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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Chair: Chris Bittle





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• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order. Welcome back.

Welcome to meeting number 19 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), the committee is meeting on its study of foreign election interference. 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.

Before we continue, I ask that all in-person participants consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents in order to protect the health and safety of all participants, especially our interpreters. There's a QR code for a short video; please take a look.

I will make a few comments for the benefit of the members. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Members in the room, if you wish to speak, raise your hand. I don't think there is anyone on Zoom today, but if you do find yourself there, use the "raise hand" function.

Before I welcome today's witnesses, I'd just like to quickly adopt three budgets that have been circulated to the members.

Is there a motion to adopt those budgets?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Is there any opposition to adopt those budgets?

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Chair:** They are approved.

I would now like to welcome today's witnesses.

From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have David Morrison, deputy minister and member of the critical election incident public protocol panel; and Saliou Babou, executive director of the rapid response mechanism.

From the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, we have Tricia Geddes, deputy minister and member of the critical election incident public protocol panel; and Sébastien Aubertin-Giguère, assistant deputy minister and national counter foreign interference coordinator.

From the Privy Council Office, we have Nathalie Drouin, deputy clerk of the Privy Council, national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister and member of the critical election incident public protocol panel.

I understand that Madam Drouin will be making a statement.

Please proceed.

[Translation]

**Nathalie Drouin (Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council Office, National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister and Member of the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol Panel, Privy Council Office):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for inviting me to discuss the work of the panel that administered the critical election incident public protocol during the 45th general election.

As you mentioned, Mr. Chair, I, along with my colleagues David Morrison and Tricia Geddes, had the privilege of being panel members during the 45th general election.

[English]

I would like to begin with a core message, one that multiple independent reviews of multiple elections have shown to be true: Canada's elections were sound. Canadians can and should have full confidence that their elections were secure and that their voices were heard.

All democracies are targets of foreign interference, and in that regard, Canada is no different. As we heard during the public inquiry into foreign interference, there is always a baseline of foreign interference observed by our intelligence agencies, which work very hard to mitigate it. It is important to note, however, that we did not see a spike in foreign interference activities during the elections. While we must remain vigilant against continued foreign attempts to undermine our democracy, Canada has implemented robust measures that have protected and will continue to protect the integrity of our elections.

In the most recent election, we implemented an enhanced protocol. Our efforts produced a greater level of preparation and transparency than for any election before. To support the evolving works of the panel, the Clerk of the Privy Council issued a guidance outlining that the panel should consider the full range of actions available to the government, including communicating with Canadians. These efforts to mitigate or defuse attempts at interference before they met the threshold of a critical incident were an important change in focus.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

We worked to mitigate problems as they arose and moved quickly to inform Canadians when necessary. We were not starting from scratch. We drew on the lessons learned from previous elections, the recommendations resulting from independent reviews, and the findings of the commission responsible for the public inquiry into foreign interference. We therefore knew that rigorous monitoring and response efforts were crucial. The government put new safeguards in place. Between January 2024 and March 2025, leading up to the general election, the panel held 17 meetings and individual briefings. We also strengthened interdepartmental coordination. We worked more closely with the security and intelligence threats to elections, or SITE, task force, for ongoing intelligence analysis and better risk mitigation.

[*English*]

Importantly, we aimed to foster trust and resilience in the Canadian public. During this past election, we instructed SITE to hold weekly public briefings to inform Canadians on the threat environment. This was a first-of-its-kind initiative for Canadian elections. We were and remain committed to transparency and vigilance.

During these briefings, our experts provided accurate and timely information about such matters as transnational repression, particularly by the PRC against a Conservative candidate in the election; efforts to amplify contrasting narratives about political candidates across a variety of social media platforms; efforts by Russia to undertake foreign information manipulation and interference activities online; and incidents where politicians' names were used to promote cryptocurrency and financial activities. Government officials also provided regular briefings to cleared political party representatives on the threat landscape before and during the election.

We expected that foreign interference activities would happen, and we were prepared for them. Despite their existence during the election, the panel, informed by the task force activities, was able to determine that none reached the threshold of threatening the election's integrity and its outcome.

[*Translation*]

Let me be clear: The integrity of the 45th general election was not compromised. The election was carried out securely and with confidence. Thanks to layered defence mechanisms across a number of areas, we were able to mitigate malign activity. We ensured continuous monitoring of the online environment, we assessed emerging threats rapidly and we took countermeasures, disrupting or even neutralizing the attempted activity.

On the diplomatic front, we were in contact with other governments, advising foreign missions what the rules were and what constituted acceptable conduct. Since the last election, we have continued our efforts to bolster Canada against foreign interference. Nearly 70% of the recommendations arising from the public inquiry into foreign interference have been, or are being, implemented. We have released the proposed foreign influence transparency and accountability regulations, and the process to appoint the first commissioner is under way.

Just as we learned from past lessons, the experience gained, particularly during the 45th election, will inform our work going forward. For the first time, we released a retrospective report summarizing the panel's deliberations and decisions during the caretaker period. I hope it was useful to you.

In closing, I want to reiterate the importance of continuing to ensure that Canadians can freely and fairly exercise their right to choose their democratic representatives; Canada's security and sovereignty depend on it.

Thank you. We are available to answer members' questions.

• (1110)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We'll turn to Mr. Cooper for six minutes, please.

**Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

During the last federal election campaign, the SITE task force, at the direction of the critical election incident public protocol panel, made a public announcement that there was a foreign information operation targeting Mr. Carney, deliberately amplifying narratives in a coordinated way to Chinese audiences. That operation involved WeChat articles from the Youli-Youmian account that were then amplified on other WeChat news accounts.

Do I have that right?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Yes.

**Michael Cooper:** Okay. Now the Youli-Youmian account is WeChat's most popular news account with links to the Chinese Communist Party's central political and legal affairs commission. Is that right as well?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Yes.

**Michael Cooper:** Now the social media engagement from these articles was high, even exceeding the engagement level on Chinese state-controlled media outlets such as the People's Daily. Is that correct?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Yes.

**Michael Cooper:** Through a high social media engagement and views, the articles about Mr. Carney received between 85,000 and 130,000 interactions at an estimated one to three million views. Is that correct?

**Nathalie Drouin:** I don't recall those specific numbers. I don't know if my colleagues... Yes.

**Michael Cooper:** That's correct, okay.

WeChat has a large footprint amongst Chinese diaspora communities in Canada, with the number of Canadian users estimated to be over a million. Is that right?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Yes.

**Michael Cooper:** So it's fair to say that a fair number of people, Canadians within the Chinese diaspora community, would have likely come across these posts. Is that fair?

**Nathalie Drouin:** That's likely, yes.

**Michael Cooper:** The articles portrayed Mr. Carney in a largely positive light. Is that a fair characterization?

**Nathalie Drouin:** I think we'll say that it was a mixed bag of positive and negative comments on Mr. Carney.

**Michael Cooper:** I've reviewed a translation of one of the main articles in question, and I've reviewed media reports from the time highlighting contents of the articles in question. The articles refer to Mr. Carney as a tough guy, a saviour, an old hand well-versed on finance matters. One of the Chinese communist propaganda pieces was a 2,000-word WeChat post saying that the United States was facing a tough prime minister from Canada. I'd say that, by any objective standard, Mr. Carney was being cast in a pretty positive light.

**Nathalie Drouin:** Again, as I said, we saw both. We saw different posts. Some were positive; others were negative. We also saw using Prime Minister Carney as a figure in order to sell, as I said in my opening remarks, some cryptocurrency. We saw different patterns and, as I said before, there was a mixed bag.

**Michael Cooper:** There were some contrasting narratives, but on the whole, the messaging was positive. I guess this is where I would offer, perhaps, some level of criticism over the backgrounder and media release that was issued by the SITE task force at the direction of the panel inasmuch as nowhere did it indicate that there were any of these positive messages. In fact, there was wording to describe the messaging as if Mr. Carney was being targeted or a target. In that sense, I think it's arguable to say that a full and accurate picture of exactly what was going on wasn't provided with respect to the scope, extent and substance of the Beijing-directed influence campaign and how it portrayed Mr. Carney.

• (1115)

**Nathalie Drouin:** I would like to say that, first of all, as I said, we tried to offer information to Canadians for them to be informed of what was happening. We took also a balanced approach. The role of the SITE task force and the role of the panel is not to amplify

what we are seeing in the social media, but, when we report to Canadians, we report in a factual way. We are not making judgment on whether or not it's positive or negative.

**Michael Cooper:** Madame Drouin, I'll let you continue, but—

**Nathalie Drouin:** If I can, Mr. Chair—

**Michael Cooper:** I'll let you continue, but I have a limited amount of time, and that is entirely the point, presenting in a factual way. What arguably is contained in the backgrounder is reporting that was not factual in the sense that it did not provide a full and complete picture. It completely downplayed what, on the whole, were generally positive narratives about Mr. Carney. That was the conclusion of the National Post. The Toronto Sun headline, upon reviewing the materials, stated "China actively promoting Carney Liberal campaign". Yet, if you just read the release, you'd have no idea of that. You'd likely draw the opposite conclusion of that.

**Nathalie Drouin:** I will give a chance to my colleague to respond.

As I was trying to say, what we report is when we see an attempt from a foreign actor or a non-state actor to influence in an unauthentic way. This is what we are giving as information to Canadians.

David, can you please add?

**The Chair:** I'll cut you off there. We are over our time. Perhaps you can get that answer in through one of our other questioners.

Madame Brière, you have six minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Hon. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Drouin, would you like a bit of time to finish what you were saying in response to the question?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Yes, thank you.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to give the floor to my colleague.

[English]

**David Morrison (Deputy Minister and Member of the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol Panel, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Just to clarify on the past question, I think the RRM group, led by Saliou, found two occasions of articles linked to the platform that has been raised. One we judged to be sort of positive. One was much more negative. Those are the only two that we found.

We called them out because of the nexus to the foreign state rather than because of what they said. There were two articles only, at slightly different times. I believe one was before the election was called and one was during the election. There was a different tenor to each article and that was it.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Élisabeth Brière:** Thank you.

Ms. Drouin, in your opening statement, you said that you did observe foreign interference activities during the last election, but that none met the threshold for bringing the issue to the public's attention, if I can put it that way.

To the extent you're able, can you explain how you assess the degree of threat that a foreign interference activity poses to our electoral process? Could you also explain how you determined that the threshold required to inform the public was not met?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Each incident is assessed on a case-by-case basis; we consider a wide range of factors in determining whether the threshold has been met.

First, we check whether the news is circulating widely on social media. We try to figure out whether the ecosystem—other media outlets, non-profit organizations or Canadian intelligence agencies—was able to address and correct the situation, and whether Canadians were made aware before casting their ballots. Those are the things we take into account.

As I said at the outset, at no time during the 45th election did we determine that elections were not fair and informed, either generally or on an individual riding basis.

• (1120)

**Hon. Élisabeth Brière:** You also mentioned the high level of transparency and resilience, saying that you communicated with the public on a more regular basis, I believe. What feedback did you receive from the public? Did people appreciate that?

**Nathalie Drouin:** I think people really appreciated the weekly televised briefings held by the SITE task force. I think that helped raise Canadians' awareness level regarding foreign interference, cybersecurity and transnational repression, and thus their resilience.

However, I could also ask my colleague from Public Safety Canada to comment. She and her department work very hard on building resilience among Canadians.

[*English*]

**Tricia Geddes (Deputy Minister and Member of the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol Panel, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness):** This is one of the functions that my colleague here, our counter foreign interference coordinator, who has appeared before, takes very seriously. We're trying to build greater resilience in communities. There are vulnerabilities across this country every single day—not just during elections.

I think that the feedback we have received from our briefings during that time period was that the information promoted specifically about the elections was extremely beneficial to the communities. It helped them to better understand the ecosystem in which the

elections were taking place. I think it is something we need to continue to do, though.

One of the lessons we took from this election period is that not only the continued technical briefings to media and to communities, but actual direct engagement with the communities most affected is a hugely important step that we can be taking.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Élisabeth Brière:** Artificial intelligence, deepfakes and such, are responsible for a lot of disinformation. Is that the source of people's concerns, according to what you heard?

In the face of this new and rising challenge, how can you protect or ensure people's confidence in the electoral process?

**Nathalie Drouin:** I'll start by saying that one of the findings of the foreign interference commission clearly indicates that disinformation and misinformation are two of the biggest risks to our democracy. As I see it, the work to address that never ends. Ceasing all those efforts would be a bad idea.

You mentioned deepfakes. We're actually about to deliver a training session to MPs on how to counter deepfakes.

Canadians are also sharing their concerns in relation to AI. It holds tremendous potential, but with that comes the concern that it will amplify the phenomenon. Canada is working on ensuring that the new technology is secure. We are front and centre in our ecosystem when it comes to AI-related standards. Canada is putting a huge number of initiatives in place, but as I said, the work is constant and ongoing.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Madame Normandin, you have six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being with us.

Ms. Drouin, I'd like you to talk about how you decide whether to inform the public of information relating to a threat. How do you decide that it meets the threshold?

I realize that experts assess the information against various criteria, such as the degree of confidence they have in the information or intelligence provided, the potential of the information to undermine the credibility of the election, and the extent to which the incident could affect the outcome of the election. Certain criteria are very objective, for instance in relation to how credible a piece of information is, but other criteria strike me as rather subjective.

How does the panel decide that the threshold has or has not been met? Is it a collective decision? Is it done by consensus, or does one person have the final say?

• (1125)

**Nathalie Drouin:** To begin with, the panel is made up of five independent public servants. The panel is active during the election period, when the caretaker convention is in effect and the government has a duty to exercise restraint in its decision-making. It is a consensus-based approach, so a determination requires that all panel members come to a particular conclusion.

In practice, gathering information is often the first thing we do when an incident is brought to our attention. The intelligence agencies are tremendously helpful to us in that regard, and organizations such as the rapid response mechanism, the ecosystem and academic groups help us determine our response. The first step is really to gather information.

**Christine Normandin:** I understand that you work by consensus, but I'd like to discuss the other aspects.

Is it fair to say that, if the panel doesn't reach a consensus, the information isn't communicated to the public? As such, each of the five panel members has a veto of sorts on whether to communicate the information to the public. Is that a fair assessment?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Here's something interesting. In my opening remarks, I mentioned that we had 17 meetings in preparation for the election. One of the things we did most was working on scenario exercises. We worked extremely hard on incredibly difficult scenarios, to build our understanding and shared analysis of the protocol, and that was tremendously helpful. I can tell you that, during the day to day, we never encountered a situation where there was total disagreement. On the contrary, each member's input resulted in a better decision.

One of the benefits of the last protocol—and I don't really like to refer to it this way, but for illustrative purposes, I will—was communicating with Canadians, even in situations that fell below the desired threshold. That is why weekly briefings were held and specific situations were addressed.

**Christine Normandin:** I have the sense that there is a suitable level for the public. I can appreciate not wanting to communicate information that would alarm people unnecessarily or cause them to lose confidence in the electoral process. I appreciate that, but shouldn't there be some threshold in the middle for the political parties and candidates? The threshold would be different from the one for informing the public.

Is that something that's missing? Candidates could have a different assessment of what's happening on the ground, a different take in relation to the more subjective of the three criteria for determining whether the threshold has been met. Isn't there a problem in that

regard, specifically parliamentarians' and candidates' own confidence in the electoral process?

**Nathalie Drouin:** You've opened the door for me to mention that numerous briefings were provided to the political parties. Each of the parties had representatives with the appropriate security clearance to be briefed. You're right; we can provide more information to those representatives than to the public at large. I think we made very good use of that mechanism during the last election.

**Christine Normandin:** Given how short the election period is—the last one was pretty quick—I'd like you to talk about the time frame for communicating the information. About how long is it between when the information is brought to your attention—information that must then be analyzed—and when you decide that the threshold for the public has not been met but that the political parties should still be informed? How long are we talking?

**Nathalie Drouin:** It can vary. During the last election, panel members received an assessment every morning, sometimes throughout the day as well, indicating whether intelligence teams or the SITE task force had detected an issue.

I think we can all think of a time when a meeting was convened and, right away, we jumped online via secure virtual systems to discuss the situation on the table. It can be extremely quick. The decision to trigger the measures at our disposal can be made quickly; then it becomes a discussion with members of the political parties. The information can go out to the appropriate people in a matter of hours.

• (1130)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you. We're a bit over time, so again, perhaps you can get that answer in to a different question.

We'll go to Mr. Calkins for five minutes, please.

**Blaine Calkins (Ponoka—Didsbury, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

In your opening remarks, Madam Drouin, you talked about mitigation, but my sense from dealing with this issue now for most of the past Parliament and this one, starting up in this conversation again, is that the organization, the task force and everybody are very good at detecting, but the countermeasures and the mitigation are never really fully understood, I think, by the Canadian public, other than basically our communicating with the public that something is happening.

Can you tell us, without exposing any tradecraft secrets, what countermeasures you're actually doing that Canadians are unaware of?

**Nathalie Drouin:** As I said, it's a multi-layered type of thing that we can do. We can do some diplomatic *démarches*, and my colleague from Global Affairs can talk about that. CSIS can do threat reduction measures. We can engage with a social media platform. We can talk to the candidate himself or herself. We can talk to the political party. We have a range of actions that can be taken in order to mitigate the threats.

**Blaine Calkins:** I don't mean to interrupt, but that sounds like communication but not a countermeasure. Can you explain to me how that would translate into a countermeasure? How would going to the embassy...actually, do you think that meeting would actually change any direction coming from the government in Beijing? I don't know if it would.

**Nathalie Drouin:** Maybe you want to talk about that, David.

**David Morrison:** In the wake of the Public Inquiry Into Foreign Interference and in the lead-up to the 2025 general election, we as the foreign ministry thought about what our role is here and what more we can do. On November 24, 2024, we called in the entire diplomatic corps. That had never been done. I personally sat on stage and talked through with all of the ambassadors—

**Blaine Calkins:** I'm not disputing that you've made the effort. What I'm asking about is how you can measure the result, Mr. Morrison.

I only have five minutes. I want to get to the succinct heart of the matter.

**David Morrison:** A measure of the result is that in the after-action reports, you're not reading a lot about misbehaving diplomats. That's either because they got more clever—

**Blaine Calkins:** Okay.

**David Morrison:** —and we didn't find out or they took to heart the three warnings that we gave: two in advance—

**Blaine Calkins:** I have no clarity, and I don't think you do either—I think that's a fair assessment—as to which, if either, of those conditions might actually be true.

I'm not making any judgments here, but right now roughly 25% of Canadian citizens are foreign born. That means we have large diaspora communities in our country. If you take a look at the handful of ridings, nobody's disputing the outcome that the Liberals clearly won the election, but they did not get a majority. The difference between their getting a majority and having a hung parliament right now would be a few hundred votes.

My colleague Mr. Cooper already indicated that there are several million views just on one WeChat article alone, which doesn't appear to be interdicted. Canadians have a lot of questions about whether the needle can be moved using a foreign interference method or by foreign actors.

In the case of this particular Parliament, the difference between a majority parliament or being close to a majority parliament could have been determined by a few hundred voters. Are you completely confident that the results we have in the House of Commons are a true reflection of the will of the Canadian public without foreign interference?

• (1135)

**David Morrison:** Yes, I am.

**Blaine Calkins:** I'm not sure you can say that with confidence, but I appreciate that.

One of the criticisms raised in the report was the high disclosure threshold. This was an area of concern in the last discussion, it's been an area of concern in the Hogue commission and it's a criticism raised in the report itself. It's akin to a smoke detector that has no alarm: It's very good at detecting the smoke but not very good at raising the alarm or broadcasting or saying anything.

What are you going to do to fix this notion that everybody seems to know there's a problem but nobody is really able to solve it?

**The Chair:** Answer very quickly.

**David Morrison:** Madame Drouin outlined in her opening remarks all of the new measures we took in advance of the 45th general election, including the very important measure of speaking out publicly on things that didn't meet the threshold but that we thought Canadians should still know about to help them make educated choices.

We have debated this issue of threshold. We have had after-action reports by several very prominent Canadians who have argued that the high threshold should be maintained but who have also said we should do more in the area of transparency and communications, and that's what we tried to do in advance of and during the election.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We'll move to Mr. Wilkinson for five minutes, please.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (North Vancouver—Capilano, Lib.):** Thank you to all the witnesses for appearing.

I will take it up a level. This body is relatively new and foreign interference has only emerged as a major issue in the last number of years.

How does the incident public protocol compare to similar mechanisms that other democratic countries have put into place? Are there international best practices we have looked at with respect to addressing foreign interference? I assume we are continuing to look at that as it evolves in other countries.

Maybe you can comment on that.

**Nathalie Drouin:** Thank you.

We have done some engagement with many democratic countries when it comes to monitoring democratic exercises. We are, here, very confident that we have the best-in-class system.

We can be inspired by other countries. They do sometimes have some mechanisms that are probably better than ours, but in terms of the overall system, we have the most comprehensive system in the world.

We have been told by both the U.K. and France that the fact we are going public during the election campaign is something they admire but they don't think that right now they will have that latitude.

We are being looked at. Minister MacKinnon, in his role regarding democratic institutions, is having a lot of engagement with other partners to talk about the system we have put in place.

We should be very proud. I'm not saying we have a perfect system. We are always ready to enhance it, but we should be very proud of the system we have put in place, all together.

**Tricia Geddes:** Maybe I'll just add that as we evolve, so too will others who are trying to take advantage of our system. We're in a constant learning mechanism. I would say that all three of us and our departments spend an inordinate amount of time, or perhaps a necessary amount of time, meeting with partners around the world to understand how the threats are evolving and how we can better protect ourselves. Some of the areas that I know people are concerned about in terms of social media amplification of fake information are the types of things that we continuously need to stay vigilant on.

I would agree with Madam Drouin's points. We are actually seen as one of the best in class when it comes to the system we put in place, but there's a lot more we can continue to do to improve. The acceleration and the change of threats are things we'll need to keep pace with and ideally get ahead of.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** I'll move to a different topic. Commissioner Hogue took note of the fact that many Canadians don't necessarily understand that public servants are non-partisan. She made a recommendation that we add to the panel membership a distinguished Canadian in whom the public would perhaps have greater confidence. The clerk, I understand, did send a letter to all the political parties in March to try to achieve unanimity with respect to that recommendation.

To be honest with you, it seems to me to be a very reasonable recommendation that could enhance the credibility of the work of the group on the part of Canadians. That unanimity was not achieved, and I don't understand exactly why. Is that something we're going to revisit? It does seem like a very reasonable thing that could actually help.

• (1140)

**Nathalie Drouin:** Yes. I mean, it would be for the government to decide, but we all agree, as actual members of the panel, that having an external member sitting on the panel could be very good. In the Hogue report, she mentioned that she was not expecting this recommendation to be in place for the 45th election. We gave it our best effort to find a good individual, but as you said, we were not able to get consensus on the suggested representative.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** People have asked a little bit about the thresholds. In the documents underpinning the work of the committee, the threshold with respect to public disclosure is relatively clear. What's not clear to me is the threshold to be achieved to share information with political parties or to take other actions. How do you determine what those thresholds are, and what are they?

**The Chair:** Give a very quick answer, please.

**Nathalie Drouin:** In terms of sharing information with a political party, to go back to a previous question, the threshold is low. Any information that can help potential victims of foreign interference to resist I think should be shared with the relevant parties. The threshold is very low.

This is except when we believe that the information we get is not credible, the source is not corroborated or things like that. If we believe that the information we are receiving is credible, even if it is not hitting our guidelines in terms of whether or not we should have communication with the public in general, we will share with the parties.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We will move on to Madame Normandin for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Drouin, I want to follow up on the question you were just asked about how the thresholds are set for communicating information to the political parties or the public.

You said that an independent group does the incident analysis. The idea is to highlight the connection to politics during the election. In terms of setting the actual threshold, do I understand correctly that it's done prior to the election?

Before you answer, I want to read you something Allen Sutherland said when he appeared before Judge Hogue. This is from a CBC article:

[*English*]

Sutherland said the threshold for informing Canadians was deliberately set very high because of the risk that such an alert could disrupt an election. Changes are being considered to allow the government to inform Canadians of lower-threshold events, he said.

[*Translation*]

Do I understand correctly that the threshold is set prior to the election and that it is partly left to the government's discretion?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Yes, the threshold is set in the protocol itself. It's a cabinet directive. However, and we talked about this earlier, independent assessments, as well as a commission of inquiry, have analyzed the threshold and provided external feedback. As has been discussed, the goal was to avoid influencing the course of the election. Every time, the independent assessments and the commission of inquiry determined that the threshold should remain high so as not to influence the course of the election.

• (1145)

**Christine Normandin:** Nevertheless, a body for which the government is responsible has the final say, does it not?

**Nathalie Drouin:** With respect to where the threshold is set, we've received a tremendous amount of feedback, as I just said. The current threshold has undergone three rounds of assessment, if I can put it that way. I'm sure that any government would be willing to incorporate any new recommendations that were made.

**Christine Normandin:** Is it the same process for setting the threshold for political parties? Is it set before the election, or is it done in co-operation with the parties? I understand that external assessments are carried out. Do the parties have any say in setting the threshold that applies to them? How does the dynamic between the panel and the parties work?

**Nathalie Drouin:** In relation to the parties and what should or shouldn't be communicated to the individuals concerned, we are mainly guided by the thresholds set by the intelligence agencies. My colleague Ms. Geddes can give you more information on that.

When it comes to the rapid response mechanism, for instance, the dynamic is much more about co-operation and information validity.

[English]

Tricia, maybe you can add to that in terms of what the indicators are to share information.

**Tricia Geddes:** Thank you.

There are two things I would say, from my long career working in security and intelligence.

It is really difficult for us to be able to determine how much information we can share in an unclassified way, but the point I want to add is that this was a very continuous feedback conversation we were having during the election process. With those briefings to the political parties, to community groups and to others, this was a continual understanding being brought back to the panel. In the course of us seeing events as they were transpiring, it was an iteration, so we were having an ongoing discussion to better understand it.

I think there was even a very good sense of collaboration with the political parties about our understanding of the events as they were transpiring, and frankly, of the perspectives that those political parties might have had on those very same events. It was definitely a circular feedback loop that was instrumental to our contemplations.

[Translation]

**Christine Normandin:** I know you may not be able to tell us this, but I'm going to ask you anyway. Has there ever been a time when a party disagreed with the panel's decision on whether the threshold had been met for informing the public?

**Nathalie Drouin:** We haven't run into a situation like that, as far as informing the public is concerned. Your question does raise an interesting theoretical issue, though. If the panel determined that Canadians needed to be made aware of an incident but a party didn't agree with that decision, there could be some sort of discussion regarding how information is communicated to Canadians. Nevertheless, the panel decides whether to inform Canadians.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Next is Mr. Van Popta for five minutes, please.

**Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I read the "Retrospective Report on the 45th General Election" from your panel. Thank you very much for that. Three of you are highlighted in the foreword by the Clerk of the Privy Council as having contributed a great deal to the work of that panel.

In it, John Hannaford writes, "I am...pleased to [inform] that none of the incidents reviewed by the Panel threatened Canada's ability to have a free and fair election."

Yet on the next page, it says, "Foreign interference activities in Canada continue to be pervasive, sophisticated, and persistent." Now, those two sentences seem to contradict each other.

Later in the report, you quote Madam Justice Hogue as saying that foreign interference in Canada's elections, "is an existential threat." Yet, you say that none of this had any impact at all on the outcome of our election. Perhaps you could explain that. It doesn't seem existential to me. It seems like foreign interference is a bit of a nuisance that we have to swat away.

• (1150)

**David Morrison:** I'll take a swing at that, if I might.

As Madame Drouin said in her introductory remarks, and as has been said around various tables and by our security agencies going back a decade or more, foreign interference is a fact of life in Canada. Your study—the "Public Inquiry Into Foreign Interference"—and the other studies have, I think, very usefully helped to educate Canadians that foreign interference is an ongoing fact of life and that we need to be on guard for it.

What I think Madame Drouin tried to say in her introductory remarks was that this baseline is what we are paying attention to. We pay very close attention during a writ period, because our democratic institutions are by definition vulnerable during such a period. During general election 45, we did not see a spike in foreign interference from that ongoing baseline.

**Tako Van Popta:** Without a spike, was it still an existential threat? I'm struggling with what seems to be a contradiction there.

**David Morrison:** I don't see the contradiction. I think that Madam Hogue wrote a very detailed report in which she chronicles all of the foreign interference we're aware of in the past number of elections, plus the ongoing foreign interference. She comes to the conclusion—and it's in her letter at the front of the summary—that there are two areas that Canadians need to pay very close attention to.

The first is foreign information manipulation and interference, FIMI. This is a growing area, and it could get very scary with artificial intelligence and deepfakes. We did not see that in general election 45, but we need to be prepared for it.

The second area that Madam Justice Hogue warned about is transnational repression, and that's sort of a complicated term. It means countries pursuing former nationals or maybe dual citizens of their countries overseas on Canadian territory. That's off-limits, as far as we are concerned.

Also, if I might, what we did see in the Joe Tay exercise, which I know you've already talked about, was a kind of digital transnational repression; so it exists.

**Tako Van Popta:** Thank you very much. That was a good comprehensive answer.

I want to talk about the Joe Tay situation. My understanding is that your panel, at some point, did raise awareness with Joe Tay and/or his campaign, but you left it until quite late in the election. Election day was April 28. I think it wasn't until the middle of April that you actually raised it with him, claiming that before that time, there had been low engagement, and you didn't think it was necessary to raise the alert, yet it became a very existential issue for him later on. Why didn't you alert him sooner?

**David Morrison:** The activity that was featured in December 2024, the so-called "bounties" that had been associated with Mr. Tay from the Hong Kong government, did receive online traction in December 2024. That online engagement had died down considerably by the time he became a candidate and the writs had been issued. We did discuss it a lot as a panel.

I'll turn to my colleagues for the details.

**The Chair:** We're well over. I'll cut you off here.

As a reminder to colleagues—and all sides are guilty—if you ask a question with five or 10 seconds left in your round, I have let it go, but it may be a shorter response, cut off by the chair.

We'll go to Ms. Kayabaga for five minutes, and then we'll take a short five-minute break after that.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I'd like to congratulate Ms. Drouin on her new appointment as Canada's ambassador to France.

• (1155)

[*English*]

I'll direct my questions to Mr. Babou.

I want to talk about this rapid response mechanism that is currently housed at Global Affairs.

Can you elaborate on what it is, how it helps Canadians, its role and why it's sitting at Global Affairs?

**Saliou Babou (Executive Director, Rapid Response Mechanism, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you.

The rapid response mechanism sits at Global Affairs Canada. It's primary mandate is to identify, monitor and detect foreign information threats to Canada's national security and foreign policy priorities. It's a team of data analysts and data scientists who provide ongoing monitoring of these threats for the benefit of the Canadian government. We also work with other government departments in the security and intelligence community to share our findings and leverage the governance tables that we have in the federal government to provide options for response to these incidents. That is the primary mandate of the rapid response mechanism.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Can you touch on why it's housed at Global Affairs and not at any other department? How is this going to help Canada and its allies?

**Saliou Babou:** One of the reasons it's housed at Global Affairs Canada is that the rapid response mechanism is also part of the G7 rapid response mechanism, which is a body of G7 members, as well as associate members, including Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, the Netherlands and NATO. Leveraging that multilateral collaboration is very natural for a foreign ministry to do, and it facilitates engagement with partners to have a global picture, a mapping of the information threats that we are dealing with.

We also have the experience of communicating to Canadians, so we do release statements and public reports. Sitting in the foreign ministry allows a direct line to the political directors, the sherpas, and for the foreign minister to engage in this discussion at various levels for collective action.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you.

Mr. Morrison, can you elaborate on some of the questions my colleagues have already asked about, on deepfakes and the impact that that has on our society, especially children and women, online?

Is there an appetite for the government to mandate the labelling of AI? I think AI is getting so good compared to a couple years ago, when it first started. You can't actually tell what's real and what's not real.

I am a millennial. I consider myself an Internet-savvy person, but lately, my gen Z teenager constantly tells me that I fall for the AI fakes all the time.

Is there an appetite to mandate labelling when someone is using an AI video so we can clearly identify what is AI and what is not?

**David Morrison:** To be completely honest, I don't know whether there's an appetite for labelling specifically.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Would you suggest it?

**David Morrison:** As a foreign ministry guy, I know that there are colleagues who are much more *au fait* with the various options.

I do know that the government is very concerned about AI and the potentially pernicious effects. As I said, we didn't see it. We looked for it and expected it, but did not see it in general election 45. However, as my colleague Tricia said recently, our adversaries in this space are continually evolving their tactics; it's only a matter of time, so we do need to be very vigilant.

Whether the ultimate solution comes through labelling or something else, this needs to be a whole-of-society effort. We're doing what we can via the foreign ministry, and it makes sense insofar as we're better joined up with our like-minded...and so on, but the role isn't to say whether something is true or not true. The role is to say whether it can be connected to a foreign state, because that's bad, and the role is to say whether it has been inauthentically amplified to make it look like a bigger deal than it is, because that's bad.

• (1200)

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** When would you do that?

**David Morrison:** It is not easy to put the government in the position of saying what is true and what is not true. There are multiple sides to that equation.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We'll suspend for five minutes.

• (1200)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1205)

**The Chair:** We are back.

We will proceed with Mr. Jackson for five minutes, please.

**Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

It's nice to meet you folks.

I have to say that, as a new member of Parliament, this whole situation has been alarming to me. The conversation about what the public knows, without alarming the public, is one that I'm quite interested in.

I would argue that when I go around in my constituency and ask people if they know about this situation, they have no idea and they don't believe that it's happened in Canada. They think I'm a crazy, tinfoil-hat person when I'm talking about the Joe Tay situation.

I'm just curious in terms of the downplaying that we're doing to try to not alarm the public. Comments were made about the actions of Paul Chiang in relation to Joe Tay and then the Prime Minister decided to go out and defend the integrity of Paul Chiang. I know some of you were advising the Prime Minister at that time.

With the situation that Joe Tay was experiencing, how well briefed in advance was the Prime Minister before Mr. Tay was informed or the campaign of the Conservatives was involved?

• (1210)

**Nathalie Drouin:** When we are operating as a panel of five, we do not get any authorization or clearance from the Prime Minister before talking to political parties.

**Grant Jackson:** I'm not saying you had to get approval from the Prime Minister to inform Mr. Tay or his campaign. At what point was Mr. Carney informed, as Prime Minister, about the situation that was ongoing?

**Nathalie Drouin:** To be clearer, I hadn't briefed the Prime Minister during the general election about those matters. My connections were with the cleared representative from the Liberal Party, as I had also a contact with the cleared representative of other parties.

**Grant Jackson:** The Prime Minister came out and encouraged one of his MPs, who had encouraged a Conservative candidate to be turned in for a bounty, and the Prime Minister was not briefed by his national security adviser on that matter before he spoke publicly about it.

Is that what you just said?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Can you repeat the question?

**Grant Jackson:** Before the Prime Minister went out and defended Paul Chiang's comments and called him a man of "integrity", he was not briefed about the Joe Tay situation by you, his national security adviser. Is that correct?

**Nathalie Drouin:** He was not briefed by me during the general election.

**Grant Jackson:** That's interesting.

I'm very curious about what the next steps are. We have the contradiction about calling the PRC an "existential threat" and also we're building "the new world order" with them, which was a comment that was made fairly recently.

How does that change your relationship in terms of global affairs and the ongoing threats to Canadian elections, given that we are establishing a new relationship? What changes in terms of your actions with the PRC?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Thank you. I'll start and the deputy minister of foreign affairs will add his comments.

As the Prime Minister said in Davos, the world is changing and we need to adjust to this new world.

I must say that our economic security is also part of our national security. We need to also make sure that Canada will be resilient when it comes to its trade and capacity, and that Canada will have diverse options in front of it.

However, it's not because we are pursuing closer economic ties with China in some specific sectors that we are abdicating our responsibilities when it comes to national security concerns. It's not because we are re-engaging on the economic side with China that we are saying that what we have said before does not exist anymore.

One important thing that we did when we were in China was talk about national security. We opened the conversation when it comes to law enforcement and the rule of law. I think that being able to have those dialogues and, at the appropriate moment with the appropriate channels, talk about our irritants and concerns will be better for Canada than not having any opportunity to talk about those things.

**Grant Jackson:** If China is continuing to be an actor in the interference in our elections, what is their goal, in your opinion?

**Nathalie Drouin:** The expert for that would be David, about the five poisons—

**Grant Jackson:** They're not going to do it for fun. They have stuff to do.

**Nathalie Drouin:** They have objectives.

**David Morrison:** China has what they call their “five poisons”. One is the independence of Taiwan. One is the group Falun Gong. One is Xinjiang. One is Hong Kong. One, I think, may just be human rights, or the way the west interprets human rights. On a scale, Taiwan is at the top.

When China pursues those goals overseas, that's foreign interference. I've told them repeatedly, personally, that we have a poison as well, and that is foreign interference. It takes place on our territory. It's our turf. We get to call the shots. That's what the clash is. Their goal is to preserve the Communist Party of China and the territorial integrity of China. They see those five poisons as threatening that.

They overreach, in our very strong view, when they pursue their five poisons agenda in other countries, including Canada. That's where we clash on what is foreign interference.

• (1215)

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to cut you off, Mr. Morrison.

We will proceed with Mr. Louis for five minutes, please.

**Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses here for the work that they do and for taking the time to meet us today.

As you stated in your opening remarks, all democracies face foreign interference, and as we know, Canada is no exception. Your work on the critical election incident public protocol understands the importance of having robust, credible and evolving measures to protect the integrity of our democratic institutions. I appreciate the work that you do to ensure that Canadians can have confidence in our elections, and that they're conducted safely, securely and with integrity.

As I hear today, this work is necessarily ongoing. Threats are evolving, technologies change and public trust has to be continually earned. You mentioned some timely countermeasures and progress in implementing the recommendations of the foreign interference report. These are all things that contribute to safeguarding our security and our sovereignty.

We've touched on some of the things, but can someone talk broadly about how the threat of foreign interference has changed in recent years, leading up to this general election? What trends are we seeing?

I'm not sure exactly who wants to answer this.

**Nathalie Drouin:** I'll start, and my colleagues will add.

One actor that I think is operating differently in Canada than in the past is Russia. Before the illegal invasion of Russia into Ukraine, Russia didn't have a lot of interest when it came to Canada's democratic exercises. Because Canada plays a great role in supporting Ukraine, Russia has now more interest in Canada—not necessarily in our democratic exercises, but mainly to push its own narrative when it comes to Ukraine. We see Russia as a more important player in our domestic affairs than we used to.

The other thing that we already talked a little bit about is on the cyber side. Technology is evolving, and there is the use of AI. We

see more attempts to undermine our critical infrastructure and IT than we used to see.

Do you want to add a little bit?

**Tricia Geddes:** I will only add transnational repression. I know we've talked about it already today, but I think this is a really critical area. These are attempts by foreign states to intimidate, coerce or harass citizens, dual citizens, or others here in Canada. It's particularly focused on those who are critical of those foreign governments or their interests. I think this is concerning. This is something that I think we are all paying close attention to, and we need to provide additional supports there.

As my colleague from foreign affairs said, those are the areas in which, when we see it, we will continue to call out those who are perpetrating or supporting it. Honestly this has no place in Canada. We are a very rich and diverse country where we need to protect those citizens who are feeling vulnerable.

**Tim Louis:** Thank you.

The SITE task force report said, “Increasing our collective resilience against threats to our electoral processes is a whole-of-society responsibility.” Maybe the question about AI would fit into this.

How can we raise awareness about what the CEIPP is doing, and how would the outreach work?

You mentioned a feedback loop, Ms. Geddes. What can we do to increase Canadians' understanding of democratic institutions and how to protect themselves?

**Nathalie Drouin:** There's a variety of things that we are doing and that we need to continue to do.

Our two intelligence agencies, the Communications Security Establishment and CSIS, are both regularly out there, talking about the threats we are facing. Recently, the director gave a speech about the threat landscape. The CSE does exactly the same, especially on the cyber side. I'm sure you are personally receiving communications from your own Sergeant-at-Arms because he's seeing threats that MPs may face and he's raising this awareness.

Those are all the types of things we need to continue to do. Working with social media is another way to address that. There's a suite of things to enhance Canadians' awareness. Tricia also talked about what the foreign coordinator is doing with communities in many languages. This is also very important, because we are talking to all Canadians.

Sébastien, do you want to—

• (1220)

**The Chair:** I'm going to cut you off again. I apologize.

We'll go to Madame Normandin for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Drouin, in response to my last question, you said there had never been a time when the panel made a determination to inform the public but a party representative disagreed with the decision. You also said that, if such a situation had arisen, the panel would have had the final say.

Has the opposite ever happened? Has the panel ever decided not to communicate information to the public but a party representative aware of the information had a different view?

**Nathalie Drouin:** No, we haven't experienced anything like that.

**Christine Normandin:** Since a party representative is bound to secrecy and cannot, on their own, decide to pass on information, for example to a candidate who might be the subject of sensitive information, how is it decided whether or not to notify a candidate?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Often, that decision will be made with the intelligence agencies. In fact, it was one of Justice Hogue's recommendations to learn to translate intelligence into unclassified information. It's not always easy, because we often have to protect our sources. This is a skill that we began developing as part of the commission of inquiry, but that we must continue to work on. Our intelligence agencies can work on wording that can be presented to the candidate. When we see that it's important, we can work to reduce the information so that the person targeted by the threat receives an unclassified version. That is part of the solution to reduce the risk.

**Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

If that happens, is this information shared with all party representatives or only with those whose candidate or riding is believed to be targeted? In some cases, could there be disparities in the information provided to the party representatives?

**Nathalie Drouin:** The information will be passed on to the people who are able to take action to reduce the threat.

**Christine Normandin:** How is that assessed?

**Nathalie Drouin:** It really depends on the person's situation. For example, if I have to tell you that someone in your circle is trying to get into your network in order to influence you to do one thing or another, I may not have to tell everyone about it. You are the one who needs to have the right tools, and perhaps some of the people around you, if this threat is directed at you, but I may not need to talk to more people about it. So the action really depends on what you're trying to achieve to reduce the threat.

[*English*]

Just a really—

**The Chair:** We're well over again.

We'll move on to Mr. Cooper for five minutes, please.

**Michael Cooper:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The critical election incident public protocol's retrospective report states that, during the election, the panel concluded that “the ability to have a free and fair election...[in]...Don Valley North...was not threatened”. How did the panel come to that conclusion?

• (1225)

**Nathalie Drouin:** We were able to address what the candidate was facing in the early stage and redress the situation.

Maybe, Tricia, you want to add to that.

**Tricia Geddes:** There are a couple of things that I guess I would add. We did discuss this case a great deal. One of the principles we are involved in is to ensure we're not amplifying foreign interference where we feel it is not having an impact on the election results. That is one of the principles of the panel.

We did take a number of actions at that time to ensure the candidate himself had information at his disposal and also to make sure that the RCMP had information. There were a number of actions that were being taken then...but a very careful and deliberate conversation happening amongst the panel members as to whether or not we felt that this had impeded the ability to have a free and fair election in that riding.

**Michael Cooper:** Here's the situation.

Joe Tay, as the Conservative candidate, had a bounty placed on him by Hong Kong police. He was subject to a social media disinformation campaign by Beijing. In addition to that, he came before this committee and testified that he and his volunteers were harassed and intimidated. There were threats of violence, including a supporter receiving a parcel containing a dress splattered with red paint simulating blood and stabbed through the chest with a knife, sent as a graphic warning to not support his candidacy.

Mr. Tay's residence was surveilled on at least one occasion. There was a door-to-door disinformation campaign targeted at members of the Chinese diaspora community, including Chinese seniors homes. Mr. Tay reported that there was a significant drop in voter participation at Chinese seniors homes in the riding, and during the campaign he was warned by the RCMP that it was unsafe to canvass. It was so bad that he had to be checked in on, on a day-to-day basis, as to whether it was safe enough to go out and canvass, and all of this was happening in Canada during an election campaign.

In the face of all of that, what possibly could it take before the threshold would be met to say that this is not a free and fair election, that there is something here and, at the very least, that a full public notification needs to be made?

**Nathalie Drouin:** You can add, Tricia, but maybe, just to say, we did a regular follow-up also with the Conservative Party during the campaign. We also offered private security to the candidate: a program that was also available to all MPs facing threats. We were reassured by the party that the campaign was unfolding in the riding.

**Michael Cooper:** Well, I think most Canadians would be absolutely shocked that this sort of thing would be happening in Canada. It's quite astounding.

Now, the backgrounder provided through the Privy Council Office noted that there was a "deliberate and persistent" campaign, including disinformation, targeting Mr. Tay. Can you confirm if Beijing's Toronto consulate was involved in directing the interference campaign against Mr. Tay in Don Valley North?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Maybe we can talk to the engagement we had with China's representative on foreign interference.

**David Morrison:** There was no suggestion that we picked up of engagement by the Chinese consulate.

We did address the overall issue of foreign interference by China in the elections with personnel, as we did with all other governments, but we had no suggestion of active involvement by the Chinese consulate in Toronto.

**Michael Cooper:** Well—

**The Chair:** I'll cut you off there, Mr. Cooper.

We'll go to Madame Brière, please, for five minutes.

**Hon. Élisabeth Brière:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Drouin, Commissioner Hogue's final report states that the work was carried out in two phases. The first phase concerned the interference activities that foreign actors may have engaged in, and the second phase concerned the flow of information within the federal government in relation to those activities and the measures taken in response to them.

How do you rate your work on this issue and the response rate?

• (1230)

**Nathalie Drouin:** In terms of the information flow, we have a system in place that allows us to better identify who is reading what. This is a responsibility that falls specifically on the national security advisors when it comes to briefing the Prime Minister. I have access to quite an incredible amount of intelligence. I'm not talking about the election period, but the period during which the government is in office.

Together with my teams, the heads of the intelligence agencies, as well as the officials responsible for public safety and foreign affairs, I determine what information the Prime Minister must receive in the course of his duties. It's an exercise that requires a lot of judgment and that must take into account what the Prime Minister needs to know when he undertakes certain activities. It must also take into account the Prime Minister's availability. We will send him the information we deem most relevant at the time he needs it.

**Hon. Élisabeth Brière:** We agree that if the information deserves to reach the ears of the Prime Minister, he will find the time to listen to you.

**Nathalie Drouin:** Absolutely. When there is an emergency or information that the Prime Minister needs to know quickly, we always listen carefully and find a way to make ourselves available.

**Hon. Élisabeth Brière:** I see two areas where you have to strike a balance. First, there is the information itself, which may be public

or confidential. Second, you have to determine whether the disclosure of information could compromise national security.

Can you talk a little bit about those two things?

**Nathalie Drouin:** I would start by saying that the past few years and all the questions you asked before bring us to the basic principle that transparency must take precedence by default. Canadians need to be informed. It contributes to their resilience, and that resilience diminishes the effect of foreign interference activities. So, by default, transparency is paramount.

As I said earlier, we also have to learn to talk about realities without necessarily disclosing the sources, without putting them at risk and without cutting bridges, which could prevent us from obtaining future information. We've started learning how to do this, and we must continue.

To summarize my answer, I would say that there is always a need to communicate with Canadians, but the level of detail may differ depending on the circumstances.

**Hon. Élisabeth Brière:** There's a lot of talk about China, Russia, Pakistan and India. Do you think that, in the next election, there could be attempts at interference from the United States?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Canada expects all countries, including the United States, not to undermine our sovereignty or our affairs, including our elections. We will monitor the situation in an agnostic manner, that is to say, by considering that any country could interfere in Canada's affairs.

• (1235)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Mr. Van Popta, you have five minutes.

**Tako Van Popta:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Drouin, you stated in the report before us today that Canadians must have full confidence that their election is secure.

Reading through the report, I summarized that the panel's mandate is to monitor and identify threats of foreign interference, manipulation of information or something like that, to coordinate responses and to generally strengthen public confidence in our democratic institutions.

Mr. Morrison is very confident that, whatever foreign interference there may have been in the 45th election, it did not impact the outcome of the election.

Ms. Geddes highlighted that there are communities feeling vulnerable, particularly diaspora communities within Canada.

How do you measure your success in that part of your mandate to instill confidence in the public that our democratic systems are sound and secure? Do you do public polling?

**Nathalie Drouin:** As we've said, there is always a baseline of foreign interference into our activities. In our preparation for the general election, we did a lot of scenario planning. We anticipated what could come from different countries, and we tried to prevent whatever they were able to do.

Another thing that really comforted us was that when I looked at the activities we did in 2019 and in 2021, the result of the independent review, the result of the public inquiry, was such that we were reassured by independent voices that what we did and what we saw were completely aligned with our own conclusions.

Having said that, I'm not saying that there was no attempt to undermine our democratic exercise. We saw attempts, but we believe that the overall result was fair and sound for Canadians.

**Tako Van Popta:** That's fair enough. That's the conclusion you draw, right?

You're very knowledgeable on the topic, of course, and you have important meetings with other important people, but I'm asking about how you measure that the public is confident, as confident as Mr. Morrison is, that whatever foreign interference there was did not impact our election results.

People are feeling vulnerable. People are worried. How do you know that the public is as confident as you are?

**Nathalie Drouin:** The level of confidence—and we can look at specific data—of Canadians toward our democratic institutions is high. When we compare with other countries, it could be better. This is our work here, to maintain that high level of confidence in our public institutions.

**Tricia Geddes:** I completely agree with your points, Nathalie, but we do still have work to do here. We have been working in the national security community in Ottawa to try to build trust with those communities for a number of years, because we need those communities to have trust in our institutions. When they're feeling threatened and vulnerable, we need them to talk to us about the nature of those threats in order to have a better understanding of what can help mitigate those threats. We need to continue to have that conversation.

I agree. I think it's very good. We do polling. We do have some sense, but there's a lack of trust sometimes in government institutions that we all have to work together to overcome. In particular, you're highlighting a very important feature, that we really do need to work directly with those communities. We are making efforts, but there's certainly more we can do.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Wilkinson, you have five minutes, please.

● (1240)

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** You said that there was no significant change in the baseline, but, obviously, threats of foreign interference evolve over time. If you look at the 2021 election relative to the 2025 election, how did the threat of foreign interference evolve over that period?

**Nathalie Drouin:** The use of cyber-technology is on the rise, for sure.

The presence of Russia has also changed, not because they are looking for a specific outcome in our election—this is not what Russia is looking at—but because they want to influence their own narrative. I must say that, unfortunately, we are seeing more Canadians who believe that the conflict was started by Ukraine in 2022.

What Russia is doing is unfortunately getting traction. That is an example of something we were not seeing, as I said, in 2019.

Transnational repression, as Tricia discussed earlier, is also an important thing. The fact that we have identified that is also part of our conversations with other states, whether it's China or India, to make sure they help us. I'm not saying that all transnational repression is state-sponsored; sometimes it's foreign actors and not state-sponsored.

We are having those conversations with those countries to reduce the level of threat when it comes to transnational repression.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** You all have touched on this in a number of different answers, but if you think about the work you did during the 2025 campaign, what did you and what did we learn that can be applied to the next election? What are some additional things that the government should be thinking about doing to ensure we are appropriately protecting our institutions and our elections?

**Nathalie Drouin:** In terms of the best practices we should continue, we went out as a panel under the signature of the clerk prior to the election saying that we were setting up the panel. We need to bring that awareness.

I think we should keep the weekly briefing. You mentioned having an independent member before, and that is another thing we should keep. The briefings to parties and having clear representatives from all parties to be able to download information as it arises are other things we need to keep.

The diplomatic *démarche* that Foreign Affairs did is something we need to continue. Interdepartmental coordination is also something we need to continue to use.

**David Morrison:** I will add, because it relates to the prior question on the whole of society, that this isn't just federal elections; it's municipal elections and provincial elections.

Our adversaries can think longer term, so we need to continue exercises like the one we're engaged in right now to raise the awareness of Canadians throughout the country at all levels of government, in civil society and in academia that this is not going to go away. The publicity, best-practice sharing and awareness that this problem doesn't have a simple fix need to go on between elections.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** You foreshadowed my next question.

Historically, we've often had difficulty sharing sensitive information with provincial governments, yet we obviously must also be concerned about interference in provincial campaigns.

What are we doing and what should we be doing to appropriately engage the provinces to ensure they are prepared?

• (1245)

**Tricia Geddes:** In fact, I'm going from this committee appearance to a federal-provincial-territorial conversation with deputy ministers of public safety across the country.

At every single one of those discussions, which happen at least once a quarter, we have this conversation about what we've seen and what we've learned. We've brought in members of the SITE task force. We've offered briefings directly to each of them as they have prepared for their elections within the provinces and territories and also in the municipalities.

We're doing a big, broad outreach to those provinces, territories and municipalities, because David's point that this could affect all of them equally is entirely correct.

One other thing we should continue to do in the lead-up to these elections is increase our communications through different modes and in different languages. Our provincial and territorial counterparts are very good at informing us of the ways they're able to reach their constituents and ensure it's being done in the languages of their choice, beyond just English and French.

Those are really important tools we should continue to drill down on.

I totally agree with you and, in fact, I will raise it with them again this afternoon.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Madam Normandin, you have two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Drouin, as we know, a government is in an election period the day after the election, and that's even more true in a minority government context. You never know when an election might be called. As you mentioned, the cornerstone of the security and intelligence threats to elections task force is public trust in institutions. However, we know that this trust is eroding around the world, and Canada is no exception.

However, the context is unique and rapidly changing. The commissioner has not yet been officially appointed, although a name is circulating. There is no foreign agent registry yet. There are discussions about trade agreements with China, when China is one of the main sources of foreign interference. We saw Liberal members on a mission to Taiwan having to leave the country, evidently at China's request. There's also your departure, Ms. Drouin. You leave with considerable expertise, obviously.

With all these changes happening at lightning speed on the ground, how can the task force ensure that it is ready for the next election and, above all, ensure that the public will have confidence in the electoral process?

**Nathalie Drouin:** I would start by telling you that one of the recommendations of the commission of inquiry was that the SITE task force be made a permanent group and not a group that operates only during general elections. The group is now permanent and, although it represents a number of government organizations, it will be located at the Privy Council Office.

As you saw last year, the task force was used in by-elections. During by-elections, the caretaker convention does not come into effect. The government can make decisions, but we still needed a team to monitor the elections. The task force was therefore used for those purposes.

Although Canada is not as big as other countries, our national security teams are still very strong. In addition, the fact that there are five of us makes it possible to ensure continuity of expertise from one election to the next.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

Mr. Cooper, you have five minutes, please.

**Michael Cooper:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to follow up on my last line of questioning respecting Beijing's Toronto consulate and their involvement in targeting Mr. Tay. Mr. Tay testified before this committee that he believed Beijing's Toronto consulate was involved. He cited, for example, supporters being summoned by Beijing's Toronto consulate. That constitutes direct interference.

In the face of that, how can the panel possibly conclude that Beijing's Toronto consulate had no involvement?

**David Morrison:** I believe I said that I'm unaware of any information intelligence that would suggest that Toronto's consulate was involved.

In the case of Mr. Tay, we did undertake a *démarche* with the Chinese embassy here in Ottawa about the online activity dating as far back as December 2024, because there, we had a direct link between the PRC and the online action taken against Mr. Tay. As a member of the panel, I'm not aware of any other involvement by the PRC.

• (1250)

**Michael Cooper:** Just to confirm on that point, with respect to Beijing's embassy in Ottawa, Global Affairs had information or had linked the embassy to some of the disinformation on various social media platforms with respect to Mr. Tay. Is that correct?

**David Morrison:** We had linked the Chinese government, and we passed the message via the Chinese embassy.

**Michael Cooper:** Okay.

With respect to the activities of the Beijing consulate, you had no information regarding activities such as summoning individuals.

**David Morrison:** I personally had no information, and it is not something that I recall ever being brought to the panel.

**Michael Cooper:** Okay.

I just find it curious that you've indicated that there's no information about the consulate in Toronto, no information about the embassy being involved, but then when I pull up the backgrounder that was sent out regarding the transnational repression operation by Beijing, that then goes on to detail what information the panel had with respect to Mr. Tay. It specifically states that the PRC uses its diplomatic missions.

Why would that be specifically referenced in the backgrounder and here you are saying, actually, no, that's not the case?

**David Morrison:** If I had that piece of paper in front of me, I could imagine a circumstance in which a piece of paper describes transnational repression as it has existed in Canada and other countries, without specifically linking that to what was happening with Mr. Tay.

I will say that it was Public Safety and the RCMP and others who were speaking directly to Mr. Tay. I do not recall any suggestion, as we deliberated over this as a panel of five, of Mr. Tay suggesting that the Chinese consulate was involved.

**Michael Cooper:** Mr. Tay said as much. It's in the backgrounder in general terms.

Mr. Morrison, with the greatest respect, forgive me for thinking that the involvement of accredited Beijing diplomats is being downplayed here today because the Prime Minister is making a new world order with a Beijing-based communist regime.

**The Chair:** Do you have a response?

**David Morrison:** I'm not certain what the question is.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper, you have 30 seconds left.

**Michael Cooper:** It's a conclusion and I think one that is pretty evident.

Now, the backgrounder issued by the Privy Council that I've referenced states that the SITE task force has observed a transnational repression operation targeting the 45th general election. It then goes on to cite the specific case of Mr. Tay.

I just want to be clear, was the campaign broader than Mr. Tay?

**The Chair:** You can give a very brief response.

**David Morrison:** The three instances that I know of are Mr. Tay, which was a digital operation, and the two instances that we have already discussed with respect to Prime Minister Carney.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We'll move to Madame Kayabaga for five minutes, please.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you, Chair.

Could I get, from either Mr. Morrison or Madame Drouin, some comments on some of the recommendations that you can make to improve the critical election incident public protocol, security intelligence threats and the RRM?

If you have any recommendations on how we can improve those three systems that you can put out to the committee, it would be great.

• (1255)

**Nathalie Drouin:** I can give a couple of suggestions.

I think we need to continue to implement all the recommendations of the public inquiry. For example, we made some improvements in the last election, but we based those improvements on a clerk's guidance. I think it would be good to enshrine those new best practices into the protocol, so that may be something we can look at.

RRM is a fantastic unit. It can be even better equipped to operate all year-round. I know this is something we are looking at right now, especially to be able to detect foreign unauthentic or amplification tactics in Canada. When I say foreign, it can be state or non-state, but at least seeing some activities coming from abroad.

In order to raise the awareness that we all talked about this morning, we need public engagement with Canadians on a regular basis from the social society, from other media, from the different branches of government. That is something we need to continue to work on.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** When you said RRM, do you mean you need more staff?

**Nathalie Drouin:** Yes, I mean more staff, more capacity and also a clear mandate that they are operating year-round.

I should have said.... You previously referred to the registry. I think this is something we need to implement. Maybe you can talk about the early stage we're in, Sébastien.

**Sébastien Aubertin-Giguère (Assistant Deputy Minister and National Counter Foreign Interference Coordinator, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness):** Yes, absolutely. I can confirm that the government has proposed the nomination of a candidate and that there need to be two resolutions—one in the House, one in the Senate—about this candidate. The matter has been referred to PROC. I think this was done today. I think we have excellent candidates, but for the regime to be in place, we need regulations.

The comment period for the draft regulations ended yesterday, and we've received about 60 interventions from the public. We're going to analyze them and move forward to finalize the regulations.

We are also building the FITCO and then moving toward a coming into force quite soon, so I think it's progressing at a very high pace.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** I agree. I think the minister just announced it in the House this morning.

I agree with Madame Drouin's comments on the fact that Canadians are confident in our democratic institutions here in Canada. Perhaps Madame Drouin or Monsieur Morrison can comment on why it's important to keep the body that would look at foreign interference non-partisan in order for democracy to be maintained and in order for it to not have any personal or political interest in it.

**Nathalie Drouin:** First of all, we have a very important value as Canadians, freedom of expression, and we need to respect that. We have a very strong democracy and we need to uphold it.

Monitoring incidents and talking to Canadians about incidents we see during an election should not be seen as a partisan exercise in order to favour one option to the detriment of the other. This independence is really crucial, because otherwise, the whole system will fall apart and we will not be in a better position.

● (1300)

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

I'd like to thank our witnesses.

The committee is adjourned.

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