



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 082

Tuesday, June 13, 2023

Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



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• (1005)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. I call the meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 82 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is studying the question of privilege related to the member for Wellington—Halton Hills and other members.

With us today, we have Michael Duheme, commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and Mark Flynn, deputy commissioner.

We welcome you to the procedure and House affairs committee. Thank you for responding to our request so quickly. Kudos to you and your team for your quick communications.

With that, Commissioner Duheme, you will have up to five minutes for your opening comments before we start our rounds of questions.

Commissioner Michael Duheme (Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Madam Chair, committee members, there's no need for introductions. The Chair looked after that.

I want to highlight that Deputy Commissioner Flynn was in charge of most of our foreign interference files in the last couple of years, so a wealth of knowledge is here, and I hope we will be able to share that knowledge with all of the members here.

As you're likely aware, foreign interference poses a complex threat to the security of Canada and Canadians. The RCMP is actively leveraging all tools at its disposal to combat foreign interference. We're working closely with our domestic and international partners to take a multipronged approach and to share as much information as possible.

[Translation]

In a minute I'll come back in more detail to how we're tackling foreign interference, but I assure you we're doing everything we can to keep Canadians safe.

Foreign interference can involve various states such as the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran, among others, attacking Canada, its institutions, its society and its citizens.

[English]

These activities are undertaken to advance the strategic interests of a state, and the methods can include threats of violence, coercion, or surveillance of the public, including culturally or linguistically diverse groups, human rights defenders, political dissidents, pro-democracy advocates, and politicians at all levels, including members of Parliament.

I will speak to two issues today. I'll speak about the RCMP's role in responding to and investigating foreign interference-related threats to public safety, including members of the public and MPs, and how members of Parliament can identify and report foreign interference-related activities to the RCMP.

[Translation]

First of all, the intimidation of MPs is worrying, as it poses a threat to the security of elected leaders and our democracy. Foreign actors are attempting to undermine our sovereignty and exercise the power of foreign states on a transnational scale. I want to assure the members of this committee that we are aware of these threats, we are responding and we are fighting foreign interference.

[English]

The RCMP has opened an investigation of reported allegations of intimidation targeting the Hon. Michael Chong, and has contacted the Commissioner of Canada Elections regarding other allegations that have come to light that fall under his mandate, and has offered its assistance.

Within the Government of Canada's approach, the RCMP has a number of tools at its disposal to address foreign interference. The RCMP's investigative teams may leverage specific provisions of the Criminal Code to investigate potential threats of violence, harassment and intimidation involving state actors. These could include breach of trust, intimidation, criminal harassment and foreign-influenced threats or violence, which fall under the Security of Information Act.

We use the knowledge gained from our criminal intelligence, as well as our collaborations with domestic and international law enforcement and security and intelligence partners, to adapt to the criminal methods used by foreign actors.

[Translation]

The RCMP works closely with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, CSIS, under our co-operation agreement. We have undertaken to ensure the effectiveness of this partnership despite some of the challenges we still face in using partner intelligence to advance criminal investigations.

That said, much work has been achieved following the Operational Improvement Review, conducted in 2018, which focused on the challenges of using intelligence as evidence. Of the 76 recommendations, 18 have yet to be fully implemented to facilitate the full use of intelligence to prosecute criminal cases.

[English]

It is important to underline our co-operation with local police jurisdictions, as well as our domestic and international law enforcement and security and intelligence partners to address foreign interference activities. I recently attended a Five Eyes law enforcement meeting in Australia, and foreign interference was the key topic of our discussions.

With that, I will open it up. Mark and I welcome questions with regard to foreign interference.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner, for those great comments, and for bringing Mr. Flynn along with you today.

We will enter the six-minute rounds, starting with Mr. Cooper followed by Mr. Turnbull, Madame Gaudreau and then Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Cooper, you have the floor.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Duheme and Mr. Flynn, for appearing this morning.

When did the RCMP open its investigation concerning Beijing's intimidation campaign targeting MP Chong?

Commr Michael Duheme: With regard to MP Chong, we found out about it through the committee here and through the media.

Mr. Michael Cooper: So it started in the last few weeks.

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes, and when we were made aware of it, we approached Mr. Chong and began the investigation.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

You also indicated that the RCMP has passed on information to the Commissioner of Canada Elections. Does that pertain to the intimidation campaign targeting MP Chong?

Commr Michael Duheme: That would include not necessarily intimidation, but other elected officials who have come to the surface with regard to possible meddling by the PRC.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Are those upper members of Parliament?

Commr Michael Duheme: I would use Mr. O'Toole as an example.

Mark, do you have anything to add?

Deputy Commissioner Mark Flynn (Deputy Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): I'd be happy to answer, Chair, if that's okay.

The RCMP is aware of the public visibility into different accusations of interference in democratic processes, including Mr. Chong as well as other members of Parliament that you've heard about who have spoken either in Parliament or in various committees about meddling in elections, misinformation or interference and voter influencing that's going on.

What the RCMP has done, because there's a primary responsibility for some of those offences with the Commissioner of Canada Elections, is that, through an MOU, the RCMP has an agreement to provide any assistance that is required to the Commissioner of Canada Elections in their investigation of those incidents, and has reached out to offer any and all assistance with respect to what we have recently learned about what has been occurring with respect to specific individuals.

● (1010)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Just to clarify that, one thing that the RCMP has learned about is the spreading of disinformation or misinformation by foreign state actors such as the Beijing regime in the democratic context of elections.

D/Commr Mark Flynn: We have learned about specific individuals who were targeted through the public disclosure—not through other means, but through the public disclosure by specific individuals who have been targeted. It is those matters that we've reached out to the Commissioner of Canada Elections to offer our assistance on if required.

Mr. Michael Cooper: How many individuals have been targeted?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: As of this point, I believe there are two in addition to Michael Chong.

Mr. Michael Cooper: One of the two individuals you cited was Mr. O'Toole. Was the other Ms. Kwan?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: [Inaudible—Editor]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay, thank you for that.

Has the RCMP opened any other investigations pertaining to the targeting of MP Kwan, MP O'Toole or any other member of parliament?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: We have not.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Is there anything you wish to add to update the committee on in regard to the situation regarding MP Chong, MP O'Toole or MP Kwan?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: No.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you.

Switching gears a little bit, on June 1, the CBC reported that, "The RCMP says it has 'shut down illegal police activity in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia' connected to so-called Chinese 'police stations'".

Have all of Beijing's illegal police stations that the RCMP is aware of as operating in Canada been shut down?

Commr Michael Duheme: I would say to that, Madam Chair, based on the work that's been done, the overt action that the RCMP has taken on the multiple sites, that we are comfortable, based on the criminal intelligence that we have, that the activities in the specific areas have shut down. I put a caveat to that: the policing activities have shut down, but be mindful that the buildings they using were sometimes community halls, which are meant for other means. But we are confident, with the intelligence that we have, that the policing activity that was being done there has been shut down, and investigations are continuing.

Mr. Michael Cooper: When were those illegal police activities shut down? Can you provide a timeline?

Commr Michael Duheme: Do we have an exact timeline, Mark?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: We'd have to come back with that exact timeline, but you would have seen very public visibility of our police officers in uniform at those locations. That was the disrupting action that caused them to shut down their activities.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

When the Prime Minister's national security adviser Jody Thomas last appeared before this committee on June 1, she said she was aware of at least two illegal police stations in Montreal. She said, "work is being done to ensure that they cease to operate." By that, she said they are still operating.

Can you help me understand what you just said—that all illegal police activities have been shut down—versus what she said—that efforts are being taken in the case of two police stations to see that they cease to operate, and presumably those illegal activities?

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, as I mentioned earlier, based on the criminal intelligence we have and the work that's been going on, we are comfortable saying that the activities in these locations have been shut down. At the moment when the NSA was here, I'm not quite sure what stage we were at. I'm comfortable saying that, at this point in time, they are shut down. Investigations are continuing into these overseas police stations.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank you for that exchange, because I think it was a very good tone and pace, and it should set an example.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks, Madam Chair.

Thanks to both Mr. Duheme and Mr. Flynn for being here today. I appreciate your service to Canada and keeping us all safe. I'm sure you're doing your utmost in that every day, and we appreciate it.

I have a few questions.

How many investigations would you say are under way with regard to foreign interference? If you could give me a general number, even a ballpark, I'd be happy.

• (1015)

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, I'd be venturing, even if it's just a ballpark.

I'm more than happy to come back, unless Deputy Commissioner Flynn has an exact number. Even for a rough estimate, I'd be guessing right now. I'd be more than happy to come back with a number.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: We would appreciate it very much if you could get back to the committee.

Commr Michael Duheme: If I may, Madam Chair, Mark just informed me we have 100-plus files on interference.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Wow.

Have any charges been laid to date, Mr. Duheme or Mr. Flynn?

Commr Michael Duheme: I'll take it back to May 2022. At Hydro-Québec in the province of Quebec, there was an employee charged with several interference offences under his role.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: In terms of the Criminal Code, which you mentioned, Mr. Duheme, in your opening remarks.... There are several offences that you cited. Do you feel there are any amendments to the Criminal Code that are needed, or do you have the offences under the Criminal Code you need to place charges on these matters?

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, I think that, when you ask the question to any law enforcement—whether they have enough tools in the Criminal Code—they will say no.

I would say that we welcome additional tools to help us with this growing phenomenon, if you wish, which is foreign interference.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Are there any criminal offences that you can foresee but that are not currently included in the Criminal Code and that, if added, would aid in your ability to combat these efforts?

Commr Michael Duheme: I don't have any that come to mind just yet, but I know there's a team working on what we can do to improve the Criminal Code with additional charges or measures.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Would you be able to get back to the committee with any suggestions you have on Criminal Code amendments?

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes, I will do that, Madam Chair.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Johnston, in his report—which I'm sure everyone has read at this point—talks about shortcomings in terms of the machinery of government and the flow of intelligence from CSIS, both up to the political level and, probably, shared with other law enforcement agencies.

Do you have any recommendations for how that flow of information could be improved, from the RCMP's perspective? I'm sure this aids in your ability to undertake investigations, and I'm sure you need that information. Could you tell us anything you can recommend in terms of improvements?

Commr Michael Duheme: In terms of improvements, we'll work collaboratively with the other government departments to ensure there's strong governance and the proper flow of information. I would say, purely from an operational perspective, that the question of intel and evidence, which you've probably heard many times before, is one key area we wish we could land on, because that impedes some of the flow of information from the service to not only other partners but also international partners, as well.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

Maybe I could ask you this question.

You mentioned an operational review, if I'm not mistaken, in your opening remarks.

Would you be able to table any of the recommendations from your operational review that would aid in that intelligence-to-evidence issue? We've heard about this gap being an ongoing or systemic problem.

Can you table that, and can you also highlight one or two things that you think would improve your ability to move intelligence to evidence?

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, I'll have to verify what can be released from that document. Obviously, if we can release the entire document, for sure we will release it.

It has recommendations that highlight the wonderful work that the service and the RCMP have done since 2008 to address some of the concerns that were raised by both departments.

Again, with regard to intel to evidence, it is probably the biggest one that we've been working on, with PPSC as well, to see how we can move this forward.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

I have one last question for you, Mr. Duheme.

In the past, you talked about having a national security strategy, if I'm not mistaken, and I wonder how we balance the need to protect our democratic institutions while also ensuring that Canadians' rights aren't infringed upon. How does a national security strategy get that balance right, from your perspective?

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, it is sometimes challenging getting that right balance, to ensure that the public trusts law enforcement security agencies in the country to make sure we are transparent in our approach.

I'll be honest. What we were facing for the last couple of years on foreign interference is something we were not facing in years. We didn't know as much as we know today, so it's a matter of adjusting our strategy, as well, to counter what we're seeing today.

• (1020)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

Madam Chair, do I have any time left?

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Oh, that's wonderful.

I have one more question, then, with regard to the so-called police stations that were operating here in Canada. You already assured us that to your knowledge they've been shut down.

How do we prevent that activity from resurfacing in the future?

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, to prevent it, you need strong relationships with the communities and making sure that people see it reported.

I'm very proud of the unit that went forward across the country. We took aggressive overt action—marked cars, people in uniform—with a lot of outreach in the communities to have people come forward.

Again, as I mentioned earlier, the investigation is ongoing and we invite the community, the people, to come forward to talk to us.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

In my learning about chairing committees and the process, it turns out that it's not just one microphone that stays on at a time. That is part of the parliamentary record that is kept if there is some commentary and so forth. We have an amazing technician who will operate the microphones and turn them on and off to ensure that whatever needs to be captured is captured.

I have raised concerns. It means that interpreters at times will hear multiple voices. I want to put that on the record that it is a concern. I'm sure it will be rectified and addressed, but it is part of the wrinkles that we are ironing out.

[*Translation*]

I will now give the floor to Ms. Gaudreau for six minutes.

As always, people can speak in the official language of their choice and take their time. The time needed for interpretation will not be taken away from Ms. Gaudreau's speaking time. I will give her more time, if necessary.

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you for that concern.

I'm all the more grateful for the witnesses' visit, since for the past several weeks we've been trying to demystify and better understand Canada's national security apparatus.

At the outset, several questions were answered. However, one that remains is a fundamental one: the RCMP's role in national security and interference.

Can you elaborate on this? I'll ask you more questions after your answer.

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes, of course.

To explain it to you in the simplest terms, the RCMP's role is to intervene when interference falls into the criminal realm. That's the difference between us and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. The latter focuses on intelligence, and the difficulty is converting intelligence into evidence.

It's about taking the information provided to us not only by the service, but also by our international partners, and using it in our police investigations. It's not always easy, because we have to disclose everything. For example, if the service is working on a file that starts to look like a criminal case, that's when we work with the service. The file is transferred to us and we start our investigation.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Excellent.

How does it play out in this grey area, before the responsibility for the investigation shifts to you? As we speak, there are major changes on the threat front. I won't go into all the details.

What are your suggestions for a very precise communication link?

Commr Michael Duheme: We have an excellent relationship with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

It's not described or defined in steps, but we are in constant communication with the service. Some files are easier to transfer than others. Sometimes there are files that we continue to work on together. The dividing line isn't defined; it's not black and white.

We have the One Vision co-operation framework so that the people involved come and discuss who takes the lead in the investigation and when. In the past, we've had cases where we've investigated criminally that have been referred back to the service so they can continue the investigation.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Are these meetings daily? Are they weekly?

Commr Michael Duheme: They take place at the national and provincial levels. They also take place when there are cases. I don't know if there's a regular frequency. Obviously, when we have cases, the frequency of these meetings increases. Whether at the national or provincial level, there are regular meetings when it comes to police investigations.

• (1025)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: In the beginning, you mentioned that you had several tools at your disposal. However, there are surely some tools you're missing. But we need to look to the future, and today is the time to identify the gaps so that, on the legislative front, we can step on the gas pedal.

Commr Michael Duheme: In the context of foreign interference experienced over the last two or three years, I think it's time to look at the tools we have. Earlier, I was talking about the Criminal Code. Do we have the right tools in the Criminal Code? Are there other tools we could use? I think we need to look not only at the tools from a police perspective, but also from a government perspective to determine what measures can be put in place to counter foreign interference.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: If I understand correctly, you don't necessarily have everything you need, whether in terms of human resources, expertise or legislation. You're missing some tools, aren't you?

Commr Michael Duheme: Any investigation into foreign interference is complex and requires personnel, technology and various techniques. The work to get to the point where charges can be laid is complex. As I said earlier, any legislative or policy improve-

ments in other departments that can facilitate the government's approach to countering foreign interference would be welcome.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: The witnesses we hear from talk a lot about our intelligence culture compared with that of foreign countries. Do we indeed have a giant step to take to achieve an intelligence culture that can make us truly effective?

Commr Michael Duheme: We must continue to evolve and learn.

Three or four weeks ago, I was in Australia with the Australian Federal Police, the New Zealand Federal Police, the FBI and other American and British partners. The main topic of discussion was foreign interference, how to tackle it, the measures that are being taken and the different legislation in place.

I believe that, collectively, we have a lot to learn from our international partners. Some people could even learn from what we do here.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have one last question for you.

Earlier, I heard you talk about transparency. Like it or not, we parliamentarians want to look after democracy. What do you mean by "transparency"? What can we do to build trust with our constituents?

Commr Michael Duheme: When I talked about transparency, it was from the perspective of the importance of giving enough information to the public to ensure the excellent work that is done in security and law enforcement.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I thank our witnesses for being here today and for their testimony.

My first question is this. Just out of curiosity, we are talking about a matter of privilege, one in which MPs are being targeted. As the RCMP proceed with their investigation about these allegations, how do you keep the members of Parliament updated?

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, before I ask Mark to elaborate on that, we do work very closely with the Sergeant-at-Arms at the House of Commons, we do work closely with the PCO, and we do work closely with the service to make sure that the information is provided.

I can't speak on behalf of the Sergeant-at-Arms as to how frequently he talks to the MPs, but I know, from a ministerial approach, we have the liaison teams that reach out to them on a regular basis with regard to the security of a minister, and we approach the topic of interference. On a grander scale, I'll pass it over to my colleague.

D/Commr Mark Flynn: Thank you, Commissioner.

Madam Chair, thank you for the question.

We are working in this space because we recognize that there's more we can do to communicate what we are seeing to all members of Parliament, and not just to ministers. You'll have recently seen some documentation about the threats. I know we've worked with the Sergeant-at-Arms. I know that the Sergeant-at-Arms provides briefings as well as tools to all members of Parliament when they become new members of Parliament.

We meet regularly to discuss the challenges of what we're seeing and to ensure that our information is included in those briefing areas. However, having said that, we do recognize there is more we can do, and we do commit to undertake further efforts to ensure that we are speaking to all of you as directly as we can with respect to the threats.

On the specific investigations, and on the individuals who have come to light recently who are facing specific threats, we do have to respect the privacy those individuals enjoy as individuals and to not allow their status as members of Parliament to further erode that privacy in these situations where they've already been subjected to unacceptable behaviours.

• (1030)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for that.

I'm definitely not asking for details; I'm really interested in the process. I think, as parliamentarians, our job is to best understand the process and to understand where gaps are so that we can make recommendations that help us move forward.

It's very clear that this reality—and you've mentioned it before in the testimony—is quickly changing, and it's not something you were looking at the same way. We know that it's evolving quickly. It's challenging to catch up to it, but we still need to have the information and the tools to provide supports.

I'm just wondering, in terms of process, when gaps are identified at your level, how does this information get passed on to your intelligence partners so there can be that dialogue about how to make sure the flow of information is happening in an effective way that will protect Canadians regardless of whether they're an MP, a citizen or a permanent resident?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: Madam Chair, information flow with our partners is one of the things that actually I'm quite proud of. We meet... I don't know what the count would be, but it's at least dozens of times a week where we are at a director, a director general, an ADM or a DM level meeting with our partners to discuss the national security threats to Canada and to inform what we are doing to combat those threats.

There are regimented meetings and regimented processes for that, and then, when we have unique things that come up in-between or have highly volatile situations, those generate ad hoc meetings where we sit down and speak about the problem and collaborate on the solution.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

We've had diaspora community members testify that, when they bring forward concerns about issues of foreign interference and about how they're being targeted, they're not really getting the assistance they perceive that they need. I think that's really important.

I know Jenny Kwan has talked about this a lot—the fact that she has been targeted—but she has the voice of an MP, so to bring this awareness to people about her experience is a lot easier. There are many in these communities who can't do that and who don't have the same ability to bring forward their concerns.

I'm just wondering, do you require more tools—we talked about this earlier—to address this issue? How do you connect with other parties like CSIS and other intelligence folks to check if that member who has come forward to you at that community level is being targeted? How does that work?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: Madam Chair, we have many individuals who have come forward to us, and I'll say specifically since we were seen as being publicly visible in responding to the threat of the police stations. Part of our plan behind that public visibility in uniforms and in police cars, particularly in provinces where the RCMP is not seen in uniform, was to help build some of that trust and confidence with the communities so they would feel comfortable coming forward, because, to be frank, they have not historically come forward to police to provide this information.

That's not a criticism. That's a criticism of ourselves, because we did not create the environment where they felt safe in doing so.

We have responded to many. We're investigating many of their complaints. We are challenged in that some of the threats they are facing are external, and it is difficult for them to be seen publicly engaging with us when their family members are facing some of that external threat.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now have five minutes with Mr. Berthold and then Madame Romanado.

Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Duheme and Mr. Flynn, good morning.

Mr. Duheme, you said at the opening of the session that the foreign threat was great and that it came from several countries. I also heard you in an interview you gave to *60 Minutes Australia*. There you made it clear, along with your colleagues, that China was currently the biggest threat we faced.

Is that also true for Canada?

• (1035)

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes, Madam Chair, that's what I said based on our intelligence on criminal activity. I said, when I was in Australia, that China was the biggest threat to our country's democracy.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Are you basing this on information from the RCMP?

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes, I'm basing this on the information we have and that I've gathered at other meetings I've attended.

Mr. Luc Berthold: There are several types of threats. Is this the biggest criminal threat? As head of crime legislation enforcement, you consider the Beijing regime and the Chinese Communist Party to be the greatest threat for criminal acts in Canada. Is this true?

Commr Michael Duheme: That's according to intelligence and the criminal activity database. You've seen my interview. I also said that we know that organized crime groups have direct ties to China, based solely on what we currently see in criminal activity.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

So, as politicians, we need to focus our efforts on this threat.

Commr Michael Duheme: Yes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

I would like to speak to Mr. Flynn.

A few moments ago, you said you were proud of the exchange and flow of information with your intelligence partners. I was rather flabbergasted earlier when I heard that it was in committee and in the media that the RCMP learned that MP Michael Chong had been intimidated.

How do you explain that information, which was held by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or CSIS, was not passed on to you before it was made public through a leak? I wouldn't be proud of this.

[English]

D/Commr Mark Flynn: Madam Chair, I completely understand the question, and I hope you will understand the complexity of the answer.

The reality is that we do have distinct organizations with distinct mandates involved in the national security space to combat this threat. There is, at times, an appropriate withholding of specific information.

The news that individuals, parliamentarians and the general public in Canada are subjected to threats and intimidation is not news. It has been in the director of CSIS' annual reports for years and in materials in NSICOP reports. This is not new information.

I have had, with my counterparts, discussions about foreign interference, foreign influence, and I know they are not necessarily the same word.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I don't have much time, Mr. Flynn. I realize this is a complex answer, however, could you summarize it in a few words so I understand the situation, as do the people watching?

You said earlier that when something special happens, special meetings are held. Mr. Chong's specific case wasn't only known when it was revealed in the media, so you knew about it beforehand; otherwise there's a problem.

[English]

D/Commr Mark Flynn: I'm aware of that type of threat's being present, but I was not aware of the specifics with respect to Michael Chong.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: We have a real problem, Madam Chair, since CSIS doesn't seem to be able to pass on information to either politicians or the RCMP, and the RCMP learns about the news from the media. This is a real concern for me today.

You say, Mr. Flynn, that no one from CSIS notified you.

In the case of the Chinese police stations, you were asked earlier when you were notified, and you will provide us with an answer. The Democracy Watch group made the location of these stations known a long time ago.

Did you initiate an investigation immediately upon learning of this, when the report was made public, or did you wait, again, until it was before the committee?

Commr Michael Duheme: I'd have to check the exact date, but as far as I know, it was done as soon as we got the information through Safeguard Defenders. In fact, I'd like to underline the Safeguard Defenders lady's praise for the fact that the RCMP has been tackling these places more aggressively.

• (1040)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Romanado, you have the floor.

[English]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Through you, I would like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

I'll be honest with you, Madam Chair, that it's tough to follow MP Blaney, because I have some of the same questions she brought up. I'm glad she was able to cover them.

I have a couple of follow-up questions further to my colleague, Mr. Berthold's, comment just now. He mentioned the fact the RCMP was not aware, the fact that the National Security and Intelligence Advisor was not aware, the fact that the Prime Minister was not aware, and the Minister of Public Safety was not aware of the specific threat to MP Michael Chong, which is the subject of today's meeting, the question of privilege with respect to the intimidation campaign.

Does that not reinforce the findings of the special rapporteur, Mr. Johnston, where he put forward the recommendation about the governance and the communication of intelligence and the problems in terms of the flow of that information.

Would you agree that you yourselves were not aware of the specific threats? And if you are in agreement with that, what would you suggest that we improve in terms of making sure that you are made aware? CSIS was aware, but you were not made aware.

What would you improve in the process to make sure that any threat to or intimidation of a sitting member of Parliament is brought to your attention and, therefore, make sure that everybody who needs to know is made aware?

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, we welcome a review of how the flow of information takes place and how we can improve the process of sharing information.

I just want to go back to the initial comment with regard to how the security intelligence service knew and we didn't know. Again, we have a really good relationship with the service. With the amount of information that flows, sometimes it's the decision as to, "Does that meet the criminal threshold and when do we engage in the RCMP?"

I'm not here to judge the service on just one single aspect, but if we can improve the flow of information, for sure, for the betterment of everyone.... That ties into the earlier question on how we get this information out to MPs.

I agree with two things out of that report, that we need a little stronger governance and, really, that we should have a look at how the flow of information proceeds within the community and to the elected officials.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Mr. Duheme.

You just touched on something that I find very interesting. I think it's interesting for the general public who may be watching and for ourselves as well. You mentioned just now that the decision on whether or not to bring the RCMP into the loop is based on whether it meets the criminal threshold.

Could you clarify for everyone listening where does the intelligence gathering end and the policing begin and the protection?

There seems to be a gap somewhere. You're brought in when it meets a certain threshold with respect to criminal activity. Is that correct?

That's sort of after the fact. That's not in the prevention part.

Am I understanding that correctly?

Commr Michael Duheme: Perhaps I can walk you through it really quickly.

The service begins an investigation under their respective mandate. As it sees something that is starting to morph towards something that's more criminal, we would receive a letter for which certain information could be used to begin an investigation. You've heard me in the committee before, when I said "actionable intelligence". Actionable intelligence means that intelligence I receive whereby I can actually start an investigation, because in law enforcement when we lay charges, I have to be able to start from the very beginning of the investigation to say how we started this investigation with the expectation that information needs to be disclosed. When the service provides this information, there's an agreement that the information can be disclosed. There are other ways as well for information that cannot be disclosed, but that's another area. In a nutshell, that's how investigation would work.

As I mentioned earlier, we have had some investigations that we bounced back to the service, because as we continued, the criminal

element had not unfolded. It's happened where it was switched back to the service.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay.

I'm going to flip it on its head. I know that you mentioned that when it comes to members of Parliament you work very closely with the Sergeant-at-Arms, the PPS and so on. In this case, Mr. Chong was not made aware of the specifics of the threat until after a news report came out.

What would you say to members of Parliament who may be aware of activities that they are not sure could be considered intimidation tactics? What would you recommend that we do?

• (1045)

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, I would say if anyone in the public or elected officials are in immediate danger, that would be 911.

The other aspect is we have a 1-800 number for the RCMP, but the easiest way would be to share it with the Sergeant-at-Arms, with whom we have an excellent relationship, and the information will flow from there.

We have the 1-800 number. We have a website as well. Some people have the security officer, and they can report it to them, but make sure it comes back.

If it's immediate, it's 911.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

As always, I will take into account the time required for interpretation. Your speaking time will be adjusted accordingly.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Duheme, please tell me if I'm mistaken. From what I understand—it's not a bad thing—you're currently dependent on information to be passed on by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. You're doing an outstanding job on crime. Right now, what I understand from everything that's happening on the national and international scenes—we're talking about foreign interference—is that our model doesn't resemble those of the FBI and the CIA or those of other countries.

You have an obligation to be very effective and warn people who may be under threat, or worse.

Am I wrong?

Commr Michael Duheme: As my colleague Mr. Flynn said, in Canada we have two separate entities with different mandates. There's the RCMP, for criminal matters, and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

As for the question of dependence on the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, I would say that there are files that are generated by the police. Because of the capabilities and different techniques that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service uses, it is exposed to more information than the RCMP.

The same is true with our international partners: Some send us documents that raise a dilemma for the service, that of using this information in a criminal case. This situation occurs not only with our Canadian partners, but also with our international partners.

That's why I was talking about tools. If we were investigating foreign interference, we'd mainly use the tools relating to the transmission of this intelligence to the person in charge of a police investigation. We'd also be looking at how to change legislation.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I see.

In a few seconds, what do you think about the transmission of information by MI5, in Westminster, for example? There, the Speaker of the House is directly informed of a potential threat to an elected member.

Do you think it would be a good idea to do that here in Canada?

Commr Michael Duheme: I am not aware of the international briefing structure or that of MI5. In fact, personally, I haven't even had to brief the Prime Minister on criminal matters. Nor am I familiar with the briefing process for other agencies or entities.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Madam Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much, Chair.

My next question returns back to the diaspora communities.

We know there's often a level of distrust, especially for newcomers who come to Canada from some of these targeted countries with authoritarian governments. I'm curious if there are strategies for rural and urban communities—because I think they both matter and they're both distinct and different—for how to do that outreach.

Does the RCMP have enough resources to spend the time building these relationships?

You talked about going forward and some of the work you've done lately with the police stations and starting to build those relationships, but I'm wondering if there are the resources there to do that work.

Commr Michael Duheme: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

I'll hand it over to Mark Flynn to add to it, but I'm of the opinion that we have to build and maintain relationships with these communities, and make these people trust us to ensure that they can come forward, because this has been going on for quite some time. Just to come in an open door and see us...I can understand it is challenging, but it's all about building this relationship.

I'll ask Mark to elaborate on the work we're doing right now within the RCMP with these communities.

• (1050)

D/Commr Mark Flynn: I'll go rapid-fire in respect of your time.

Obviously, I've already covered that our very public visibility in the police stations was a key element of being seen to do some-

thing, of being seen to care and to be effective. I believe we achieved that initial objective. That isn't enough.

We are continuing to work with community associations. We are creating materials in multiple languages so those communities can engage in their natural language. We've also reached out to some members of Parliament who have come forward and offered their assistance. I don't think we should look to the police to be the sole communicators and the ones who will solve this problem. It's going to require everyone to use all of our access and all of our effort.

When I look at members of Parliament who are in our communities every day—whether it be during campaign time or at your constituency offices—you have that access. You have that influence and you have that respect from the community. We need to leverage that in engaging those communities and helping them understand how Canada is different. The authorities here are not the same authorities who are threatening or intimidating them from afar.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll do four minutes and four minutes, and that will bring us close to the top of the hour.

Mr. Cooper, you have four minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Flynn, you stated earlier that you were aware of the threat generally as it pertained to Beijing but not as it pertained specifically to MP Chong. Can you elaborate on that? Were you aware generally that Beijing and Beijing diplomats were targeting MPs even though you weren't aware that those specifically included MP Chong until recently?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: I was not aware of specific targeting in the manner in which MP Chong was targeted. I was certainly aware of that being a general threat to diaspora in Canada.

Mr. Michael Cooper: What general threat were you aware of?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: It was intimidation of family members from afar.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you.

Jody Thomas confirmed that the July 2021 CSIS memo indicating that MPs were being targeted by a Beijing diplomat at Beijing's Toronto consulate was sent to three deputy ministers as well as the PCO, including the Prime Minister's national security and intelligence adviser. Was that memo passed on to the RCMP?

Commr Michael Duheme: Madam Chair, I don't recall seeing it. I truly don't recall.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You don't recall...?

Commr Michael Duheme: I don't recall reading anything to that effect with regard to the interference. It doesn't mean it wasn't discussed during meetings at a lower level, but I don't recall seeing that.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You don't know whether it was passed on to the RCMP.

Commr Michael Duheme: I'm saying it might have been passed on to the program without my being aware of it, since I was formerly in Mark's chair. I don't recall seeing anything.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Flynn, do you have something to add on that?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: I would just say that in order to speak authoritatively to this, we'd have to see the memo and come back to you and let you know whether or not we had seen it.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Could you undertake to come back based upon what has been reported of that memo—whether it had been passed on to the RCMP at any point? Is that a fair undertaking?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: We can undertake it. I will caution, though, that if that memo has not been transitioned to us, I'd be comparing with the public discourse on it, but we can work with our partners to come back.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay. If you could do that as well as you could, it would be appreciated.

Both of you indicated that there are ongoing investigations pertaining to illegal police stations but that no arrests have been made. Is that correct?

Commr Michael Duheme: That's correct.

Mr. Michael Cooper: How many sites of illegal police activity has the RCMP taken action in respect of?

• (1055)

D/Commr Mark Flynn: I would say seven or possibly eight. You'll have to understand that there are intermingling elements to things.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay.

The June 1 CBC report that I cited in my previous questions noted two sites that have been identified as illegal police stations in Montreal. One is situated in downtown Montreal and the other is situated in Brossard. The organizations connected to those police stations or alleged police stations indicated that no police action has been taken in respect of those sites.

Is that correct?

Commr Michael Duheme: I can assure you, Madam Chair, that we are investigating the sites in Montreal.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Those are in downtown Montreal and Brossard.

Commr Michael Duheme: The sites that you've just mentioned are. That's correct.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fergus, you have the floor.

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses who are here today.

I'm going to ask a few questions that follow on from the answers you've given.

First of all, did I understand correctly that there are a hundred ongoing investigations into foreign interference?

[*English*]

D/Commr Mark Flynn: Madam Chair, that is correct. There are over a hundred.

I do want to add some clarification to that, though. Foreign interference is a broad problem, which in our investigative efforts would be characterized as intellectual property theft as well, from the different academic institutions, etc. that are targeted.

That is correct. That is over a several-year period.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you for this very important clarification. I couldn't agree more.

This leads me to ask my second question: Does this interference come from a single country, or does it rather come from several countries or foreign actors?

[*English*]

D/Commr Mark Flynn: We are seeing it from several different foreign actors. I also want to be precise in that we believe much of it is tied to specific entities within foreign countries and governments. We look at that interference as entities, as well.

We are not in a position to connect this to leadership of particular regimes around the world.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Perfect.

Let me just dig a little further without you revealing any sensitive information.

Could you give this committee an estimate of the number of countries that are the source of these activities? Are we talking fewer than 10 or more than 10?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: It's fewer than 10.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Is it more than five?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: We're starting to get fairly precise, but I would say more than five.

Hon. Greg Fergus: That's fair. I just wanted to get it to that.

Another question I would like to follow up on, which I think was from Mr. Cooper and actually it came out in a couple of other questions, as well.... You had indicated that you have not received this famous memo, which ends up being the subject of our study here on the question of privilege in regard to Mr. Chong.

We've heard from other folks as well that they didn't receive this memo. What recommendations could you make to ensure that information doesn't fall into a black hole?

D/Commr Mark Flynn: It's a tough question.

When I look at what we have done, Madam Chair, within our efforts with the service, we undertook the operational improvement review that was meant to solve many of the challenges that we've had between our two organizations alone.

When we're looking at these types of problems, hindsight always brings 100% clarity. We need to, as a community, undertake interally to have discussions about what has occurred here. We need to learn the lessons moving forward in what we can do and still respect and not react to the situation and the pressure that's coming today. I don't mean that with disrespect. We have to understand the importance of this.

We also have to look at Canada as a society and what we need to do to maintain public safety here and ensure we're respecting all sides of that equation.

• (1100)

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, on behalf of PROC committee members, I really do want to thank both of you for, I feel, a very honest conversation.

I think the comments that you just ended with, Deputy, are quite accurate. We don't want to just be reactionary, but there do come times where we need to be honest about where we as lawmakers can help our agencies and organizations do the work they need to do, because no one of us is in this alone, and when it comes to our democratic institutions, every single one of us has a responsibility.

I know that was a tough question posed by Mr. Fergus, but at any point, if there is an opportunity to provide some suggestions as to what can we do to actually allow you to do the work that we entrust in you and that we need you to do, we would welcome that feedback. I don't think that speaks to what you're not doing or what you haven't done. I think that speaks to us wanting to strengthen our institutions, all of us together, because I think that as Canadians we have that responsibility.

I think our rights and freedoms come with responsibilities, and the insights that you have, I know I would never have, and I know many of us won't, but there are people who have served. If something comes to mind, please talk to your teams and let us know. We are at a moment where I think most people are taking this very seriously, and we want to ensure that we're laying a stronger foundation for the future.

I want to thank you for your time and attention. I want to thank you for your service. I wish you a really good rest of the day, and we look forward to seeing you again. Thank you. Keep well and safe.

The meeting is suspended. We'll get ready for our next panel.

• (1100)

(Pause)

• (1105)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

As we continue meeting number 82 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in studying the question of privilege related to the member for Wellington—Halton Hills and other members, today we have with us, from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs David Morrison.

Deputy, welcome to the committee. We appreciate your response and your finding the time for us. We do have a bit of extra time together today. We appreciate your generosity in satisfying the wishes of the committee.

You will have up to 10 minutes for your opening comments. Then we will proceed with questions.

Welcome to the procedure and House affairs committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. David Morrison (Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning to the members of the committee.

Thank you for inviting me this morning.

Foreign interference is an important issue that continues to be at the heart of our national agenda and deserves our constant attention.

[*English*]

Madam Chair, I know that at least part of the reason you invited me here today is that I was acting national security and intelligence adviser from early July 2021 through to early January 2022.

It was, of course, during this period that a July 20, 2021, CSIS report on Chinese foreign interference was produced and disseminated. It's a report that has proven to be quite controversial since key aspects of it were published in *The Globe and Mail* on May 1 of this year.

Privy Council Office records show that the report in question was in my reading pack on August 17, 2021. For the record, I have no recollection of receiving it or reading it then. Like Jody Thomas, I was, at the time, fully occupied with the evacuation from Afghanistan, as Kabul had fallen only two days before.

I believe I did read the report when the dust from Afghanistan settled because I was interested enough to have commissioned a follow-on piece by a different group within our intelligence community in an attempt to gain the fullest possible picture of Chinese foreign interference in Canada. I would be pleased to come back to this point if members of the committee are interested.

There are two important aspects of the July 20, 2021, CSIS report that seem to have been widely misunderstood.

First, the report was never intended to spur action by readers, whether around the targeting of MPs or any of the other examples of foreign interference it lists. In its own words as published in *The Globe*, the report was intended to establish "a 'baseline for understanding the intent, motives and scope' of Beijing's foreign interference in Canada." It was not a memorandum for action. It was a report for awareness.

Intelligence agencies in Canada and elsewhere produce a range of products for consumers. These products are short reports containing fragments of information, sometimes from a single source, that tend to be concise and timely; as well as longer, periodic assessments that often rest upon earlier intelligence and are designed to build understanding of complex issues. It is like the difference between the kind of breaking news that appears on the front page of *The Globe and Mail* and the deep-dive reports that often appear in the middle pages of the weekend edition.

The July 2021 CSIS report was very much a deep dive. It was not intended to spur action by me, as acting NSIA, or by anyone else. It was certainly not something that I would have rushed to brief up the Prime Minister on.

Importantly, as reported by the *Globe* and repeated by Jody Thomas, the report did not name Michael Chong or any other MP. Indeed, it would have been highly irregular for this kind of piece to go into that kind of detail.

The second key aspect of the July 2021 report that seems to have been widely misunderstood is that anyone reading such a report could have safely assumed that any necessary action on any of the specific points raised had already been taken. Indeed, this was the case for the reference in the report to Chinese actions against Canadian MPs.

To recall for the committee.... As reported in the *Globe*, the targeting of Canadian MPs by China was linked to a February 2021 parliamentary motion, sponsored by Michael Chong, condemning Beijing's oppression of the Uyghurs and likening this oppression to genocide.

You will recall that, after the motion and subsequent sanctions imposed several weeks later by Canada on people and entities in China, China responded by sanctioning Michael Chong and the entire membership of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

- (1110)

It was in this context, as shown in David Johnston's report, that China built "profiles" and "contemplated action" against Michael Chong and other MPs. It was in response to that Chinese activity that in May 2021, CSIS wrote the issues management brief, referred to in the David Johnston report as an IMU, to the Minister of Public Safety.

If you look at page 27 of the Johnston report, you will see that this was not an action note seeking a decision from the minister. It was an information note telling the then minister that CSIS intended to provide defensive briefings to MPs who, intelligence showed, China had intended to target.

Now, I know that there have been questions about how this issues management note was sent, who received it and so on. I'm aware that you have already asked Minister Blair about this. I know that you will be raising these questions with my colleague David Vigneault when he appears before you this evening. But the larger picture is this: Intelligence emerged in the spring, around the time of the Uyghur motion, that the Chinese government was looking for

information on parliamentarians, and in particular on Mr. Chong and his relatives.

That intelligence was actioned, in that it led to an information memo to the Minister of Public Safety and then, in June 2021, to a defensive briefing to Mr. Chong and another MP. All of this is on page 27 of Mr. Johnston's report.

Madam Chair, some may find that all of this took too long. The point has already been made that if the then Minister of Public Safety was not aware of the intelligence with respect to Mr. Chong and other MPs, there were obviously deficiencies. But I would submit that the system did function according to the protocols that were in place back in 2021. Importantly, as you are aware, the system has now been changed. The new ministerial directive issued on May 16 of this year means that, in the future, any intelligence received with respect to specific MPs will be briefed up to ministers.

Getting back to where I started, Madam Chair, all of this is to say that in my view, the focus on the 2021 CSIS report—who the NSIA at the time was, who else read it, whether it went into a black hole—has been misplaced. Action by the relevant authorities with respect to the targeting of MPs had already been taken before the report was even published.

Before closing, Madam Chair, allow me to make two final points. First, much has been made of the term "target" in the sense of being a "target of Beijing". I do not intend to diminish for one moment how unsettling it must have been for Mr. Chong and other MPs to learn that China had been building profiles on them and possibly preparing to take action, including against their family members living abroad. At the same time, as Jody Thomas, Wesley Wark, Thomas Juneau and others have already indicated, there is nothing inherently nefarious about foreign governments discussing members of Parliament or anyone else in Canadian society. Members of the committee should be aware that all embassies, including Canadian embassies around the world, create influence maps that list individuals through whom they intend to pursue national objectives. The important thing to keep in mind is whether the activity in question is clandestine, deceptive or threatening to an individual or an institution. As previous witnesses have stated, intent and capability are key.

For the record, while governments with values that differ from our own do not always appreciate Canada's activities abroad, Canadian diplomats do not engage in foreign interference. Everything they do is overt and above board.

This brings me to my second and last point, Madam Chair. While our focus recently, and appropriately, has been on members of Parliament, in the case of China, many of the Canadians on lists, whether you wish to call these individuals "targets" or part of larger "influence maps", will be ethnically Chinese. These diaspora members are, in my view, the most vulnerable populations when it comes to China's interference in Canada. They are Canadian citizens and permanent residents. They deserve the same protections as everyone else living in Canada.

• (1115)

When it comes to foreign interference, I view this as an area of the greatest long-term threat. We need to know more about ongoing foreign interference in these communities, what form it takes, and how it can be combatted.

Public hearings with these communities were to have been included in the second part of the process led by David Johnston, and I hope that the importance of this focus does not get lost in whatever process is agreed to in the future.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy Minister Morrison.

We will enter into six-minute rounds, starting with Mr. Cooper, followed by Mr. Fergus and Madame Gaudreau, and then Ms. Blaney.

I will remind all members that we had a really good first session, and I would like to maintain that. I will also remind members that by having a decent exchange, back and forth, we actually had more time. I would appreciate it if we would continue with that right now. I would appreciate it if I do not need to interrupt to and remind members how we can function, because we just had a good hour of that. You know how it works. Excellent.

Mr. Cooper, you have six minutes.

• (1120)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Morrison, through you, Madam Chair, I am absolutely astounded and, frankly, disturbed by your testimony and your singular refusal to accept responsibility as the then national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister on what amounts to a colossal breakdown, to put it charitably.

You cited page 27 of Mr. Johnston's report in which an IMU, noting that MP Chong had been targeted by Beijing, had been sent to the Minister of Public Safety, except for the fact that the Minister of Public Safety didn't receive that IMU, nor did his deputy minister and chief of staff.

In fact, Mr. Johnston, at page 28 of his report, which I hope you have bothered to read, characterized it as the most prominent example of poor information flow. You said in your testimony that the system functioned properly.

How can you say that in the face of that?

Mr. David Morrison: I did have some caveats to how I described how the system functioned. I also pointed out that it was an information memo, not an action memo, and that with 20/20 hindsight, I think folks probably wish that it had reached the relevant minister.

The larger point I was making is that something disturbing came to light, and the relevant authorities in our system took action as they deemed best.

Mr. Michael Cooper: That isn't so. In fact, the IMU went into a black hole, and it appears that the July 2021 CSIS memo went into a black hole as well.

You claimed, again, that the system functioned well. If that were the case, why was MP Michael Chong not informed that his family was being targeted by Beijing?

Mr. David Morrison: Madam Chair, I would suggest that question be put to the director of CSIS who will be here tonight.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

You said—

Mr. David Morrison: If I could just finish, Madam Chair.

I believe the CSIS Act required the director of CSIS to only respond with unclassified information.

Mr. Michael Cooper: The notion that you would characterize this as merely information, background information, is really, again, astounding.

We're talking about a memo that specifically indicated that a member of Parliament and his family were being targeted by Beijing. I think you're the first witness to come before this committee who has said essentially that in the face of that alarming information, you felt that the information would not be acted upon. I find that just astonishing, Mr. Morrison.

Mr. David Morrison: The member is confusing two different pieces of paper. The IMU note that was issued in May was acted upon. I characterized the July 2021 memo as for information and awareness raising, which was published afterward.

Mr. Michael Cooper: The July 2021 memo spoke about a member of Parliament being targeted by Beijing because of his support for a motion declaring that the treatment by Beijing of the Uyghurs is tantamount to a genocide.

It further stated that Beijing's intelligence service, the Ministry of State Security, "has taken specific actions to target Canadian MPs" and you think that's information that should be just passed along in your reading materials. You wouldn't bother, upon that coming across your desk, to see that the member of Parliament has been informed, to see that the minister is aware and to see that had been brought up to the Prime Minister.

Really?

• (1125)

Mr. David Morrison: Madam Chair, if we go back to my introductory statement, I think it's important to note that I tried to suggest that long intelligence assessments...and according to The Globe and Mail, this assessment was nine pages long and mentioned a great number of areas in which China may be trying to interfere in Canada's democracy. Jody Thomas characterized such assessments as—I forget her exact term—nice to read, but not necessary to read instantly, or something like that.

The larger point is that such an assessment is designed to raise awareness within the community.

I was also clear in making a second point, which was that readers of such assessments, which do not include names and which did not include Michael Chong's name, can safely assume that if it shows up in a periodic assessment, the relevant actions have been taken. I made the distinction between something that appears on the front page as a breaking news story and something that appears in a deep dive.

The July 2021 assessment report was a deep dive, and I stand by my comment that it was not intended, in its own preface, to spur any action. That is made clear by The Globe and Mail reporting on it.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Mr. Fergus.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to welcome Mr. Morrison and thank him again for testifying today.

[English]

Mr. Morrison, you gave, I think, a very important contextual statement today. I'd like to just dig a little bit further with regard to that.

You had mentioned that this report was never intended to require action. Could you very briefly say what kind of reports you would receive that call for action? Did you receive those kinds of reports when you served as the acting national security and intelligence adviser?

Mr. David Morrison: I recall that during my time as acting national security adviser.... To be clear, I was asked to do it around the first of July for six weeks and I ended up doing it for six months, in addition to my day job. I recall during that time one piece of intelligence, which had to do with Afghanistan, required urgent action.

I do not recall any other intel that caused me to rush to my bosses and say, "We need to do something about this."

Hon. Greg Fergus: Again, just to provide us with context—I'm just trying to understand how the process works—at the time, in the role you occupied, there are some memos that you would get that would require you to read pretty much for information only. Are there other ones that are designed for action or where they need your input?

Mr. David Morrison: CSIS has something called an "issues management brief". I don't know why the acronym is IMU, but it's been described as an issues management note.

I've had a number of different jobs and I may have seen such things in my reading packs over the years. None of them, to the best of my knowledge, has ever been directed to me. That's not the nature of the role of the national security and intelligence adviser, and certainly not of the other roles I have occupied over the past number of years.

I'm assuming that if CSIS has such a thing as an IMU for information, it might have an IMU for action, but that would be a question best put to CSIS representatives.

• (1130)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Let me dig a little further here. For IMUs, without your revealing material that I'm not supposed to receive and that wouldn't make sense to reveal publicly, I would like to have an understanding of, when it listed this particular memo, whether it listed the nature of the interest of Beijing toward a Canadian member of Parliament? Did they talk about particular threats?

Mr. David Morrison: Do you mean in the IMU memo?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Yes, in the IMU note.

Mr. David Morrison: I wouldn't have seen that because at the time I was the foreign and defence policy adviser. I was not yet acting national security adviser. The time frame is May, and I took over in July. I now know what it says. I can't go into that. I don't know to whom it was distributed. The David Johnston report has a list of people whom it was intended to reach. As we know, it does not seem to have reached all of those people. Again, the important point, though, is that it was for information that CSIS was already intending to take these actions.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Okay, so this was just keeping you abreast of actions—

Mr. David Morrison: It was keeping the Minister of Public Safety, and up the chain at Public Safety, abreast of action that CSIS was intending to take.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Again, you indicated that, when you came into the function in July, you don't recall seeing the note right away, but it's clear that a number of weeks later you must have gone through that note, because there were actions that you had asked for a certain amount of follow-up on.

Again, was that borne of your experience? Would your experience or intuition say, "I want to see more of that" or was it in the note itself that requested some information or action be taken?

Mr. David Morrison: There was nothing in the note that spurred me to take action. I was the national security adviser at that point for an indeterminate amount of time. I didn't know for how long. It would seem to be a week-to-week or month-to-month thing. I was interested enough in the subject matter of the July 2021 memo to have wanted to know more about the overall area of Chinese foreign interference and to have commissioned a group within PCO to provide additional information.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

French-speakers may reply in the language of their choice. The time required for interpretation will not be deducted from the time allotted to Ms. Gaudreau and the other MPs.

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like not only to thank you, but also to tell you that I feel like I'm in *The Twelve Tasks of Asterix*, as if the situation will finally be crystal clear only when we finally get all the pieces of the puzzle and hear all the testimony.

Thus, we see that what we are doing is essential. We are parliamentarians, not experts. However, we are before the public, who are currently seeing that we are doing our spring cleaning, which should have been done 20 years ago.

I have a host of questions, and it's important for me to ask them, because I'm really not reassured, not by people's expertise, but because of the flaws in communications. Had it not been for these flaws, the alarm would have sounded. Names would have come out. People would have known. When a potential prime minister isn't even made aware of what's happening to him, that's serious.

Actually, we're seeing that there are several chairs, but they all have big cracks in them. So we're going to be constructive, today.

I understand that the witness, whom I greet in passing, has extensive experience, both at the UN, CSIS and as a deputy minister. However, we urgently need this cry from the heart that will really help us shed some light.

If we ask people if they really trust our democracy, they'll probably say that, if they're told about the new measures we're going to take, they'll believe in it.

I'd like to hear your comments on that and then I'll have a few more questions.

You have a great deal of expertise and you're now collaborating with CSIS, as a deputy minister.

I yield the floor to you.

• (1135)

Mr. David Morrison: I thank the member for raising all these issues.

[*English*]

I think spring cleaning is always a good idea. I think it helps us update things.

I too worry about the threat to our institutions, both from foreign interference but also from lack of comprehensive understanding of the nature of the threat. In that sense, I would point to the fact that a ministerial direction has been issued on May 16. That makes it very clear that the Prime Minister, through the Minister of Public Safety, wishes to be informed rapidly should there be any information or potential threats to members of Parliament.

On top of that, as has been stated by other witnesses before your committee, the government is, I believe, considering legislative changes to some of the key legal frameworks that govern this space. There's a project afoot—I think it's well known—to create an agent registry. There are potential changes to other laws as well.

I think you can look forward and, indeed, Canadians can look forward, to an updating of the *cadres* or frameworks that govern this area. In addition to that, as Jody Thomas said when she was before you, within the public service we are creating or tweaking some governance mechanisms and some information-sharing mechanisms to try to ensure that we can do the very best we can in terms of providing relevant information to the government.

The final point that I would make, and I'm happy to expand on it later...I do have a sort of varied background, as you indicated or as the member indicated. I'm not a career public servant. I've seen how other organizations work outside of Canada. What I would say is that I think we have a national security set-up that was optimized for terrorism. We had this period in Canada between 1989 and, say, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, where, after 9/11, the primary threat was deemed to come from terrorists. I'm not certain that's any longer the case.

We have geopolitical tensions. We have foreign interference. We have what the Indo-Pacific strategy calls—I might not get the wording right—an increasingly assertive China. The world has changed, and our set-up needs to be able to adapt to that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: What I see is that we need to speed up the process as much as possible. I tell people that transparency is important, and that you have to make the right choices. Obviously, together, we'll be able to put in place a process and the means to reassure people. Right now, we're in the process of learning all the facts, but we need to put it all together and get to the bottom of it, and we need to do so in a neutral manner.

I had a lot of questions, but I'll have a chance to come back to them later, during my two-and-a-half-minute speaking turn.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Gaudreau, thank you for giving the deputy minister time to respond. It allows us to have the information we need, so I'm very grateful.

[*English*]

Ms. Blaney, you have up to six minutes, please.

• (1140)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much, Chair.

Thank you to Mr. Morrison for being here today to testify.

The first question I'm going to ask is just a clarifying one. I think what I heard you say was that you were the temporary NSIA for what you thought was going to be six weeks and it became six months, and that during that time you kept your other job. In fact, it sounds like you were doing two full-time jobs at one time. Is that correct?

Mr. David Morrison: Yes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

That is interesting in itself. Those are two very important jobs. It's too bad that somebody didn't see that maybe that was too much for one human being.

I have another question. During this time when you were the acting NSIA, you said that the report came to you and it was not intended to cause “action”, that it was just “for awareness”, and that the report did not name any MPs.

I'm just wondering: In the pathway of this information, who would ask for the names of MPs? Because it seems to me that there's something there and nobody knew what it was for an extended amount of time, so I'm just wondering, who would ask?

Mr. David Morrison: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

The second thing I tried to say, in addition to how it was not a report that was intended to spur action, is that when someone like me reads that report, we have awareness that it is based on underlying intel. There are other reports that have been sifted through and analyzed that build up to this assessment.

I actually have a fairly high degree of confidence in our security agencies that if there's an action that needs to be taken because of a development, something that shows up in intel, they will take that action.

Jody Thomas was very clear that in the intel, when it first surfaced, with respect to the MPs in February and March 2021, there was no physical threat. There was some alarming information. It's up to others in the system to determine how loud that alarm is ringing and what actions are required to be taken.

In answer to your question, Madam Chair, when someone like me reads it, we can be quite certain that others already know the information and have taken action on it, or it wouldn't be buried in an assessment report.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for that.

We can argue about whether the action was appropriate from our opinions, but it is alarming to me that we have multiple MPs who were targeted and they just didn't know. That's concerning.

You said that Mr. Chong was provided a defensive briefing, but I want to be really clear. According to the testimony that we've heard, he was provided the defensive briefing, but he had no idea that he and his family were being targeted specifically.

When you look at that, how does that make sense? If I don't know that I am being targeted, as a human being, and I'm provided information, that information is helpful—Mr. Chong said it was helpful—but it doesn't allow me to assess the issue in a meaningful way. That's what I'm really concerned about, because at the end of the day, to me, this is not partisan. This is a broken system—I don't think everything's broken, but there's a part of it that's broken—that we need to fix so that parliamentarians feel they have faith in the system, and Canadians have faith in the system.

Can you explain from your perspective or give me insight as to why he was provided a defensive briefing, but he did not know that both he and his family, both internally and externally to Canada, were being targeted?

Mr. David Morrison: Thank you for the question, Madam Chair.

It's a question that would be better posed to the head of CSIS, who I know is appearing before you later tonight. I think at least part of his answer will be that he was guided by the CSIS Act as it is in place and as interpreted, and was somewhat constrained in the information he felt he was able to provide to Mr. Chong.

I think other witnesses have shown clearly, and 20/20 hindsight has shown very clearly, that that's not acceptable. It wasn't sufficient, which is why there is, as of May 16 this year, a new regime in place that will allow anyone involved in briefing MPs to go further than has been the case up until now.

The second thing that I tried to say on this issue in my earlier testimony is that we need to be slightly cautious that it is not abnormal for foreign governments to be discussing Canadian citizens or permanent residents. I tried to say that that, in itself, is not necessarily cause for alarm. It depends on capability and intent.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cooper, you have five minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Morrison, you say it's not abnormal for foreign states to be commenting on Canadian citizens. In this particular case, we have evidence in a memo of a diplomat threatening a sitting member of Parliament because of his doing his job of speaking on behalf of his constituents, and threatening to sanction his family. For you to suggest or dismiss it as just a foreign state talking about someone in some way that shouldn't have raised alarm bells is completely unacceptable and really undermines your credibility.

You said that the system functioned properly. I want to go back to that point.

The system functioned properly, even though a sitting member of Parliament, Mr. Chong, was not briefed. The system functioned properly even though that information you sat on resulted in a Beijing diplomat being able to stay in Canada for two more years to harass and intimidate Chinese Canadians. However, you say, sir, through you, Madam Chair, that is a case of the system working properly.

Also, Mr. Morrison, you sat on that memo, which contained information that has resulted in the expulsion of a diplomat, Mr. Zhao Wei. Do you support the decision to expel Mr. Zhao Wei?

Mr. David Morrison: Just to be clear, I never said the system functioned properly. I said the system functioned. I read my remarks. I've just gone back and reread them, so maybe the transcript will show...

I said, "I would submit that the system did function according to the protocols that were in place back in 2021." That's what I believe—

Mr. Michael Cooper: I asked you a question, Mr. Morrison. Do you support the expulsion of Mr. Zhao Wei, which is based on information that you sat on and allowed him to stay there for two years. Yes or no?

Mr. David Morrison: I was the person directly involved in the expulsion of Zhao Wei, so, yes, I definitely support that expulsion.

I would say, though, that I can't go into all of the details but there is information that has circulated in the media and elsewhere about Mr. Zhao Wei that is not accurate. I would say, though, that he did engage in—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Morrison, you answered my question.

Now, you poo-poo and downplay the significance of the information that was before your desk, the Prime Minister's national security and intelligence adviser, on the basis that it was buried in a memo and that somehow that shouldn't have captured your attention. We're talking about a nine-page memo. It's hardly a book, Mr. Morrison, and you're the national security adviser to the Prime Minister. Do you not take responsibility?

• (1150)

Mr. David Morrison: Madam Chair, I think the question's been asked and I think I've tried to answer it a number of times.

Mr. Michael Cooper: No, you don't take responsibility.

Mr. David Morrison: I can try again to say, number one, that the memo did not name Michael Chong. It was a memo designed to raise awareness—

Mr. Michael Cooper: A sitting member of Parliament—

The Chair: Please pause, Mr. Cooper.

Deputy, I'm going to say to you there was a series of comments that were made within that exchange. I have to appreciate your attempts to answer and not be given the floor.

This institution that we're creating and that we're trying to improve is not one that always functions well. The way people interpret comments and the way they are repeated often don't match the way they're delivered.

Your opening comments will be part of our binder. Members will be able to review them. I can assure you and reassure you that what members—some more than others—want to take from them, they will.

With that, for me, when it comes to this issue, it's very important. The minute there was a good exchange, a good hour, I rewarded good behaviour. I commended it. I appreciated it.

I try not to interrupt, but right now I am taking some time here to interrupt, because the members need to understand that this chair will take time when we're not taking turns and allowing everyone to satisfy their role.

That's how simple it is.

I am going to give the floor back to Mr. Cooper, but, Deputy, rest assured that I will provide you some time to answer if you would like it. Your being here to provide us information is important. I also want to make some comments today, too.

We need to understand how our institutions work. Oftentimes people who are on the elected side, who have not had the exchanges, don't really really understand where there is overlap and how it works. What you know and what we know doesn't always match. This is our opportunity to better understand what you know.

Thank you for that.

I hope everyone got to take a nice little breath.

Mr. Cooper, you have the floor.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, through you to Mr. Morrison, as the Prime Minister's national security and intelligence ad-

viser, do you take any responsibility for this failure? Do you take any responsibility, yes or no?

Mr. David Morrison: I'm sorry. Do I take any responsibility for...? I missed the word.

Mr. Michael Cooper: For this failure, the fact that you had this information on your desk in August 2021 and you did nothing.

Do you take any responsibility for that?

Mr. David Morrison: Madam Chair, I challenge the premise of the question.

I did read the report. I'm sure that in the course of my role as acting NSIA and as foreign and defence policy adviser, it informed how I advised the Prime Minister. I did commission a follow-on piece into the subject area.

Thank you.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Let me just say in conclusion that it seems that people fail upward in this government as long as they remain loyal to the Prime Minister.

Isn't that right, Mr. Morrison?

The Chair: With that, we are at time.

Mr. Cooper, I do not anticipate hearing your voice until it's your turn again, or whomever else it is.

Deputy Morrison, the floor is yours.

Mr. David Morrison: I have nothing to say to the fail upward comment.

The Chair: That's appreciated.

With that, we will go to Mrs. Romanado for five minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Through you, I would like to thank Mr. Morrison for being with us today.

I'm trying to determine the question of privilege for Mr. Chong. I'm going to clarify a couple of dates. After I do so, could you make sure I have the right information?

We understand that, on February 18, 2021, Mr. Chong introduced the opposition day motion. On February 22, 2021, there was a vote. Subsequent to that vote, you mentioned influence maps were created on the members of the subcommittee on human rights, which would have included Mr. Chong. No physical or imminent threats were in that.

I understand the issues management note of May 2021—I don't have the exact date—was prepared. No specific threats were made, and no MPs were named specifically. Subsequent to that, Mr. Chong received the first defensive briefing on June 24, 2021—a defensive briefing that did not include specific threats.

On July 20, 2021, there as an assessment and deep dive done—this famous memo—that did not require action and did not name any MPs. It appeared in your reading package of August. Could you clarify the exact date? That, of course, did not, again, include names of MPs. You had follow-up action identified.

Mr. Chong has testified that he initiated meetings with CSIS on August 5, 2021, February 25, 2022 and July 18, 2022.

I'm trying to get a better understanding of when the specific threat to MP Chong gets to MP Chong. I'm trying to understand when he was made aware of the specific threat. I understand he mentioned he learned about it through the media on May 1, 2023—I think. We're trying to determine the point of privilege.

Could you clarify the date of the May 2021 issues management note, the reading package date and which date Mr. Chong was made aware of the specific threat to him that would have constituted an intimidation tactic?

• (1155)

Mr. David Morrison: Madam Chair, thank you for the question.

I believe the issues management note is dated May 30 or 31, 2021. The date I gave as the Privy Council Office reconstructing when it arrived to me.... It's been in the press that I was on some medical leave earlier in the month, but it arrived in my reading pack on August 17.

I don't know exactly when the more fulsome brief was given to Mr. Chong. That's a question to put to CSIS.

Your timeline is largely accurate. I don't want to have confused things with the use of the term “influence map”. My point was simply that diplomats around the world keep lists of people in order to do their jobs so that—

Mrs. Sherry Romano: I don't want to cut you off, Mr. Morrison. I'm aware of that.

We ourselves meet with people. We prepare backgrounders on them, obviously. Anyone who comes to see a member of Parliament, when there's a new election.... Anybody who's a lobbyist will do profiles on each of us. I think that's normal. It's not illegal to do. They look at our bios, they try to make connections and so on and so forth.

What I'm trying to get at here is that, when Michael Chong received a briefing on June 24, 2021, it would have prompted him, because three subsequent meetings at his request happened. I'll speak to Mr. Vigneault this evening about this. I think it was more him providing background to CSIS or information to them based on the defensive briefing.

What I'm trying to understand is this: When was Mr. Chong notified that his family and himself were being...? I don't want to say “targeted”, because there were no imminent threats, but I'm not trying to downplay what happened to him—not at all. What I'm trying to understand is this: When was he made aware that he was a person of interest per se?

Mr. David Morrison: Again, I think you should ask CSIS. My understanding is that this was quite recent.

I want to be clear. The original intel on Michael Chong, as I have read it now, was not about an influence map; it was definitely something that went well over the line of foreign interference.

The Chair: Thank you.

This topic has expanded, but I appreciate the commentary on the question of privilege.

Based on question period yesterday, it sounds like our colleague would like to see a response coming out of this committee. Helping to get to a response would help satisfy the person whose question of privilege it is, namely, Mr. Chong.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

You have three minutes, Ms. Gaudreau.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I don't know if I've understood you correctly, but you can see that this requires a lot of work and that taking on the oversight role, i.e., filtering the information well, becoming aware of it and following the whole disclosure process, seems superhuman. Have you ever, following an alert, said you needed help?

Witnesses have told us that this task involves reading 3,000, 4,000 or 5,000 reports. Did you ever mention that the task, to ensure a good oversight, was colossal?

[*English*]

Mr. David Morrison: Thank you for the question, Madam Chair.

I do think there is an issue with triaging the relevance of the information that comes in because of its volume. I think this is part of the tightening up within the public service that Jody Thomas and others spoke about.

There's a difference between a piece of intel that names names and says things might happen to people and a piece of intel.... I should say that most of the intel that I consume in my current job is intel about things happening out in the world.

There's a nice-to-know and need-to-know trade-off that isn't always apparent when the packs arrive. That is something we are tightening up on.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: That's fine. I'm not an expert on the machinery of government, although I'm in my second term. I'd like to know who appoints the chief of staff. Who makes the appointment? Who is in charge of services?

I'm trying to understand who the employer is.

Mr. David Morrison: Are you talking about ministers, or other people?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I'm talking about Ms. Katie Telford, who is chief of staff.

Mr. David Morrison: All right. So you're talking about the Prime Minister's chief of staff.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Is it the Prime Minister?

Mr. David Morrison: Yes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: All right.

Who hires someone like Jody Thomas, who is National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister?

Mr. David Morrison: What do you mean by “hires”?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Who appoints a person to this position?

Mr. David Morrison: That is the Clerk of the Privy Council. I believe this is with the agreement of the Prime Minister, given that in the public service of Canada, this is one of the most important people. He or she is the person responsible for coordinating national security responses and information.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I'll come back to it later.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much, Chair.

I'm going to follow up. I think you clarified what you said, which is basically that the function of the protocols that were in place in 2021 were followed. To me, that lets us know that there was a problem with the protocols. That is an opinion that I can have, but I felt that was a clear statement that you made.

Ms. Thomas talked to us about looking at that system and changing it fundamentally. She feels it will help to assist in moving it forward.

I'm wondering two things.

One is, when you were reviewing your position after you left, was there any process where you passed on information to the new person? Were those processes something that you denoted as being a concern in terms of sharing information?

The second part is that hopefully you have heard some of Ms. Thomas's testimony: She talked about revamping the system. Having your experience in that role, do you feel that is a good move and does that make sense?

Mr. David Morrison: I don't recall exactly what I told Jody Thomas when I passed the baton to her in early 2022. I do recall that we talked about personnel and some other things.

However, with regard to your broader question about some reforms and tightening up the system, I think that is a good idea. I started to say, in response to another question, that the world has changed, and I think that we have some structures and processes and so on that were optimized for a different time. The nature of threats to Canada has changed. I think that should be very clear. We're now in a geopolitical environment unlike any that I have experienced in my 30-some years on the international scene. When the world changes, I think it's incumbent upon structures, systems and outlooks to change, as well. That would include how Canada

processes intelligence, produces intelligence and gets intelligence to policy-makers and so on.

• (1205)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I think my time is up, so thank you so much.

The Chair: Ms. Blaney, you put a smile on my face. Thank you.

Mr. Nater, you have five minutes.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Madame Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Morrison, for joining us here today.

I want to follow up on some comments and some dates that have been thrown out. I want to confirm that you received the nine-page memo in your reading package on August 17, 2021, and that this reading package was prepared for you by a PCO official. Is that correct?

Mr. David Morrison: Yes.

Mr. John Nater: Are aware that two days prior to that—August 15—the Prime Minister dissolved Parliament, triggering an election? Were you aware of that fact at the time of August 17?

Mr. David Morrison: I was aware that an election had been called.

Mr. John Nater: You, as the national security and intelligence adviser, were a member of the panel of five of the critical election incident public protocol. Am I correct in that?

Mr. David Morrison: Yes, you are.

Mr. John Nater: The fact that a PCO official provided you, on August 17, two days into a writ period, with a memo indicating that parliamentarians were being targeted by a foreign regime.... You, as the national security and intelligence adviser and as a member of the panel of five, didn't twig to the fact that this could be an issue in a campaign that had just been called two days prior?

Mr. David Morrison: Let me begin by saying that my participation in the panel of five and my awareness of the role that this panel plays during our elections began when I was named acting national security and intelligence adviser on the first of July. There were, I recall, several meetings, briefings and scenario-playings of the panel of five in the run-up to a widely anticipated election.

My clear expectation was that, if there was any real and imminent threat to Canada's democracy, the SITE task force would make that part of its regular briefings and, in fact, part of its daily written briefings to the panel of five.

The answer to the question is no, I did not anticipate being informed of a threat to Canada's democratic processes in a lengthy info note that came without warning in my pack.

Mr. John Nater: With the greatest of respect, sir, you were informed. You were informed on August 17, two days into the writ period. You, as the national security and intelligence adviser and as a member of the panel of five, were informed of foreign activities targeting Canadian citizens, targeting Canadian parliamentarians. You were informed, sir.

You can't say that because you weren't informed in the capacity of the CEIPP. You were informed as the national security and intelligence adviser. That's the fact that's troubling to me. Two days into the writ period, the PCO saw fit to provide you with a nine-page memo on foreign interference in Canadian elections, and you did not twig to that fact or deal with it through the critical election incident public protocol. I find it simply astonishing that someone in your position.... You say that you're not a career public servant, but, sir, you've been in the most senior ranks of government for over a decade, so you can't hide behind the fact that you're not a career public servant. Frankly, in listening to the testimony today, I fear that you've watched *Yes, Minister* and taken that as a training guide rather than as a comedy. I'm reminded of Sir Humphrey Appleby, who said that clarification isn't meant to provide clarity. "It is [meant] to put oneself 'in' the clear." That is what we're seeing here.

You mentioned that there was a follow-up piece. You asked for a follow-up piece. On what date did you ask for that follow-up piece?

• (1210)

Mr. David Morrison: May I begin, Madam Chair, by stating explicitly that my opening remarks were, in fact, intended to provide clarity on an issue that has bedevilled many people, understandably, because it's a complex issue. I said explicitly that I think there are two areas of misunderstanding in the July 2021 memo, and I did my best to try to inject some clarity into that.

The answer to the question is I don't recall the exact date that I asked for the follow-up memo.

Mr. John Nater: I would ask, then, if you could come back to this committee and provide the date on which you asked for the follow-up memo, and the date that you received the follow-up memo. Could you share that memo with this committee?

Mr. David Morrison: If I can answer, Madam Chair, I'm sure the follow-up memo is top secret and, therefore, unable to be shared with the committee. I am told that I saw a draft in December 2021 and that the memo was finalized in January 2022. For the record, most of it has already been published by Global.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Bains.

Mr. Parm Bains (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Morrison, for joining us today.

I'm going to go back to a question my colleague put forward. You mentioned that there was a committee on human rights, and all the members, including Mr. Chong, were sanctioned and targeted. In that same vein, every member of Parliament's been sanctioned by Russia, and now we've seen news reports suggesting that Russia was involved in an information campaign fuelling the convoy.

Are we targeted? Does being sanctioned constitute being a target?

Mr. David Morrison: I think the community thinks of these things as part of a spectrum. Yes, sanctions are obviously a form of targeting, so my answer would be yes.

Anyone who has been subject to sanctions by Russia or by anyone else has been targeted because research needed to be done to know how to create the list of the people who were subsequently sanctioned.

Mr. Parm Bains: That target constitutes a threat. Are we under threat?

Mr. David Morrison: The sanctions that were meted out to the members of the international human rights subcommittee of the standing committee that I mentioned were sanctions about travel to China and about financial dealings with China. That is, in itself, the sanction. It isn't a threat and it doesn't constitute foreign interference, because it's all above board. Canada does this all the time with respect to Haiti, Russia, Belarus and Iran.

The process of researching individuals in a different country and then later sanctioning them is part of how diplomacy and sanctions work. It is not in itself foreign interference.

Mr. Parm Bains: After learning about the situation with our colleague Mr. Chong, the government expelled Zhao Wei from the country.

Is it difficult to expel a foreign diplomat?

Mr. David Morrison: The process is not difficult. The decisions to expel foreign diplomats are not taken lightly.

In the tool kit of diplomacy that we use when we disagree with action and we want to protest action, it begins with conversations and statements. It goes through written exchanges and, ultimately, can get as serious as declaring someone *persona non grata*, which is what we did in the case of Chinese foreign interference.

Again, as I said, I was very involved in that. There is a public perception about Mr. Zhao's activities.

Let me say that the Vienna convention allows you to expel anyone for any reason, and you don't have to give a reason. We have been very clear with China, going back several years, that foreign interference is unacceptable. Police stations are unacceptable, balloons are unacceptable and interference in our institutions and our democracy is unacceptable.

We eventually expelled a foreign diplomat and then China, as everyone knows, on May 9, expelled one of our diplomats.

• (1215)

Mr. Parm Bains: Thank you. I'm going to move on.

On June 2, at another committee that I'm a member of, we heard from Dean Baxendale, chief executive officer of the China Democracy Foundation. He told us:

Under the Harper government, a number of MOUs were entered into directly with the RCMP. This allowed some 25 China communist agents—we'll call them "policing agents"—to enter the country to look at repatriating supposed criminals from Canada. A number of them were deported during that period of time—about 290 [of them].

Is that consistent with the types of arrangements the Harper government was signing to improve relations with China and would that be consistent with China's MO?

Mr. David Morrison: I'll answer very quickly, Madam Chair.

It's not a subject that I know anything about.

Several folks have commented on my trajectory: I only arrived back in Canada right at the end of the previous government.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cooper, you have five minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Morrison, in answer to the last question posed by Mr. Nater, you said that with respect to the follow-up to the July 2021 CSIS memo, you saw a draft in December of 2021, and that draft was finalized in January of 2022. When Mr. Nater asked you to provide a copy of that to the committee, you said that you would be unable to but that much of its contents had been reported by Global News.

For the record, Madam Chair, I would like to note that Global News did in fact, on March 8, report a January 2022 "Special Report" that was prepared by PCO, which was date-stamped and finalized, suggesting that it was intended to be read by the Prime Minister and his senior aides.

That memo, or "Special Report", contained, among other things: that "A large clandestine transfer of funds earmarked for the federal election from the PRC Consulate in Toronto was transferred to an elected provincial government official via a staff member of a 2019 federal candidate,"; that "We assess that Canada remains highly vulnerable to Chinese foreign interference efforts."; that "We base this judgment on intelligence that highlights deep and persistent Chinese Communist Party interference attempts over more than a decade"; and, that "The group allegedly involved at least 11 candidates and 13 or more aides."

In short, Mr. Morrison, you have conceded what the Prime Minister and this government have repeatedly denied and attempted to cover up.

Did that PCO memo, that January 2022 Special Report, come to the attention of the Prime Minister?

• (1220)

Mr. David Morrison: Thank you for the question, Madam Chair.

I left PCO on or about the fifth or sixth of January of 2022. I don't believe that I even saw the memo until very recently, so I can't answer whether it came to the attention of the Prime Minister.

What I will say is that all such allegations of money transferring hands and direct influence in our democratic institutions by the People's Republic of China were investigated by the independent special rapporteur, and I would commend his report to anyone wishing further information.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, I think it's pretty incredible....

Changing gears, Mr. Morrison, through you, Madam Chair, when you last came before this committee, you said that there was "there was no spike in foreign interference...in either the 2019 or 2021 elections." I'd ask you to explain how you can reconcile that assertion with the CSIS briefing that Erin O'Toole received, wherein he was informed that, in the 2021 election campaign, Beijing had

launched an orchestrated campaign targeting him and the Conservative Party.

Mr. David Morrison: Thank you for the question, Madam Chair.

I would respectfully suggest that questions about what CSIS did or did not brief to Mr. O'Toole be put directly to CSIS. I know there will be an opportunity to do so this evening.

As I think the committee knows, I was a member of the panel of five for the 2021 election. I've answered the question on this several times. We were not made aware of any spike in foreign interference during either the 2019 or the 2021 election. That finding was validated by two separate after-action reports.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. O'Toole was briefed of foreign funding to create misinformation, human resources to amplify misinformation through proxies coordinated by the United Front Work Department, foreign controlled social media platforms spreading disinformation and an active voter suppression campaign against Mr. O'Toole and the Conservative Party.

Are you suggesting that these activities are normal and that it wouldn't constitute a spike in foreign interference by a hostile state such as Beijing?

Mr. David Morrison: Madam Chair, thank you for the question.

I would say that I am familiar with the account that has shown up in the media of what took place in that briefing. I'm also saying what I've said before. There's a baseline level of foreign interference in Canada. That did not spike in the 2021 election. That finding has been validated by independent observers.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just so everyone knows, I've entered into the third round of questions where we go five, five, two and a half, two and a half, five and five. That will bring us to the possibility of a fourth round, which I'll adjust to balance out for each party to get an equal amount of time. I'm watching the clock and I'll keep doing that.

Please, if we continue like this, we'll actually get through it all.

Mrs. Romanado.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the witness again because he's walking us through a timeline that is going to help us put the puzzle pieces together. As I mentioned, when pieces of information and/or intelligence are taken individually, it's hard to put the puzzle pieces together.

Mr. Morrison, you mentioned that the reading package of August 17, 2021, which included the July 20 memo, had information that prompted you to do a follow-up. You then saw in December 2021 a draft, which was finalized in January 2022. We know that an order in council dated January 4 named Jody Thomas as the national security and intelligence adviser and she began her role on January 11, 2022.

She has testified that immediately when she took on the role, and in her previous role as deputy minister of national defence, one of her concerns was that the acts of the People's Republic of China were of concern. This was not something that was new to people. I, myself, sat on the national defence committee during my first mandate and was made aware of concerns of national security issues with respect to China, Russia and other states actors.

Could you walk us through what you would do differently or what you would recommend? You received the reading package in August. We were in an election at that time. Cabinet was sworn in later that year. Therefore, there was a delay of approximately five months before you actually received the draft. They were gathering more information, I'm assuming, which you had requested.

Could you let us know what you would do differently or what would you recommend to us to help the NSIA, future NSIAs and departments to see if we could have been doing something differently in that timeline?

It seems like a quite a bit of time from the time you requested the follow-up and the time the draft came. I'm assuming intelligence is not something where you send out an email and hope to get information back. This is gathering and various people are working on that. As you mentioned, we were also dealing with the evacuation of Kabul.

Could you let us know what you would recommend in that regard?

• (1225)

Mr. David Morrison: My intent in commissioning the new memo—and I should say that it was also a report not intended for anybody to take action—is that I wished to drill down to try to convince myself of the details, or more of the details of exactly what had been going on.

My information is that the United Front workers department of the Communist Party of China has existed in one form or another in Canada since the 1950s. I was interested to know what had been happening in all of that time. What was the exact nature of the foreign interference threat in Canada and what should we do about it?

I asked the team to come back to me with everything they could marshal in terms of examples, specific examples, of what China was doing in Canada so that I could inform myself and, if necessary, inform the Prime Minister. That was the intent behind my commissioning the additional work.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you for that.

Without revealing intelligence information, in furthering that deep dive or asking for follow-up, were specific names of members of Parliament then provided to you? You don't have to reveal the names, but...

Mr. David Morrison: No, they were not provided to me. Again, I think the committee should be aware that now we're into January 2022. According to the protocols in place at the time, action had already been taken in the first half of 2021, action that had been spurred by the intelligence that arrived following the Uyghur motion.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you so much. That was very helpful.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Gaudreau, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to continue our discussion, Mr. Morrison.

I'm looking for who is responsible for the individuals who are in office. In the case of the chief of staff, it's the Prime Minister. In the case of Ms. Thomas, the national security adviser, it's also the Prime Minister. We also met with the special rapporteur, who also reports to the Prime Minister. In fact, we've realized that our intelligence culture is outdated. Everyone agrees on that.

If we're here today, it's because we're wondering whose responsibility it is. Otherwise, we wouldn't be here.

Is it up to the Prime Minister? There should have been steps to take upstream to be ready for the next elections, among others.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. David Morrison: Thank you for the question. It's an important one.

Certainly in my view, Madam Chair, we need to distinguish between the Prime Minister's exempt staff and career public servants like me and Jody Thomas, who will serve whoever is in government.

I went on at some length in response to another question, as did Madam Thomas, about the changes to legislative frameworks and to public service business practices that are being undertaken right now to tighten up systems.

I've also made the point that some of our structures and systems may not be optimized for the threats Canada faces now and in the future. Addressing all of those challenges will require the public service to do some deep thinking and also require the government of the day to make some decisions, should it come to machinery changes, for example.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: At the end of the day, if individuals are struggling to do their job accurately because of the amount of information, it would be normal for them to be helped, i.e., given manpower and new means.

Several witnesses have told us that your predecessor left frustrated, because he even published a report that wasn't well studied. If there had been more staff to be able to process the raw information that everyone receives, so that no information slips through the cracks, we wouldn't be here, would we?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Chair.

I do want to come back to the follow-up piece to the report that you've talked about. You've indicated that you can't give us the memo about it, but you have brought it up several times. What can you tell us, and in what context did you send it?

Mr. David Morrison: I commissioned it. That's an important point. As I've stated, it is also important to know that I didn't know how long I was going to be the national security and intelligence adviser. I considered as serious the issue of foreign interference, and I therefore challenged a team of analysts within the Privy Council Office—so not CSIS but folks who worked directly for me—to help educate me as best they could on all of the threats I should be worried about. That led to the memo I have referenced, which, as has been established, wasn't actually finalized until after I left the job.

It included information that has already been read into the record today. It included international comparisons, because Canada was certainly not the only country that faced foreign interference from China. Some of our Five Eyes partners have, and it's a thing on which we compare notes with others internationally.

Certainly, that is the case in another hat I have recently worn as the Prime Minister's G7 sherpa. Within the G7 context we have also been discussing the threat of foreign interference, in general, and China, in particular.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Speaking of foreign interference, we know that one of the challenges is that when we have people in Canada who have loved ones in these authoritarian countries, sometimes what they are asked to do is impacted by what could happen in other countries. We know we don't have jurisdiction there.

Is there any conversation about how we deal with this, because it is an eminent threat, and just saying that we can't do anything doesn't seem like the best response? In partnership with other countries, is there any discussion about what next steps could be taken to address this issue?

• (1235)

Mr. David Morrison: Let me refer you back to how I tried to end my introductory statement. I do think you have put your finger on something that is very important for Canada and Canadians, given the size and diversity of our diaspora communities and how many of the family members remain behind, sometimes in authoritarian countries. Public hearings on this would be a helpful first step toward being able to eventually do something about it.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

It's now Mr. Berthold's turn, and he will be followed by Mr. Ferguson.

We're listening, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Morrison, I've been listening to you from the beginning. I've listened to several witnesses since the beginning of these hearings on the case of Mr. Michael Chong. One thing amazes me, and that is to see that no one has taken responsibility for the information coming from just about everywhere.

You confirmed, today, that you have repeatedly read these memos that talked about foreign interference. You practically confirmed the content of the memo that had been revealed by *Global News*, saying that it was top secret, but that the whole content had practically been revealed in that article. Your predecessor, Mr. Vincent Rigby, said he had read between 5,000 and 7,000 documents in 18 months. He even challenged me to sit in the national security adviser's chair to see the extent of the work.

That's precisely the problem: We sit people like you or like Mr. Rigby in these chairs to analyze this information. Who makes the connections between the different pieces of information, who makes the necessary cross-references, and who makes sure that we determine what's important?

Hearing you and everyone else who has come before us since the beginning, everyone has been informed, but no one has made a decision.

When you see the word “information”, are you purposely not taking any action because you figure someone else will do it for you, Mr. Morrison?

It's worrying for Canadians and it's worrying for the Chinese diaspora. It's also worrying to know that people who are appointed to positions like yours are incapable of being the eyes of Canadian citizens, who need people who will see elements like these.

Mr. David Morrison: Madam Chair, I thank the member for his question.

[English]

I won't go through the dates again. I've given you my opening statement and I've said that I believe the system in place with respect to Mr. Chong functioned according to the relevant protocols at that time.

The honourable member has asked a much bigger question—a good and thoughtful question—about what do you do when there is such a volume of intel reporting. In response to a previous question, I used the word “triage”. I do think we could be better at flagging up to the national security and intelligence adviser—flagging up to me when necessary—particularly relevant pieces of information. Within Global Affairs, where I've been for the past seven or so months, we have tried to tighten up our own efforts to ensure that I know what I need to know and to ensure that the Minister of Foreign Affairs knows what she needs to know.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Morrison, I listened to your opening remarks, but the fact remains that it's still worrisome. You realize it now, but it wasn't done back then.

How can we be sure that people won't respond in exactly the same way?

I'll give you a specific example. On May 12, The Globe and Mail published an article in which it was mentioned that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service had provided the government, specifically your department, Global Affairs Canada, with a list of other diplomats from Beijing who should be considered for expulsion because of their interference activity.

Is this a note that was sent with the notation "For your information only?"

Mr. David Morrison: Thank you for the question, but I would need some clarification.

When you say "for your information only," do you mean that the information was passed on to me personally?

Mr. Luc Berthold: The Canadian Security Intelligence Service provided the government, Global Affairs Canada, for which you are responsible, with a list that included the names of other diplomats.

Was this list sent to your department with the notation "for your information only"? If so, who will take action in relation to this list? Obviously, it won't be you, since you took no action when you received these notes.

• (1240)

[English]

Mr. David Morrison: Madam Chair, I would once again encourage folks not to believe everything they read in the newspapers.

My second point is that if I had the date of The Globe and Mail article you just mentioned correct, that was May 12, and I would remind you, Madam Chair, that we did expel a Canadian diplomat on May 8. As a part of the normal way in which we do diplomacy and intelligence, the system is always on the lookout for foreign interference, and when it happens we'll take the necessary actions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fergus.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

Mr. Morrison, again I feel obliged to say this. No one is questioning your abilities and your service to our country; it's been exemplary. I will only presume, because I only have evidence to say so, that you have conducted yourself honourably and with a lot of attention to the details and that you do the best that you can. As Mr. Rigby, your predecessor, had pointed out, there is a lot of reading material that comes across your desk. As you answered questions to me about things that are being sent up for information or things sent up for action, if it's classified information that's stuff that you do carry on. Even in spite of getting an information note, you still act-

ed on the material because your experience had taught you that there was something you wanted to dig further on.

I thank you for your work.

I'd like to go back to a question regarding the Johnston report. Mr. Johnston said on page 21 of his report, "There is uncertainty about whether there was money, if it actually went to staff or the provincial MPP, and there is no intelligence suggesting any federal candidates received these funds."

The media reported later that there was no evidence of covert funding—although this was largely overlooked and the public narrative persisted that candidates, sometimes identified as Liberal candidates, received these funds. NSIA Thomas and the Prime Minister's chief of staff both testified to PROC that there was no evidence of money flowing to federal candidates.

Mr. Morrison, does that seem true to you in terms of what Mr. Johnston wrote in his report?

Mr. David Morrison: It seems accurate, yes.

As the committee knows, I have had various positions over the past number of years. I was one of those who was determined to get to the bottom of this. I was interviewed by the independent special rapporteur, as many others were, on multiple occasions. I would encourage anyone who has not read the independent special rapporteur's report to read it, because I think it is a very credible account. It is not accurate to suggest that Mr. Johnston said, "trust me". I recently appeared in camera before NSICOP, a different committee—that was only several days ago—and went over many of these same issues.

I, as a Canadian, and as a Canadian official, am very satisfied that Mr. Johnston had access to what he needed to have access to and that he got to the bottom of the kinds of issues you just mentioned.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you for that.

I do agree. I think it's actually a very easy read. It was very accessible. I found that it was very far away from being a whitewash. It was very much a very frank note that identified where we've been, what the threat is, or what the threat seems to be now, the direction in which it's trending and what steps we need to take to make sure we close that gap.

Is there anything in the Johnston report that you would take issue with given your knowledge and your depth of experience in all of this?

• (1245)

Mr. David Morrison: The only element of the Johnston report I would take issue with is the notion of a top secret system that a minister may or may not have had access to. I know such systems exist within Global Affairs Canada and exist within the Privy Council Office. I've never personally used one, so I doubt very much that a minister's office.... I don't know how the Minister of Public Safety's office is set up, but since I joined the Canadian government about 10 years ago, all of the intel I have ever seen has come in hard copy.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much for that. That also, again, is consistent with other testimony we've heard around this table from members of the national security and intelligence community.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are going to now enter our final round.

Deputy, as you know, we started about 10 minutes late, so we'll just be going about 10 minutes past the hour.

What we'll do is give five minutes to Mr. Calkins followed by five minutes for Mr. Fergus, Madame Gaudreau and Madame Blaney.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fergus, Ms. Gaudreau and Ms. Blaney will also have five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Morrison, for coming back to committee.

Can you just reiterate, for the committee and for people who are watching, how many times David Johnston met with you in regard to the report he issued?

Mr. David Morrison: It was three times.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Was that in person or over the phone? How did that happen?

Mr. David Morrison: On all three occasions, I went to a location in central Ottawa from where this process was being conducted. It was in a secure facility. On one of those three occasions, I recall Mr. Johnston's being on video. On the other two, I believe he was there in person.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You say it was only three times. I do believe there's information out there suggesting you met with him four times, but I'm not going to get into....

Mr. David Morrison: I believe your question was on when he was preparing the report. I met with him an additional time after the report came out—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you.

Mr. David Morrison: —so it was a total of four times.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: It was a total of four times. Thank you.

Today, before this committee, you've talked about the special report. In your conversations with David Johnston did you disclose or have a conversation with him about that special report? I ask because I don't see any reference in the Johnston report to the January 2022 special report.

Mr. David Morrison: To the best of my recollection, in all of my interactions with Mr. Johnston and his team, we were not dealing principally or even occasionally with individual pieces of intel.

The first time I met Mr. Johnston was on Easter Monday in the afternoon, and it was.... I believe, by that time, Mr. Johnston had had introductory briefings with a range of federal public service colleagues.

As deputy minister of foreign affairs, I'm responsible for something called the rapid-response mechanism. I was on the panel of five, but I believe most of the introductory briefings came from the security and intelligence community. I was interested—and he was interested, I think—in learning more about the difference between foreign interference and foreign influence.

• (1250)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Did you need to go to a remote, secure location to have that general conversation? It seems to me that if you're going to a secure location to have a meeting, you would be talking about classified information.

Am I missing something?

Mr. David Morrison: I believe the set-up was established by the Privy Council Office. It had a secure location and a top-secret location, if I remember. I know I had to leave my phone outside and take off my smart watch. That is because such conversations can range over a wide variety of topics. We therefore took appropriate protections.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You talked about your role on the panel of five. The Johnston report doesn't even address the issues pertaining to this memo and other information. He only addressed the panel of five as it pertains to the 2019 election.

Is there a reason why Mr. Johnston would not have included those conversations or any information from the panel of five in the 2021 election? It seems odd that it's missing from his report. You were a member of the panel of five in 2021, but not in 2019. Do I have right?

Mr. David Morrison: You have that correct.

I don't consider it curious, at all, that his report....

Let me just say the following: There were reports produced by Jim Judd and Morris Rosenberg about the functioning of the panel in 2019 and 2021. I would recommend those to the committee.

Mr. John Nater: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I have one more follow-up.

The Chair: I'm sorry.

Do you have a point of order, Mr. Nater?

Mr. John Nater: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I will be exceptionally brief.

I don't want misinformation before the committee. A document tabled yesterday by Mr. Fergus indicates that Mr. Morrison met with Mr. Johnston four times before Mr. Johnston's report was table: on April 10, April 12, April 13 and April 25.

I just don't want misinformation to hang before the committee.

Mr. David Morrison: May I respond to that, Madam Chair?

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm going to—

Mr. David Morrison: I just want to say that I believe I said, “to the best of my recollection”. If I met four times with David Johnston before the publication of the report, I apologize. That was my recollection. The record can be corrected accordingly.

Thank you.

The Chair: We appreciate that, because I think there is a lot going on. I think Mr. Nater's point is well received, and we appreciate the clarification. That means the record will reflect accurately what was said. We'll make sure your comments match.

Mr. Calkins, because the exchange was so peaceful and good, yes, there's one more question from you.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I have in my hands an article from Global News by Marc-André Cossette, which says that, via a statement issued by your department while you were, I believe, the deputy minister of Global Affairs, you said the following:

“Mr. Morrison does not recall having received any written material regarding threats to MPs during this time,” according to a spokesperson for Global Affairs Canada, where Morrison now serves as deputy minister.

“He also does not recall any oral briefings or discussions on the issue while NSIA,” the department said in its statement.

However, you admitted today before this committee that you were not only functionally aware of threats to members of Parliament—even though you claimed you didn't know their names—but also that you were acutely aware of and have even taken credit for initiating responses to the special report originating in December and talked about in January 2022.

How can you have a premeditated, vetted correspondence coming out of your department while you're the deputy minister that completely contradicts what you've said here today at this committee?

Mr. David Morrison: I believe the actual question had to do with the targeting of MPs, and that's the question to which I responded. I not only claimed not to know the names, but also that I didn't know the names of any of the MPs who had been targeted until I read them in the press.

The Chair: Thank you, Deputy.

Monsieur Fergus.

• (1255)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Morrison, first of all, as a result of your work as an NSIA, you are privy to a number of documents that are of top security, national security at the highest levels. You have come to this committee and testified and frankly illuminated us on a number of issues. You participated in the review by the independent special rapporteur, and as you had mentioned in your responses to the previous questions you went to a secure room, you received the information, and you answered questions fully and frankly. You've appeared before the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians and yet you're still able to come here and tell us, to the best of your abilities.... While fulfilling your obligations to keep secrets secret, you're able to share with us a number of facts and information, which have allowed us to glean a lot more about what is going on.

I'm not going to ask you a political question, but this is a serious question. Has being informed and being privy to this secret information stopped you from being able to have, to the best of your abilities, a frank exchange with members of Parliament without threatening or compromising our national security?

Mr. David Morrison: I think when David Johnston was before the committee, he talked about needing to have some kind of firewall in his head or some kind of protection against revealing things that he is not supposed to reveal. That is an aspect of this business that all of us in the business have to grapple with. I would point out that everything I said in my opening remarks came from either The Globe and Mail or David Johnston's report. So all of that has been available to all Canadians for a number of weeks now.

I like to try to be forthcoming with parliamentarians exercising oversight. That's how our system works. There are some things that can't be shared. In general I think intelligence exists on a need-to-know basis, and that principle needs to be protected because of sources and methods, but in general, I think it is good that we are having this debate about the role of intelligence in Canadian society and indeed the changing nature of national security.

Hon. Greg Fergus: And of course it's a lot easier to be able to speak authoritatively and to understand the distinctions between rumour, innuendo, and fact, and that usually comes by informing yourself.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madame Gaudreau.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

We've had some great exchanges and I just have two questions.

My first one is for Mr. Morrison.

I'd like us to return to our main issue. You were part of the election working group, and I'm trying to understand a few things. I'm thinking of Mr. O'Toole, who, after the election, could have been your boss. He would have been the head of government of a G7 country and the target of Chinese agents.

I'd like to understand how it is that no alarm bells went off at such an important juncture. I think your words will help me explain to the people who come to me in the field and are surprised.

Mr. David Morrison: I thank the member for her question.

[*English*]

In answer to your question—and this is what I was trying to get at in the way I framed my remarks—I think anyone who is the leader of an opposition or who aspires to be the leader of a G7 country, or any country, frankly, should recognize that they are very likely to be targets for foreign intelligence agencies, for foreign governments. Those could be targets of influence or targets of interference.

We certainly build profiles in this country on all sorts of people in other countries, because that's what our national interests demand. It is important to know the background of, the inclinations of, the likely policy positions of leaders and opposition leaders in other countries.

I tried to say several times that there is nothing necessarily nefarious in a foreign government building a profile on a prominent Canadian. As I said, this is part of what we do via our embassies. Frankly, it helps make our diplomacy more effective if the Prime Minister knows something about the background—something that's not available on the website—of a foreign leader before he meets that foreign leader.

It was said by one of my questioners from this side of the room that this seems to be normal activity. It crosses a line when it is coercive, deceptive or threatening to an individual or an institution. That is the definition of foreign interference and that is what is unacceptable.

• (1300)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: So, once again, thresholds are extremely important. Otherwise, there's too much sloppiness, because some information, while important, isn't deemed important enough.

I'd like to ask you one last question. You've been a sherpa, that is, a representative and organizer for the G7 summits. In Charlevoix in 2018, Canada hosted the G7, and a rapid response mechanism was put in place. We have to say it. Did this mechanism, which must have worked very well, fail to do its job?

I was just telling you about the leader of the official opposition, who could have been the prime minister. How is it that we were able to act in the past, but it's different now? I'd like to understand that, but I can't.

Mr. David Morrison: Madam Chair, that's an excellent question.

The member is right. Following the G7 Summit held in Charlevoix in 2018, Canada created the Rapid Response Mechanism Canada to try to coordinate the efforts of the G7 countries.

[*English*]

And it's to bring to light issues of misinformation and disinformation.

Canada hosts the secretariat for the mechanism within Global Affairs. It is networked throughout the G7 countries. It is that mechanism that was operative within Canada during the 2019 and 2021 elections.

I would be happy to follow up directly afterwards on the question.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mrs. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you so much, Chair.

This will be my final round with you, Mr. Morrison, so I thank you for your time with us today.

Something has been niggling in the back of my mind as we have asked you questions. One of the things I remember your saying is that when you receive the intelligence, you trust that action would have been taken—appropriate action.

I'm wondering whether I am missing something.

We have had intelligence agencies in here and they have testified that they give information but they do not recommend actions. Based on that, I'm trying to understand where in that process you felt that action had been taken.

Mr. David Morrison: Action had been taken by the same organization that produced the intelligence. It is an accurate statement that the way the system works is that the collectors collect and they feed to consumers. On the basis of that, portraits form over time from disparate pieces of intelligence, the kinds of one-off reports that I spoke of. Sometimes they're only a paragraph long, right up to the kind of nine-page assessments I spoke of. That is meant to allow consumers such as me and others who are advising the government to form pictures of what's really going on out there. There are multiple collection agencies, and there are multiple consumers.

In the case we're talking about of threats against Canadian MPs, it happens to have been the same agency, to the best of my recollection, that first picked up the intelligence. They were the ones who then did the defensive briefing to Mr. Chong.

In general, there's a collection function and an assessment function, and then the likes of people like me read, are briefed or participate in discussions on intelligence. I should say that those discussions are not informed only by intelligence. Intelligence is an input into the discussions, but, from where I sit, I consume intelligence, but I also consume diplomatic reporting.

We have people all over the world who send us reports every day that give a view as to what is going on. In a collegial fashion, the deputy minister community at the highest level comes together to debate issues. We sometimes have different views as to exactly what is going on because we may read slightly different things and we may talk to slightly different people. Out of that comes a picture.

• (1305)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

We know that the diaspora communities have been ringing this alarm for quite a while. I think that is one thing I find frustrating about this process. We did have people saying very clearly that there are issues happening and that we should all be aware of them.

You have talked to us several times about the fact that Mr. Johnston recommended public hearings with these communities. You amplified the need for that.

We've also heard testimony from these communities that they have come forward many times asking for help, but with very little success. These folks, who often come from countries with authoritarian governments, are not interested, necessarily, in talking with government or with police.

In the system you're part of, how are voices like theirs heard and amplified? Based on what we're seeing, I don't think they are. I want to know if there is a process and if that is being reviewed internally as well as these public hearings.

Mr. David Morrison: I've already made my views known on the importance of this particular issue of the challenges that we are facing. I believe I characterized it as the greatest long-term threat with respect to Chinese foreign interference. Diaspora communities will

grow. Frankly, we don't know as much as we need to about what is going on.

I'm not, frankly, aware of the mechanisms that members of communities have to register concerns. They clearly don't feel listened to. That's why I think public hearings would be an appropriate next step.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, Deputy Morrison, our time has come to an end.

It is National Public Service Week. I do echo the comments by Mr. Fergus and thank you for your service. I thank all people who serve. We do push hard and we have a lot of work to do. I have the utmost confidence in the people who are helping us get there.

I do want to thank all members for the meeting today.

The good news is that we'll be back together again at 6:30 tonight in room 225. With that, I'm wishing you all to keep well and safe.

The meeting is adjourned.

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