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Chair: Fayçal El-Khoury

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)): This meeting is called to order.

Welcome, everyone, to meeting number 16 of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights 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 subcommittee on Monday, January 26, 2026, the subcommittee is meeting as part of its study on the global impacts of transnational repression.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

[*Translation*]

I would now like to welcome the witnesses.

[*English*]

From the Falun Dafa Association of Canada, we have Dr. Maria Cheung, senior researcher, and Ms. Grace Wollensak, national coordinator.

As individuals, we have Madam Zaha Hassan, senior fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, by video conference; Mr. Marcus Kolga, senior fellow, Macdonald-Laurier Institute; and Mr. Peter Mattis, president of The Jamestown Foundation, by video conference.

From the Canada Tibet Committee, we have Sherap Therchin, executive director.

From the World Uyghur Congress, we have Zumretay Arkin, vice-president.

Welcome to you all. You will have five minutes to give your remarks.

I would like to start with Dr. Maria Cheung.

You have the floor for five minutes.

• (1540)

Maria Cheung (Senior Researcher, Falun Dafa Association of Canada): Honourable members, thank you for this opportunity.

The CCP's transnational repression against Falun Gong is a sustained global campaign, not isolated incidents. What is happening on Canadian soil is a direct encroachment on sovereignty, democratic values and fundamental freedoms. Falun Gong is a spiritual practice centred on the principles of truth, compassion and forbearance, practised in over 100 countries.

In 1999, the CCP launched a systematic campaign to eradicate it due to its popularity and independence, resulting in mass atrocities. For 27 years, the CCP has deployed a full spectrum of transnational repression against the Falun Gong community worldwide, including disinformation, surveillance, intimidation, harassment, assault, political manipulation, pressure on groups and institutions that work with the community, cyber-attacks and threats to family members in China.

A defecting high-level Chinese diplomat testified that persecuting Falun Gong is a formalized daily task for Chinese diplomatic missions worldwide. Central to this campaign is disinformation. Falun Gong is unfamiliar to many in the west, and the CCP has exploited this gap by systematically spreading a hate narrative across all available channels in Canada and globally. Canadian tribunals have ruled such content abusive and hate-inciting and have recognized Falun Gong as a protected creed.

Despite this, CCP diplomatic missions and proxies continue to spread propaganda and disinformation. The CCP's "50 cent army" amplifies this disinformation across Chinese and non-Chinese social media platforms. Recent reports found thousands of fake social media accounts spreading anti-Falun Gong content, likely aligned with China. Prolonged disinformation has fostered indifference, eroded public support and undermined Canada's ability to respond to serious human rights abuses in China and the repression occurring here on Canadian soil.

Grace Wollensak (National Coordinator, Falun Dafa Association of Canada): Two leaked CCP documents reveal that Xi Jinping directly ordered a new coordinated campaign, one that has escalated sharply over the past two years, combining disinformation, lawfare and a hoax bomb threat targeting Shen Yun and Falun Gong. In Canada alone, there have been 20 hoax bomb and shooting threats in two years among over 270 violent threats worldwide.

This year, targets expanded to Canadian leaders, including a threat stating that if Shen Yun dared to perform in March, something bad would happen to both Justin Trudeau and Mark Carney, and there would be a massive explosion on Parliament Hill. Police deemed this threat non-credible, yet six performances at Toronto's Four Seasons Centre were cancelled. The perpetrator then boasted in Chinese emails that the Toronto fall season incident was their most successful one yet and that Canada is hardly worth taking seriously.

The sender referred to the CCP as "my motherland's Communist Party", and email time-stamps corresponded to China standard time. The Vancouver police's cybercrime unit determined that the phone number associated with the sender is based in China. The sender went further to impersonate our organization while sending bomb threat to targets internationally, including the White House and the Tokyo theatre.

We urge our government to take the following actions.

One, publicly condemn this campaign and convey through diplomatic channels that the CCP-directed interference against Canadians and institutions must stop.

Two, direct security agencies to investigate this threat as foreign interference, pursue perpetrators and train frontline police to recognize transnational repression.

Three, bring Bill C-70's countering foreign interference provisions into force without delay, and enact dedicated legislation explicitly criminalizing transnational repression as a distinct offence.

Four, brief performing arts venues on responding to foreign-linked hoax threats. Where law enforcement finds no credible threat, Canadians' right to attend lawful performances must be upheld. No foreign actor should veto cultural life in Canada.

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to invite Madam Zaha Hassan to take the floor for five minutes.

The floor is yours.

Zaha Hassan (Senior Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, As an Individual): Thank you to the subcommittee for the invitation to offer testimony.

In addition to being a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C., I'm the co-editor of *Suppressing Dissent: Shrinking Civic Space, Transnational Repression and Palestine-Israel*.

The main point I want to make in my opening remarks today is that our traditional understanding of TNR is insufficient to capture the full extent of the problem and how it functions in liberal democracies. The widely accepted definition is that TNR encompasses actions of a foreign government, typically an authoritarian adversary of the target country, to silence or harm exiles or others critical of the regime with a goal of chilling dissent. However, this definition overlooks TNR perpetrated by states considered allies or liberal democracies. The aim of TNR in such cases is to discourage or punish activism that could lead to policy change toward the TNR-perpetrating state. Coordinated efforts by the Israeli government to suppress dissent in North America and Europe is illustrative of this brand of TNR.

Efforts to suppress dissent advocating for a rights-respecting foreign policy toward Israel-Palestine began after the Gaza war in 2008-09, but it was not until 2015 that the Israeli government mandated its Ministry of Strategic Affairs to combat international civil society efforts. The international grassroots pro-Palestinian rights movement was modelled after the campaign against apartheid in South Africa. Consumer boycotts, divestment and sanctions, or BDS, were the tactics advocated, similar to the tactics deployed by American civil rights activists in the 1960s. The Israeli military's objective was to create costs for this activism.

Over the next decade, the ministry and its various successor ministries worked in coordination or partnership with pro-Israel organizations and individuals around the world, even hosting conferences for them. According to a 2017 annual report, the ministry intended to build the "infrastructure" for "an organized network".

Three professional networks were established by the ministry: the Global Coalition for Israel, the Legal Network Initiative and the DigiTell Network. Most of the work and identities of the members of these networks were classified by Israel. However, through open-source material, freedom of information act requests and research conducted by Dr. Yousef Munayyer and other experts for the book *Suppressing Dissent*, we can understand how Israel and its networks coordinated their efforts to silence and intimidate speech and protest.

Some of the very early accomplishments that the MSA, or Ministry of Strategic Affairs, took credit for in 2019 included the adoption of anti-boycott laws in 27 U.S. states and also by Congress and the U.K. government; the filing of 50 lawsuits against activists and their organizations around the world; the crackdown on campus activists; and the growing adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, or IHRA, definition for anti-Semitism.

How did these networks do this? The ministry's so-called Global Coalition for Israel campaigned for the widespread adoption of IHRA's expansive definition of anti-Semitism, which equated legitimate criticism of Israeli policies or critique of political Zionism with hate speech. As a lawyer involved with the legal network for Israel stated, "If we permit administrators on university campuses, representatives on Capitol Hill, and the general public to perceive the situation as merely a political disagreement...then we neuter the most important weapons in our arsenal." The weapons she was referring to were the uses of anti-discrimination legislation offensively against activists. The result has been far-reaching, including the cancellation of certain college courses, repression against pro-Palestinian campus protesters, doxing, arrests, deportation and physical attacks against students.

Members of the ministry's legal network for Israel worked to mire pro-Palestinian rights organizations in civil lawsuits and administrative actions, claiming that their advocacy supports terrorism or incites against Jews. Individuals and organizations are also facing reputational harm, resulting in loss of employment or opportunities and threats of losing non-profit status or of funding cuts.

Members of the DigiTell Network and the Israeli Cyber Unit worked to pressure media companies to take down posts on the human rights situation in Palestine with great success during the war in Gaza in 2021. Over 90% of the requests for takedowns were honoured. Today, content moderation policies have been adopted that treat certain pro-Palestine advocacy as hate speech or terrorism.

- (1550)

Beyond these real-world harms to individuals and institutions, these activities suppressed robust debate essential for policy-making, weakened democracies and undermined civil liberties.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. The time was well respected.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Marcus Kolga to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Marcus Kolga (Senior Fellow, Macdonald-Laurier Institute, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair, members of the committee and my fellow witnesses.

I have fond memories of working with this committee more than a decade ago, when it played a key role in advancing Canada's Magnitsky law, a campaign that I had the honour of leading with Bill Browder and my dear friend Irwin Cotler. That work, along with my efforts to expose foreign authoritarian influence and information operations and transnational repression, has also made me a target of them. I am one of only three Canadians sanctioned by both China and Russia.

The threats, intimidation and harassment against me intensified when I led the civil society campaign for Magnitsky sanctions and after I published the first major Canadian report on Russian influence operations in Canada for the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, titled "Stemming the Virus", which I have provided to the clerk. That report exposed Russian information and cognitive warfare targeting Canada. It also outlined how the Kremlin arbitrarily accuses critics of being fascists or tolerant of Nazis in order to discredit, dehumanize and silence them.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been labelled this way, as have prominent Canadian MPs, including former deputy prime minister Chrystia Freeland, MP James Bezan and former MP Borys Wrzesnewskij. Shortly after my report was published, an article appeared in an Ottawa newspaper falsely accusing me of the same.

After I exposed the role of a former Canadian ambassador to Russia as a board member of a Russian resource company and Canadian academics who collaborate with Vladimir Putin's Valdai Club think tank and their role in advancing Kremlin-aligned positions within Canada's information environment, I became the target of a coordinated defamation campaign intended to have me removed from the Macdonald-Laurier Institute and to discredit my work.

For their courage to stand by me, the Macdonald-Laurier Institute was among the first organizations outside of Russia to be officially designated undesirable by the Kremlin, effectively criminalizing contact with the institute or its members. Shortly thereafter, Russia's most widely read daily tabloid, Komsomolskaya Pravda, accused me of falsifying Russian history and attacked my Estonian heritage using Russian neo-colonial tropes designed to incite hatred.

This was followed by a long series of harassing emails and social media messages, many of which included death threats and threats against my family. I have submitted samples of these to the clerk. These threats caused sustained psychological stress for me and my family, and their effects continue to linger to this day.

Finding help within Canadian law enforcement was extremely difficult. My local police service told me to contact the RCMP. The RCMP told me to go back to the local police. I was then told to contact CSIS. No one provided much help. I was left in limbo, isolated and alone. Isolation deepens the fear and psychological stress victims are already enduring.

I am deeply grateful to John Khoshandish of York Regional Police, whose team took up my case. York Regional Police's approach is now being recognized internationally as an effective victim-centred model for responding to transnational repression. While that helped end the worst of the attacks against me, the pressure continues in other forms.

In 2022, shortly after I published an opinion piece about Russian oligarch and close associate of Vladimir Putin Roman Abramovich, I was informed by the publisher, Maclean's magazine, that they had received a legal threat from lawyers connected to Chelsea Football Club, which was then still owned by Abramovich. He was seeking removal of the piece. Fearing costly legal action from one of the richest Russian oligarchs, the publisher backed down.

I am also regularly warned by digital service providers that foreign governments are constantly seeking to hack my accounts and devices, but my reaction has been to fight back and to support others, those far more courageous than me and for whom the stakes are much higher, including the brave Belarusian, Ukrainian, Russian, Iranian, Jewish, Hong Kong, Uyghur, Falun Gong and Tibetan activists, like my friend Sherap Tharchin, who continues to be surveilled, intimidated and threatened for exercising rights that should be protected in any democracy.

• (1555)

Canada must treat transnational repression as a national security threat. That means ending the impunity through which foreign authoritarians and their domestic allies and enablers operate. We need clearer reporting pathways; better coordination among police, intelligence and government agencies; and stronger victim-centred responses so that no one in Canada is left isolated when targeted by a foreign regime.

I've submitted to the clerk frameworks that I have helped develop for Digital Public Square and the Atlantic Council, which I hope will be useful to the committee in this study.

I thank the committee, but especially my fellow witnesses for their courage and their bravery. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I'd like to invite Mr. Peter Mattis to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Peter Mattis (President, The Jamestown Foundation, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me to testify.

Many Canadians have already testified about the dangers and realities of transnational repression, including that perpetrated by the Chinese Communist Party. Therefore, I'd like to focus my remarks on the party's infrastructure for transnational repression and political influence.

The party's main instrument is the United Front policy system. It works from the Politburo standing committee, down to local party committees. In every kind of organization where you can find a party committee, you are likely to find united front work departments. This could be in a business or in a research institution. This is not something where you can simply say that the United Front Work Department is doing this, because there's a central level and provincial levels, and it goes all the way on down.

United front work is a CCP tool for political struggle and conflict that U.S. intelligence once described as "A technique for controlling, mobilizing, and utilizing non-Communist masses." The purpose of this system was to mobilize friends to isolate or strike at enemies of the party. In the 1930s, Mao Zedong was explicit about this, describing the party as a "warrior" that wields the twin weapons of "the united front and the armed struggle, to storm and shatter the [enemy]".

The United Front system builds bridges between the party and society through creating, co-opting or controlling social groups that can be leveraged for the party's political purposes. The closest thing in a democratic political context is like having a political campaign organization that never stops running, even after elections. Moreover, that same organization has to keep extending itself into schools, into media, and into community organizations in a never-ending process to identify threats and to ensure the control of ideas that might be dangerous to the party.

While Mao's perspective may seem historical rather than contemporary, Mao's basic framing of united front work within the party's tool box has been consistent and clear across all of his successors, up to Xi Jinping today, all of whom have characterized united front work as a magic weapon or talisman to facilitate China's rise in the midst of an international and ideological battleground.

United front work is not equivalent to influence operations or covert actions that our governments might understand. Those are set-piece operations with a specific goal. United front work is characterized as the day-to-day work of the party. It's not only a party system with the committees. It's present in almost every single government ministry—the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of State Security, etc.

To do such work, the United Front system and the CCP cadre who participate in this target civil society organizations, wealthy proxies—like Hong Kong tycoons—universities, companies, politicians and local governments, media organizations and even some celebrity personalities, as well as any other institution that might shape interactions with the PRC.

Not only can this organizational infrastructure be used to support transnational oppression, including surveillance and intimidation, but it can also be used to support other harms, including trying to insert itself between democratic citizens and governments and representatives so they speak with the party's voice or they see the legitimacy of their constituents represented by the party to them. The second harm is that by constructing and influencing politicians, they undermine the integrity of decision-making. Finally, these groups can be used for facilitating intelligence operations and technology transfer.

This is an all-purpose tool for creating and applying political power while hiding the party's hand. Even though some elements of the system are open to the public and are visible, the ultimate aim is still subversion and control.

This is why all the analysis and discussion of this should begin with the CCP and work outward. We know what the party's intentions are, and we know what the party organizations are. We should be able to have a conversation about what it means to channel our engagement with China through organizations whose purpose is to break and shatter us.

This is something where many of us may be naive rather than malicious, but that's the reason we have to be able to have a conversation. We have to be able to understand how the party operates so we can control this and ensure the integrity of our democracies and our governments.

Thank you very much for having me. I look forward to your questions.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Sherap Therchin to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Sherap Therchin (Executive Director, Canada Tibet Committee): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members. I deeply appreciate this opportunity to speak with you today on the important matter of transnational repression.

I'm one of the 20 Canadians who were sanctioned by the Government of China on December 21, 2024. While we wear this sanction as a badge of honour and as a recognition of our commitment to human rights and justice, it does come with real and lasting consequences. We have been deemed a threat to China's national security, sovereignty and development interests by the Chinese foreign ministry and almost all major Chinese state media.

These sanctions are not merely symbolic. Since being sanctioned, our daily life has become more difficult, more fearful and more restrictive. I receive frequent phishing emails. Our website has been infected with malware. We have received threatening online comments from anonymous accounts. We have had to install VPNs on our phones and devices for basic security, but even that comes at a cost: slowing down other applications and constantly reminding us that we are living under threat. These are not abstract concerns. They affect how we work and how we communicate and live.

Our international travel has also become increasingly complicated. We have to think carefully about where we go, who we speak to and what risks we may face in countries that are friendly to China. We have to watch our backs, be cautious with strangers and remain constantly alert.

At the same time, many of us carry deep concern for our loved ones inside Tibet or in countries with close ties to China, knowing that these sanctions can be weaponized at any moment. Despite our determination not to be deterred in our advocacy, this reality creates fear. It indirectly and subconsciously curtails our sense of freedom and, at times, even our courage to speak as openly as we otherwise would.

The Canadian government has been supportive during this difficult time in extending solidarity, listening to our concerns, holding consultations and providing safety workshops. We are grateful for that support, but the fact remains that being sanctioned by one of the world's most powerful authoritarian regimes, known for silencing dissent both inside and outside its borders, changes a person's life. Despite our best efforts to remain strong and continue our work, our lives have never been the same. We are constantly securing our digital tools—email, social media, websites—and living with a level of vigilance that no Canadian should have to accept.

To understand the true meaning of being sanctioned by China, we must first recognize the broader threat posed by the People's Republic of China. This is not simply about one government disagreeing with criticism. It is about a state with a documented record of foreign interference, cyber-aggression, transnational repression and intimidation.

The final report of the public inquiry into foreign interference found that the PRC is the most active perpetrator of foreign interference targeting Canada's democratic institutions. A recent report, Canada's 2026 "National Cyber Threat Assessment", states that the PRC poses the "most sophisticated and active state cyber threat to Canada today". It notes that China "conducts cyber operations against Canadian interests" to advance "political and commercial objectives, including espionage, intellectual property (IP) theft, malign influence, and transnational repression."

China's blatant disregard for freedom of speech has gone beyond its own citizens. It has gone transnational now. The threat is already here in Canada.

Canadians remember the arbitrary detention of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor for nearly three years. In a similar case in 2014, which many of you might have forgotten, Canadians Kevin and Julia Garratt were detained after the arrest of Chinese national and Canadian permanent resident Su Bin in Canada on charges related to the theft of sensitive U.S. military technology. Also, Canadian citizen of Uyghur origin Huseyin Celil has been imprisoned in China since 2006.

China's own laws help explain why these risks cannot be dismissed. Article 14 of China's National Intelligence Law clearly states that national intelligence institutions may require that "relevant organs, organisations, and citizens provide necessary support, assistance, and cooperation". In other words, the obligation to assist the state's intelligence work is written directly into Chinese law.

While we seek to diversify our trade and investment, we should not let the arbitrary arrests and sanctions of Canadian citizens be normalized. These incidents should not be treated as isolated events. We can continue to push for strengthened trade ties with countries around the world, including China, while standing firm on international law and democratic values, without fear of retaliation and transnational repression.

● (1605)

While we pursue trade, we must build solid guardrails, as mentioned by the government last year, including with transparency in the supply chain linked to China, an unrestricted and independent fact-finding mission to China, and reciprocal access to Tibet and East Turkestan. I'm adding "reciprocal access" here because of the announcement of visa-free access for Canadians to visit China. After the announcement, some Tibetan-origin Canadians bought tickets and tried to visit Tibet and mainland China, but they were sent back to Canada without any clear reasons.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I would like to invite Madame Zumretay Arkin to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Zumretay Arkin (Vice-President, World Uyghur Congress): Mr. Chair and honourable members, thank you for this opportunity.

My name is Zumretay Arkin. I'm a Uyghur Canadian activist and vice-president of the World Uyghur Congress, an international organization defending Uyghur rights.

For over 20 years, my organization has documented transnational repression targeting Uyghurs globally. Transnational repression is a growing phenomenon aimed at silencing human rights defenders, journalists, academics and diaspora communities. According to Freedom House, China is the leading perpetrator, using tactics such as online harassment, coercion by proxy, mobility controls, Interpol red notices, spyware, SLAPP lawsuits and abuse of extradition systems.

One of the most cruel tactics is the family hostage policy: detaining or threatening relatives to silence activists abroad. I want to highlight the case of Huseyin Celil, a Canadian citizen detained in Uzbekistan in 2006 and deported to China under an Interpol red notice, despite Canada's objections. Nearly 20 years later, his fate re-

mains unknown. His case reflects the systematic campaign that continues to affect people in Canada today.

My own experience has demonstrated that the Chinese government uses these tactics everywhere. Since I joined the World Uyghur Congress in September 2019, my family and I have become visible targets. My relatives in Urumqi face ongoing harassment, despite losing contact with me in 2017.

In 2024, I received anonymous messages, with images suggesting my uncle was being interrogated. I have been followed in multiple countries, including on UN premises in Geneva, and filmed by individuals linked to Chinese entities. I have been targeted by online smear campaigns, deepfakes and threats. In 2024, my colleagues and I received death threats during our general assembly.

Although I am a Canadian citizen, I do not feel safe anywhere. My father, also a Canadian citizen, was detained and interrogated in 2013 while visiting Urumqi, and pressured to spy on Uyghur activists. When reported, no action was taken.

Transnational repression does not only strike individuals; it is actually engineered to strike communities. It creates fear, anxiety and self-censorship, forcing people to withdraw from public life and undermining collective advocacy. Tactics have evolved to avoid international attention: quietly intimidating individuals from speaking publicly, placing community figures under surveillance and even enlisting community members to create positive images of China. Trust collapses from within, and communities begin to police themselves.

Canada already knows this. Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue described transnational repression as a "genuine scourge" in Canada, and identified China as "the most active perpetrator of foreign interference" targeting Canada.

Recent steps, including the appointment of a foreign influence transparency commissioner, are important, but these measures focus primarily on elections and political interference, not on the lived reality of diaspora communities facing daily threats. Canada still lacks a clear mechanism for victims to report transnational repression or to receive support. Many are turned away because cases do not meet national security thresholds, leaving victims without protection and further traumatized.

In light of this, we urge the subcommittee to take the following steps. First, expand the mandate of the foreign influence transparency commissioner to explicitly address transnational repression targeting diaspora communities. Second, legislate a clear definition of TNR and create specific offences, ensuring accountability for those acting on behalf of foreign governments. Third, establish a safe, trusted and accessible reporting mechanism, separate from national security agencies, where victims can come forward without fear. Fourth, train law enforcement and policy-makers to recognize and respond to transnational repression, and strengthen investigative capacity. Fifth, improve coordination across federal, provincial and municipal levels to better protect affected communities. Sixth, develop legal and diplomatic tools, in coordination with international partners, to hold perpetrators accountable. Finally, build long-term, trust-based engagement with affected communities.

Uyghur Canadians who are surveilled, threatened and silenced are your constituents. This subcommittee has a critical opportunity to ensure that they are not left behind.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

• (1610)

The Chair: Thank you.

I would now like to move to the first round of questions. I invite Mr. Majumdar to take the floor for seven minutes, please.

Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Thank you to all for your testimony today on transnational repression. It's certainly illuminating on many levels.

In the interest of time, Peter Mattis, let me start with you.

I want to give you an opportunity to respond to Senator Yuen Pau Woo, who described your recent Jamestown report as “disinformation”, “fear mongering” and “bad fiction”. You've warned that more than 575 organizations in Canada are linked to the CCP's United Front Work Department. What do you make of a sitting Canadian senator refusing to take this threat seriously?

Peter Mattis: It's a kind of laziness not to look at the methodology and not to look at the party. The point is, as I said in my testimony, that we were not blaming Canadians for not understanding. We were saying that you should be able to look at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, the United Front Work Department and its supporting units, like the Chinese Overseas Exchange Association, the China Overseas Friendship Association and all of the associated provincial organizations. These are not friendly organizations. They explicitly exist to do harm.

We should be able to have a conversation about what the appropriate channel is for engagement. What should we think of an organization whose leadership attends multiple world Chinese media forums in the PRC? This is about collaborating with the propaganda system and the United Front system to influence foreign audiences about how to understand China and to tell China's story well.

If people are Canadian citizens, American citizens or anything else and take official advisory or delegate positions with these United Front organizations—again, a set of organizations that seek to do

us harm—that seems to me a reasonable question that we could ask of our fellow citizens in a democratic state.

If we want to protect integrity, we have to be able to have a conversation that deals with facts and deals with those sources. Our report left a clear methodology for examining and following up on those questions.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: As a follow-up, you described, alarmingly, how the United Front Work Department is deploying a swarm approach—an asymmetric approach—in democracies like ours and indeed countries around the world. You likened it to a 24-7 political campaign that never ends and constantly looks for opportunity, with Canada having the highest per capita density of United Front organizations, which have been going after our own Uyghurs, Hong Kongers and Falun Dafa, among many others. In Canada, the presence per capita is five times more than that of the United States.

What unique risks does this create for our North American security? What practical reforms do you recommend not just for North America but for the western world?

• (1615)

Peter Mattis: First, I think this kind of expansion, in terms of it being open and accessible, is a product of a lack of direct push-back. If you go back to the controversial project Sidewinder report in the 1990s, this was a speculative effort. It was a sense that something could happen. What you can see from the report done by Cheryl Yu earlier this year is that this is what happens when there is no push-back—when there are no investigations and no discussions about what takes place.

Many Canadian reporters have discussed what has happened in Richmond, Vancouver and Toronto—the way in which the party and crime kind of come together. The first thing is that you have to make sure that news organizations are equipped to research and look at this, because there are elements of this that only a news organization can report and can provide a credible discussion on.

The second thing is that you have to be building expertise inside companies, universities, politics and government, because how are you supposed to recognize that some obscure...? Let's say the Guangdong Overseas Exchange Association is operating in your district. Why should you know that it is a problem? You should be able to find some sort of resource. This is the kind of thing that CSIS and the RCMP should be able to do.

With the foreign influence registration system that's coming online, it also means that you should be thinking about how we enforce this and how we create consequences. Unless there are consequences, Beijing is running no risks whatsoever by continuing its operations.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: I appreciate your testimony today. Thank you for that.

Marcus Kolga, it's nice to see you, a friend and former colleague at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. I thank you for your courage, having borne witness to what you have endured for well over a decade in your advocacy for human rights. You and your family are truly courageous.

Let me ask you about Bill C-219, a private member's bill introduced by James Bezan on confronting transnational repression in Canada. I have the honour of co-sponsoring it with him.

In your mind, how would that bill help improve the federal government's response to all the problems you described with respect to the threat of transnational repression?

Marcus Kolga: Thank you for that very important question.

I had the honour of leading the Magnitsky campaign when it began in 2012. It concluded in 2018. It provided the first key tool in deterring transnational repression—holding the perpetrators to account. I don't think we've used it to good enough effect to create deterrence with those sanctions.

The other problem is that it is missing a few tools. James Bezan's private member's bill adds new, very important amendments to our existing sanctions legislation. It includes, as many of the witnesses here have asked for, a clear definition of transnational repression. This is the first piece of Canadian legislation that has a very clear definition of transnational repression. It also adds, very importantly, visa bans for the immediate family members of perpetrators and includes measures for far more robust enforcement of our sanctions legislation.

Allow me to quickly reiterate that transnational repression is not a partisan issue, nor are the solutions to it partisan. The integrity of our democracy and defending the right of Canadians to express themselves free of threat, harassment and intimidation are not trivial, partisan issues. They affect all of us, including, as we very well know, those who sit in the House of Commons.

I urge all members of this committee to go back to their caucuses and urge all of their fellow MPs to support Bill C-219 in order to hold these perpetrators to account.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Majumdar.

Now I'd like to ask Mr. Zuberi to take the floor for seven minutes.

Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): I want to thank the witnesses for being here and for their courage and testimony. Thank you for remaining strong despite the challenges you face personally, as well as those around you.

I want to start off with Maria and Grace.

I know you've been dealing with transnational repression over several decades. Have you seen an evolution in the repression you've been facing over recent periods of time—an evolution since you've been involved and active?

Maria Cheung: Yes, we've seen this over the 27 years.

At the beginning, it was Chinese consulates—embassy people taking anti-Falun Gong disinformation and hate propaganda to forums and the public. They were spreading it. Over the last 15 or 20 years, we've seen a lot more proxies in Canada doing these things for the consulates.

Recently, the bomb threats have become a very serious matter. This is an international issue because Shen Yun performs around the world in 200 cities every year. Nowadays, bomb threats have become a daily reality. Wherever Shen Yun goes, bomb threats follow.

For Canada, if we cancel the shows without understanding foreign interference and transnational repression, it's a very dangerous sign. We bow to the Communist regime so they can silence us. It is very important for Canada to stand up.

Sameer Zuberi: Definitely, the point you're mentioning, the raising of how things have evolved over time, is important.

Sherap, you mentioned how technology is playing a role. I'm assuming that's part of the evolution of repression that you have experienced or have seen manifest. Do you want to add to the question and expand upon the technological aspect as it relates to the repression that you've seen in the community?

Sherap Therchin: As I mentioned in my opening remarks, some of the threats that came right after we were sanctioned were on Twitter accounts. They called for our assassination. I took an immediate screenshot knowing that they might just delete it, because it was from a fake account, which they did.

There's also an unverified website called The Canada Files, which has been compiling information on Tibetans speaking out on human rights issues, labelling us as “foreign proxies” actually, which is very ironic. Our website—Tibet.ca—was down last year, just three days before March 10, which marks the annual Tibetan uprising day. It actually took us a long time, two months, to bring it back.

Similarly—

Sameer Zuberi: Have you reported these incidents to the Canadian authorities? If so, what action, if any, has been taken around that?

Sherap Therchin: We have informed our contact person within Global Affairs, yes.

Sameer Zuberi: How about the police or security agencies? Have you reported to them?

Sherap Therchin: We reported it in the sense that we received a few rounds of a safety workshop, so we did discuss those issues.

Sameer Zuberi: But in terms of addressing these threats or the targeting of your websites, etc., has there, to your knowledge, been any response or have steps been taken by authorities to investigate this or to prevent it in the future?

Sherap Therchin: Not yet, no.

Sameer Zuberi: I understand that investigations oftentimes are not public, or you might not even be aware if that is the case, but to your knowledge, that isn't the case.

• (1625)

Sherap Therchin: The fact that an ongoing consultation workshop is being provided, I take it as a continued study and assessment of the threat that we received.

Sameer Zuberi: I understand.

Zumretay, do you want to add anything to the question I had with respect to the evolution of foreign repression and interference?

Zumretay Arkin: Sure. Thank you.

I think there is a clear evolution, because even 20 years ago, transnational repression was exerted mostly on human rights defenders who were very vocal. However, in recent years, what we have observed is that this is now impacting the lives of normal Uyghurs around the world, those who are not even active politically or culturally. It's almost, in a way, to prevent them from participating in public life.

Even cultural circles have decreased. For example, we've seen in Germany, where I now reside, that with our cultural and political events, over the last two or three years, especially with the now visa-free entries to China, people no longer attend. If we have protests—we used to gather at least 200 people—it's now a miracle if we can get 30 people to join. Even in our cultural initiatives, like language schools and dance schools, the participants are no longer willing to take the risk. That's because the Chinese government has, in a way, become more sophisticated in its approach, and more subtle as well. There's a grey line.

Sameer Zuberi: You said that you're in Germany. In Europe, are there unique, positive responses from European governments that we can learn from here in Canada?

Zumretay Arkin: Yes. There are some governments in Europe that are taking this quite seriously. For example, in Germany, there have been some initiatives, such as the creation of a TNR-focused desk. The foreign ministry and the interior ministry are working together to host a hotline for victims of transnational repression. This hotline is now open to victims. That's a great initiative. Of course, civil society organizations are there, and they're working closely with civil society organizations.

Last year, in Switzerland, for example, they worked on a first report specifically on transnational repression targeting Uyghur and Tibetan communities in Switzerland. This created a lot of awareness among different ministries. There were different consultations provided.

I actually just came from Belgium, where I met with the European External Action Service and the Belgian MFA. They're also taking this quite seriously. It's also being reiterated at the UN level.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

[Translation]

I invite Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe to take the floor for seven minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses joining us today for this important study.

Ms. Arkin, first of all, I must say that I am very pleased that you are here today. We know each other well.

We often hear members of the Uyghur diaspora say that they are subject to pressure, surveillance or threats towards their loved ones who remain in East Turkestan, meaning Xinjiang. You talked about that. You, yourself, are a prime example.

Now, you've just told us about certain countries that seem to be taking the issue of transnational repression very seriously.

In your opinion, are Canadian authorities taking this problem seriously enough?

Zumretay Arkin: I think Canadian authorities are taking the issue seriously; otherwise, we wouldn't be here. However, I believe that the mechanisms currently in place serve more to inform the public and the various authorities in the country.

Here in Parliament, members of Parliament do an extraordinary job of recognizing that this is not only a national security issue but also an issue that affects the daily lives of activists and defenders of human rights like our organization. No concrete measures have been taken, however. We're talking about it more and more in committees like this one, in meetings and elsewhere in Parliament, but it's still very basic.

We really need to take action, facilitate the transfer of information and, for example, open hotlines for victims. When victims call the police, for example, the police have to know how to respond to such threats, which are very serious. In fact, we experience those constant threats in our daily lives, which have huge consequences, both personally and professionally. It's good to have workshops, but we need to do more.

Moreover, Canada needs to work with its international partners, multilaterally, including at the United Nations, in Geneva and in New York, to really take action.

The measures proposed in Bill C-219 are very specific, and I think they would help us a great deal in combatting transnational repression.

• (1630)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Indeed, there is a lot of talk and a lot of good will, but we might see it less on the ground, as you said.

One of your recommendations is to provide more training for police forces, but I suspect you also mean training for legal authorities.

Has that been done elsewhere? If not, how do you think this recommendation could be implemented?

Zumretay Arkin: Legally, it takes a very long time. In Canada, for example, the specific acts are included in the Criminal Code. However, when it comes to surveillance of our family members in China or East Turkestan, it's still very unclear. It is also difficult for authorities in countries to make laws in that regard.

There is nonetheless a real desire to define transnational repression. I think we can start with that. In Germany, a lot of effort has gone into this, particularly by the Department of Foreign Affairs, but also by other departments concerned.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We are seeing some rapprochement currently between the Carney government and the Chinese authorities. It's not that we're opposed to warming of diplomatic relations, but you have to understand what that entails. Often, the very nature of diplomatic relations is to be able to address difficult, delicate or sensitive matters.

The Bloc Québécois has also introduced Bill C-251 pertaining to forced labour. Don't you think that, if we pass this bill, it would also send a message to the Chinese authorities that Canada is serious? We could also move forward with motion M-62, moved by my friend Mr. Zuberi. If we sent a more serious message about transnational repression, I think that would help Canada as regards China.

Zumretay Arkin: Absolutely. I think the Bill C-251 would help us. That would be a very concrete step.

Recently, we have seen members of the House of Commons downplaying flagrant human rights violations, including the forced labour of Uyghurs, which is happening not only in the Uyghur region, but throughout China.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We're talking about Michael Ma, aren't we?

Zumretay Arkin: That's right.

Whether in Shenzhen or elsewhere, it is indeed a system of forced labour that is systematic and imposed by the state. So it's not set up by Chinese companies, but very much by the state. So this bill would be a concrete step.

There's also motion M-62, of course, which was one of the most successful measures. Mr. Zuberi, who is here, and other members did a lot of work on this, and we're already seeing the results. Nonetheless, the Uyghurs who arrived under the program mentioned in the motion are still in danger. They get phone calls and face constant harassment. So the work is not done. We must continue, and we need help from the Canadian authorities.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I would like to use my remaining 40 seconds to talk about the agreement that was reached to allow Chinese electric cars to enter the country.

If Bill C-251 were enacted to combat forced labour, would those vehicles be allowed to enter Canada?

• (1635)

Zumretay Arkin: That's a very good question. I don't know, but I think that, under that bill, the burden of proof would be on the importer. So that would help us block those products. As we've seen in the United States, when the burden of proof is reversed, it helps

block those products that keep entering the market. The European Union is also being encouraged to do the same. It's difficult, but it would be a good start.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now invite Ms. Vandenberg to take the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to echo the thanks to all of you for your courage and for continuing to speak out despite the intimidation you face. I think I speak for all committee members here. We are very grateful for your testimony and advocacy, and we are 100% supportive of the work you do.

I'm very happy to see some of you back here at the committee. Our committee has done a lot of work on these issues.

I'd like to start with the Falun Dafa Association.

There's a word you used, and I noticed others also used the same term. Can you delve a bit more into that? Then, perhaps, I'll open it up. You said that it's a "coordinated" campaign. Mr. Kolga said the same thing. If you say "coordinated", it will mean different things to different people.

What exactly does that look like, who is coordinating it and how are they doing it?

Grace Wollensak: Thank you for the question. It's important to understand how the Chinese Communist regime works.

"Coordinated" means that it is always from the very top. It's from Xi Jinping and the highest echelons of leaders in the public security ministry and the state ministry. They have directives. They instruct that they be worldwide so that all countries are working in the same way. What is happening to Falun Gong in Canada is also happening in other countries.

In the past few years, we've seen a sharp escalation because Xi Jinping gave an order in 2022. He said that so far, the global fight against Falun Gong was a failure. He initiated a new campaign. He instructed all ministries to fight Falun Gong overseas. They have a joint office in North America. They have a new office to directly tackle Falun Gong. They have public opinion warfare, legal warfare and bomb threats. This happens globally.

Also, thousands of social media accounts are spreading the CCP's anti-Falun Gong narrative worldwide. You can see them working together. This is all happening in a coordinated way.

The bomb threats follow the same pattern. They even use different languages. The threat sent to Canada was in Swiss, Czech, French and Chinese—in different languages but from the same person. The one who sent a threat to shut down the Four Seasons Centre in Toronto sent the same threat to Vancouver, but they continued the performance in Vancouver. He sent it to other countries like France, the U.K., the United States and Denmark. There was one threat sent to Canada regarding the Prime Minister and all the senior leaders in Parliament. That same threat message was sent to six heads of state. Australia, Denmark and other countries received exactly the same threat message at the same time, on the same day and from the same sender.

We see the pattern. The work is by the state. It cannot be individual or isolated incidents.

• (1640)

Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you so much. We see that this is happening globally.

I would like to hear from Ms. Arkin and Mr. Therchin.

It's a similar question, Ms. Arkin. You talked a lot about the surveillance on you and others. We're seeing a coordinated, global campaign and this level of surveillance. Where is all that surveillance data going and what is happening to it?

I'll start with Ms. Arkin. If we have time, I'll then go to Mr. Therchin.

Zumretay Arkin: All that data is going back to Beijing at the highest level, as my colleague said.

The surveillance is both physical and digital. As I mentioned in my statement, I was surveilled on UN premises, and it's perpetrated by Chinese diplomats. We reported this to the UN reprisals office. They've taken note. There's not much being done at the UN level either, but I think that's changing now.

Digitally, everything that goes online—all the information and the people we communicate with—is being surveilled through relatives and people in our networks. For example, we have had issues in the last few years with informants infiltrating our communities. Sometimes they're Uyghurs, Tibetans or Hong Kongers. You can imagine the sense of anxiety and fear that our community members have to live with. Sometimes you don't know. Sometimes it's the closest people to you who are surveilling and infiltrating your networks.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vandenbeld.

I would like to invite Ms. Tamara Kronis to take the floor for five minutes.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I really want to thank the witnesses for being here, especially given the sheer number of you who are under sanctions by various countries. You take a risk in coming here and are exacerbating your relationships with those governments.

Traditionally, transnational repression involved a country targeting its own citizens living abroad. Increasingly, we're seeing broader efforts by those governments aimed at damaging the institutions,

public debates and governments of the countries hosting human rights defenders in order to make those environments increasingly inhospitable to that kind of human rights action.

Mr. Kolga, I want to start with you.

Can you comment on the intersection between transnational repression and foreign interference?

Marcus Kolga: Sure.

On the Russian side of things, this is nothing new. This has been going on for the past 100 years or so. Certainly, after the Second World War, we saw Soviet Russia target all critics of the regime then. That was primarily communities that were forced to flee, whether it was the Ukrainians, the Balts, the Poles or others.

Anyone who was critical of Soviet Russia's colonial and neo-imperialist practices was often labelled as a fascist, as a neo-Nazi. That means anyone, from those who fled to even children of those refugees—and including me. Using that term was intended to silence them, discredit them and dehumanize them. That's a tactic that's been modernized over the past 20 years by the Russian government.

Tamara Kronis: Of course, we're familiar with it in the context of the Cold War, but we're less familiar with it in terms of China and the things that China is currently doing to mimic some of the concepts that the Russians used to use in the context of Canada.

I want to turn to Ms. Arkin.

At least three of you have personally been sanctioned by the Chinese government. When you hear claims that forced labour in China is merely hearsay, I'm wondering how this fits for you inside the framework of transnational repression, which attempts to make Canada less hospitable to human rights defenders who note the practices that China is perpetrating. I'm wondering how you respond to that, based on your experiences. Do you think dismissing those concerns as hearsay really risks downplaying credible evidence and discourages victims, witnesses and activists from being able to do the good work they do?

• (1645)

Zumretay Arkin: Absolutely. I think that does downplay the severe abuses, especially in a context where the Chinese government has consistently refused access to international experts, including UN experts. The last UN special rapporteur who actually visited was Manfred Nowak, the special rapporteur on torture, in 2009. Since then, no meaningful access has been given, except for one special rapporteur last year, the special rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures, who basically said that sanctioning China was bad for the economy and for the development in China overall. We criticized that a lot.

No meaningful access was given, even to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet Jeria, in 2022. It does downplay a lot.

Tamara Kronis: Mr. Therchin, in the context of the threats that you have faced, do you feel that the moves we're making towards doing more business with China—in the context of the questions about electric vehicles that my colleague asked and some of the other activities that we're doing—send a signal to those regimes that their activities aimed at silencing voices around human rights are effective and that they should keep going? What does this mean for you? What does it mean for your personal safety?

Sherap Therchin: China has used trade to its advantage for a long time to coerce anyone speaking on Tibetan and human rights issues. We could learn a lesson from the U.S. It had a very engaged, interlinked trade relationship with China for decades, and now China has turned it around to its advantage.

We have to be very careful. I'm not saying that we shouldn't diversify trade and engage with China, but when we do, we have to establish very strong guardrails. We must understand that this is a regime that could be very ruthless.

A colleague spoke about the United Front, but what we haven't spoken about is how China has an intelligence wing called the MSS, which has three times more people than the CIA. It uses the MSS to surveil people.

Am I in favour of engaging in trade with China? I'm not really as a Tibetan Canadian, but I also understand Canada's need to diversify trade, so I would focus on establishing guardrails, which China would take as, really, a step to challenge its coercion capability.

Tamara Kronis: Thank you so much.

Mr. Kolga, do you have anything you would like to add?

Marcus Kolga: I completely agree with that. We have to have an understanding that the Canadian government is trying to diversify trade, but at the same time, we should also be able to call out human rights abuses and speak up for those 20 Canadians who have been placed on China's sanctions list. I didn't hear any mention of that when the Prime Minister was in Beijing. I know that a lot of us were concerned that our situation was not at all mentioned during that trip.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kronis.

I invite Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe to take the floor for five minutes.

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

I'm going to pick up on that, Mr. Kolga. There are a few members of this subcommittee, myself included, who are subject to sanctions from China and Russia. So we have some things in common.

The warming of diplomatic relations with China is one thing, but isn't it the very nature of diplomatic relations to be able to address delicate and sensitive matters? While boasting about warming diplomatic relations with China, doesn't Canada have a duty to address those matters?

[*English*]

Marcus Kolga: I believe we have diplomatic tools in place to hold the perpetrators of human rights abuses, especially mass human rights abuses, to account. I don't think that Canada, having those tools in place.... We've used them quite effectively for Russia's crimes against Ukraine, for Russia's domestic repression inside of Russia and with the Belarusian regime as well, which engaged in mass repression of the Belarusian people after 2020.

We haven't been so effective in using them against the Chinese regime perpetrators of mass human rights abuses, and I think this is the first tool we have. We should be using it to demonstrate to the Chinese government that we will not stand for these sorts of abuses and that we stand with the victims.

At the current rate, we have very few Chinese officials on the sanctions list, and if we're talking about diplomatic tools, this is the first one that we should be using, and we should be using it to greater effect.

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In 2021, the Parliament of Canada recognized the Uyghur genocide. That's not insignificant. However, as you said, we're much less serious with China than we are with Russia, for example.

Mr. Therchin, the case of the 11th Panchen Lama, who has been missing for decades, is often cited as a symbol of repression in Tibet. How can this affect the Tibetan diaspora today, particularly in terms of oppression, intimidation abroad and self-censorship?

We know that the current Dalai Lama will not be around forever. So there is a concern about the next Dalai Lama. I'd like to hear your thoughts on that. Is there a connection? Could transnational repression increase right now as a result of that situation?

[*English*]

Sherap Therchin: The detention of the Panchen Lama at six years old has a direct connection with China's long-term plan to capture and control Tibetan Buddhism through its influence in the succession of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He is 90 years old, and China has already claimed that it would have the right to appoint the next Dalai Lama.

The Dalai Lama is an honorary Canadian citizen, and I have advocated in the past, in a different committee, that Canadian soil shouldn't be used by the Chinese government to spread disinformation about its claim on the religious rights of Tibetan people, including the Dalai Lama. In 2018, a Chinese delegate claiming to be a representative of the Tibet Autonomous Region came and testified before the foreign affairs committee on many issues, but also on the Panchen Lama. One of the witnesses said the Panchen Lama was doing fine and did not wish to be disturbed, but the world hasn't seen him or heard from him for more than 30 years.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

Ms. Arkin, since we were just talking about Canadian citizenship, that brings me to the case of Huseyin Celil.

Can you tell the subcommittee about Celil's case? Isn't it a perfect example of transnational repression?

Zumretay Arkin: Absolutely. As I said in my presentation, that is the perfect example. We are really disappointed because we have not received any confirmation that the Prime Minister publicly mentioned his case during his visit to Beijing. This case is a clear example of transnational repression. We know that the two Michaels have been released, but in this case, the authorities have not made the same effort.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's exactly where I was going. The two Michaels are Canadian citizens. Celil is a Canadian citizen, but he obtained his Canadian citizenship after he was born. Does that make him some kind of second-class Canadian citizen? If we compare the Celil case with the case of the two Michaels, we can see that the efforts made by Canadian diplomacy, whether currently or in the past, have not been at all the same. Yet they have the same rights, as Canadian citizens. Only one of those people obtained their citizenship after they were born, while the other two are Canadian citizens by birth.

Isn't that paradoxical?

Zumretay Arkin: Yes, that is indeed a paradox. I'm not saying that Canadian authorities haven't tried, but I think more effort is needed. There has been no consular visit since his disappearance. This is a very basic recommendation, and we urge the government to mention his case in all of its bilateral and multilateral dealings with Beijing. The case of the two Michaels received a lot of media coverage, but the case of Huseyin Celil did not. His family here is still waiting to hear from him. It has been 20 years. I think Canada could do more, specifically by calling on its international partners to find out about him.

• (1655)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now, I invite Mr. Zuberi to take the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

I'd like to start with you, Mr. Mattis. We heard testimony about how there's been an evolution of TNR. With respect to that evolu-

tion, we heard that at one point it was officials, and later on it moved into organizations. Do you want to comment on that at all, based on your experience and background, and on where we are today specifically?

Peter Mattis: There's been a steady expansion of united front work. You might say that in early phases, it was about mobilizing diaspora. You could say that it was about targeting a few handfuls of individuals, or about controlling the back-and-forth, but it's increasingly become an effort at mobilization. Therefore, you can see the groups being mobilized around Canadian politicians. You could see the groups being mobilized during COVID, for example, to get access to PPE and facilitate its transfer, as happened in Quebec. There are all these efforts to control.

Think about something like the Confucius Institutes on university campuses. I've never been convinced that this was so much an espionage threat or propaganda threat as it was that it trapped the university into a kind of relationship with the PRC. Somebody who got promoted because they built this relationship now has a stake in it, and is deeper and deeper inside the university's decision-making. They're considering the interests created by the Confucius Institute, by this United Front system, when thinking about the choices for that university—even though the Chinese Communist Party considers academic freedom to be fundamentally anathema to its values and to the way it thinks society should work.

Sameer Zuberi: How do we tread the line between being aware of this and not falling into discrimination and into something beyond awareness and appropriate responses? How do we tread that line, in your opinion?

Peter Mattis: First, let's recognize, as some of the previous panellists just pointed out, that we are actually discriminating. We are treating people who have had, in some cases, criminal acts committed against them by a foreign government on our soil as secondary citizens who don't deserve the full faith and protection of our laws. Let's remember that piece of discrimination that's already ongoing and taking place.

Second, we have to have clear laws about what is right and what is wrong. When it is illegal, that's where our intelligence and our police services have a responsibility to investigate, to disrupt and to ensure that the behaviour is not tolerated and that there are direct consequences for it.

As for the rest of it, part of being a citizen in a democracy is being able to have this conversation, and it means that it should be informed. Why isn't it appropriate, if you are a member of the press, if you are a member of a university or if you are an elected politician? Why would you surround yourself with people who choose to be official representatives, if you will, of not just China, not just of the People's Republic, but of a part of the system that is actively hostile to us? We wouldn't sit here and say, "Oh, you're doing this with the Ministry of State Security. That's fine." If it's an intelligence service, we would start thinking of this as something like espionage.

This United Front system is something altogether different, and it's not an intelligence service. It's not just a sort of people-to-people diplomacy organization. It is something that the party uses to build power and to mobilize when it needs to, and we should be asking, just like with FIRS, is someone acting because they're a citizen or are they acting at the direction of someone else or a foreign government?

Sameer Zuberi: In the 30 seconds or so that remain, I'll open it up to you to add any recommendations or concluding thoughts.

• (1700)

Peter Mattis: This is one of those touchy issues where it helps to work with concrete cases. We should look at espionage cases, and we should look at the organizations that are involved, because we've already decided that a conviction happened and that there was a danger. What else happened around them? What other organizations were involved? That can help us figure out a conversation about where things are that we have already decided are illegal and already decided are bad, and how we understand that environment that was created. That's our early warning point, because these organizations, in some cases, are established around companies or universities to facilitate this bad behaviour. It's worth watching to see the pattern as it emerges.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

I would now like to invite Mr. Davies to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Fred Davies (Niagara South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I get into a broad topic, I want to ask either Dr. Cheung or Ms. Wollensak about Shen Yun. This is one of the most popular presentations you can see in North America. It's travelled across the continent for years. I believe it performed at the National Arts Centre here in Ottawa for 19 straight years, but it has been cancelled.

Can you briefly walk me through the evolution of the threats against this show? It's hard to explain to Canadians what transnational oppression is and what these threats are, but this is a very salient and specific example of something happening right in front of our eyes. Can you explain how that evolved and what the status of the show is now?

Grace Wollensak: Thank you.

This is another manifestation of transnational repression and foreign interference. Another aspect of the coordinated campaign was that the Chinese embassy and the consulate also very actively pressured the theatres and the government to cancel. We have dozens of such examples worldwide in other countries.

In the meantime, there is a public opinion campaign. The government mobilized the disinformation campaign. It spread all over the place, and it is false, but people have no idea what's going on. That's another factor, plus the bomb threats, so I think a lot of the theatres have valid concerns.

We asked our government to help with a public statement to condemn the bomb threats, because that involved a cost around public safety, but they are false. They are not real threats, so people should not take them as real. They want to censor a lawful, legitimate cultural performance here in Canada.

This will facilitate the Chinese Communist Party's goal. We should not fall into that trap. It will really embolden the CCP to go further and do more of this if they see success in Canada. They could apply this like a playbook against other countries, communities and groups.

We see that as a dangerous precedent happening in Canada. We need help from government—

Fred Davies: Thank you. I have limited time.

Canadians are inundated with social media. We hear about forced labour. We hear about transnational suppression. We hear about persecution and human rights violations.

Mr. Kolga, I wonder if you could give me your ideas on how China and Russia linked information operations and adapted them to Canada's media landscape, including digital platforms and community-based outlets. What are the indicators we should be paying closer attention to?

Marcus Kolga: We need to be looking at the role of influencers. We have a very clear case of Russia allegedly using \$10 million U.S. to hire U.S.-based influencers. This was done allegedly through two Canadians. It included a Canadian influencer as well.

The \$10 million was used to set up a media platform in order to inject Kremlin-aligned narratives into the North American information space. Each of these influencers was offered \$100,000 U.S. for a one-hour podcast episode to do so, so we have a clear smoking gun showing the Russian government is paying influencers to do this work.

This represents the tip of a much larger iceberg in terms of Russian, Chinese and Iranian information and influence operations targeting North America.

One other thing I should mention is that we shouldn't just be looking at Canada when it comes to these operations. Information influence operations often don't respect borders; they're transnational. Although a well-known influencer in the U.S. may be U.S.-based and may be talking about primarily U.S.-based grievances, a lot of those grievances are also shared by many Canadians, so those audiences in Canada are significant.

In terms of information influence operations, this is one of the aspects we need to pay much closer attention to, because as information operations evolve, our foreign adversaries understand that it is the domestic voices that lend credibility to them.

Regarding Russian state media and, God forbid, Global Times News in China, I don't think there's a single Canadian who is going to those sites, but the domestic influencers who amplify those narratives are being listened to. They have significant audiences, and I think they represent a significant threat to our democracy and our information space.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I invite Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe to take the floor for five minutes.

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

Ms. Arkin, have you ever seen politicians being targeted by Beijing for their work with human rights organizations such as yours?

Zumretay Arkin: Yes, it has happened on many occasions. It is mostly members of IPAC, the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, of which you are a member, who are approached by ambassadors in various countries, including North Macedonia, Indonesia and Malaysia.

I've also participated in missions in other countries, such as in Latin America and Southeast Asia, where politicians received messages from the Chinese embassy in the country in question before our visit. The embassy ordered them not to meet with us.

So it happens very often. Sometimes politicians who are very vocal about the human rights violations in the Uyghur region receive a visit afterwards and are silenced. If it doesn't work with the individual, they talk to the party leader, then to the Speaker of Parliament, and so on. It goes up the line pretty fast.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

Mr. Therchin, I'd like to know what you think when you see Mr. Carney travel or when economic agreements are signed with China, when you see Liberal members of Parliament being urgently repatriated because they're travelling to Taiwan while Mr. Carney is in Beijing, and when you hear Michael Ma cast doubt on the existence of forced labour in China.

In your opinion, does this make China feel less and less threatened and more and more free to continue, and even to increase transnational repression against the Tibetan diaspora, but also against the various diasporas that are currently victims of the Chinese communist regime?

[*English*]

Sherap Therchin: China certainly has shown its aggression and ruthlessness. Both the report that came from the public inquiry into foreign interference and the recent report from the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security found China was the main perpetrator of foreign interference.

We saw one of the recent election candidates basically saying that the other candidate should be handed over to the Chinese consulate for the bounty placed on him, which is absolutely unacceptable in a democratic, free and independent country like Canada.

We cannot let China take advantage of Canadian freedom and democracy. China is really good at studying, extracting and exploiting diversity and democracy to its advantage, and we have to recognize this.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Kolga, you mentioned Irwin Cotler, who is my mentor, and also the mentor of many people sit-

ting around the table here. You've worked very closely with Mr. Cotler, of course. I'm thinking of what he endured, specifically the death threats against him from the government of another country, Iran.

Isn't that also an example of transnational repression?

I would like you to tell the subcommittee.

[*English*]

Marcus Kolga: Absolutely, I believe that. This was not the first time Professor Cotler had been targeted. I remember him telling me about a trip he took to Russia in the early 2000s when he was advocating for human rights and had been doing so for several decades. He believes that when he visited Moscow in the early 2000s, he was poisoned by Russian intelligence services, so this is not the first time he has faced these sorts of threats. He faces a regular bombardment of threats via email and otherwise.

All of this, of course, is related to his work in defending human rights and standing up for those most vulnerable to domestic repression inside of places like China, Russia, Belarus and beyond, and standing up for those of us who are fighting with him in common cause for those rights here in Canada or elsewhere.

The sorts of threats that Professor Cotler is facing and has been facing, especially the latest death threats from Iran, are only going to continue unless we, this government and all members of this committee and their caucuses take a stand against them to say that enough is enough: We are going to stand up to transnational repression, we are going to support the disruption of these sorts of operations and we are going to stand up for the rights of those who are being threatened and are the most vulnerable to transnational repression.

Until we take that sort of a stand, they're going to continue. I've seen this happen for the past 20 years. I have been a victim, but more importantly, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, I've been working with very brave activists like Sherap, who has been doing this for just as long but faces much more dire consequences.

We need to stand up for them. We need to find that political will. Until we do that, our authoritarian foreign adversaries are going to continue targeting us with impunity, unfortunately.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I'd like to invite Madame Vandenberg to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

I'd like to continue with Mr. Kolga.

Thank you for that. I think our committee has done very well in standing up for human rights defenders, including all of you, and we will continue to do so.

I want to pick up on something you said in your opening remarks. You used a term that I had not heard before. You spoke about cognitive warfare. We heard some of the others talk about the psychological impact of some of the surveillance and intimidation, but it sounds like this is more scientific. This is not just trying to intimidate people; there's something more behind it.

Could you talk a bit about that? Then maybe I can hear about lived experience from some of the others.

Marcus Kolga: Sure. Thank you for that question.

Cognitive warfare is a more specific term. It's not just information warfare, and it's not just transnational oppression. This is warfare undertaken by our authoritarian adversaries to try to manipulate our understanding of the world around us to impair our ability to clearly make political decisions based on facts.

It's part of what I call cognitive sovereignty, which is our ability to defend the sovereignty of our information spaces and defend not just individually but collectively our ability to make political decisions clear of any sort of foreign intimidation and, on the topic that we're talking about today, clear of any fear, intimidation and harassment as well.

When we look at the Uyghur, the Tibetan and the Falun Gong Hong Kong communities, they are being bombarded with cognitive warfare. We're seeing that on an increasingly large scale. The sophistication with which it's carried out is helping intensify those operations.

That's what I mean by cognitive warfare and also cognitive sovereignty, which is an important term when we're talking about these issues.

• (1715)

Anita Vandenberg: I'd like to hear how this is impacting the other witnesses' lives.

Mr. Therchin, maybe you can begin.

Sherap Therchin: One of the biggest examples of cognitive warfare that China has launched on the Tibet issue—for more than 60 years—is that it has repeatedly created a narrative that Tibet is an issue of ethnic minority through a manufactured history. The world unfortunately has bought into this narrative, and today, when people discuss Tibet, it is almost assumed to be an issue of human rights, which is very important, as much as an issue of ethnic minority.

If we look at the 1960s and even the 1970s, it was an issue of one nation invading another. China has succeeded in creating the impression on the rest of the world that this is an issue of ethnic minority. That, I think, is a good example.

Anita Vandenberg: Ms. Arkin, with the Uyghurs, could you give us your experience?

Zumretay Arkin: It's very similar, but it's also that Uyghurs have been labelled terrorists and separatists for the longest time. Before 9/11, we were labelled as separatists. Nowadays, we're labelled as terrorists. The moment you engage in political advocacy, that's the label you carry with you.

Of course, that has repercussions on your travels. For example, you can be issued an Interpol red notice. We know about the case of Idris Hasan, for example, who has sought refuge in Canada. He was detained in Morocco for over two years because he had an Interpol red notice. These are actions that also go along the lines of cognitive warfare.

Anita Vandenberg: For the Falun Dafa, because you also talked about lawfare, which is similar to this, could you also talk in the last minute remaining?

Maria Cheung: The CCP used lawfare to make the world think that Shen Yun or the Falun Gong have done something wrong, but actually, all this has been debunked by Shen Yun Performing Arts and the Falun Gong Information Centre.

The Chinese Communist Party, starting in 1999, once the persecution started, used a cult narrative to describe Falun Gong, and that planted a seed even for Canadians in general. When they did not understand Falun Gong, they thought the CCP was right. Now, when there are, say, political differences, the CCP will use that to attack Falun Gong. That is cognitive warfare. That is very unfair to the Falun Gong community.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Vandenberg.

Now I would like to invite Madame Kronis to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Tamara Kronis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and really, thank you to the witnesses. This has been a really interesting and important discussion we've had here today.

I want to turn back to the concept of cognitive warfare and misinformation and think about them in the context of both the goals that various would-be world powers have and the fora in which they are conducting the cognitive warfare that they're conducting in this country.

I'll start with Mr. Kolga.

What do you think the goals of Russia, China, Iran and the United States are with respect to Canada? How do they differ? Also, what role are university campuses playing in all of this? We talk a lot about the Internet, but where is the warfare occurring? It's occurring in the courts and it's occurring on the Internet, but where is it physically manifesting itself and who is being targeted and why?

Marcus Kolga: Thank you for that very big question. I'll try to be as concise as possible.

On the Russian side—and I don't think it's that much different on the side of the Chinese government—we have certain elements of its playbook, which was exposed in a 2024 FBI affidavit focused on Russia's doppelgänger operation. We have very sensitive top secret and high-level documents that were leaked from the Russian presidential administration that basically lay out what those objectives are. At the top of that list, at least for the Russians, is to disparage the Ukrainians and to erode public support for the war in Ukraine, but more importantly, it is to divide democratic nations, to find the most potentially divisive polarizing issues and to then basically target both sides of those issues with various forms of misinformation and disinformation.

From those same documents, we know that Russian strategic communications firms—and also leadership within the government—were instructed to persistently monitor our information space for those sorts of issues. They've been doing that for quite some time. We've seen Russian information operations target both sides of environmental issues. During Black Lives, they target both sides of that issue. During COVID, we know that they became extremely active in trying to intensify the social and political impacts of the pandemic on western societies, including Canada.

Right now, with my work with DisinfoWatch, we're monitoring what's happening in the Canadian information space now and are seeing Russia becoming very active in trying to amplify regional grievances inside of Canada to try to further flare up and polarize Canadians on those regional issues. This is what Russia does very well. China is doing it increasingly well, but what China does very well is that it focuses on—

• (1720)

Tamara Kronis: I apologize. I only have a minute and a half left.

You're right. People can probably extrapolate from what China is doing and which issues they are targeting both sides of, such as forced labour. On Iran, you can see where they're going.

The next question I want to ask is about the thing I want to get at for the people watching at home. This will probably be my last question of the day.

As politicians, we get a lot of emails. We get a lot of form emails. What advice do you have for the people watching at home when they get a report or watch something online and there is inevitably something that wants them to click a petition and send us a message? What advice do you have for people when they are learning about issues that look to divide Canadians?

Marcus Kolga: Take a step back. Take a deep breath. Think about what you're seeing. Consider who is behind it and what they're trying to achieve before you click on anything.

The other thing I tell Canadians is to stop looking at social media. Just get off social media, if you can. Get a subscription.

I know that the trust in professional journalism has been eroded over the past decade or two—intentionally so, I think, by some of our foreign actors. Get a subscription to a newspaper. Buy your children, especially, a subscription to a newspaper. Get off social media.

Tamara Kronis: Even better, subscribe to not just one newspaper but several newspapers.

Marcus Kolga: Absolutely.

Tamara Kronis: I personally try really hard to make sure that when I'm looking at sources that agree with me or when I see a whole bunch of sources taking the same position, I try to find the counterpoint, just to understand what else is going on in the world.

Thank you very much for that, because it is so important right now, at a time when it's so hard to tell whether you're being spoon-fed something and being taken down a path to something that people want you to believe, or you really are seeing data that should cause you to change your opinions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kronis.

[*Translation*]

I now invite Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe to take the floor for five minutes.

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

I just want to make a quick comment on the last conversation. I think that, if organizations such as the World Uyghur Congress use social media a lot, that might also be because of the lack of coverage in the traditional media.

Is that correct, Ms. Arkin?

Zumretay Arkin: You're right.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you. I know it's used by advocacy NGOs as well, but you always have to keep things in perspective.

Earlier, we talked about the politicians who were being targeted by Beijing. That is transnational repression. I'm talking about politicians who would like to help minorities who are persecuted by certain regimes. However, there are also politicians who are being targeted because they are on Beijing's side.

You're based in Munich, in the centre of Europe. You can see that there are a lot of different political parties in Europe. It's not like here. There are countries that have seven, eight, nine or ten political parties. Often, some are targeted by foreign governments seeking help in their mission of transnational repression. Have you seen that? Can you give any examples of political parties?

If you don't want to give an example, that's fine, but are you seeing that on the ground in Europe and here in Canada?

• (1725)

Zumretay Arkin: If I understand the question correctly, you want to know if Beijing is helping politicians in order to facilitate its transnational repression activities.

I don't have any concrete examples, but I know that some political parties are very close to the Chinese regime. One is the AfD party in Germany. The irony is that sometimes they want to meet with us, and we say no, of course, but we never know what the goal is. It's true that there are left-leaning parties in Germany and a few other countries that are very close to the regime. It is certainly very worrisome to see that. As defenders of human rights, we don't know whether they will subsequently inform the Chinese authorities of our meeting. So we definitely take precautions.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So that's a message for all politicians: We have to be careful about the people we talk to in our meetings and to whom we report afterward. We also have to be responsible in our duties.

Mr. Therchin, I'll ask you the same question: Do you ever see Beijing trying to get closer to certain politicians, by whatever means, so that they can help it pursue its mission?

[*English*]

Sherap Therchin: While there could be a few politicians who are influenced by China, I come with a mindset that the majority of us and the majority of Canadian politicians are supportive of human rights. For example, today when I come here to testify, I know that all committee members here are supporting human rights. I come with a lot of confidence that, regardless of whatever I say here, whether agreeable or disagreeable, committee members, the MPs, support my freedom of speech.

Yes, I acknowledge that there are a few politicians who could be or are influenced by China.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'll ask you the same question, Mr. Kolga: Do you feel that various regimes are becoming more aggressive in targeting political parties, depending on the funding method, which can vary from country to country?

In your work, have you seen political regimes, be it Russia, China or Iran, target different politicians around the world to achieve their ends by bringing them onto their side, either financially or ideologically?

[*English*]

Marcus Kolga: It varies by region. In Europe, we have seen Russia fund far-right parties like the AfD. In many countries in central and eastern Europe, we've seen them do that. This is very well documented. Those influence operations are very well documented.

In Canada, what China tries to do is exploit its diaspora, and it has been doing this, I would say, rather effectively over the past 30

or even 40 years. I happen to live in Markham—Unionville, and I think the issues in that riding are very well documented as well.

Even though these issues are brought up publicly in committees like this one, one bright light in terms of foreign interference was the SITE task force's exposure to the campaign against Joe Tay and the bounty that was placed on him in Markham—Unionville. This is something we should learn from SITE. Its courage and confidence in calling out those sorts of operations were very effective. I would argue that it probably largely put an end to those sorts of operations and probably made the Chinese government think twice about this, but in terms of transnational oppression, they will continue their efforts to influence western governments, and certainly our government and its diaspora as well. It's only until we stand up to that and impose a cost for these sorts of operations that we will see them stop. We've seen some European governments do this. Estonia has done this very effectively. We need to do the same.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you.

On behalf of the subcommittee and all members, I would like to thank our witnesses. Thank you for being here for us. Thanks for your introductions, interventions and answers and for enlightening our committee. Thank you for your testimony during our meeting on the repercussions of transnational oppression.

My colleagues and I wish you the best.

The meeting is adjourned.

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