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• (1555)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 127 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. I would like to remind participants of the following points. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak, whether participating in person or via Zoom. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on October 22, 2024, the committee resumes its study of electoral interference and criminal activities in Canada by agents of the Government of India.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour. We have, from the British Columbia Gurdwaras Council, Moninder Singh, spokesperson. Mr. Singh is also a spokesperson for the Sikh Federation of Canada. From the World Sikh Organization of Canada, we have Balpreet Singh, legal counsel, by video conference.

It being Diwali today, namaste, and happy Diwali to everybody.

I now invite Mr. Moninder Singh to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Please go ahead, sir.

Mr. Moninder Singh (Spokesperson, British Columbia Gurdwaras Council): Thank you.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I come to you from the unceded, occupied territories of the Kwantlen, Katzie and Semiah-moo first nations. I'd like to thank them for the opportunity to live and work on the lands they've been caretakers of since time immemorial.

I'd also like to recognize that today marks the anniversary of the onset of the first brutal and horrific incidents of Indian state-sponsored, planned and orchestrated violence against the Sikh community, in November 1984—a genocide in which thousands of Sikhs were murdered across India. The continuation of this state violence, oppression and now transnational repression has placed its foot firmly in Canada. The challenge before all of those who call Canada home is how to stop it.

State-sponsored violence is nothing new for India. In their report “Protecting the Killers: A Policy of Impunity in Punjab, India”, Human Rights Watch states, “from 1984 to 1995 the Indian government ordered counterinsurgency operations that led to the arbitrary detention, torture, extrajudicial execution, and enforced disappearance of thousands of Sikhs.” This is important today, because of the continuation of this violence in the form of transnational repression, which has taken the lives of Canadian citizens in this country. There should be no question about what India's policy has been towards Sikh activists for the last 40 years. India has engaged in these types of behaviours for decades.

However, successive governments have ignored this or brushed it under the rug, in order to pursue trade or closer ties with India. Repression is going unchecked, and the international community's response, or lack thereof, has emboldened India to reach even further. Canada's role is that it effectively granted Indian intelligence networks impunity to operate in Canada, which emboldened them to escalate their violence. As a case in point, when it was known that a nexus of agents of Indian origin were operating in the Vancouver consulate in 2017, very little to nothing was done to stop them at that time. This eventually led to the assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Surrey on June 18, 2023. All of this evidence is pointing to the fact that India is continuing its transnational repression in a very violent form. The evidence on record demonstrates that India is directly targeting activists for assassination and coordinating generalized violence against the entire community across the country. The acts of violence...through the revelations of the RCMP on October 14.

The reality of the situation in the community is something I can speak about personally. I am one of the individuals in Canada who have received multiple duties to warn regarding the threat of imminent assassination against their lives. This obviously places an individual in a very dangerous situation. I was removed from my home, where I have children who are minors. I couldn't be around them. The reality of working within your community while exercising your charter rights of freedom of speech and expression becomes blurred. Communities suffer greatly, not just families. The lack of response we receive in those situations is also very problematic. We have law enforcement agencies that aren't able to provide much help. We don't know where the threat is coming from. We don't know how to react to this type of threat within Canada, either.

All of these things, over the last two years, have been right in front of us. Mr. Nijjar, myself and dozens of other Sikh Canadians are forced to choose between retreating from public life and supporting our communities, or continuing our work and risking our lives as Sikhs and as people who stand up for human rights—which I believe everyone in this room would also adhere to. There was no choice. We had to continue our work. We had to continue to speak out. We had to continue to exercise those rights of freedom of speech and expression enshrined within the charter. That is the only option we have, and we continue to do so. We will do so going into the future, as well.

This is what an authoritarian regime like India looks like, and this is what they want—to intimidate and shut down dissenting voices. However, that's not going to be possible in Canada, and it's definitely not going to be possible for the Sikh community in Canada.

Transnational repression tactics include assassination attempts, threats and intimidation of Sikh activists. The assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar is a blatant example of how deeply India has penetrated into Canada, not only with assassinations but also by undermining general elections and the nominations of candidates in political parties—all the way to leadership races in that sphere, as well. We have evidence presented at the foreign interference commission that verifies all of this. India has conducted these operations for over 40 years. I myself have come out several times, over the last two years, stating that the Sikh community knows India is interfering in Canada.

• (1600)

I'd like to read you something:

India conducts intelligence operations in Canada at two levels—directly through its consulates in Toronto and Vancouver and indirectly through infiltration of the Canadian Sikh community. India's target is a well-organized international Sikh lobby that is the financial, intellectual and administrative backbone of the drive for a homeland in Punjab.

According to the sources, India's intelligence activities in Canada include the spreading of false information, the use of paid informers and the instigation of activities to discredit the Sikh separatist movement.

This is not something that was put out in the last six months. This is from November 28, 1984, in the *Globe and Mail* in Canada. Canada has known about Indian interference for 40 years. Canada, its media and the Sikh community all have known about it. The unfortunate reality is that little to nothing has been done about it.

In closing, we have four things that we think would help protect Canadians: the suspension of security and intelligence agreements with India in the short term as a short-term mechanism to ensure there is safety within Canada for all Canadians; a public inquiry into the assassination of Mr. Nijjar, along with India's activities and the revelations of violence that have been put forward by the RCMP on October 14, because, as far as we know, India is the only country to inflict this much violence in Canada on Canadian citizens on Canadian soil; the prosecution of conspirators and perpetrators and the imposition of targeted sanctions against Indian diplomats who are believed to be involved in this, especially those who have been removed from this country; and support for the Sikh community in combatting the rise in anti-Sikh hate, which has a di-

rect link back to India's misinformation and disinformation campaigns against Sikhs.

Finally, I implore all of you to ask me questions about the real lived experience of Indian foreign interference. If anyone here remains silent on this issue, it will actually speak volumes as to where they stand and whom they are seeking to protect. We're all here as Canadians. We're all here in order to protect this country and its freedoms.

Right now, it's the Sikh community that's facing the brunt of this violence, but in the future it can be any community. There must not be party lines as we work together to combat this type of hate, this type of violence, on Canadian soil. This is a life-and-death situation for the Sikh community, for sure, but it's also the sovereignty of Canada that's being undermined, and that of all Canadians. Your response here now will be indicative of the priority you give our lives and of your commitment to your elected office to safeguard the interests of this country first.

Thank you.

The Chair: We go now to Mr. Balpreet Singh for five minutes, please.

Mr. Balpreet Singh (Legal Counsel, World Sikh Organization of Canada): Thank you.

Good afternoon. My name is Balpreet Singh. I'm legal counsel for the World Sikh Organization of Canada.

Today, as we approach the 40th anniversary of the 1984 Sikh genocide in India, we're here to discuss India's continued targeting of Sikhs in Canada, but it's absolutely essential to understand the context of this ongoing interference.

For decades, the Government of India has targeted Sikhs and other minorities without any consequences. Tens of thousands of Sikhs were killed by the Indian state with no accountability or reckoning. For 40 years, Sikhs in Canada have known that India engages in foreign interference and targets our community. This has been a truth that's been an open secret.

Open Secrets is also the title of a book by a former Indian diplomat and intelligence officer, M.K. Dhar, who was stationed in Ottawa from 1983 to 1987. In his memoir, he admits that his mission was to “penetrate select Gurdwaras”, establish assets within the Sikh community and make “a few friends amongst Canadian members of Parliament”. Several other books and articles have documented India's espionage and interference aimed at Canada's Sikhs. Canada has long been aware of this interference but has often looked the other way or treated India with kid gloves.

This interference continues to take several forms. The first is visa manipulation. The primary tool India uses is the Indian visa. Individuals are denied visas for expressing views that India deems objectionable, while others are coerced into actions or statements in exchange for visas. Some individuals have been forced to sign pre-drafted letters supporting India, which are then used to extort them. Even Canadian politicians have been subject to these tactics. Other forms include intimidation of relatives in India, surveillance of individuals and events, and media manipulation and disinformation, creating narratives that favour the Indian government's position.

The impact on the Sikh community has been profound. Sikhs are coerced into avoiding discussions about Khalistan, a sovereign Sikh state. For India, any dialogue about Khalistan is labelled as extremism or terrorism, and this is a nuance that's often misunderstood in the West. India has worked very hard to make "Khalistan" a scary term. Supporters of Khalistan have faced torture and disappearance in India. India seeks to make that repressive approach normal and export it to Canada; however, here we have freedom of expression, and that's protected, of course, by the charter.

The current tensions that we're seeing can be traced back to 2015, when a notable number of Sikhs were elected as MPs and also included in cabinet. This was seen as a threat by India, which quickly framed the Canadian government as being influenced by Khalistani extremists. Our report in September 2023 in *The Bureau*, by Sam Cooper, indicated that, in 2017, CSIS was aware of increased Indian diplomatic activities targeting the Sikh community, including monitoring, vote manipulation and visa coercion.

Ottawa allegedly halted actions due to political sensitivity and the impending 2018 Canadian delegation to India. That delegation, as we know, was subsequently targeted by India, which used the false narrative of Sikh extremism to taint the visit. Canada attempted to appease India by signing the framework for cooperation on countering terrorism and violent extremism, which was then portrayed by India as a crackdown on Khalistan supporters.

Sikhs in Canada have repeatedly reported Indian interference to law enforcement and CSIS, but it's not clear that it had any effect. In June 2022, I personally informed CSIS that India might attempt to target Sikh activists under the guise of gang wars, based on Indian media narratives. After Ripudaman Singh Malik's murder in July 2022, I warned CSIS of risks to the lives of Hardeep Singh Nijjar and other activists. Duties to warn were issued, but no real protection was provided, leaving many feeling resigned to their fate.

The Prime Minister's announcement in Parliament last year and the RCMP's recent statement were a welcome breath of fresh air and feel like vindication for our community. However, India's interference now extends to our democratic institutions and elected officials. Indian influence is seen in nomination races and elections, and there are allegations of MPs receiving funds from India to raise specific issues in Parliament. Make no mistake, India's actions reflect a hostile and rogue nation acting with impunity.

Canada and its allies must re-evaluate their relationship with India. Turning a blind eye or handling it with kid gloves is no longer an option. We must continue to expose and counter Indian interference as we've begun to do over the past year. This is a moment that's absolutely critical for our community but also for our country.

Canada must commit to shutting down India's foreign interference, which has continued unabated for the past 40 years.

Thank you.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We'll start our round of questions. Our first round is with Ms. Dancho.

You have six minutes, please.

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

Thank you to both witnesses for being here and for their excellent testimony.

I deeply appreciated your remarks. You both touched on the concern that, when duties to warn are issued, there is a lack of protection following them. Can you both go into some detail of what that experience is like? If you could choose, what would you want to see from police and others for additional protections?

Mr. Moninder Singh, would you like to start?

Mr. Moninder Singh: Yes, definitely. I can speak from experience, with multiple duties to warn issued against me.

One of the problems we see is that there is very little information on where the threat is coming from, so you don't really know what to look out for. There are very few resources provided when it comes to direction as to how you can safeguard yourself. There are simple things, like getting a security camera and being aware of your surroundings, but when you have somebody from law enforcement telling you that you have an imminent threat of assassination against your life, those are not things that are going to protect anyone living in Canada, as we saw in the case of my friend, Mr. Nijjar, who also received the same warning, with me, in July 2022.

What we'd like to see is actually going deeper. Why does this risk persist in the first place? We feel like an inquiry to actually understand India is what's needed first. The safeguarding is really just putting band-aids on a bleeding wound that won't stop right now, with what India is doing. An inquiry will go deep enough into the situation to understand how deeply India has penetrated into Canada and where in our electoral systems, in our academia, in our media and in our politics they're interfering. I think that's the only way to understand them and then be able to counter them. I think the rest of it is really band-aid solutions.

The law enforcement agencies don't have the ability to put cars in front of people's homes 24-7. I have two years of duties to warn that are persisting. To expect the Canadian government or the law enforcement agencies to station multiple officers with me at all times is just not feasible for this country and it shouldn't have to happen.

I think we need to go to the root of the problem versus the band-aid solutions, which will just maybe keep people safe for the time being, but they are not getting to the actual cause of the whole situation, which is India.

• (1610)

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

Mr. Balpreet Singh, do you have anything to add to that?

Mr. Balpreet Singh: I'll just briefly add that I've spoken to a number of people who have received these duties to warn. You are visited by law enforcement. You are given a piece of paper to read, which is then taken back. You are not told what the source of the threat is. You are not given any real resources to protect yourself. You are told that you must change your routines and take precautions, but what those precautions and changes to routines would look like is not clear.

These people feel abandoned. They feel a little bit helpless and they feel stigmatized. If this information goes out into the community, they don't want other people to know, necessarily, because then they won't feel safe being around in those same spaces.

It's a very unsatisfactory process. I'm not sure how much it actually helps.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you for that.

Mr. Moninder Singh, you mentioned your family and the impact on your family. The steps as outlined just now by Mr. Balpreet Singh.... I can't imagine people just being at home, getting a knock at the door and then kind of being left to their own devices, especially when they have children and a spouse at home. Can you just go into a bit more detail about the impact that has?

I appreciate what you're saying about getting to the root cause. I agree, but imminently, are there any things that could be done, particularly given that this is a very heightened moment? Do you have any comments?

Mr. Moninder Singh: The reality becomes that your whole life changes. Coming into rooms like this, you start thinking whether there is safety here. If it's an imminent threat of assassination—as law enforcement and its highest level of national security, through the INSET division, is telling us—am I putting people in this room at risk by coming here? Can I go to my kids' schools? Can I go to their practices, their recitals and their games?

It may feel like these are minor things until they happen to you. Your whole life flips upside down with things like that and you don't want to be around people. The reality of the situation becomes that you want to protect people around you, especially those people you care about, and even those you don't know—probably even more, because they have nothing to do with this.

We're thrust into this situation. I think that in the immediate sense.... What we saw with Mr. Nijjar was that he changed his routines. He did everything he could. He did everything that you could possibly do to try to protect yourself in that situation.

The only thing he didn't do, which none of us will do, is go silent. I think if we don't go silent, they're going to keep coming. I don't believe there's anything—aside from a personal security detail that would be provided to individuals at a very extreme cost to our country—that would really keep people safe, from my two years of experience now.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

Do you feel there's anything more that should be done to hold people who are responsible for this accountable?

Mr. Moninder Singh: Again, I would go back to the inquiry, to understand who's actually accountable. We've heard everyone from Mr. Modi to Amit Shah, through to David Morrison earlier this week naming the highest levels of Indian authorities who are involved, so I think we definitely need to do that.

One of the things I mentioned at the end was that diplomatic sanctions against the Indian intelligence officials and the diplomats who have already been expelled from this country would help for sure.

I think that, ultimately, we have to figure out what's going on here. What's going on in our backyard, and how deeply has India penetrated here? I think that's the only way to keep all Canadians safe. This actually went way beyond just a focused group of individuals. It spread out to violence in public. It spread out to business owners. It spread out to members of the Sikh community and also the broader South Asian community. It could go wider than that if it's not checked. There's no reason why extortion wouldn't then just go to all Canadians, if we let gangs from India come into this country and operate at the behest of the Indian government.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

We go now to Mr. Chahal for six minutes, please.

Mr. George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank both witnesses for joining us today and for their opening statements and the important testimony they've provided.

I'm going to go to the root cause. Why we're here is interference by a foreign government. In this case, the Indian government is targeting members of the Sikh community in Canada. That is why we are here today and why we need to discuss this important matter. You've shown courage, both of you, in talking openly to this committee to address this very important issue. I'm shocked and surprised that members who are elected to our Parliament, who are from our community, from the Sikh community, or their heritage is from India, are not here, particularly from the Conservative Party, to discuss this important issue. I actually find it quite shocking as a member of the community.

You talked about the deep penetration of India and targeting Canadian citizens, members of the community here who are engaged in political activity or just exercising their charter rights to freedom of speech.

I'll start with Moninder Singh first, and then I'll go to Mr. Balpreet Singh.

You both mentioned that nomination and leadership races are of concern. Do you believe that the Indian government has targeted nomination and leadership races in Canada in recent history?

Mr. Moninder Singh: Absolutely. From what we've seen at the foreign interference commission, all of this has come up.

We're not going to focus on an individual party, but we would say it's all through our general election system, our nominations, our party leaderships, influencing people in bureaucracy, all the way through. I firmly believe it's everywhere. I don't think it's limited in any of its scope. I think India, as the foreign interference commission has stated, will find people who lean towards them, who are actively supporting them on many of their initiatives, or people they can control or manipulate in some way. They will push them forward and support them in their candidacy or nomination.

I'm a firm believer that it's everywhere. I don't think we can limit it to any one individual or one party. I think this is an issue for all of Canada and its systems right now.

Mr. George Chahal: Mr. Balpreet Singh, I have the same question for you.

Mr. Balpreet Singh: We have heard about these situations where individuals.... I'm aware of one person who ran in a nomination who was approached. He was told to soften his tone around India and was offered funding and support. I'm aware of a number of these sorts of situations, but it's all whispers behind the scenes. I personally feel that it's shocking that this is the case.

I'll go as far as to say this. When you have a problem, you're told to visit your MP, talk to your MP about the problem. If you don't know who your MP is working for anymore, how do you feel comfortable talking to them? That's really the situation in our community.

Mr. George Chahal: Thank you for that.

I know the conversation has been happening throughout Parliament and across the country that leaders of Canadian political parties should get their security clearances to know what's happening within their parties and have the appropriate intelligence to take ac-

tion. Do you believe that all Canadian elected officials, leaders of our political parties, should get their security clearances?

I'll start with you, Moninder Singh.

Mr. Moninder Singh: I would probably go so far as to say that anyone who could possibly get that clearance should try. At least we'd know what's going on.

I wouldn't get into the semantics of who or why or where, but we're watching closely and we're quite concerned about the fact that we can be having very serious situations that are occurring in Canada. We have a lot of information that can be released. We see the Prime Minister and others who are actually speaking to the issue, so there is no muzzling going on if you are privy to the information that's being provided to you.

We would actually expect everyone, especially party leadership, to have that clearance, because then you can have a real conversation. When you don't get the clearance.... One of the things being spoken about in the Sikh community—I'll be very blunt—is that people who don't want to know can actually walk away from a situation, saying, "Well, I never knew." That type of excuse is not going to fly.

I hope that's not what's going on. I don't pretend to know the inner workings of parties, but our expectation, I think, as Canadians, is that every party leader would have that clearance.

• (1620)

Mr. George Chahal: I'm assuming you're talking about Mr. Pierre Poilievre, the leader of the Conservative Party, who has refused to get a security clearance to have the full information. He's the only leader who has refused that.

Mr. Balpreet Singh, I have the same question for you.

Mr. Balpreet Singh: I would concur. I think all party leaders should have that clearance and should receive that information.

My initial inclination was that this information should be made public. We need to know which MPs are working for foreign governments, but I appreciate that there are intelligence considerations and that's probably not going to happen. However, at the very least, our party leaders should know, so they can take actions within their own parties.

Mr. George Chahal: Thank you.

I'll go back to you, Mr. Moninder Singh.

You talked about the four things we need to do. You talked about support for anti-Sikh hate. You talked about MPs. As Mr. Balpreet Singh just mentioned, you may go to your MP's office and you're not sure who's actually serving you when you go there.

Does it cause you concern that you cannot trust leaders of the parties to support your community because they don't have the information or clearance? Is it concerning that members have made—

The Chair: Your time's up.

Mr. George Chahal: Okay.

The Chair: We can get very quick answers from each of you, if you wish.

Mr. Moninder Singh: I don't think it breaches trust; it just breaches expectations. It's disappointing that we can't have those conversations in relative safety.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for their testimony. I think it's very important to hear what they have to say.

Earlier, Mr. Singh, you talked about the duty to warn.

The RCMP Commissioner also addressed this issue when he appeared before the committee last Tuesday. He told us that these situations were becoming increasingly frequent, particularly over the past year. There have been situations where people have been intimidated, where there have been homicides, harassment, and the RCMP has had to exercise its duty to warn.

When he explained what this meant, I was quite surprised to hear that it was just the duty to warn.

It was not a duty to protect.

That's also what you mentioned in a Global News article in June 2023. You said that members of the RCMP came to inform you that death threats had been made against you. When you asked what kind of protection was available to you, you were told in a way that there wasn't any and that you were on your own.

That's what you said in the article, and that's what you've repeated today.

Does it surprise you that a police service goes part of the way, that this information can be obtained and shared with you, but that you're then sort of left to your own devices? You mentioned that you had to change your daily routine somewhat to protect yourself.

Do you think police services should do more in circumstances like this?

[*English*]

Mr. Moninder Singh: I definitely think that if any person in this country was facing this type of imminent threat of assassination... Being shown a simple piece of paper that is taken back from you and then being left to your own devices feels like a shift of liability. When we were sitting in that space, it felt like the duty to warn was like, "We've told you, and now if something happens to you, we can wash our hands of it." It's a horrible feeling for anyone living in this country. I hope no one in this room ever has to experience it. I have had multiple experiences with it over the last two years.

I definitely think there needs to be more. There was a similar question earlier on. I won't go too far into it, but I do believe there are things that we can do for the long game to ensure that Canadians don't have to go through this. We can protect our borders. We can protect this country, and we can protect the Sikh community in

this country. The one thing we shouldn't be looking at is silencing communities and saying that if they just went quiet on this issue, they would be left alone.

It's not just an issue of the Sikh community anymore. This is an issue of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of this country. That has to be more apparent. This is not a fight just between Sikhs and India anymore. It is now a fight, as we can see with the expulsion of diplomats, between Canada and India.

In the long term, I think we have to get to the root of the problem, but in the short term, as I mentioned before, there's not a lot that even we think can happen, but what's happening right now is very limited, for sure.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

You say that you can change a lot of things in your daily life to try to protect yourself, but one thing you won't do is remain silent. I think it takes an enormous amount of courage to do that.

Do you feel safe coming and testifying here today, and talking to us openly about what you're experiencing?

[*English*]

Mr. Moninder Singh: I think the idea of safety is gone now. It doesn't really exist when these threats persist, so you do the best to protect yourself and those around you the best way you can. I don't walk down the street with anyone. I don't do a lot of things, but coming here to testify was a no-brainer. Living in this country, being born and raised here, watching the things that happened around me, looking at indigenous rights.... People being allowed to have a voice in this country and to have disagreements is the underlying fabric of what Canada is supposed to be.

Coming here and testifying, I think, for me.... Whether it was safe or not, I would have come into this building to testify. I don't know about leaving this building with an imminent threat of assassination and what that means, but that's the reality of it. When I said that we wouldn't be silenced, that's what comes with it. You take on the danger that the law enforcement agencies have told you about, but we're not going to let India come into our backyards and silence us here. We may have disagreements on the issues that we're advocating for, but we have a right to advocate for them.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

How did you and your community react on October 14, when government agencies, namely the RCMP and the intelligence agency, held a press conference to reveal certain details of the ongoing investigation into foreign interference by India? We were told that it was highly unusual to do this and that the details of investigations are usually protected to protect their integrity. The RCMP has said that it wants to make sure that as many people as possible are aware, so that they can also provide information.

Has that reassured your community? How did the fact that this inquiry became public overnight change things for you?

Do you think it would have been more of the same had the RCMP not held a press conference?

[English]

Mr. Moninder Singh: I think if the RCMP hadn't done the press conference, there would still be a lot of questions. Every time Canada has come out to challenge India and to make revelations about India, India has just gone into denial mode. It helps Canadians, and it helps the Sikh community in Canada know that they're being validated for their concerns.

The RCMP press conference, I think, was instrumental for our community to understand how deeply India is operating within Canada. It's everyone. Those of us who are supporters of Sikh sovereignty in Khalistan, those who are somewhere in the middle and those who are just business owners who are being extorted, I think all of them felt a sense of relief when those revelations were made and that Canada is trying to move in the right direction. Our law enforcement agencies and our intelligence agencies are taking this threat seriously.

The further expectation is that what we're doing here right now is a big part of that as well. People are watching in our community. They see that we have a study happening on India and on these issues. I think those are all very important for the public to realize that their elected officials, the law enforcement agencies and intelligence agencies are working in their interests.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

We will go to Mr. MacGregor now for six minutes, please.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank both of you for coming to this important study. This committee came together unanimously through the call for an emergency meeting, and we unanimously supported this study. The revelations that were made on October 14, like you said, are things that the Sikh community in Canada has known about for the past number of decades. Finally, the rest of Canada is waking up to the reality of the threat. I hope there's some validation there now. I think the trick is to see that we can continue our efforts to meet this threat with the seriousness that it deserves.

Earlier this week, we had both the RCMP commissioner and the director of CSIS here. I want to touch on the issue of security clearances for federal party leaders, because when I asked the new direc-

tor of CSIS, Mr. Daniel Rogers, about his perspective on federal party leaders getting security clearances, he said that it would basically allow federal leaders to be more aware and that they could take appropriate actions within their own parties.

Maybe I'll start with you, Mr. Moninder Singh. I don't think this is really about gagging federal party leaders. I think this is about equipping them with the ability to take action so that Canadians can have confidence in the next election that no one running under a party banner might be compromised.

When the CSIS director talked about actions that a properly briefed federal party leader can take, do you have some suggestions on what that could be? I think we're just trying to get this on the record because we ultimately want to make sure that our electoral processes are secure no matter what party you belong to.

• (1630)

Mr. Moninder Singh: I think we definitely have thoughts when we're seeing all these things unfold, one of them being that India watches and manipulates this type of information all the time. When our elected leadership in the country is not on the same page on an issue of national security, I think it sends a very wrong message internationally.

India is able to utilize this. They have utilized it, if we can be very frank and clear. A party leader not getting security clearance has been just blown out of proportion within Indian media—basically, that this party, the Conservative Party, and Mr. Poilievre are standing up for the truth, which is Indian truth, and everyone else is a Khalistani extremist supporter. That's a horrible way of painting this entire country and all of its government and elected officials and its people, including the Sikh community, but that's what India is doing with it.

My reservation in the whole situation is that if we don't understand, as average people living in this country, why a security clearance is not being taken, I think there's a huge gap along the way as to what's happening, because we are watching others who are speaking very openly about this issue and they have that security clearance. That's where I think the confusing part comes in for average people like us. We're not understanding what's happening and why that wouldn't happen. The automatic linkage is, then, is somebody trying to protect the interests of India in this country? Whether that's the case or not, that's the perception.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Yes.

Mr. Moninder Singh: I think perception is 90% of the problem here. We need to understand this better, as average people, and I don't think we have enough information yet.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I think most people watching this would agree that it's time to put the interests of Canada ahead of political parties' partisan interests and have a united front on this.

I'll just add that this was the current CSIS director. His comments were echoed by previous CSIS directors, previous CSIS executives and previous national security advisers. I mean, these are all veterans with many years of experience in our national intelligence and security agencies, who are in lockstep saying that all federal party leaders should get that clearance.

Mr. Balpreet Singh, maybe I'll turn the floor over to you. Would you like to add anything from your perspective on the same question?

Mr. Balpreet Singh: I think from day one our community has said that this issue shouldn't be politicized. We should all be united against foreign interference. Right now, we're dealing with a hostile foreign country—India—that is killing Canadian citizens, running criminal gangs, extorting, doing arson and all of it. I mean, it's unprecedented, as far as I'm concerned. No other country has even come close.

India is using this issue as a wedge, trying to find friends, as it were, among Canadian politicians who might be seen as soft on the India issue, and maybe things can go back to the way they were just a few years ago, or even just a couple of years ago.

I think all of our political leaders should have the security clearance. Not having that clearance at this point, I would go so far as to say, is willful blindness.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

I have a final question for you, Mr. Moninder Singh. The NSI-COP report that came out, the redacted version, referred to Canada as being a “low-risk, high reward” environment for our foreign adversaries to operate in. Very quickly, how do you think we flip those terms so that it becomes a high-risk, low-reward environment for our foreign adversaries?

Mr. Moninder Singh: I think for a country like India...which, basically, for me, is an enemy state right now for what they're doing in Canada. I don't know what else could be more defined as an enemy state than somebody who's coming here and killing Canadians on Canadian soil. For me, it would be actually about understanding them. If it's low risk to them, that means they know they can come here. They can kill people. They can extort people. They can meddle in our governmental affairs and our elections. They can manipulate everything from our media to other spaces as well. They've been doing it without any type of retribution or fear of any type of retribution.

My thinking is that I'd go back to the inquiry to understand how they've been operating and to understand them much more deeply. I think there's no other way to do it. To find out why successive governments have allowed them to get to this point, I think, is key in this. This didn't happen just overnight. This is a decades-long process that has brought us to this point right now.

If people are being killed in this country because India wants them dead for their activism, when they're not violating any Canadian law and are just exercising their charter rights, then I think, as Balpreet Singh said, we cannot politicize that issue. It has to be a firm issue of solidarity among all Canadians and amongst all Canadian political parties to stand up to India. I think it starts by understanding them, their motives and where our gaps and failures have been. That's only done through an inquiry.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We'll start our second round of questions with Mr. Shipley.

Mr. Shipley, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today. After listening to your opening remarks, I thank you for your bravery and what you're still doing.

My first question is for both of you gentlemen. We know that Canada is seeing a drastic rise in extortion attempts, in particular targeting the South Asian community in Ontario, B.C., and Alberta. Can you explain to the committee the nature of these extortion attempts? Can you provide some examples of how these attempts play out and the tactics that are used to intimidate individuals in your communities?

Mr. Moninder Singh: To start, they're primarily targeting the Sikh and the Punjabi communities versus the South Asian community at large. I would like to point that out.

The second part of that is how it actually plays out. What we saw in multiple reports that have come out is that India is using this nexus of gangs, individuals who might even have been in prison in India, who are given a free-for-all to go out and extort people out here. That extortion happens when people enter this country and start criminal activity, or they come here with the intention of conducting criminal activity, and those people then organize. They're coordinated through Indian proxies and middle persons who are within the communities in the areas that you set out, and they're being coordinated through both the Indian consulate offices in Canada and their gang nexus as well.

When they go to somebody, a business person, they say, “Give us \$300,000 or we're going to get you and we're going to kill you.” They burn down a townhouse complex, their building, a house they're building as business people; they shoot up their home when they have their family and their kids at home. People have been known to give extraordinary amounts of money, in the millions of dollars, to try to protect themselves. They're afraid of going to law enforcement because they've been told not to, and I think that speaks to the fact that they don't think they're safe.

That's a very brief way of putting it, to your question as to how the whole thing operates, but it's a very elaborate way for India: Their Indian consulates, their diplomats who have been expelled, the nexus of gangs and individuals they brought over here do their dirty work for them.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Balpreet Singh, do you have anything to add to that?

Mr. Balpreet Singh: Yes, I have a couple of things. The extortion comes in two different forms. One is at a smaller level. It's not about money but about behaviour, so it's getting documents signed by individuals saying that they believe in the unity and integrity of India, and then threatening them by saying they would make that or other statements that they've signed public—that's one way of forcing people—or saying that they won't get a visa or threatening their family. All of this is a smaller level of extortion.

However, the game plan for the multimillion-dollar type of extortion is to paint Canada as an unsafe country to further a narrative. In that situation, we see businesses being asked for amounts that they simply can't pay, and the real purpose is to strike terror. As I said, in June 2022 I pointed out that this gang war narrative might be used to target Sikhs, because that's what happens. The Indian media and state put out these narratives, and then they create the events on the ground to support those narratives. That's what we're seeing here. They say, "Canada is unsafe. It's overrun by Khalistani extremists and Punjabi gangs", and then they make that a reality.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for those answers.

Obviously, we're hearing about a situation where there has to be great fear in your community about these situations and these extortion attempts. Not all are just attempts: Some of them are successful, unfortunately.

A while ago, our Conservative colleague Tim Uppal brought forward a private member's bill to try to help address this issue and the dramatic rise in extortion offences. In this private member's bill, there were going to be parts to establish mandatory minimum penalties for the offence of extortion, to capture all instances of extortion "committed for the benefit of, at the direction of, or in association with, a criminal organization". It was also to restore the mandatory minimum penalty of four years for the offence of extortion with a non-restricted firearm, and also to establish arson—earlier you mentioned there was definitely some arson in these events—

● (1640)

The Chair: Mr. Shipley, can you wrap it up quickly?

Mr. Doug Shipley: I'm at only four minutes and 30 seconds.

The Chair: Okay. Our timing is a little off here.

Mr. Doug Shipley: I'm sorry about that. I was just about at the end. The last point was to establish arson as an aggravating factor for the charge of extortion. You had mentioned that arson is definitely part of this extortion.

Both the Liberals and the NDP voted against what was put forward by our Conservative colleague Tim Uppal.

Do you not think that having harsher penalties would make your community feel a little safer in these instances?

I know we're almost out of time, so maybe I'll just go to Mr. Balpreet Singh and ask for his comments on it.

Mr. Balpreet Singh: I'm not completely familiar with the motion.

In theory, I think it's absolutely true that there need to be penalties for this sort of behaviour. One of the things mentioned before

was why Canada is a soft target. The reason is that you can engage in espionage here. You can pass names on and video on, and surveil people. There are no penalties for it. Now, Germany has tried Indian agents. That has had, I believe, a chilling effect.

Here in Canada, there are absolutely no consequences for the type of behaviour India is engaging in.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shipley.

We'll now go to Mr. Gaheer for five minutes.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'm a bit disappointed by the line of questioning by my colleague Mr. Shipley. We know mandatory minimum penalties are not going to stop the Indian state from engaging in the activities they're doing. We also increased the maximum penalty for extortion. Obviously, that's not going to stop India, but it is something our government implemented.

I want to thank both witnesses for appearing in this committee.

Whenever the Prime Minister speaks about the issue of Indian interference in Canada—both last year and again this year—and whenever the RCMP speaks about it, we see this flood of misinformation and disinformation emanating from India's media sources and government. Can you speak about the dangers of that disinformation? I can look at that and see the disinformation for what it is. However, the worry I have is that, when it is quoted by international sources, it receives a primer of legitimacy.

I want both of you to talk about that.

Balpreet, maybe you can go first?

Mr. Balpreet Singh: This is a real problem. We see Indian narratives parroted by western media and Canadian media. That was the case during the 2018 Trudeau visit to India. This narrative of so-called Sikh extremism was used to completely taint the entire visit, but it was based on a false Indian narrative and planted stories.

Currently, we are seeing many similar things. India creates a narrative and puts out false news. That, frankly, puts Canadian lives at risk. We have seen how an individual here in Canada—I won't use his name, but he has absolutely nothing to do with any sort of extremism, or anything else—had his address, name and picture put into Indian media as a so-called Sikh extremist. He's afraid of living at home, but he can't sell his home because the house is now tainted property.

Disinformation is absolutely crazy. I think Canada needs to take steps to point it out, because, you know, Canadian consumers of this are also very numerous. Indian media is read by Canadians, as well, so something needs to be done about that.

Mr. Moninder Singh: To add to this, disinformation and misinformation also lead to the polarizing of communities within Canada, which is a very unfortunate situation we're finding ourselves in now. This is not a fight between Sikhs and Hindus in India. This is not a fight between Sikhs and another community, or another community and another community. This is now a struggle for those who believe in the sovereignty of this country and in protecting it from rogue actors like India. That is the actual fight we're facing right now. Misinformation and disinformation polarize communities. There are hate crimes being committed. We're seeing a rise of those against the Sikh community, as well. This is why I mentioned it in one of the four asks that we'll be taking forward around resources to strengthen communities and build those bridges again.

While there are opportunities for media outlets to run with misinformation and disinformation, the impact we're seeing on the ground is that there is polarization—clashes among larger diaspora communities in Surrey, Brampton and other spaces. We're seeing them polarized. We're seeing hate crimes on the rise against the Sikh community, because India's misinformation and disinformation are not just throughout their media but also on social media. Social media, as you all know, is a horrendous space for people to become ill-informed and misinformed very quickly.

I think the threat of it is very real. Countering it, I think, has been a huge problem for us in Canada.

• (1645)

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: You both raised a great point. Thank you for that.

Can you speak a bit about the level of infiltration the Sikh community feels or knows about that has been happening in Canada, or in other countries where there is a big Sikh diaspora?

I referenced a Washington Post article that made reference to a news outlet in Germany that ran a pro-Sikh separatist paper. The owner of the paper was charged by the German government because they were then leaking information about their sources to the Indian government itself. On the face of it, they were pro-separatist, but behind the scenes, they were leaking information to the Indian government. They were charged by the German government with a criminal penalty.

Can you speak about that level of infiltration you might hear in conversations, or that you've maybe seen?

Mr. Moninder Singh: The infiltration starts in our gurdwaras, in our places of worship, in our community organizations, and it influences and impacts Punjabi-based media and also politicians from Punjabi Sikh backgrounds who are actually entering any level of government as well. The way India does that is through its consulate offices, the coercion and visa denials. You have the same individuals who are acting as Indian proxies. If somebody's visa is denied, for example, they are told to come into the Indian consulate. They go to the Indian consulate through a middle person,

who is more than likely the individual who has provided enough intelligence to get that person's visa cancelled in the first place, and then, when they are reissued a visa, they are made to bend the knee.

Balpreet Singh spoke about signing certain types of letters, denouncing Sikh separatism or the Khalistan movement, or on the flip side, promoting Mr. Modi and basically his fascist regime in India. These are individuals who are usually within community leadership spaces and roles, so I think those are the individuals they target more than anyone. The infiltration runs deep through media, ethnic media, through gurdwaras and places of worship, Sikh organizations, all the way through to politicians in any level of government who are trying to make a difference. I think India moves to counter and influence—

The Chair: I'm sorry, sir. I'm going to have to cut you off there. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Singh, in September 2023, the Sikh Press Association published a press release on its social networks that came from your organization, calling for more transparency from the government and more seriousness from the opposition parties. It was called “Canada's Political Parties Must Demonstrate Leadership and Unity to Confront the Threat of Indian Foreign Interference”.

I have a great deal of respect for my parliamentary colleagues, but it isn't uncommon for the majority of them use their speaking time to take jabs at the other parties, criticizing what the government is or isn't doing, what the Conservative Party should or shouldn't be doing, and so on. Even the New Democratic Party has followed suit on several occasions.

Do you think that we've learned our lesson and taken things more seriously since this press release was published?

Instead, do you think that, even if this issue is studied and a serious, independent public inquiry into foreign interference has been launched by the RCMP, politicians could show more unity and less partisanship in dealing with this problem?

[*English*]

Mr. Moninder Singh: I believe we have made progress since then.

I will say very quickly, about the political jockeying and positioning that goes on between political parties, that we're not a part of that, nor is that a reason why we're in this room. We see it. We watch it, and we know what's going on. We're trying to stick to the topic, always, and I have no partisan views towards any political leader or political party, for that matter.

To your question, I believe we have made progress. Should we have made it a long time ago? Probably. I think there have been a lot of failures during the last decade or so that have led us to this point. I think that's the biggest thing that we have to look at: what got us here in the first place. I think there have been failures along the way and gaps along the way, and we have to be better. But I think in the last year or so, we have seen movement. We have seen some things from our law enforcement agencies. We have seen big steps with the expulsion of diplomats. I believe there have been positive steps for sure.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

We go now to Mr. MacGregor for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to ask a question of both of you. I'll start with you, Mr. Moninder Singh.

The Parliament of Canada came together in quite a rapid fashion in the summer to pass Bill C-70, which updated a lot of our laws, including bringing the CSIS Act up to speed to operate in a digital world. There were also some significant amendments to the security of information act to really provide a lot more legislative flexibility in targeting clandestine foreign interference operations. I know from CBC News, from some of their sources, they have reported that India's clandestine operations remain largely in place and that it may be some time before we dismantle those.

When you've seen what Canada's Parliament has done and the fact that there is now this attention on the Indian government, are you optimistic that we are on a path toward finally confronting this? Do you remain optimistic, given all of your personal experiences?

Mr. Moninder Singh: I think hope and optimism aren't an option: Action is the only way. I think that being hopeful and optimistic is just something that's ingrained within us: being in high spirits all the time no matter what we're facing as individuals, as Sikhs. I will carry that with me always, but that doesn't resolve the fact that action has to be taken.

When we see certain things happening and then we have reports saying that India's clandestine activities are relatively unchecked and they're still continuing forward, it begs the question, what are we going to do? The legislation is passed, but has to be action behind it. We are calling for that inquiry, because I don't believe that we fully understand their ability here, and their networks and what they've actually set up.

If they're able to continue after all of this, that means we have a gap somewhere—or several gaps—within law enforcement or security intelligence and their operatives are still here, or they have such a huge operation running here that it's going to take some time to dismantle. I believe we definitely need to check that—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'm sorry to interrupt.

Very quickly, Mr. Balpreet Singh, from your perspective from the World Sikh Organization, are there any important lessons that Canada can learn from Indian interference in other countries—the things they're doing well, the nature of the threat, etc.?

Mr. Balpreet Singh: I think we're in uncharted territory right now. India is, for the first time, exposed to quite an extent, but what India has done consistently over the past 40 years is to say, “Well, you know, India is such a large market. It's this pesky small community of Sikhs. If you can deal with them, then we'll open up our markets and we can buy your pulses and whatnot.”

We cannot be trading our human rights for economic growth and trade. We have to keep our doors open for trade, obviously, but it can't be at the expense of human rights, and I think that's what we've seen over the past 40 years. Sikh concerns have been ignored and we've pussyfooted with India because we didn't want to offend them, because that might affect our political and economic relations. That has to be re-evaluated.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We'll do our final two slots in this round at four minutes apiece.

Ms. Dancho, please go ahead for four minutes.

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

Thank you again to the witnesses for their testimony.

Mr. Moninder Singh, I wanted to ask you a bit more. You talked a lot about the duty to warn. When did you start receiving these? You said you received multiples. Can you share a time frame of when these started happening?

Mr. Moninder Singh: The first ones were in July 2022. It was approximately a few days after Mr. Ripudaman Singh Malik was killed in Surrey, B.C. I, Mr. Nijjar and three others in Surrey were immediately given a duty to warn, within days. One of the reasons those duties to warn may have popped up, which is much more apparent now, is that multiple Indian newspaper media outlets had published our names as individuals who may have been involved in the murder of Mr. Malik, which is absolutely just BS at the end of the day, but they wanted to show there was a row in the community.

After Mr. Nijjar's death, I received my second duty to warn. It was also broadcast in the media that it was supporters of Mr. Malik that may have killed Mr. Nijjar. This is the way they wanted to run this whole operation. They wanted to show this was an intercommunity battle. They wanted to remove Sikh leadership from this country. Then they had multiple other threats, and after the indictment in the U.S. opened up, it was very clear it wasn't just going to be limited to Mr. Nijjar, Mr. Pannun and others. It was going to be a whole bunch of other Sikh leadership—in Canada especially—that was going to be eliminated.

Those duties to warn came in multiple forms. I have had regular conversations with law enforcement, with INSET and with CSIS around concerns within the community and, potentially, concerns they may have with me and my moving around the way I do. You get the duty to warn, and for me it was at very interesting times. It was after the murder of two Sikhs in Canada that I received both of those warnings. They've been continuing until now.

• (1655)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you for that. I appreciate your experience and that you shared it.

You mentioned the U.S. indictment. The Americans were able to thwart the murder with that indictment. I'm wondering if you feel that there are things the Americans did to prevent the murder that we could be doing moving forward to ensure that no more Mr. Nijjar's are murdered. I take issue with the fact that we weren't able to stop those murders by a foreign government from happening. Our party obviously cares very deeply about this country, and foreign interference is a serious issue that is deeply assaulting to all of us. To see it from India, to such an extent that individuals are being murdered in Canada, is completely unacceptable.

It is frustrating as a Canadian to see that another country was able to stop murders and ours was not. Do you have any feedback on what we could be doing better so that we can stop future ones? I appreciate that the recent announcement addressed 13 individuals who were in peril. Our hope is that those individuals are no longer in peril, but we're not sure if that is the case. Any further information you can provide from your perspective would be welcome.

Mr. Moninder Singh: The way the United States is set up with its interests first, it takes care of its country and its citizens. Something we don't understand, as citizens of this country, is, where are our interests right now? As Balpreet Singh stated, is it human rights, the right to life and freedoms that we have in this country, or is it keeping India as a strong partner? That is something that only the foreign interference commission, this study, and other actions the government will take in the coming months will actually show us. Where does the government put Canadian lives versus a relationship with India?

Treating India with padded gloves versus framing Russia and China as hostile actors.... I don't believe we have seen the same level of violence inflicted upon Canada and Canadians that India has done. I mentioned before that action is going to speak. I think an inquiry.... I will keep coming back to that, because we don't understand the enemy. We don't understand what it has done here. We don't understand how deeply it has infiltrated. Without knowing that, in a very strong sense [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] activities. Like Mr. MacGregor mentioned, they will just continue. We'll keep putting on band-aid solutions, and we won't actually protect Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

We'll now go to Mr. Sarai, for four minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

By my understanding, both of you were born and raised in Canada. I've seen you both for decades work as activists for human rights of not only Sikh Canadians but also others. I know you've

both been very active on indigenous rights. I know Balpreet Singh has done a lot of work with Jewish groups, Muslim groups, and other impoverished groups. I know you, Moninder Singh, have done a lot for indigenous groups.

When we talk about human rights, Balpreet mentioned a very important point. Sometimes governments trade off the human rights of another country versus trade. In this case, we're talking about the human rights of Canadians, not the citizens of another country. It's really appalling that it has stepped into not only another country, which we've always known, but now right here in Canada. For that, I acknowledge your courage and commend you for standing up despite that.

Moninder Singh, can you speak about the weeks and months prior to Hardeep Singh Nijjar's death? There were lots of rumours, and even after, about organized crime calling for a hit on Mr. Nijjar. In fact, I got my information from people like you, and others before the Prime Minister unveiled it in September. There was a whisper, as Balpreet Singh said, that there was Indian involvement.

Can you shed some light on what you felt, beyond what would go into a trial situation?

Mr. Moninder Singh: It's just my nature that I have to correct things. I've given nothing and done nothing for indigenous communities. They've provided us with everything in this country. I just want to put that out there. As much as we could do, we could never do enough to reconcile for what's happened here.

On the actual question, in the months and weeks leading up to Mr. Nijjar's assassination, there was a lot of information that was just in the community. He was warned days before by law enforcement that his life was at risk. He was supposed to be meeting with intelligence a day after he was killed for more briefings, as well. He was continuously warned for a year. We got our warnings in July 2022. He was the only one among the five of us who was repeatedly receiving those warnings. He kept saying the same thing from every stage where he spoke. He said he had the right to speak, and that he would not go silent. If people didn't like what he was saying, that was a different thing.

That happened right up until the day of his assassination. On June 18, 2023, at approximately 12 p.m., just a few hours before he was gunned down, he actually stated from the stage that he may not survive, that people should move on with the struggle. He said, "Don't go quietly. You have a duty to your people to speak out." That's what we remember about him. One of the reasons I'm in this room is because of him. Many of us are here because that is the catalyst that brought us all into this space, and with the revelations that came out of that.

I think the community felt a bit helpless. When we look back at that moment, and we look at him, did we do enough to protect him? Did we do enough as a community? We have to get out of that. For a year, he kept getting warnings, but no one did anything. That's where we come back to the failures. We have one side of it. India will continue to attack, but are we in Canada prepared to thwart those attacks? At the moment, I would have to say no.

• (1700)

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Look, we're in the last round of questions, and I'm pretty appalled. I don't want to make this political, but three parties have asked questions about India's direct involvement in foreign interference, which is the nature of this study. However, one party has asked nothing about India's involvement and their role.

Does that alarm you? If you were white or a different colour, would you not expect to have the same level of respect...or if it was Russia or Iran? Do you feel offended? I personally feel offended.

Mr. Moninder Singh: I never feel offended. I just figure out how to move forward. I have to respect everyone in this room, as they are elected officials. Somebody elected them to be in this room. Our expectation, as people living in this country, is that it wouldn't be the case that racism and discrimination are at play here. I would definitely hope not. My mind isn't going there. My mind is focused on who in this room will help us in the future. That's what we're going to be working towards. The commentary here is momentary, although I will say that I ended my five minutes by asking you to please ask me questions about India, because I watched what happened over the last two days, and I don't think enough questions were asked about India by certain individuals in this room, specifically.

The Chair: Thank you, gentlemen. That ends this round.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. We appreciate your testimony and the risks you run on a daily basis. Thank you for your efforts.

With that, we will suspend and bring in the next panel.

• (1700)

(Pause)

• (1707)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

I would like to welcome, as an individual, Mr. Serge Granger, director of the school of applied politics, Université de Sherbrooke, by video conference. We also have Mr. Wesley Wark, senior fellow, Centre for International Governance Innovation.

I now invite Mr. Granger to make an opening statement for up to five minutes.

Please go ahead, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Granger (Director School of Applied Politics, Université de Sherbrooke, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the committee for inviting me to this discussion on foreign interference.

I will break down the elements of the Indo-Canadian relations into three points. I will first discuss India's admission to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, its relative appreciation of Canada, diasporic specificity in Canada, and recommendations to limit foreign interference from India.

Originally created as the Shanghai Five, this Sino-centric organization was founded by China, Russia and the central Asian republics in 2001. Focusing on limited, unconventional security, the organization fights three "evils": extremism, terrorism and separatism. This association of words is not accidental. This multilateral organization allows China to ensure the co-operation of neighbouring and distant countries in the repatriation of people, be it Uyghurs, Tibetans or Han, posing challenges to national unity. India joined the organization in 2017, as did Pakistan, which is also struggling with separatist or secessionist movements. In the case of India, it has an endorsement to act with impunity when its unity is at stake.

The juxtaposition of the three evils links terrorism, separatism and extremism with a normative framework according to which any separatist impulse is extremist and terrorist. This substitution of rule of law to rule by law attempts to legitimize actions outside the normative framework of sovereignty. From guided missiles to selective assassinations, foreign interference is not new, but is intensifying. However, this association of terrorism with separatism is not found in the Canadian legal system, so the charges that can be laid in India cannot be applied to the Canadian case.

In terms of Canada-India relations, Professor Ryan M. Touhey points out that the first decades of Indo-Canadian relations were characterized by misunderstanding. Is this still the case? Despite the ambition of a Canadian Indo-Pacific policy, geopolitical issues, as Indian politicians point out, are hurting bilateral relations. These recurrent geopolitical problems, be it the nuclear bomb in 1974, Air India in 1985 or nuclear tests in 1998, do not erase the more structural issues, in particular the presence in Canada of movements that jeopardize Indian unity.

Since the imposition of a continuous voyage in 1908 preventing Indians from migrating to Canada, and thus to the British Empire, the Sikhs have initiated revolutionary movements to weaken the Empire, many of which are in the Vancouver area. The *Komagata Maru* incident in 1914, in which a boat of migrants from India was turned back by the Canadian authorities, increased Sikh activism. Since that time, the Sikh community in Canada has been the epicentre of Khalistan claims.

In terms of diasporic specificity in Canada, it will come as no surprise that Canada is home to the largest Sikh community outside India and makes up about half of the Indian diaspora in Canada. This specific reality in Canada breeds Sikh activism like nowhere else in the world. This party explains why India uses a strong discourse against Canada, as opposed to the co-operative discourse with other partners, such as the United States or the United Kingdom. Moreover, the use of violence, sometimes even murder, is a tool of electoral repression in India. What is surprising is its export within the Indian diaspora in Canada.

Given Canada's specificity, we can expect moral support from Canada's partners without hoping for legal proceedings or sanctions against India. Among the 13 Indo-Pacific strategies identified, India is mentioned as a strategic partner several times, but for Canada it remains an uncertain ally.

To alleviate the problems associated with these political tensions and violence within the Indian diaspora, without pretending to say that this will eliminate foreign interference in Canada, my first recommendation is to move forward Bill C-367, which amends the Criminal Code to prohibit hate speech at religious ceremonies, such as processions or festivals.

My second recommendation is that every prime minister of Canada since Jean Chrétien has visited Punjab on an official visit to India, which India perceives as a celebration of Sikh separatism.

● (1710)

This perception emerged under the Harper administration and was amplified under the Trudeau administration. It would be desirable for the upcoming visit of a Canadian prime minister to India to avoid a trip to Punjab as a goodwill gesture aimed at resolving geopolitical tensions between India and Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Granger.

[*English*]

We go now to Mr. Wark to make an opening statement.

You have up to five minutes, please.

Dr. Wesley Wark (Senior Fellow, Centre for International Governance Innovation, As an Individual): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and happy Halloween to everyone.

I would like to use my time to provide some insights into the role of India's foreign intelligence service in the conduct of covert operations abroad. I know that a question was asked about this in the committee's last meeting, and Mr. Rogers, the new CSIS director, said that he couldn't provide any details.

The name of that service is the research and analysis wing, or RAW. It operates from within the Prime Minister's office. It is subject to direction from the Prime Minister's national security adviser and is not publicly or judicially accountable for its actions. RAW sometimes enjoys heroic treatment within Indian popular culture as a defender of Indian security.

RAW has a long history, tracing its roots back to a British-run organization during the period of the Raj. After Indian independence,

it was reformulated but struggled to attain any real professional capacity. It was significantly reformed and founded as RAW in 1968. For decades, the focus of its foreign operations was in intelligence-gathering targeting regional geopolitical adversaries, China and Pakistan in particular. From the late 1980s, RAW began to turn its attention to a different sort of perceived enemy—advocates of the Khalistan separatist movement. RAW slowly began to push its covert operations targeting Khalistani activists outward from India's near abroad, where it devoted special attention to operations in Pakistan. Some of the methods it deployed in Pakistan have now been exported to the west, to the United States and Canada, to elements of the Sikh diaspora living farther afield.

RAW posts officers under diplomatic cover to Indian embassies and consulates abroad. The power that RAW possesses as an independent arm of the Prime Minister's conduct of global diplomacy gives its sway over India's diplomatic corps and means that it can deploy India's foreign ministry officials as dutiful instruments in intelligence collection and as support for the conduct of covert operations. RAW, in my view, has joined the ranks of the Russian SVR and FSB and the Chinese MSS as posing a critical national security threat to Canada.

In September 2023, as members of this committee will know, the Prime Minister made an announcement in the House of Commons regarding “credible allegations” held by Canadian security agencies “of a potential link between agents of the Government of India and the killing of a Canadian citizen”. On the same day, Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly announced that Canada had expelled a top Indian diplomat. In a press briefing, the minister confirmed that the Indian diplomat who had been PNG'd was actually the head of India's RAW office in Canada. His name was Pavan Kumar Rai.

A little over a year later, immediately following the RCMP press conference that stimulated this committee's study, it was announced that six Indian diplomats, including the Indian high commissioner, were being expelled from Canada. The expulsion was part and parcel of an effort to urgently disrupt violent Indian foreign interference in Canada by breaking the chain between Indian diplomats collecting covert intelligence and the transmission of this information to proxy agents and criminal gangs operating within Canada to engage in intimidation, harassment and murder. This is a clear illustration of how Indian diplomats are being drawn into the RAW network of covert operations abroad.

What is to be done? The activities of RAW in Canada require a strong counter-intelligence response by CSIS and CSE in particular, in association with GAC and the RCMP. The task before these agencies is to identify RAW officials, monitor their activities and disrupt them whenever possible. Known or suspected RAW officers can be refused visas and diplomatic accreditation and kept out of the country. Those discovered to be engaged in covert foreign interference can be expelled. Proxy networks can be disrupted, investigated and charged. This is not an easy task. Our agencies will need the resources and expertise to do this job. It requires a coordinated and sustained effort. Canada must also use every opportunity to leverage its membership in the Five Eyes intelligence alliance to benefit from shared intelligence on RAW operations globally.

Canada also needs to mobilize a broad diplomatic national security coalition of allies—starting, but not ending, with Washington—to put constant pressure on the highest levels of the Modi government to force a stop to intolerable Indian covert operations. Much of this pressure campaign will, of necessity, operate away from the public eye, but on occasion, publicity might help, as the RCMP clearly believes in terms of their recent press conference. There is much more to be done, including through law enforcement, outreach to the South Asian community and more national security strategic transparency to make Canadians as a whole aware of the threat.

• (1715)

We must conduct a harder-edged, pragmatic diplomacy toward India, not over-invest in India as a counterweight to China. It is a role that recent events, such as the BRICS meeting, suggest it may not be interested in playing. However, the counter-intelligence effort is foundational, and it's one that, typically, our security and intelligence agencies have underinvested in in the past.

Thank you.

The Chair: We'll start our first round of questions with Ms. Dancho for six minutes, please.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you to the witnesses for being here and for their expert testimony.

Mr. Wark, I'll start with you. I appreciated your insight on RAW, particularly when you mentioned our leverage with Five Eyes intelligence. I was wondering if you could enlighten the committee.

When we heard from Nathalie Drouin and the deputy minister the other day, we understood then that there were a number of attempts made by Canada to meet with India to discuss this. We were brushed off, we were stood up and we had visas denied. There were all types of excuses for not being met with.

Can you tell the committee, from your experience or your thoughts, why India feels so comfortable brushing us off like that? It just seems quite insulting.

Dr. Wesley Wark: It's a good question, Ms. Dancho, and I thank you for it.

I think there are two things at play here. One is that India believes it can be more muscular in its approach to Canada and, as you say, brush us off and treat senior Canadian officials with ex-

traordinary degrees of contempt. It simply believes it has the power to do that.

I've described India before as being stuck in what I call a plausible deniability box. It's finding it difficult to get out of that box by taking responsibility or being accountable for some of the covert operations it has been linked to.

It is in an embarrassing position with regard to the United States, in that it has been forced by the U.S. to agree to an investigation into covert operations conducted against American citizens. It would like to be able to treat Canada differently, so it would bend to the United States, but not bend to Canada, as a way of saving face while the Indian government figures out a real escape route from its past practices.

• (1720)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Wark, they wouldn't feel as confident treating the United States that way. Would they feel as confident treating the U.K. that way, for example, or another of our Five Eyes allies? It seems like it's Canada, but perhaps it's not just Canada.

Dr. Wesley Wark: What we've seen, Ms. Dancho, is that these kinds of covert operations, which I suggest were first conducted at scale in Pakistan by RAW, have been exported to the west, including to the U.K., Germany, the United States, obviously—we know one case in particular there—and Canada. India will approach each of these countries and the ties with them selectively on a case-by-case basis. There are particular frictions, of course, given the past history between India and Britain, but there is recognition, I think, on the part of India that both Britain and Germany are, in many respects, significant powers in ways that Canada is not, in their eyes.

They have seen, certainly in the past, Canada as a power that they can push around on the global stage and a power that it makes sense for them in domestic politics.... Their official line is that successive Canadian governments never take seriously their concerns about violent extremism abroad targeting their country. They have made Canada a bit of a target, and it will be, in my view, very interesting to see how they respond next to a forceful push-back, as I would call it, by the Canadian authorities.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

As I mentioned, you also talked in your opening remarks about the Five Eyes alliance that we have to share intelligence with. My understanding of the way it works is that we get out of the Five Eyes what we put in, so if we're contributing intelligence, we'll get a relatively similar degree back. My understanding as well is that the Five Eyes can provide us a lot of intelligence to tip us off on what may be going on here, so it's critical that we have a strong presence there and are contributing.

Do you feel that Canada is contributing to the level it should be? Are we getting the most that we can out of this, or should we be doing more?

Dr. Wesley Wark: I think a lot of our Five Eyes partners would like to see Canada do more, frankly. This has been expressed from time to time, particularly in terms of certain kinds of capacities to collect intelligence globally. There have been criticisms directed at Canada that we do not have, for example, a foreign intelligence service, unlike all of our Five Eyes partners. That's an area where Canada continues to face pressure.

I think where Canada is highly regarded as a partner within the Five Eyes is with regard to its signals intelligence capabilities in foreign intelligence collection and cybersecurity. Canada is also regarded as a useful partner in the kinds of strategic intelligence assessments it can share with our Five Eyes partners, and that Canadian view is often regarded as a useful touchpoint for other countries to consider how they're looking at global threats.

On your opening remark about the Five Eyes being an equal trading relationship, the reality is that it's never been that. The United States is by far and away the largest and greatest intelligence power in the Five Eyes. Other countries try to make their contribution, but we get a lot more out of the Five Eyes than we can put in, and no one has ever suggested that we should have an equal trading relation on intelligence there.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

Certainly we've had a number of extraordinary witnesses from government. It seems like they are working very hard to do more than we even know to keep this country safe. Of course, we're very proud of our intelligence agents and operators. I do take issue when we get criticisms from security officials around the world calling Canada a free rider, whether it's on defence or intelligence-gathering.

With my few seconds remaining, I'd like to get more advice from you on what Canada can be doing to elevate our position, to prevent us from being, in essence, bullied by foreign countries.

Dr. Wesley Wark: Again, I think it would be a tougher diplomatic response to various forms of Indian aggression and a more robust capability. Especially, I would come back to the question of how well positioned we really are to conduct significant penetrating counter-intelligence operations against Indian officials in Canada.

We have the laws to allow us to do that, but CSIS as an organization these days is overstretched, and the RCMP certainly is. India would never have been regarded as a principal counter-intelligence mission for the Canadian community until recently, so there's going to have to be a surge of capabilities and talent into that area. It may take time to achieve it. I suspect the recognition is there, but there's probably going to be a gap between understanding there's a new kind of counter-intelligence mission that has to be performed and the ability to perform it fully.

• (1725)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

We go now to Ms. Damoff for six minutes.

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

Thank you to both of our witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Wark, I said to you that you need a frequent flyer card for the number of times you've come to this committee over the years.

My first question is for both of you, and it's a fairly simple one. Do you think all of the leaders in the House should get a top secret security clearance to get briefings on this issue and any others that impact the national security of the country?

Dr. Wesley Wark: I'm happy to go first.

I should just say that I'll preview a submission that I'm writing on behalf of the Centre for International Governance Innovation to the foreign interference inquiry. One of the recommendations we're going to offer to Justice Hogue is precisely this, that it would be beneficial for all leaders of opposition parties to have a top secret clearance and to be briefed by officials from the security intelligence community.

It's beneficial for two reasons. One reason is to expand their understanding of national security threats—not just foreign interference, but a wide range of them—and allow them to perform the mission they will all have of holding the government to account. Second, and we've heard much about this in this committee and in other forums, would be to enhance their ability to understand the potentially direct impacts of foreign interference within their own caucuses.

So, the answer is yes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Mr. Granger.

Mr. Serge Granger: My answer would be yes also, for two reasons. First of all, it's always important to know exactly the issues about national security you're dealing with, especially with India.

Second, whenever the next trip of the Canadian Prime Minister to India will be, I think he should be aware of who's surrounding him, making sure this trip goes smoothly. If you compare other trips in the past, I would say there were some mishaps. Also, as we're going through India when we travel there, there's the message that the Prime Minister is a representative not only of political parties, but of Canada. This is also why the obsession of always visiting Punjab maybe should be questioned. This is a way of.... I would not say it's confronting India in its own homeland, but for sure it does not make them very comfortable when they have this type of visit. It basically celebrates some.... It fragilizes in a certain way the perception of their own unity.

I would say, yes, everybody should be aware of what they're doing. Also, all the leaders of the political parties should know exactly who's dealing with our relations with India within their party, and also, of course, within the different ministries.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

I'm going to give the rest of my time to Mr. Gaheer.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Great. Thank you.

My questions are for Dr. Wark.

Dr. Wark: India proclaims itself as the world's largest democracy. Is it normal for a democracy to have a foreign intelligence service that operates within its executive, within its PMO, that is practically answerable only to the Prime Minister in a direct line in the chain of command and that does not face parliamentary oversight, public oversight or any judicial oversight? Is it normal for a democracy to have that kind of a service?

Dr. Wesley Wark: It's an excellent question, sir. The answer, as I suspect you know, is that it's absolutely anomalous among democracies. I think democracies have learned a lesson over the last many decades that it is important for their intelligence services to be accountable publicly to their Parliaments, not just accountable to their executives. Mechanisms have been set up in this country and others, of course, to achieve that, whether it's review bodies or parliamentary committees and so on.

To have an intelligence service that reports secretly and operates secretly as the arm of a prime minister is, frankly, an authoritarian model.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Thank you.

You mentioned that India is now potentially seen for what it is, a flawed democracy, and that it's not the perfect counterbalance to China, which is what the west was hoping it would be. I'd like to hear your views on that.

• (1730)

Dr. Wesley Wark: I don't regard myself as an expert on Canadian-Indian diplomatic relations. I think it was very clear in the Indo-Pacific strategy that Global Affairs produced that there was a lot of hope invested in being able to develop closer ties between Canada and India, both on the economic front and on the security front, and hope that India would serve as a counterweight to China. I think economic hopes remain, and understandably so, so that we can continue to be a strong economic trading partner with India.

I think hopes around India being willing to perform, if you like, in the western camp in terms of geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific region are diminishing rapidly, and I think the idea that a country like Canada can engage in national security co-operation on various fronts with a country like India has been exploded entirely.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Thank you.

Do I have more time?

The Chair: You have 50 seconds.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Okay, I have another question.

You mentioned that, as this investigation comes out, obviously the U.S. has an indictment system where more information, more evidence, has been presented already, and we see a fuller picture of the activities that India engages in internationally, especially against the Sikh diaspora. Domestically, though, within India, I'm seeing certain reports that they favour a strongman-type prime minister to rule, so this domestically plays well for Modi.

Do you have any comments on that?

Dr. Wesley Wark: Yes, it does, clearly, and I think we saw some of this in terms of the recent election of Mr. Modi, although that election, as you know, didn't go quite the way that he expected in terms of achieving an overwhelming majority. However, he enjoys considerable domestic support, clearly, within India in terms of the way in which he has positioned India as a more forceful global partner and has distanced himself, in a way, from the west. That's my reading of it.

These policies seem to be popular, and it must also be said that, in the Indian context, my view of this is that, increasingly, the Indian media is being captured by the government, and the number of independent Indian media sources is ever diminishing, which creates complexity in the political environment in terms of any effort to hold and promulgate alternative views.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us.

Mr. Wark, you're certainly becoming a regular at this committee.

Mr. Granger, thank you for accepting the committee's invitation to testify. In an article in *La Presse* in September 2023, when asked by journalist Vincent Larin about why India would have a grudge against Canada, you replied that "India therefore blames Canada 'for being a bit soft' in the face of this resurgence of the Sikh separatist movement in the country." You also said that "India criticizes Canada for not protecting its diplomats from intimidation by Sikh separatists" and that this has been "a recurring accusation since the 1980s". You pointed out that "recent events somewhat justify these fears, including referenda in Canada on Khalistan independence, in which past acts of violence were allegedly celebrated".

I'm wondering about Canada's attitude. In my view, Canada's responsibility is to protect its citizens first and foremost, and they should come before foreign diplomats, for instance.

Do you think Canada should have taken a tougher stance on India or on what India thinks of Canada?

What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Serge Granger: India believes that Canada isn't doing enough. In this whole debate, we must also remember that Canada has the distinction of being the country with the largest Sikh community outside India, a community that India cannot control.

India's frustration with Canadian politicians travelling to India should also be noted. This obsession could be explained by what could be called electoral solicitation aimed at getting closer to the Sikh community in order to obtain votes at home. That's a problem.

A second problem that must also be taken into account is that there are concerns outside India. Of course, I fully understand the concerns of the Sikh community, but it could also be said that tensions and political violence are growing within the Indian community. It's not going away. This is also what the Indian government is worried about. It's seeing its national unity at risk in Canada.

That's why I'm proposing that you take certain measures. A harsher response can always be taken with India, and our Canadian laws on extortion can always be strengthened, but will that really stop the Indian government's actions in Canada? I doubt it.

To calm interdiasporic tensions, I believe that criminalizing hate speech in religious processions and religious festivals would be a way to lower these diasporic tensions, which are often generated by an outside government.

Among other things, there was the proposal to ban Shiv Sena in Canada. The Shiv Sena is an ultranationalist Hindu group. It could very well also, in turn, create religious festivals or religious ceremonies and allow hate speech towards the Sikh community to erupt.

Before passing laws, which are of course necessary to toughen the diplomatic response and increase penalties for extortion, we also need to calm things down here in Canada, because as long as this tension remains very high, India will want to intervene.

You could say that we are practically inviting India to interfere in our country, given that there is polarization within the Indian diaspora.

• (1735)

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you very much for addressing the bill introduced by the Bloc Québécois to end the religious exemption for hate speech. It is intended, in fact, to reduce tensions. There have been some rather disturbing events in Canada, particularly when Adil Charkaoui made some very hateful comments under the guise of religion. It was allowed to let slide. I don't think that allowing such rhetoric slide helps to soften the current climate, whether it's India or other foreign states that are interfering.

On a radio program on October 15, you said that it was a bit surprising to see India resorting to targeted assassinations today. In your opinion, this type of action abroad is not in its nature, traditionally.

What do you think explains this situation?

Is the Modi government impatient? Is there a resurgence of aggression towards Canada?

Mr. Serge Granger: We have to be careful not to personalize the problem. I remind you that it was during Indira Gandhi's term that the massacre in Amritsar took place, during Operation Blue Star.

Linking a reality to a political party in India could distort the reality. The fundamental debate for Indians is about national unity and the challenges of national unity. Why is Canada being targeted? Actually, it's very surprising that India is doing such things now. What happened in Pakistan in the past wasn't surprising. We could also talk about other neighbouring regions where India has taken such action. However, it's surprising that this is being done outside South Asia, particularly in Canada.

Why, then, is Canada a target? It's because it's the epicentre of the Khalistani movement. So it should come as no surprise that India is attacking Canada. Elsewhere, whether in the United States, the United Kingdom or Australia, the Khalistani movement is much less strong than in Canada. India is attacking the epicentre of this

so-called separatist movement that is threatening Indian national unity.

That said, I was surprised to see India committing murders in Canada, but that is a rhetoric of political violence that has existed for a very long time in India. The current government, led by the Bharatiya Janata party, as well as the Shiv Sena and other groups, use political violence—

• (1740)

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Granger. We'll have to stop here.

Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

Mr. MacGregor, you have six minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both witnesses for being here today.

Professor Wark, I'll start with you.

I read the iPolitics article of October 18. You were interviewed extensively about your feelings on political party leaders at the federal level getting the necessary security clearance so that they could be properly briefed. You've made it very clear what your position is on that. I will note that in other articles in The Hill Times, that position is supported by former CSIS executives. It is supported by a former CSIS director, Ward Elcock. In private conversations that I've had with current CSIS executives, that is their position as well.

At Tuesday's meeting, we had the new CSIS director, Mr. Daniel Rogers. I'll quote from his testimony: "From our perspective, the more knowledgeable party leaders are about the threat of foreign interference and some of the specifics that we've seen through our intelligence, the more they can be aware and the more they may be able to take appropriate actions within their own parties." I think the conversation about whether or not party leaders can speak freely is a red herring, because the part I really zeroed in on from the current CSIS director is "appropriate actions" that a party leader can take. I think that's very important for Canadians to understand.

Professor Wark, could you inform the committee what actions you believe a federal party leader who has gotten the clearance and received the necessary briefings can take, in partnership with an organization like CSIS, that can lend themselves to protecting our democratic processes and giving Canadians a little bit more confidence that in the next election we're taking our choice of candidates very seriously?

Dr. Wesley Wark: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

I would begin by saying a couple of things. I have had, in the past, over a number of years, a top secret code word clearance. I appreciate the obligations that go with that. I also appreciate the benefit of it in terms of access to kinds of information and assessments that you would not otherwise have. I can underline, just on the basis of my own experience of holding a top secret clearance, how valuable it can be. I would underline the value of it in two ways.

One is that it is, in my view, important for any leader of a party in the House of Commons to have a top secret clearance in order to better appreciate the range of national security threats that Canada faces. That range is very broad these days, and it goes far beyond foreign interference. I do want to make that point. There's a broader purpose to having access and briefings from national security officials to understand the threat environment. This may be an unfamiliar arena for political party leaders before they come into their positions of leadership, and there may be a steep learning curve. A top secret clearance is the way to climb that learning curve.

The second thing—and I think you've heard from people better able to speak to this than I am—is that the general understanding is that if you have a top secret clearance, you have the ability to have a clearer picture of the potential impacts of things like foreign interference or even related activities, like espionage targeting some members of your caucus. You're able to manage those problems more effectively than if you didn't have that awareness, whether it's appointments to committees, appointments to shadow cabinet positions, nomination contests and accrediting them and so on.

There is a range of activities that you can undertake, but I would just step back and say that, from my perspective, the most important reason for having a top secret clearance is that ability to have a wider understanding of the national security threat environment.

• (1745)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that.

I want to turn to your opening comments on India's research and analysis wing.

The RCMP and CSIS have a spotlight on India's activities right now in a way I don't think was there before. From October 14 onwards, there's been a new conversation in Canada that we're having about India's activities here. From India's perspective, do you think they're now regarding this as a failed operation? They can't see this increased attention on their activities as a success.

What do you think they are going to do from this point forward, now that there's all of this attention? Are they susceptible to international embarrassment? Do you feel that Canada's allies have sufficiently backed us up in our claims?

Dr. Wesley Wark: Mr. MacGregor, thank you for that question. I think it's a very important one.

I would say—and this may be tinged with a degree of optimism—that the Indian government and RAW are learning some lessons from their attempted operations in countries like the United States and Canada. Unfortunately, they were successful in one case in Canada, with the murder of Mr. Nijjar.

What they're learning is that it's one thing to conduct covert operations in Pakistan, where the Pakistani government has a relatively weak security and intelligence capacity, but that it's quite a different thing to conduct these kinds of operations farther afield, in countries like the United States, western European countries, the U.K. and Germany, which have very strong security and intelligence systems, particularly the United States, and that also goes for Canada.

I think the Indians are now having second thoughts about the cost-benefit analysis of conducting these kinds of operations and

whether they can really pull them off. They weren't able to pull off the U.S. operation, and that looks like a huge embarrassment for any intelligence organization. I think they're going to have to rethink these kinds of operations, targeting countries that are not in their near abroad.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We'll start our second round. We're running out of time, so we're going to shorten the time slots in this round to four minutes for the first two parties and two minutes for the others.

Mr. Caputo, please go ahead for four minutes.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Professor Granger and Dr. Wark. I appreciate having you both here and benefiting from your expertise.

Dr. Wark, I was really interested in your opening comments. I have so many questions to ask, and maybe I'll get to ask them another time or after this.

I gather your expertise is wide-ranging when it comes to foreign interference, and we're obviously talking about interference from India here. I'm wondering, when we talk about what one country does.... You've alluded to this, perhaps obliquely, maybe more directly at other times, about how countries like India, when they engage in foreign interference, look at the treatment of other countries. In other words, they look at how Canada responds to foreign interference from other countries.

It's quite clear that Beijing has interfered in prior elections. What message, in your view, is sent based on how Canada has dealt with foreign interference from Beijing, in relation to how India is now attempting to carry out violence, murders or extortion? I hope I'm being clear in my question.

Dr. Wesley Wark: Thank you, sir. It's a good question, and I would approach it in this way.

When a foreign country, an authoritarian state like China, Russia and increasingly India, engages in foreign interference, they do so by attempting to understand their target on two different levels. On a political level, how well can they operate politically in that country in terms of engaging with target audiences within that country? What is the state of their diaspora in that country? To what extent can they encourage them to form and to hold opinions that are favourable to their official policy? There's that political level.

There's a different level in terms of foreign states like those countries trying to understand what kind of resistance they are going to meet from security and intelligence agencies in those foreign countries that they're targeting. They may be able to come to a picture of that political environment that they're operating in.

I would suggest to you, sir, that one of the challenges for many authoritarian states, no matter what the size of their intelligence arms might be, is really understanding the operating environment abroad. What are they going to hit when they try to conduct operations in Canada, in the U.S., in the U.K., in Europe and so on? They will often engage in those operations with a degree of ignorance about their opposition and about what they're going to face, and with a degree of overconfidence about what they can achieve.

It's because we're in the secret world now and knowing how to understand the success of foreign interference operations.... I think one of the blind spots of many authoritarian states is that they come at foreign interference with a picture of the politics of a foreign target that may not be very accurate. They often come at intelligence and security operations related to foreign interference without a full understanding of what they're going to meet in terms of security push-back.

I appreciate that this has been a contested issue, including throughout the public inquiry into foreign interference. On the view that Canada should be seen as some kind of playground for foreign interference, my own view, personally, is that it's an exaggerated position. Again, I would separate it into what foreign states think about Canada as a playground politically and what they think about Canada as a playground in terms of security and intelligence capabilities. I think there are two different calculations there. We're perhaps an easier target politically, but we're a harder target in terms of operations on the ground.

• (1750)

Mr. Frank Caputo: When I see—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Caputo.

We'll go now to Ms. O'Connell for four minutes, please.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to both of our witnesses for being here.

I have to say how dismayed I am once again on our second day of testimony here. We just had really powerful testimony from two members of the community in the last hour, speaking about personal threats to themselves. Mr. Moninder Singh spoke about some of the last words spoken by Mr. Nijjar, and the Conservatives asked, in their first round, whether Canada is getting brushed off by India in meetings.

Do you think the Sikh community experiencing threats against their lives care that Canada and the Modi government brushed off some of those meetings? Perhaps if we cowed to that pressure...like Stephen Harper, who condemned Canadians' right to free speech and promoted Sikh separatism. He got those meetings. Andrew Scheer got those meetings. Do you think that Canadians care about the brushing off of meetings over the safety of community members' lives? Let's seriously think about this. Mr. Caputo, in his round of questions on a study about foreign interference by India, asked about China. I wonder how the Sikh community feels after that powerful testimony, not even an hour ago, about threats to life in our country and Mr. Caputo asking about China. Ms. Dancho asked about brushing off of meetings. Perhaps we should be asking about how the Indian government has used agents to threaten the lives of Canadian citizens. Perhaps that should be a priority in the limited time that we have in these meetings.

To our two witnesses, do you think that it provides Canadians with a sense of safety and security whether or not the Modi government likes us enough to have those meetings, or is it better for Canada to initiate Canadian policy and take a Canadian stance that protects our citizens?

Dr. Wesley Wark: I'm happy to go first.

In response to that question, I would say two things.

I can't speak, of course, on behalf of the Sikh community. I would hope that the Sikh community would take considerable comfort from some of the revelations about the details of Canadian diplomatic and national security efforts in terms of trying to convince the Indian government to cease its covert operations in Canada. We have learned a great deal about that. You, all the members of this committee, have learned an extraordinary amount about that, in terms of the testimony you got a couple of days ago. We learned more about it in the foreign interference inquiry and from the RCMP press conference on Thanksgiving Day. I think there are some demonstrations there that are important, not just to the Sikh community, but to Canadians as a whole, to see their government taking strong action diplomatically and taking action on the national security front.

The question about Canadian officials being brushed off should be taken seriously, in the sense that Canadian officials, at the end of the day, created a policy around responding to being brushed off that was designed to bring a stop to these Indian covert activities.

• (1755)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for two minutes.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Granger, it has been said that Canada is a target because of its large Sikh community. In 2022 alone, it welcomed 118,000 migrants from India. The ties between the two countries are quite strong.

Right now, lives are at stake. We heard from witnesses in the previous panel that they know they're very much at risk. They're not just feeling it.

What could be the medium and long-term repercussions on relations between India and Canada of what is happening in the Sikh community at the moment?

Mr. Serge Granger: In the medium and long term, it will depend in large part on how this problem is resolved within the Indian diaspora.

I have a great deal of sympathy for Sikhs, who are under pressure and under threat. However, it's also important to understand that another half of the Indian diaspora feels threatened to some extent. I remind you of the Air India incident in 1985, which was the largest terrorist attack in Canadian history. I would also note that two weeks ago an Air India flight landed in Iqaluit because of a threat.

Both sides feel unsafe. What can be done, then, to address the challenges of Indian interference? We need to consider a more holistic approach that doesn't favour one group at the expense of the other. It's dangerous to want to solve one problem, as sometimes that creates another problem.

So I come back to my proposal, which is, in the medium term, to calm things down within the Indian community, where there is a lot of tension and political violence at the moment. It's all well and good to say that we're going to pass legislation, but that doesn't solve the fundamental problem that angers India and prompts it to intervene in Canada. That is what we could do first.

Over the longer term, we need to better understand our legal system in line with what distinguishes us from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which, to a certain extent, allows separatism to be criminalized. In Canadian law, that is clearly not the case. The idea is to make India and the entire planet understand that it is not a crime against humanity to want to create a state called Khalistan, or to create any other independent state in other parts of the world.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

We'll now go to Mr. MacGregor to wrap up.

You have two minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Professor Wark, in our first hour, we had two Sikh men here from their respective organizations. I'll paraphrase them. Essentially, what they were trying to really hammer home was that the revelations made by the RCMP on October 14 were finally confirming and validating what the Sikh community has known for decades about India's reach in Canada.

In my riding of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford on Vancouver Island, there is a large South Asian population. My riding is home to Paldi, which has one of the oldest Sikh temples in British Columbia.

I keep going back to the NSICOP report. There was one sentence in there stating that our foreign adversaries find that Canada has been a “low-risk, high reward” arena in which to operate. Can you expand on how we can flip those terms? How do we make Canada a high-risk, low-reward environment? You talked about CSIS and

its resources being stretched. In this final minute, would you like to add some thoughts on things that this committee could recommend to the Government of Canada?

• (1800)

Dr. Wesley Wark: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor. I'll try to be brief—briefer than I have been in response to some other questions.

First of all, I would point out to the committee that the concept of foreign interference in Canada being low-risk, high-reward is a CSIS formula. It's a formula that serves CSIS's interests and desires to constantly bring the government's and senior decision-makers' attention to CSIS's needs and operations. To be honest, I think it's an exaggerated way of understanding things. I don't see a lot of evidence for it.

The things we can do are those that I've tried to outline. Again, very briefly, we have to pay much more attention to stopping the covert activities of Indian diplomats in Canada. That's a key mission, and it requires a lot of good intelligence. We have the capabilities. We just need to pay more attention to that issue.

The other thing—and this will come out in Justice Hogue's final report—is that we're going to have to devote many more resources to, and be much more strategic in, outreach to diaspora communities that may be targeted by foreign interference from whatever direction. We have some tools to do that, but I think everyone would regard those tools as inadequate at the moment. Having the capacity to engage with diaspora communities as a two-way flow of information about concerns and best practices, and how the Canadian government and the security intelligence community can support vulnerable diaspora communities, is going to be vital going forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Thank you to our witnesses for their testimony today. It's very helpful and very much appreciated.

With that, we are adjourned.

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