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Chair: Mr. Ken Hardie



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• (1830)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.)):
Good evening, everyone. We'll call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 12 of the House of Commons Special Committee on the Canada-People's Republic of China Relationship. Pursuant to the order of reference of May 16, 2022, the committee is meeting on its study of the Canada-People's Republic of China relations, with a focus on police service stations.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

For the benefit of witnesses and members, please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking. For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I will remind you that that all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Let's see. I believe, Madam Clerk, that we have tested all of the connections. Yes, everybody has been tested. You're all healthy. That's good.

I'd now like to welcome the Honourable Marco Mendicino, Minister of Public Safety. He's accompanied today by Tricia Geddes, associate deputy minister, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness; Brenda Lucki, commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police; and David Vigneault, director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or CSIS.

Minister Mendicino, you have up to five minutes for your opening statement.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Public Safety): Mr Chair, thank you for the opportunity to present to you and committee members today.

I would like to begin by commending the committee for studying the so-called police stations, which are a suspected vector of for-

eign activities steered by the People's Republic of China and operate in Canada as well as other democracies around the world.

The reports of the PRC attempting to enhance its clandestine footprint on Canadian soil reflect two incontrovertible trends. First is that the geopolitical landscape is increasingly complex, with hostile actors looking to disrupt the international rules-based order that has been in place since the end of the Second World War; and, second, like other democracies, Canada has increasingly become a target of foreign interference, which is a direct by-product of the agenda driven by hostile actors whose objective is to undermine our national interests.

[Translation]

Today, I will outline the concrete steps the federal government is taking to mitigate the threat of foreign interference. Before I do so, let me emphasize that Canada has a strong and resilient democracy that is bolstered by a community of national security and public safety agencies that work around the clock to protect our institutions. These agencies have important resources, technologies and tools at their disposal to ensure national security.

[English]

The federal government does not undertake this work alone. Rather, we work collaboratively with other levels of government, as well as key allies in the Five Eyes, G7 and NATO. Together, the whole of government is positioned to assess, mitigate, investigate, prosecute and report on threats to Canadian national security.

We need to be always vigilant, because those threats are constantly evolving and manifesting in different ways, including through state and non-state hostile activities, foreign interference, cyber-attacks and threats to the security of our democratic, economic, academic, environmental and public health institutions.

In the face of these threats, the federal government is vigilant, and we are acting. I'd like to highlight five priority areas of our work.

First, we have put into place robust measures to protect our democratic institutions, including our elections.

We introduced Bill C-76 to crack down on foreign funding from third parties to federal campaigns and candidates. We created the security and intelligence threats to elections task force, or SITE. We created the critical incident reporting protocol to communicate transparently and impartially with Canadians during elections in the event that there is a threat to the integrity of a federal election. We also introduced the digital citizen initiative to promote democracy and social inclusion by building resilience against online disinformation and building partnerships to support a healthy information ecosystem.

The SITE task force looked at the federal elections of 2019 and 2021 and independently concluded that in both cases the integrity of the election was not compromised.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

Second, we implemented a national cybersecurity strategy and action plan, which resulted in the launch of the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security.

In budget 2022, we allocated more than \$850 million to enhance the Communications Security Establishment's ability to conduct cyber operations and better protect the privacy of Canadians.

Moreover, last spring, I introduced Bill C-26, our new legislation on cybersecurity, which prioritizes critical infrastructure protection as it relates to the financial, telecommunications, transportation and innovation sectors.

[*English*]

Third, we have introduced national security guidelines for research partnerships that are backed by a research security centre and a \$12.6-million investment, in order to protect the integrity of our academic institutions. The purpose of these guidelines is to integrate national security considerations into the overall assessment of research partnerships. Among other things, the guidelines require clear information about who researchers intend to partner with, what researchers intend to research and what additional due diligence will be taken to mitigate if the subject of research involves a sensitive area. In addition to the guidelines, research partnerships are subject to rigorous admissibility screening and required to comply with existing authorities that regulate exports and imports.

Fourth, when it comes to protecting our economy, the government vets foreign investments under the Investment Canada Act and has the capacity to reject those deals when they are contrary to our national security. The government, as you know, is proposing to further augment the authorities under the ICA.

We also have a new national critical minerals strategy in place. It will help leverage Canada's national resources in a sustainable way, in partnership with indigenous peoples.

Fifth, and finally, we've also modernized our foreign policy with the Indo-Pacific strategy. This strategy calls for the strengthening of our intelligence capabilities in the region, in order to enhance our cyber-diplomacy and deepen our partnership with allies. It is supported by an investment of over \$100 million for these particular areas. Within the Indo-Pacific strategy, vis-à-vis our relationship with China, Canada states its commitment to challenge, compete,

co-operate and coexist. Put simply, we will never apologize for defending our national interest.

Taken together, these give the committee an overview of the government's approach to managing threats, including foreign interference.

[*Translation*]

In closing, I would like to say a few words about the activities of foreign governments in Canada. Under international law, all foreign government representatives have a duty to respect our laws and regulations. Any foreign state that threatens, harasses or intimidates Canadians and Canadian residents is in violation of these international agreements.

I assure you that the RCMP is working with the intelligence community and our law enforcement partners to address these so-called police stations that appear to be operating in the greater Toronto area. Its goal is to ensure that the public feels safe in its own communities. It's about building trust and, where possible, enforcing the law or disrupting activities.

[*English*]

The only way to build trust, Mr. Chair, is by being transparent. That is why we have grown the arsenal of national security tools. However, we have simultaneously raised the bar of transparency through the creation of NSIRA, NSICOP and more frequent public reporting by our intelligence agencies. In a similar vein, we have expressed that we will explore ways to further enhance transparency with regard to our fight against foreign interference. All options are on the table. These could include requiring foreign agents to be properly registered.

However, we must bring all Canadians into this discussion as we reform our institutions so they are more diverse, inclusive and free from systemic discrimination, biases and racism.

• (1840)

[*Translation*]

The objective of these and other ongoing efforts is to recognize that the threat of foreign interference is not static and that we must continue to develop the tools available to Canada to deal with this evolving threat.

[*English*]

Colleagues, as I close, I will underline that our national security and intelligence agencies continue to investigate and monitor reports of Chinese overseas police stations in Canada. There will be no tolerance for this or any other form of intimidation, harassment or harmful targeting of Canadians or individuals within Canada.

Canada will continue to stand for its interests and values, both at home and abroad.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Mendicino.

I would like to welcome some new people joining us. I see Mr. Chiang on the Liberal side, and on the Conservative side, I see Mr. Allison and Mr. Lake.

It's good to see you.

Mr. Lake, we'll try to get the proper name because I don't know if you want to be referred to as Mr. Genuis.

We will get on with the questioning tonight. We will start our first round of six minutes each with Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Thank you, Minister, for coming to speak about this important issue.

I think Canadians were rightfully concerned when they first heard reports that there were three alleged Chinese police stations operating illegally and certainly in violation of Canadian sovereignty in Toronto. Could you provide for the committee any information about how many of these so-called police stations have been and are operating currently in Canada?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for the question, Ms. Dancho, and thank you for your attention to this matter.

As I said, I embrace the committee's study of it. I would begin by pointing out that we are deeply concerned with regard to any allegations and reports of foreign interference. As you have seen, there have been public reports of these so-called police stations. I would point out to you that, with regard to the details of the investigation, this is the subject of ongoing initiatives by the RCMP, and I would invite you to put those questions with regard to those details directly to the commissioner.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Commissioner, can you provide information to Canadians about how many of these alleged so-called police stations are operating in Canada or have operated previously, and if any of them have been shut down?

Commissioner Brenda Lucki (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Currently, we're looking at three of the police stations in Toronto and one in Vancouver. Obviously, we're working with our police of jurisdiction, as well as with the Government of Canada national security agencies. We've initiated an investigation, and it's led by the greater Toronto integrated national security enforcement team, INSET.

So far, the elements of our investigation have been very overt—marked police cars and members in uniform—to cause disruption to the allegations. We've had that visible presence, and that's mostly so that people will see the actions, first of all, because we need more information. We hope—and it did occur—when we do this, a lot of people come forward to provide information because they see the police in the area dealing with the allegations. The investigation

is ongoing, obviously, and I can't get into the various details specifically, but we did put out a statement in October or November saying that we were actually investigating reports of possible—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Pardon me.

You can confirm that you know the location of these supposed police stations and that you have RCMP in uniform at those locations causing a disruption. Is that correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: In the initial instances, we did a disruption by going in uniform with marked police cars to speak with the people involved in those police stations or locations, because those locations are a legitimate business in the front.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Can you give a timeline of when you think your investigation will conclude whether or not these allegations are true, whether these are, in fact, police stations?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Normally, they're very lengthy investigations. There's a lot of information coming in that we need to go through. Like I said, I can't get into specific details because it's ongoing.

● (1845)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Has anyone been arrested or deported, or have any credentials of diplomats been revoked in response to these police stations operating in Canada?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No, if any of that had happened, then I could speak more about it—if there were any charges laid—but that is not the case.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: No charges have been laid.

Perhaps the minister can comment on whether there have been any diplomatic credentials removed from anyone involved from the PRC.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would echo the response that you got from the commissioner, which is to say that, if there are any actions taken, then the government will share that information when it can.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Nothing has been shared. Therefore, we can conclude that no one has been arrested or has had their credentials removed. Is that correct?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay.

My understanding is that the RCMP in the past legitimately has had co-operation with the Chinese police. Is that continuing?

Commr Brenda Lucki: We did have two liaison officers in China. We took them out a couple of years ago. We returned one liaison officer back to Beijing, and we work with the ministry of public safety in that country for urgent files of mutual interest, because it's more than just interference. It's a lot of the movement of controlled substances and drugs.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

Minister, I don't believe that anyone from your government mentioned that the Prime Minister or any cabinet minister has publicly reviewed the operations of these so-called police stations operating in Canada in clear violation of our sovereignty and international law.

Would you like to take this opportunity right now to rebuke the PRC, if these so-called police stations are, in fact, operating on Canadian soil illegally?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would underline, Ms. Dancho, that the government has always been vigilant and proactive when it comes to highlighting any conduct that runs afoul of Canadian laws and conventions around diplomatic conduct.

You heard the commissioner just state that in one of her previous interactions with foreign agents from abroad. We will never apologize, as I said during my remarks, for standing up for the Canadian national interests.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Can you provide just the last—

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Dancho. You are practically out of time for now. You will have more time later.

We will now go to Ms. Yip for six minutes or less.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Minister, associate deputy minister and Commissioner Lucki to our committee.

I was first alerted by a concerned constituent who had heard that there was an alleged police station in the riding, and that was back in the fall of 2022. He was very worried about foreign interference and harassment of the Chinese community and the threat to Canada's national security.

What would you say to this constituent?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Ms. Yip, for bringing that concern to this committee. It's one that I have heard expressed by a number of our colleagues.

I would say to that individual that the government, including the many agencies that work within the community of public safety, are there to support Canadians and other individuals within Canada who may have been the target of foreign interference in its various forms, whether it's through intimidation, harassment or any other kind of pressure that is untoward. That is one of the reasons the RCMP and other law enforcement agencies at different levels publish hotlines and publish general email accounts that allow individuals within various communities and diaspora to reach out without there being any pressure on them to do so.

Once they do, they are able to provide information in a way that is safe and secure with the positive reinforcement that we are there to protect them, to protect the community and to protect our national security. That was one of the things that I alluded to in my introductory remarks: Even as we expand our tool kit to protect communities from potential threats related to foreign interference, we have to bring Canadians along. We have to engender trust and confidence.

It is equally important that we enhance our transparency and our accountability, which is what we have done by creating NSIRA and NSICOP, but equally in the resources and tools that we provide to the community through the RCMP and other police services.

• (1850)

Ms. Jean Yip: Commissioner Lucki, many people may not speak English and French well. How will you help those of Chinese background who may not speak English well but want to speak to someone in their own language about intimidation or harassment regarding the police stations?

Commr Brenda Lucki: We have resources and translation services when people want to bring forward their concerns in their own home language. It's really important for us as a police agency, when we work with the police of jurisdiction. We have to ensure that we do much engagement to strengthen that trust in the community, because often people are fearful to come forward. That's, in fact, why we created a 1-800 number, so if people don't feel comfortable going to, for example, a police station, or are fearful, they can call the 1-800 number. We also have an email address where they can send their concerns. That especially works well if the person's first language is not English or French. They can write in their language, and we can have that translated.

Ms. Jean Yip: That's good. Would that also apply for residents of Russian and Iranian backgrounds?

Commr Brenda Lucki: We always have access to various different translation services. We might not have them if they arrive at the police of jurisdiction, but they do everything possible to make it available as soon as possible.

Ms. Jean Yip: Minister, what are your thoughts on having a foreign agents registry?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The short answer is that there is an intention to begin consultations on the possibility of creating such an initiative.

Before we do that, we have to be sure that Canadians understand why we are looking to modernize our tool kit when it comes to protecting against foreign interference. That means bringing them along, engendering trust and making sure that the appropriate accountability mechanisms are in place, so that we raise the bar when it comes to transparency.

The fact of the matter is that, even as the geopolitical landscape becomes more complex, we are, at the same time, reforming our institutions within the public safety and national security apparatus so that they are more diverse, more inclusive and more culturally sensitive, as you have just asked. You're beginning to hear the reflections of those values in the various initiatives that are being rolled out to support the diaspora, who are often the target of foreign interference.

We have to keep all options open, including the potential creation of a foreign agent registry.

As we embark on that I would say two closing things. One is that we need to maximize our current tool kit, which we are doing vigilantly every day. Then, as we expand it, we need to make sure that we bring Canadians along in a way that is transparent.

Ms. Jean Yip: What is the most important tool you would suggest or point to in that tool kit?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: It's all of them.

That's why I took some time to highlight the various initiatives that the Government of Canada has put forward to protect our democratic institutions with the independent panels. It is so we can be sure that Canadians are able to exercise their vote in free and fair elections. It's so we can be sure we are putting forward a plan to be vigilant when it comes to our cybersecurity and critical infrastructure and that we are protecting our economy and our academic research institutions. It's to be sure that we are able to protect our interests both here and abroad by modernizing our foreign policy. That is exactly what we have done through the launch of the Indo-Pacific strategy, which includes as a core component our approach to managing the complex relationship with China.

We need to be leveraging all of those tools simultaneously, so that we can manage, mitigate and address threats to our national security. That is something, I might add, that the agencies that are represented at this table do a very good job of every single day.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we'll go over to Mr. Trudel for six minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank all of our guests for joining us tonight. I know this is a complex issue that is not always straightforward.

This weekend, some sort of a balloon flew over North America with impunity, from the northwest to the southeast, until it reached the Atlantic Ocean and the Americans decided to shoot it down. This incident caught our imagination: we are talking about a Chinese balloon flying across our territory.

However, there was not much of a response by the government. Yet, we are talking about a foreign government opening police stations here. It was also recently reported that the Chinese government funded political candidates in the last general election, which is interference in Canada's democratic system.

We are under the impression that Canada is a sieve when it comes to foreign interference. Do you think Canada is a sieve, Minister?

• (1855)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: No. I trust our public safety and intelligence agencies.

First, they have the tools they need to deal with any threats, including those you mentioned in your question.

Second, the government continues to make investments to increase their resources and the tools at their disposal. This includes modernizing legal texts. In particular, I mentioned the legislation that governs investments. In addition, I have introduced a new bill to strengthen these authorities and to protect our critical cybersecurity infrastructure. It's a combination of investments and legislative

and administrative tools. Discussions and consultations are also held with all Canadians.

Mr. Denis Trudel: The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics will conduct a study on foreign interference.

Have you been invited to appear, Minister? Will you be testifying before those committees?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: So far, I have received many invitations to appear before various committees, so I will take your word for it. I am always available to testify on matters of interference.

Today, I know that this committee is looking at some issues related to police stations operated in Canada by the People's Republic of China. In my view, the RCMP's activities are critical to this issue if we are to mitigate the risks and know whether to investigate.

Mr. Denis Trudel: My next question is for Mr. Vigneault or Ms. Lucki.

Mr. Vigneault, we briefly talked before the meeting about the issue I am going to raise.

Hydro-Québec is important infrastructure of Quebec. It's a crown jewel of Quebec Inc., let's put it that way. Now, a Chinese spy set up shop there and took pictures. We know that he was working at Hydro-Québec's research institute. They work on electric batteries, they produce electric motors and conduct research there.

It is thought that the spy in question probably took pictures of what we are doing in Quebec and would have transmitted them to the Chinese government, which is still important and serious. While Canada and Quebec want to position themselves as bearers of tomorrow's green and sustainable energy, we realize that a major power is watching what we are doing full time. That's serious, after all.

What was your reaction? Is it safe to assume that China has gained access to other major infrastructure in Quebec and Canada?

Mr. David Vigneault (Director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Trudel, thank you for your question. I will give you a two-part answer.

First, I can talk about national security and security intelligence. Then I may ask my colleague the RCMP commissioner to talk about the investigation.

It is unfortunately not a surprise when these types of situations occur. We have made it clear to Canadians in the past and in recent years that economic espionage, among other types of threats, is one of the things we are most concerned about. The future sovereignty and prosperity of all Canadians and Quebecers is at stake. Our secrets being stolen will prevent us from prospering.

What is also important is to look at what enables Canada to be competitive and prosperous in advanced technologies. You mentioned green technologies. We're also talking about biotechnologies and artificial intelligence. Many places in Canada and Quebec have established centres of expertise. Those are unfortunately targets.

Therefore, we work closely with other national security partners to try to raise awareness and inform people, within the limits of what we can make public, to increase their resilience. We have some very real examples where, as a result of different interventions on our part, companies have told us that they have been able to stop some of the interference and espionage activities.

As far as this particular investigation goes, perhaps I can ask the commissioner to talk about it.

• (1900)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Trudel, I'm sorry, sir, but your time has expired.

We now move to Ms. McPherson for six minutes or less.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to all of the witnesses for being here.

Thank you, Minister, for making the time to come. I do understand that you have lots of invitations, so we're grateful that you were able to make this one of your stops.

Like my colleague Mr. Trudel, Canadians and everyone in this room are concerned about their security. Canadians of course are very worried about hearing things like that our elections are at risk, that our academic institutions are at risk, that there are police stations operating in our communities or that there are spy balloons floating over our communities. This is very worrying for all Canadians and certainly everyone in this room.

I have a series of questions for you with regard to the police stations.

How have you talked to impacted communities? What does that dialogue look like? How have you made sure that impacted communities are being heard? What we've heard in my constituency office and from groups around the country is that they don't feel protected. They don't feel heard. They don't feel that the government is listening and doing things. They're being told to contact the RCMP, and the RCMP tells them to contact their police. The police tell them to contact the government. They're not feeling like the government is taking care of them.

Minister, how do I respond to that? What you're telling other members of this committee is that these groups are being protected, but what they are feeling is that they are not.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I assure you that they are being protected by the array of tools and measures that I highlighted during my remarks. I also take your point that there is a level of anxiety and disconnect at times that is felt by various communities. That's because of the historical context and the relationship between our institutions and those communities, and all of the institutional challenges that go along with it, as well as the complexity of today's

challenges when it comes to national security threats. The combination of those factors does I think create a degree of concern.

Now, in response to that question, what I would offer to you and the members of this committee is that my office, my agencies and my department are constantly doing outreach. Beyond the ad hoc outreach that we do, we have institutionalized consultations through a variety of forums, including the cross-cultural round table on security, and through the transparency initiative, which is headed by my deputy minister. We seek to reach into communities and invite them to be part of an ongoing conversation and dialogue to break down those barriers.

It is not easy, but we have to keep at it. As we address the complexities around the challenges of the threats to national security, we have to engender trust and confidence. You can only do that if you are transparent, and these conversations help that.

Ms. Heather McPherson: What we're looking at, though, is transnational repression. We know how complicated that can be.

We also have a situation, from what I hear from your statement, Minister, with regard to academic guidelines. I'm sorry, but guidelines don't really help. That's not going to solve any of these problems. It's like asking nicely, which I'm not sure is the response we should have here.

You talked about the foreign agent registry and that it's on the table and you're thinking about it. It feels like we've had impacted communities tell us this has been a big problem for a very long time. We are now in a situation where you're considering guidelines, you're thinking about a registry and you're hoping we might be able to move on impacted communities. Does it not seem to you that much of this work should have already been done?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I think it's more precise to say that we have concrete guidelines in place when it comes to protecting our academic institutions.

Ms. Heather McPherson: What if they don't follow those guidelines?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. McPherson, there are working groups to ensure there is accountability and rigour when it comes to the application of those guidelines. I can assure you that the government works very closely with academic institutions to make sure the application of those guidelines is consistent and coherent, so that we are not in any way allowing for a back door into our institutions for foreign interference.

How do we do that? We use tools. Those tools, as I said in my introductory remarks, probe into who the research partners are and the subject matter of research. The guidelines are quite precise in identifying sensitive areas so that there is a strict standard and screening prior to that partnership being finalized. Those guidelines are in place. They're objective, they're normed and they do protect us.

• (1905)

Ms. Heather McPherson: If there are funding agreements with the federal government—the research grants—and those guidelines aren't followed, is that funding being withheld?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would share any concern about any research partnership that did not apply the guidelines. That is why we have to be vigilant about it, which is why—

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm sorry, but concerns are different from whether or not that funding would be withdrawn.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: If the guidelines were not met, it's certainly my expectation that the funding and the research partnership would not be finalized. That's the whole point of having the guidelines.

Now where that doesn't happen, I think there would need to be a review of the partnership. I and my colleagues, the ministers of health and ISED, are always looking at whether there's a way in which we can enhance the application of the guidelines.

I would put a finer point on it just to clarify, Ms. McPherson. These guidelines are not abstract. They are not theoretical. They are in place and they are being applied.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I have one last quick question for you before my time runs out.

When you heard the news about these police stations happening in Toronto and Vancouver, did you have conversations with Minister Joly or anyone at Global Affairs Canada?

The Chair: We need a brief answer, please, Minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The short answer is yes. I'm in touch with my colleagues all the time with regard to threats of foreign interference, including on this subject matter.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will go to Mr. Chong for five minutes or less.

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

Minister, CSIS said in its February 2021 briefing note that foreign interference is a serious threat to the security of Canada. It also indicated in that briefing note that “PRC media influence activities in Canada have become normalized” in Chinese-language media outlets operating in Canada.

The government issued order 2022-0183 a year ago, asking the CRTC to review Russia Today's broadcasting licence, which led to the revocation of that licence several weeks later. However, CGTN, China's authoritarian, state-controlled broadcaster, is still operating here, spreading disinformation and propaganda, and violating international human rights laws.

In fact, the Financial Times reported about a year ago that they were airing pretrial confessions of, for example, Simon Cheng, a former employee of the U.K. consulate in Hong Kong. He was tortured to obtain that confession, and that confession was aired on CGTN. As a result, Ofcom, the United Kingdom's equivalent of the CRTC, yanked the broadcaster's licence off their airwaves.

Why hasn't your government done the same, based on the advice from CSIS, based on the advice from Five Eyes intelligence and based on what's going on here in Canada?

Why hasn't your government issued, under section 7 of the Broadcasting Act, an order of general application to a new policy that would remove authoritarian, state-controlled broadcasters off our airwaves?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chong, I would begin by sharing your profound concern about the distribution of any kind of disinformation. However, I think, in fairness to you and to the question, this goes beyond disinformation. If a statement was obtained through torture, that would obviously be contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I would say to you, with regard to decisions that fall within the purview of the CRTC.... As you well know, this is an administrative body that enjoys independence and makes decisions that are based on the merits and the law. As a government, we endeavour to respect the independence of those bodies, rather than to politicize those decisions.

• (1910)

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you for that answer, but I note that it was an order from this government—order 2022-0183—that led to the revocation of RT's licence. I would hope it doesn't take a war for the government to change its position on state-controlled, authoritarian broadcasters on public, Crown-owned airwaves, spreading disinformation and violating international human rights law.

I have a second quick question.

Reports indicate that CSIS told your government this past fall that China's consulate in Toronto had targeted 11 candidates in the 2019 election. CSIS also indicated in its briefing notes released to the committee.... As I mentioned before, this foreign interference is a serious threat to the security of Canada. CSIS advised the government in its briefing that, “Canada can make use of a policy that is grounded in transparency and sunlight in order to highlight the point that foreign interference should be exposed to the public”. However, your government, in many respects, hasn't followed this advice.

We have been asking about who the 11 candidates are who were targeted in the 2019 election. We have been asking for specific briefings from intelligence before and during elections. All we get are briefings of general application. Our national campaign team in the last election asked for the specific names of candidates who were targeted. We didn't get them, so we couldn't take action as a political party to stop foreign interference and ensure that our candidates weren't being subject to this.

That's not the case in other countries. For example, last summer, a year ago, MI5 went public with an agent of the PRC in the U.K. Parliament by the name of Christine Lee. She had targeted MPs with hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations. Those names were made public by the Speaker of the House, based on MI5's request.

Why isn't your government doing the same thing for parliamentarians here, so that we can protect ourselves from foreign interference that doesn't rise to the level of a prosecution in law?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chong, I am as concerned as you are about protecting the integrity of our elections. I would provide you with two answers.

First, on the specific issue that you raise around the threat that is posed by foreign funding, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, this government has raised the bar when it comes to providing legislative tools to crack down on foreign funding that could potentially compromise candidates and campaigns in a federal election. I would hope that would be something you would applaud as a tool to protect the integrity of our elections.

Secondly, I would clarify, and I take your point about wanting to see transparency, that this is precisely why we created the SITE task force. That is a task force that is made up of the clerk and deputy ministers from a number of portfolios that are directly implicated in the protection of our democratic institutions. Within the protocol around critical incidents during elections, there are thresholds. Those thresholds are assessed and evaluated not by me and you, who are elected officials, which, in my view, would be wholly inappropriate given our vested interest in the outcome of those elections, but rather, by the non-elected, independent, non-partisan professional public service. They make the calls about what can and should be released with regard to any events that implicate foreign interference, and we put our confidence in those officials to make those calls.

That does not mean, I would add, that the elected branch of government is not accountable. We are accountable for those policies that we put into place. That is precisely why the conversation that we are having today at this committee is important. It is not a partisan issue. We do not want to go down the path that we've seen in some other democracies where people start to question our elections. We want to have full faith and confidence in our elections, and that is something that I think we're all united behind.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll go to Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes or less.

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

Thank you to all of you for being here.

Minister, you spoke a couple of times tonight, first in your opening remarks and then MP Yip raised the matter as well, about a foreign agents registry. In the United States, a registry's been in place since 1938. In Australia, a more recent example, in 2018 it was put in place. I know that you're giving consideration to the matter, and it certainly deserves it. In your considerations, is there something

that gives hesitancy or pause regarding the utility of a registry along these lines?

• (1915)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I wouldn't describe it as hesitation, I think we need to be diligent and thoughtful and inclusive when it comes to bringing all Canadians along in the modernization of the tools and the arsenal that we create for our national security and intelligence communities. The reason that is important is, first, there is a historical context when it comes to some communities within this country and their relationship with agencies and the law enforcement community.

That is why we—among other things—are endeavouring to reform those institutions. I want to commend the agency heads at the table and all of the agencies within my portfolio for their leadership. They recognize that, to deal with the threats to national security, we need agencies to be inclusive, diverse and culturally sensitive so Canadians can have trust and confidence that, as we are taking actions to mitigate the threats to national security, they believe that we are consistently going to act in the national interest.

The last thing I would say, Mr. Fragiskatos, is that, while there is attention to looking at each of the examples of the tools that we may consult on, including the foreign agent registry, I would discourage the members of this committee from quickly concluding that any one of these in isolation will work by itself. That's why my colleagues and I frequently resort to creating a tool box that is made up of a suite of measures that can be deployed rapidly and transparently.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

We have limited time, so I want to ask Commissioner Lucki a question.

Commissioner, you said—and we know it—that there is a 1-800 number in place. You also talked about the ability of citizens who might not have English or French as their first language to send in a question to the RCMP and have it translated. My question is twofold.

Number one, how is information about the 1-800 number communicated to the wider public so they're aware of it?

Number two, what is the turnaround for providing answers to members of the public who might wish to send in a question in a question in, let's say, Mandarin or Cantonese, and have that question translated?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thank you for that question.

The engagement with the public, obviously, is so important. That's exactly why we brought in that number and the email address. We encourage people to send those in. The way we advertise is through engagement with the community, making sure there are groups of community members we can share that with, and through various non-governmental agencies sharing the information. The places they go to get information on general government programs are where a lot of that information is shared.

As I said, it's about building that trust and confidence. The best information we can get comes from the victim. If the victim does not feel comfortable coming forward, it really ties our hands. It makes the investigation more difficult.

As far as the turnaround time is concerned, I do not know the answer to that.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

We will now go to Mr. Trudel for two and a half minutes or less.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: I believe the House voted on November 18, 2020, to create a registry of foreign agents. Now, you seem to be walking on eggshells to tell us that things aren't moving forward that much after all.

I'm not sure if my question is for Commissioner Lucki or Mr. Vigneault.

In concrete terms, if this registry existed today, would it have helped us detect Chinese police stations or find the spies working at Hydro-Québec? Would it have helped us with the funding of candidates in elections?

Would this particular tool that we've been waiting two and a half years for be useful today to prevent what we're witnessing?

● (1920)

Mr. David Vigneault: As the minister said, the threat is evolving, and the tools need to evolve as well. So yes, absolutely: this would be another tool to improve transparency. But I wouldn't want people to think that this would be the only tool needed.

By requiring people to declare their affiliation publicly, such a registry would effectively increase transparency. It might force people who want to commit these acts of foreign interference to use more resources, which might make it more difficult for them to do so.

So in terms of the ecosystem of foreign interference in Canada, this tool would therefore be useful, but other tools must also be considered.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Do you personally put pressure on the minister to bring this tool into our lives?

Mr. David Vigneault: I never put pressure on the minister, but sometimes I have fairly direct conversations with him.

This is indeed something we have said publicly. One of the things we've said is that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act, which dates back to 1984, needs to be modernized. We have very direct discussions with the minister and with the government.

One of the things this committee can also do is find ways to work more effectively, while ensuring that all Canadians feel safe.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

Now we'll go to Ms. McPherson for two and a half minutes or less.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Two and a half minutes—what will I do with all my time?

Mr. Vigneault, I'm going to ask you a question.

You were just talking a little bit about security legislation in Canada. I know that the foreign investment promotion and protection agreement, or the FIPA, locked us into a 31-year deal to protect Chinese investments in Canada. I know that, in theory, there is a provision for the Canadian government to block investments due to security concerns. However, of course, there was such a ridiculous mess with regard to Huawei that it could, in fact, take between five and 10 years.

Do you believe the FIPA has made it more difficult for Canada to push back on national security threats coming from the Chinese government?

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you for the question.

Ms. McPherson, I'm not an expert on the FIPA, but what I can tell you is that, over the last number of years, we have seen how effective the tools under the Investment Canada Act have been to counter investments in Canada that have been or could be detrimental to our national security. There are security provisions in the act that prevent the disclosure of specific details.

I can tell you there's more and more activity in our organization at CSIS and with the other agencies of the national security community looking specifically at those investments. Throughout this period, the FIPA has not been one of the issues that has been raised to my level to say that it was of concern, but there are other experts in government who may speak in more detail.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I think some of them may be joining us later, so we can ask that again.

You did talk about security legislation, though, with my colleague, Mr. Trudel. What security legislation do you think needs to be updated with regard to the Canadian government and how we deal with these crimes?

Mr. David Vigneault: We have been quite open about the fact that the CSIS Act was created in 1984 at a time when we were talking about analog technology, when the threat environment was during the Cold War, so it's very different.

The world has evolved, unfortunately going in the wrong direction from many points of view regarding Canada's national security. Our effort has been to generate a mature discussion with the government and with Canadians to make sure that more people are involved. That's why, for example, CSIS and I, personally, have been engaged in making more public speeches and engaging with communities like universities, the business sector and marginalized communities to essentially talk about the fact that national security in our country should not be a zero-sum game. We should be able to have both the right tools and the right legislation to protect Canadians, while at the same time protecting their privacy and their security interests.

That has been the focus of our efforts.

Ms. Heather McPherson: You're not sure that we have that in place right now.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

We'll now go to Mr. Genuis.

Is Michael going to take this? All right.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, I'm going to share some time with my colleague, MP Dancho.

Minister, just to follow up on the SITE task force that was established, its primary purpose is intragovernmental coordination. It's not a decision-making body. Each constituent entity of the task force is responsible for making its own decisions and its own communications, coordinated through the normal process during the writ through PCO.

The problem with this task force is that it doesn't tell political actors, doesn't tell parties and candidates, if there is a threat going on during the election. Clearly, SITE was monitoring interference in the election that was targeting MP Kenny Chiu. They highlighted that in their documents that were released months later, but MP Kenny Chiu—the candidate Kenny Chiu—had no idea this was taking place.

Again, there's a lack of transparency in informing political parties, candidates and MPs about the threats they're facing. We get these general briefings of general application, and we're never told if we're the target. I very well could be a target. I want to know if I'm a target. I want to know that.

That's the kind of information the government is failing to provide to parties, candidates and MPs, which other democracies are doing as a best practice. As CSIS has highlighted, sunshine and transparency are tools available to the Government of Canada to counterpoint interference. A lot of this stuff doesn't rise to the level where it can be prosecuted through law; therefore, the only tool we have is transparency. If we're flying blind and we don't know who the 11 candidates are, if we don't know who's being targeted, we're not going to be as effective as we could be and as some of our allies are.

• (1925)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would just say in response that you raise a number of very legitimate concerns, particularly with regard

to the initiating of criminal proceedings against those who would attempt to engage in foreign interference. Having spent some time in the criminal justice system, I recognize fully that there is an ongoing challenge around the transitioning of intelligence into evidence that is admissible and that can be used and adduced to prove the types of offences that would bring those individuals responsible for that conduct to justice. I take your point on that.

In addition, I embrace the conversation around how those decisions are made and around how much is shared and when. As I said, the elected branch of government is there to work with our public service to inform their discretion during elections—

Hon. Michael Chong: Minister, with respect, those entities, the agencies, the departments, the boards, the commissions, they have to go through the communications protocols of the Government of Canada, which as we know in this town is an information desert. We don't get told anything, so it's going to require direction from the cabinet to the constituent bodies to indicate to them that they are free to relay this information to parties, to candidates and to MPs. That's what needs to happen.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would submit that in the context of SITE and the protocol around critical instance they have that unfettered discretion. The extent of cabinet's direction is in the protocol that's done in consultation with the independent public service, but once we're into the writ, they exercise that discretion.

You don't want—and I would underline this again, Mr. Chong—you, or I, or any party to start to pierce that veil, because it is a slippery slope. I would just point out that, yes, we do have to constantly reassess whether or not the transparency bar is being met. Again, I embrace that conversation, but those decisions should be undertaken by our public servants once we're talking about elections.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm not suggesting we release information injurious to national security. What I am suggesting is that, if 11 candidates were targeted in the 2019 election, surely the parties involved and the candidates involved should be informed of that.

Going forward I would hope that would be the case so that we can take action, particularly for measures that don't rise to the level of something that could be prosecuted under the law, whether it's the Criminal Code or other non-criminal law.

Mr. Chair, those are all the questions I have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

I want to remind everybody that we will have one more round. You'll each have two more five-minute slots as will the Liberals, and then, of course, we'll have two and a half minutes for our Bloc and NDP friends.

For the final five minutes in this round we will go to Mr. Dubourg.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I see some jockeying back and forth among my colleagues in the Conservatives. I can stay for another minute if that will help ease the pressure.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): That's great.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: There you go. I'm always trying to help in the spirit of bipartisanship, Mr. Dubourg.

• (1930)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you also to the Minister of Public Safety for allowing us to ask him more questions and for his transparency.

I, too, would like to welcome the witnesses here this evening.

Mr. Minister, I'd like your views on the following.

As members of Parliament and as elected officials, we can be seen as being followed or targeted. We sit on the Special Committee on the Canada—People's Republic of China Relationship, and I think that we are being watched and singled out by foreign actors. I was a member of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. Foreign groups are interested in elected officials who sit on these committees.

Shouldn't we make a distinction between being targeted and being threatened? I'm assuming that if a member of Parliament is actually threatened, they will be informed, whether or not they sit on one of these committees. Is that the case?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Dubourg, you're absolutely right. All members of the House of Commons, as well as all Canadian elected officials, including municipal officials, are targeted by hostile actors. We must always remain vigilant in the context of such threats. That's why the agencies represented here today are constantly addressing these threats using the tools at their disposal.

However, you mentioned that there is sometimes stereotyping and stigmatization of racialized communities or Canadians, and that's why the reforms need to continue. It's in my mandate letter from Prime Minister. I thank the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service for their efforts, together with the government, to commit to the necessary reforms to strengthen the trust of all Canadians, while modernizing our tool kit.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Mr. Vigneault, my next question is along the same lines as the previous one. If your organization detects a threat, are you prevented by law from sharing that information with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to take appropriate action?

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you for the question.

Different scenarios are possible. If we're talking about threats to individuals, threats to physical integrity and an immediate risk, we will always work with the RCMP, no problem.

If the threat is more diffuse and more long-term, however, we can use some specialized authorities, such as threat reduction measures. We use these authorities to communicate targeted information rather than general information.

There is a certain process to follow. You can be sure that if the service has access to information, it will be passed on to the people involved.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you very much.

Commissioner Lucki, you confirmed in your remarks what we already know, that these police stations are under investigation. Do you know of anyone who has been approached or intimidated by the individuals who work there? Have you been in touch with them to find out more?

• (1935)

Commr Brenda Lucki: Thank you for the question.

That's exactly why we went there in uniform and in a patrol car. We wanted to be totally visible, and we wanted the community to see that we were taking action against these police stations. We made sure to give people a phone number and an email address so that they could report things like this to the police. This has given us a lot of information, which we will use if necessary to lay charges when we get to that point in our investigation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner.

We'll now go to our next round.

We'll begin with Ms. Dancho for five minutes or less.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have one follow-up question for the commissioner, and perhaps the minister can answer.

You mentioned that we have one RCMP officer in China. How many Chinese police officers do we have operating in Canada?

Commr Brenda Lucki: That's a good question.

Obviously in the embassy, they have.... I don't think they have any actual police officers, but they do have people in the ministry. I'd have to double-check on that.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Could you double-check and get that information to the committee?

I have a follow-up. If we don't know if there are any formally operating within the bounds of our diplomatic agreements, as we have one operating in China.... I'm just concerned that if there are any, how can we be sure they're not engaging in Operation Fox Hunt, which, as I'm sure you know, is a global covert operation run by the Chinese in foreign countries in looking to root out any dissidents of the PRC?

Can you outline briefly if you have any knowledge of this, and if there's anyone from China operating under that auspice in Canada?

Commr Brenda Lucki: There haven't been any files recently opened under Fox Hunt, but we have had incidents in the past. Those are all followed up succinctly.

Any of the people who would come from China as far as the government goes would be situated in Ottawa only. It's again.... Beyond foreign interference, of course, it's the movement of contraband.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

For the minister, regarding the spy balloon, my understanding is that the Canadian people did not find out about the spy balloon from your government. It was actually from the American news agencies and from their government. The American government told the American news agencies very transparently.

Canadians actually found out about the spy balloon that was over Canadian sovereignty for several days not from your government and not from a Canadian news agency, but from an American one. Do you find that acceptable?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, Ms. Dancho, as you well know, when it comes to the briefings the government receives from our national security and intelligence community of agencies, there is a lot of regard, first, to being careful and cautious around when information is released so that we do not in any way jeopardize the integrity of the operations that are being undertaken to protect national security, as well as the people who are engaged in those operations.

That is a matter of the utmost sensitivity, as you can appreciate, but when we—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Regarding that, Minister, does the American government not have the same commitment to national security that you described? They shared the information with their people before you shared it with us.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'm glad you added that qualifier, but I would say you allude to the co-operation between Canada and the United States. Canada and the United States were stitched up on this particular event. We shared intelligence. We coordinated our efforts. As you heard my colleague Minister Anand say, we fully supported the United States' actions in bringing down one of those balloons.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Minister, are you aware of other spy balloons over Canadian territory?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would say to you and members of this committee that we are always vigilant in terms of potential threats to our airspace, sovereignty and national security.

• (1940)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's a non-answer.

Can you commit to this committee to being more transparent or the first to deliver the news in the event this happens again—unlike a few days ago, when we had to wait for American news outlets to confirm it?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The government will always share and be transparent when it can be, without compromising, in any way, our classified information, the people who work in these agencies or the integrity of operations. Those are there to protect national security and the Canadian people.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Would your government have released the information if the American government had not? Did your government have intentions to release this information, at any point, or did you just confirm it because the Americans did?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We are always transparent as quickly as we possibly can be, while having regard for the sensitivity of the operations undertaken to protect national security.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: However, you can't tell me whether this has happened before, explain why you weren't the first to deliver the news to Canadians or commit to telling us if this happens again. That's what we're seeing in this committee today, Minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The government will always be transparent as soon as it can be, when it comes to our national security.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Respectfully, that's not transparency, Minister. That's the definition of not being transparent: not sharing this information with the public. It's the opposite of transparent.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We have shared information and coordinated with our allies. I would argue the timing of our making that information available was generally contemporaneous to the events themselves.

We'll continue to share information without compromising the classified nature of the information we receive, because we have people in the line of duty. There are lives at stake. There are techniques at stake. This is complex stuff, as you well appreciate, Ms. Dancho. We are up front with Canadians as soon as we can be.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Were there lives at stake with the spy balloon?

The Chair: Excuse me, Ms. Dancho, but your time has expired.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: He can probably answer that.

Were there lives at stake as a result of the spy balloon? It's quite significant that he mentioned it.

The Chair: Answer very quickly.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We had people in the field who work in a wide range of agencies, including the Canadian military. Yes, they put their lives at stake every day to protect our national interest.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Cormier for five minutes or less.

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will give my time to my colleague and our guest tonight, Mr. Chiang.

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Cormier, for allowing me to use your time.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for appearing tonight in front of this committee.

My question is directed to Commissioner Lucki.

As you know, we've been talking about the alleged police stations in Canada, three of them in the GTA. One of them is in my riding of Markham—Unionville. I have a constituency base that is 66% of Chinese origin. The concerns my constituents have about this issue.... They've been coming to me and asking me for help on this.

I want to find out whether something is being done. We know these places exist. As you mentioned, you had uniformed police officers go there, but has anything been done to prevent any foreign interference? What safety precautions are there for our residents?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Obviously, engagement with the public is one of the first things that we need to do, because our goal is to ensure that the public feels safe in their own communities. We need to build that trust and confidence, where possible, and enforce the relative legislation or disrupt those activities. As I said, because the investigation is ongoing, we have to protect the methods and techniques that are used in the investigation and safeguard the witnesses, possibly with personal or sensitive information. We don't get into the specifics. What I can say is that there is an investigation opened in the four police stations that have been identified in Canada.

Obviously, there are four in Canada, but we actually work with our Five Eyes partners and other partners of law enforcement across the world, because this is bigger than just four police stations in Canada. There are several across the world. We try to look at similarities. We share the information to see if there are any connections with other similar countries.

We work with the police jurisdictions in Canada, because not only do we have to provide awareness and education for the people who could be victims, but there's also education and awareness for the police. Most of this is not in RCMP jurisdiction. It's in big municipalities, where we need to make sure that police can identify the signs in advance of potential foreign interference. We do a lot of that, especially in and around the elections, to describe what some of that interference might look like and for police to be in tune with that, so that they can report it.

● (1945)

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Commissioner.

Following up on your answer, do you have a timeline? You mentioned that it's an active investigation. Is there a timeline for its conclusion?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No. They are quite complex investigations, but what I would do is encourage any of the people who are coming to you, who don't feel safe.... If they're in obvious immediate danger, they should call 911. If they aren't and they would like to share information, that's the best way we can take this investigation to fruition. Instead of just simply disrupting the activity, if we can bring that to charges, that is also a sign of success.

We need information from the public, but they need to feel safe, so we have to make sure we provide a venue where they can feel safe.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chiang.

We will now go to Mr. Trudel, for two and a half minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commissioner Lucki, it goes without saying that police stations in Toronto are spying. They are targeting Chinese dissidents, especially those who advocate for Uighurs in China. What measures are you putting in place to prevent Canadian citizens who are simply human rights activists from being sent back to China?

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: Of course, when we're dealing with this, these are allegations. We have to gather up the evidence from sources. There's a lot of intelligence coming in, and Director Vigneault spoke about the fact that turning intelligence into evidence is not always easy in our judicial system. That is part of our challenge, but we do take those threats seriously.

[*Translation*]

If people are in danger or in a situation

[*English*]

where they feel they can be sent home, we need to know that. We're going to investigate that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: I imagine you meet with these people? Do you conduct interviews? If people feel that they are threatened, that their lives are in danger or that they and their families are at risk of being sent back to China, do you investigate?

Commr Brenda Lucki: Yes, absolutely. We give them our toll-free number so that they can provide us with the necessary information. Also, if they're willing to come forward, we will, of course, use their statement in our investigation.

Mr. Denis Trudel: To your knowledge, has the Chinese government been successful in repatriating to China Canadian citizens who were human rights activists or even imprisoning them? Do you have any figures on that?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No, as far as I know there is none. There are no recent police records on that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

Ms. McPherson, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, again, to all of the witnesses for being here today.

Commissioner Lucki, I'm going to ask you a couple of questions.

You spoke about the 1-800 number that has been set up. How many people have called that number?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I don't have that number in front of me.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Do you have access to that number? Do you know if it's actually being utilized by the community?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I know that when we went in, like I said, in uniform with our police vehicles shortly thereafter, that visibility allowed more information to come in via the police of jurisdiction, the 1-800 number or the email.

Ms. Heather McPherson: If you could, I would like you to provide the committee afterward with the number of how many people have accessed that 1-800 number. Maybe you'll have to get some of those numbers for us. I think it would be quite useful for us to know whether it is an effective tool.

I'm recognizing that you're talking an awful lot about gathering information. You're talking a lot about how important it is to get the information to have that for the investigation. I'm not hearing how that's translating into protection for people and communities that are impacted. Like I said earlier, I've heard many times from many people—from the Uighur community and Hong Kongers across Canada—who have been threatened. They have tried to reach out to their local police. Their police have not been trained. They have not had the tools to do the job of protecting people. They have not been given solutions. The RCMP has not gotten back to people.

I understand that you're gathering a lot of information, but what are you doing actively—not in the future and not after the case is done—to protect Canadians and other people who are being impacted?

- (1950)

Commr Brenda Lucki: In most of those areas—in the big municipalities—it's up to the police of jurisdiction to provide safety within their communities. For the RCMP, our role is to gather the information.

We have to make sure in our engagement with the public that they feel safe to bring that information forward, so we can initiate an investigation.

Ms. Heather McPherson: You feel that the RCMP role is just gathering the information, then.

Commr Brenda Lucki: No, our role is doing the investigation. That's why it's important for people to bring the information to us, so we can initiate an investigation and complete the investigation with a goal—

Ms. Heather McPherson: With all due respect, you don't have the numbers of how many people have come to you with the information.

Commr Brenda Lucki: I don't have that at my level. People have used that phone number. We will follow up on every investigation and every lead that we get. These are complicated investigations. They're not as straightforward as one would think.

Ms. Heather McPherson: No, I don't think anyone in this room expects that they are not complicated, but I do think we need to do more to protect Canadians who are being impacted.

Commr Brenda Lucki: Absolutely.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

Commissioner Lucki, I do hope that you follow up with the request for statistics. Thank you for that.

We'll now go to Mr. Genuis for five minutes or less.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Chair. It's great to be back at this committee.

Minister, were or are foreign diplomats involved in the operations of these so-called police stations?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I can appreciate the question and your desire to get an answer to it.

I would defer to the commissioner of the RCMP, who, as I said at the outset—I don't know if you were here for my opening remarks or not, Mr. Genuis—is carrying out an active investigation. I want to be respectful of operational limits.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. I have limited time, so I'll just go quickly to the commissioner.

Are foreign diplomats involved in the operation?

Commr Brenda Lucki: I can't give you any of the information regarding the investigation to protect the methods—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

Minister, in general, are any foreign diplomats engaged in inappropriate interference activities here in Canada?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Again, I would point out that we get briefings all the time with regard to potential threats that involve foreign interference. For obvious reasons, when it comes to active investigations or operations, I would defer both to my colleague at CSIS, the director, Mr. Vigneault, or the RCMP.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

If a diplomat were expelled, would you be able to comment publicly on the reasons for an expulsion?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Declaring someone inadmissible and expelling a foreign agent are legislative authorities and equities that are exercised by my colleague, the minister for Global Affairs.

There may be some cases where, for reasons pertaining to national security, some of that information makes its way into the public domain and some does not. We endeavour to be as transparent about those decisions as we can be.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. In endeavouring to be as transparent as possible, I'm sure the minister seeks your advice on issues of security involving diplomats.

In the last eight years, how many foreign diplomats have been expelled?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Let us get back to you on that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. Will you provide an answer to the committee on how many have been expelled on the basis of interference concerns?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Let us get back to you on that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Chair, I'll look forward to that update.

When did you become aware of the so-called foreign police stations here in Canada? When did you first become aware of them?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would have been briefed consistently on a variety of threats of foreign interference.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: When did you become aware of that specific one?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Again, with regard to the police stations, I would say to you that it was certainly within the last year.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Did you become aware of it before or after it was reported in the media, or at the same time?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I can't tell you off the bat exactly when media reports first surfaced about this. I would say to you that I've been briefed within the last year.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's not a complicated question. When you saw the story in the news, were you surprised by it, or did you say, "Oh yes, this is something I knew already that has now made its way into the media"?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: What I'm saying to you is that I don't recall, and I don't know that you have the date that these reports first surfaced.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I wasn't receiving briefings about them from the department.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: You were referring to the media reports, though.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I first became aware of them through the media reports. I'm wondering when you first became aware of them as minister. Was it before or after the media reports?

Are you telling me that you don't remember whether it was before or after the media reports that you became aware of them?

• (1955)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'm saying I became generally aware of this particular subject matter within the last year.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Was it before or after the media reports?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: That's the part—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You don't remember.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I don't remember when they first became publicly reported in the press, no.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Could you provide an update to the committee on that?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'm happy to do that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

In your view, is there any instance where it is appropriate for Canadian institutions to be co-operating on any matter of research with Chinese military institutions?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: That, too, is a very important question. We touched on it earlier, Mr. Genuis, when I was answering Ms. McPherson's questions about research guidelines. I think that there are—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, I saw your statements on it.

Very specifically, is there any instance where you think it would be acceptable for Canadian institutions to collaborate with Chinese military institutions?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Given the sensitivity of that particular subject matter, there would need to be a very strict standard. It's hard for me to conceive of a scenario.

Again, these decisions are taken independently by the academic institutions that have research partnerships. Those guidelines are there. I think they guard against—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I think it would be helpful if you provided clearer advice.

I have 30 seconds left. I want to get in one last question.

Following Mr. Chong's questions about CGTN and noting the directive you issued on RT, is the government considering issuing a directive regarding CGTN similar to the directive issued for RT?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: You heard my answer to Mr. Chong. As a matter of first principle, those are decisions that are typically undertaken by the—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm almost out of time. Are you considering a directive?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I was endeavouring to complete the answer to your first question.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's yes or no. Are you considering issuing a directive?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We endeavour to respect the independence of the CRTC, which is an administrative tribunal that makes those decisions. We'll always take decisions consistent with that principle and—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You issued the directive with RT. Was that consistent with the principle of respecting its independence?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Where appropriate, we will look to other potential decisions. At this moment—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Are you considering that in this case, though?

The Chair: Gentlemen, I hate to interrupt. You are both out of time on this round of questioning.

Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Chiang.

I believe you're going to share your time with Mr. Cormier. Who is going to lead, you or Mr. Cormier?

Mr. Paul Chiang: I will.

The Chair: All right. Go ahead for five minutes or less.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for allowing me to be here tonight.

I'm going to go back to Commissioner Lucki, since we're talking about the alleged Chinese police stations here.

Again, my concerns are for my constituents. They have been amply clear to me in regard to these police stations that they are fearful for their safety. They look at it as being a police station, but in your professional view, is this considered a police station or are they just a front for something else?

Commr Brenda Lucki: In the media, they've referred to them as police stations. For us, it's any place that causes interference, intimidation or harassment in any form. It's not a police station how we define a police station. In some of these cases, it could be as simple as a room behind a commercial retail store. It's not what we call police stations. I think the reference is probably because of the.... I'm not even sure why that is the reference.

We have to make sure that your constituents and all Canadians feel safe. It's important that, if they are directly threatened, they first of all call 911. We don't want to see anybody get hurt because of any interference, harassment or coercion. If it isn't an urgent matter, and they feel safe to come forward.... If they don't feel safe, maybe they feel safe coming with their member of Parliament or somebody. Even if we start off by getting the information through another source so that they can feel safe....

When Ms. McPherson was talking about the runaround that some people are getting, that's exactly why we created the 1-800 number and the email address, so that people could have that one spot to report if they felt.... We are educating the other police of jurisdiction, but sometimes they don't have the specialized expertise in foreign interference that our members of the RCMP have.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much, Commissioner.

Through these investigations, has there been any other locations discovered?

Commr Brenda Lucki: No. So far to date there have been three in the greater Toronto area and one in Vancouver.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I cede my time to Mr. Cormier.

• (2000)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My question may have been touched on a little earlier today, but it is always nice to have answers in French, if possible.

I noticed that Ireland and the Netherlands had ordered the closure of these so-called police stations. How did these countries close these police stations? Did they investigate, as Canada does, and did it take months or years? What process did these countries adopt when they ordered the closure of these police stations?

My question is for anyone who wants to answer.

[*English*]

Commr Brenda Lucki: I don't know the specifics of the investigations you're referring to, but what I can say is that, of course, we have to meet the threshold of our Criminal Code if, in fact, we are going to lay charges. We have several Criminal Code offences that can be leveraged, such as breach of trust, criminal harassment, unauthorized use of a computer, fraud for obtaining trade secrets, intimidation, mischief and bribery of officers.

Then we have a whole suite of allegations or charges that can be laid under the Security of Information Act offences, such as unauthorized communications, communicating safeguarded information and use of trade secrets. These are all specific charges for various types of foreign interference.

Of course, we have to meet the threshold of the evidence in order to bring somebody to court. Shutting them down.... I will say that with police culture often our success is by charges laid, but it's also through disruption as well, because we haven't heard very many new complaints on those three stations in Toronto and the one in Vancouver as a result of the disruption we have done with those particular locations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cormier. There's not very much time left for a follow-up question.

I want to thank our panellists, Minister Mendicino, Commissioner Lucki, Ms. Geddes and Mr. Vigneault. You've been very generous with your time this evening, and we thank you for that.

We'll take a quick break while we get our second panel in place.

• (2000)

(Pause)

• (2005)

The Chair: In the interest of making sure we have enough time for questions before our allotted time runs out, we will commence with our second panel.

Joining us now is Adam Fisher, director general, intelligence assessments, from the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service. We have Sébastien Aubertin-Giguère, assistant deputy minister; and Lesley Soper, director general, national security policy, from the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. We then have Brigitte Gauvin, acting director general, federal policing, national security; and Matt Peggs, chief superintendent, criminal operations officer of O Division (Ontario), from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

I understand we will have opening statements from Mr. Fisher and Ms. Gauvin.

We will start with Ms. Gauvin for five minutes or less.

• (2010)

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin (Acting Director General, Federal Policing, National Security, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the honourable members of this committee for the opportunity to discuss the issue of foreign interference today concerning the allegations of police stations that are allegedly affiliated with the People's Republic of China and operating in Canada.

My name is Brigitte Gauvin, and I am the acting director general of federal policing in the national security program. I am accompanied by Matt Peggs, the officer in charge of criminal operations in O Division, which is in Ontario, where the RCMP is responsible for federal law enforcement.

The study of this issue is important from a law enforcement perspective, and the RCMP takes this very seriously. While I cannot discuss precise details of ongoing investigations, I want to assure this committee that the RCMP may leverage criminal offences to investigate potential threats to public safety involving a state actor, including Criminal Code offences such as intimidation, criminal harassment, uttering threats and also specific foreign influence threats of violence or violence offences under the Security of Information Act.

Today, I'll focus on explaining three specific concerns from a law enforcement perspective.

First, why is foreign interference, including the activities allegedly connected to the police stations, a problem? This is because the foreign interference threat is multi-layered. It can range from students being pressured to support activities that are favourable to a foreign country, to the theft of intellectual property or the coercion of an individual.

The common thread among each of these foreign interference-related activities is that they are clandestine, deceptive activities that may involve threats to a person and are detrimental to Canada's interests.

This state-backed harassment and intimidation of Canadian communities is no different, as foreign actors seek to benefit another country by limiting certain dialogue and messaging in Canada. There is a collective concern on this topic, which has been expressed both domestically and internationally. This is not only because these alleged police stations have been reported to be operating in the greater Toronto area, but also reportedly around the globe.

This is concerning for several reasons. These alleged police stations may contribute to the involuntary return of individuals to China. Also, families living in both China and Canada may become the target of harassment, intimidation or experience other negative consequences. If the activities of these alleged police stations are consistent with those reported by Safeguard Defenders and the media, they would be operating outside existing Canadian legal mechanisms.

Second, how is the RCMP responding to the alleged police stations issue, and how is the RCMP countering foreign interference more broadly? The RCMP has a specialized team dedicated to

countering foreign interference. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the public feels safe in their own communities, building trust and confidence where possible, enforcing relevant legislation or disrupting activities.

We are working directly with the community, our domestic and intelligence law enforcement, security and intelligence partners and other Government of Canada partners on this issue. Our efforts include investigating, preventing and disrupting foreign interference, and we use the knowledge gained from our strategic and criminal intelligence functions, as well as our collaborations with our partners, to adapt to the criminal methods used by foreign actors.

As mentioned, I cannot share specific details about the RCMP's investigations. This is because the investigations are ongoing, and foreign interference investigations are some of the most sensitive national security investigations the RCMP currently conducts.

Third and finally, I will explain how the Canadian public can assist in countering this activity. We encourage the public to report state-backed harassment and intimidation, as this will allow us to investigate and will assist the RCMP in creating a more complete picture of the criminal threat environment. The local police of jurisdiction are typically the first to learn of a foreign interference-related issue. The RCMP works closely with its law enforcement partners, including police of jurisdiction, to respond to these state-backed threats.

If someone is in immediate danger, 911 or local police should be contacted. If an individual is not in immediate danger, the RCMP's national security information network may be contacted by phone or email.

In conclusion, I would like to re-emphasize that the RCMP is taking this situation very seriously. This is a nationwide and global issue. The alleged police stations rightly concern Canadians. We share these concerns.

Thank you for your time today.

• (2015)

The Chair: Thank you, acting director general.

Now we'll go to director general Adam Fisher for five minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adam Fisher (Director General, Intelligence Assessments, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, good evening.

My name is Adam Fisher and I am the director general of Intelligence Assessments within the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. I would like to thank you for inviting me to meet with you today. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have about this study.

[English]

As has been noted, the case this committee is studying is under close investigation by the RCMP. While I am sure you will appreciate that I cannot get into specifics in order to protect our sources and methods, CSIS endeavours to support its partners to the best of its ability across all manner of foreign interference investigations.

CSIS investigates and provides advice to government on threats to the security of Canada, such as foreign interference. We take any allegation of foreign interference seriously and have several long-standing and emerging foreign interference investigations across Canada today. As always, close alignment with the RCMP on national security matters is critical.

Foreign interference is covert and malign activity undertaken by a foreign state to advance its national interests to the detriment of Canada's. These activities threaten Canada's democratic institutions, policy process, economy, communities and free press.

Foreign interference can take multiple forms. Threat actors may attempt to elicit sensitive information from those they perceive to have access and influence, cultivating relationships with these individuals over a very long period of time. Threat actors may aggressively threaten or coerce their targets into acting in a certain way. This is a common activity impacting Canada's diverse communities. Other techniques include illicit financing, cyber-attacks, espionage and disinformation campaigns.

A number of foreign states engage in these activities. For example, China's attempts to threaten and intimidate individuals around the world have been well reported in open sources. To be clear, the threat does not come from the Chinese people but rather from the Chinese Communist Party and the Government of China. Their activities can instill fear and silence dissent in Canadian communities and communities around the world.

[Translation]

Fighting foreign interference requires a pan-Canadian approach. Those threatened often lack the means to defend themselves or are unaware that they can report such activities to Canadian authorities, such as CSIS.

[English]

This also requires an understanding of the threat. We have prioritized outreach and engagement with communities across Canada to build awareness and resilience. Last year, for example, CSIS's "Foreign Interference and You" publication outlined in several languages concrete ways that Canadians can defend themselves against foreign interference. Our goal is to strengthen individual resilience and to protect Canadians and their interests.

Canadians can be assured that CSIS and the government take these threats very seriously. Both the RCMP and CSIS have phone numbers and online reporting mechanisms that are monitored 24-7 for anyone who would like to report a threat to national security, including foreign interference.

To conclude, foreign interference is a rising challenge for the whole of our society. However, I want to assure this committee that CSIS is steadfast in its commitment to keep all Canadians safe.

With that, I'm happy to take your questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

To questions we will go.

Mr. Chong, you have six minutes or less.

● (2020)

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing as we continue this hearing we're having today.

My question concerns both the protection of national security and whether it's being threatened by foreign interference, and the protection of our intellectual property as it's threatened by espionage.

To my knowledge, in the last several years, only one person has been investigated and charged with either of these two things. That was a Hydro-Québec employee who was charged just a short time ago with allegedly stealing secrets, intellectual property, to transfer to the People's Republic of China.

I don't want to talk about anything that concerns an active investigation. I want to point out that's the only case I know of that has led to the arrest of someone, the laying of charges and prosecution. I don't know of anything else, yet I read in newspapers every day and every month that our closest Five Eyes intelligence allies are actually arresting agents of China in their territory and charging them. Just last year in the United States, on May 18, four PRC intelligence officers were charged with spying on prominent dissidents, Hong Kong activists and pro-democracy activists. On October 24, the United States charged 13 people in three separate cases regarding foreign interference and espionage. On October 20, six people were charged as illegal agents of the People's Republic of China in the United States. On November 17, a U.S. court sentenced a PRC spy to 20 years for stealing trade secrets.

In the United Kingdom a year ago, MI5 came forward with naming and shaming Christine Lee for a being an agent of the PRC in the U.K. Parliament. Just over two years ago, the United Kingdom expelled three people posing as journalists who were actually spies and agents of the PRC.

Yet here in Canada, I don't hear about anything other than this one case that I heard about three days ago.

Maybe you can tell us if I'm wrong, if there are any other cases that have led to prosecution.

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: Thank you for the question.

You are correct. In December 2022, the RCMP federal policing program led to a charge of breach of trust by a public officer against Mr. Wang.

Hon. Michael Chong: I appreciate that answer.

Here's the other thing I'm concerned about. An internal report was made public in April of last year. In that report it came to light that RCMP officers refused to catch and release an individual who was a threat to our national security about whom they were notified by CSIS. CSIS called up the RCMP and said, "We need to thwart an active national security threat, an active threat to the intellectual property, to the national security of this country, and we are requesting that the RCMP catch and release this individual", and the RCMP refused. That came out in this report in April of last year.

How is the public supposed to have confidence in the ability of our law enforcement to protect the national security of this country and to protect us against espionage, when in the last several years, while our closest Five Eye allies have arrested and charged and convicted many people and named and shamed people, we've had only one case that's led to a prosecution? Meanwhile, we get internal reports that the RCMP and CSIS aren't even co-operating on an investigation, on a catch-and-release, on sharing information.

How is the public supposed to have confidence that this country is protecting our national security and protecting us against espionage?

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: If I may continue answering the first question the honourable member had, I do in fact have two other examples of where individuals were charged by the RCMP, one of them being in November of 2019, when a now former employee of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, who worked at the facility in Swift Current, was charged with a number of Criminal Code offences: breach of trust by public officer, fraud over \$5,000 and possession of proceeds of crime over \$5,000. In November of 2022—

Hon. Michael Chong: Just to clarify, on that first case, was that in relation to a threat to national security or a threat to intellectual property?

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: The allegations were in relation to theft of intellectual property, which falls under the national security program.

Hon. Michael Chong: I understand.

What's the second case?

• (2025)

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: The next one was in December 2021. The federal policing national security program charged an ex-employee of the Canadian Space Agency. That was Mr. Zheng of Brossard, Quebec. He was charged in relation to illegal activities carried out alongside his duties at the Canadian Space Agency. We initiated an investigation in October 2019 after receiving information from the CSA's departmental security. Mr. Zheng allegedly used his status as a CSA engineer to negotiate agreements for the installation of satellite station facilities in Iceland. He had allegedly acted on behalf of a Chinese aerospace company. The matter is currently before the courts.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you for the elucidation of those three cases—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong. Your time has expired.

Hon. Michael Chong: —but the other question I wouldn't mind having answered at some point.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: There will be other opportunities.

Mr. Chiang, now to you for six minutes or less.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here tonight. It's a long night for all of you.

You mentioned earlier in your opening remarks about threats and foreign interference. How prevalent are they? I understand you said three people are being charged, that we had three incidents in the last little while. How prevalent are threats and foreign interference in Canada by foreign actors?

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: Thank you for the question.

The RCMP national security program receives a number of allegations regarding foreign actor interference and will investigate every allegation or complaint received. In doing so, we will collaborate with our domestic and international partners. We will engage with the communities. We share information. We investigate these allegations to the fullest of our abilities.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you.

Mr. Adam Fisher: I can try to answer your question as well, if you like.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Yes, please.

Mr. Adam Fisher: Very quickly, certainly from a service perspective, our assessment of the threat is that it's been increasing, without a doubt, over the last five to 10 years. Certainly, with the geopolitical environment and technology, we're seeing more foreign interference. We're seeing more espionage and hostile state activity here in Canada, in particular being perpetrated by the People's Republic of China, but there are others as well. It's certainly our estimation that the threat environment will continue to increase in the years ahead.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much.

Mr. Fisher, in follow-up to your answer, when you say "others as well", are these other countries you're talking about or...?

Mr. Adam Fisher: Yes. Although China certainly dominates in this space, Russia is known to be active in foreign interference as well as other countries, such as Iran. Those are the three countries we speak publicly of. There is a very short list beyond that, but those are the most persistent and worrisome threats we're seeing today.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

In regard to the Chinese police stations, do we have information on other countries having these Chinese police stations? Are we working with other governments in regard to tracking and stopping these police stations?

Chief Superintendent Matt Peggs (Criminal Operations Officer, O Division (Ontario), Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Thank you for the question.

Yes, we are working with other governments as well. Although there were the ones reported in Toronto and in Vancouver, there were others reported around the globe as well. Unfortunately, this is an experience that's shared by many countries right now.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Would that be with our Five Eyes partners? Are we working with them in collaboration to make sure we have eliminated these police stations?

C/Supt Matt Peggs: Yes, we're in communication with the Five Eyes partners about this issue and about ongoing investigations.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Are you aware of any instances where Canadians have been pressured or harassed by these foreign agents?

• (2030)

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: Thank you for the question.

As mentioned previously, the RCMP will receive numerous allegations, and we follow up on every allegation or complaint received from the public or other sources of information. We will investigate and....

I'm sorry. Could you repeat the question?

Mr. Paul Chiang: The question was on the police stations. Has there been harassment against our citizens, or pressure?

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: Thank you for clarifying.

Yes, we will investigate all the allegations of harassment and intimidation, as this is not tolerated by the RCMP or the Government of Canada. Although I'm not at liberty to reveal any specific details of ongoing investigations, if the RCMP receives complaints or allegations of intimidation or harassment, we will definitely be investigating those allegations.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Your answer was just generalizing it by saying, "If we receive any calls like that." However, do we have information on any harassment being conducted against our citizens?

C/Supt Matt Peggs: Are you talking specifically about the alleged police stations?

Mr. Paul Chiang: That's right.

C/Supt Matt Peggs: To maintain the integrity of the investigation as well as the security and the privacy of those who will be—

Mr. Paul Chiang: I'm sorry. Could I interject there for a moment?

I'm not asking you for pertinent information on anybody in particular. I'm asking, if any actual harassment or threatening has been done. I understand you are investigating the police stations, but has there been any actual threatening or harassment done? I'm not asking about the specific investigation.

C/Supt Matt Peggs: Right. The best way I can answer that is to say, as my colleagues have mentioned earlier, when we went for-

ward overtly, when we were doing interviews and things like that, that was part of the overall investigation into the existence of the alleged police stations. I really don't want to confirm details of what we learned as a result of that investigation.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Has the Canadian government reached out to the Chinese government in regard to these police stations?

That's my final question.

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: Currently, we haven't engaged with the Chinese government.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Trudel, for six minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, witnesses, I am sure you are very competent officers. I do not question your competence. However, China has been in the news a lot lately. I mentioned it earlier. There was the balloon story, there is talk of Chinese police stations, interference in elections, and so on. This is a major issue. It is discussed during question period, when ministers are often asked about it. We also hear about spying at Hydro-Québec. You mentioned it earlier. It's all been in the news.

As police officers involved in these kinds of stories, when they make the headlines, it must affect your pride a little. You must want to do something about it and stop it from happening. It's almost as if drug dealers are having fun doing deals outside municipal police stations or as if China is taunting your services in broad daylight.

Clearly, there is something Canada is not doing. There are tools that we don't have to deal with these problems, since it's in the news day after day and you don't know when it's going to stop. Given these problems, I imagine that you have frequent meetings with politicians and ministers and that you make representations.

Since you are on the ground, you must know what tools you lack to prevent Chinese balloons and police stations from making headlines, and spies from being discovered day after day in Canada's sensitive infrastructure. You must know what we're missing, what we're not doing here that other countries may be doing.

What are these tools? What do you say to politicians when you meet them? What do you say to the Minister of Public Safety, who was here earlier?

There was talk earlier about the creation of a foreign agents' register. We were told that this could be a useful tool. What other tools would you need to prevent China from continuing to make headlines and taunting our intelligence services?

• (2035)

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: Thank you for your comments and questions, Mr. Trudel.

Indeed, we are also concerned about these threats of foreign interference and the magnitude they are taking on these days. The RCMP takes any threat seriously, it is a priority. Foreign interference threats are significant and are fully investigated by the RCMP.

We work with our domestic and international partners to obtain all the information necessary to investigate any foreign interference threats. We maximize the use of our tools and other available tools, and we are certainly prepared to use additional ones.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Exactly; what are these tools? You say that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police works with the tools at its disposal, but you also seem to imply that it does not have enough. What tools do you need?

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: We use the Criminal Code and other federal statutes to lay charges in our foreign interference investigations, as I mentioned earlier. That said, we are always open to proposals to add tools—

Mr. Denis Trudel: Pardon me for interrupting, but I will repeat my question: what tools do you need?

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: You should put the question to the representatives of the Department of Public Safety. If we are consulted, we will certainly provide feedback on proposed new tools.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Can you share those comments with us now? What is Canada not doing that other countries are doing?

Earlier, we talked about Ireland and the Netherlands ordering the closure of foreign police stations. Why has that not been done in Canada? What tools do Ireland and the Netherlands have that Canada does not have?

Mr. Sébastien Aubertin-Giguère (Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): I don't have specific details about the Netherlands. The geopolitical reality is what it is and the threat is growing. China has a very aggressive policy in this regard. So it is normal that this is more present. It is a reality in all countries in the western world.

We can't necessarily draw the conclusion that this represents a vulnerability for Canada. Of course, there is frustration, but also a novelty factor, which cuts across several vectors.

We have tools in a lot of areas, such as cybersecurity and the protection of democratic institutions or laws against foreign interference and espionage. We have a lot of tools, but the threat is obviously constantly evolving and we have to keep adapting our tools.

I won't go into detail, but I can say that we are in the process of—

Mr. Denis Trudel: We are here precisely to obtain this kind of detail.

Mr. Sébastien Aubertin-Giguère: Of course, the minister put forward...

[English]

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Now it's Ms. McPherson's turn for six minutes or less.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here tonight and sharing this expertise with us. I know it is a late night for this.

I'm trying to understand how exactly this is all working and how the local policing interacts with the RCMP, CSIS and the government and Global Affairs Canada. It seems to me there's a bit of a challenge or a problem in how that information is being shared. I don't know how effective those communications are. I'm really interested in how that works.

To you, Mr. Fisher, if a threat comes in, for example, how do you ensure that Global Affairs and the RCMP are apprised of it? Who takes responsibility for that? How does that work?

Don't worry, gang. I'll get to you next.

• (2040)

Mr. Adam Fisher: I'd say to that question that, in terms of the flow of information and intelligence between the security agency CSIS, the RCMP, Public Safety, the Communications Security Establishment and others, it's very good and very healthy. There are multiple fora that meet regularly—weekly—to discuss these intelligence matters. I'd say to you that, within the Government of Canada and within the national security establishment, there is very broad awareness and understanding of the threats, general and specific, that we're facing.

When it comes to actually transitioning intelligence to evidence that would allow police and enforcement to lay charges, that is a challenge—and that was alluded to in the previous panel—but there are other avenues and tools we can use.

For example, for the service we have our threat reduction mandate. We may see or perceive foreign influence activity occurring within a community or against a certain official, and within the national security community we would discuss that and talk about what the best method is to address it. It might not be charges. It might be the service using its threat reduction mandate to reduce the threat, which we'll never hear about publicly and we can never talk about publicly, but it occurs and it does occur within the foreign influence activity threat.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Mr. Fisher, you did talk about there being a phone number. You were here when I asked the commissioner about how often that phone number has been accessed. I always have a bit of concern because it's quite easy to put a phone number out into the public. It's not always that easy to deal with the calls that come in on that number.

Is the data being collected from that phone number? Do you have the information of who is utilizing it? You have to believe that we're all quite worried, especially when we now hear that there is conceivably.... Of course, we always suspected foreign interference with regard to Russia and Iran.

Is that data being collected? Do the impacted communities have that information? Is this information staying up here and not getting down to the impacted communities, because we're hearing a very different story from people who are living in these communities?

Mr. Adam Fisher: I will try to answer that in a couple of ways.

In terms of data on our 1-800 number, I would have to get back to the committee on that.

Probably the more useful activity that we conduct is actual engagement with the communities. It's not necessarily a number that they can call, although there is one. It's actively going out into the communities through our regions and the big cities across Canada, sitting down with community associations and leaders, and talking to them—usually in an unclassified setting—about the threats. It's sensitizing them to the threat and letting them know that there's someone they can call if they need to.

In spite of what people might think, the service is not everywhere watching everything. We actually rely heavily on communities to tell us when they see something that's amiss. Part of it is building that connection with the communities. Part of it is educating them with regard to what they need to be aware of and looking for.

We have a number of publications that we put out there that talk about foreign influence activity, the flags people should be looking for, and if they see them, that they can give us a call and meet with us or talk to us on the phone—however they want to interact with us.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Is there a direct pathway if that was perhaps to happen with the local police? Is there a pathway for that information to get to you?

Mr. Adam Fisher: Yes. Certainly at an operational regional level, the same kind of connectivity that you see here in Ottawa between the RCMP and CSIS would exist in the field. For example, I think it was mentioned that our INSETs are investigating some of the front-office police stations. CSIS is embedded within these INSET organizations.

• (2045)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Does CSIS have all the resources it needs to do this work?

You might want to be careful how you answer that because this will go to Parliament, of course.

Mr. Adam Fisher: CSIS is continuously reprioritizing and real-locating internally to face the threats we're dealing with.

The threat environment's evolving. Twenty years ago it was all about counterterrorism. Today you will hear our director say publicly that the number one strategic threat to Canada is espionage and foreign interference. We have adjusted internally to put significant resources into those investigations.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Have the resources been sufficient for the changes?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

We will go now to Mr. Chong for five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to return to this issue of foreign interference. Three cases were mentioned: the 2019 case with the Canadian Space Agency that involved an employee acting on behalf of a Chinese aerospace company; the 2019 case that was mentioned regarding an Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada employee who was acting on behalf of a Chinese university and an Italian pasta company; and then more recently, the Hydro-Québec employee case that involved espionage.

It seems to me that all these three cases involve espionage and not foreign interference in the form of illegal police stations or the intimidation of citizens and pro-democracy groups and human rights activists, which involves things like targeting democratic institutions, political parties or candidates.

The source of frustration that I and many MPs have is, first of all, we have not heard of any criminal investigations that have led to prosecution with respect to foreign interference in the form of intimidation of citizens and the targeting of political parties or candidates. In respect of illegal police stations, we have not heard of any investigations that have led to charges, yet we hear of this happening among our Five Eyes allies.

Then for the stuff that doesn't rise to the level of criminality, we're not even told who's being targeted. The Prime Minister's brief said that 11 candidates in the 2019 election were targeted by the People's Republic of China, but nobody tells us who the 11 candidates are. We are not even getting information to help equip ourselves to defend ourselves, to defend our institutions, yet other Five Eyes allies are using sunlight and transparency to do exactly that.

Then last year we read about a lack of inter-agency co-operation. The agencies aren't sharing information. CSIS has an active investigation on what's apparently a threat to our national security, calls up the RCMP and says this individual or individuals need to be arrested, and the RCMP refuses. When you put this all together, can you understand why we're concerned about what is seemingly a lack of institutional capacity to defend our national security and our intellectual property?

One question, has this inter-agency rivalry between CSIS and the RCMP that was highlighted in an internal report of last April been resolved? Has the lack of information sharing within the Government of Canada been resolved?

C/Supt Matt Peggs: I don't know which case you are specifically referring to and I can only speak from my Ontario perspective, but we're in constant communication with the service and the information sharing back and forth between our two agencies is positive.

Hon. Michael Chong: It's a case that dates back several years. It was so serious that an internal investigation was conducted that led to an internal report that came to light in April of last year, so it wasn't that long ago. It was about eight or nine months ago.

In this report it was highlighted that CSIS requested the RCMP to carry out arrests in order to thwart an active threat to our national security and that the RCMP officers involved refused to do so. Clearly, whatever threat was active at the time wasn't thwarted because the RCMP officers involved quit the premise, quit the situation, rather than carry out what CSIS had requested. The report concluded that part of the problem was that the RCMP officers didn't feel they had enough information from CSIS to make the arrest.

This was an internal report. It was pretty public. It was published by the CBC, reported by the CBC, I believe, in April of last year. The simple question is this: Has this inter-agency rivalry been resolved so that, if there were active threats to national security that don't rise to the level of criminal prosecution but require some other techniques, our police and security agencies are integrated and functioning so that these other tools, such as catch-and-release, can be executed upon to protect this country's citizens?

That's my question.

• (2050)

The Chair: Actually, I will ask the witnesses to maybe work that answer into some of their follow-up comments because, Mr. Chong, your time has expired.

We'll now go to Mr. Fragiskatos, for six minutes or less.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here tonight.

Mr. Fisher, in your opening statement, you mentioned a document. I think you said foreign interference and me. I believe it is a document that you were talking about. Is that correct?

Mr. Adam Fisher: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Can you expand on that? What exactly is it?

Mr. Adam Fisher: Yes, absolutely. I think "Foreign Interference and You" is the way it's titled. It's a document that we put out, I believe it was last year. It's unclassified. It's translated into a number of languages. It's meant to sensitize communities to the foreign interference threat. It talks about what to look for. It talks about some of the techniques that our adversaries use in advancing foreign interference, for example, cultivation of targets, elicitation of information. It talks about cyber-attacks that are used as well, as part of foreign influence activity, financing, that sort of thing.

It's available for all, and I think it's on our website.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Certainly in principle, it sounds like a very worthwhile thing to pursue. How are the messages contained in that report communicated more broadly to the public? Is that the

message, to go on the website to find it? In the age we live in, distraction is all around us. People are very unlikely....

I respect the work that you do, so this is not necessarily a criticism. However, I am a bit perplexed as to how people are supposed to learn about this if they aren't being directed. Are there efforts to engage community leaders, who have wider networks perhaps, so that they can help to spread the message? Otherwise, it just remains on a website collecting dust, so to speak.

Mr. Adam Fisher: Yes, absolutely.

It's not just a static tool, something that we posted on our website. In our regions, when we meet with community leaders and associations, we bring that document with us and we share it there. We try to publicize it in fora such as this. We're certainly doing more public speaking as well, at very senior levels, with our director and others. Slowly but surely, we're trying to get the word out there. This is just one document that we would bring along with us when we're engaging with communities and partners. We leave it on the table when we leave.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: As I said, it sounds interesting. It sounds like something that would be worthwhile for Canadians to delve into. I'm even thinking that it wouldn't be out of place if someone was on a community radio station or something like that, talking about what the document contains. Right now, we're telling people to go online to find it. I'm not sure there's a lot of utility with that, with great respect.

Ms. Soper, I have another question for you or Mr. Giguère, if I could, but it sounds like you have an opinion on that.

Ms. Lesley Soper (Director General, National Security Policy, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): I would add, in another context, that we have a researchers' portal that's housed through Innovation, Science and Economic Development. That also provides lots of rich information to the research community, the academic community, about how to safeguard their research. We use that in complement with seminars that we send out to universities in order to meet with students and researchers. We push out the message that way, so it's another.... We try to tailor our products to specific communities who will have an interest in it.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

You won't have much time to answer this.

There is continued interest and focus among many, including I think members of this committee, on the question of a foreign agents act.

This goes to either you or Mr. Giguère from Public Safety.

Is there something already in place in Canadian law that would achieve the same goal, thus preventing that kind of an advance forward—or not? I'm thinking in terms of redundancy. If Canadian law allows objectively for the aims of a foreign agents act already somehow, then all this talk about the need to implement that kind of law might be moot. Do you have any perspective on that?

• (2055)

Mr. Sébastien Aubertin-Giguère: The foreign agents registry is a tool for transparency above all. There obviously is the Lobbying Act, which is very constrained and applies to very specific conditions. At this point, there's no alternative. The foreign agents registry would fill a specific gap in that regard.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

We'll go over to you, Mr. Trudel, for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: FBI Director Wray said, I don't know at what point exactly, that the Chinese Communist Party had an obvious habit of exporting its repression to the United States. That is a fact that we know. He said that, in terms of law enforcement in the United States, harassment, stalking, surveillance and blackmail were among the uncoordinated measures taken by the People's Republic of China against its citizens who do not approve of its regime. We also suspect this to be the case. He added that the FBI was discussing the issue with its foreign partners.

So I'd like to know if you are discussing this with the United States, as well as measures that could be put into effect. Are there any coordinated measures? Are there discussions with countries other than the United States?

I'm addressing the whole group. I assume I will get a response.

Mr. Sébastien Aubertin-Giguère: Of course, we have close ongoing discussions with our traditional Group of Five partners. We also have discussions in the G7, as well as with our NATO partners. These are obviously ongoing discussions, which are very specific in their focus.

In that context, there are all sorts of subcommittees or forums where you can discuss very focused issues like interference, cyber-security or whatever. So we are really well aligned with our colleagues. We share information, tools and analysis. We also try to work together when we can, which is not always easy.

Mr. Denis Trudel: In closing, I'm going to ask you a trick question. Was the sounding balloon used for meteorological purposes or for espionage purposes?

You must know that.

Mr. Sébastien Aubertin-Giguère: For operational reasons, I obviously cannot discuss this matter.

Mr. Denis Trudel: If it were just a weather balloon used for meteorological purposes, I imagine you would tell us.

Mr. Sébastien Aubertin-Giguère: I think the U.S. government specified that this sounding balloon had a surveillance function. The Americans shot it down for a specific reason, without going into details.

Mr. Denis Trudel: All right. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Ms. McPherson for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I said I would get back to you on my next round, but I don't have very much time.

As we think about the connections between the local police, CSIS and the RCMP, the obvious goal here is to identify when there is a risk at play and find a way to stop that risk, so that we are protecting Canadians and people in Canada from that risk.

Is there training being undertaken with local police officers, so they are able to play that key role?

C/Supt Matt Peggs: I'll speak to that question.

The policing landscape of the GTA is such that there are a lot of police services working together in that geographical area, with us doing the national security function. The model of our INSET unit is such that there are integrated partners within that unit.

The other thing we have in the GTA INSET is an integrated intake and assessment team. Not only are we getting complaints from the other national security agencies, but we also get some that come in through the police forces of jurisdiction, so there is that consistent analysis and triage of files. With that, there is some training and learning with the management, so they're aware of what to look for.

• (2100)

Ms. Heather McPherson: What about local police officers? Let's go out of the GTA, because that's a very complex example. Let's talk about the Edmonton Police Service. We can assume there are probably situations across the country, not just in Toronto and Vancouver. We can assume there are situations happening in other cities.

If the Edmonton Police Service gets a complaint, how does that get to you? How does that get to Mr. Fisher? How does that get resolved to ensure that the people making the complaint are being protected? Where is the training in place to ensure those police officers know how to manage that?

C/Supt Matt Peggs: The INSET model across the country has those partnerships within them with the local police and the RCMP as well. With that comes an awareness of the files that they're working on, and the communication is also easier between the police service of jurisdiction and the INSET unit.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Peggs, if I have a citizen in Edmonton who has a concern, who perhaps is a Uighur activist or a Hong Kong activist, and they contact the local police, the local police will have had no training on how to manage that, but it will be escalated to the RCMP. Is that how I understand that?

C/Supt Matt Peggs: I don't know what the training has been with all the police agencies and what there is, but there should be that awareness. I think this is still very much a work-in-progress with the awareness of what they're looking for, because, as you can surely understand, what can sometimes appear to be just an initial Criminal Code complaint could be something much—

Ms. Heather McPherson: It could be more serious, which is why it's important to have an audit.

C/Supt Matt Peggs: —more sinister.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

It sounds like maybe a little quick audit needs to happen there just to see who knows what about what.

We'll go now to Ms. Dancho for five minutes or less.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are for Director General Fisher.

What is the role of CSIS concerning these alleged Chinese police stations operating in Canada? What role does CSIS play?

Mr. Adam Fisher: Through you, Mr. Chair, as has been said here, the RCMP is leading the investigation, but that doesn't mean we're not also looking at it. I can't say we are or we are not in an unclassified forum, but certainly any allegation of foreign influence activity, in particular one that is seemingly so bold, would certainly get our attention and—I'm speaking in the hypothetical—we would perform our own checks, while leaving the RCMP to lead the criminal investigation from their side.

We certainly would take an interest in it.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Certainly. Would it have been CSIS, in a hypothetical situation, that would have been the first agency of government that would have been made aware of these police stations? Would it have been your agency first or would the RCMP have been notified, or was it Global Affairs when they read the Charles Burton article in *The Globe and Mail*? In a hypothetical situation, would it have been CSIS that learned about this first?

Mr. Adam Fisher: Again, I won't speak to these police stations specifically.

From my experience in the national security environment, information like this can come in through various channels. It could come through the service. It could come through police channels. It could come through foreign intelligence partners or police partners. There's no one route into the government when something like this becomes known, but once it is known by one agency, it's very quickly shared amongst the community so that we can talk about it and talk about the best approach to managing it.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: The community being the government agencies, the RCMP and yourselves.

To share that information with the Five Eyes or our other allies, would Global Affairs take on that responsibility or would CSIS take on that responsibility of gathering information, if these are operating in another country, and sharing what we know about them if they are or are not in ours? Would it be CSIS?

Mr. Adam Fisher: Quite often where there's a criminal investigation into something that's threat-related, there's a parallel intelligence investigation. In the intelligence world that information is shared.

Going to an earlier question talking about interactions with our Five Eyes partners and other intelligence agencies, there's a very robust conversation that goes on in intelligence channels on issues of foreign influence activities. We would be comparing notes. We would be talking to one another in those intelligence channels.

• (2105)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Commissioner Lucki confirmed for the committee, or actually provided news—and it was the first time we

were made aware of this—that there were uniformed RCMP officers—she didn't use the word “stationed”, but they were at the Vancouver location. She didn't say they were gathering intelligence, but she said they were there. I think the word she used was that they were there to “disrupt”.

If you're gathering intelligence, are you then sharing it with CSIS? Who would then share it, as he's just outlined, with our allies? Is that how that flow of information works?

C/Supt Matt Peggs: Thanks for that question.

There are a couple of things. The uniformed presence in the marked vehicles was at the Toronto locations.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Oh, I thought she said Vancouver. It's my mistake.

C/Supt Matt Peggs: It's okay. They were at the Toronto locations. The purpose of that was essentially to show the community we were doing something about this to try to encourage that reporting to come in.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: If reporting did come in, is the flow of information then to Director General Fisher or someone in CSIS, who then can share that with our allies and compare notes? Is that how that flow of information works?

C/Supt Matt Peggs: Typically speaking, all of the information that we gather is shared with the service as well.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You would confirm that.

Mr. Adam Fisher: I would, yes. It's easier going in that direction than in the other direction, which touches on a previous question from a member. That's where we get into.... It was referenced—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Can I confirm what you mean there? I'm sorry.

Do you mean our CSIS operatives gathering that information?

Mr. Adam Fisher: The flow of information is easier from a law enforcement context into an intelligence realm, rather than vice versa. Going from intelligence into law enforcement is difficult because of the intelligence evidence issue, which is a long-standing challenge within the Canadian context. Actually, all of our partners face very similar challenges.

That comes to how police forces handle evidence, and their requirements and their thresholds. It also touches on our requirement to protect sources, in particular, from our Five Eyes partners and others.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

The Chair: That may beg further questions, but there will be opportunities to do that a bit later on.

We'll now go to Mr. Cormier for five minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Gauvin, with a last name like yours, you surely have relatives in Acadia.

In your opening remarks, you indicated that you wanted to talk to anyone who might feel threatened or intimidated by these police stations. You also mentioned that this could be aimed at students.

Do you go to these people, or do you let them come to you? One of the things you mentioned was a phone number to contact the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

I would also like to have some answers in French about the process you use to gather information, especially from students. Do you go to them at their university, or do you let them contact you if they have information to pass on to you or if they think that a so-called police station is in their area?

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: Thank you for your question, Mr. Cormier.

I would answer yes, in both cases, absolutely.

We encourage people to come to us to make a complaint or inform us of any threats or intimidation they may experience.

We proactively engage with communities, including universities and other institutions that may be affected by foreign interference. As part of our involvement with these institutions and people, including students, we inform and educate them about potential foreign threats and the different means used to make these threats. We also equip them to report these events while protecting themselves.

• (2110)

Mr. Serge Cormier: You talk to these people, students or other members of the Chinese community. I read that some people fear for their safety, or for the safety of their family members who are still in China.

Do you feel this fear when you talk to them? Do these people seem to be open and transparent when they tell you about the threats or intimidation they face, or are some reluctant to disclose what they are really seeing?

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: When we engage with these persons, we certainly try to get as much information as possible. It is possible, indeed, that people are reluctant to provide information for fear of reprisals from foreign actors. The RCMP is also aware of the intimidation that family members who still remain in China may face. We therefore encourage Chinese nationals in Canada to share as much information as possible, which we take into consideration in our investigations.

Mr. Serge Cormier: That's fine.

I have a question that may be for you or other witnesses.

I have heard what China has said about these police stations; that these facilities are not police stations, but rather centres run by volunteers to help Chinese citizens abroad.

What do you think of this claim by the Chinese authorities?

C/Supt Matt Peggs: As French is not my mother tongue, I prefer to reply in English.

[*English*]

I just have to remember the question now after I got that out.

Unfortunately, the facts that we've learned through our investigation—to maintain the integrity of it—I cannot share with you today, as we want to make sure that we can proceed with this investigation down the road to try to get to prosecutions. I'm afraid I can't answer that question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: I know that the RCMP has a lot of files and a lot of work to do, but I would like to know if, in terms of priority, the issue of these police stations is at the bottom, in the middle or at the very top of the ladder.

[*English*]

C/Supt Matt Peggs: I can say that we take this very seriously. It is one of our priority matters, and we're continuing to investigate it. We have actually moved some resources into that unit to bolster that investigation so that we can keep it going. It remains a priority for us.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you very much.

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

We go to Mr. Chong now for five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong: I just want to continue the line of questioning that MP Dancho had and that I asked earlier but never got a response, which was on this April 2022 internal report. It highlighted an apparent lack of co-operation in the integrated national security enforcement team and where information intelligence to evidence wasn't flowing. As a result, arrests were not made and an active threat was not thwarted.

My simple question is this: Has this been addressed, or is this an ongoing issue? If so, what should be done by Parliament, by government and by the cabinet to address this lack of inter-agency co-operation when it comes to protecting our national security?

Mr. Adam Fisher: First, I'd just like to emphasize that, certainly from my perspective—and, I think, the service perspective in general—the co-operation between us and the RCMP and the rest of the national security community is very sound, very good and very healthy. There was a time when that wasn't the case, I think we'd all agree, but we've come a long way. We've done a lot of work to define our lanes and ways that we can help each other in terms of executing our mandates. I just want to emphasize that point.

I don't know how far back this document goes. It's potentially back to days when things weren't so healthy. However, today things are very healthy.

Intelligence to evidence is an issue. It's something that the government has recognized as such and has been putting a lot of effort into trying to address. It's not a straightforward issue at all. However, I also wouldn't want to leave the impression that it's the only avenue.

Again, I don't know the particulars of the case you're citing, but it wouldn't be unusual in such circumstances for the Mounties to tell CSIS, "You're not giving us enough information for us to pursue our own investigation." We'd have to go back, look at ourselves and see whether there's perhaps something we can do on our own threat reduction mandate. I'm not saying that happened. I'm just saying that would not be an unusual conversation.

• (2115)

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you for that answer.

Just quickly.... We're talking about foreign interference today in the form of police stations and other forms of interference.

Christopher Wray, the director of the FBI, said just before Christmas that TikTok is a threat to U.S. national security in two forms. First, it's potentially a real threat with respect to espionage—the ability of TikTok to gather vast amounts of data to track and surveil persons in the U.S. Second, it's a threat in the form of foreign interference because the recommendation algorithms could be used to attack democratic institutions, parties and candidates during and in between elections by serving up massive amounts of disinformation. It is the number one app that's been downloaded worldwide, and it's the number one app amongst a younger generation of our citizens.

Can you tell us what the CSIS assessment is of TikTok with respect to espionage and its ability to track Canadians through the vast amounts of data it collects? Second, what is the CSIS assessment of TikTok's threat with respect to foreign interference and the fact that the recommendation algorithms could be manipulated to spread disinformation to attack our parties, our elections and our institutions?

Mr. Adam Fisher: I wouldn't comment specifically on TikTok and what our assessment may or may not be of that company. I can certainly confirm in a general way that what you said about social media being a potential platform that does get exploited for foreign influence activity is true. It's a platform where vast amounts of data can be collected—personal, identifying information. It can assist the adversary in honing in their own targeting in terms of foreign influence activity. It's also a vector for messaging and narratives that are friendly to and supportive of the authoritarian regime, while at the same time, suppressing voices that may be contrary.

We see that in social media.

Hon. Michael Chong: Would you recommend that TikTok be banned from Government of Canada's devices and from the Parliament of Canada's devices?

Mr. Adam Fisher: I wouldn't recommend that, Mr. Chair. The service provides assessments and advice to government and decision-makers. That sort of thing is done in a confidential setting.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

Mr. Dubourg, it's over to you now for five minutes.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Ladies and gentlemen, witnesses, it is my turn to greet you. Thank you for being here at this late hour to take part in our study.

We know that there is an ongoing RCMP investigation. There are a number of questions that may be difficult for you to answer, but I will ask them anyway.

Can you comment on whether, since this story about the infamous police stations came out in the media, threats to citizens related to the three or four stations you uncovered have decreased?

C/Supt Matt Peggs: Thank you for the question. I prefer to answer in English.

[*English*]

No, I'm not in a position to comment on that today, unfortunately. Anything that I would say with respect to what we've determined makes up the fabric of the investigation. I can't comment on that. I apologize for that.

• (2120)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you. I will give it a second try.

Earlier, we spoke with Ms. Lucki about the toll-free line. Are you able to tell us in general terms the types of threats that Canadians report when they call that number?

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: Thank you for the question.

I would say that the nature of the complaints we receive varies. I don't have the data at this time on the types of threats that are complained about, but I can check with my colleagues in the RCMP to get that data and provide it to you in writing.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you.

Let me come back to the threats. I understand that it is Chinese Canadians who are targeted. However, it is often the case that other communities share the demands of the Chinese community and support them. Are these other people also facing threats from police stations?

[*English*]

C/Supt Matt Peggs: Anything that we've learned with respect to the alleged police stations themselves is not something that I'm going to be able to comment on. I can speak in generalities about these types of investigations and things like that. I can't speak about anything specific to the police stations.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Let me try one more question.

I'd like to know about, let's say, those police individuals. Do you know if they come from China or if they are already people in Canada? Did they just arrive in Canada or were they installed in Canada? Lastly, can we link them to the Embassy of China in Canada?

C/Supt Matt Peggs: To get the answers to those questions we need to let the investigation run its course so that the investigators can do what they have to do, and then some of those answers can become known. As of now, I can't say anything about it.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you so much, and good luck in your job.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Maybe, Mr. Dubourg, you can sign on and go and ask those questions directly and find out for yourself.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: I will wait for the investigation.

The Chair: Very good.

Mr. Trudel, it's over to you for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Ms. Gauvin, I imagine that you are familiar with the Safeguard Defenders organization. According to the Safeguard Defenders, Chinese service centres, which are non-profit organizations that provide food, clothing and shelter, often quietly turn into Chinese intelligence centres. I think that's what happened in Toronto and Vancouver.

As it happens, there is such a centre in Montreal. Have you received any information that a service centre, a police station or an intelligence centre is being set up in Montreal?

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: Thank you for your question, Mr. Trudel.

If we received information that such a police station is being set up in the Montreal area, we would certainly try to find out the location and investigate.

• (2125)

Mr. Denis Trudel: If I understand correctly, you have no information at this time that such a police station is being developed in Montreal.

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: At this time, I cannot confirm whether we are currently conducting an investigation or if we have received any information about it.

Mr. Denis Trudel: When it comes to espionage, we often hear that foreign students at McGill University and Concordia University, both in Montreal, are working for the Chinese government. This has often been mentioned in newspaper articles and news items, but it is never made very clear.

Are there Chinese government cells still operating in these two Montreal universities?

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: I will give you the same kind of answer as before.

If we received information that Chinese cells were operating in Canadian universities, we would certainly investigate. We take these kinds of allegations very seriously.

Mr. Denis Trudel: However, you are not going to tell us about it tonight.

Ms. Brigitte Gauvin: I cannot, as I have to protect ongoing investigations.

Mr. Denis Trudel: I see. Thank you for being here tonight.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

To wrap up, we'll go to Ms. McPherson for our final two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To be fair, I should ask some questions of our Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness team. Obviously we've been hearing about online threats, coercion, all of these harms being directed towards Canadians.

What are the policy steps being taken right now to deal with this? What is happening at the policy level?

Mr. Sébastien Aubertin-Giguère: Thanks for the fairness.

Because the threat is constantly changing and because the threat landscape is shifting constantly, we need to make sure our tools are up to date and adequate. Obviously there's quite a lot of policy work that's being done internally: We share with the community, we talk with the allies, we learn constantly and we are providing advice to government.

This results oftentimes in legislative amendments or proposals, the latest one being the changes to the Investment Canada Act that have been tabled by ISED. We're also working, on the Prime Minister's request, on a renewal of the cyber-strategy.

The threat is multivector, and we are looking at the range of policies and tools across the board to come up with an updated policy tool kit.

Ms. Heather McPherson: You talked about the cyber-threat, of course, that we are seeing against Canadians, but specifically, what are those policy pieces for the targeting of Canadians?

Mr. Sébastien Aubertin-Giguère: Again, I think what's important to discuss is the fact that the targeting of Canadians happens in many ways. It's not just someone being harassed on a personal level. It could be what's happening online, through investments or the narratives being channelled to social media.

We're trying to take a look at this from a more comprehensive perspective in order to see whether there are gaps that need to be addressed; how best to invest our money, efforts and resources; and where we need to adjust the legislation. This is all being done right now. We're looking at it at a very comprehensive level to make sure we're not forgetting any threat actors who—

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'd like to get much more detail on that, but I don't think it's possible at this time.

The Chair: The time is up. I appreciate that. Thank you.

Thank you to the panel. I know it's late, but your input has been welcomed and, hopefully, valuable to our ongoing consideration of this. We have another session coming up on this topic. What we learned from you will probably lead to more questions for the next group coming in. Thank you for that.

I'd like to thank our two clerks. We're blessed tonight, again, with two for the price of one. With analysts, we're down, instead, to one for the price of two. To our interpreters, technical crew and staff, thank you all for being here and for your work tonight.

The meeting is adjourned.

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