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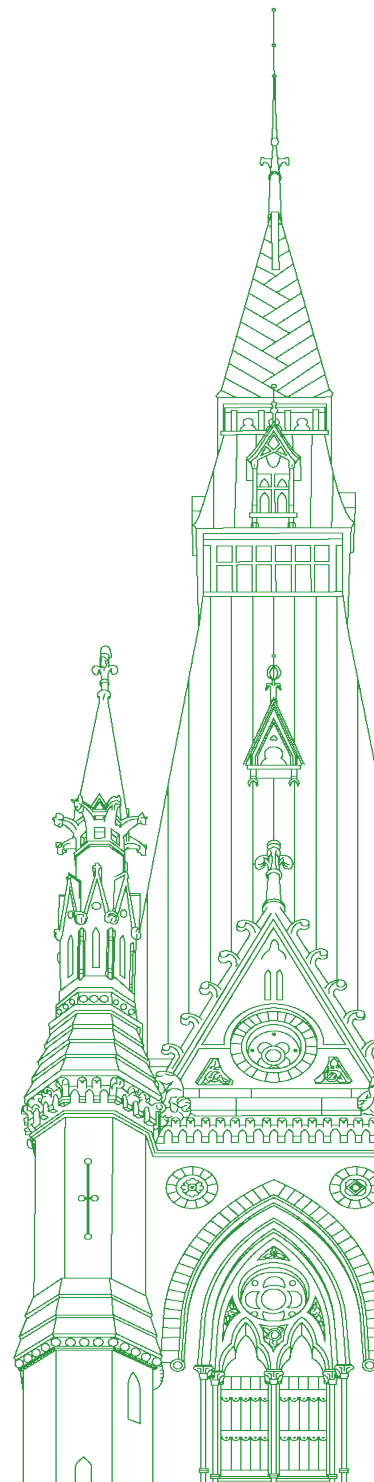
Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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Monday, October 5, 2026

Chair: Jean-Yves Duclos



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• (1100)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Québec Centre, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone. I hope you are having a good start to the week.

Welcome to meeting number 49 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee is meeting today to follow up on the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, August 17, 2026. At that time, the committee met to make a determination concerning its study of Canada's security screening process.

For that reason, we are pleased to welcome the Minister of Public Safety, Gary Anandasangaree, along with a number of senior officials.

First, we welcome Vanessa Lloyd, deputy director of policy and strategic partnerships at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

We also welcome Richard Bilodeau, assistant deputy minister at the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

In addition, we are joined by representatives of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police: Assistant Commissioner Don Halina, who is responsible for forensic science and identification services, and Assistant Commissioner Josianne Phénix, chief security officer.

Finally, we welcome Adam Hatfield, acting assistant deputy minister for data and digital policy at the Treasury Board Secretariat.

I now invite the minister to make an opening statement for up to five minutes.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety): Mr. Chair, thank you for the invitation to appear today to discuss the security screening process for government officials.

[English]

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered here on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Joining me today is my assistant deputy minister for national security and cybersecurity, Richard Bilodeau. Here from Treasury Board Secretariat is the acting ADM for data and digital policy, Adam Hatfield. Also joining me today is senior leadership from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and RCMP, including

deputy director of policy and strategic partnerships, Vanessa Lloyd; Don Halina, assistant commissioner of forensic science and identification services; and assistant commissioner Josianne Phénix, the chief security officer for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Our government's most fundamental duty is to keep Canadians safe. In an increasingly complex global threat environment, protecting the integrity of sensitive information and assets is a national security imperative. The Government of Canada's security screening process is mandated and guided by the Treasury Board's directive on security screening.

Public Safety's portfolio agencies have important roles in this process. They support deputy heads, who have accountability to make decisions on whether or not to grant a clearance in their department or agency. While deputy heads are accountable for granting, denying or revoking a security clearance for their respective organizations, CSIS is responsible for providing a security assessment based on available information that is relevant to the requested level of clearance. Depending on the level of clearance, such assessments would also look for potential indicators linked to national security threats such as foreign influence, espionage or radicalization. The requesting department or agency would then consider this assessment in its risk-based decision-making, along with the employment information it has gathered such as employment history, references and performance reports. For the RCMP, they perform criminal and law enforcement record checks and inform deputy heads of their findings to support decision-making.

The threat landscape is evolving, and our employment processes must evolve with it. As Minister of Public Safety, my responsibility is to work with my colleagues who are responsible for this policy to ensure security agencies have the tools and authorities they need.

Canadians must have absolute confidence in the integrity of their public institutions and the processes by which the government employs individuals for work on sensitive issues. They deserve to know that security-cleared government officials working on their behalf have an undivided loyalty to our country. The employees at Public Safety Canada, CSIS and the RCMP work hard every day to maintain that trust. I want to thank them for their ongoing dedication to protecting our public institutions and the integrity of our public service. I also want to thank this committee for undertaking this study.

• (1105)

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I look forward to taking the committee's questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

That brings us to the first round of questions.

Mr. Caputo, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will direct all of my questions through you to the minister.

Minister, some time ago you told Canadians that you would get to the bottom of the situation with Ms. Zhang. I didn't hear a single thing in your opening remarks about whether you got to the bottom of anything. Did you actually get to the bottom of this?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Caputo, I have absolutely advised Canadians that any issues that are in the public realm, that are of concern, we will get to the bottom of, including the case that you referenced.

I want to just say—

Frank Caputo: Minister, that's not what I asked you.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Caputo, this is a very serious matter—

Frank Caputo: You're right. It is a very serious matter.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: —and I would appreciate it if you would give me the courtesy of—

Frank Caputo: I'd like some answers to it, sir.

The Chair: I'm sorry. We are starting on a bad foot.

Please, Mr. Minister, let MP Caputo continue his questioning.

Frank Caputo: How many days ago did you tell Canadians you would get to the bottom of this, Minister?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Caputo, it would have been around the end of July. That is my recollection.

Frank Caputo: The end of July.... You had 70 days to get to the bottom of this. It doesn't sound to me like you got to the bottom of this. Did you get to the bottom of this, yes or no?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Caputo, are you looking for a clip, or are you looking for a comprehensive answer from me? I'm willing to provide you answers on a very complex situation. If you would give me the courtesy, I will give you that answer.

Frank Caputo: Minister—

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I'm not prepared to give you clips so that this can be politicized, Mr. Caputo. This is a very serious matter, as you will agree.

Frank Caputo: You're right. It is serious, but do you know what? I'd like an answer, not a lecture, so let's get some answers here, Minister.

You said, 70 days ago, that you would get to the bottom of this. This is the third time that I've asked you this now. Did you get to the bottom of this, yes or no?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Let me just say that the issue in question is a matter of an investigation that's being undertaken by Belgium. We are fully co-operating. Our agencies here are fully co-operating with that investigation. It is an investigation that we hope will provide the requisite types of answers that we're looking for.

Concurrently, I can assure you that all of our agencies.... The issue around security screening is up to each of the departments. With the mandate of the Treasury Board Secretariat—

Frank Caputo: It's a lot of this, then: "It's up to other people."

Minister, the buck stops with you. I've asked you three times whether you've gotten to the bottom of it. You've referenced people co-operating. You've referenced Belgium. It is a shame—and I think it's actually disgraceful, dare I say, Minister—that it was Belgium that figured out a Canadian was spying, rather than Canada.

Ultimately, the buck stops with you, Minister. I've asked you three times whether you've gotten to the bottom of it, and not once did you say that you have. That is your job. In fact, the Prime Minister said that China was Canada's greatest security threat. He said that during the election. Are you prepared to release the memorandum of understanding between Canada and China relating to security matters, yes or no?

• (1110)

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Caputo, I have, on a number of occasions, addressed this matter. The protocol for MOUs of this nature was set previously by former prime minister Harper and his administration. You will recall that memorandums of this nature are not, generally, released to the public.

Frank Caputo: That's interesting, Minister, but if you want to talk about Harper, it wasn't the situation that Prime Minister Harper called China the greatest security threat.

You said in your previous testimony—on May 28, I believe—that China did not have to provide consent to the release of the MOU. However, I believe that in a story from May 21, the government said that it did. Which is it? Does China have to agree to the MOU being released or not?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: We are following previously set protocol—

Frank Caputo: That's not what I asked. I didn't ask about previous protocols. I'm asking you very clearly, Minister: Does China need to consent? This is a yes or no answer.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: We are following a previously set protocol, and we are not releasing that particular MOU.

Frank Caputo: Minister, I have asked you two direct questions multiple times, and we haven't had a single answer from you. Did you prepare for today's meeting?

I have asked you multiple times about these things. We don't know whether China has to assent to the release of the MOU. Would you release the MOU? Will you release it?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I've indicated in the past that we will be following previously set standards—

Frank Caputo: Yes, but then you're asking people to go and research this.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: —and we will not be releasing that MOU.

Frank Caputo: I'm asking you: Will you release it, yes or no?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I've answered that question, Mr. Chair.

Frank Caputo: No, you haven't answered it.

[Translation]

Jacques Ramsay (La Prairie—Atateken, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Ramsay, you have the floor.

Jacques Ramsay: The witness has given the same answer three times. That is the answer he wishes to provide. I think the vice-chair should move forward in his line of questioning.

The Chair: Quite right. Your point has been heard. Thank you, Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Caputo, you have one minute remaining.

[English]

Frank Caputo: Thank you.

It's not appropriate for a member to try to rescue the minister, who is simply not prepared to answer questions here.

Minister, why is it that our intelligence didn't figure this out and Belgian intelligence did?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Caputo, I have indicated that the matter is being investigated right now by Belgian police.

It's an ongoing investigation, and we are providing full co-operation to the Belgian officials to be able to get to the bottom of this—

Frank Caputo: You said that you would get to the bottom of this 70 days ago.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Concurrently—

The Chair: Mr. Caputo, the minister hasn't finished yet.

Please do so quickly.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Caputo, I understand that at some point you understand the nature of investigations and reviews. Seventy days is not a particularly long time.

Frank Caputo: Seventy days is not a particularly long time...?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I'm pretty sure you can appreciate that, Mr. Caputo.

Frank Caputo: Just a second here, Minister. You said that you would get to the bottom of this—

The Chair: Okay. I'm sorry, MP Caputo. I have to....

Frank Caputo: You are the minister. As the minister, the buck stops with you. Seventy days ago, you said you'd get to the bottom of this, and you haven't gotten to the bottom of this. You told Canadians you would.

I have to question whether you have your hands on the wheel when you can't get to bottom of this, Minister.

The Chair: Mr. Caputo, I think your point was well understood. Unfortunately, the time has run out, which brings us to the next speaker. There will be other opportunities for opposition questions.

Ms. Acan, you have six minutes, please.

Sima Acan (Oakville West, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Minister, we heard you answering yes or no questions with one of those words very clearly. I hope that before making any videos, Mr. Caputo will go back to the recordings and he'll listen to your answer.

This study is focused on concerns regarding Canada's national security screening process. While Treasury Board sets the policy framework, departments and agencies are responsible for implementing security screening requirements. Could you explain how organizations such as the RCMP, CSIS, CSE and Public Safety Canada conduct security screening, establish risk thresholds and determine eligibility for security clearances?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, MP Acan, for that question. I want to just set the frame because I think there may be some misunderstanding or a lack of understanding about how our process works.

With respect to the matter in question that has brought us here, it is being investigated by Belgian police. We are fully co-operating and our agencies are fully co-operating with that process. Concurrently what we've done is that the Treasury Board is responsible for providing direction on security screening and they have already done so, as of January of this year. They continue to review the process to make sure that if there are any gaps and there are any improvements to be made, they can be made on a real-time basis.

Every agency or every department has been asked to review their processes and to ensure that if there are any gaps, again, they fulfill and make those changes. In this particular case, the authorization went from Global Affairs Canada, with the support, of course, of CSIS and the RCMP. Global Affairs Canada, as far as I'm aware, is appearing here next week.

The RCMP plays two roles. One would be to go through CPIC to highlight any criminal offences and, secondly, to undertake a more extensive review—

• (1115)

The Chair: Go ahead, Madame DeBellefeuille.

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille (Vallée-du-Haut-Saint-Laurent, BQ): Mr. Chair, excuse me, but the interpretation is not working at all.

The Chair: All right. We will pause briefly.

[English]

I'll speak English to see whether the interpretation comes back. It seems to have been missing for a little while.

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: Interpretation is working again.

[English]

The Chair: Very good. Thank you, Madame DeBellefeuille.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the interpreters for their patience and perseverance.

[English]

We'll go back to you, Minister Anandasangaree.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, Chair.

Let me just wrap up here. The RCMP does a secondary review if required. Then it will be going to CSIS—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt again. It seems there's been a break in interpretation. We'll take the time it takes to ensure that everyone has the appropriate services.

We'll suspend for a couple of seconds.

• (1115)

(Pause)

• (1120)

[Translation]

The Chair: We will now resume.

Thank you for your patience.

[English]

MP Acan, you have another three minutes and 45 seconds.

Sima Acan: Thank you.

Minister, the current policy on the security screening framework builds off the standard on security screening, which places the ultimate responsibility for security clearance decisions on deputy heads, as you mentioned in your opening speech. Is that correct, yes or no?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Yes, it is correct.

Sima Acan: As security threats continue to evolve, are there opportunities to modernize or improve the support provided to deputy heads responsible for security clearance decisions?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I believe there are. We're looking at those options. I will say that the Treasury Board implemented a new security screening directive as of January 2025. That is, in fact, quite a modernized version. It is in the process of being implemented across the board.

With your permission, I'd like to ask both the RCMP and CSIS to maybe weigh in on the work they are doing.

Assistant Commissioner Don Halina (Assistant Commissioner, Forensic Science and Identification Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): We conduct two roles in support of the Treasury Board Secretariat's directive on security screening. From our perspective, we conduct biometric fingerprint-based checks of the national repository of criminal records and provide those results back to the requesting agency to assist in their decision-making process.

Assistant Commissioner Josianne Phénix (Chief Security Officer, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): We also conduct law enforcement record checks for employees or prospective employees who require enhanced security screening.

Sima Acan: Thank you so much.

My second question is around whether greater involvement from security and intelligence agencies such as the RCMP and CSIS would improve those processes and decisions. Is there more room to grow?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I always believe there's room to improve. The Treasury Board Secretariat is looking at how to make those changes from a directive perspective. Departmentally, I think each department, including Public Safety, has undertaken a comprehensive review. In fact, our processes go beyond the Treasury Board Secretariat advisory.

Sima Acan: Thank you so much.

My next question is for the officials. Considering today's threat environment, do you believe the current security screening standards place too much emphasis on making clearances transferable between departments and not enough emphasis on department-specific security?

Adam Hatfield (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Data and Digital Policy, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you for the question. The current security screening policy in the Government of Canada does state that deputy heads ultimately are accountable. Every government department has the authority to make security screening decisions for itself. The current policy does encourage—for the purposes of efficiency, saving time and just consistency—that government departments accept other government departments' clearing or security screening decisions where it is appropriate.

What the policy actually states is that if an employee is being transferred, the receiving department receives the security screening file and reviews the file. If for any reason they might feel there's a reason to revisit some or all of the work that was done, they absolutely have the discretion to do so. Ultimately, the receiving department who grants the clearance to the incoming individual is responsible for that decision. There's a lot of emphasis on transferability, but the authority rests with the receiving department.

Sima Acan: Okay—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, MP Acan. The time is up.

Let's move to Madame DeBellefeuille for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Chair, before I begin my speaking time, I would like to seek unanimous consent, as well as the minister's agreement. Given the time we lost because of the interpretation issues, I want to ensure that I do not lose my two and a half minutes at the end of the first round.

Could you ask the minister whether he would be willing to stay a little longer so that I may have my second round of questions?

• (1125)

The Chair: That seems to me to be a reasonable request. We will see whether the minister and his team are able to respond a little later, after your intervention.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Great, thank you.

Minister, the case before us today is not an isolated one. There have been others. In the case of Mr. Delisle, the Royal Canadian Navy officer who sold intelligence to Russia for several years and was sentenced to 20 years in prison, it was discovered during the analysis that national defence had failed to review his security clearance. They hadn't updated their data. We know that because the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency conducted an investigation and found that national defence had been negligent.

I understand that Treasury Board makes policies and directives and that it is up to each department to follow and apply them. However, you are the boss in charge of national security. How do you ensure that national defence and all departments are doing their job and conducting their reviews, particularly for people with secret or top secret security clearance?

I get the feeling that everyone is doing their own thing in every department, but there is no proper oversight. In any event, there is a very specific case, that of Mr. Delisle, where national defence failed to conduct security clearance reviews.

Would it be a good idea for you to be the big boss in your process and use dashboards to ensure that all departments are doing their job?

Do you, as minister, have the information, or do you trust the departments to do their jobs?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: It's a very important question, and I think you frame some of the challenges in the right way.

Let me just say that with respect to national defence, again, the actual review and investigation is left up to each of the respective departments, particularly with national defence given the nature—

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: I don't want to interrupt you, but I've already told you that. Each department is responsible. That's a fact. You said it, I read it in the notes and I got it. What I want to know is who ensures that everything is in order and that all departments do their review work within the allotted time frame.

Are you, as Minister of National Security, given a report saying that everyone with a high security clearance, whether secret or top secret, has been reviewed?

Do you have that assurance since Mr. Delisle's case came to light and it was revealed that there had been review errors in the most sensitive department?

Did you require that, or do you already have it?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: We play a supportive role vis-à-vis the RCMP and CSIS. Treasury Board sets the directive and it is technically responsible for personnel. Staffing, onboarding, issues and complaints, all of that essentially goes through Treasury Board.

I'm open to suggestions if you feel we need to—

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: Minister, I've read my documents. Treasury Board provides directives and policies. It does not use any tool to ensure that the departments are doing their jobs.

Mr. Bilodeau is next to you. Since the Delisle case, are you able to compile a list of personnel with secret or top secret security clearances and tell me which clearances are up for review or are not up for review?

I'd like to know if you have that tool, since you're the guardian of national security here.

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I have that for the department.

I will say that CSIS will have it in certain respects. It would have better visibility on ongoing challenges to someone's security. CSIS has the authority to advise a department on material changes to someone's background that could spark the revocation of the security clearance.

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: I understand from what you're telling me that there is no process or "superstructure" that allows you, as minister, to ensure that all departments do their work within the allotted time frames.

Today, we're talking about a person accused of espionage who, in 2023, was accused of fraud by the Public Service Commission and was still given security clearance to do an internship at NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Can you explain to me how someone who was accused of fraud in 2023 could end up at NATO in 2026, only to be arrested as a spy by Belgian authorities? What went wrong, Minister? Who was remiss? How is it that what happened at the Public Service Commission was not passed on to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service? That's what I don't understand. It's such a big mistake.

Is it incompetence, simple laziness or a lack of due diligence? I don't understand how that can happen.

• (1130)

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: This is the matter that's currently being investigated in Belgium, and we're co-operating with the investigation. What I will say is that there will obviously be some serious learnings that come out of that process. Ultimately, the provision of security clearance is up to the specific department. In this case, it's Global Affairs Canada, based on the advice of the Treasury Board Secretariat.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

[English]

MP Morrison, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Rob Morrison (Columbia—Kootenay—Southern Rockies, CPC): Thank you, Chair, for inviting me here today. I don't usually get to come to this committee, so this is a joy for me.

Minister, I liked where we were going with that last comment on the fact that the public service concluded that the individual committed fraud, yet the security clearance was granted. Who's accountable for that, and which department? If it's the public service, they should be here to say, "Yes, we messed up."

I just want to find out who's accountable at the end of the day. I understand people learn, and we have to learn from mistakes. That's granted, but somebody has to have their head on the block here. Who is it?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I appreciate the question. Welcome to the committee.

There are two things happening. One is the actual investigation. I don't want to pre-empt and influence the investigation that's taking place in Belgium. We are providing as much information as we can. Concurrently, we are doing an internal review.

You rightfully asked a question about accountability, and that is something that I will say we need to come back to. Given what's happening, I don't think we can pre-empt the investigation and in any way influence or tarnish that. However, the question you posed is absolutely correct, and we will need to get to the bottom of it. In this particular case, my understanding is that Global Affairs Canada is the ultimate provider of that security clearance based on, obviously, advice from CSIS and the RCMP.

Rob Morrison: Okay. That sounds acceptable, for sure, in that you will come back to this committee and say, "Here's who made this mistake, and this person is being terminated," or whatever you decide is going to happen to the individual who approved this. If the deputy head is the one who's responsible, they should be removed. Is Treasury Board the right place to have the centre of security clearances, or should it be your national security person?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: The current interplay among national security, RCMP and CSIS to advise the respective departments has worked for the most part. It's imperfect, and I think we can see some gaps there. For the most part, it works because issues around personnel are strictly subject to Treasury Board rules and Treasury Board guidance on hiring, on firing, on promotion and on a range of things, including security clearance. That's why I think TBS plays a central role in that.

When we come to, for example, Public Safety Canada, the deputy minister and Richard and his team have a security review function for every single person who's onboarded to the department. It is based on the Treasury Board guidelines, but our department goes beyond that and implements that in the review of new and existing staff, again, with advice from the RCMP and CSIS.

Rob Morrison: Yes. I mean, there are lessons learned here, obviously. We've gone through several of these over the years where security clearances, especially top secret security clearances, have been granted to individuals who should never, ever have been given them, but we don't seem to be learning about it. We seem to be reading about it in the paper when someone's arrested for espionage.

For the RCMP, what's the entry level for a constable joining the RCMP? Is it top secret, is it secret or is it nothing?

• (1135)

A/Commr Josianne Phénix: It's enhanced secret for our cadets.

Rob Morrison: Is that a high enough level?

A/Commr Josianne Phénix: It's when they get hired until the time they graduate Depot. Then depending on the function they will occupy, it could be top secret, but as a constable with general duties at first.... It's based on position.

Rob Morrison: Years ago, you were hired as top secret right out of the gate. Then they changed that to very little.

I would be remiss if I didn't bring this up. An individual came forward through the RCMP and went to visit her husband who's in the graveyard at Depot. She had a terrible time there. The people at Depot treated her horribly. They wouldn't let her in to see the graves. Several ex-members were treated the same way. This is about the third time I've heard about this happening in Regina. I need somebody to get to the bottom of this.

Minister, could you follow through with the commissioner? I didn't know whether he was going to be here today. Something has to be fixed with Depot, especially for retired members and those who are going to visit their lost ones in the gravesite at Regina.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I will—

The Chair: Thank you, MP Morrison. I'm sorry to interrupt. Welcome again to committee. Hopefully, there will be other opportunities.

[Translation]

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

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

As you said, Minister, this is an important issue that you and the entire team are working on. I think it's also the committee's role, beyond what went wrong, to look into this and find a way to improve the situation. Thank you for being here to talk about all this.

First, I would like some clarification from the Treasury Board Secretariat. Minister, you can probably answer as well. It says that the secretariat is responsible for setting the rules, but, as I understand it, it is not responsible for enforcing them afterwards.

Whose responsibility is it to verify or assign security clearances?

Adam Hatfield: Thank you for the question, madam.

[English]

As you said, it is Treasury Board Secretariat that sets government-wide policy on how security screening is done, but it is individual departments and deputy heads who implement that policy. The security environment of a Coast Guard facility on the east coast, a repository for Library and Archives Canada here in the national capital region or a national park in Nunavut are radically different security environments. It is a feature of the system today that deputy heads have the flexibility to set security screening requirements for their positions and also to make those security screening decisions.

As with all Treasury Board policies, it is deputy heads who are accountable for ensuring that those policies are followed within their departments.

[Translation]

Marianne Dandurand: Thank you.

Given the constantly evolving threats, which are something we regularly examine here at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, how is the framework evolving? We talked about some things that have evolved since last year, but how is the framework evolving and being applied on an ongoing basis in the various departments?

[English]

Adam Hatfield: Security screening is an evolving discipline across Canada and across our allies internationally. The previous policy was set in 2014. After significant analytical and research work, as the minister said, in January of 2025 a significant new update to that policy was done. We're still in the implementation window of that policy. We're working extensively across the security community to provide guidance to ensure that government departments are implementing it consistently and to find lessons learned from that implementation.

A lot of the focus right now, actually, is on security screening data and systems. There's significant room for improvement in how information about public servants and security screening is managed and significant room for improvement in terms of data interoperability and the speed of such systems. All of that improvement is ongoing, regardless of any specific case or incident.

• (1140)

[Translation]

Marianne Dandurand: Since the incident last summer, what do you think has been put in place? How is enforcement coming along? Are you satisfied? What could be sped up? What could the committee help improve to support you?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: If I may, I will ask Vanessa Lloyd to give you a response on that.

Vanessa Lloyd (Deputy Director, Policy and Strategic Partnerships, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Thank you for the question.

I'll start by saying that in situations where a security incident arises, it is natural for each department to look at what happened in that particular case. As the minister said, because this case is ongoing, I'm limited in what I can say in respect to that case. As I referenced earlier in the discussion, the minister asked each of the departments involved in this particular case to do a review. We have done that. Opportunities for improvements were identified and are with the minister for consideration.

That being said, as my colleague from Treasury Board Secretariat referenced, we have an ongoing dialogue as a high-security organization, being CSIS—and the RCMP as well—in community discussions about whether the current processes and the standards can be improved. Then, inside each department, we look at our own practices.

CSIS is constantly looking at whether we can improve the efficacy and efficiency of our security screening efforts. As my colleagues referenced, that includes both processes and how we are adhering to the processes and requirements of the directive on security screening and improvements to systems and technology.

[Translation]

Marianne Dandurand: In the case—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Ms. Dandurand, but we must now move on to Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I will never be the Minister of Public Safety, but given what we are seeing, if I were the minister, I would require that a dashboard and performance indicators be implemented for all reviews of secret and top secret clearances. This would prevent cases like Mr. Delisle's, but more importantly, it would create a paper trail to ensure that departments take this seriously—which does not seem to be the case for some of them. You are the ones taking the heat today, but when it comes to defence, we could name plenty of other cases. It's crazy, really.

I have little to no knowledge of national security, but the case we are examining today strikes me as the direct result of gross incompetence and a lack of rigour on the part of many people across many departments. I don't understand why this person—who used fake names, applied twice to the Canada Border Services Agency and had Facebook accounts under two different names—managed to obtain a security clearance to work at NATO.

I know you can't say anything about your investigation, but I'll tell you frankly that this is a demonstration of the weakness of your processes and the way they operate. If I were the Minister of Public Safety, I would be very unhappy to see that the group that is supposed to protect us is showing such a high degree of laxity.

I can't let you go without telling you that I'm very disappointed by the job cuts at La Macaza and Donnacona penitentiaries. This issue is weighing heavily on my mind. I have visited those two penitentiaries and, like you, I noted that there is a significant need for investment in the infrastructure and systems of federal peniten-

tiaries in Quebec. The job cuts at La Macaza and Donnacona are so significant that correctional officers are staging sit-down strikes.

Honestly, I don't understand why you're cutting positions that aren't vacant—positions held by correctional officers—and why you're reducing the number of yard patrols at La Macaza. I don't understand that. I don't know why you agreed to that.

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you. I've had the chance to visit a number of institutions over the summer.

The safety of our frontline officers is critical, as is the safety of those who are incarcerated. The comprehensive expenditure review that we undertook was quite surgical. We wanted to ensure that any impacts on the front line were minimized. I believe we have found the right balance, but of course we will continue to review.

If there are any specific concerns, I'm always willing to have that conversation, as is the commissioner of corrections.

• (1145)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

[English]

Ms. Kirkland, you have five minutes.

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): My questions are for the minister.

Minister, 70 days ago you said you would get to the bottom of this. On August 17, we brought a motion to this committee to study this. You've had some time to take a look and to get to the bottom of this. We understand that Belgium has an investigation. I believe we need an investigation into our processes. I believe you're calling that an internal review. Then you've often said, "if we find major gaps." In my opinion, clearly we have major gaps because this has happened. We have had a major security breach. It's not a matter of if.

You keep pointing to the department heads, but ultimately you're the public safety minister. You said in your opening that your "fundamental duty is to keep Canadians safe." Without pointing to department heads, departments and what they're doing, what are you doing? What is your position? What's the point of the position of public safety minister if you're not going to get to the bottom of it and if you don't have the answers? Yes, Ms. Lloyd, Mr. Bilodeau and Mr. Hatfield may give us some specifics, and we'll get to that in the next hour. However, in this hour we have you, and so far you've said over and over again that you will get to the bottom of it, that you are trying to get to the bottom of it.

You've had some time. What are you doing to get to the bottom of it? I mean you, Minister. What are you doing?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you, and I appreciate where this question is coming from. Let me just at the outset say that, as you indicated, the matter is being investigated by the Belgian police. That limits my ability to say things publicly—an attempt not to in any way jeopardize that investigation. That is pretty much standard protocol when there's an investigation taking place.

Having said that, there are a number of measures that are being undertaken by, first of all, Public Safety. Richard and his team and my deputy minister and her team are looking to see how we can improve our processes within our department.

Rhonda Kirkland: Minister, with respect, we've heard that. Can you tell me something new?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Concurrently, with both the RCMP and CSIS, I have had conversations. They're, again, looking at processes. They have provided some specific recommendations. I am going through those recommendations, and I will be making a decision as appropriate.

However, what I don't want to do—

Rhonda Kirkland: Minister, how long will it take for you to go through those recommendations?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Well, I don't want to pre-empt anything right now, Ms. Kirkland. I want to be able to collaborate with our officials and be able to give you a more comprehensive answer.

Rhonda Kirkland: Okay, that's fair, except that in the meantime we have a process that's continuing as we speak, and folks may be getting access when they shouldn't be getting it because there are clear indicators that they shouldn't get it.

Minister, would you agree that a documented—

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I can assure you, Ms. Kirkland—

Rhonda Kirkland: I haven't asked the question yet.

Would you agree that a documented finding of fraud is relevant to assessing whether an individual can be trusted with sensitive government information?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: There are a number of factors that are taken into consideration by CSIS. Fraud or any type of criminal offence, I think, could preclude individuals from serving in government.

Rhonda Kirkland: If someone has committed fraud, it should be clear that they should not have access to sensitive government information. That is clear to every Canadian watching us today.

It has been reported that Ms. Zhang cleared both CSIS and RCMP background checks despite the 2023 finding that she had committed fraud. What screening checks can Canadian authorities actually conduct in connection with her NATO placement? Has your government—have you, Minister—established whether that finding was available to the officials responsible? Are you following the trail? How did this happen? We need to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Ms. Kirkland, if I may, I'll just ask Ms. Lloyd to respond to that.

Rhonda Kirkland: No, I'm sorry. You're the minister. I understand that we have department heads, and I'll ask Ms. Lloyd questions in the next hour. However, I want to know what you know. People are trusting you for their public safety, for the national security of our country. What can you tell me?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: What I can tell you is that, by and large, our security apparatus does a comprehensive job with respect to security screening. It is across the board. I think there are over 200,000 screenings undertaken every year. That includes various departments with the support of both CSIS and the RCMP. By and large, it is an unimpeachable record. Of course, there are gaps there, and I recognize that there are gaps. That's what I think we need to improve on, and that is why we have officials here who can give you better responses with respect to that.

• (1150)

Rhonda Kirkland: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: I'm sorry to cut you off, Minister, but the time is over.

Let us, therefore, move to MP Housefather for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Welcome, Minister.

Welcome to all of you. Thank you for being here.

As my colleague Marianne said before, I think it's important for this committee to take its role seriously as to what this is about and where we can recommend improvements to the framework.

As such, Minister, I guess my first question is this. I've been, previously, parliamentary secretary of the Treasury Board. I understand Treasury Board's role in terms of overseeing government-wide policies, but it does seem slightly odd to me that the RCMP and CSIS could, theoretically, make recommendations to a department, and the deputy head in that department can overrule the recommendations of CSIS and the RCMP with regard to security clearance.

Do you believe, Minister, we should be looking at clarifying that so there is a process whereby, if a department deputy head is going to overrule a recommendation of either CSIS or the RCMP, they would have to justify that to somebody? They would have to go to the public safety minister and get a waiver the public safety minister has signed off on, for example, versus a civil servant doing that on their own.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: What I would say is the RCMP and CSIS offer the information that's available to them. It is ultimately the deputy, or delegated authority, who would make that decision.

Anthony Housefather: I understand that is the case. What I'm asking you is whether we should we change that. Should it not be that, if the RCMP or CSIS is making a recommendation, a deputy head should not have the ability to overrule that recommendation without getting sign-off from the public safety minister or someone else who is not a civil servant but is, actually, accountable to the public? That's what I'm asking.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Right now there is no requirement for the public safety minister.... There's no actual role. What I will suggest is that if this is a recommendation this committee chooses to bring forward—and I look forward to the number of recommendations that will be coming from this study—for us to enhance and better our security screenings, we'll absolutely take it into consideration.

Anthony Housefather: I understand the constraints you face and that you can't simply say “yes”, but I personally will be advocating for that as being one of the recommendations of the committee.

I, personally, would also note, as I haven't been in charge of Treasury Board since 2025, since the last election, that the changes that were made to the policies in 2025 have changed the evaluation to a more collective evaluation of information to deal with the DEI changes, which creates a greater amount of subjectivity now with respect to the evaluation.

I'll ask the representative for the Treasury Board.

Mr. Hatfield, do you agree that this creates, now, more subjectivity, when you're taking a holistic as opposed to a black and white approach to somebody's security clearance, based on information you're getting? Does it now leave more power in the hands of whoever is making that decision at the department level?

Adam Hatfield: The changes made in 2025 didn't change that level of subjectivity, but it did make it clearer. There was always a sense that there was a collective evaluation. Security screening, fundamentally, is a process by which information is gathered about a person from various sources, including the RCMP and CSIS, but other sources as well. All that information then goes on the table, including consideration of the position they are going into and the security requirements of that position. Then a security screening official makes a decision: Is this person trustworthy to be reliable and loyal to Canada? That decision is, by design, made within the context of a specific department and under the authority of that deputy head, because it is that deputy head—

Anthony Housefather: I understand all of that. I know the process.

What I'm asking you is this. I understand—this is just my opinion—that the changes made create more of a question of subjectivity because now you have fewer black and whites. You have more qualifiers. You have more instructions that you need to evaluate—for example, foreign risk—on a much wider threshold than you did before in order to prevent somebody who immigrated here from a different country from being subject to discriminatory policies. To me, there's more subjectivity, which would mean even more reason

that if the RCMP or CSIS is making a recommendation, somebody should not simply be allowed to subvert that without going to a politically accountable person. I'm asking again.

• (1155)

Adam Hatfield: Security screening done well is an enabler of a trusted and, yes, diverse and inclusive workforce that is representative of Canadians and Canadian values.

I think that the number of times a security screening official in a government department would receive a negative evaluation or negative review from CSIS and override that decision, in practice, would be vanishingly small. It would almost certainly prompt a conversation with CSIS to understand what, exactly, was the nature of what was happening. As the minister said, there are over 200,000 screenings a year. The vast majority of those screenings yield employees who are reliable and loyal to Canada.

Anthony Housefather: The reliability—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Housefather. I'm always very sorry to cut you off.

The minister's team just informed me that he cannot stay beyond 12, so this will be the last round. This chance is for the Conservatives to have that last five minutes.

Let's start with you, MP Lloyd, for five minutes in total.

Dane Lloyd (Parkland, CPC): Thank you for being here, Minister and officials.

Minister, you've had 70 days since this incident became public to learn about the process and what happened. Can you tell this committee if you are aware of the process by which Ms. Zhang received a security clearance?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I can't get into the specifics of it, Mr. Lloyd, but I am—

Dane Lloyd: I'm not looking for specifics. I'm just asking if you are aware.

The Chair: MP Lloyd, I'm sorry, but if you want to have time, you need to listen to the minister.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I have been briefed on the matter, yes.

Dane Lloyd: Do you believe that there were gaps in the process that led to Ms. Zhang getting her security clearance?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Lloyd, I think that's a determination that this committee could make. I know that this is also part of the investigation that the Belgian officials are undertaking.

Dane Lloyd: Minister, do you believe that there was a gap in the process that led to Ms. Zhang getting her security clearance?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Lloyd, I think in respect of the investigation that's taking place it would be inappropriate for me to be conclusive.

Dane Lloyd: I don't know how.... You know, this is a simple question. It seems pretty obvious to me. Somebody has been suspected and accused of committing crimes and espionage on behalf of a criminal organization, and probably a foreign power, and you can't tell this committee whether or not you think our security screening process failed....?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: What I will say is that we have work to do with respect to our security screening processes. That's why we're here today. That's why all of our agencies are engaged in a review. That's why our Treasury Board, for example, is looking at their policies.

I think it would be unfair to say that we're not responding to this, Mr. Lloyd. We are.

Dane Lloyd: I'm not saying that you're not responding, but you can't solve a problem unless you admit that a problem exists, and you're refusing to admit that there was a gap in our security clearance process.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: That's not—

Dane Lloyd: My next technical question is this: Did the RCMP and CBSA flag concerns to the deputy heads about Ms. Zhang getting a security clearance?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: We should pose that question to them, Mr. Lloyd.

Dane Lloyd: Yes.

A/Commr Don Halina: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I can confirm that we do not provide advice on whether or not to grant the security clearance. What we do provide is the empirical information they're looking for. If it's from a—

Dane Lloyd: Were there concerns provided? Were there concerns raised?

A/Commr Don Halina: I can also confirm that I cannot speak to this individual case. I can speak to the Government of Canada's security process and how the RCMP supports that process.

Dane Lloyd: Minister, did Belgian authorities ever raise this investigation before it became public? Did they share any information about this investigation before the charges were laid?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I believe this matter came to light on the 25th or so of July. I had a briefing on it about a week prior.

Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

I'll pass this on to Mr. Caputo.

Frank Caputo: Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

This is for the minister.

You've probably seen a little year-in-review when it comes to sports, but let's do a little committee-in-review at this point, Minister. We have somebody who knowingly committed fraud. We have a minister who said that they would get to the bottom of it and who 70 days later comes to this committee and says, "We will get to the bottom of it," with no answers. We don't even have a clear answer as to who's responsible for this. Spoiler alert, Minister: you're responsible.

We have no timelines as to when this will happen. You said that we do "a comprehensive job" in security screening and have "an unimpeachable record".

Minister, no we don't. This is negligence. Will you come back within the next 30 days to answer the questions that you didn't answer today, yes or no?

● (1200)

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Great clip, Mr. Caputo....

I'm actually quite.... Every time I come to this committee, I come with a great deal of respect—

Frank Caputo: Answer, please, Minister. Just answer, please.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: —and with the anticipation of answering questions, Mr. Caputo—

Frank Caputo: Canadians want answers not a lecture.

The Chair: Mr. Caputo....

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: —and not for the benefit of a social media post.

Frank Caputo: Just answer, please, Minister.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: What I will say, Mr. Chair, is that I've always made myself available to this committee. I've come here numerous times—

Frank Caputo: Will you come in 30 days...?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: I'm not answering your question, Mr. Caputo. I'm advising the chair that I'm always available to appear.

Frank Caputo: All right. We'll see you in 30 days, then.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all the time we have.

That gives me—I think on behalf of everyone—the opportunity to thank you, Mr. Minister, for having come to this meeting.

We know that the officials will stay for the second hour. For that to be possible, we will suspend for a couple of minutes.

● (1200)

(Pause)

● (1205)

[Translation]

The Chair: Hello again. Thank you for joining us for the second part of the meeting.

We have with us the officials from the departments and agencies we mentioned earlier. I won't list their names again, since you're already familiar with them.

I'll immediately go to Mr. Lloyd for six minutes.

• (1210)

[English]

Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Have you reviewed the process by which Ms. Zhang was able to get a security clearance?

Richard Bilodeau (Assistant Deputy Minister, National and Cyber Security Branch, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Thank you, MP Lloyd.

As Ms. Lloyd commented during the first hour, we have looked at the process. The minister asked for a review, so we have an understanding of it. Unfortunately, we're not in a position to go into any details at this point. There is an ongoing investigation.

Dane Lloyd: Has that review been completed?

Richard Bilodeau: A review is always an ongoing issue. There's always, generally speaking, an opportunity to learn as an investigation proceeds. At this point, I wouldn't be able to give you more specific—

Dane Lloyd: Was it provided to the minister?

Richard Bilodeau: We have briefed the minister on the situation.

Dane Lloyd: Were there gaps in the process that allowed Ms. Zhang to get a security clearance?

Richard Bilodeau: I'm not in a position to answer any questions relevant to the specific case because an investigation is ongoing.

What I can tell you is that every time something comes up, we always take a look at our processes. I can tell you that at Public Safety we have already made some changes, including adding Internet inquiries to our secret security clearances. That is something that we decided to do at Public Safety.

Dane Lloyd: In the wake of this case...?

Richard Bilodeau: Just understanding what happened, we decided when we took a look at our processes that it would be appropriate for us to include Internet inquiries for secret clearances. That's a decision that our deputy head made as a delegated authority on security clearances.

Dane Lloyd: I guess, then, it's safe that.... You're implying that change isn't made unless somebody identifies something that needs to change. It seems clear that there was a gap identified in this case.

I'll ask the RCMP this again. Was the information—specifically, the information about the court finding that Ms. Zhang had committed an act of fraud by using two different names and emails to do a Government of Canada test—passed along through this process?

A/Commr Don Halina: Thank you.

As mentioned before, I can't speak specifically to this case. What we do share is the information from a biometric fingerprint check, outstanding charges, conviction information, criminal fingerprints and biographic data. That's shared with the requesting agency.

Dane Lloyd: Speaking more generally, not in relation to this case, if somebody were found to have committed said fraud when trying to obtain employment with the Government of Canada, would that information come to the attention of the RCMP as part of this process?

A/Commr Josianne Phénix: Let's say that through a law enforcement record check, if a department requires one, depending on the level of security status or clearance, it goes to the Canadian Police Information Centre verification—

Dane Lloyd: It seems to me that Ms. Zhang was probably not listed in CPIC because she wasn't found guilty of the criminal act of fraud. However, is unethical behaviour included in the RCMP's report that's provided?

Clearly, it's unethical to try to use multiple names in order to get a success on a test. Is unethical behaviour something that the RCMP looks for and provides for when doing security clearances?

A/Commr Josianne Phénix: In law enforcement record checks, besides your criminal conviction and charges, we're also going to be looking into association with criminality, with organized crime and with trends or high-risk behaviour with respect to police—

Dane Lloyd: Yes, but let's say that somebody hasn't committed crime per se but has been found to have conducted unethical behaviour in their job or in order to obtain a job. Ms. Zhang, in this case, was found to have broken ethics rules. Is that information in those cases provided by the RCMP? How would the information in a case like that be flagged in a security clearance? Are you looking for that information?

Richard Bilodeau: I think the more information the hiring department has on somebody, the better the decision they can make in terms of their behaviour.

That's why we added an Internet records check. When you Google somebody and look at social media, that can give you valuable information.

Dane Lloyd: Do you think that would have helped in this case, this change that you've implemented? Was it on the Internet? Was it on social media that she had done this unethical act?

• (1215)

Richard Bilodeau: I'm speaking in a general manner. I'm not going to speak about this particular case.

Dane Lloyd: Okay. Let's just speak about a general case where somebody was found guilty of unethical conduct. Is that something you're really going to find on Facebook and Google? Why aren't the government departments talking to each other? Why aren't they sharing information?

Richard Bilodeau: The more information one has—that's why we've added the Internet records check—the better we can make decisions, because that can point to issues of judgment. It can point to associations and ideologies that might present a risk. That can inform the decision by the granting department. If the information is not available publicly, then obviously an Internet records check is not going to yield that, but it also—

Dane Lloyd: Is there a problem with government departments not sharing pertinent information about their employees when they're seeking security clearances?

Richard Bilodeau: I think my colleague from the Treasury Board Secretariat explained some of the modernization that's happening.

I don't know, Adam, if you want to add anything to that.

Adam Hatfield: The directive on security screening is crystal clear that part of even the lowest level of security screening is the verification of the person's identity; the verification of five years of background information, including their employment history, address history and where they've been; and the verification of their education and their professional credentials. If somebody presents themselves as a person who played a role at an organization, that professional credential must be verified. Personal and professional reference checks must be done, plus the financial inquiry and plus a criminal records check. That is the minimum that a department is required to do.

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt. Thank you, Mr. Hatfield.

Ms. Sodhi, you have five minutes, please.

Amandeep Sodhi (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for you, Assistant Deputy Minister Bilodeau. For Canadians who are watching this meeting right now who might not be familiar with the security screening process, can you walk us through the different organizations that are involved?

Richard Bilodeau: I might ask my colleague Mr. Hatfield to answer that. Maybe my colleagues from the RCMP and CSIS can outline the supporting or enabling role they play in the process.

Adam Hatfield: Security screening is defined as being three levels—reliability, secret and top secret—with an enhanced variant at each of those levels, for a total of six categories. Depending on the level of screening, different organizations get involved. Every single Government of Canada employee, co-op student, contractor and partner is screened to at least reliability status. I just listed off the requirements for what reliability screening entails. The one check that is done within the Government of Canada is to the RCMP criminal record database. Higher levels of screening would involve the RCMP again for a law enforcement record check. My RCMP colleagues can explain the difference, but a LERC, as it is known, is a much more exhaustive check. At the level of secret or higher, CSIS is also engaged to provide a security risk assessment.

Beyond that, as checks get higher and higher, it is largely the department that's making the decision and that's aggregating information together.

Amandeep Sodhi: Just as a follow-up, when federal employees or other individuals require a security clearance, what is the very first step that happens? Who ultimately makes the decision?

Adam Hatfield: Once security screening actually begins, it's not looking at the person. It begins by looking at the position and asking what level of screening is required for this position. It's then a question of gathering information about that person with their consent. As part of the security screening process, the individual is made fully aware of what information will be sought. Much of it comes from the individual. Some of it comes from other departments or external sources. The security screening official in the department who's hiring them then puts all of that information on the table and does a collective assessment, taking into account all the information available—its accuracy, its completeness and the particulars of the circumstances of that individual. They then make a call.

The individual is informed of that call. If it is a negative decision, then they are informed in writing as to why and exactly what their rights of recourse are. Post the granting of a clearance or a status, as security screening is not a one-and-done process, there's a continuous maintenance process to make sure that as the person goes through their career, regular recurring checks are done, depending on the level. That clearance is updated when necessary.

Amandeep Sodhi: Once an individual has been granted a security clearance, what mechanisms are in place to identify changes in their circumstances that could affect their security status? What would trigger an updated security assessment or a review of an existing clearance?

Adam Hatfield: The directive on security screening defines a strict timeline for when certain checks need to be redone. It is more frequent at higher levels.

Managers, employees and all public servants are also required under the directive both to self-report any changes in their own personal circumstances and, to be quite frank, to report changes in circumstances that they see in other employees and incidents where an individual might be seeking to access information they don't have the right to access, or anything that might be security related, to their chief security officer so they can be considered.

● (1220)

Amandeep Sodhi: This next question is directed to our witnesses from the RCMP.

Are there any areas where greater information sharing among CSIS, the RCMP and departments could strengthen the security screening process? If so, what does that look like for you in practice?

A/Commr Josianne Phénix: There's already communication among those departments. If there's adverse information that comes up, as you mentioned before, and we need to review somebody, we are able to communicate with our partners, whether it's CSIS or the chief security officer from another department, to share that information for their assessment.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you.

This question is for all of the officials, so feel free to add anything that you would like.

Everyone around this table shares the objective of having a strong and effective screening system. From your perspective, what aspects of Canada's current security screening framework are working particularly well, and where do you see the greatest opportunities for improvement?

Vanessa Lloyd: Thank you for the question.

I'll start by saying that each organization takes its responsibilities extremely seriously in regard to security clearance, which in effect allows individuals access to Canada's most sensitive systems and classified information. That system, under the revised security screening directive, works quite well. I believe that each of our departments would say that in our cases, we perform those functions with extreme rigour and due diligence.

The distinction that my colleague from the Treasury Board made about the differences in the parts of the process relating to the full information considered by a decision-maker—a deputy head who is hiring an individual—also means that some of the information goes to different parts of the system.

I will emphasize that what CSIS is looking at, for example, is whether the information provided about the applicant by a requesting department has links to any concerns we have in our holdings related to national security investigations and national security threats. What we do not look at is all of the bulk of the information collected in the suitability portion of a department's responsibility or all of the information amassed in the reliability status.

We are not entitled to ask for that information or to share that information back.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Sodhi.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for six minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Lloyd, can you tell me what level of security clearance is required to do an internship at NATO, as Ms. Zhang did?

Vanessa Lloyd: Thank you for the question, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

As my colleague from the Treasury Board Secretariat mentioned, the nature of the work is—

Claude DeBellefeuille: You know the nature of her work. What level was required?

Vanessa Lloyd: It depends on the position.

Claude DeBellefeuille: You know her position, Ms. Lloyd. Just tell me if it was secret or top secret clearance.

Vanessa Lloyd: I won't talk about a specific case, but for the committee's information, I can say that, according to the standard, internships at NATO require a secret security clearance.

Claude DeBellefeuille: What I understood from the testimony is that this person was employed by Global Affairs Canada before leaving for NATO. Could an employee move from one department to another to avoid security clearance reviews and slip through the cracks?

This person worked at the Canadian Space Agency, Statistics Canada, the European Space Agency and the Standards Council of Canada, before ending up as an intern at NATO, without anyone within the government realizing that she had defrauded the Public Service Commission.

Is it possible for a highly intelligent employee to move from one department to another without ever having their security clearance reviewed?

• (1225)

Richard Bilodeau: I'll start, and then I'll ask Mr. Hatfield to add to my answer if necessary.

When we hire someone at the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, we always verify the validity of their security clearance, which is transferred. It is also the department's responsibility, when someone comes to work there, to ensure that they can be trusted, taking into account the position they are filling. If it's a position that requires secret or top secret security clearance, it's up to the department to verify the clearance.

In my field, there are more positions that require top secret security clearance. When we have to raise an employee's security clearance level, we must conduct a new background check. We ensure that we follow the policy. As the receiving department, we have a responsibility to verify the validity of the security clearance.

Claude DeBellefeuille: We know that, Mr. Bilodeau. It's in the committee analysts' notes. I want to understand something else.

Before joining NATO, Ms. Zhang was employed by a government department. She applied for an internship. You told me that, according to the standard, internships at NATO require a secret security clearance, which requires a review every five years. That means this person left a department—which was not yours, as I understand—that the department let her go without reviewing her security clearance and that NATO accepted her without ensuring that the security clearance had been verified. That's my understanding.

It's not the fault of the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness because she's not your employee, after all. You're all absolving yourselves of blame by saying that each department is responsible, that it's doing its best and that it submits requests to the RCMP and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. I understand that. It's convenient to say that in committee, as it shifts the blame from everyone. However, this person still managed to obtain an internship that requires a secret security clearance without having her status validated and reapproved, despite everything we know today—such as the fact that she was using fake names and multiple Facebook accounts. I've never conducted a background check, but it seems to me that this is information that can be easily found.

So it's possible to move from one department to another without ever having your security clearance verified. Mr. Hatfield, as an experienced public servant who has worked in many departments, have you ever seen anything like this?

Adam Hatfield: According to the policy, it is not possible to hire someone without verifying their security clearance.

Claude DeBellefeuille: So what happened? Does that mean the verification was not done?

[English]

Adam Hatfield: I'm not in a position to speak to the particulars of this case because Treasury Board does not get involved in the forensics of a case, but I can say that the policy is very clear that when someone arrives, either the clearance is verified working with the previous government department or it is redone. There is no circumstance where a government department would hire somebody—

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Hatfield, I have another quick question for you.

When a thorough background check is conducted on a Canadian of foreign origin for a position that requires secret or top secret security clearance, is it also necessary to investigate their family and relationships in their country of origin? Does it go that far?

[English]

Adam Hatfield: Part of the security screening process at any level is identification of immediate family, and certainly at a top secret or a secret level, an assessment of foreign influence or the potential for the individual to be coerced because they have family overseas who might be vulnerable. That is absolutely part of the criteria that are looked at.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much for that exchange.

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

[English]

Rhonda Kirkland: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Lloyd, when CSIS conducts security screenings, does it have access to findings of fraud or misconduct made by the Public Service Commission?

Vanessa Lloyd: Thank you for the question.

Again, I will emphasize this and maybe make a point of language precision. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service supports the broader security screening continuum of the various parts of the activities that we've been talking about. Our responsibility is to provide an assessment, not advice or recommendations, to the requesting department of whether there are indications with respect to that individual that could affect their loyalty to Canada and their reliability related thereto. Our responsibilities in that sphere relate strictly to threats to the security of Canada as defined under the CSIS Act.

• (1230)

Rhonda Kirkland: Would you consider a person who commits fraud when applying for another position across the public service to be a threat to security or to Canada?

Vanessa Lloyd: Again, thank you for the question.

The aspects of honesty and trustworthiness relate to the reliability status part of the continuum that we're speaking to, and they could be relevant, as my colleague and Mr. Hatfield indicated, to aspects of influence on an individual in terms of their future behaviour. When we look at the information provided by an individual in relation to their application, we would look to determine whether we have, in our holdings, any information that indicates that the individual has or is and could be involved in threats to national security—that relates to espionage, foreign interference and terrorism threats.

Rhonda Kirkland: What if it were a potential CSIS employee?

Vanessa Lloyd: Thank you very much for the question.

At CSIS, as a high-security organization, its employees are assessed to a higher standard than secret, as we've been speaking about today, which requires the—

Rhonda Kirkland: Is it at a higher standard than for someone being placed in NATO?

Vanessa Lloyd: The base requirement for an employment with CSIS is “top secret enhanced”. The directive on security screening outlines the requirements for issuing and considering whether an individual, under those requirements, is suitable for employment at CSIS.

Rhonda Kirkland: If CSIS were to hire an individual, would they look at their past history and whether they've applied to the public service at all before?

Vanessa Lloyd: As my colleague Mr. Hatfield outlined, we would do all of the checks that are outlined in the directive on security screening—

Rhonda Kirkland: You wouldn't check that they have because that wasn't one he listed.

Vanessa Lloyd: “Top secret enhanced,” for example, does mean that we have to do the background and employment checks. As an employer, we would have to do all parts of that continuum we've been speaking about today. There's suitability: Do they have the knowledge and experience for the job? There's reliability—

Rhonda Kirkland: I'm very specific. I'm trying to home in and be very specific regarding fraud. If I'm hiring somebody for my office, for instance, I would like to know whether they had applied somewhere else. I don't always have access to that. Maybe members of Parliament should have access as to whether or not that person applied to the public service at the federal level and was denied because it was seen that they had committed fraud. That's a real concern. If they're willing to commit fraud to get a job at the federal level in our government, why is that not...?

It just feels very laissez-faire. It feels very, "Oh, well, that's just a small piece. We're really looking at this." That's pretty important. If someone is willing to lie to get a job with the federal government, how are we not more cautious of putting them in a place of high national security?

Maybe that question is for Mr. Bilodeau—I don't know.

If we're not, what can we do to get there?

Richard Bilodeau: Let me answer your question from the perspective of a hiring manager—which I am. I have delegated authority to hire. It is important for me, when I hire somebody, to, first, assess the person on whether or not they meet the requirements of the job. However, part of that assessment is talking to previous employers and doing reference checks with, for example, the immediate previous supervisor. We do that because that allows us to understand—

Rhonda Kirkland: I'm sorry. Can I just clarify something? As far as I understand, this person was found to have committed fraud, so they did not get employment before. In a scenario where they just applied, would we be able to find that out? They applied for public service somewhere across the federal level. They were found to have committed fraud. Now they come to another public service and try to apply there. What's missing? Why are the silos...? What's missing in communication?

The Chair: Give a short answer, please.

Richard Bilodeau: Without speaking to that hypothetical situation—and I don't want to speak to the case, either—

Rhonda Kirkland: I understand.

Richard Bilodeau: —immediate previous supervisors can include government and non-government supervisors. For example, if I talk to an immediate supervisor and that person has information on the person's employment, that could influence how I do that suitability, that reliability.

To your—

Rhonda Kirkland: That's right, but that doesn't fix the problem.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Kirkland. I always—as you know—hesitate to do that.

I have to now turn to MP Powlowski for five minutes, please.

• (1235)

Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): This is an interesting area of inquiry for me. I have not spent a lot of my life thinking about how I would do security screening. It would seem to me, just in thinking about it, that this would be pretty difficult—potentially impossible.

You talked about biometrics and law enforcement records. I assume the Chinese or Russians aren't going to employ some petty criminal from Thunder Bay who's done a lot of B and Es, so I'm not sure how useful that would be. You also mentioned Internet inquiries. When did that start?

Adam Hatfield: The Internet inquiry, or open source inquiry, has been part of security screening since at least 2014, and it was part of it prior to that. It depends on the level at which the individual is being screened. It is not a default requirement for the lowest level of screening and reliability. Of the six levels of screening, it is required for four of those, and a department has the flexibility to go above and beyond and can certainly do so, as Mr. Bilodeau noted about Public Safety.

Marcus Powlowski: Does that just include using Google, or do you have the ability to screen social media like Facebook posts and things like that?

Adam Hatfield: Different government departments will do it differently. Everything is done with the person's consent. There are privacy issues here. There's also the fact that a lot of what you might find out about someone on the Internet is in fact completely false. There are controls in place to make sure that when a department gathers information about an individual specifically for an Internet inquiry, they bring that back to the individual, if it's potentially security relevant, to ask, "Is this actually you?", and verify that the information is in fact accurate.

Marcus Powlowski: What do you do if I say, "No, I don't want you searching my Facebook"?

Adam Hatfield: It's just like when you're at an airport: "If you don't want to be searched, you don't have to get on the plane, sir."

Marcus Powlowski: That means you don't hire them if they don't like it.

Adam Hatfield: Full consent for the security screening process is a fundamental part of the process. An individual can choose to withdraw their consent and say, "I don't want to go any further," and the screening is simply cancelled.

Marcus Powlowski: How useful is that information anyhow? Say someone like this woman who's been accused of spying for NATO is applying for a job, but five years ago she said something on a Facebook page like, "The Chinese are our friends. We ought to have a closer economic association between our countries." Is that really going to be something that bars you from hiring her for this kind of position, and should it be?

Adam Hatfield: None of the checks that are done are pass-fail checks, and that is by design. The directive states that it must be a "collective evaluation" of all the information, giving due consideration to that individual's particular circumstances.

The question that you're posing is about the decision-maker in that moment and everything they're looking at. If required, they can always go back to the individual and say, "Listen, these are the things that are causing us some concern. Can you talk to us about them?" That is what the security screening officials are trained to do in order to make a good risk decision within the context of their organization and their own security tolerance.

Marcus Powlowski: Similarly, with friends and associates, in the old days it probably used to be easy. You worked for the CIA, you came from Des Moines and when you started hanging out with a bunch of Russians, people started to ask questions.

Nowadays, we know people from every country in the world. I have a thousand names on my phone, and some of them may have criminal records, for all I know. Some of them may have extreme views. Nowadays we have so many contacts. How and what do you do to look at your circle of friends to see whether you happen to hang out with a lot of people from ISIS, for example? What practically can you do to screen through the vast number of contacts to see if there's something of concern?

Adam Hatfield: The basis of the directive on security screening is reliability as a person: honesty, trustworthiness, integrity and loyalty to Canada. It covers anything that raises doubt about whether you're an honest and reliable person. Are you inclined to lie? Are you inclined to shade things in your favour? Do you have attachments to foreign nations? Is there reason to believe that when making a decision, you might prioritize another nation over Canada?

Anything that raises doubt is brought forward to the individual, and the security screening official has a conversation with them. Out of that determination, a decision is made by the department: Do we trust this person to be reliable and loyal? Sometimes it is a no, but usually it is a yes.

• (1240)

Marcus Powlowski: You said something about whether that person has an allegiance to Canada or might have an allegiance to some other entity that exceeds it. How would you know that? In my circle of friends, if I happen to hang around with a lot of Chinese people, does that make it questionable whether my allegiance is to Canada or to China?

The Chair: Answer quickly, please.

Adam Hatfield: The directive is not a one-and-done process. Ongoing continuous assurance of individuals is important as well. The security screening process is a point in time, but security monitoring and insider risk management is an ongoing process.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Powlowski.

[Translation]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Hatfield, do employees who work for multiple departments have a single human resources file or multiple human resources files?

Is there a central file for all public service employees and agency staff or does each department have its own human resources file?

Adam Hatfield: When it comes to human resources files, I'm no expert.

[English]

Also, if we look at the breadth of the public service, there are departments that are within the core public administration and subject to Treasury Board as the employer. There are separate employers, agencies such as CSIS or the Communications Security Establishment. If you go even a little broader, there are Crown corporations—

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: I'm sorry to interrupt. I'll explain what I'm trying to understand.

If there is a central file on an employee who undergoes a fairly thorough evaluation, is the result of that search or investigation transferred from one department to another? Is it reported to Treasury Board?

When someone has a track record as a good employee or a bad employee, is that information shared among departments and agencies, or is everything handled in isolation?

[English]

Richard Bilodeau: Do you want me to jump in on this, Adam?

For example, Madame DeBellefeuille....

[Translation]

I'm sorry, I started answering in English.

There are files—in the case of our performance evaluations, for example—that are centralized in a government software system. So they are accessible.

I believe Ms. Kirkland asked a question earlier about working in isolation. There is always room for improvement in information sharing among departments—whether it concerns human resources or security—in order to facilitate hiring or security decisions—

Claude DeBellefeuille: When you talk about improvement, am I to understand that, basically, there is currently no centralized process for sharing information?

Richard Bilodeau: There is a process, but we can still wonder if there is room to make it more efficient and faster. That is one of the questions that arises and that could be examined.

Claude DeBellefeuille: At Global Affairs Canada, when the person in question left to join NATO, normally, there should have been awareness of that person's behaviour and the complaint filed against them. That's what we can't understand. I think it will remain a mystery until we see the results of the investigation. However, this seems so major to us, Mr. Bilodeau, that we don't understand how this person was able to reach NATO.

Richard Bilodeau: Unfortunately, I can't give you an answer on that case, but Mr. Hatfield—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Bilodeau and Mr. Hatfield, but the two and a half minutes are up.

Mr. Caputo, you have the floor for five minutes.

Frank Caputo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I'm going to ask the two RCMP assistant commissioners a question.

I'll start with a quote from a Global News story on May 21. It says, "The RCMP will not unilaterally make public or share the contents of an MOU with a third party without the concurrence of the other party". That's a quote from a Ms. Percival. It continues, "As such, the RCMP is not releasing the contents of the MOU at this time." Is that still the RCMP position?

A/Commr Don Halina: I'm not a specialist on the MOU. I can get that information, and I can endeavour to get that back to the committee.

Frank Caputo: What I would specifically like that information to answer is this: Does that remain the RCMP position? If not, when did it change?

I'm going to read another quote. This is directly from the minister, and it's from May 28, a week later. The minister said, "To answer your question with a yes or no, no, the Chinese government does not tell us or dictate to us or veto any release of these documents."

I'll be very direct, the RCMP statement is at odds with what the minister said. I think Canadians have a right to know the truth without any word salad or anything like that. If we could get a very direct quote within the next week from the RCMP, please, that would be very helpful.

I'll move on here.

• (1245)

A/Commr Don Halina: I have a point for clarification: You're looking for the RCMP policy as it relates to MOUs—

Frank Caputo: I mean this MOU in particular. Does the May 21 quote still stand? Does that remain the RCMP position? If it doesn't, when did it change?

Let's move on here. I'll be very candid. This isn't meant to be disparaging or anything like that, but we walked in an hour and 45 minutes ago, and I don't feel like we have any further answers on something that is a very serious matter.

I will ask this: What level of security clearance did Ms. Zhang require for the NATO position?

Vanessa Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Caputo, for the question.

As we mentioned earlier today, according to the Privacy Act, we are unable to answer questions specifically related to individuals who have asked for or have renewed a security clearance. I did share with Ms. DeBellefeuille that the norm for NATO is a secret clearance.

Frank Caputo: I'm sorry to interrupt you.

I will be very direct. What about somebody in that role? What security clearance do they require? I don't mean for Ms. Zhang, but for a NATO intern, what is the security clearance level?

Vanessa Lloyd: Thank you for the question.

As I mentioned to Madame DeBellefeuille, the norm at NATO is a NATO secret clearance, but it depends on the position and it depends on the role at NATO. That is done by the sponsoring department—in this case Global Affairs.

Frank Caputo: The security clearance is at least a secret level. It can go to that enhanced level. Is that correct?

Vanessa Lloyd: In every instance, as my colleagues have described, a security clearance requirement is determined by the employer, based on the duties and functions of the position the employee will fill.

Frank Caputo: Thank you.

How is it that somebody with two identities, somebody who had committed fraud, somebody who was previously barred from work, got past a secret level clearance? If you can't answer, I understand that's the answer we're going to get, but Canadians really want to know. We were told that the minister would get to the bottom of this 70 days ago, and we still don't have an answer. The spectre of an "ongoing investigation" is going to loom large, and who knows how long that's going to take.

A secret level clearance is a high-level clearance. It's actually a higher level clearance than I had as a parole officer. It's a high-level clearance. Background interviews are done. Credit checks, I'm sure, are done—things like that. How is it possible, hypothetically, that somebody with the factors I outlined got, at least, a secret level clearance?

Vanessa Lloyd: Thank you for the question.

As we've been discussing this afternoon, there are various parts of a security clearance process. What I can speak to is the CSIS process, and that is based on information that is provided by the sponsoring department to CSIS, in comparison to information that we have in our holdings at the time of that request.

Frank Caputo: We have a few more seconds here. The last question—

The Chair: Thank you. Unfortunately—

Frank Caputo: Can I ask a quick question, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have to be very quick.

Frank Caputo: If this were missed, would that not be a massive intelligence failure?

Vanessa Lloyd: Thank you for the question.

My quick response would be that intelligence and security professionals are rigorous and dedicated in doing their duties. They provide the assessments to a sponsoring department based on the information available to them and in comparison to the information we have about security and intelligence threats, as related to loyalty at the time of that request.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramsay, go ahead for five minutes.

Jacques Ramsay: I'd like to begin by thanking the five witnesses for their patience and co-operation.

Ms. Lloyd, Mr. Bilodeau and Mr. Hatfield, you told us that Canada's security screening process is constantly evolving. There were changes in 2014 and 2025. I can't imagine that you don't monitor what is being done elsewhere when you have to draft new directives. You certainly monitor what is being done within the Five Eyes, and perhaps what is being done elsewhere more generally.

I would like the three of you to tell us what you've learned from this monitoring you've done. What lessons or insights have you drawn from that monitoring?

I imagine that you have done such monitoring again in recent months. Therefore, I would particularly like to know if you have seen anything that is not being done in Canada that we could implement now.

• (1250)

Adam Hatfield: I thank the member for his question.

[English]

Our Five Eyes allies and I, in Canada, collaborate extremely closely on matters of security screening, and so does NATO more broadly. A Canadian secret clearance or top secret clearance is considered an equivalent to a NATO or a Five Eyes clearance. All of those equivalencies are done. When you talk internationally to experts in this field about security screening, all of the same issues are coming up, and many of them have been raised today.

We now live in a world that is very globalized. People have connections all over the place. How do you assure a trusted workforce? How do you ensure that the person in front of you is reliable and loyal at the moment you hire them, and how do you ensure that through their career, as their life changes and as they encounter life events, they remain reliable and loyal? Those are difficult questions to answer.

All of our security screening practices—and by “practices”, I include the work that is done at the working level by screening officials, the tools they use, the information they base it on and, ultimately, the policies by which they do this that are set by Treasury Board—are in play at any given moment. Very frequently, when we learn lessons, it isn't at the level of policy. It's at the level of the training of a security official, the tools that they had and the criteria that they used.

These are judgment decisions that are made. You can look at judgment decisions from two different government organizations and see that one would say, “Based on our threat environment, we would have said yes”, and another would say, “Given our circumstances, we would have said no in that situation.” There are always cases that are right on that edge.

These are ongoing conversations, and the discipline of security screening is a very active one. We are constantly looking for ways to do this better.

[Translation]

Richard Bilodeau: I would add that, at Public Safety Canada, whenever something doesn't go as planned, we ask ourselves what we could improve. With that in mind, as part of our review of our own security measures, we decided to add an Internet check, which we've been doing for a few months now.

[English]

Vanessa Lloyd: Perhaps I'll add for the consideration of the committee that there are different systems. A question that was asked earlier was with regard to whether vetoes are in play in our system. They are not. In other systems, they are. Certainly as a community of high-security organizations, we look forward to the considerations of this committee on recommendations to improve going forward, both at the individual institution level and as a community writ large.

Jacques Ramsay: When you say “veto”, does this go back to what my colleague mentioned earlier?

Vanessa Lloyd: Yes.

[Translation]

Jacques Ramsay: Okay.

Other deputy ministers may be less aware of everything. Since you're telling me that responsibility lies across all departments, what do you plan to do to ensure that everyone is on the same page?

Adam Hatfield: I can speak to that.

[English]

Across the federal government, every government department that is subject to the policy on government security is required to name a chief security officer who is responsible for all of this. Those chief security officers are all members of a council of chief security officers that meets on a regular basis. This specific issue is absolutely being discussed. Everyone, on a continuing basis, is asking themselves and asking their colleagues, “How is it that you do this? Are my practices similar to yours? Can I learn something from you?”

The security community in government is an extremely active one and a very collaborative one. All of that is underpinned at a more profound level by intelligence from organizations like the service and like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Morrison, the floor is yours.

[English]

Rob Morrison: Thank you, Chair.

To start with, I was really surprised to hear the RCMP say that there isn't an interoperability issue. I think that when you talk about information sharing, there is so much work that could be done. I'm glad Treasury Board's here too to be able to link databases.

When the RCMP have challenges within their own agency because of the number of databases that are there, I would think that in this case, when you're talking security clearances, especially getting into the secret or top secret security levels or indoctrination levels, we could do so much better in the RCMP as an organization if you could somehow figure out your interoperability issues, and I don't think you're anywhere close to that. We know that you can't talk to certain agencies. You can't electronically share information, given how challenging it is. I think we could do a lot there.

I'm curious about who sets the national security clearance levels. Does each agency do its own? Do they figure out a position and figure out what level it's going to be?

• (1255)

Adam Hatfield: That is correct.

Rob Morrison: With 200,000 applicants every year, that's an enormous amount.

Can you give me a rough idea how many would be enhanced, how many would be secret and how many would be TS?

Adam Hatfield: Roughly 60% of the screenings done every year are at the reliability level, 30% are at the secret level and 10% are at the top secret level.

Rob Morrison: We all know—that's anybody who's gone through the top secret or secret process—how long it takes with CSIS because of the resources needed. Even 10% of 200,000 is a huge number.

Is there something we can do so that we can be better at, I guess.... It's like what's happened with this case where the individual missed a fraud investigation, which is crazy. The RCMP would never hire anybody if they saw that. It would be a no-go automatically, yet somehow that squished through the system.

What could we do? Please give a short answer, because I'm going to share my time with MP Caputo.

Adam Hatfield: I'm happy to respond to that.

The rigour in the system is very high when those high screening levels are applied.

To your comment about interoperability and better sharing of information, I 100% agree there's room for improvement there. A lot of that turns into an IT and data problem. Where we would see improvement is in the speed, transferability and consistency. It wouldn't necessarily affect the rigour of the system, but it would certainly let us use our resources far more effectively and hopefully cut down some of those times.

Frank Caputo: Thank you.

I said at the beginning of my last intervention and my last opportunity to speak that we were no further ahead, and we're still no further ahead.

I know that you all have limits to what you can say that are set by the government or by your positions, but I haven't heard any answers today. All I've heard is shifting: "Well, this person is responsible for this, and that agency is responsible for that." It's a lot of pointing fingers. It's like I'm looking at the Spider-Man meme with

everybody pointing at each other. Everybody's talking about who should be doing what.

I asked a really basic question—no disrespect, Ms. Lloyd—about whether this would be a colossal intelligence failure. I think that's a really simple question, and we did not get a simple answer. We got a lot of, "Well, it depends on this, and it depends on who knew what or when."

I think that at your levels, you all know what happened. You've all been briefed on what happened or you have a pretty darn good idea, and you're not allowed to share that with this committee, but can we not just answer some simple questions?

Was this an intelligence failure? Yes, it was. Did Canada's international standing suffer because of this? Yes, it did.

How could this happen? We have no answer for that. All we were told was, "We'll get to the bottom of this." We were told that 70 days ago. We don't even know when this investigation is going to be done, from what I heard—and correct me if I'm wrong. What we were told here was that this is Belgium's investigation and we're co-operating. What about Canada's investigation? Everybody around this table is responsible to their constituents and to Canadians. As a member of His Majesty's loyal opposition, my job is to be critical where it is appropriate to be critical, and that's why I'm making these remarks. It's not personal. It is just that we have no answers. I don't even know if there's a Canadian investigation going on here. I have no idea how our national security was compromised.

Can we even confirm that? Is there a Canadian investigation going on? Can somebody give me a yes or no answer to that, please?

Vanessa Lloyd: Thank you for the question. I will try my best to answer multiple of your questions.

Frank Caputo: Is there an investigation? That's it, please.

The Chair: You have just a few seconds.

Vanessa Lloyd: I can confirm, as the minister and the Prime Minister have said, that CSIS is involved in the ongoing investigation as it relates to this particular case.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Caputo. I'm sorry to interrupt.

Ms. Acan, go ahead for five minutes, please.

• (1300)

Sima Acan: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

We all agree that there is an issue that we need to discuss, but to find out who is guilty is to understand what the gaps are in the policies and work on those.

As mentioned, the Treasury Board establishes the policy framework for security screening. Mr. Hatfield, could you please walk us through the security screening process once again?

Adam Hatfield: It begins first and foremost with a consideration of the position that is being staffed or the contract that is being let, in the situation that it's a contract. What level of screening is required for that position, based on the duties and functions?

Second, when a candidate is presented to occupy that position, it's a process of gathering information about that individual, with that individual's consent. Some of that information comes directly from the individual. Some of it comes from security agencies like the service and the RCMP, and some of it comes from an external source, such as a financial credit agency.

Then the decision-maker takes all of that information, puts it on the table and looks at it collectively to understand whether they see reason for doubt as to the reliability and loyalty of this individual. If there is doubt, the individual is pulled into the process. They are required to be informed that there is doubt and to be provided with an opportunity to answer to that doubt. The decision-maker then makes a decision. If it's a negative decision, the person has to be informed, has to be told why and has to be told what avenues of recourse are available to them. If it is a positive decision, they have to be informed as to what level of responsibility they now have for the information and the facilities that they might now have access to because of the level of screening they have.

Then we enter a process of continuous assurance. Screening is not just a "one and done". Once the initial screening is awarded, the person is subject to a regular cycle of updates and verifications to ensure that their reliability and loyalty are assessed on a continuous basis. When they leave the public service, that clearance is then deactivated as necessary.

Sima Acan: Thank you very much.

Today you made it very clear to us that the deputy heads of departments retain the final decision in granting clearance and other routine screening decisions. Is that correct?

Adam Hatfield: That is correct.

Sima Acan: Okay. When was this policy established?

Adam Hatfield: Security screening started during the Second World War. It has evolved very considerably over time. Potentially of interest to this committee—

Sima Acan: When are the deputy heads put in as the main persons in these considerations?

Adam Hatfield: Per the Financial Administration Act, deputy heads are designated as accounting officers responsible for the prudent management of their departments. That includes security management. By dint of being a deputy minister, those individuals inherit responsibility for the security of their organizations and of their people. Because of that, it flows from there that they are the ones ultimately accountable within their organizations for the decisions they make.

Treasury Board policy flows from that and informs them how they exercise their security responsibilities, but it is the Financial Administration Act that puts that responsibility on them.

Sima Acan: What year was it?

Adam Hatfield: The Financial Administration Act, I believe, was first written in 1867. I could not tell you when.

Sima Acan: The final decision that was made by—

Adam Hatfield: I don't have that information.

Sima Acan: I believe the policy changed to giving the decision to the heads in 2014.

Given that CSIS and the RCMP provide the intelligence and security assessments, do you believe there's a risk in having the final clearance decision made by a single deputy head?

Adam Hatfield: The design of the system today.... Again, given the fact that different organizations operate in very different security environments and in very different threat environments against different organizations, giving the deputy head the final say is currently the policy in place.

To change that—to say to a deputy head, for example, that they are not empowered to make that decision—would be like saying that they're required to accept somebody else's positive or negative decision about somebody they're hiring. That would undercut their own responsibility as accounting officers to manage the department.

Sima Acan: In your view, does concentrating that authority in a single decision-maker create any vulnerabilities or increase the risk of error?

Adam Hatfield: I would argue that in fact it is distributed across the system. Every deputy head is responsible for their own department. Together, collectively, they assure the security of the government as a whole, but there's no one person making decisions across the entire federal government.

Sima Acan: Earlier you mentioned that updates were done in the policy framework in January 2025. Where are we with that implementation?

Adam Hatfield: When that policy was promulgated, departments were given two years to become fully compliant. This past January, a check-in with all government departments required them to provide an update and to identify whether they saw any barriers to full implementation. I'm pleased to say that not a single government department indicated any barriers to implementation.

In January of this coming year, we will—

● (1305)

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Claude DeBellefeuille: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

So, Mr. Hatfield, you're delighted. You're telling us that, since the new policy was implemented in 2025, no department has fallen behind schedule and everything is going well. However, there was still one case in 2026 of a person working for Global Affairs Canada who needed a secret security clearance to do an internship and still managed to be hired.

Now, we are asking ourselves questions. If the implementation of the new policy is going so well, how can you explain to the committee members what happened in July 2026? You can't tell us that everything is going very well and that you're satisfied when there's such a glaring example of a botched investigation, poor research and a lack of communication. Call it what you will, but I don't get the impression that the implementation of your policy is going all that well because the result, in 2026, is pretty bad, isn't it?

Adam Hatfield: Thank you for the question.

[English]

I'm not in a position to speak to the specifics of this particular case. What I can say is that an estimated over 200,000 security screenings are done every year. The vast majority of those individuals prove themselves, day in and day out, to be reliable and loyal public servants.

I'm afraid I can't speak to the specifics of this particular case.

[Translation]

Claude DeBellefeuille: Okay.

I have no further questions.

The Chair: That's great.

I would like to thank the senior officials for taking the time to prepare for this meeting and for attending.

Of course, I'd like to thank the technicians.

Before you leave, colleagues, I'll give you a brief overview of what's coming up.

On Wednesday, October 7, two days from now, we'll have another meeting on this topic. There will be no meeting next Monday or on Wednesday, October 14.

On Monday, October 19, we will consider two reports. The first concerns what is known as the H₂O highway corridor, the St. Lawrence River. The second report, which we will consider for the first time, concerns foreign nationals.

This Wednesday, we will hold a third meeting on today's topic of Canada's security screening processes. The week after that, we may have some good news for Mr. Lloyd and his bill.

[English]

I know that MP Lloyd is working very hard with the clerk and the analysts. We look forward to the possible consideration of his private member's bill the week after.

Thank you. Have a great day.

The meeting is adjourned.

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