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• (1100)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 21 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 I continue, I would ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. You will notice a QR code; you can scan it to watch an awareness video.

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

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

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

I would like to welcome today's witnesses.

From the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, we have Vanessa Lloyd, deputy director, security and intelligence threats to elections task force.

From the Communications Security Establishment, we have Bridget Walshe, associate head, Canadian centre for cybersecurity, security and intelligence threats to elections task force.

From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have Saliou Babou, executive director, rapid response mechanism.

Finally, from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we have Greg O'Hayon, director general, federal policing security intelligence, intelligence and international policing, security and intelligence threats to elections task force. There's a lot of intelligence in that title.

Thank you for being here.

Ms. Lloyd will be delivering opening remarks on behalf of everyone.

You have five minutes.

Vanessa Lloyd (Deputy Director, Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to you and to the members of the committee.

As mentioned, my name is Vanessa Lloyd, and I am the deputy director of operations at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. I'm appearing this morning in my capacity as the CSIS chair of the security and intelligence threats to elections task force, the SITE task force, during last year's 45th general election.

I'm joined this morning by my colleagues from three other member organizations of the SITE task force, Bridget Walshe, who is the associate head of the Canadian centre for cybersecurity, part of the Communications Security Establishment Canada; Greg O'Hayon, director general of federal policing; and Saliou Babou, the executive director of rapid response mechanism Canada at Global Affairs Canada.

Members of the committee may recognize Ms. Walshe, Mr. O'Hayon and me from our participation in the weekly media technical briefings during the election period, where we were also joined by the assistant secretary to cabinet, communications, Laurie-Anne Kempton; assistant secretary to cabinet, Allen Sutherland; associate assistant deputy minister of Global Affairs, Larisa Galadza; and my colleague, Anam Alvi, the executive lead for operations at CSIS.

Mr. Babou also had the pleasure to appear before you last week.

I would also like to take a moment to highlight the involvement of other partners at Public Safety Canada, including the foreign interference coordinator at the integrated threat assessment centre, or ITAC, and at the office of the commissioner of elections, as well as Elections Canada, who contributed to, supported or considered the work of the SITE task force during the election, for example, during daily meetings of the assistant deputy ministers' electoral security coordinating committee, or ADMESCC, which was co-chaired by the Privy Council Office.

Each of these representatives and their teams were proud to have had a role in protecting the integrity of the last general election from foreign information manipulation and interference, transnational repression, cyber-threats and violent extremism. It's our privilege to represent a part of that work by appearing before this committee today.

I will start with the reminder to members that, while the SITE task force was stood up to provide enhanced monitoring of threats to general election 45 from March 24 to May 5, 2025, the ongoing work of its member departments, agencies and partners continues year-round under our respective mandates and as a strong national security community.

This collective expertise and co-operation ensure that SITE's reporting and assessments included information, intelligence and insights from all member organizations to form a comprehensive understanding of a range of threat actor capabilities, intentions and potential actions before and during the electoral process.

Those assessments were leveraged in the government's preparation for general election 45. For example, there were the periodic briefings to the critical election incident public protocol panel, or the panel, and the election security coordinating committee; the task force's inclusion in pre-election training sessions for key stakeholders; and the task force's participation in engagement efforts, for example, with the House of Commons and the leaders' debates commission.

Similarly, once the election was called, SITE delivered classified briefings to security-cleared representatives of political parties on possible threats to GE45, providing them with non-partisan insights and information to help protect their campaigns.

The task force also developed and contributed information on tactics used by threat actors as well as personal and cybersecurity advice, which was sent to all confirmed candidates by the Privy Council Office along with instructions on how to report incidents of potential foreign interference, cyber or violent extremist threats to SITE.

During the monitoring period, SITE produced daily situational reports based on reporting from the task force members. We met weekly and supported the daily ADM election security coordinating committee meetings.

The ADM election security coordinating committee reviewed SITE reporting and provided recommendations to the panel via weekly briefings by the director of CSIS as the chair of SITE on behalf of the SITE task force.

Any perceived threat can erode public confidence and trust in the integrity of Canada's democratic processes and institutions. Enabling an informed and resilient public is the best way to counter foreign interference. As such, the SITE task force members participated in the government's weekly media technical briefings on five occasions during the writ period, increasing transparency by sharing information about the threats that Canada faces and measures put in place to detect and counter those threats.

- (1105)

These technical briefings helped to inform Canadians of observed incidents and the evolving threat environment as a whole, as well as to provide reminders and best practice recommendations for the public in navigating the online ecosystem pre election day. Tools and resources published by the government and by individual SITE members prior to and during the election period were highlighted, as was the ongoing work taking place to safeguard the election.

This included providing an outline of the threat landscape during the first technical briefing and sharing information about the threat posed by detected instances of digital transnational repression and online information operations, as well as an overview of CSE's fifth report on cyber-threats to Canada's democratic processes during subsequent briefings.

The technical briefings ultimately informed the media and the public that SITE had not observed incidents determined by the panel to have impacted Canada's ability to have a free and fair election. This assurance was provided in advance of Canadians casting their votes.

Following the election, SITE published an after-action report, which detailed SITE's assessments in advance of the election and observed instances of foreign interference during the election. The report affirms that during the election period, SITE observed instances of foreign interference, such as digital transnational repression, inauthentic and coordinated amplification of online content and online threats such as scams and disinformation. These activities were observed at a small scale and remain difficult to attribute to a foreign actor.

Two of these instances were discussed openly during the weekly technical briefings. The report emphasizes that it is essential to remain vigilant against foreign interference, which can take the form of information manipulation and transnational repression.

Citizens who are informed about the threats to democracy are better equipped to critically evaluate information and resist manipulation, helping them to confidently cast their votes and engage in ongoing democratic processes at all levels of government.

Building this resilience involves making sure Canadians have access to reliable and factual information, which is precisely why the SITE task force engaged in such proactive communications. SITE hopes that the after-action report is helpful to citizens and to this committee in this regard.

The SITE task force will continue to share information publicly about the threats Canada faces during future democratic processes, as well as about the measures being put in place to detect and counter them. Individual task force members will also continue investigative efforts under their department's or agency's mandate and communicate with the public when possible.

Mr. Chair, thank you again for the opportunity to do that today and to be a part of the committee's study. My colleagues and I would be pleased to answer questions from members.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

Ms. Lloyd, you indicated that the SITE task force did not observe foreign interference activities that rose to the level of threatening Canada's ability to have a free and fair election, pursuant to the cabinet directive on the critical election incident public protocol. I hope you would concede that is a high threshold to meet.

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, the threshold for that determination is set according to the critical election incident public protocol, and the job of the SITE task force members was to ensure that we put all instances of reported threats to Canada's security, be they foreign interference or threats from violent extremism, before the panel for their consideration.

Michael Cooper: It is a high threshold, because it would be national in scope, wouldn't it? We're talking about compromising the ability to have a free and fair election across Canada. That's the standard.

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I believe our colleagues who appeared before you on the panel last week spoke to and gave evidence to that effect. What we want to ensure—

Michael Cooper: I would hope, Ms. Lloyd, with the greatest of respect, that you would be familiar enough with the standard to answer yes or no to that.

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, what I will reiterate is that the job of the SITE task force members was to ensure we had communicated sufficiently with Canadians such that it was clear that individual candidates could campaign—

Michael Cooper: Ms. Lloyd, I gave you a very simple.... I'm not trying to be adversarial here, but I am trying to get some basic answers.

I cited something in response to your testimony. You said that a determination was reached that interference activities did not rise to the level of threatening Canada's ability to have a free and fair election.

I asked you first if that's a high standard. Second of all, I asked you whether in order for that standard to apply it would encompass threats on a national scope.

These are straightforward questions—just an answer, please.

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I'll reiterate that the determination on whether the threshold had been met is one that is made not by the SITE task force members, but by the panel. Our responsibility in this process is to ensure that the ability for Canadians, campaigns and candidates to report to the SITE task force—

Michael Cooper: You won't answer that. The answer to that is, yes. It's very clear.

Bridget Walshe (Associate Head, Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force, Communications Security Establishment): Mr. Chair, if you'll permit me to add a little bit of elaboration to the response, I think—

Michael Cooper: I don't need a further elaboration. My time is limited.

We know that Beijing targeted Conservative candidate Joe Tay in Don Valley North. In addition to Don Valley North, in how many other ridings were foreign interference activities detected during the 2025 election?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, what I can tell the committee is that the SITE task force ensured that, prior to the election, all security-cleared representatives of the parties were provided the mechanism to ensure that all campaigns and individual candidates had the ability to report to SITE instances where they felt that foreign interference or other threats to the election could have been occurring.

Michael Cooper: Ms. Lloyd, the SITE task force gathers intelligence and information. It provides it to the panel. The panel is tasked with the cabinet directive. That includes informing candidates. That determines whether to go public. That determines whether threats reach the level of compromising an election on a national scale.

I just asked you a simple question. How many ridings, aside from Don Valley North, were targeted?

• (1115)

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I'm not able to provide you with the number of reports that came into the SITE task force. What I can assure the committee is that all incidents that were reported by the public or by candidates or campaigns were provided—

Michael Cooper: If you can't provide a number, then can someone on the panel provide a number?

Hon. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Isn't the witness supposed to have the same time as the questioner to answer?

The Chair: No, it's Mr. Cooper's time. We've paused it.

It is Mr. Cooper's time to address it. Typically, that is what the case is, but if there is a lead-up in what is, typically, a yes-or-no question—or a leading question, as we called it back when I was practising law—I think a short answer would be expected.

It is the member's time, and I'll turn it back to Mr. Cooper.

Bridget Walshe: Maybe, if I can add....

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

What I can say is that we worked across all our mandates. Each of the agencies who are members of SITE looked across threats coming to any and all ridings and really made sure that we were putting together that intelligence to inform the panel.

I think a very important part of that process this year was coming back and reporting to Canadians, not just on some of the individual issues that came up, but also on the information that gave, as my colleague, Ms. Lloyd, mentioned previously—

Michael Cooper: Again, I'm asking a simple question.

Ms. Lloyd referenced the fact that there were interference activities involving transnational repression and other activities, scamming, I think she referred to. I'm just asking if there were other ridings on the radar of the RCMP, on behalf of the Communications Security Establishment, CSIS and Foreign Affairs that were noted.

Were other ridings and candidates targeted?

Vanessa Lloyd: As my colleague has mentioned, the SITE task force members were alert and reported to the panel all instances, regardless—

Michael Cooper: I assume you're alert. I assume you report to the panel. That's your job.

I asked a question. Were any other ridings, in addition to Don Valley North, or candidates targeted, yes or no?

Vanessa Lloyd: As I mentioned, we were alert and reported all instances across the country, in all ridings—

Michael Cooper: This is going to be a very unproductive meeting—

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, we're—

Michael Cooper: —because all we're getting is stonewalling from the panel, and I think that when they....

Mr. Chair, I do raise a concern.

The Chair: Is this a point of order?

Michael Cooper: It's a point of order.

The Chair: We have a point of order from Mr. Cooper.

Michael Cooper: When questions are put to witnesses, I think they have a duty to answer. When I ask yes-or-no questions that are straightforward, and they obstruct, as we saw from this panel, I would ask that you direct them to answer questions that are straightforward in nature.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Madam Kayabaga, do you wish to add something?

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): No, I just hope to get my turn.

The Chair: Okay.

I can't make the witnesses answer. Your point has been made very clearly, Mr. Cooper.

I have been in similar positions as a member of the committee.

To witnesses, members are here and are elected to represent their constituents. If there are reasons, be it for national security, that issues are classified, perhaps those can be explained, but the expectation from members of this committee, if those issues are not classified, is the members' questions should be addressed specifically.

We have a lot of time left, and it will be a long committee meeting if this information isn't classified and members' questions aren't answered.

On that point, we will turn to Madam Kayabaga for six minutes, please.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you, Chair.

I also welcome our guests to this committee today.

Ms. Lloyd, I will start with you.

• (1120)

You mentioned that you provided a recommendation report on the public inquiry into foreign interference, which states that the SITE task force “guarantees the nimbleness needed to adapt to evolving situations”..

How does it encourage a nimble response to foreign interference?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I think it is important to share with the committee how the SITE task force has evolved its practices since the various studies on foreign interference, for example, by the experience of the public inquiry into foreign interference, as well as reports done by NSICOP on foreign interference.

What was different about this election, in addition to the ongoing collaboration between the operational members who you see appearing before you today, is we were much more transparent about reporting to Canadians incidents as we saw them. That was part of the direction given to the panel that was executed by the SITE members on the clerk's direction and guidance, which I believe the committee heard about in the testimony last week.

One of the things we need to keep in mind is that as threat actors evolve their tactics, the government must do so as well. Part of the mechanism for countering foreign interference was to ensure that every candidate, campaign and clear representatives of each party understood what it is to recognize foreign interference now.

Part of the effort that the SITE members made was to ensure that every confirmed candidate received an email from the SITE task force, which included information about how to detect foreign interference, made specifications about the difference between acceptable diplomatic behaviour and that which was beyond diplomatic engagements and provided them information on how to protect their social and digital selves, as well as how to report to CSIS and the RCMP threats of physical intimidation or violence.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: From your perspective, how prepared is the task force to go into another election compared to past elections?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, the task force is always prepared, since we have the experience of having now been stood up for three general elections. We have also been stood up since 2023 for 12 by-elections.

I think the power you see before you is the integrated approach of the national security community to executing our investigations under our individual mandates and, as my colleague Ms. Walshe mentioned, bringing that insight and analysis together to provide an informed view during a general election specifically to the panel and, during by-elections, to the deputy minister committee on intelligence action, which performs that role during the by-election functions.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: What would you say to Canadians who are concerned about election interference but may not fully understand the safeguards that are already in place? We've been studying this for a while, and it turns out a lot of Canadians are concerned. Can you let them know some of the safeguards that are in place?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, during the five weekly tech briefs that we had, we covered a range of topics to ensure that we were sharing information with Canadians, again, for the purposes of making them more resilient to attempts of foreign interference and violent extremist threats.

Part of the evolution of the way we approached the last general election was to ensure that a large amount of information was readily available to Canadians both by explaining it verbally during the tech briefings and by publishing tools like the tool kit for threats to democratic institutions. It also included a large number of back-grounders, individual SITE members' reports and information in multiple languages.

When we came forward to speak about instances of transnational repression, for example, that information, because of the nature of

the threat actor, was provided in English, French and simplified Chinese. The CSIS "Foreign Interference and You" document, which I believe has been shared with this committee's chair in past appearances, is available in nine languages.

Part of making the effort to communicate is ensuring that Canadians down to the individual citizen level are equipped with the tools and information to recognize threats against them, particularly in the cyber domain, and help them be digitally savvy. For example, CSE's Get Cyber Safe campaign is one of the tools we hope citizens use on an ongoing basis for their engagement in daily life.

Bridget Walshe: Mr. Chair, I'd like to add to that response.

We did a lot of work even ahead of the election by studying and understanding, for example, the threats posed by artificial intelligence to democratic processes, and we put that out in advance.

From leading up to elections to making sure there's a lot of information available to Canadians ahead of time and briefing candidates, as Ms. Lloyd mentioned, we made sure we were providing a lot of information and resources.

We offer a hotline to candidates during an election. Should they have any questions or concerns from a cybersecurity perspective, they have one number or one email they can use to reach out so they're supported.

As Ms. Lloyd mentioned, we have the Get Cyber Safe campaign. It's true that it's tough to reach all Canadians to make sure everybody understands the message and the clarity, but we're certainly investing quite a bit to spread the messages across social media and through the tech briefings we had and to make every effort to ensure the guidance, advice and practical steps are available to Canadians out there.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will turn now to Madam Normandin.

There will be a cameo, which I am excited for. Apologies to our witnesses that they may not be the star of the show for today.

On a side note, I don't understand how he could be sleeping during a PROC committee meeting. That's absolutely shocking.

Madam Normandin, you have six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much.

I hope my questions won't force you to lie.

Witnesses, thank you for being with us, especially since some of you are appearing for a second or third time.

I want to start with a question about your relationship with social media platforms.

Last week, the Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Perrault, told us that when disinformation is posted online he is sometimes able to communicate with social media platforms. Generally speaking, they work together quite well to take down pages.

Have some platforms systematically refused to respond to your requests?

We know that disinformation posts sometimes garner a large audience. For a social media platform, there can be value in keeping them up.

Have you seen any cases where the platform was reluctant to take down a disinformation post?

Saliou Babou (Executive Director, Rapid Response Mechanism, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I thank the member for the question, Mr. Chair.

It's true that we have a collaborative relationship with social media platforms. When we identify information threats, we contact the platforms and submit that information to them so that they can determine whether those threats violate their own rules, their own terms of use. That's the way we do things. Each platform determines whether the content should be taken down or whether they continue the conversation with us. It's a variable geometry relationship. Some platforms are more collaborative than others.

At Global Affairs Canada, we prefer to let the platforms themselves communicate the measures they are taking as a result of our recommendations. We feel it's our duty to communicate with these platforms whenever we have information that could be relevant to them. So we have a fairly transactional collaborative relationship with the platforms.

I couldn't tell you which platforms are more reluctant than others. Some chose to communicate publicly following the federal election, while others did not.

Christine Normandin: Thank you.

What I understand from your answer is that there's a lot of reliance on collaboration, which couldn't happen in some cases. I'm thinking in particular of platforms controlled by certain states. Take for example China, a key player in spreading disinformation.

As I understand it, there's no coercive or other mechanism that would make it possible, for example, to take down or suppress a non-compliant post that could be seen by millions of people, if the social media platform doesn't collaborate.

Is that correct?

Saliou Babou: It's a bit more nuanced than that. The relationship with the platforms is one of the tools at our disposal to try to counter these information threats.

We have other tools at our disposal in collaboration with other partners in the intelligence community that enable us to take more

robust action when necessary, always under the authority of our superiors and ministers.

Christine Normandin: I find your answer interesting.

At what point could one decide to forcibly have a post taken down? If problem posts have remained on social media—I'm referring here to questions my Conservative colleagues asked—it's because there's been unwillingness to take them down in some cases.

Am I reading the situation correctly?

• (1130)

Saliou Babou: I'd just like to make a small clarification. I'll let my colleague Ms. Walshe add to that. It's not about having information removed, because we're not responsible for content moderation online. Rather, we work to counter information threats. There's a distinction and a nuance to be made.

In terms of the Canadian government's position, we never ask platforms to take down content.

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I'd like you to tell me about the review of the national security strategy.

The current strategy dates back to 2004, so it's been in place quite a long time. A new strategy was supposed to be issued to us in 2025, and Ms. Drouin had been entrusted with the mandate.

Now that she is stepping down, can we expect a new national security strategy to be taken up in the coming weeks or months?

[English]

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

[English]

That would be beyond the purview of the members you have before you today, Madam Normandin.

What I can say is that should a new national security strategy be issued, we would reflect on how that applies to our responsibilities as SITE members in going forward to a next democratic process, whether that be a by-election or a general election, and—

[Translation]

Bridget Walshe: May I add a nuance about my colleague's answer and the relationship with social media platforms?

[English]

During the election, there were certainly engagements with social media companies to provide context. While it's absolutely true that it's the purview of those social media companies, since they own their platforms, to moderate what goes onto them, we wanted to ensure that there was information about those threats provided to those companies. Our colleagues at the PCO arranged for regular meetings with the platforms, and at one point we did brief them on the types of threats that we see, especially the threats posed by artificial intelligence in the use of social media to propagate misinformation and disinformation and those sorts of things.

The other thing I'll mention is that when it comes to candidates in elections, as I said, we ran a hotline for candidates to raise concerns about cybersecurity. In those particular instances, should a candidate ever say that there's wrong information about them online, we're not going to be able to contact the social media company and we would not be in a position to ask them to take it down, but we can provide the candidate with information and advice on the tools that are available to them and to the party so that they can have this discussion—

The Chair: I have to interrupt there. We're well over the time.

We'll turn to Mr. Jackson for five minutes, please.

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

It's nice to meet all the witnesses. Some of you have been here before, and it's nice to see you again.

I'm picking up where Mr. Cooper left off. I think Canadians are quite concerned about the example of Don Valley North. It was shocking to me, frankly, as a new member of Parliament, and it's shocking to many of the constituents I talked to.

In what other constituencies were foreign interference activities detected during the 2025 election?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, perhaps I'll answer the question this way.

It's important to remind Canadians that the SITE member task force investigates threat activities of foreign states in relation to foreign interference and investigates individual entities that are of concern from the violent extremism perspective. We did say during the tech briefings that in not all instances would we be able to share the detail of where we detected those occurrences—

Grant Jackson: Why would that be the case? Why would you not be able to share with Canadians whether their constituency was targeted by a foreign state or not? I don't understand the lack of transparency there.

Vanessa Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the question.

If you'll permit me to finish, what we were trying to balance in the instances when we did speak publicly—and we did so on two occasions, out of the five appearances we had—were a number of concerns.

First, we wanted to ensure that when we did speak publicly, we were not unduly amplifying the messages of foreign interference actors by contributing to the dialogue. Second, in some instances

we needed to ensure that we were ensuring the integrity of national security investigations—

Grant Jackson: I understand that during the election—I really do—but we're well past the election now. The results are finalized and certified. They're in government and we're not, and it's pretty final, so I don't understand now why you cannot share that. Just give us the number of seats.

• (1135)

Bridget Walshe: Mr. Chair, maybe I can pop in and provide a bit of additional context.

We look all the time at threats. While SITE is stood up for enhanced monitoring during an election period or a by-election period, we all work together as colleagues, and our teams all work together as colleagues all the time. If we see any threat, a foreign interference threat, for example, threatening our democratic processes, we would work together to address it under our own mandates at any time.

Grant Jackson: Was my seat targeted? Do you think I have the right to know that as a member of Parliament?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, what I can tell the member is that during the course of the election, the security-cleared representatives of all the parties were provided with both unclassified and classified briefs, and we ensured that any information that was reported to the SITE task force was understood during those conversations.

On the question of the post-election impact, as my colleague said and as we have heard in testimony and as our minister, the Minister of Public Safety, has also said, foreign interference itself is a threat that is persistent and pervasive. That was also a conclusion of Commissioner Hogue.

As my colleague Bridget said, as we share necessary information to equip Canadians to be resilient against those threats, we do need to ensure that we do not compromise the methodologies that—

Grant Jackson: Okay. I have one more question.

Madam Drouin was here last week and testified at the committee that countermeasures were deployed that disrupted or even neutralized attempts at foreign interference in certain constituencies. Will you tell us where those countermeasures were deployed?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I appreciate that I will frustrate the member with my answer, but it is important that we, as operational agencies, maintain the ability to protect our methodologies and our investigations in our ongoing efforts to ensure that Canadians are protected from the efforts of hostile states, so I will not, for the reasons of protecting the integrity of those efforts, share the details of where we applied each and every instance of our interventions to protect Canadians during the election period.

Grant Jackson: Thank you. That was very clear, actually. I appreciate that answer.

I just find it very concerning that, countermeasures aside, you will not tell Canadians which constituencies were targeted. The Don Valley North example was not shared as widely as perhaps you think it was, as many of us were shocked to learn the details.

If other constituencies are subjected to threats, either during an election period or ongoing, I believe, and I think most of us believe, that Canadians have the right to know which constituencies are being targeted by foreign states. I strongly encourage you folks to consider being more accountable and publicly transparent about sharing the names of those constituencies.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I turn to Mr. Louis for five minutes.

Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Thanks to all of our witnesses for being here. It's more than once, actually. Your extensive experience is on display here, both in intelligence operations and national security threat assessments. I want to appreciate your service to free and fair elections.

I will start by directing a question to Ms. Lloyd.

You mentioned in your opening statement that during the 2025 general election, the SITE task force provided weekly briefings to the media about foreign interference. What feedback did you receive from those briefings, and what role do Canadian media have in helping to reach the Canadian public?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, in fact, we are very grateful for the media being along with us on that journey and sharing the information verbally, as I said earlier, and pointing regularly and often to the tools that we were publishing and putting before Canadians during the course of the election.

The purpose of doing so was to ensure that Canadians had the tools they needed to navigate the information ecosystem in particular, and we received quite positive feedback, perhaps unusually, from the media in offering those briefings.

I will also say that it was one of the elements for which the security-cleared members of each party commended us, because it allowed a frequent engagement with Canadians and also allowed campaigns on the ground that were supporting individual candidates to understand how things were shifting and to be alerted on issues. It also encouraged reporting, both from Canadians and from members of the campaigns, including volunteers.

• (1140)

Tim Louis: Thank you.

Ms. Walshe, you had started an answer before. I want to see if you can expand on it.

What are some of the ways that Canadians, when they're hearing this information—misinformation, disinformation—can learn and educate themselves? We're trying to reach out to Canadians to help educate them. It sounds like you have a number of programs in place.

Bridget Walshe: Mr. Chair, absolutely, we do a lot of work to understand the threats that exist online, what those cyber-threats are that target Canadians and Canadian organizations. One piece of that is looking at the threats that come to our democratic process. Approximately a year ago, we published a report on the threats that AI poses to cybersecurity.

Part of that is really about being transparent and providing a mechanism to let Canadians know what those threats are. The fact that cyber-threat actors are able to automate what they do, do it at scale and do it faster and in a less expensive way means that the threats increase. The fact that we have generative AI that allows somebody to create deepfake images has clear implications for our democratic process and the spreading of misinformation. We publish that information and make it available so that Canadians are informed about their decision-making, but it's not the only piece that we put out there.

As mentioned previously, we have a campaign called Get Cyber Safe, which is used to distribute and disseminate that information on social media. We have resources on misinformation, disinformation, other cyber-threats and things that anyone can implement to make themselves more resilient from a cybersecurity perspective.

We're not the only ones, though. Our colleagues at the Privy Council Office have the democracy tool kit. Our colleagues at CSIS, at the service, produce information about those threats. It's all across the table. The rapid response mechanism puts pieces out, and the RCMP has education campaigns.

It's not something that only we do, but there is an awful lot of work out there to make sure that Canadians are well informed heading in as they're making their choice to vote.

Tim Louis: That's very helpful. Thank you.

I believe it was you, Ms. Lloyd, who mentioned that you have enhanced monitoring during elections but that there is always ongoing work in between at some sort of a reduced capacity. You also mentioned that there have been 12 by-elections that you've overseen.

Can you give us a perspective on how a by-election is handled? It's not a full election, yet it's not off-season. How is that handled?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, since 2023, we have been mandated to stand up for every by-election. A key difference to understand is that during a by-election, we're not in a caretaker period. That means the panel is not stood up to be able to receive the information from the SITE task force. Instead, it is considered in the same tempo and at the same depth by a deputy ministerial committee for intelligence and action. It is that body that then responds to the task force members in terms of the actions they would like us to take on what we've observed.

All of those by-elections are subject to the same transparency as the general election in terms of the fact that we do publish—and you can find them on PCO's website for SITE—the after-action reports for each of those 12 by-elections. They make clear where we saw or didn't see foreign interference.

To the member's point and to Ms. Walshe's comment, there is, for certain threat actors, a baseline of foreign interference threats, for example, that takes place all of the time. While elections are an opportunity to conduct focused foreign interference, threats to democratic societies, including Canada, are a standard operating procedure for certain threat actors.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Because we have a two-hour panel, we will do Madam Normandin for five minutes, Mr. Cooper for five minutes and Madam Brière for five minutes. Then we'll take a five-minute break for the benefit of everyone.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for five minutes.

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to continue asking questions about disinformation, particularly with respect to social media spreading it. I imagine that newspapers don't spread a lot of disinformation.

Your answers give me the impression that disinformation is the panel of experts' Achilles heel. You talked about cybersecurity and other threats, but I imagine that it's really disinformation that could have the most impact on the outcome of an election.

From what I understand, you don't really have any measures in place to counter disinformation or stop the spread of intentionally biased misinformation.

I'd like your comments on that.

When we were talking about robust measures, Mr. Babou, you mentioned that they might be necessary for cybersecurity incidents, but not for disinformation incidents.

Did I understand correctly?

• (1145)

Saliou Babou: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for the question.

I'll provide a little background. We're talking about information manipulation, which is something broader than pure disinformation. It can also be the inauthentic amplification of content that might be truthful.

It's not the committee's or our unit's job to determine what information is true. We're more concerned about the source of the information. If the information is linked to a state actor but that link is not made public, we believe that should be shared with the public. The amplification and virality of this inauthentic content is also something we feel we must communicate to the public.

As for measures to counter this information manipulation, you're absolutely right to say that there's no way in the digital environment to turn off the tap. As Ms. Walshe said earlier, part of the solution is to inform the public so that they can stay well informed and think a little more critically about the information obtained online.

All government agencies have a role to play in this issue, but civil society also has a large part to play. We work with some institutions, and we fund some as well, to get the public to have a more critical eye on the information that's being consumed.

Then there are other measures that can be taken to focus on certain sources of information that are less credible and more critical. I think that's what we did during the election, for example. Take for example the incident where, with intelligence sources and open data sources, we were able to inform the Canadian public that a very popular WeChat account was actually linked to the Chinese government.

When the information is received, it allows the public to exercise judgment. There's no silver bullet solution in and of itself. It's a set of tools that we're trying to make available to Canadians so that they can make more informed choices about the information they consume.

My colleague Ms. Walshe may want to add to that.

Christine Normandin: If I may, I would like to add something about this. I have about a minute of speaking time left.

You said it was impossible to turn off the tap, but at the same time, you're trying other methods to make the public understand that certain accounts and certain posts are problematic. However, generally speaking, people who get their news on social media are perhaps less interested in traditional media.

Isn't that a waste of time, and shouldn't we reconsider the possibility of turning off the tap, as you said?

Saliou Babou: That's more a question for the lawmakers. This is something that parliamentarians should be debating. It's not up to the government to know what position to take with the platforms.

For us, I would say that it's not a waste of time. I think measures must be taken. During the last election, I think we were very transparent in sharing as much information as we could with the Canadian public. I believe it's our duty to do that, and it's our responsibility as Canadians and as public servants too. This is an ongoing effort, and we will continue to do that.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will go to Mr. Cooper for five minutes, please.

Michael Cooper: Mr. Chair, I'm going to continue where I left off. I'm going to try again.

In addition to Don Valley North, how many candidates and how many ridings were targeted by foreign interference activities?

• (1150)

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for the follow-up question.

Unfortunately, I'm not able to tell you the numbers of the incidents or the reports we received. I can tell you that foreign interference activities—

Michael Cooper: You're not able to provide the numbers. Will you undertake to provide those numbers to the committee?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, for reasons of privacy of the reporting and for national security reasons as it relates to the individual incidents, I can provide assurances to the member that in instances where we observed other incidences for which we cannot speak publicly, that those instances where it affected a riding or candidate were a subject of conversations with the security-cleared members of each party.

I would also mention to the committee that there is a classified version of our after-action report, and parliamentarians who sit on the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians have access to that report as well.

Michael Cooper: Well, thank you for that.

Based upon your answer, I think I'm able to discern that other candidates and other ridings were targeted. I'm not asking you to disclose the particulars of where those ridings are or who those candidates are; I was simply asking if you would be able to provide a number so that we can have an idea of how big or how small this problem was.

Vanessa Lloyd: As I believe I mentioned in my remarks, what we did observe was small scale, and in no instance did the panel determine that there was an impact on the ability to have a free and fair election, either at the national level or at the riding level.

I could perhaps be helpful to the committee by sharing that we did receive reporting from individual members of the public, as well as from candidates. Each instance was explored by the various members before you today, and all of those instances were put before the panel for their consideration.

Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

What foreign actors were responsible for these activities? We certainly know that Beijing was responsible for the targeting of Joe Tay, as well as for the WeChat propaganda campaign involving Mark Carney that largely promoted him, although there were some contrasting narratives.

I presume Beijing was also involved in some of these other instances. Is that the case?

In addition to that, what other states were involved in these concerning activities?

Vanessa Lloyd: Before we began the election period, the SITE task force did undertake an assessment of what we expected to see during the election period. That included an overview that was provided to Canadians and the public through the very first technical brief. In that brief, we outlined that we expected to see, as MP Normandin mentioned, a range of activities specific to disinformation, for example, as well as the potential for cyber-activities. We didn't expect to see incidences of violent extremism.

We went through each of the countries that we expected to see conducting some activities—

Michael Cooper: My time is very limited.

I understand that there was work done in anticipation of what might happen during the election, but we've had the election. I'm asking what states were involved in the activities that were identified as being foreign interference.

Vanessa Lloyd: In the after-action report, we outlined that instances were observed that related to the People's Republic of China and to Russia. We indicated that we were also monitoring for foreign interference efforts by both India and Pakistan.

Michael Cooper: Okay.

Mr. O'Hayon, is the RCMP undertaking any investigations with respect to foreign interference-related activities that occurred during the 2025 election?

Greg O'Hayon (Director General, Federal Policing Security Intelligence, Intelligence and International Policing, Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): As we confirmed during the technical briefings, an investigation was initiated into the incidents related to candidate Tay. However, in terms of confirming the existence of criminal investigations that were triggered during the 45th general election, the RCMP does not publicly disclose whether or not a criminal investigation exists until charges are laid.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Cooper.

I will go to Madam Brière for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. It's a bit like Groundhog Day for some of them.

My Conservative colleague pushed you a bit on sharing information that could be sensitive during a campaign, for a candidate or for a party.

Can you talk about the importance of getting all the security clearances before gaining access to the information you need?

How can that influence decision-making in a timely manner when we receive information through an intermediary, and not directly? Someone may not have the right security clearance, the clearance that allows them to obtain all the relevant information to make the best possible decision under certain circumstances.

Vanessa Lloyd: I'll start.

Mr. Chair, I thank the member for the question.

[English]

I am happy to be able to share with the committee that we were successful in securing two cleared candidates for each party to be able to share the relevant information. We provided briefings to those individuals before the election, over the preparatory period at the outset of the election and during the election.

We also ensured that we gave as much information as possible to each candidate and to each campaign. We did that in a way that equipped them with not necessarily classified detail about threat actors, as referenced by the Conservative member, but on what foreign interference, for example, looks like, and we ensured that each candidate and campaign had the ability to report it to SITE.

We are also conscious that although we work constantly to improve the efficiency of our communication with Canadians, there is still hesitancy, in some instances, to trust the institutions of government. Therefore, in particular as it relates to foreign interference that can have a real impact on individuals, we wanted to ensure that there are mechanisms for both individual citizens and volunteers to report it through a chain of trusted engagements that they have with either the campaign managers for particular ridings or through the national representatives we were briefing on a regular basis.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Would anyone like to add something on this question?

Bridget Walshe: Absolutely, I can add a little bit from the cybersecurity perspective.

While it's true that a lot of the information that we have and that we use to inform on threats to the election is classified, we also work hard to make sure that we are able to share when we can. Both ahead of the election and during the election, we shared a lot of information about the details that we saw from a cybersecurity perspective, for example. During some of those media technical briefings and in some of our previous publications on threats linked to the government of Iran, for example, which is conducting cyber-threats online, we tried to share enough detail so that especially candidates and anyone involved in the campaign had the information to know and to recognize when they might be targeted.

That very high level of precision and technical detail is something that we really strive to make sure that we continue to improve on and share.

[Translation]

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Thank you very much.

It sounds like there's a lot of work being done to respond to situations. That's to be expected. My colleague asked you about social media. Obviously, once the post is online, it's easier to react and inform people.

Is it still possible to do prevention work?

Saliou Babou: I thank the member for the question, Mr. Chair.

Yes, a lot of work is done upstream. As was said earlier, this is ongoing work. We have databases and access to narratives that we monitor on a daily basis with a team of analysts. All this posturing is taken during elections, and even before elections, to set the monitoring parameters, especially with regard to digital platforms, in our case.

In addition, a lot of incidents are detected and not necessarily reported, for a number of reasons. In particular, we don't want to amplify content that wouldn't be present in the Canadian ecosystem. An analysis is also done on that.

To answer your question, I would say that it's not only about being reactive once the threat is known. Work is also being done to ensure that the threat doesn't reach a point where it could influence Canadian public opinion.

It's the same thing, I believe, for the other members of the SITE task force.

● (1200)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We are over time.

We'll suspend for five minutes to stretch our legs.

● (1200)

(Pause)

● (1205)

The Chair: Welcome back.

We will continue with Mr. Van Popta for five minutes.

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

Thank you to the panellists for being here.

I'm going to quote from page 4 in your report:

None of the incidents [of foreign interference] observed by the SITE TF during GE45 were determined by the Panel to have had an impact on Canada's ability to have a free and fair election.

I think you reconfirmed that several times in your testimony earlier today.

I'm going back to the report of Commissioner Hogue into foreign interference. She stated that in her opinion, information manipulation by foreign actors "poses the single biggest risk to our democracy. It is an existential threat."

I think you all appreciate that the public is alarmed by that. Our democratic processes are very important to us. We want to know that we have free and fair democratic elections. You say that we have, yet it's an existential threat, so how do you connect those two?

If I could clarify where I'm going with this question, you also state as your goal: "Canadians must have full confidence that their election is secure." How do you connect all of that together? There's alarm on the one side, but you're hoping that we're feeling secure about our election processes.

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I would offer to the member that we're certainly grateful that each department here had the opportunity to participate in the public inquiry on foreign interference. Again, the instances that we saw in this particular election did not meet the threshold, and where we could, we spoke about the instances that we did see.

One of the things we emphasized to Canadians as it relates to the security of their vote was to ensure that on two occasions, during the technical briefings, we shared with Canadians that their votes are secret and their votes are secure. I believe the committee heard last week from the commissioner of elections, and during the technical briefings we often pointed to the measures that our colleagues at Elections Canada were undertaking to ensure that the activities of voting at the polling stations were undertaken securely. We emphasized the nature of foreign interference, which is that foreign interference by hostile state actors is an attempt by a hostile state actor to influence a vote and that the system of voting in Canada ensures that votes are secret and are secure.

● (1210)

Tako Van Popta: I understand that you are all highly educated people who dedicated the last number of years to exactly this topic and are very well informed. Your meetings strive to maintain "a high level of situational awareness throughout the election period." That's another quote from your report.

You have a lot of high-level meetings with very important people. How does that communicate to the public, and are you comfortable that it is being communicated? Ms. Walshe, you talked about the Get Cyber Safe campaign. How effective has that campaign been?

Bridget Walshe: The Get Cyber Safe campaign is effective at reaching Canadians and making sure that the information and advice that we have out there on how to protect themselves and on navigating social media and misinformation and disinformation is reaching Canadians. That's one piece—

Tako Van Popta: How do you measure that?

Bridget Walshe: Measurement is a tricky one, but we certainly put a lot of effort into making sure that we're making it very available and promoting it.

It's not just that. It's also that during the election campaign, all of the the media briefings that we had were not just about sharing information about the threats that we see and pointing Canadians to where they can find advice to help protect themselves from those threats, but also in talking about the process that we use, the fact that we work together, that this is a very collaborative effort among the security organizations so that we're providing a level of confidence that we are looking for those threats and we are advising on them and mitigating them.

Tako Van Popta: Fair enough.

Do you know that the message that this is an existential threat for Canadians is coming through? Do you know that?

Vanessa Lloyd: I think that one of the things that we would look to evolve in the future is definitely meeting communities where they are. We started that in the last election by ensuring that materials were available in multiple languages.

Also, in the case of transnational repression cases that we did speak about publicly, we engaged our colleague, the national counter foreign interference coordinator, who engaged with various community organizations across the country to understand the pulse, if you will, around those incidents. This is an area where I believe we will endeavour to do more in the future as a national security community.

Tako Van Popta: I'm going to have a little more specific question.

Page 9 of—

The Chair: I'm sorry. You're over the time. They're all very important questions, and we have plenty of time to ask more very important questions.

We'll go to Madam Kayabaga, please.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you, Chair.

Through you, Chair, to Madam Lloyd, and without asking for any classified details, how does the task force assess the relative threat posed by different foreign states operating across Canada, and how do you assess the priority of that during an election period?

Vanessa Lloyd: The question is on how we assess the threats and how we assess the priority.

We bring together classified and unclassified information. We bring together, as Madam Walshe said, the insights and information from all of the organizations present here, but also inputs from the broader national security community. For example, observers on the SITE task force also include the commissioner of elections and Public Safety's counter foreign interference coordinator. It is really by accumulating the wealth of experience and insights of the community that we come to an assessment and an evaluation of the information and facts that we have before us.

In terms of prioritizing, I can assure you that this community takes every instance of foreign interference extremely seriously, as we do any threats to the security and safety of candidates or campaigns. On your question of priority, it's not so much prioritization as it is of ensuring that we address all instances during an election period.

• (1215)

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you.

In the last election, there were obviously a lot of concerns around foreign interference. We have had the elections commissioner here, and he's told us that our institutions are some of the safest around the world. However, this question is raised quite often, and there is a specific case that our colleagues on the other side have raised.

There could be an election at any time, because we are in a minority Parliament. There's a lot of work that your task force is doing, but it's not palpable to the public. What information can you share that would help someone in the riding of London West feel much safer about the next election, which could happen any time from now?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, perhaps I'll answer the question in two ways.

All of the information that we provided during the technical briefings is still available to all Canadians, but more importantly, all of the tool kits to protect democracy, to be cyber-safe, to understand and navigate the social media environment of information and disinformation remain available to all Canadians. We would look to amplify and increase that on an ongoing basis, and we do so as individual member departments.

In addition to the foreign interference document, a new document from the service, there is also a CSIS-specific document that relates to threats to democratic institutions, similar to the report that Ms. Walshe emphasized.

I would reiterate that a way to do better in the future would be to ensure that those publications are available in even more languages and that they are understood through engagement efforts with those Canadians and individual communities on an ongoing, sustained basis, not only during an election but also on an ongoing basis.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: We know that extortions have impacted communities in Surrey and Brampton and other places, and some of those extortions have been linked to foreign interference. Is there any work that you're doing to address or assess the impact of the linkage between foreign interference and the extortions that are happening in the communities of Surrey and Brampton and in other areas in the GTA, where it's very related to ethnic groups? What's that linkage around foreign interference and extortions?

Vanessa Lloyd: What I would share with the committee is that it's a very complex world that we are facing in terms of navigating national security. The CSIS director, in his public speech in November 2025, highlighted the overlap of the various tools that are available to hostile state actors to be able to perpetrate foreign interference.

We also are very conscious of the Venn diagram of the types of techniques that foreign actors will use. In some instances, there

may be overlap with the use of criminal proxy agents. In the foreign interference space—and CSIS has issued an alert about this for Canadians—there may also be the use of private investigators to assist and enable transnational repression. Similarly, in the cyberspace, we are aware of the overlap between criminal entities that support various hostile states in undertaking those efforts.

While I won't speak to the specifics of any ongoing efforts by the RCMP or other police of jurisdiction as they relate to extortion specifically, we can tell you that we do monitor the efforts of multiple states as they relate to the engagements of proxies, private sectors or criminal organizations. That is part of what we look at in monitoring for threats to Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

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

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

If I may, I want to preface my question.

In November, Charles Burton appeared before the committee. He told us about the work he'd done, particularly on the Kenny Chiu case. He told us about WeChat and the very sophisticated aspect of that platform, particularly with respect to not only information manipulation, but also mass manipulation. We know that countries that engage in foreign interference, such as India, have banned this platform.

People have discussed banning TikTok. I know you're going to tell me that it's not your role to decide whether or not these instruments should be banned. That's up to the lawmakers. However, to make an informed decision, we need to know what's happening on the ground. You are our eyes on this.

Based on your experience in the field, to what extent is WeChat, for example, a major vector for disinformation?

• (1220)

Saliou Babou: I thank the member for her question, Mr. Chair.

My answer may disappoint you. Yes, I will confirm that it's not our role to determine which platforms should be monitored or what action should be taken with respect to any given platform.

What I could say is that we made certain incidents that occurred on the WeChat platform public, before and during the election. Our work is ongoing. When we perceive information threats, we make them public so that people can make informed choices.

As for whether platforms should be monitored more closely, I would say that that question isn't our responsibility. Our job is to communicate information threats, whatever they may be, on WeChat and other platforms, as is the case with elections.

Christine Normandin: I understand that you can't make the decision. However, in terms of the number of attempts to disinform, was WeChat one of the platforms that was often involved, based on what you saw on the ground?

Saliou Babou: I can confirm that WeChat was one of them, as we've publicly identified two disinformation campaigns that took place on WeChat.

In our technical briefings, we also identified campaigns on other platforms. It's one of many platforms that we monitor continuously. As information threats emerge, we share them with the public.

However, I couldn't say that we pay more attention to one platform than another.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Van Popta, you have five minutes, please.

Tako Van Popta: Good. Thank you, Chair.

Thank you again to the witnesses.

In the previous round, you were talking about how or to what extent your group's high level of situational awareness was being communicated to the public. I was asking that line of questions in the context of the panel's refusal to answer earlier questions about whether specific ridings were being targeted.

On page 9 of your report, you state that the SITE task force "sent a comprehensive email to all candidates that included information from the SITE [task force] on tactics used by threat actors, personal and cyber security advice, and instructions on how to report incidents to the SITE [task force], further empowering candidates to take proactive steps to secure their campaigns."

I don't remember getting that. I was a candidate. I checked with my campaign manager, who I will acknowledge had a higher level of situational awareness about these sorts of things than I did. I was out knocking on doors and pounding up signs throughout the riding.

Did my campaign get an email like that? Why wouldn't I have known about that?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I can confirm to the member that the email was sent to all confirmed candidates based on a list shared with the SITE task force, through the Privy Council Office specifically, by Elections Canada. That email was sent on April 11, if that will help the member to locate it.

The description you gave is accurate in terms of the information we shared. What we were trying to emphasize there was that it was clear for all candidates and campaigns the path by which they could communicate any instances that were observed by the campaign teams, the volunteers and the candidates themselves during the period of the election.

Tako Van Popta: Good. Okay. I'll acknowledge that perhaps I was a bit negligent in not reading all the emails that came to my campaign email, but my campaign manager asserts that he did not receive it. Now, maybe he did, and maybe he also just glanced over it, in which case he and I will have a little follow-up conversation about this.

However, just the fact that I didn't know about that email and about this service even being available makes me really, really wonder how effective your SITE task force has been in communicating with the public when your goal is to ensure that the public has a high degree of confidence in our electoral system.

● (1225)

Vanessa Lloyd: I'll answer the question perhaps also with a point of interest to your colleague Madam Normandin.

One of the things we're aware of is that public opinion reporting, which will come out later this year, demonstrates that national security issues are most informed or are most received by Canadians where they go to get their information via television, newspapers and the Internet. Social media actually falls below that list in terms of where people go to receive national security information.

I would add for the member that in addition to the email we sent, we did an unclassified brief that went over all the information that was shared in that email to all campaigns. The opportunity for each and every candidate's campaign to be represented at that briefing was also put out to increase the chances that the candidates would understand the information we were putting out to help them maintain the integrity and security of their efforts.

Tako Van Popta: In your earlier testimony, or perhaps lack thereof, you didn't want to answer questions about whether specific ridings were being targeted with foreign interference. I'm wondering if you could answer this question: If there was a riding, or a campaign in a specific riding, that was being targeted, did you reach out to that campaign specifically?

Vanessa Lloyd: The process for ensuring that campaigns were informed when there was an instance that either met the threshold that we were going to speak about publicly or where we had the ability, through a cleared party member, to share that information was to do it through the cleared members, because in some instances we were sharing classified information that we could not speak about publicly. So we—

Tako Van Popta: I'm not talking about publicly. I'm talking about the specific candidate whose campaign was being threatened by foreign interference, which is an existential threat to our democratic systems.

Vanessa Lloyd: In every instance where we could share that information and where we felt it was important for Canadians, including Canadians in ridings all across the country, to be aware of an instance of foreign interference, the panel made the determination about whether they would direct the SITE task force to speak about it during the tech briefings. In other instances, we offered classified and unclassified briefings, regular briefs during the campaign to those cleared party members to pass along information. It was up to those campaigns, national campaigns, to manage the impact of that information sharing.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Since I have a bad habit of not deleting emails I've read, I did as a candidate receive an email from security and intelligence from the PCO. The re line is, "Ensuring the security of candidates in the 45th Canadian general election", with attachments from SITE and the RCMP.

We will go to Mr. Louis for five minutes, please.

Tim Louis: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for your continued testimony.

My Conservative colleagues are bringing up some issues around possibly receiving communications, but it's also public knowledge that their party leader has refused to get security clearance. I know they enjoy the yes-or-no questions. I just want to ask a simple one.

This would be a yes or no, Ms. Lloyd. A political party leader without security clearance cannot directly receive classified intelligence or operational detail. Is that correct?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, whether or not an individual has a security clearance is protected by privacy implications. It is correct that we can give classified information only to those who are authorized to receive it. As I mentioned earlier, all parties had cleared representatives for us to be able to do that.

Tim Louis: Thank you.

Cleared representatives seem to be an extra step, and I will be looking here to make sure that we're maintaining the integrity of elections. My concern would be about how a political leader can make a timely, responsible decision during an election period, when things change fast, if they're getting filtered or second-hand briefings rather than getting direct access to classified threat information. I'll leave that as is.

The SITE task force is also monitoring against malicious uses of artificial intelligence by hostile actors. That threat is changing rapidly. How are your responses changing as quickly?

Ms. Walshe can answer that question, because it's a bit of a cat and mouse game.

• (1230)

Bridget Walshe: Mr. Chair, we certainly do see changes in the way artificial intelligence is being used online. In our day-to-day lives, we've seen how much easier it is in the past year or two to use artificial intelligence. We see the same thing happening with the threat actors who use it in their malicious activities.

To monitor that, we look globally at how it's being used online. As an example, when we put forward our publication last year on the threats AI posed to Canada's democratic process, we looked at over 200 elections that occurred in that year or year-and-a-half period globally ahead of that to understand the tactics and the techniques being used.

We put that into the report so that Canadians have that information to understand how to protect themselves and what the threat is, but we also use it internally. We use that to derive the advice and guidance we provide. We use it to provide insight into our day-to-day operations in cybersecurity for Canada. We share it with our colleagues across the security community.

It's a big piece that helps us inform how we operate and that helps us in the advice and guidance we give to Canadians.

Tim Louis: You've already answered my follow-up question.

You are looking at other countries and trying to learn from that in what I would call the off-season.

Bridget Walshe: Absolutely. We look at what's available online for what we see through the important intelligence we have within Canada to put together a picture of how that use by cyber-threat actors evolves over time.

Tim Louis: Thank you.

Mr. O'Hayon, we wanted to get you in on the conversation and haven't had a chance yet. You're with the RCMP federal policing security intelligence, intelligence and international policing, security and intelligence threats to elections task force.

How does the RCMP determine when suspected election interference activity crosses from influence to criminal or coercive conduct? What steps are taken, and what coordination happens?

Greg O'Hayon: Thank you for the question.

In terms of what the thresholds are, those are determined depending on the piece of legislation we're enforcing, whether it's the Criminal Code of Canada or the Security Offences Act. There are stipulations in those that are quite clear about when that threshold is crossed.

What I can say is that when the threshold is crossed, the RCMP will take the necessary actions to investigate to its fullest extent, whether it's a cyber-threat or a physical threat. In the course of that, whether this happens during a by-election or a general election, it will be shared with our SITE task force partners so that they at least have visibility not over the criminal investigation but over the fact that an incident has occurred.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will now turn to Mr. Cooper for five minutes, please.

Michael Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to drill down a bit on what happened to Joe Tay in Don Valley North.

The election panel announced to the public that there was a transnational repression campaign and went on to cite some of the targeting as it specifically pertained to Mr. Tay. That announcement was made on April 17, nearly at the very end of the writ period. Mr. Tay testified that the day after he was nominated as the Conservative candidate in Don Valley North, which was on March 23, the RCMP attended his home to advise him that there were credible threats to his safety and that they had been intercepted.

I just want to confirm, Mr. O'Hayon, that it is correct and that the RCMP did attend his home at that time.

Greg O'Hayon: That is my understanding, yes.

Michael Cooper: Okay.

Would it be fair to say there were threats that persisted against Mr. Tay through the course of the election campaign?

• (1235)

Greg O'Hayon: Thank you for the question.

Apologies, sir, unfortunately, I'm not able to....

I don't have that level of detail, Mr. Chairman. I'd be happy to take the question back and provide the answer to the—

Michael Cooper: If you would, that would be appreciated.

Mr. Tay was eventually told by the RCMP that it was unsafe for him to go door to door to canvass because of these threats. When was Mr. Tay informed of that? At what point?

Greg O'Hayon: Thank you for the question.

Unfortunately, I will have to go back and provide a detailed answer to that question. I don't have an answer to that.

Michael Cooper: Okay, if you would, because I'm just trying to understand the timeline. Very early on, in fact, well before the writ was dropped, information had been intercepted that Mr. Tay was being targeted, at least on social media propaganda efforts, by Beijing.

Mr. Tay went on to indicate that, although in the panel report that was released—as well as the press release, media release, that went out—detailing the transnational repression campaign, it involved much more than propaganda. It involved voter suppression efforts particularly targeting Chinese seniors residences, as well as harassment, surveillance and threats of violence against Mr. Tay.

I don't suppose, Mr. O'Hayon, that you would dispute that.

Greg O'Hayon: Thank you for the question.

As I've said before, I can't comment beyond the confirmation that there was a criminal investigation that was opened as a result of the threats against Mr. Tay. The details the member is bringing up may or may not have come up during the investigation. I can't confirm.

Michael Cooper: Okay. Since you can't confirm the details but you're undertaking to provide some level of response to this committee with respect to those details to the degree that they can be disclosed, I would take it that whatever information the RCMP had was relayed to the panel. That would have been occurring on a day-to-day basis, a frequent basis.

Greg O'Hayon: Well, what I can commit to is providing the answers that we can. I can't.... I am, like I've said—

Michael Cooper: I'm just trying to confirm that the information would have been relayed to the panel.

Greg O'Hayon: Pardon me? I didn't hear the question, sir.

Michael Cooper: The question is just to confirm that the information was routinely being relayed to the panel.

Greg O'Hayon: I'm not in a position to confirm what was presented to the panel in terms of Mr. Tay.

Michael Cooper: Okay, fine. You said there was....

Ms. Lloyd, would you very briefly answer that question?

Vanessa Lloyd: Yes, certainly.

Do we have time?

The Chair: We're over the time. My apologies, Mr. Cooper.

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

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

[*Translation*]

Strengthening cybersecurity measures is one of the task force's priorities. You gather a lot of intelligence, such as intelligence on foreigners, including threat actors.

Some say that Q-Day is coming, and quantum technology will soon be part of our lives. As is the case with AI, there will certainly be side benefits, but if it falls into the wrong hands, there could also be negative repercussions. Quantum computers will be able to process very complex problems like code decryption extremely quickly, and hackers know this. It seems they're already collecting data so they can use it later. Data theft is on the rise. Our identities and words are at risk.

How are you preparing for technological changes, particularly this shift to quantum technology, which could lead to a significant reduction in the level of security for the main standards, particularly in terms of decryption?

• (1240)

Bridget Walshe: I thank the member very much for her question.

[*English*]

Thank you very much for providing a nice summary of what we see when it comes to some of the cyber-threats that are out there.

When I think about it, there is a lot of technology that's amazing and is helping us improve the way we do our work and our jobs and live our daily lives across Canada and the world, but some of them do pose threats.

Going back to the question, there's a threat posed by the development of quantum computers that could break the encryption we use and really impact our cybersecurity. As I've already discussed, the threat posed by AI and how threat actors use it online is something we monitor and look at quite closely. There are steps that we take to mitigate that when it comes to what we do on a daily basis to help Canadians, critical infrastructure and our government institutions to ensure that they're protected against those threats.

It also applies to what we do for election security. There are a couple of things I might note. We work very closely with Elections Canada and other institutions with ties to our democratic processes to be sure that we're collectively keeping those systems safe from all of these threats. We provide advice and guidance, and work closely with critical infrastructure, which of course has a role in our democracy as well. You can't vote if you can't get to the polling station and receive that information you need online.

We look at and assess all of those pieces. We think about the threats, and we use them to inform the advice and guidance and the partnership we have with government and critical infrastructure, especially in that critical time during an election.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: Could information sharing with other countries, for example, also help to always stay ahead of the game?

This is once again related to the question I asked earlier.

Saliou Babou: I could come back to that.

[*English*]

Absolutely. Global Affairs Canada is part of the G7 rapid response mechanism alongside G7 members, as well as Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands, and now Poland as well. We share information in real time about these threats, and we feed off each other in terms of procuring and building the tools that we need.

As my colleagues said, the AI and quantum threats are very real, and they were outlined, but there are also tools we can use to make sure that we are keeping up with the evolution of these threats as well. There are threats, but there are also tools that we use in collaboration with our partners.

Hon. Élisabeth Brière: I'm done.

The Chair: Madam Normandin, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Babou, if I may, I'll circle back to the answer you gave me earlier.

You mentioned that, yes, there have been incidents on WeChat, but they've also been observed on other platforms. I don't think we can put WeChat and Pinterest on the same footing.

What kind of analysis do you do in terms of the balance of risk that WeChat poses, considering its ownership or type of use?

What is the real risk of this platform? Even if you can't comment on the qualitative aspect, perhaps you can tell us what the quantitative aspect is.

Were there more interventions related to foreign interference on that platform than on others?

Saliou Babou: The analysis we do is an overall analysis of all the platforms. I wouldn't be able to comment on a quantitative analysis of one platform versus another. We consider the threat as a whole, and therefore across all the platforms we monitor, for operational security reasons and to avoid giving too much information on the very capabilities of the Government of Canada to counter these threats. I wouldn't be able to comment in detail on the incidents we see on one platform versus another.

I think it would be important to send a message to Canadians that we're monitoring all publicly known platforms, in all languages, to ensure real-time detection of any threats we may face.

• (1245)

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Ms. Lloyd, you talked about some public opinion research indicating that Canadians get more information from traditional media than from social media.

Is that true for all diasporas? I understand the general picture, but are there diasporas that get more information on social media, particularly due to the language barrier?

[English]

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I would like to advise the member that the public opinion research should come out later this year, probably in the summer. I hope that a level of detail will be provided there. I'll just make a *précision* on my point. My point was that, for national security matters, we see the Canadian public continuing to leverage traditional media above social media.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now turn to the Conservatives. I believe they're splitting their time, but we'll start with Mr. Cooper.

Michael Cooper: Ms. Lloyd, I'll let you answer very briefly the question I asked regarding Mr. Tay and the interaction between the SITE task force and the panel. I just want to confirm that this was ongoing on a day-to-day basis, more or less.

Vanessa Lloyd: That's right. I can confirm that the panel was briefed on six occasions during the monitoring period as it relates to Mr. Tay. As well, the cleared representatives for the Conservative Party were briefed on two occasions.

Michael Cooper: Thank you.

Mr. O'Hayon, you indicated there was a criminal investigation that had been opened. Is that investigation ongoing?

Greg O'Hayon: I can't provide any further detail besides confirming that a criminal investigation was opened.

Michael Cooper: Okay. Thank you.

I have one last question before I turn it over to Mr. Jackson.

It was indicated in the backgrounder on the situation in Don Valley North that, with respect to the propaganda campaign against Mr. Tay, engagement levels had been low, with an increase at various points during the writ period. What was the number of interactions and views? What was the scope of engagement?

Saliou Babou: The scope of engagement was in the thousands to tens of thousands, in total, of views, likes and shares.

Michael Cooper: Thank you.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Jackson.

Grant Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just in retrospect of last year.... Parliament passed a law, getting rid of the first-generation limit for Canadians living abroad. I'm just curious about how your officials and your work as the task force are going to ensure that the now greater number of Canadian citizens living abroad are protected from foreign interference in casting their ballots.

Vanessa Lloyd: That's an excellent and interesting question.

I am aware of the legislative changes that the member refers to, and I could offer that, to my knowledge, all of the reporting we did

have from individual citizens originated from within Canada. That would certainly be a take-away: that we could reflect on what we could do better in the next election.

Thank you to the member for the question and the input.

Grant Jackson: I think that's a point of concern: that perhaps these citizens living abroad, of which there are now many more by virtue of this legislative change, may not be aware of the task force and the efforts you're undertaking to protect them and Canadians living within the country. It is a concern, given that there are not just a couple of hundred but rather millions, potentially, now—or thousands, anyway.

I appreciate your undertaking that to protect them as well, because every vote counts. They get to choose the constituency where their ballot is going to be cast, based on where they last lived. That's how I understand it's going to be implemented. Therefore, it's quite complicated when you get multiple generations down.

Anyway, I don't know if anybody else has any additional thoughts on that. I'm just quite concerned about the potential impact of this. Perhaps that should have been thought of before the legislation was implemented, but we are where we are.

• (1250)

Bridget Walshe: Mr. Chair, if you'll let me add some additional information, I would say that I think it's an opportunity for us, too, because so much of what we communicated about this is online—the information that we have and that we put out there for Canadians. Maybe it's a point for us to be looking at how we make sure that we're reaching Canadians abroad with that same information and insight.

The Chair: You still have 50 seconds, if you'd like. You don't have to take it.

Grant Jackson: I'll be very quick.

I take your point about TV and its being the main source of information. I'm coming from a younger, a generation Z, perspective. We don't pay for cable news subscriptions. Therefore, I am concerned about the narrative and the information that people are getting from sources like TikTok. Are you engaging on those platforms in terms of disinformation and those types of things going on?

Saliou Babou: I will confirm that, yes, we are active on these platforms in terms of providing information to Canadians directly where they consume it. During GE45, we made sure that the information was also available in simplified and traditional Chinese so that we could reach the constituents and they could absorb the information that was communicated by the SITE task force.

In response to your question, yes, we are communicating on various social media platforms to Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Madam Kayabaga, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you so much.

I'll ask this because it's relevant to the conversation we're having right now, and it could be relevant as we could potentially be in an election anytime soon. We are a minority government and an election can happen at any point. Can the task force walk us through how intelligence is stress-tested inside your group before it informs a decision, especially in moments when there is an election and there is information that is incomplete or rapidly evolving?

Vanessa Lloyd: I believe the committee would have heard some of this testimony in the evidence presented by the panel last week on the range of considerations given to the intelligence that we put before it.

In terms of the intelligence originating from CSIS, for example, we endeavour to ensure that the intelligence we put forward to the panel is characterized so that the panel will have detail to help it make the determination based on the level of confidence it has in that piece of information or intelligence. That can range from qualifying whether it is a single piece of information that has been corroborated, new information or information that has come from one of our partners at this table or, as my colleagues have mentioned, has come from another intelligence agency that collaborates and is also monitoring—particularly in 2024, which was the year of elections around the world—interference that occurred in their countries. Sometimes, as a result of that, they are able to inform Canadian concerns as well.

Bridget Walshe: If I can add to that, both of our teams worked very hard, as Ms. Lloyd said, to assess this information to make sure that we were incorporating all of it and judging it. We also met very regularly at different levels. Our teams were engaged in that assessment process. We met daily as an assistant deputy minister community to know and understand another level of challenge and provide feedback before all of that information was ultimately shared with the panel.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: What I was trying to get from this question is I hope that, if we're in an election and there's something happening rapidly, the response is much quicker than going through many different layers of bureaucracy to get to a decision.

How do you flag that? How do we make sure we're not going to be dealing with it post-election and that we can actually take action in that immediate moment?

Vanessa Lloyd: As Ms. Walshe said, we met daily and we put our information in a brief through the chair of the committee, the director of CSIS, who gave a weekly brief to the panel. That being said, if we'd had an instance where we wanted to raise something urgently, there was always the opportunity to convene the panel on an urgent basis.

I would also add that it is important to understand that, in our ongoing mandates, we are constantly collecting information outside of election periods that can also be relevant during the election period. We often found ourselves in situations where we had context to add to an evolving incident and already had some information that was relevant to the panel's consideration.

• (1255)

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Looking ahead to a potential election, what would help Canadians remain vigilant?

There have been a lot of comments in the committee during this study about ethnic communities that may have some challenges going to vote because they fear foreign interference. It's a big threat, and they fear that their votes may be intercepted. We've already talked about the fact that our votes are secure and safe.

What kind of information do you think Canadians can have right now as they prepare for an election?

Vanessa Lloyd: Thank you for the question.

I hope we've succeeded in communicating that the information and tool kits we developed in advance of GE45 remain available online and are actively talked about as we all engage with communities and, as well, as the foreign interference coordinator from Public Safety engages with different communities to make sure that that level of awareness and those tools are used on an ongoing basis, particularly to combat some of the threats my colleague Mr. Babou mentioned in terms of disinformation, which could occur on any issue, regardless of whether it's an election period.

I see that Bridget wants to jump in, so I'm going to stop.

Bridget Walshe: Maybe what I'll add is that we always look to see if there is something that we should be communicating, election or not, and in preparation if need be. We typically put out our publication on threats to the democratic process every two years. Last winter, when we saw those threats from AI increasing, we went off cycle.

We went off cycle, we put it out there and we worked with the media to make sure it was distributed. We put it onto social media so that maybe some of the gen Zs would pick it up. We did all the things to promote and make sure it was out there.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Before we go, I have a couple of questions. I'm getting into a bad habit of asking questions at the end.

We've talked about security clearance, and I think that for a lot of Canadians it really doesn't mean anything. I've been through the process, and I'm certain you've all been through the process. Could you briefly explain, from the broad applications through interviews, what physically happens when you apply for your security clearance?

Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, may I clarify whether it is specific to members of Parliament that your question is asked?

The Chair: That's my experience, but yes, specifically to members of Parliament, or perhaps to party members who have gone through this process.

Vanessa Lloyd: Okay. I'll take that as CSIS and not necessarily as SITE.

In the instance where a party wishes to have a member cleared for a security clearance, that is something that is done through sponsorship and approach of the Privy Council Office, and that would be referred to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service as it relates to conducting our government screening processes. We apply that kind of lens to the security clearances and the advice we give back.

In the government employment space, that's called government security screening, and in the security clearances for members, we do a very similar process. We use our authorities under the CSIS Act to investigate and provide advice back to the sponsoring department.

In this case, for members like you, that sponsoring department is the Privy Council Office and, as the chair mentioned, that can include interviews with you as individuals and also with individuals around you.

The Chair: You would agree with me that it's a very lengthy and thick application that you have to go through.

Vanessa Lloyd: Certainly for my colleagues here at the table it is in fact more lengthy than what you are subject to. Most of us have enhanced top secret clearances, which have a number of specific criteria under the government policy for security clearances.

The Chair: A lengthy interview on what is in the application is what is found by the process of going through that application. Is that correct?

Vanessa Lloyd: It can be a lengthy interview.

The Chair: If you had something to hide, you probably wouldn't want to go through that process. Is that correct?

Vanessa Lloyd: I would say that those processes often can give opportunities to clarify concerns we would have, so there is a benefit to engaging in the process and having the opportunity to have any misconceptions clarified as well.

● (1300)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I appreciate the witnesses for being here.

Seeing no further business, we're adjourned.

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