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• (1555)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 22 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 23, 2025, the committee is resuming its study of Canada's Arctic strategy.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

I'd like to now welcome the witnesses for our meeting today. From the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, we have René Ouellette, director general, and Paul Lynd, assistant director.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions from colleagues.

I now invite Mr. Lynd to make an opening statement.

Welcome.

Paul Lynd (Assistant Director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Paul Lynd, and I am the assistant deputy minister responsible for intelligence collection at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or CSIS for short. I am responsible for the management and oversight of all regional collection activities and operational capabilities, both foreign and domestic. I am joined today by René Ouellette, director general of engagement.

CSIS investigates threats to the security of Canada in order to protect Canada's prosperity and national security and the safety of Canadians. Our work in the Arctic is guided by and informed through co-operation with federal, indigenous and territorial partners. The economic and strategic importance of the region has been steadily increasing, along with the diversity and tempo of threats to Canada's national security. Protecting Canada's Arctic sovereignty and security is more critical than ever to Canada's prosperity and national interests, as well as to North American, continental and maritime security.

Contemporary threats to the Arctic stem not only from growing militarization and the effects of climate change but also, increasingly, from espionage and foreign interference activities, including

through cyber means. CSIS seeks to help enhance Canada's resilience against various threats in the region. Our mandate with respect to the Arctic includes but is not limited to investigating activities in the Arctic and the north that are suspected to be threats to the security of Canada, taking steps to mitigate or reduce these threats where possible, advising the government and partners in the region on these threats, and engaging with indigenous governments and organizations, the private sector and the public, among others.

Contacts and relationships built over time with Arctic communities and different orders of government have resulted in valuable threat-related information being shared proactively with CSIS. The unique insights and experiences that Arctic and northern partners bring to CSIS help us better understand the threat landscape as it relates to the region and its people.

As commercial and international interests in the Arctic grow, the number and diversity of threats to Canada's security and sovereignty in the region have also increased. CSIS has intensified its focus and efforts to investigate these threats. Canada's Arctic sovereignty is long-standing and well established. This includes the waters of Canada's Arctic Archipelago and the various waterways often referred to as the Northwest Passage, which are internal waters of Canada by virtue of historic title. Governments, indigenous people and local communities across Canada exercise Canada's enduring sovereignty over its Arctic lands, ice and waters every day.

CSIS is building on strong, trusted relationships with key partners within and outside the government, and with like-minded Arctic states, sharing information and coordinating efforts with respect to the Arctic. This includes providing relevant information to help inform decision-making, and to build and maintain resiliency against threats to the region. We have been sharing information on the threat landscape with territorial and indigenous governments and partner organizations across the Canadian Arctic and the north. We will continue to work closely with first nations, Inuit and Métis organizations and governments to support decision-making in relation to resource development on indigenous peoples' land. For example, we have provided multiple briefings on critical minerals, economic security and the activities of hostile foreign state actors to empower partners with relevant national security insights so these can be considered as part of decision-making processes.

Our engagement with indigenous partners is aligned with the commitment CSIS made in the action plan for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act: to share information with indigenous partners, and to support informed decision-making and self-determination.

As CSIS pursues its mandate in a complex, dynamic and challenging environment, it remains committed to doing so in a way that aligns with the government's Arctic and northern policy framework and Arctic foreign policy. As part of these efforts, CSIS maintains an evergreen internal Arctic and northern framework that aims to ensure a strategic and coordinated approach to CSIS's engagement in the Arctic and the north, underscoring our commitment to collaboration with government and indigenous partners, especially those who make their home in the region.

While CSIS was not involved in the 2019 FAAE study on the Arctic, we are glad to contribute to the new study and very much appreciate the invitation today.

Thank you.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lynd, for your remarks.

I will now open the floor to questions, beginning with my colleague and member of Parliament Ziad Aboultaif.

You have six minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Lynd and Mr. Ouellette, for attending the committee today.

The Department of National Defence's October 2024 report, entitled "Evaluation of Arctic Operations", found that there was no military threat to Canada's territorial sovereignty. However, we know that state actors, primarily Russia and China, are trying to gain a foothold in the Arctic.

China is known to use research vessels for scientific activities and espionage. How does CSIS monitor, evaluate and respond to these activities?

Paul Lynd: When it comes to threats to the security of Canada, particularly in relation to the Arctic, CSIS is focused on espionage, sabotage and foreign-influenced activities that are clandestine or

deceptive. When it comes to the research vessels, the threat you mentioned is multi-faceted, so we use a number of methods and approaches to collect that information.

Our primary focus of engagement in the Arctic recently has been to try to build resiliency and co-operate with indigenous partners, territorial governments and local communities to forge those connections so they can be aware of all the threat-related information that we're aware of and, more importantly, so they have more visibility on these threats and activities and are in a position to inform us when they see something.

Ziad Aboultaif: How have Russia's operations, specifically in the circumpolar Arctic, developed over the past few years, especially since the invasion of Ukraine?

Paul Lynd: From a CSIS perspective, the activities of Russia are still a concern. Russia has a tremendous interest and focus in the Arctic. However, they are of less concern than, say, the activities of China and other hostile state actors at this time.

That's not to say they're not of concern. As you mentioned, since the invasion of Ukraine, there have been a number of international sanctions against Russia, which have limited their ability to be as effective in their intelligence collection activities as they were in the past.

• (1605)

Ziad Aboultaif: Is that because of a previous understanding of our position as Canada in the Arctic and our interests versus Russia's, since, as we know, the Chinese do not own any part of the Arctic? Could the differences in the situation with Russia compared to China be due to a previous understanding or agreement of some kind, let's say, between Canada and Russia on the Arctic?

Paul Lynd: I'm not sure if I understand the question completely, but what I would say in response is that the concern with Russia is more of a military-focused threat in terms of intelligence collection to support military efforts as opposed to other hostile state actors, where the concern would be more about economic security.

Ziad Aboultaif: The sovereignty of Canada's Arctic waters is of paramount importance. What attempts have been made by ships affiliated with China, Russia and other countries to enter Canadian waters illegally, and how have we responded?

Paul Lynd: That question might be better answered by other government departments, such as National Defence.

From a CSIS perspective, we are focused on espionage, sabotage and foreign interference activities as they relate to the Arctic. The tracking of ships would be one element of that, but it wouldn't be the primary focus or element from a CSIS perspective.

Ziad Aboultaif: I agree with part of your answer, but in the meantime, how do you measure your activities when it comes to changes in operations and circumstances, such as the development in the last few years where we have started to see and feel that the threat to the Arctic from Russia and China is larger than ever?

How does CSIS react to such a thing? Are you prepared enough to cover the areas and the information needed so we are well aware?

Paul Lynd: I would say that the vast size of the landscape is absolutely a challenge, which I believe is what you are alluding to as well.

CSIS is regularly travelling to the region. We are regularly collecting information on threats to the security of Canada. We are regularly conducting investigations in the Arctic and outside of the Arctic, because not all threats to the Arctic need to be investigated within the Arctic. I would say that the service is regularly engaged on these threats and is regularly collecting.

Part of your question was, how do we evaluate and measure our success? I would say that one of our primary focuses over the last couple of years has been this enhanced engagement. Our legislation changed about two years ago, which now allows us to share more information more widely with partners, and not just with federal government partners but with territorial governments, local communities and indigenous partners.

There are two objectives to that. One is to make sure these partners have all the relevant threat-related information that we're aware of so they can build resiliency and protect themselves against the threat, but it's also so that they can be our eyes and ears as well and can provide us with that information. One way of measuring our success is that we have had these partners proactively contact us with information of concern about the behaviour and activities of threat-related actors, so I would say there's a positive development right there.

Ziad Aboultaif: The United States is a partner in that fashion. What does the degree of collaboration with the United States look like now when compared to before President Trump took over a year ago?

The Chair: Please provide a very brief response, if possible, because we've just run out of time.

Paul Lynd: You're correct that the United States is still a partner. We have been partners for decades. Despite some of the unpredictable behaviour, I'd say, at the political level at this time, at the intelligence department level we still work in lockstep and hand in hand with each other, and it's in our interests to continue to do so, on both sides.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next is MP Steven Guilbeault.

You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Lynd and Mr. Ouellette. We're very pleased to have you here.

Mr. Lynd, in your presentation, you said that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service did not participate in the committee's study in 2019. You're part of it now.

You touched on this a bit, but I would like you to tell us a little more about the changes in the threats observed in the Arctic in recent years, and particularly in recent months.

● (1610)

[*English*]

Paul Lynd: Thank you. I believe the changes since the 2019 study are the focus of your question.

I would say that now our primary concern about the threat in the Arctic falls under economic security. It's about foreign interference in our economic sector. It's attempted manipulation, in a clandestine or deceptive nature, of our economic policies and attempts to disrupt, interfere with or control our economic decision-making. This is where we've seen an increase in at least our concern, and the threat-related activity would be from an economic security perspective.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Earlier, in a response to questions from Mr. Aboultaif, you referred to collaboration with other federal government departments, including the Department of National Defence. You didn't mention Natural Resources Canada, but I think you referred to it without naming it.

Can you elaborate on the type of collaboration our intelligence services have with various federal government departments on intelligence and security matters?

[*English*]

Paul Lynd: Absolutely. Thank you for the question.

We take an all-of-government approach to protecting the Arctic. We are engaging with a number of other government departments—all of the government departments that are operating in the region as well—in order to share the threat-related information I mentioned earlier. We're trying to build resiliency in the local communities, but to also share our awareness and understanding of the threat with as many of our federal partners as possible and look for ways to both support and amplify each other's mandates.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: You also mentioned several times the collaboration with industry, indigenous communities and local governments. Without going into details that are confidential, can you give us an example of how this collaboration with these various entities works? I'm thinking in particular of stewards and conservationists, the rangers, who occupy the territory where it's more difficult for us to do so. Can you give us some examples of that collaboration?

[English]

Paul Lynd: Some examples would include sharing with those that operate critical infrastructure in the north and the Arctic. It's about ensuring that they have an awareness of the threats, the ways they can protect themselves and the ways they can be more resilient against those threats, and also ensuring that those pathways of communication are open and strong so they can report back their concerns and their insights as well.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: That means, for example, that they can communicate with you and that you will also communicate with them at certain times when you determine that there is a potential threat.

[English]

Paul Lynd: Effectively, yes. We have a pathway for communication. From our perspective, it's to make sure that they're aware of the threats being directed against them and to help provide advice or awareness so that they can better protect themselves and mitigate those threats.

[Translation]

René Ouellette (Director General, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): I'd like to add something about trends.

Traditionally, our partners in the north and in the Arctic were mainly our federal partners, because the threat was primarily directed at our main partners. Our advice was therefore given to those departments.

As my colleague mentioned, the threats now tend to affect other levels of government and other sectors, including the research sector and the private sector. This forces us to have a broader range of partners so that we can provide information to those who have the authority to make decisions to protect themselves against these threats.

• (1615)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I would like to ask one last question, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I imagine that one of the threats that is on the rise is cybersecurity-type threats, that is to say cyberthreats. Are there ways to work with our partners, particularly local governments and communities, to prepare them to face these threats?

[English]

Paul Lynd: One of the ways is building the resiliency that I mentioned and making sure they're aware of the threat. There are other government departments that also have that expertise—the CSE's cyber centre, for example—and are making sure that the local infrastructure and these partners are aware of whom to turn to and where they can get that threat-related information. They're making those connections between other federal government departments and those being targeted.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we'll go to Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

You have six minutes.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lynd and Mr. Ouellette, welcome to the committee. Thank you for being here.

We heard Donald Trump's speech on Greenland, which focused primarily on the Chinese military threat. When it comes to Greenland and the Arctic, some experts tell us that focusing solely on the Chinese military threat is a mistake. The director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Daniel Rogers, has stated that non-Arctic countries, such as the People's Republic of China, are looking to establish a foothold in the region for strategic and economic purposes.

Could you tell us about the real challenges posed by China's Arctic ambitions?

Isn't the challenge more in the grey areas, such as data collection and the potential use of the data that's collected?

[English]

Paul Lynd: I would say it's a multi-faceted threat. It's not just data collection and worrying about what they would do with the data. Some of the concerns we have, as I mentioned before, are around economic security and predatory foreign investment. They're things of a clandestine or deceptive nature.

You mentioned China. China is in strategic competition to control critical minerals and supply chains. By some accounts, it already controls between 60% and 90%, depending on what you use to measure critical minerals.

The concerns we have are clandestine or deceptive investment practices or economic engagement in certain market sectors in the Arctic. From a CSIS perspective, we investigate, collect information on that and advise the government on the risks and the threat, and we do so under the Investment Canada Act, which is a very powerful tool. It allows us to provide security advice and recommendations to the government so it can make informed decisions on those investments.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Experts also say that when countries want to work with China on critical infrastructure, it creates a certain vulnerability.

When China develops relationships in the areas of port, airport and energy infrastructure, it gives it levers that it can use when economic or political conflicts suddenly arise.

How do you view the recent diplomatic thaw and trade agreements between Canada and China, considering what I just said in my introduction and if we accept that as legitimate?

[English]

Paul Lynd: I would say that there's no such thing as anything that's zero risk. This is the issue. Basic risk management practice, as I'm sure many of you are aware, is that you review something, determine or measure what the risk is and put in as many mitigations as possible. What you have left is a residual risk. With the residual risk, you either accept it, transfer it somewhere else or further mitigate it.

The service's perspective is that we would investigate any threat to the national security of Canada, and we would provide that advice to government. That is but one of a number of inputs the government needs to weigh and measure in order to make informed decisions.

With the recent trade engagement with China, I would say that CSIS will continue to provide the government with economic security considerations and advice on national security, so it can weigh those different inputs and make informed decisions.

• (1620)

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Ouellette, you spoke earlier about the fact that you are communicating more and more with other levels of government because the situation requires it.

Have you felt that there have been attempts by hostile states to influence local political actors or even local economic actors?

René Ouellette: From time to time, we do indeed see efforts by certain foreign countries to conduct disinformation campaigns in an attempt to divide the population with regard to the federal government.

Everyone agrees that there is history between the Crown and indigenous peoples in the north. It's a complex history, and we're working closely with our indigenous partners in the north to try to mitigate the efforts of hostile foreign governments that are trying to undermine confidence in the work we've done recently.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If I understand correctly, there is a risk of misusing a story that was horrific, but is now being repaired.

I have another question, but you don't have to answer it: Have you seen any attempts by hostile governments to map critical infrastructure on our territory in the Arctic?

[English]

Paul Lynd: Without getting into specifics, I would say that it's something that we would be alive to and focused on and would investigate if it came to our attention.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going next to the second round of questions.

MP Majumdar, welcome to the committee.

You have five minutes.

Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a lot of questions. I was hoping we could, as best as possible, have approximate yes and no answers, but I understand that some nuance is required.

My first question is, do you think that China is the greatest principal threat to our Arctic sovereignty?

Paul Lynd: I would say it's a primary threat, yes.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: What about airspace and subsea? Do foreign actors pose significant threats in those domains as well?

Paul Lynd: I think foreign actors can pose significant threats to those as well. I'm not informed enough to be an expert on those areas, but it's definitely something that CSIS would investigate.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Has CSIS identified Chinese or Russian attempts to map, survey or access Canadian subsea regions?

Paul Lynd: I do not have that information available at this time. I'm not in a position to make an informed response.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Are there ongoing efforts that you may be aware of by China or Russia to collect intelligence on Canada's Arctic region?

Paul Lynd: Yes.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Is Canada's Arctic airspace fully secure against foreign incursions or surveillance?

Paul Lynd: Again, that would be a question that would be outside of the mandate of CSIS. I wouldn't be in a position to provide an informed response.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: To the best of your knowledge, have foreign aircraft conducted incursions or surveillance activities in Canada's Arctic region?

Paul Lynd: Again, I'm sorry, but I'm not in a position to be able to respond in an informed manner, because I don't know.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: How about drone satellites or unmanned systems currently being deployed by foreign actors in the Arctic? Has that ever comprised part of the threat analysis you conduct?

Paul Lynd: Yes, that would comprise part of the threat analysis. We would investigate that area.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Have you any notion of whether that's been happening in the Arctic?

Paul Lynd: I'm unfortunately not in a position to get into any specifics right now. I apologize, but I'm not able to provide an informed answer to that question.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Have China or Russia engaged in activities that undermine Canadian Arctic sovereignty?

Paul Lynd: Yes, China and Russia have engaged in those activities.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Are there Chinese or Russian Arctic activities occurring that are not immediately visible or publicly declared, to the best of your knowledge?

Paul Lynd: I believe that there are activities going on at all times and, yes, I would say that there are some that are not fully public at this time.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: You mentioned economic security as being a principal threat for how China compromises Canadian sovereignty, Canadian IP and Canadian advantages. Are foreign actors using commercial, scientific or research platforms to conceal strategic Arctic operations?

• (1625)

Paul Lynd: I think all of those vectors are a possibility to be considered, and CSIS would be interested in investigating the potential for all of those to be used in the manner you described.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Are there Arctic activities being conducted in ways designed to avoid clear attribution to China or to Russia?

Paul Lynd: The very heart of foreign interference is that it's clandestine, deceptive and meant to hide the true connection to the hostile state actor.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Do gaps exist then, in your best assessment, in Canada's monitoring capabilities that could allow covert foreign activity to go undetected?

Paul Lynd: It's hard to answer that question in the manner that it's been posed, because when you mention detecting covert activity, as I mentioned, CSIS is constantly investigating threats to the security of Canada in the Arctic and across the country. To the degree to which there are gaps, it's hard to characterize a response to that question, because we are aware of what we're able to detect. We're not always aware of what may be going on that we have not yet detected.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: To the best information you are able to glean from your own analysis, from government and colleagues across other agencies and partners, Five Eyes and otherwise, are any of these gaps in deterrence in Canada's Arctic strategy being directly and disproportionately exploited by Russia or by China?

Paul Lynd: I apologize. It's a difficult question to answer, because I'm not informed on any specific gaps I'd be able to use as an example that are being exploited. I would say that it's quite likely the possibility exists that there are different gaps in our approach that are being exploited by hostile state actors.

For example, we mentioned the Investment Canada Act, which is a fantastic tool. It allows us to provide security advice to government to make informed decisions. If your question is whether that act and that tool are capturing everything, the answer would be no. There would likely be opportunities. We know that hostile state actors are looking to exploit and work around areas that would prevent them from triggering a notification under the Investment Canada Act.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to the next questioner.

Anita Vandenberg, you have five minutes.

Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Welcome to the committee, Mr. Ouellette and Mr. Lynd.

I'd like to carry on with what you were talking about earlier in terms of information sharing. This is, I understand, two-directional information sharing. You're sharing with Inuit first nations communities, and they are also then providing information back.

To what extent are you also engaging researchers, scholars and academics, given that yesterday we announced a new Inuit university? How would they play into the information networks that you have?

René Ouellette: To a large extent, part of our approach in the Arctic and the north has been to speak not only to those who live there but also to expert scholars and researchers. Our focus is in a number of areas. We would speak to university and college administrators who design policy around research partnerships, for example, about the threats that might come with hostile states seeking to engage in partnerships for purposes other than those they are mentioning, and with researchers as well, who can provide us with insights into the history, culture and languages of the north and of the Arctic to help us better understand the region and be able to then feed back information that will be relevant to them.

Anita Vandenberg: Of course, once the Inuit university is there, that would be a....

René Ouellette: Yes, we look forward to that. We meet with a number of scholars as well. We participate in conferences, workshops and panel discussions where we are openly speaking with folks who would be involved in the set-up of these places.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

We know that DND has declared that climate change is a national security threat. We know that the Arctic has 70% of our coastline. To what extent are you looking at climate change and all of the related changes in the north as a security threat?

René Ouellette: We're aware of the impact that climate change could have on towns, obviously, and on populations and so on.

In terms of the threat itself, if it's not conducted by a foreign state in terms of an espionage activity or a foreign interference activity, it's not necessarily something that we would investigate per se, but obviously the implications of climate change are significant, and we're aware of them.

• (1630)

Anita Vandenberg: Of course, with ports potentially opening up and the kind of infrastructure.... This actually leads well into my next question.

You talked about the threats to critical infrastructure. In the course of this study, we have been hearing from those in the north who are looking to have more infrastructure—for instance, data centres and potentially ports—because of the cold temperatures, the land and the proximity to water. If we expand that, to what extent would it create more targets, more threats to the infrastructure in the north?

Paul Lynd: I would agree that it will.... Those data centres would contribute to the threat environment. Hostile state actors would target them, as they would any kind of critical infrastructure or any data.

We do know that hostile state actors have an interest in collecting personal data and harvesting it. Some of these actors have some very advanced and sophisticated big data programs, and they are collecting as much personal data as possible and then using AI to sort through that data and use it to target individuals of interest. It would absolutely contribute to the threat environment.

From a service perspective, we mentioned that the resiliency briefings would be important to us. We would want to engage with those centres. We'd want to provide all the information that we have available on the threat and help them become resilient to it.

Anita Vandenbeld: That's the same, no matter where. It wouldn't matter if they're in the north or in other parts of Canada; that threat is similar in all areas.

Paul Lynd: Yes.

Anita Vandenbeld: To what extent is the increased attention and interest toward Greenland changing your analysis and the way in which you're looking at the threat environment?

Paul Lynd: I would say that it's a bit of a complicated environment. Obviously, everyone wants stability in the world. I would say CSIS is focused on threats to the security of Canada, that are directed at Canada or against Canadian interests.

When it comes to Greenland, the Prime Minister has been very public that we stand strongly with Denmark and Greenland and their right to determine their own sovereignty. The service remains aware of it, but again, our efforts are focused on threats directed at Canada or against Canadian interests.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll next have Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lynd, you said earlier that China was the main threat, or at least one of the main threats, to Arctic security. That was your response to my colleague.

You also told us that one of the dangers is the collection of sensitive data that China uses as a weapon, if you will. However, Canada has just signed an agreement to import 49,000 highly advanced electric cars, and these cars will be connected to servers in China.

How can such an agreement be justified when the Canadian Security Intelligence Service itself tells us, as you just did, that not only is China one of the main threats, if not the main threat, in the Arctic, but that, on top of that, one of the weapons it uses, if I may use that term—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Chair, I think we are far from the Arctic.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Not at all.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I don't think there will be a lot of Chinese electric vehicles in the Arctic.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I think I'm staying on topic. I'm talking about the Arctic and the main threat, which is China.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: We're talking about cars that are sold thousands of kilometres south.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Excuse me, Mr.—

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I'm trying to find the connection, Mr. Chair. I'm not sure what—

[*English*]

The Chair: We will—

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: There is a connection.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll let the member have a little more latitude, but he should get to the point.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I hope I didn't lose any speaking time. I'll respond to Mr. Guilbeault's point of order to explain to him what I'm doing.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We're talking about major threats in the Arctic, and I've just been told it's China.

[*English*]

The Chair: Let's not have a debate between colleagues.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay. My apologies.

[*English*]

The Chair: Let's resume.

I want to assure the member that he hasn't lost any seconds.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'll pick up where I left off.

Mr. Lynd, you just told us that the main threat in the Arctic is China. We're bringing in vehicles that are connected to servers in China and we're told that one of the weapons China uses is sensitive data collection.

How can such an agreement be justified? Doesn't that make you a little nervous at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service to see these vehicles come into Canada?

• (1635)

[English]

Paul Lynd: As I mentioned before, one of CSIS's roles is providing advice to government on all the economic security considerations, so that government can make the best-informed decision possible. On mitigating risk, you get down to the level where you have residual risk and decide whether you can accept it or need to further mitigate. This is a decision more for government decision-makers.

What the service does is investigate, provide advice on the threat and the activity, and allow government to use that information to make the best decision possible about the way forward.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We touched on critical minerals. We know that there's an abundance of them in the Arctic. In your opinion, is this currently the main target not only for China, but also for any hostile state seeking to undermine the security of the Arctic territory, which is under Canadian sovereignty?

[English]

Paul Lynd: I would say that it's an important factor for us to consider and keep in mind in terms of Canada's Arctic security. We need investment. I'm sure this committee has heard a lot about the infrastructure up there and the desire for investment.

From a CSIS perspective, again, we conduct investigations, identify threats, advise government and allow decision-makers to use that information to make the best decision for the way forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will go next to MP Kramp-Neuman.

You have five minutes.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington—Tyendinaga, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

In earlier testimony, you mentioned that Russia is not as much of a military threat as other actors.

Aside from China, who are those other actors?

Paul Lynd: Unfortunately, I'm not able to get into specifics.

I don't want to leave the impression that Russia is not a threat. I will just say that the concern about Russia is from more of a military perspective than an economic one.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Okay.

I'll draw on my recent visit to Greenland, my many conversations with Arctic partners and my experience with the Joint Arctic Command centre: I'm curious as to whether CSIS is concerned about and aware of the message that working with authoritarian regimes like China, the U.A.E. and Qatar sends to our security partners, particularly our Five Eyes allies.

How could that perception affect intelligence sharing, trust and co-operation?

Paul Lynd: We work very closely with a number of international partners. We have robust information-sharing policies that respect all of our international obligations.

From an intelligence perspective, our focus still remains on threats to the security of Canada, and this is how we engage other partners. We have not run into any issues or concerns in terms of those engagements with foreign allies on any of our intelligence matters.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

Are Canada's Arctic early warning systems fully modernized?

Paul Lynd: I'm sorry. I don't believe I'm the best-placed person to answer that question.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Okay.

Do you believe Canada's current Arctic strategy achieves deterrence of Chinese and Russian ambitions?

Paul Lynd: From a CSIS perspective, again, I would say that all of our activities are completely aligned with the Arctic foreign policy and Arctic strategy.

As per the intentions and effects of the Arctic strategy, I don't believe CSIS is best placed to answer that question.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Okay.

Was CSIS consulted at all, specifically on the security risks of closer economic integration with authoritarian regimes, prior to any agreements made with China?

Paul Lynd: One of CSIS's roles is to provide security advice to government, so it would be natural to do so. I'm not informed on that specific question. I'm unable to give you a proper, informed response.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Okay. Thank you.

Is there a danger of authoritarian regimes like China using current public sentiment toward the trade dispute with the United States to whitewash their public image?

The Chair: I would encourage the member to focus her questions on the Arctic, because broader trade relations and the public image of a particular country is not what we're looking at today.

Let's get back to it.

• (1640)

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Okay. I was drawing into the economic security.

The Chair: I gave you some leeway. Sure. Go ahead.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Okay. Thank you.

Could you please speak to the actions that you think, or CSIS thinks, the Canadian government can take specifically to protect our economic sovereignty in the north?

Paul Lynd: CSIS's contribution to this, as I mentioned before, is that we investigate threats to the security of Canada: espionage, sabotage and foreign interference. We take the findings from those investigations and provide that information to government, but also to territorial governments, municipal governments and local partners.

What CSIS is doing to protect and contribute to the sovereignty is exactly that. It's the resiliency. It's sharing this information more widely than we've done in the past and building and fostering that trust and helping to build resiliency in the Arctic communities.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Are there any further protections, plans or processes currently in place to mitigate any threats that closer economic integration with China may present?

Paul Lynd: Well, CSIS will continue to investigate these threats where they surface. Part of our act allows us to undertake threat reduction activities and mitigate the threats where appropriate and where possible, and the service will continue to do so. We'll continue to share the information on these threats with local communities and territorial governments, which will help to contribute to mitigating the threat.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: In earlier testimony, you spoke about IP theft. There were questions about economic espionage and infiltration by agents of governments and commercial institutions. Can you speak further to that? How do Beijing and Moscow pose these threats to Canada outside of straight military threats? Can you expand on that?

Paul Lynd: Yes. It's multi-faceted. They pose these threats in a number of ways.

Foreign interference is a good example. It's an attempt that could be manipulating public opinion or manipulating people who aspire to higher office through coercion as well, through covert financing. From an economic security perspective, it's also investing using proxies or using disinformation or economic coercion. As long as there's a clandestine and deceptive nature to it, it would trigger under our mandate and allow us to investigate.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we go to MP Mona Fortier.

You have five minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lynd and Mr. Ouellette, thank you very much for being here today to clarify some of the questions we have as part of our study, which focuses more specifically on the Arctic.

I would like to know whether you're seeing an increase in cyber-espionage or digital espionage activities targeting organizations operating in the Arctic, including territorial governments, indigenous communities or private businesses.

[English]

Paul Lynd: I don't think we're best placed to provide the best answer. I think the CSE would be in a better position to respond to that question.

What I can say, though, is that we are absolutely concerned with cyber-attacks in the north and cyber-attacks both against the private sector and against government entities up there as well.

[Translation]

René Ouellette: If I may, I would add that orders of government other than the federal government are often less protected. So we know that there's a vulnerability that doesn't exist in the federal government. However, you put your finger on the kind of thing we will want to take up with non-traditional northern and Arctic partners, to provide them with information. It helps build a bit of trust and maybe make up for some of the history, especially with indigenous governments.

• (1645)

Hon. Mona Fortier: It's interesting, because we've had two territorial premiers come and tell us that they don't have all the resources they need. It's therefore important to mention that the federal government can play a role in ensuring that we have this oversight, these analyses that can also help them fulfill their mandate. The same is true for private companies or even for indigenous communities, I imagine.

René Ouellette: Absolutely.

Hon. Mona Fortier: The reason I'm asking this question is that I'm also trying to find out whether you have the tools and instruments you need to do your job properly in the current context—

[English]

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption. We'll pause the time. We have to fix the interpretation, so we'll suspend for a very brief period of time.

• (1645)

(Pause)

• (1645)

The Chair: Colleagues, we'll resume our meeting.

I turn to Madame Fortier. You have two minutes and 20 seconds to continue your line of questioning.

• (1650)

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lynd and Mr. Ouellette, I'll come back to my question, because I'm trying to find out whether you have all the tools and instruments you need to do your job in the current context, when there are a lot of changes happening.

You were talking about the investment act, which is an instrument that you have to work with, but are there things that we should be aware of, especially since the Arctic is a big place and there's so much to consider in your workplace? Is there anything the committee should know?

[English]

Paul Lynd: Yes, we have the tools available, but it is not without challenge. You mentioned the vastness of the area that we have to cover. We regularly send employees into the region, and we engage with partners and premiers' offices as often as possible to be able to provide those briefings, but there are a number of challenges, absolutely. There's the cost of travel. We don't have a permanent presence in the Arctic right now.

We are absolutely committed to supporting the communities in the Arctic. We're constantly looking at options for how we could enhance our presence in the Arctic. This is one of the major challenges. We go regularly and as often as possible. We've steadily increased our trips to the Arctic over the last number of years in order to have these engagements and be able to share that information that we mentioned.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: If I understand correctly, you can't award contracts to other companies to help you do your work. This complementarity must be very hard to obtain.

When I was president of the Treasury Board, there were things we could subcontract out. In this case, though, I guess you can't do that. You really have to keep the issues within your unit.

[English]

Paul Lynd: We work very closely with other government departments in the Arctic. We look at ways they can help us accomplish our mandate and how we can support them in their mandate as well, but it is a challenge, given the vastness of the area to cover.

We work very closely with other government departments as well, but you're correct in that we can't subcontract this out to anybody else. However, we leverage our partners for support.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: I need a clarification.

When you say governments, do you mean other countries, or are you really referring to the federal government, the Government of Canada?

[English]

The Chair: Give a very brief response, as we are over time.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: I just want to make sure I understand.

René Ouellette: We're talking about the Government of Canada, yes.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll start the third round of questions with MP Michael Chong.

You have five minutes.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing.

Mr. Lynd, in your opening remarks you mentioned the growing threat of foreign interference, particularly in the economic sector, by the PRC in the Arctic.

The Prime Minister said last year that the biggest threat to the security of Canada is China, and particularly its foreign interference.

Earlier in your testimony, you said something with respect to the PRC being a primary actor. I'd like some clarification. Is it the assessment of CSIS that the People's Republic of China is the primary threat to the security of Canada, including through its foreign interference in the Arctic?

Paul Lynd: The PRC is among the primary threats to the security of Canada. It's absolutely an actor that we are concerned about in terms of threat-related behaviour in the Arctic.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay.

Could you enumerate what the other primary threat actors are to the security of Canada? If the PRC is one of them, which other states are also primary threat actors?

Paul Lynd: We mentioned a number in our public report last year. When it comes to the Arctic, the two primary actors we tend to talk about the most are the PRC and Russia.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay.

In your opening remarks, you also said you were working with like-minded states and against hostile foreign state actors. You later clarified that the service is working in lockstep and hand in hand with your U.S. intelligence community counterparts.

Clearly, the U.S. president is talking in a way—political rhetoric, as you said—that threatens the sovereignty of Arctic states, including the Kingdom of Denmark and Canada.

What I conclude from your testimony and what we're all watching out there on an almost daily basis is that the political rhetoric is not percolating down into the U.S. intelligence community that you work with. Is that correct?

● (1655)

Paul Lynd: Yes, we still work closely with our intelligence partners in the areas where we're aligned.

Hon. Michael Chong: In other words, you're not siloing them in terms of collaborating on Five Eyes intelligence with respect to Arctic security. Is that correct?

Paul Lynd: That is correct. We're still working closely.

Hon. Michael Chong: Understood. Thank you very much for that clarification.

The CSIS director, Daniel Rogers, has said, “Non-Arctic states, including the People's Republic of China, seek to gain a strategic and economic foothold in the region.”

I think we have a pretty good idea of what the economic foothold is that they seek to gain, but could you talk about what kind of strategic foothold they seek to gain? In other words, could you be a little more pedestrian about what a strategic foothold is? What are we talking about here in terms of a strategic foothold? Are we talking infrastructure, or clandestine agents or proxy agents surveilling the Arctic region? What do we mean when we say they are seeking to gain a strategic foothold?

Paul Lynd: It would cover all of the things you just mentioned. Economically speaking, it's investments in critical minerals, predatory market investments and attempts at supply chain control, which also gives them access to the area and access to infrastructure. A foothold in the region is really it.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay.

Could you talk about the kinds of critical infrastructure they're seeking to gain a foothold in? What kinds of infrastructure are we talking about here? There's clearly not a lot of infrastructure up in that region. Is it cyber-infrastructure, energy, diesel-fired electrical plants or runways? What infrastructure are we talking about that they're seeking to gain control of?

Paul Lynd: From a CSIS perspective, the concern would be all of the above. As you mentioned, there's a lack of infrastructure in the Arctic, and there's a lack of redundancy for some of the infrastructure that exists. It's rather sparse.

The concern from a CSIS perspective is dependencies, control and access to that infrastructure.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go next to Steven Guilbeault for five minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: I think a lot of questions have been asked, but I'd like to ask a few more.

Mr. Lynd, you cited the investment act as one of the tools you're working with.

I understand that it's tricky for someone in your role to make suggestions about the government. However, we're not the government. We are elected officials, we are the legislative branch. If you had a few recommendations to make to improve some of these tools, such as the investment act, where should we look to make improvements? I'm trying not to put you on the spot. I don't want to get you in trouble either.

[English]

Paul Lynd: It's a good question.

I am not an expert on the Investment Canada Act, so I wouldn't be the best person to respond to that. I am sure that there would be people who be able to identify, based on some of the observations we have, where the gaps could be and make recommendations.

Unfortunately, I'm not in an informed position to do so.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: My colleague tells me that the committee should hold more meetings on this issue.

A number of us have asked questions about partnerships with indigenous communities and governments. Are there ways to strengthen ties and work with them to better protect them against all manner of threats? We're talking about cyber-threats, digital threats, but regardless of their nature, would you have any recommendations to help us to better protect these entities?

René Ouellette: One thing we tell the government about the Arctic and the north is a truth that everyone knows: Infrastructure gaps pose an indirect risk to national security. If the communities are vulnerable, if the infrastructure is not advanced enough, those communities may want to accept investments from abroad, which would make them even more vulnerable.

We often tell the government that gaps in critical infrastructure and infrastructure in general pose an indirect risk to national security.

• (1700)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Thank you. I have no further questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go next to Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

You have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lynd, considering that threats in the Arctic and actions by hostile actors are growing in number, I want to pick up on the questions Ms. Fortier asked earlier about your presence.

You say that you don't necessarily have a permanent presence. Is that due to a lack of funding, resources, or training? If none of those are lacking, couldn't you use more training, more resources, more money?

[English]

Paul Lynd: Like all government departments, we've had to allocate our resources across the country in a way that maximizes impact. It is a resource issue at the current time.

What we have done is increase our travel from our offices that are not in the Arctic by sending employees much more regularly and frequently into the Arctic—as often as possible. It's not just to the territorial capitals but also into the smaller cities as well. It is related to the allocation of our resources to be able to have a maximum effect across the country.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I don't want to show off my superpower here, but we are talking about strengthening relationships with communities.

Here's an idea that might blossom and make you wonder if it might be precisely within those communities that one could find resources who would necessarily become permanent and would help you not only be more present on the territory, but that presence could also be people who know the territory perfectly well?

[English]

Paul Lynd: I completely agree. Ideally, we would have offices in the Arctic, in the territorial capitals. The way the service is structured now, we have offices across the country in the provincial capitals. They're everywhere except in P.E.I. Ideally, we would have similar office structures up in the Arctic as well.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: This would fill two gaps, namely the permanent presence of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service on site, as well as the relationship with the communities, if people from those communities have permanent jobs with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. That's my understanding.

[English]

Paul Lynd: Yes. Thank you.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you. I have no further questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we go to MP Michael Chong for five minutes, please.

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

Obviously, Canada has had, for decades, intelligence sharing and collaboration as a member of the Five Eyes network, two members of which are clearly Arctic states. Recently, other Arctic states have obviously been threatened by the increased level of activity of states like the PRC and the Russian Federation in that sphere.

I note that the Government of Canada has signalled that it is going to be establishing foreign and security partnerships with other Arctic states that are not members of the Five Eyes network, such as Finland, for example. Can you tell us whether there's anything flowing from these recently announced security partnerships that involves CSIS, and whether or not CSIS is now more actively collaborating and sharing intelligence with states like Finland, Norway, Sweden and the other Arctic states that are not members of the Five Eyes network?

Paul Lynd: The answer is yes. Without getting into specific countries and organizations, I can tell you that CSIS is amplifying its partnerships and relationships with other countries, particularly when it comes to the Arctic. We're enhancing our information sharing, our approach to jointly ensuring the mutual security of Arctic issues. Yes, CSIS has been engaged and has progressed some work in relation to those international commitments that you mentioned.

• (1705)

Hon. Michael Chong: In other words, this flows from the security partnerships that the government has announced in the last year or two.

Paul Lynd: Those partnerships always existed, and we were always sharing with our partners. However, we have looked for ways to continue to enhance and strategically progress some of those partnerships.

Hon. Michael Chong: In other words, you have looked for ways to intensify the collaboration and information sharing. I understand. Thank you. I appreciate that clarification.

I have a question regarding dual-use type activities, such as research, in Canada's Arctic by malevolent state actors. Can you talk to us a bit about the kinds, the nature and the form of these dual-use activities by malevolent state actors in the Arctic region?

René Ouellette: An obvious example would be research partnerships that maybe flow from climate change concerns, such as how the passageways are evolving. A lot of that research would involve sensors, for example, that are placed in the region. Those sensors are collecting information about various different things that are related to that legitimate research, but they are also collecting information about other kinds of movements in the region that could be of use to the military or intelligence capacity of a foreign country.

Hon. Michael Chong: With respect to Arctic research, particularly Arctic research funded by the four granting councils—the tri-councils and the Canada Foundation for Innovation—I know that several years ago there were concerns that money from the Government of Canada was flowing into research collaboration that involved malevolent state actors or their proxies. The industry minister at the time issued new guidelines, I believe, to the granting councils to ensure that this money didn't flow into these partnerships.

Does this funding of research as it relates to things including climate change in Canada's Arctic remain a concern for the service, or has that largely been addressed through the actions taken previously by the then minister of industry?

René Ouellette: It obviously remains a concern, but the policy and legal responses to the problem that we identified in the 2020 time frame.... There has been a lot of investment within government and with research institutions themselves to allow them to avail themselves of research security expertise on their own. We are very tightly connected with those entities as well, to keep sharing information about the nature of the threat, exactly as is mentioned here.

Hon. Michael Chong: I know that, in the last Trudeau government budget, CSIS was allocated resources to hire, from what I recall, hundreds of new agents, in the greater Toronto area in particular, to counter foreign interference threat activities there.

Is CSIS ramping up its resources in the north as well?

Paul Lynd: As I mentioned, there are resource considerations to being able to ramp up in the north, and we don't have specific funding related to ramping up resources in the north.

Hon. Michael Chong: Is that a request of CSIS through the budget process?

Paul Lynd: Is that a current request of CSIS right now? I'm sorry, but I'm not in a position to answer the question.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're over the time.

Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your appearance and for your testimony before this committee today. We're very appreciative.

We will now briefly suspend to prepare the last portion—

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, before we suspend.... I assume we're going in camera.

The Chair: There's one more member.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay.

The Chair: We'll go to MP Fancy.

You have five minutes, and then we'll suspend.

Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for today.

I have a couple of quick questions in regard to the intelligence gap and, looking toward future legislation, the role CSIS will have in helping us develop that.

In terms of the intelligence gap, what further details could you provide to the committee about the multi-faceted nature of security threats to the Arctic overall?

• (1710)

René Ouellette: Can you repeat the question?

Jessica Fancy: We're looking for further details that you could provide on some of the stuff we've talked about today in terms of the multi-faceted nature of security in the Arctic and the intelligence gaps that we have currently.

René Ouellette: I think it's fair to say that the service believes that it has most of the authorities it requires, specifically related to the Arctic.

We're very happy to be here today to speak to this committee and to shine a light on the issues and the threats that are manifest there.

Going back to the questions we answered, just speaking about infrastructure concerns and the socio-economic concerns raised there would certainly help mitigate national security threats facing the region.

Jessica Fancy: Outside of those infrastructure gaps, what other key tools—and legislation can be part of that—do you feel that CSIS needs to help strengthen national resilience in the Arctic?

Paul Lynd: One of the key tools is the change to the CSIS Act that occurred a couple of years ago, which allows us to share information. We call them resiliency briefings. The fact that we can now share the findings of our investigations, the threats, with wider partners and not just with small sections of the federal government has been a tremendous tool for the service.

Jessica Fancy: Are there any other tools or authorities that you feel we should be providing in our legislation to help you do your job? I'm giving you the wish list here.

Paul Lynd: Right now, I believe that we have the necessary tools to be able to do our job, to be able to investigate those threats and to share that information.

Jessica Fancy: My colleague Mr. Chong talked about allies and partnerships.

Our foreign affairs minister recently met with the Secretary General of NATO. In terms of our partnerships, what role do you think CSIS plays in contributing to these allied partnerships as we grow and build them across the threat environment, across the Arctic?

Paul Lynd: I would say that these partnerships are extremely important, because they allow us to share information on a threat from our different perspectives. It allows us to look for opportunities where we can work jointly against a threat, where we can jointly mitigate the threat. We can share training opportunities and have discussions about different capabilities that we may be able to amplify or use to support each other in working against these threats in the Arctic.

Jessica Fancy: Thank you.

Lastly, as a wrap-up, what role do you feel that NATO allies play in enhancing Canada's own awareness of the threat environment in the Arctic?

Paul Lynd: My answer would be similar to the last one. I think the role those allies play could also help us in terms of sharing information on the threat environment and looking for opportunities to work together to counter some of those threats.

As I mentioned, not all threats to the Arctic happen in the Arctic; some of them happen outside the Arctic. These allies could be very useful and helpful to us in terms of being able to have impact against those threats and not necessarily having to do that in the Arctic.

Jessica Fancy: Thank you.

René Ouellette: Can I just clarify a point I made earlier, when you asked about authorities? I wouldn't want to leave the impression that the CSIS Act can't use some modernization. I think we all agree that it can. I think what we were trying to point out is that the modernization that would come to the CSIS Act would apply equally to the Arctic as to anywhere else.

These are regional agnostic authorities that we think could stand to be modernized, and we will provide our advice to government on those measures as well.

Jessica Fancy: Wonderful.

That's everything I had.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Fancy.

Thank you, gentlemen, for appearing before the committee and for your testimony.

Hon. Michael Chong: Just briefly, I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The committee, as you know, received a communication dated January 26 from the PRC, asking this committee to extend a formal invitation to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National People's Congress to come to Canada and be hosted by us. Our subcommittee proposed, and I agree, that the chair should reply and seek clarification on whether the sanctions remain in place on the subcommittee on international human rights, and on me.

If the members of the committee agree, Mr. Chair, I ask that you proceed on that basis.

• (1715)

The Chair: Are there any comments from any member regarding that intervention?

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It was hard for the interpreters to translate what Mr. Chong just said, but I think I got the gist of it. What I understood was that we were talking—

Hon. Mona Fortier: We were talking about the letter.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: —about the foreign affairs committee of the People's Republic of China. Is that correct?

Hon. Michael Chong: I'll repeat what I said.

The subcommittee proposed, and I agree, that the chair of the committee send a response to his counterpart in China and inquire whether the sanctions against the Subcommittee on International Human Rights and myself are still in place.

I asked the committee members whether they agreed that the chair should send a message to China to ask for that clarification.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Perfect. Thank you.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I would add that we have two other members around the table who are also caught up in this.

So I think it's important that we move forward with the proposal that was discussed at the subcommittee, and that has since been discussed, to ensure that a letter is sent and that it contains a response. I think everyone agrees with the response. It's to support everyone affected by this situation.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes.

I also asked that we do it publicly, because I think it's important in a democracy to make sure that we're transparent.

[*English*]

Anita Vandenberg: Mr. Chair, while there are three members of the committee, as far as I'm aware, who are implicated in this, there are others in Parliament. I would say that it should be all the members of Parliament who are impacted, not just the three on this committee.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, if I might, when you seek clarification on this, I think you should use the exact wording that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China used in March 2021 when it imposed the sanctions. I think that would be the proper way to do it.

The Chair: Is that agreeable to Ms. Vandenberg?

Anita Vandenberg: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that. It's duly noted, as is the agreement of the committee.

Once again, gentlemen, I thank you for appearing in front of the committee.

We will now briefly suspend to prepare for the last portion of our meeting, which will be in camera. Only duly authorized persons are permitted to remain in the room when we go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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