I want to thank all of you very much for your appearance this evening.

We'll need a few minutes to switch over and bring in our next guest and test the sound. We'll suspend for two minutes while we make the changeover.

• (1925)

(Pause)

• (1925)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

I'd like to welcome Dr. Scott Halperin, who is appearing as an individual.

Dr. Scott Halperin is a professor of pediatrics and microbiology and immunology at Dalhousie University, a university I know well. He's also a director of the Canadian Center for Vaccinology.

Thank you for being here tonight.

You have five minutes to make your opening remarks.

Dr. Scott Halperin (Professor of Pediatrics and Microbiology & Immunology, Dalhousie University and Director, Canadian Center for Vaccinology, As an Individual): Thank you very much for the invitation to speak to the committee.

In addition to those descriptions of what I do, I am the nominated principal or co-principal investigator for two national networks relevant to vaccine research. The first is IMPACT, which is the Immunization Monitoring Program, Active. It is a Public Health Agency of Canada funded surveillance network administered at 12 of the country's pediatric tertiary care hospitals, and undertakes surveillance for selected vaccine preventable, or soon to be vaccine preventable, infectious diseases and adverse events following immunization severe enough to require hospitalization.

The second network is the Canadian Immunization Research Network, CIRN. CIRN organizes a network of networks that comprises eight subnetworks and does a broad range of vaccine-related surveillance and research. One of these subnetworks is the Clinical Trials Network, which has been involved in clinical trials related to candidate COVID-19 vaccines.

My experience related to this committee's mandate on Canadian and Chinese relations is restricted to a collaboration with a single Chinese manufacturer of a candidate COVID-19 vaccine. This is what I will describe, since I imagine that's the reason I was asked to present to the committee.

In mid-March 2020, exactly one year ago this week, I was asked to join a meeting with the National Research Council and CanSino Biologics about my centre, the Canadian Center for Vaccinology, or CCFV, and our network, CIRN, partnering with NRC and CanSino to undertake a phase one clinical trial in Canada for their adenovirus vectored COVID-19 vaccine candidate.

This vaccine had just finished enrolment of a phase one study in China, and preliminary safety information was soon going to be available. There was a plan to undertake a second follow-on phase one study in Canada to expand information generated from the first phase one trial, and to continue with the development of the vaccine in Canada following a meeting scheduled with Health Canada regulatory authorities.

The plan was, if the vaccine was demonstrated to be safe and effective by Canadian regulatory authorities, it would be manufactured in the NRC's facility in sufficient quantities to contribute to Canada's vaccine needs. A meeting with Health Canada regulators, NRC, CanSino and CCFV took place at the end of March and guidance around the design of that phase one study was received. A protocol for the phase one study was developed and, several weeks later in a follow-up meeting with Health Canada, further guidance was obtained. Based on that meeting, further modifications to the protocol were undertaken and the protocol was approved on May 15.

Arrangements were then made for the vaccine to be shipped from China to Halifax, where CCFV is located, on May 19. The vaccine moved from the company in China to the airport to be stored in a secure, temperature-controlled facility awaiting clearance for one of the flights that took place several times a week, at that time, from China to Toronto.

Over the next several weeks we were told which flights it would be on and then told the vaccine had not made it onto the flights because of lacking customs clearance. During this period, CanSino executives met with various Chinese government officials to determine what the problem was and what had to be done to get the approvals needed for exporting the vaccine from China. They were told various things and about various forms they were supposed to complete. They continued to complete whatever paperwork they were asked to provide.

Weeks later, in June, they were told that the Chinese government was setting up a new committee to review and approve any vaccines shipped out of the country, and that CanSino's approvals would be part of this new process that was going to be used for all vaccines from any company in China.

They continued to meet with government officials, but were not able to find out what the delay was. We were assured by the company that the delay was not political in nature, but rather was bureaucratic. Because of these delays, the phase one trial that we had been planning was becoming increasingly irrelevant as by this time, later

in June and July, phase two trial data became available from studies that were being done in China.

● (1930)

While we were continuing to work on getting vaccines shipped to Canada, we assisted in the design of their phase three clinical trial, which would evaluate the efficacy of the vaccine. This phase three trial was planned for multiple countries around the world in which the rates of COVID-19 disease were high. These sites—

● (1935)

The Chair: Doctor, forgive me, but I have to stop you because we're at the five-minute point and I have to get to members for their questions. I'm guessing there will be an opportunity through those questions for you to complete your thoughts. I'm sorry about that.

[*Translation*]

We now begin the first round.

Mr. Paul-Hus, you have the floor for the next six minutes.

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

Dr. Halperin, your testimony has been very interesting so far. I would like to know... Can you hear me well, Dr. Halperin?

The Chair: I can hear you well.

[*English*]

Dr. Halperin, do you have a problem hearing Mr. Paul-Hus? Do you have the interpretation, Dr. Halperin?

Dr. Scott Halperin: I do now. I had it on before, but I guess when I logged back in it didn't come back.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Paul-Hus, please start again.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I'll start again.

Thank you, Dr. Halperin, for the information you have given us, which was very important to us.

My questions now concern dates. As of June 28, 2020, CanSino Biologics has had its vaccine approved in China for military use.

Were you informed, at the end of June, that the Chinese army was in contact with CanSino Biologics?

[*English*]

Dr. Scott Halperin: Yes, I was informed that the vaccine was going to be for emergency use authorization prior to the end of the clinical trials we were planning by the Chinese military.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: We are trying to understand the situation. You mentioned in your speech that it was not a political decision to prevent vaccines from being sent to Canada. However, we can see that, through the army, the Chinese government was in direct contact with CanSino Biologics. On June 29, they vaccinated—and thus protected—entire units of Chinese soldiers deployed in certain areas, while we were left without any assistance.

Were you surprised to learn that this was their way of doing things at that time?

[English]

Dr. Scott Halperin: I think those were two different issues. One was that we were attempting to get the vaccine in order to do clinical trials to obtain more information about the use of those vaccines. As you're aware, before those vaccines could be used for emergency use and in the general population, they would need to go through phase one, phase two and phase three studies before emergency authorization would be approved for the general population, certainly in Canada and elsewhere.

We're definitely surprised any time a vaccine is authorized for use before any of those data are available, whether that be in China or.... We were similarly surprised when that occurred in Russia with the Russian vaccine, which was also authorized for general usage after only phase two studies, before phase three studies had even begun.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: We are currently conducting a national security review. I would like to know if, when you were put in touch with CanSino Biologics, any national security agencies in Canada provided you with information regarding possible links between CanSino Biologics and the Chinese government.

[English]

Dr. Scott Halperin: When we started having discussions with CanSino, they were with NRC, the National Research Council, and CanSino. Our interactions were with the company, which was in the business of undertaking clinical trials to show the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine. The interaction between that company and the government was not really an issue that I was looking at.

• (1940)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: You know that the founders of CanSino Biologics were recognized as part of what is called the Thousand Talents Plan. Were you aware of this connection to the founders of CanSino Biologics?

[English]

Dr. Scott Halperin: No, I was not aware of that program. I was aware that the founders had previously worked in Canada at Sanofi Pasteur and had then gone back to China to start that company, but I was not aware of their program.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I want to make sure I understand what you said at the beginning. You mentioned that you were informed, on May 15, 2020, that there would be no shipments of CanSino Biologics products to Canada. Is that correct?

[English]

Dr. Scott Halperin: No, that's not correct. I was informed that the shipment scheduled for that day was not coming, but not that vaccines.... It wasn't until August that we found there would not be shipments of vaccine to Canada. Up until that point, the dates of scheduling them kept rolling back and back and back, until finally the vaccine had to be shipped back from the airport to the company

while they continued to try to get the process for release of them through customs. It wasn't until August that we finally decided, based on the fact that shipments had gone to other countries, that it was a unique problem of shipping to Canada, not just exporting. Once we saw that the vaccines were shipped for the phase three studies to Pakistan, that suggested it was a political issue.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Paul-Hus.

[English]

Now we'll go to Ms. Zann for six minutes, please.

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

Welcome, Dr. Halperin. It's so nice to have you here at our committee. I'm coming to you from Truro, the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. As a proud Nova Scotian, I'm really happy to have you here in your capacity as the director of the Canadian Center for Vaccinology. Of course, the agricultural campus of Dalhousie is in Truro.

As you know, global partners have come together to learn about COVID-19 and do research about the factors of transmissibility, for instance, and new variants of concern and the lasting effects. Could you tell us, please, about that collaboration and why it's so important to have a global response to infectious diseases such as COVID-19?

Dr. Scott Halperin: It's very important. It's a truism, albeit a worn-out truism, that viruses don't respect borders. We really need to have collaboration so that when variants become apparent in any jurisdiction anywhere in the world, they're very quickly shared so they can be sequenced. If revised vaccines need to be made, it needs to be done very quickly.

There's an incredible amount of data sharing and material sharing around the world that we didn't see 10 or 20 years ago with previous pandemics, including the routine influenza pandemics. I think it's incredibly important to have that type of collaboration around the world to make sure that we have very early warnings so that we can develop interventions that are effective.

Ms. Lenore Zann: There's a lot of disinformation about vaccines, as you know, that may cause some Canadians to be hesitant about getting vaccinated. Can you tell us more about the work that goes into evaluating vaccine candidates for use in Canada, and expand a bit on the COVID-19 vaccines and why they're safe and effective?

Dr. Scott Halperin: Canada has one of the most rigorous regulatory authorities in the world. Any vaccine, before it gets to widespread use in a population, has to undergo a series of clinical trials—phase one, phase two and phase three studies with an increasing number of people in them—that look for safety and efficacy.

Prior to being released, they need to be studied in thousands of people. These current COVID trials have had over 30,000 to 40,000 people in all of them before they get to the point of emergency authorization. Even at that stage, a study of 30,000 or 40,000 is not going to detect adverse events that occur in more than one in 1,000 people. If one wants to assure the safety, even for more rare adverse events, one needs to have post-use surveillance within the country. Canada has developed a very rigorous augmented surveillance system in order to look at COVID-19 vaccines as these vaccine programs roll out.

Safety is one of the most important things people are concerned about in terms of hesitancy. People are hesitant for a variety of reasons, and that's normal and expected. We want people to want to know about the vaccines before they receive them. We need to be able to provide them with the type of information they need, while considering how they want the information and from whom they want the information, in order to make sure we get the highest rates of vaccine uptake.

• (1945)

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you. Honestly, I'm very proud of your work.

I'm probably going to get cut off any second here, but do you have a second to talk about your research on immunity, particularly in the long term?

Dr. Scott Halperin: That's one of the most important issues we're facing now. These vaccines were authorized for emergency use with information from up to about three months. Obviously, we want a vaccine that lasts longer. There's a lot of work that's now ongoing to look at duration of protection and what we call vaccine effectiveness, as we're rolling them out in the real world situation. We are monitoring for vaccine effectiveness over time, so we can look at the durability of the immune response, as well as the immune response to the variants that are emerging.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Again, I want to say that I'm very proud of the work you're doing.

I think that here in Nova Scotia we've done a great job of looking after people so that nobody is getting COVID, or very few are. Here in the northern district, we've been very lucky. As well, in our long-term care homes, nobody has gotten COVID that we know of. They were very good at locking down the homes at the very beginning of the pandemic, and they've continued to make sure nobody comes in and makes people sick.

I also wanted to mention Dr. Alice Aiken, who I posted about for International Women's Day. She is one of your colleagues, and I think she's done incredible work as well. What kind of security briefings, if any, are the Canadian Center for Vaccinology scientists receiving regarding foreign threats to sensitive intellectual property that they create?

Dr. Scott Halperin: We have had security briefings, and I've met with a representative from CSIS on multiple occasions. I have his direct line if I ever have a concern or question.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt. That's the conclusion of Ms. Zann's time.

[Translation]

We now continue with Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Bergeron, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you, Dr. Halperin, for being with us today.

You have been cut off twice already. So if you would like to take advantage of my first few minutes to complete your thoughts, I will gladly offer them to you, after which I may have a few questions to ask you.

[English]

Dr. Scott Halperin: Thank you very much.

I was just going to say that I do have a direct access to the experts at CSIS, and they have my number. They also call me on a routine basis to get any updates and discuss both general security issues and my centre's interaction with CanSino Biologics.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: As for your opening speech, would you like to add to your thoughts? Had you covered everything?

[English]

Dr. Scott Halperin: I think mostly I was just going to complete that timeline and if there are any specific questions about my continued interaction with CanSino, I'd be happy to discuss those further, if there's any interest in that.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I understand that this partnership with CanSino was negotiated within the framework of a partnership with the National Research Council of Canada and that CanSino, somewhat unexpectedly, decided not to send the samples that would normally have been sent to you.

You told us earlier that you thought it was for political reasons.

Could you tell us more about this issue?

• (1950)

[English]

Dr. Scott Halperin: Yes, I'd be happy to.

The decision not to ship the vaccine to Canada was not made by CanSino. They were not able to get export agreement and it became clear during the month of August that this had nothing to do with just bureaucratic paperwork, because, as I was mentioning when I was cut off, that vaccine was then cleared to be shipped out of China to Russia, Pakistan and then eventually to Mexico, Chile and Argentina, which were part of the phase three trials that we had designed. It was clear that this was not just that CanSino wasn't able to ship out of the country, but that it was specific to Canada. That's when it became clear that it was political and that this was not something that was going to be solved by more paperwork.

At that time, the NRC decided that the agreement they had in order to manufacture the CanSino vaccine in Canada made no sense because they weren't able to get the vaccine, so they ended that collaboration.

In the meantime, we had designed the phase three study, the efficacy study, that was going to be done globally and we at CCFV continued to participate in the design and then the implementation of that study in other countries. The phase three study was never planned to take place in Canada because, very fortunately, our incidence of disease in Canada was really too low to have supported a phase three study.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You continue to contribute to the Phase III clinical trial of this vaccine.

What can you tell us about it today?

Do the studies and trials that have been carried out so far seem to be conclusive?

[English]

Dr. Scott Halperin: Yes, the phase three study was implemented. It began in September in Pakistan and Russia. Pakistan enrolled a large number of participants and then enrolment was started in Mexico, Chile and Argentina. Pakistan and Mexico were the two countries that contributed the most participants, volunteers, to the study. It underwent an interim analysis, the same type of analysis that was done by the Pfizer vaccine that received a lot of press. Pfizer vaccine's interim analysis was in December. CanSino's was at the end of January, and it was reported to have an efficacy of over 70%. Based on those results, it received emergency authorization in Pakistan and Mexico. There are multiple other countries where that emergency authorization is also being reviewed by their regulators. That vaccine is now being used in those countries under emergency authorization.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, you have 25 seconds left.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: So let's move on to the next round.

The Chair: Very well, thank you.

[English]

Mr. Harris, you have six minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you very much.

I have to tell you though, Chair, your voice comes in and out off and on. I don't know why that is. It's not my earphones, I'll guarantee you that.

Thank you, Dr. Halperin, for joining us. It's a pleasure to have you with us. In your work with CanSino, am I right in assuming that your work on the phase three investigation continued in terms of supervision of some of the phase three trials in Pakistan and Mexico, or am I reading too much into the notes I have here?

• (1955)

Dr. Scott Halperin: You are absolutely correct.

I am the global principal investigator for that study. There are principal investigators in each of the individual countries, but I'm the overall investigator. My centre has the data team that's doing the data and statistical analyses and providing those results to the regulatory authorities in all of those countries.

Mr. Jack Harris: Would that have been the case with respect to the phase one trials that were expected to be undertaken in Canada as well?

Dr. Scott Halperin: That's right. We would have done that for the phase one and phase two studies in Canada. Then we would have gone on to phase three, globally. The reason, of course, is that if we had done those trials and gotten a vaccine here, then we would have had a vaccine that would have been available in Canada.

Mr. Jack Harris: That vaccine has now been approved in some other countries and is in use.

Dr. Scott Halperin: That's correct.

Mr. Jack Harris: You had told at some length that you are well aware of the security considerations in dealing with research with foreign entities and that you've been regularly in touch with CSIS and representatives. I have to assume there were no concerns raised about working with CanSino in respect of this project of development in Canada, whether it be the trials, the arrangement with NRC or the plans for production in Canada. Is that correct?

Dr. Scott Halperin: That's correct.

The concerns would actually more likely be in the opposite direction. In other words, we have their data. They're the sponsor of the clinical trial and they're paying for the clinical trial, but the data is held in Canada. There's no security concern that they may steal those data because they own that data.

I think there was more concern, not from the company's standpoint, but from the Chinese government's standpoint, that the data would be here in Canada and not in China.

Mr. Jack Harris: Beyond that, the question of intellectual property is always raised. The data would be intellectual property, of course. What about the vaccine itself? The vaccine that was being used—or was planned to be used—for the trials within Canada was all manufactured in China, I take it.

Dr. Scott Halperin: The plan had been that the initial vaccine we would have received would be from China, but then the NRC would receive the starting material for the production of that. Once the NRC's facility was upgraded and available—remembering that was at the very beginning, before NRC's facility was upgraded—they could start manufacturing it to then supply the latter stages of the vaccine needs to the clinical trials in Canada.

Mr. Jack Harris: That would have involved a certain amount of technology or intellectual property transfer to Canada for the purpose of being able to manufacture that product and ensure it's quality standards and all of the things that go with that.

There was no difficulty with that either was there?

Dr. Scott Halperin: There wasn't from the company's standpoint. From the company's standpoint, it was part of the agreement that they would be transferring that technology to Canada.

Mr. Jack Harris: I take it then that, based on what you're telling us so far, your undertaking of research and your Canadian Center for Vaccinology is fully aware of the concerns that have been talked about from time to time in terms of research and the concerns that have been raised about a potential for mitigating risks to intellectual property and all of that.

You seem to be fully aware of these dimensions of Canadian research being undertaken by your university. Am I right in assuming that?

Dr. Scott Halperin: That's correct. We're certainly aware of those concerns.

Mr. Jack Harris: Has it ever been raised within your university that any other research activities or partnerships have given rise to suspicions or concerns about security?

Dr. Scott Halperin: I'm not personally aware of any research being done in my university, certainly not in my centre, where there were concerns that any of that information was being shared inappropriately with any foreign countries.

● (2000)

Mr. Jack Harris: However, you're the scientists, obviously, and you would be dealing with your colleagues at other universities as well on the issues related to your discipline and your research.

The Chair: Pardon me, Mr. Harris. I'm sorry, but your time is up. Thank you very much.

This gives me an opportunity to thank—

Mr. Jack Harris: I might get back to you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris. Sorry about that.

Dr. Halperin, thank you so much for being with us tonight.

I'm coming to you from Bedford, so I'm not very far away from you, also on Mi'kma'ki, obviously.

I'll give you a moment to disconnect. We have to carry on.

Mr. Genuis, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes. Mr. Chair, I wonder if there is consensus among the committee to extend in order to give every party an opportunity to ask one additional question. I know that the bells are going to start ringing soon, but we've only had half an hour, which is fairly limited time for a witness.

The Chair: Let me ask that question.

Is there anyone who objects to giving a couple of minutes each?

Mr. Genuis, I guess that's what you're saying is—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes. I'll say two minutes each.

The Chair: —two minutes each to each party.

Does anyone object to that?

Not seeing any objection, is Mr. Genuis next, or is it Mr. Chong?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: No, I believe it's Mr. Chong.

The Chair: That's very good.

Mr. Chong, please proceed for two minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Dr. Halperin, thank you for appearing in front of us today.

In light of the experience you went through earlier last year, would you collaborate with CanSino in the future?

Dr. Scott Halperin: I would absolutely still collaborate with them. It has been a very good collaboration with the individuals at CanSino.

I think before I got too far down the path I'd want to make sure that if there were a vaccine that I needed, we'd test it out to make sure it could be shipped so I didn't expend a lot of time and effort.

Hon. Michael Chong: Do entities of the Canadian security apparatus ever sit down with you and talk to you about threats and risks coming from places such as China when it comes to intellectual property or national security?

Dr. Scott Halperin: Yes. I have met with members of CSIS multiple times in the past year and a half and went through—

Hon. Michael Chong: Is that a formal process or is it more ad hoc where they'll call you up and brief you? Is it a formalized process that you go through?

Dr. Scott Halperin: My interactions have been ad hoc, but as part of those conversations, I was told that they provide information routinely to the institutions where research is being done, particularly where they consider it to be high-risk research that is being done. They told me that they had met with members of my various institutions, the IT people in the institutions, about that risk.

Hon. Michael Chong: I assume you're familiar with the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg.

Dr. Scott Halperin: Absolutely.

Hon. Michael Chong: Were you surprised when those researchers were escorted out of that laboratory?

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Halperin. I'm afraid we'll have to wait for that answer, because the two minutes are up. It's a very short, lightning round.

[Translation]

Mr. Lightbound, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Halperin, thank you for being here.

Mr. Chong touched on some of the same questions I had in mind. From your experience in the academic research community, how much awareness is there in our institutions about the risks posed by foreign actors, in this case China?

I would also like to talk about the Department of Public Safety's Safeguarding Science program.

How have you interacted with this program, and what link does it create with intelligence and security agencies?

[English]

Dr. Scott Halperin: With the type of research I'm doing, typically I am not generating intellectual property. I'm evaluating intellectual property of other entities, and that's the same whether it be a domestic or a foreign manufacturer. The type of work I'm doing at this level is evaluative research. I'm dealing with other people's intellectual property rather than sharing intellectual property that we are generating. Therefore, it's a bit of a different situation than what you're talking about.

• (2005)

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: More generally, I actually wanted to know the degree of awareness in academia of the risk that foreign actors present, in your experience.

[English]

Dr. Scott Halperin: In my world, I think the interaction with foreign actors becomes higher on the priority list based on the type of research we're doing. With COVID-19 vaccines, that became a higher priority, and that's where people have approached us to have these conversations. Most times we don't hear about that, just because it doesn't seem to be an overall concern. It's targeted.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Lightbound.

Mr. Bergeron, the floor is yours for two minutes.

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

We know that, under the national security laws in the People's Republic of China, all companies have to work with the regime in terms of transferring information.

Under those circumstances, were Canadian security agencies and yourself not concerned by the fact that CanSino could come looking for information here without us being able to do so in return? That is what seems to be demonstrated by the fact that CanSino was not able to send the samples that were supposed to be forwarded to Canada.

In other words, what were they looking for here and what did we gain from this exchange with CanSino?

[English]

Dr. Scott Halperin: For the phase one study that ended up being cancelled, they gained nothing and we gained nothing, because we were not able to generate any data from the planned study. The study didn't go ahead because we couldn't get the vaccine. For that study, it just turned out to be a waste of a lot of time for all parties because of the block of the export of the product.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: In terms of the concern that you or Canada's security agencies might have that the company was perhaps coming to look for information, you are basically telling me that it got nothing.

However, were there any prior concerns along those lines?

[English]

Dr. Scott Halperin: No, because the type of information that they would have gained if the study had gone forward would have been information that they would have sponsored to generate, so it would have been clinical trial information.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Harris, you have two minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

I'll give another version of my last question, and hopefully it's short enough that you can answer this time.

Dalhousie is a member of the U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities and U15 and Universities Canada published in 2019 a document called "Mitigating Economic And/Or Geopolitical Risks in Sensitive Research Projects", a set of guidelines and risk mitigation tools developed in collaboration with Canada.

Are you, sir, familiar with that particular document, and is it in use by your organization? Are your researchers familiar with that?

Dr. Scott Halperin: I am not familiar with it myself. I know that for any study we do, the university screens it first, and any research we do has to be signed off by our vice-president of research, so—

Mr. Jack Harris: Does that include the kind of lens we're talking about here in terms of security and mitigation to risks?

Dr. Scott Halperin: I'm not sure. I can't answer that.

Mr. Jack Harris: Before you were engaged with CSIS in the last year and a half, as you pointed out, were you aware of any of these types of problems or issues that were related to that?

Dr. Scott Halperin: Yes, absolutely. I was certainly aware that there are state actors and particular countries that have been of concern. That's been in the news, and I follow that. Although it's not a formal process that I am aware of, I certainly am cognizant of and aware that, in my interactions with any study sponsor, I'm going to make sure that we're not being taken advantage of in any way and that we're not losing any information that is not in the public domain.

• (2010)

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Dr. Halperin.

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

Thank you so much, Dr. Halperin, for being with us this evening. I appreciate that very much.

We'll let you go now. Have a nice evening.

To members of the committee, I get the impression from the clerk that the bells are ringing. Is that correct?

Now we have, of course, the work plan and subcommittee report, but we can only go to that, since the bells are ringing, if there is unanimous consent to continue.

I would ask if anyone objects to our continuing for 15 minutes.

Seeing no objections, would someone like to move the adoption of the subcommittee report and the work plan?

Go ahead, Mr. Chong, and I'll see Mr. Bergeron after that.

Hon. Michael Chong: I so move.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Monsieur Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I have already pointed out to my colleagues that this version that has been sent to us concerns me because it does not quite match the conclusion we reached.

For example, I had proposed that Clive Hamilton, who is now paired with Roger Faligot and Michel Juneau-Katsuya, would actually be paired with Ting-Sheng Lin.

It seems, however, that, right at the end, the clerk asked us whether we were referring to Mr. Lin or Mr. Li, and that your interpretation, Mr. Chair, was that it was Mr. Li. As a result, Mr. Li seems to end up in another group of witnesses and Mr. Lin seems to be on the bench. It seems that you said that I was supposed to nominate a witness for the ninth meeting and that I could propose Mr. Lin at that time. I do not want to be forced to propose Mr. Lin for the ninth meeting just because we overlooked him when the report that committee members are getting this evening was finalized.

Although Mr. Hamilton may be a little out of his element in the group he shares with Mr. Faligot and Mr. Juneau-Katsuya, I had proposed the compromise of adding Mr. Lin to the group with Paul Evans and Gordon Houlden, two other academics. If the committee agrees to include Mr. Ting-Shen Lin—whom our analyst had proposed—with that group of witnesses, I feel that we would be able to come to some common ground.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I can see the proposal from Mr. Genuis in my notes. For meeting 7, here is what is written in English.

[*English*]

I had written “old number 5”, or what was planned originally for meeting number five, plus Mr. Li.

I understand, I think from Mr. Genuis, that he said Mr. Li—that's what I wrote down—would be in the seventh meeting. I'm not sure. I don't have the work plan right in front of me.

Can you clarify or correct the situation here, Mr. Genuis?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sure. Thank you.

I was looking for Mr. Li to be invited in the seventh panel, and that is reflected in the work plan, but I have absolutely no objection

to the proposal for Mr. Lin as well, or to the particular configuration proposed by Mr. Bergeron.

I don't think it's an either-or. We should adopt what I understood to be Mr. Bergeron's proposed amendment.

Mr. Chair, I do want to make one other general comment.

We have this work plan. It has been agreed upon. Of course, there may be times when witnesses are not available, as happened tonight. There were some witnesses we had agreed we would hear from and they weren't available. I hope we have an understanding at the committee that we give our staff the flexibility to schedule those witnesses at a time when they are available, if they aren't available in certain instances.

We may find, for instance, that the Minister of National Defence is not available on Monday but is available on Thursday. I hope that the work plan is adopted with the spirit of that kind of flexibility and understanding.

● (2015)

The Chair: If the chair and the clerk had the permission of the committee for it, that would sound good. We would carry on, I think, on that basis.

Monsieur Lightbound.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: I completely agree with including the witness that Mr. Bergeron is proposing. As Mr. Genuis has just mentioned, we must of course be flexible so that the committee can make good progress. We have no objection on our side.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Chong, are you agreeable to that amendment to your motion, then?

If you are, good.

Does anyone object or disagree with this motion?

Madam Clerk?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-France Lafleur): I have Monsieur Bergeron in the room.

The Chair: We have Monsieur Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Since we seem to have consensus, I'm not going to add anything.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I feel that we have consensus.

[*English*]

Does anyone have any objections to that proposal?

If not, I will consider the report of the subcommittee and the work plan as amended—

Ms. Lenore Zann: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry to interrupt. I can't hear you.

The Chair: Okay. I'm going to hold this closer.

This is my third headset. I don't think it's my computer. Maybe it is. It's a Surface from the House, but—

Ms. Lenore Zann: Your voice keeps fading out.

The Chair: I'm terribly sorry about that.

I'm probably too loud now for the interpreters.

What I'm saying is that I consider the report of the subcommittee and the work plan as amended this evening to be adopted.

On that basis, I think we're ready to adjourn. That's all we have on the agenda tonight, I believe.

I'll see all of you at the vote.

Thank you very much. Have a nice evening.

The meeting is adjourned.

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