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# Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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Chair: Mr. Ron McKinnon





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Tuesday, October 8, 2024

• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 122 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

I would like to remind participants of the following points. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak, whether participating in person or via Zoom. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on September 19, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of Russian interference and disinformation campaigns in Canada.

Ms. Damoff.

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** Thanks, Chair. I have a question for the clerk, if that's okay, just before we start.

I understand that some of the witnesses have not been responding to your outreach. There were three witnesses named in our study to whom we had all unanimously agreed—Liam Donovan, Lauren Chen and Lauren Southern.

First of all, have you heard back from them at all?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Simon Larouche):** They were contacted twice and no answers were provided.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I'm wondering if the committee would be agreeable to having the clerk send a letter from committee members inviting them again, but this time having it come from the members of the committee—and, as we do have powers beyond just an invitation if we want folks to appear, just listing what our options are if they choose not to respond.

**The Chair:** I'll take that as a motion.

Do we have unanimous consent?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Very well.

Thank you.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thanks, Chair.

**The Chair:** I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour. As an individual, we have Anton Shekhovtsov, visiting professor, Central European University, by video conference; and from Reset, Ben Scott, chief executive officer.

I now invite Mr. Shekhovtsov to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Please go ahead, sir.

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov (Visiting Professor, Central European University, As an Individual):** Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you for your kind invitation.

*Technical difficulty—Editor]* and members of Parliament, it is my long-time observation that Russia is waging a—

**The Chair:** Excuse me, sir. You're breaking up on us here.

While we'd like to see you, maybe if you shut your video off that would give you more bandwidth for your speech.

Okay. Try again, please.

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** Is it better now, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** The sound is much better now. Thank you.

Go ahead. Start from the top, if you wish.

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** It is my long-term observation that Russia is waging political warfare against western nations. By “political warfare” I imply, not necessarily limited to the context of the Russian activities, a grey area in international relations where nations influence the behaviour and thinking of others using methods beyond legitimate instruments, such as diplomacy and soft power, yet don't escalate to open military conflict using regular armed forces. Russian political warfare against the west is nothing new, but it has escalated since 2022, when western nations decided to provide political, military and economic support to Ukraine in its defensive war against the full-scale Russian aggression. As a country in the world's top 10 donors to Ukraine, Canada is one of the targets of Russian political warfare.

In the context of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, one prominent element of Russian political warfare against the west, including Canada, is information war in which Russia advances two types of narratives: strategic and tactical.

Strategic narratives reflect genuine, deep-seated beliefs of the Russian leadership linked to Ukraine or the broader context of the aggression. Strategic narratives demonstrate some internal logic and are generally coherent, although that does not imply that they are right or correct. Three major strategic narratives related to the Russian invasion and directed at the west, including Canada, are as follows: First, Russia is a global power that has a right to have its own sphere of influence, and Ukraine belongs there. Second, Ukraine, as part of the west, poses an existential threat to Russia. Third, NATO is using Ukraine to wage a war against Russia.

Tactical narratives serve as individual steps that aim to strengthen the validity of strategic narratives or respond to emerging themes and to current events and developments related to the Russian aggression. Unlike strategic narratives, however, tactical narratives are less coherent because they are extremely manipulative and usually appeal to emotions.

There are many dozens of tactical narratives produced by the Russian information warfare machine. I will highlight some of them that are especially relevant to Canada: Ukraine is run by Nazis. Russia defends Russian people from Ukrainian Nazis. Canada has an immense Nazi problem. All western sanctions are damaging for western businesses and households. Ukraine is one of the most corrupt countries in the world; it cannot be part of the west. Financial aid sent to Ukraine is being pocketed by corrupt Ukrainian leaders and officials. The west attacks Russia because of inherent western Russophobia, or hatred of Russians. Ukrainian nationalists heavily influence policy decisions of the Canadian authorities. western weapons given to Ukraine will end up with international terrorists or on the black market. Providing military aid to Ukraine does not help Ukraine win the war; it only extends the suffering of Ukrainians. The west should not oppose Russia because it can eventually use nuclear weapons.

Russian pro-regime stakeholders use a wide range of instruments in their attempt to deliver both strategic and tactical narratives to targeted audiences. I'll identify four major types of these instruments. The first type is official Russian channels: statements by the Russian president and his presidential administration, and statements by Russian ministries, especially the foreign ministry and the defence ministry. The second instrument is Russian state-controlled media, especially those producing contents in the English language. The third is social network accounts openly or secretly run by Russian pro-regime stakeholders. The fourth is western-based agents of malign Russian influence, be they academics, experts, journalists, celebrities, producers, politicians, businesses or religious organizations—namely, entities in western countries created and/or used by Russian pro-regime stakeholders to conceal the pro-Russian agenda of the people behind them.

While the main objective of the Russian information warfare, which relies on a variety of instruments listed above, is to reduced western support for Ukraine's defensive efforts, Russian pro-regime stakeholders appear to rely on a three-tier approach in evaluating the efficiency of their information operations.

The first one is delivery. One-third of the success of a particular information operation is the successful delivery of a strategic or tactical narrative to a targeted audience. If the targeted audience consumes that narrative, that is one-third of success.

• (1110)

The second tier is legitimacy. Two-thirds of success is when a malign narrative is not only consumed by a target audience but also becomes a legitimate point of view in western mainstream discussions—for example, in the media or in Parliament.

Third is acceptance. A complete success of a malign influence operation is achieved when a viewpoint rooted in a malign narrative produced by Russian stakeholders is not only seen as legitimate but is also accepted as the only correct perspective. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

**The Chair:** Sir, you're breaking up again.

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** I will stop here, and I will be happy to answer questions.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The latter part of your speech was a little choppy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** The interpreter pointed out on several occasions that the sound was cutting in and out and that it was difficult for her, in these conditions, to translate what was being said. We were able to hear most of the interpretation, but if the problem continues during the question and answer period, it may be to our disadvantage.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We'll have to see how things progress, but we can ask for his opening statement to be translated and distributed to the members as well, if that's okay.

We'll go now to Mr. Scott to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Please go ahead, sir.

**Dr. Ben Scott (Chief Executive Officer, Reset Tech):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. It's a pleasure to be back before the Canadian Parliament. I spent several years living in Canada and have a great deal of respect for the work you do.

I am the CEO of Reset Tech. We're a global non-profit that works to support research, policy development and public attention focused on fighting digital threats to democracy, including the kinds of Russian information operations targeting democratic states that we're here to talk about today.

I have done quite a bit of work with my team in looking at the case of Tenet Media, which has sparked this hearing, so I want to talk a bit about what Tenet Media looks like.

I think all members of the committee are likely familiar with the details of this case, but just to recap, this was revealed in a sweeping indictment by the U.S. Department of Justice back in September, just over a month ago. It indicated that a company based in Tennessee but, importantly, is a subsidiary of a Montreal-based company run by two Canadians—Lauren Chen and her husband, Liam Donovan—was paid \$10 million by the Russians to subsidize the production of video and social media content that was distributed over all of the major social media platforms. This was done by the two of them, as well as a set of six other influencers, including Lauren Southern, who is another prominent Canadian social media influencer.

It's notable that a lot of the media attention has described this activity as being focused on the U.S. market, but it's really important to note how much of the content had a Canadian focus, and how many Russian information operations we have observed over the years have not distinguished much between an American audience and a Canadian audience. Russian tactics, as the professor's comments clearly illustrate, are intended to divide and to destabilize with disinforming and conspiratorial narratives, and that's certainly true as for Canada as it is for the U.S.

I want to highlight here for you in my opening remarks some of the evidence we have uncovered in our forensic work to look at what Tenet Media did with its \$10 million in Russian funding.

First, all of these accounts that Tenet was subsidizing across all social media platforms had a total subscriber base of about 16 million, which is quite large. What does that mean in terms of total audience? Over the course of the last year, we were able to see Tenet media channels on Twitter alone get 20 billion impressions. I'll repeat that. They had 20 billion impressions on Twitter alone over the course of the last year. Add to that an additional 1.1 billion video views across YouTube, TikTok and Rumble, and the creation of a podcast, *The Rubin Report*, which is consistently ranked in the top 0.01% of podcasts in the world.

This is a very successful social media influencer campaign that has a variety of important features, not least of which is something the researcher community has called “the Elon effect”. This essentially means tweeting at Elon Musk, who has a giant social media presence on X, formerly Twitter, to try to get him to retweet or amplify posts. He amplified Tenet Media posts 70 times over the course of the last year, dramatically increasing the audience for this content.

What does this mean? How is this relevant for us in evaluating the threat level posed by the Kremlin in information operations?

I think we need to be very concerned. The Kremlin is innovating. It used to buy Facebook ads. It used to do little bits and pieces of influence campaigns. I'm happy to talk about some of the others that we've seen over the years in the question and answer part of this hearing, but for now, I think it's important to note that \$10 million for 20 billion impressions is extraordinary value for money. It

means we can fully expect to see more attacks of this kind if we don't already have them in the marketplace today.

This one was discovered only because of FBI signals intelligence intercepts on the Russians, who were supplying the funding to Tenet Media. It's very difficult to detect. It's important to call out the fact that the Silicon Valley companies that run these platforms, with all of their money and talent, do not seem to have any kind of defences in place to protect against this kind of dark money payola that's using social media channels to secretly influence public opinion in both Canada and the United States.

It's an urgent issue. It is critical that this inquiry is happening and that Canadian forces in law enforcement and national security pay close attention and develop defensive measures.

• (1115)

Thank you very much for your time. I look forward to the questions.

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

We'll go, now, to our questions.

We'll start with Ms. Dancho for six minutes.

• (1120)

**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lloyd is going to take my time.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank both witnesses. My wrist is hurting from all the notes I took during your testimony. It's been very interesting.

Mr. Shekhovtsov, in supporting Ukraine in this fight, how important is it to present a united front among countries?

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** Mr. Chair, Ukraine is heavily dependent on external support for its defensive war. What is more important is the unity that western nations have exhibited since the very beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, although there are some problematic cases in some member states of the European Union. Ukraine also heavily relies on American and Canadian support. In this case, consensus and solidarity among western nations with respect to Ukraine are crucial. This is existential for Ukraine's fight for its independence and sovereignty today.

Of course, Russia and the malign Russian actors related to the Kremlin or Russian authorities understand how important this consensus and solidarity are. They are trying all they can to ruin this solidarity, to create divisions and polarization, and to undermine that solidarity and support for Ukraine; hence, the information attacks.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** I don't think I'm putting words in your mouth by reiterating what you said about there being a strong consensus for the support of Ukraine in countries like Canada.

Is that correct?

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** That is my understanding, looking at some data on the support Canada gives Ukraine. I mentioned it in my speech, and I'm very sorry if the audio quality was not enough. Canada, as far as I know, is in the top 10 of the world's donors to Ukraine. Of course, that is extremely important.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** I'm certainly very proud of Canada's long-standing support of Ukraine, especially as it started in 2014 with Operation Unifier training the Ukrainian forces. A number of my friends in the Canadian Armed Forces went over there to do that.

In a country like Canada, though, sometimes our political debates and partisanship lead to political parties accusing other political parties of not being supportive of Ukraine, including cases of the Liberal Party accusing the Conservative Party of being in the back pocket of Vladimir Putin.

Is it helpful for our strong consensus on Ukraine to have the governing political party accuse the opposition party of being...? Does that help build consensus, or does creating these divisive debates bring down consensus?

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** Mr. Chair, it's not for me to give comments on political parties competing with each other in Canada. I am grateful to all the parties in Canada providing support for Ukraine.

I would not like to comment on the political debates.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** I understand.

I'll put this more generally for you.

You talked about how one part of the success of the Russian operation is our consumption of the disinformation and misinformation they're spreading. The second part is this: Once those have been consumed, they become part of the debate. There is now a debate about which political parties do or do not support Ukraine when once there was, as you said, a strong consensus of support for Ukraine.

Is that considered a success by Russia—a perception being created that there is no consensus of political support for Ukraine in a country like Canada?

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** Mr. Chair, in this case, it is important to highlight that only the full acceptance of a particular malign information narrative produced in Russia can be considered a full success for such an operation. When there are disinformation narratives spread in the mainstream media, seeing divisions is only part of the success. It is not the only thing.

I'm sure that, for example, all of you know that one of the most popular narratives of Russian propaganda is that Ukrainians are Nazis—that Ukraine has a Nazi problem. The mere fact that you know about this narrative is part of the success, but it does not mean the entire information operation in Russia has been successful.

• (1125)

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** You know, Canada has a role. We've sent observers to help out in elections in countries like Ukraine. We see that there is Russian interference in other countries' elections, including in the country of Georgia, whose election is upcoming. How concerned are you about Russian influence campaigns in those countries as well? How do you think Canada can play a role in strengthening those countries' democratic institutions?

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** Mr. Chair, I am concerned about the developments in Georgia. In September, I published a report on how Russian political warfare also concerns Georgia and what actors in Georgia are essentially amplifying Russian propaganda and disinformation. The elections that will be held in Georgia later this month, I think, will be crucial for democracy, not only in Georgia but also, in a way, in this part of what is still called “the post-Soviet space”.

As far as I know, Canada is also part of the OSCE and participates in the OSCE/ODIHR missions. I hope that Canada will continue participating in those monitoring missions, including in Georgia.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir.

We go now to Ms. Damoff for six minutes, please.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you, Chair.

Just before I start, I noticed that yesterday Ms. Dancho said that she was going to disrupt today's meeting by bringing forward a motion. It's unfortunate that the Conservatives would want to stall and disrupt this meeting when we have such experts with us for this testimony, studying something that the former public safety minister and high commissioner for the U.K. called “a crisis situation”. Let's hope that she changes her mind so that we can actually hear from the witnesses.

I'm going to start with Mr. Scott.

Beyond Ukraine messaging from Russia, what other kinds of messages was Russia sending through Tenet Media?

**Dr. Ben Scott:** The primary messages that you see in Tenet Media creative are what I would call a “standard culture war playbook”. They are aimed at some of the most divisive issues in western society at the moment—questions around immigration, LGBTQ rights, and the validity of climate change. Also, of course, as the professor has very clearly explained, there is an aggressive messaging campaign to try to undermine support for Ukraine. These are consistently reiterated across all of the Tenet Media channels.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Yes, I think Ukraine is one that we've heard a lot about, but I'm hearing as an MP in my office Canadians expressing concerns about climate change, for example, and we're hearing a lot about that from the party opposite me. Immigration and LGBTQ issues, all of those are filtered beyond Tenet Media and their 16 million subscribers to Canadians. I'm wondering if you could tell us, Mr. Scott, about the vulnerabilities that every-day Canadians have to this kind of messaging.

**Dr. Ben Scott:** I think it's quite significant, especially when you consider the way in which social media platforms function and how they make money and what kind of content they reward and monetize. When you have channels like Tenet Media, which are hyperbolic and intentionally provocative, what happens, of course, is human nature. It draws eyeballs and people pay attention to that. Then the algorithm that is curating content on TikTok or on YouTube simply serves up more content of a similar type.

The more we see things, the more normal they seem and the more normalized they become in our political rhetoric, and the less extreme they seem to us from a political standpoint as the centre line begins to move. How extreme can something be if it seems like everybody on social media is talking about it?

This is the pattern that we see in digital media marketplaces, which gradually leads towards a polarization of rhetoric. This is extremely divisive, not only because it distorts the representation of public opinion but also because it is so heavily rewarded. It's not that Tenet Media relied exclusively on Russian secret dark money to run their operation. They also made a lot of money on advertising from the likes of YouTube and TikTok, who also make a lot of money from this kind of overt, hyper-politicized content, without any effort to determine where it is coming from, whether it could be an influence operation, and what are their responsibilities in terms of public safety and national security.

● (1130)

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Thank you.

I'm going to switch to Mr. Shekhovtsov.

You've written extensively on the influence that Russia had, through social media, on French President Macron as well as on German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Are you seeing that kind of influence here in Canada on our current leadership in the government?

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** Mr. Chair, I should say that Germany and France are the main targets of the Russian operations in Europe. For North America, it's still the United States of America that is the primary target. I can't say that Russia is going around the west and interfering in all elections. They do have their limits as to where they can interfere, where they have resources and where they maybe even have allies to interfere. In some countries, it's very difficult for them.

In a way, Canada is not a priority for the Russian operations, although the fact that so many—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I only have a minute left.

On that, though, if we are seeing Russian influence through Tenet Media on climate change and immigration, for example, and

then if you have political parties of differing views, is that not going to influence Canadians' perceptions of those political parties, given the disinformation that's put out there?

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** You're absolutely right. Of course, all the content that is produced, say, in the English language targeting the west in general will necessarily, almost automatically, have influence on Canadian audiences. This influence is something that is impossible to stop. It goes from one audience to another. There is also content on climate change and, as my colleague said, LGBTQI issues, immigration and so on.

Although Canada may not be the primary target, still, the information operations produced for and targeting western audiences will also target other western nations, including Canada.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses for their presence and for their very interesting, very enlightening, but also rather worrying testimonies.

Mr. Shekhovtsov, you mentioned at the beginning of your speech that Russia has been waging a political war against western democracies for a number of years, that this has intensified since 2022, that is, since the illegal invasion of Ukraine, and that Canada was one of the main targets because of its support for Ukraine.

I feel like we're losing this political war, especially these days.

You mentioned a few kinds of Russian propaganda messages that make their way to Canada. They say Ukraine is corrupt, for example. Last week, I was in Dublin for a meeting of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and we met with the Ukrainian delegation. The first thing the head of the Canadian delegation said to the Ukrainian delegation was that they should know that, if Canada were to learn that the money it was giving to Ukraine was being used for something other than what it was supposed to be used for, i.e., corruption, its support would cease fairly quickly. He was saying that there was corruption everywhere, including in Canada and Ukraine, and that the Ukrainian delegation had to give him that assurance.

So I get the impression that this Russian propaganda message that Ukraine is corrupt is making its way to Canadian elected officials and senators. I wonder how we're supposed to get back to the truth and untangle all this false information circulating and making its way to the Canadian Parliament.

I was surprised to hear this question. Normally, we discuss what Canada is doing to help Ukraine, what more we should be doing, and so on; yet we were addressing the Ukrainian delegation in an almost confrontational way.

I don't know if you're seeing this more and more, but I'd like to hear what you have to say about it.

• (1135)

[English]

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** Mr. Chair, as far as I understand, for the overwhelming majority of the cases of western support for Ukraine, there are audit committees. There are commissions that regularly check how resources are spent, including financial resources provided to Ukraine. There is a constant auditing process. For those who are interested, it would probably be useful if they had access to those auditing operations. They probably do not, of course, concerning some secret information that could be too sensitive, but could for general observations and general assessments of how money is spent, for example. Strategic communication with those actors who are interested is important.

Social networks are another thing. In market economies, it's probably very difficult to have any control over social networks. I do think that authorities should talk to representatives of social networks to co-operate more closely in monitoring, and removing all if those accounts that are spreading malign disinformation that can actually influence the lives and health of millions of people, not necessarily only in Ukraine.

Better co-operation with social networks is important in the short-term, mid-term and long-term. Media literacy and similar educational efforts are important to teach people in our age of misinformation and disinformation. Honestly, there is a huge amount of information that a regular person cannot consume without being confused by that amount of information. It's important to teach people how to double-check information, how to rely on particular sources of information and be able to distinguish truth from lies.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you.

I only have a few seconds left, but I'd like to ask Mr. Scott a quick question.

You said that it was the FBI that discovered the whole scheme behind Tenet Media, that there were people in Canada, that the company was based here, and so on.

Would CSIS, the RCMP or our Canadian information services have been sufficiently equipped to make the same discovery? Consider, though, that the company was based in Canada, but it was the FBI that discovered the scheme.

Do we have the same tools as the Americans? I know, and you've both mentioned it, that the United States is unquestionably the main target in North America, with Canada a close second. That said, I'd like to know if, in your opinion, Canada would have been sufficiently equipped to discover this kind of scheme.

**The Chair:** Your time is up, but I will allow a short response.

[English]

**Dr. Ben Scott:** The short answer is yes. I believe Canadian authorities do have those tools. It's a question of where to look and how deeply, and how to prioritize law enforcement and intelligence investigations.

• (1140)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

We'll now go to Mr. MacGregor, for six minutes.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to echo my colleagues in thanking our witnesses for helping guide us through.

I consider myself an optimist, but it's certainly hard not to be pessimistic when you look at the challenges that we're facing from this very real problem in our democratic space and in how our politics operate. In the nine years I've been an elected official, I have certainly seen the trend line getting much worse.

Mr. Scott, I'd like to start with you because I know your organization is trying to find a way "to support a realignment of digital media markets with democratic values."

In your opening statement, when you were talking about the number of impressions that were made, the subscriber base and the 1.1 billion video views of Tenet Media, I was thinking of this concept of the public square and how that has transitioned over time. We have to be very careful as policy-makers because we don't want to give the Canadian public the perception that we're stepping in in a hard way. One thing we have to remember is that social media platforms, which have become today's public square, are in fact not public. They are owned by a handful of billionaires and they are designed for one purpose only, which is to return a massive profit to those billionaires. They wield an incredible amount of power.

Mr. Scott, this is a probably a very big question. How do we as policy-makers rein that power back in, so that a handful of billionaires are not controlling our public discourse, but do so in a way that tries to protect freedom of speech?

It seems like a monumental task. This is not the first time this committee has been confronted with such a massive question. We looked at this issue two years ago when we were looking at Canada's security posture vis-à-vis Russia and I'm not sure we've arrived at any answers yet.

I would love to have some of your feedback to help guide us through this particular study because, ultimately, we want to make some solid recommendations to the Government of Canada.



**Dr. Ben Scott:** I think you're exactly right to put your finger on the business model and the responsibilities of the industry to do a better job of protecting security and public safety. The exploitation of these products is not an accident. It is taking advantage of vulnerabilities that these giant, extremely wealthy companies have left in their services.

I want to state up front that the solutions that I would propose to you are almost never to delete content. If you have an operator that is clearly being paid by a foreign adversary to intentionally manipulate and deceive the Canadian public, that's an illegal activity. It would be illegal in any media, just like it is on social media. That's prosecutable. That should be removed.

The key point here is that it's not the public square. It's not a mirror of society that you see when you open your phone and you look at Twitter or Facebook. It's a funhouse mirror. It's distortion.

A public sphere brings to mind the idea that everybody has an equal opportunity to speak. In social media, that's not the case. TikTok and YouTube give megaphones to some speakers on their platforms and not to others. They give the megaphones to the people who attract the most eyeballs and earn them the most money. When you give megaphones to propagandists who are paid by the Russians, like at Tenet Media, you are giving them a massive advantage in communicating in that public sphere and drowning out lots of other voices that might otherwise have been finding audiences in the Canadian public.

There are things that can be done around transparency. How do these algorithms work? How does TikTok and YouTube decide what gets amplified and what doesn't?

Why aren't these things more transparent to researchers and to public interest organizations?

We look at these social media platforms like they are great innovators and magical technologists when, in reality, they're just making money like any other business.

Think back to the Cold War. If it were 1985 and commercial broadcasters in Canada were handing an hour a day to the Kremlin to program whatever it wanted with no questions asked—blasting it out to the whole Canadian public—they'd be sat in front of this committee in five seconds, yet with social media companies, it's like, "Well, there's nothing we can do".

There sure is a lot we can do about it and it starts with conversations like this one.

● (1145)

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you very much for that.

Professor Shekhovtsov, I'd like to turn to you. Being in Europe, you are much closer to the front lines of the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine.

Certainly, we are no strangers to people emailing us about how Canada is doing too much for Ukraine, that it's corrupt and that it's full of Nazis. We've all heard that false discourse.

What I'd like you to point out is what the consequences would be for a country like Canada if we were not to hold Russia back in Ukraine and were to let them roll over that country.

What does that do for the general security of NATO and countries like Canada?

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** Thank you for this question.

It is my belief that Ukraine, although it is currently a main object of the Russian aggression, is not the last in line if Russia succeeds. It only takes one Ukraine, one country, for Russia to amass huge forces on the borders of the EU and NATO. This completely changes the security situation in all of Europe. The assistance that western nations, including Canada—and again, I'm grateful for the support—give to Ukraine is not only to Ukraine, but an investment in the security and maintenance of that security architecture in all of Europe.

Of course, I know that Polish colleagues and colleagues in the Baltic states are always nervous about whether NATO would come to their help in case Russia decides to be aggressive against them as well. However, Ukraine is indeed.... As Ukraine is standing right now, it prevents Russia from attacking NATO member states, from attacking the EU, where the involvement of countries such as Canada would have been much more significant, and the amounts of money and, then, financial assistance to European—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, sir. I have to cut you off. Thank you very much.

We'll start our second round now with Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Dancho, go ahead. You have five minutes, please.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. It's excellent testimony.

I would like to build on some of the questions from Ms. Michaud concerning the capacity in Canada. I have concerns that we relied on the DOJ to find this out.

You've mentioned that we have the capacity in Canada, and yet it seems, from what you were saying, that it hasn't been made a priority by your current intelligence and law enforcement agencies. I do want to ask you a question about that.

Before I get to that, I want to address something with you, Mr. Chair. I want to register my disappointment that you cancelled Thursday's meeting on this study. I do not feel that we were adequately consulted. The standard practice from my last experience with this, before I was away on mat leave, was that there was much more consultation with vice-chairs. As first vice-chair, I do think we anticipated that we would be called to discuss what could be done about Thursday in the event that witnesses were not able to attend Thursday's committee meeting.

Now, that does happen. However, in reviewing the motion put forward by the Liberals, the witnesses who were mentioned on there were not exhaustive. It specifically mentions other “disinformation experts”. I know from past experience that we have had situations where our excellent public servants have come, with relatively short notice, to provide feedback and information. Of course, this area of study that we're working on has an intelligence focus. It has a law enforcement focus. It has a legal focus. I would be shocked if, among all the individuals in our public service, any of them could not have come. I do believe that if more effort were put in, we could have had a robust meeting with other witnesses, perhaps within our own government apparatus, who we should include in this study. I want to register my disappointment in that regard, given that we do not feel that adequate consultation was provided. I would ask that in the future you provide better consultation.

There's a second point I want to make about this. We have a number of other things that we could do as a committee. If we couldn't get witnesses on this important study, we could have reviewed, for example, the Paul Bernardo report that has been gathering dust. The analysts worked very hard on that report. That was an area of intense public interest when this committee was reviewing it. Given that the individual we were talking about was the worst mass killer and rapist in Canadian history and was being moved from maximum security prison to medium security prison, with all the privileges that entails, I was shocked to see that we wouldn't at least look at that draft report. The committee had already approved to study that issue. We had the draft report. It's sitting and collecting dust. Why were we not able to review that report on Thursday?

Mr. Chair, there are a number of studies that we have agreed to as a committee and a number of things we could have talked about. I think it would be shocking to the public to think that a meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security should be cancelled because we have nothing to look into. I just find that completely unacceptable.

Again, to quote the Liberals' own words, Ms. O'Connell said—I would wish to discuss this with her, but she's not here at the moment—“We, as a committee, should be held accountable if we don't take this as a very serious priority.” She said we owe it to Ukrainians “to not wait another minute”. Yet where was the discussion, where was the leadership from Liberal members, to ensure that we had a committee meeting on this on Thursday?

That there was no one who could have, Mr. Chair, I find very hard to believe. I would ask that more effort be put into ensuring that we have this study. If we can't find witnesses, find someone from government. It is important that we get into this issue. But if we can't, let's focus on the work that we've already done. I would ask that if there's no one we can find for this very study, let's look at the Paul Bernardo study.

I wanted to register my very clear disappointment that this was not adequately consulted on and that the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security Committee of Canada failed to have a meeting for an excuse that I don't find acceptable. There's a whole host of issues we could be looking into. It is a failure that we had that meeting cancelled.

Thank you.

With my remaining minute, Mr. Scott, to go back to my question, can you elaborate a little bit on what you'd said to Ms. Michaud? I thought it was a great area of interest that this committee should hear.

I can reiterate, if you don't recall what I said.

• (1150)

**Dr. Ben Scott:** I do. I don't have any information about what the Canadian authorities did or didn't do, or what their involvement might have been, in the DOJ indictment. I'm only relying on publicly available documents, including the DOJ's published affidavits.

In my experience working in the U.S. government, it is very possible, if not likely, that there was Five Eyes co-operation if this was an intelligence operation that discovered this Russian intervention through signals intelligence. Just because it's not public that the Canadian authorities were involved doesn't mean they weren't. I can't say one way or the other whether or not they had an involvement in this particular case.

What I will say is that it's very difficult to detect this kind of operation of payola influence using dark money as a foreign power, because there are so many different YouTube and TikTok channels out there that will operate on a pay-for-play basis. As I read the DOJ affidavits, it was only through wiretaps that they were able to discover this one.

Partly, I put that at the feet of the technology companies who simply don't monitor sufficiently for patterns of propagation characteristics that indicate the probability of some kind of malign influence or coordinated inauthentic activity.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir.

We go now to Mr. MacDonald, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald (Malpeque, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Chair, I just want to go back a little bit. Mr. MacGregor talked a little bit about it, but it was also mentioned in the preamble. It's regarding the operations launched against European countries, and how they differ from operations launched against Canada and the United States. We did mention France and Germany.

I'm just wondering what the difference is there between what they're doing now to Canada and basically what they've been doing for a number of years to France and Germany.

This is to Mr. Shekhovtsov, please.

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** Thank you for this question.

Indeed, some of the Russian information operations target particular audiences. Although the western world can be one audience, there are still differences among different nations. Those differences, to put it simply, are that every society has its own vulnerabilities and sensitivities. The vulnerabilities that are probably inherent in one western society is not really a case for another.

Just to give you an example, for France and Germany, immigration or even illegal immigration from the Middle East and Africa is something that these countries are concerned with. This is probably not the case for central European countries, where immigration from those regions of the world is not that significant.

For Canada, I think it is the proximity to the U.S. Maybe some Canadians are not very happy to be confused sometimes with the citizens of the United States.

This Nazi problem is also a concern. I'm aware that in many debates in Canada—

• (1155)

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Thank you. I'd like to move on.

Are both far left and far right political actors equally susceptible, or are they focusing on one over the other?

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** I think if we are talking about Canada, it's mostly far left actors who are susceptible to Russian disinformation campaigns regarding Ukraine. If the Russian propagandists are talking about immigration or LGBT issues, then probably the Canadian far right is the most susceptible. These are different topics for different audiences.

Really, those strategic and tactical narratives are tailor-made to divide nations and to divide the national consensus. They're using these extremes from the right and left to achieve their objectives.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** Can you see around the world if particular political parties are using this propaganda as a decisive tool in their own countries?

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** We see that in some countries of the EU, and I would probably mention Hungary and Slovakia at the moment. These countries have governments that are particularly influenced by malign Russian strategic and tactical narratives. The fact, for example, that Slovakia is no longer providing state-sponsored support in the military sphere to Ukraine, in my opinion, is quite largely an influence or effect of Russian disinformation being very successful.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** In your opinion, basically in the United States if a new government gets in over the one in office right now, there will be a decrease in support for Ukraine. We've seen the government opposition here vote against a free trade agreement with Ukraine. Are these the types of things that concern you?

**Mr. Anton Shekhovtsov:** I am concerned, of course, about support continuing for Ukraine. I'm sure it doesn't really matter for Ukraine where the support is coming from. As I mentioned at the very beginning, all parties and all political forces that in one way or another provide support and assistance for Ukraine are all welcomed by Ukrainians who are fighting this existential fight.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** How much time do I have, Chair?

**The Chair:** You have 19 seconds.

**Mr. Heath MacDonald:** That's fine. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

[Translation]

Ms. Michaud, you have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Shekhovtsov and Mr. Scott, my question is for both of you, and you can answer in turn.

It has to do with a fairly recent controversy in Canada. I don't know if you've heard about it. People wanted to present the documentary *Russians at War* at the Toronto International Film Festival. This documentary was made by a Russian-Canadian documentary filmmaker, Anastasia Trofimova. Some people say it's obviously Russian propaganda, and that it was filmed illegally in occupied Ukrainian territory. Others say it's not Russian propaganda and that it was financed by France and Canada. Canada did indeed donate a few hundred thousand dollars for the production of this film.

How does one go about detecting or differentiating between the different forms that propaganda can take in Canada?

I don't want to make allegations, and I don't want to say that this film is propaganda, but there was controversy nonetheless. The Deputy Prime Minister said she was uncomfortable with the fact that it was funded by the Canadian government. The Ukrainian MPs I met last week made us aware of this. I don't know if the president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress mentioned it. I know she was here at the last committee meeting. However, it's still something that's floating around in the news. We're wondering whether we should make room for it. We wonder if it could be a form of propaganda.

How do you think we can untangle all this?

Mr. Scott, would you like to speak first?

• (1200)

[English]

**Dr. Ben Scott:** Thank you for your question.

I'm unfamiliar with the film. I can only speak broadly and say that there always has been and always will be, in democratic societies, speech that makes people uncomfortable.

The question is, first and foremost, is it lawful? There is a very high bar in Canada for what constitutes illegal speech. If it reaches or exceeds that bar, then it shouldn't be permitted. Everything else, I think, is fair game. However, that doesn't mean that broadcasters or social media platforms have to amplify it and extend their audience for commercial reasons beyond that which it would achieve on its own merits.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam.

We go now to Mr. MacGregor for two and a half minutes, please.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll turn to Mr. Scott again.

I wanted to look at how we assign responsibility for where we're at. I mean, in my opening exchange with you, I talked about how we have a handful of billionaires who control and wield so much power and influence over the public discourse through their platforms. We're certainly looking forward to hearing from a few of those representatives.

As you know, for the influencers themselves, these are not regular everyday folks. They are multi-millionaires in some cases. They make a lot of money doing what they do.

Do you think the influencers themselves need to be assigned some responsibility for this? Or can they remain wilfully ignorant of where they're receiving their money from? Do we need to target the social media platforms? One of my NDP colleagues has an idea for legislation that tries to enforce algorithmic transparency. Do we need to look at large corporate sponsors whose ads run on these platforms and are being funnelled towards eyeballs, depending on how extreme the content is, or is it a mix of all three?

I would love to hear your feedback on that.

**Dr. Ben Scott:** Yes, you should do all of those things.

I'll echo the comments at the top of the hearing that for the individuals involved in the Tenet Media case, who are Canadian citizens, they ought to be before this panel.

I would also say that representatives of the technology companies, in particular, Google, which owns YouTube; and TikTok, Meta and Twitter also should be sat before this committee and be answering questions about what they do and don't do to guard against foreign interference operations.

The vulnerabilities that these companies permit on their products is really unacceptable, and they do so because we allow them to do so, as citizens and as communities who have the power to make laws and determine how businesses do and don't make money. The longer we allow them to do this without accountability and with impunity, the more we send the message that this is a completely acceptable practice and they can off-load all the harms of security and safety vulnerabilities onto the public.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** I'll leave it there, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're going to wrap up this panel.

Thank you, witnesses, for your testimony and for appearing today. Your information is most helpful.

That concludes this portion of the meeting. We will suspend for a few minutes to change panels.

• (1200) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1210)

**The Chair:** We are short one witness, at this point. Hopefully, that witness arrives online in the interim. We will pause briefly and test their audio.

I would like to welcome our witness for the second hour.

From the Centre for International Governance Innovation, we have Mr. Wesley Wark, senior fellow.

Thank you for joining us today.

I'll now invite Mr. Wark to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Please go ahead, sir.

**Dr. Wesley Wark (Senior Fellow, Centre for International Governance Innovation):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm grateful to appear before the committee on this important study.

There are two concerning aspects of Russian disinformation targeting Canada. One is real. It's the effort to manipulate Canadian attitudes towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The other is what I call a "potentiality". It's the use of Russian intelligence and cyber-capabilities, which are significant, to interfere in Canadian elections and democratic processes in the future. These elements were captured in the CSIS intelligence assessment of May 2023, which was recently released to PIFI.

The conclusion to the CSIS assessment reads:

While the Russian diaspora and its organizations may not have a broad impact on Canadian society, their influence becomes more apparent when consolidated with other organizations and their online presence, pro-Russian proxies or agents of influence, and [the Russian Federation's] global disinformation efforts.

There is also, of course, the blowback potential of Russian disinformation operations targeting other countries, especially the United States.

The question I want to address concerns Canadian governmental capabilities to detect and counter Russian-directed online information operations.

The first is on detection. This involves attack attributions back to a Russian state or proxy source, the tracing of methodologies of attack—especially technical ones—and an understanding of intended targets. Canadian capabilities for detection of malicious online information operations are nascent and were created in an evolving and reactive way. This is the history of the rapid response mechanism, or RRM Canada, in a nutshell.

I'll very briefly go over that history. The RRM, as I'll call it, was created following the 2018 G7 meeting in order to perform a coordination function that can respond to a variety of shared threats to democracy. It was only after the Russian invasion of Ukraine that the Prime Minister announced, in August 2022, the establishment of a dedicated unit in RRM Canada at Global Affairs to address Russian and other state-sponsored disinformation. In essence, RRM Canada's disinformation unit is brand spanking new. Its resources are minuscule and its capacity to engage with a range of expert, private sector media-monitoring and open-source intelligence organizations is very limited. It was an innovative idea and has potential, but its "engine room", as I call it, is far too small, and its fit as a Global Affairs Canada unit within the broader security and intelligence community is very problematic. Our detection side is weak.

What about countering? There are various tools. I'll list them: engaging with foreign state actors directly; working with allies, which is an important one; naming-and-shaming campaigns, as they're sometimes called; helping to strengthen the resilience of targeted communities, not least by giving them the means to be the eyes and ears against disinformation; and providing broader public education through published threat assessments from organizations like CSIS and CSE. At the pointy end, there are two things. One is using CSE powers to what could be called, colloquially, "hack back". This is, in essence, using powers provided to CSE in 2019 for offensive cyber-operations. The other is criminal sanctions, which should be boosted by some of the provisions in Bill C-70. No one tool will suffice. All are necessary.

What about the foreign influence transparency registry, newly established through Bill C-70? Here I would urge the committee to have realistic expectations. FITR—the acronym—will mostly be a registry for good guys. It won't stop covert bad actors, but it might have a deterrent effect on grey-zone activities and open up a criminal sanctions path, such as the one utilized in the recent United States Department of Justice indictment against two Russia Today actors.

What do we need? First, I would argue that we need upgrades to RRM Canada's capacity and changes to its placement in government. One suggestion would be to move it to Public Safety's office for countering foreign interference. It's in the wrong place at Global Affairs.

We also need—and this is critical to any understanding of foreign malign influence operations—a much stronger open-source intelligence capability in the Canadian S and I community.

• (1215)

There is some capability. The function is far too widely distributed within the S and I community and subject to too many diverse mandates and sets of authorities. We saw some of this at work with regard to the government's efforts to respond to the freedom convoy protests. A central OSINT—open source intelligence—agency with a clear mandate is needed.

Finally, I would encourage the committee to give some serious thought to creating an equivalent of Sweden's Psychological Defence Agency, which was established by Sweden in January 2022. This agency combines an operations role in detecting and countering foreign malign influence operations, especially over social me-

dia, with a public role to strengthen societal resilience. A psychological defence agency may sound a little Orwellian, but that's the world we live in.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Our other witness, Mr. Oksanen, is now able to join us online. We will pause briefly and do an audio check.

We are now joined by Mr. Patrik Oksanen, who is appearing as an individual. Mr. Oksanen is a resident senior fellow at the Stockholm Free World Forum, and he is joining us, of course, by video conference.

Mr. Oksanen, would you please go ahead with your opening statement of up to five minutes?

• (1220)

**Mr. Patrik Oksanen (Resident Senior Fellow, Stockholm Free World Forum, As an Individual):** Thank you, sir and dear madams and sirs. I am very honoured to be invited to the committee to give a statement on Russian influence in allied countries.

I will focus my time on transnational repression, targeting people from Nordic countries who are in EU and NATO countries. These are people who have been exposing Russian influence work. Among them are journalists, researchers and civil servants.

My personal experience started in 2015, when I wrote about Russian information warfare as an opinion writer for a green, liberal, centrist, regional Swedish newspaper. Since then, I have received phone calls with demands that I stop writing because I am about to cause a nuclear war. I have regularly been accused of being a racist, mentally sick and a very despicable person, and I have received several death threats online. I have been physically intimidated in a public place by the pro-Russian, Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement. By the way, it is classified in the U.S. as a terror group.

I have been smeared and wrongly accused of being a convicted pedophile in a Facebook group very close to the Russian embassy in Sweden. It was a campaign in which an alternative media editor-in-chief took part. He was prohibited from entering the Swedish parliament due to contacts with Russian intelligence. He repeated it and gave it a larger reach to the extent that I have also been harassed in person about this accusation outside my part-time workplace, the Swedish Defence University in Stockholm. That was by a student at the university who has a background in the alternative right movement.

These are just some brief examples of what has happened over the last decade, and is still happening. Of course, they have had consequences for me and my family, as we now live with our addresses and public registers protected in Sweden.

However, here is the clue. I am not the story. I am here as just an example of the story. The story is how Russia tries to scare those who expose Kremlin operations to the public.

If we widen the scope, here are some more things that we know have happened to Nordic citizens in EU and NATO countries. These are citizens who work as journalists, experts or public servants.

We have cases of home visits. People leave traces in your home, like an unflushed number two in the toilet, so you can see that someone has been there. Feel the stress and insecurity of what that means. Imagine that happening in your home.

There have been cyber-attacks against individuals, infiltration of workplaces with an insider giving Russian operatives data on a person's travel and whereabouts, nameless demonstrations and mass reporting to media or researcher ethics boards targeting an individual person, and digital and physical harassment up to the level of the demonstration of the capability to kill someone, such as a drive-by shooting with a water gun in a central European capital.

All these methods have resulted in self-censorship and a delayed understanding of the threat. One public example is Swedish political scientists not daring to sign a public debate article in a Swedish paper in support of one of their targeted colleagues because they were afraid that they would receive similar treatment.

The aim of these methods is to paralyze or fragment a hostile person. This is how the East German Stasi defined these methods back in the 1980s. They have real, long-term effects on the targets, like stress-related diseases, mental strain and a lack of understanding from their surroundings, like workplaces and the public sphere.

It has been a long time since Russia threw out the rule book, and we are now heading to a more critical situation in relation to Russia. In the year ahead and the years to come, Russia will deploy any means below article 5 to frighten and split our societies so that Russia can achieve its imperial goals. These are threats to peace, stability and national security, both in the Nordic countries and in Canada.

Thank you for listening. I am happy to take your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir, for your statement.

The clerk has asked me to remind you that, should you need translation services, if you look on your Zoom window, there's a button on the bottom somewhere near the centre that allows you to choose between English, French or original feeds. Please advise us if you have any difficulties.

We will start our questioning now with Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Lloyd, go ahead, please, for six minutes.

• (1225)

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. It is a very informative panel.

Mr. Wark, concerning any foreign interference campaign, whether it be from China, Iran, Russia or any other hostile foreign state actor, is it more effective for them to basically create false campaigns out of nowhere, or do they generally latch on to existing societal issues to amplify their campaigns?

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** Thank you, Mr. Lloyd. It's an excellent question.

The general view that emerges from studies of propaganda offensives over decades if not centuries is that they are typically most effective when they are able to latch on to existing views, even if they're minority views, and try to amplify them, find new audiences for them and spread them.

I think it's relatively rare that a disinformation operation from a foreign authoritarian state would try to create some brand new narrative. They depend for their success on latching on to what they understand to be societal dynamics in foreign states. I would say, finally, that this is potentially a weakness for authoritarian foreign states, because it requires a fairly sophisticated understanding of the state that they're targeting.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** My question leads into concerns that Canadians have right now regarding inflation, housing and crime. These aren't issues that are being made up by foreign state powers. They might be being amplified by them, but they aren't issues that are being made up by foreign powers. These are real issues that Canadians are facing. Wouldn't you agree?

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** Absolutely, and, of course, disinformation campaigns love to latch on to various kinds of conspiracy theories that might link to some of those significant societal issues.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Thank you for that.

At our previous panel last Tuesday, I was very concerned because the witnesses were talking about the high level of infiltration of Canada's media and academics. I learned about the existence of a group called the Valdai Club.

Can you comment on the role of Russian misinformation and disinformation campaigns on influencers in academia and media?

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** I may be the wrong person to give you an absolutely objective view of this, coming out of that academic community, but I would say that the impact within the academic world is probably pretty limited. If you take the example of the Valdai Club, I cannot imagine there are many Canadian academics who would fully subscribe to their activities in the present day. The Valdai Club has evolved over time. It is certainly something much more sinister and propaganda oriented than it was when it was first established.

I don't think there is large traction in the academic community. I also doubt that it's really a significant target for Russian disinformation operations.

CSIS's intelligence assessment is interesting in that regard, because it really is suggesting that what Russia would like to be able to do, as a foreign state actor in disinformation, is latch on to a Russian diaspora in Canada and try to use elements of that diaspora to spread the message further, but there are significant limitations in their ability to do that.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** That is interesting.

You talked about the weaknesses of the government's actions. You're talking about the minuscule investment at Global Affairs Canada. Can you elaborate further on that? Why do you believe that there's been such a minuscule investment, and what do you think needs to be done in order to deter this Russian misinformation and other foreign actors?

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** That is an excellent question, and probably government officials are better placed to explain how this attention has evolved.

I'm confident in my appraisal that it is minusculely resourced at RRM Canada. The best available figures are that there are between six and eight officials assigned to that unit of Global Affairs. There are also, in addition to the human talent question, the sophisticated technological capacities that you need to be able to sift through an immense universe of social media and other Internet activity to come up with indications of disinformation campaigns.

This is why the general understanding is that no government, no matter how well it might resource a unit like RRM Canada, is able to do that on its own. It has to be able to engage in extensive partnerships with established social media monitoring companies, with established private sector, open-source intelligence organizations. Creating those partnerships is something that, frankly, the Canadian government is very bad at doing.

• (1230)

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Based on the comments you just made about the minuscule investment, do you think this government is not taking this issue as seriously as it should be?

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** I think they have come to take it seriously, partly under pressure of the events. I think attitudes shifted with regard to the seriousness of Russian disinformation after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, although Russia has been a problematic actor in international affairs for a long time.

Similarly, I think attitudes profoundly shifted with regard to understanding China's engagement with the world in the context of the two Michaels case.

There have been shifts, but they have been recent ones, and perhaps delayed.

**Mr. Dane Lloyd:** Would you say our current government was taken by surprise by this development?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lloyd.

The witness can answer quickly.

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** Did it take the government by surprise? Yes, I think that's fair to say. The scale of both Russian and Chinese aggressive operations targeting democracies in the West, not just Canada, using a range of tools, not least espionage and cyber-attack tools, and the extent of that aggression did certainly take the Canadian government by surprise.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We go now to Mr. Erskine-Smith for six minutes.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Thanks very much, Chair.

Professor Wark, it's good to see you again.

I want to pick up on the thread by Mr. Lloyd regarding disinformation and propaganda taking issues that already exist and amplifying them to sow distrust and social disorder.

If you look at the Tenet Media case as an example, there are stories focused on Canada, like "Inflation In Canada Is Insane". Okay, that sounds like it could have come from any quarter in a more conservative network, but then they have "Canada Has Fallen". "Fallen", "broken"—we've heard that refrain before. Then there is "Canada is Becoming A COMMUNIST HELLHOLE" and "The Great Replacement: Can we finally talk about it?"

There's a pattern where it might start with something that is within the realm of ordinary discourse, and we get to a place that is incredibly sinister. Can you speak to that element of propaganda, specifically Russian propaganda in this case, but propaganda overall?

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** I think the potential is clearly there. We would need to consider it in a proportional sense in terms of real impacts in Canada and real understandings, again, on the part of foreign states devising these campaigns about the nature of the society that they're trying to alter perceptions within. I think those are two great limitations.

However, just for example, with regard to what we know of Tenet Media's operations, one of its key influencers, who it hired and spent a lot of money on, was a figure who turned up with attached allegedly heroic significance during the "freedom convoy" protests and the occupation in Ottawa. That may be a small indication of some of the dangers that can attach to this.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Let's stay with that, Mr. Wark, because Mr. Scott, who was just here, suggested that the accounts that were subsidized by Tenet Media ultimately accrued 16 million followers and had that initial reach, but then in Tenet Media channels, in one year, just on Twitter alone, they had 20 billion impressions and an additional 1.1 billion video views on other platforms like YouTube and Rumble.

In the words of Mr. Scott, and he's right, that's absolutely extraordinary value for \$10 million.

You mentioned the “freedom convoy”, though. There's a clear case where there was a destabilizing conversation in our debate, certainly, and yes, some Conservatives were tripping over themselves to deliver coffee and donuts, but the fact of the matter is there were many far-right accounts in the convoy crowd who were retweeting and amplifying RT content—Russian content. What do you make of that?

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** This is how social media campaigns can attempt to be effective. For many of us who would not spend time on Tenet Media channels, it is a head shaker the extent to which they are able to spread their message through this network.

I would note, and it's a component of the indictment, as you probably know, that Tenet Media was not able to show the commercial value to justify the Russian investment in it. I think there is an important difference to be—

• (1235)

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** I'm sorry to cut you off, Mr. Wark, but you mentioned the indictment, and I want to get to that. I only have a minute and a half left.

Mr. Scott was talking about solutions, and I want to get there. When it comes to solutions, obviously, and when it comes to Canadians amplifying content in good faith, as much as it might be misguided, or in the case of Russians amplifying homegrown Canadian content, the path to enforcement isn't clear to me.

Free speech does matter, and we have to protect free speech. In that specific indictment, you have Founder-1 and Founder-2, and we clearly know that Russians are funding their operation here. I don't know about the actual producers of the content. Maybe they don't know, right? They say they don't know. However, Founder-1 and Founder-2 knew what was going on, based on the information in that indictment.

Is the law clear enough to ensure there's going to be action against Founder-1 and Founder-2? They're not charged yet, but is the law clear enough that there's a path for that?

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** Mr. Erskine-Smith, that's a great question.

Much will depend on how the foreign influence transparency registry is rolled out. We have the legislation. We don't have the registry, yet. The registry would have the capacity to do two things if it is effectively instituted. One would be to provide some degree of deterrent against so-called grey zone actors, and you might consider Tenet Media founders as an illustration of that. The other would be to pursue either monetary or criminal sanctions under either that legislation, or changes to the Criminal Code that were intro-

duced, particularly changes to the Security of Information Act that were introduced in Bill C-70.

Hypothetically, in future, we might have a better capacity, as the United States has had for some time, to use criminal sanctions against such activities. At the moment, we don't really have that.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** Thanks very much. I appreciate it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Erskine-Smith.

[*Translation*]

It's your turn now, Ms. Michaud.

You have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here.

I'll continue in the same vein; my questions are for Mr. Wark.

I wanted to get your opinion on Bill C-70 that the House passed a few months ago to deal with foreign interference. I was asking the witnesses in the previous hour whether they thought Canada had the same tools at its disposal as the Americans with the FBI, for example, to uncover schemes like the one behind Tenet Media. I'd like to know what you think.

Do you think we have the same tools as the Americans to deal with this interference? Do we also have the right legislative tools in a context where everything is evolving so rapidly, technologically speaking?

We know that social networks are a powerful tool for disinformation. Right now, are these legislative tools to be found in Bill C-70, or do we need to go further?

Will we have to constantly renew ourselves to be on the cutting edge of new tactics or stratagems used by people who want to make disinformation or propaganda for Russia's benefit? I imagine so.

[*English*]

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** Thank you, Madame Michaud. I'll respond in English.

In terms of tools, I think the first tool is the ability to detect these kinds of serious activities. That goes to the intelligence capacity. It goes to the disinformation monitoring capacity, which is too weak at the moment in Canada—and that was the burden of some of my remarks in the opening presentation.

In terms of responding to them—if you can detect them—I think the tool kit has been very limited up until recently. Bill C-70 will improve things. Bill C-59, before that, with its new powers given to CSE, may improve our capacities to respond to these disinformation campaigns and try to render them null and void.



The last thing that has to be said is that in no real universe will we be able to detect or counter all disinformation campaigns. At the end of the day, it comes down to Canadian citizens and consumers being able to respond to them in a sensible way.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** In your opinion, what examples can we take from the United States?

The United States seems a little more advanced, being the main target of Russian propaganda in North America. Are there any examples of what's being done there that Canada can learn from to improve?

I quite agree with you, we'll never be in the same place or the right place to predict everything. However, have you noted any good examples of measures being taken elsewhere in the world from which we could learn?

The previous witnesses were saying that in Europe, we might think of France and Germany as the main targets. To your knowledge, do these European countries and the United States have ways of doing things that Canada could learn from?

[*English*]

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** I just want to say very briefly—and I don't mean this in a supercilious way—that the United States has the FBI, and we do not. We have the RCMP, which has divided attention in terms of contracted policing roles and national security roles, and as the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians recently pointed out, that division of responsibilities is not serving Canadians well. Something has to be done seriously to boost the capacity of the RCMP to perform as a national security law enforcement agency, which has been in its mandate for decades and was reinforced, frankly, once CSIS was created. So, we have a big problem on the law enforcement side.

The legislative side, I think, we are improving on, but again, I would come back to the fact that we need.... The starting point for all of this has to be an intelligence capacity, which we don't have at the moment.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** In your opening remarks, you talked about a responsibility that falls under Global Affairs Canada, but which should be the responsibility of the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Could you come back to that and, if possible, tell us a little more about it?

[*English*]

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** I would just say, as I tried to explain in the brief history, that the rapid-response mechanism was originally established as a kind of secretariat to coordinate activities on the part of the G7 countries. That was in 2018. It was only in late 2022, midway through the year, on the basis of what we were seeing in terms of the kind of psychological operations that Russia was conducting, in conjunction with its invasion of Ukraine, that the government decided that we needed a dedicated unit to kind of monitor disinformation, so that was added on to RRM Canada in 2022.

It's important, of course, to note that Global Affairs Canada has no specific legislative authority to do this work. It relies on Crown prerogative to do it, which is, in the world of intelligence, always a weakness.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[*English*]

We go now to Mr. MacGregor for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both witnesses for joining us today.

Professor Wark, I'd like to start with you.

I appreciate your opening remarks about the rapid-response mechanism, and I guess it's in the name. It's a response; it's after the fact. I'm always trying to look for more proactive ways that we can effectively deal with this issue. You may have heard my earlier interventions with Mr. Scott from Reset Tech, just lamenting the fact that so much of our public discourse today is held on platforms that are controlled by a handful of billionaires whose main motive, of course, is to enrich themselves. We can see the way their social media platforms operate.

I think Mr. Scott said that if we were back at the height of the Cold War in the mid-1980s and a number of Canadian media companies were running an hour's worth of Kremlin propaganda, they'd be hauled before a committee right away, and action would be taken.

I guess from your perspective we've talked about how we can confront the power that these social media companies wield. I know it's difficult from a Canadian perspective because they're largely based in California and in Silicon Valley, and they are subject to U.S. laws. However, doing nothing is not an answer. We have already seen the corrosive effects that their platforms are having on what people in Canada are thinking about and the effect it's having on our democratic norms.

Do you have any thoughts that you can share with the committee on how we proactively deal with the platforms that are hosting a lot of this misinformation and disinformation that is, in some ways, directly linked to what Russia is trying to do with its strategic objectives?

• (1245)

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** Mr. MacGregor, I wouldn't claim to be an expert on platform regulation. For many of the people I work with at the Centre for International Governance Innovation, that's their kool-aid, and I'm sure they would be happy to come and talk to you about that at some point.

I'll come back to your question about the rapid response mechanism, and I'll say that it's probably mistitled. I think the idea was it was going to be a rapid detection mechanism, but maybe that sounded a little too un-Canadian when it was created. I think I would take to heart many of Mr. Scott's comments in terms of a guide, particularly in terms of requiring these social media platforms to be much more transparent and much more responsible.

I would also add to that—and this, maybe, just reflects my own age—that we did this to ourselves. No one required us to sign up to YouTube, Instagram, etc., and, you know, drink from those fountains. I think Canadians have to exercise some degree of responsibility themselves in terms of how they intersect with social media platforms. There's an education component to that. There may be a regulation component to it, but at the end of the day, in a democratic society, it comes down to our being able to exercise good judgment in that regard.

I think there's a lot that can be done, and this is why I'm very keen on a model like the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency—which perhaps our other guest knows more about than I do—that could combine a detection capacity and use intelligence resources and so on alongside a public-facing organization that could really talk to and try to educate Canadians.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Thank you for that.

Mr. Oksanen, maybe that's a great segue to you.

I'd like to have your thoughts on the same question because, with Canada's geographic position in the world, I think we have a history of feeling quite insulated from events that happen on the other side of the Atlantic. Of course, for residents in Sweden and for your neighbour in Finland, Russia is always present and always has been, for centuries. I'm wondering how that informs the discourse in Sweden on this very same topic. Are there any other lessons that you think Canadians need to learn from that so that we can make recommendations to our own government?

**Mr. Patrik Oksanen:** I think both Finland and Sweden have had an advantage here because we know Russia more than other countries. You mentioned earlier in this panel discussion that there are problems in Germany and in France because they don't have the same level of understanding of Russia. We have a good understanding of the problem, in general, in society.

As mentioned, we have this new agency: the Psychological Defence Agency. It has been up and running now for two years. The effects are too early to tell, really, but what we are seeing is that there is an increased level of awareness in society. They've been doing a lot of work in educating civil servants in various levels. Also, they have this detection capability so that they can reach out to relevant agencies that have to deal with the actual problem and that have to address it in the Swedish system. The Psychological Defence Agency is not the one addressing this information if it is under, for example, public health.

If I may also address the overall question on regulated platforms, I think we should start to have a debate and think about social media a bit like tobacco. We have dealt with tobacco in a way to inform the public of the problems and the risks. For example, for young people, they are not able to buy it, and so on. I think that is

an approach that we should consider in the open society. That debate is nowhere yet in the world, but I think that is something that we need to start to think about.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We'll start a second round now with Mr. Brock.

Please go ahead. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank both witnesses for your attendance and participation in this study.

At this time, Mr. Chair, I'd like to move a motion that was put on notice last Friday and was filed with the clerk in both official languages.

The motion reads:

That the committee reports to the house the Minister should apologize for defending a dirtbag cop shooter by saying "It is disturbing to me as a member of Parliament to hear other members of Parliament use names and slurs toward constituents. These are Canadians we are talking about. When we are calling each other names and calling constituents names we can do better" and recognize this monster is currently being charged with attempted murder, possession of a firearm, uttering death threats and breaching a probation order, and has previously been charged with possessing a stolen vehicle, stolen license plates, breaking into and entering multiple homes, as well as breaching an earlier probation order.

I'd like to be recognized as the first speaker, Chair.

● (1250)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Brock.

I call the attention of the committee to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 1065. Regarding the admissibility of motions to committee proceedings, "a motion should not contain offensive or unparliamentary language. Motions should not contain any objectionable or irregular wording, and they should be neither argumentative nor in the style of a speech."

On that basis, the chair finds that this motion is not admissible.

**An hon. member:** I challenge that.

**The Chair:** The chair has been challenged.

The decision for the committee is this: Shall the decision of the chair be sustained? If you vote yes, then you agree with the chair. If you vote no, then the motion will go forward.

Mr. Clerk, would you take the roll, please?

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 7; nays 4)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Clerk.

The chair's decision is sustained.

Mr. Brock, you have two minutes left.

**Mr. Larry Brock:** I'll pass the rest of my time to my colleague, Mr. Motz.

**Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair.

I would like to ask Dr. Wark a question, if I could.

We had a witness here on Tuesday last week whose question was, why is Canada still a safe haven for Russian operatives?

I'd like to ask you the same question. Why is Canada still such a safe haven?

Why has the current government not taken any action with regard to those in Canada who collaborate with institutions that spread Russian propaganda?

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Motz.

I could preface my answer by saying that I wear as a badge of honour the fact that I'm on the Russian sanctions list. That is not our list of sanctioned individuals, but theirs. I think I'm on that list partly because I have advocated for much more aggressive activity on the part of the Government of Canada in terms of Russian diplomats, who are engaging in activities that are not commensurate with their Geneva Convention duties, being declared *persona non grata*.

As Mr. Motz probably knows, Canada is almost unique among NATO and EU countries in not having expelled a single Russian diplomat from its establishment in Canada since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Frankly, I think there is no good argument to be made for that lack of action. I would distinguish that activity, which is fully within the federal government's capacity, from the broader question of dealing with Russian potential agents of influence, proxies and so on, in Canada.

Here, I think there is a twofold problem. One is that up until very recently, in Bill C-70, we really haven't had the legal tools to respond to that problem.

Secondly, I think there is, as I indicated in response to Madame Michaud's question, a genuine institutional lack of capacity, both on the intelligence side and the law enforcement side, to be able to respond to these threats.

• (1255)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Motz.

We go now to Mr. Gaheer.

Please go ahead. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing before the committee.

Professor Wark, my questions are for you.

You've mentioned to me in the past that we don't have an FBI in Canada. We have the RCMP and up to 80% of the work they do is contract policing.

You've obviously thought about this at length. Can you talk a little bit about what it would look like if the RCMP looked a little bit more like the FBI? What would happen to contract policing?

In your opinion, what could the RCMP then focus on that they don't quite have the resources for now?

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** Very briefly, Mr. Gaheer, it's a complicated issue.

I think that in the broad scheme of things, the RCMP should get out of the business of contract policing altogether. An alternative model would have to be found in funding law enforcement in the provinces, territories and municipalities. Surely that is not beyond our ability.

I think what we need the RCMP to become is a nationally focused law enforcement and national security agency that can really have the capacity to dig into a variety of serious criminal and national security offences, whether they're serious organized crime in nature or have to do with national security challenges, of which we face many.

**Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer:** We've talked a little bit about the specific tactics that are employed by Russia to manipulate western voices.

Do you want to expand on that a little bit?

Do you think these efforts are effective, especially in a country like Canada, where we have some of the highest rates of tertiary education?

I want to ask a follow-up to that as well.

Do you think there's an ethnic component to some of this destabilizing manipulation? Canada obviously has a large proportion of immigrants whose first language is perhaps not English.

Does the level of Russian influence go as deep as reaching into these other minority communities within Canada?

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** I would say two things. I think that Russia is in a slightly difficult position in engaging in disinformation operations against Canada. Some of this was pointed out in the CSIS assessment, which I'd encourage members of the committee to read because I think it's a good overview document. Part of the problem is that there is not a lot of sympathy for Russian positions on issues in Canada across the board, particularly in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Also, the Russian diaspora is not a unified entity within Canada. It contains many kind of diverse groups, including groups like the Russian Canadian Democratic Alliance, that are very much in opposition to the Putin regime, so they don't have a big diaspora base to work on and they don't have sympathies they can draw on.

Against that is the fact that the Russians are past masters at disinformation or propaganda operations. They devote a lot of resources to these. They have almost unlimited resources in terms of money, personnel and cyber-capabilities to try to engage in disinformation operations. They just start from a weaker base when it comes to targeting Canada, I would say.

**Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer:** Does Russian manipulation go as deep as to reach ethnic communities within Canada? Obviously, there are quite sizable minority populations within Canada.

The reason I ask is that Pearson airport is in my riding, and my constituency has a high proportion of immigrants. I often have these conversations where some of them seem to be parroting a lot of this disinformation that's coming from Russia. I'm wondering if it has ricocheted off something else to reach them or if they are being directly targeted.

**Dr. Wesley Wark:** I think there are two answers to that question.

One is that some of it is definitely directly targeted, but I think that takes place more in the field of transnational repression, which you've heard a bit about from some of the other witnesses, where there are members of the Russian diaspora who are identified as aggressively anti-Putin or against the Russian illegal invasion of Ukraine. The Russian government would do whatever it could to try to stifle those kinds of criticisms or counter them.

More broadly, their disinformation efforts, I would argue, are a kind of subset of what they're attempting to do in the United States, which is deepen polarization and introduce doubts about the validity and viability of democratic governance. I think that the Canadian playbook for Russian disinformation is essentially a copy on a smaller scale of their playbook directed against the United States.

• (1300)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gaheer.

[Translation]

Ms. Michaud, you have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Oksanen.

Not long ago, Mr. Shekhovtsov, the previous witness, shared a post on Twitter. It showed an advertisement or billboard that can be found in several Italian cities. On these billboards, it says that Russia is not our enemy. The image depicts a handshake and contains the colours of both countries, Russia and Italy. On these billboards, people are also encouraged to stop giving money for weapons and to help Ukraine.

According to the testimony we heard today, in Canada, the propaganda or disinformation messages that come from Russia are much more subtle. For example, they say that Ukraine is corrupt, or other such messages.

Since you're in Sweden, I'm curious as to whether this is the kind of advertising you see in other European cities. We talked about France and Germany, which could be particularly targeted.

Is this the kind of advertising that can often be seen in your country? How do governments react to this, and how should they react?

[English]

**Mr. Patrik Oksanen:** Well, that main aim of what the Russians are doing here is to break the support for Ukraine. Here, they work with different methods in different countries.

You were mentioning Italy. That's another context, another situation and another kind of support for Russia to push that kind of advertisement. That will not work in Sweden. It will not work in the Nordic-Baltic countries.

Instead, you can see narratives like "Ukraine will lose" and that kind of narrative: "time is on Russia's side" and "we could save lives if Ukraine gave territory for peace". That kind of argument is what you're seeing pro-Russian persons, media outlets and so on pushing in that context, but this differs, of course, in what country you're talking about.

Italy has a long tradition of Russian influence, and we have seen more political parties being more positive towards Russia in Italy than in Sweden. In Sweden, it would be a political disaster to do that.

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Okay.

I'll come back to the second part of my question.

How should different governments react? I know that some governments may be more in favour of Ukraine, others in favour of Russia.

Already two years ago, I was in France and I saw quite frequent messages saying that we should support Russia rather than Ukraine.

What role can the government play in all this? I know there's a fine line between what we can do and freedom of expression, but at some point, what kind of action can governments take to counter this?

[English]

**Mr. Patrik Oksanen:** Thank you, Madame, for reminding me about the second part of the question there.

I think governments should be very clear on why Russia is doing this, on what is at stake, and have that frank and sincere conversation with citizens. We are in a situation right now when the democratic world is in conflict with authoritarian states, especially Russia, but also we have other states like China and so on.

We should be very clear in communicating to citizens what is going on and what is at stake, and then, of course, also look over what kinds of regulations we have within society that we could use without infringing on what we're trying to save and to protect the democracy.

This is a delicate balance. Of course, I will not go into the Canadian debate here, but in general terms, I think we must have leaders in society to be very clear on what's going on.

• (1305)

[Translation]

**Ms. Kristina Michaud:** Thank you, Mr. Oksanen.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. There's a bit of confusion with the time. Your time was going up, not down.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

Mr. MacGregor—it's one of those Scottish names—you have two and a half minutes. We'll draw the line there.

Thank you.

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:** Okay. I appreciate it.

Mr. Oksanen, I'd like to turn back to you again. In one of our previous meetings, one of our witnesses was talking about how Canada needs to enact a “national digital resilience strategy”, so there are certainly some sectors of Canadian society that are recognizing the scope of the challenges before us.

With respect to the psychological defence agency, I think Professor Wark said that it does sound a bit Orwellian, and certainly we might face a bit of criticism from certain sectors of society.

I'm curious. Since this agency was created in Sweden, what has been the public's reaction to it? Is there a general consensus that this is a tool that is needed for this moment in time? Over the two years of its existence, has there been any shift in public opinion on that agency's role in Swedish society and its necessity to counteract Russian threats?

**Mr. Patrik Oksanen:** Let me first give some historical background. This agency might be new now, but it is an old agency that was scrapped during the eternal peacetime.

The history of the Psychological Defence Agency and its predecessor goes back to the early 1950s, when the Cold War was coming back again. Sweden drew on the conclusions and the experiences we had during World War II, when we had radio propaganda from Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union into our society and so on. This has a long tradition.

It is also very intertwined with the Swedish total defence concept, where we communicate with our citizens that we will never surrender if we get into war. We started those communications back in 1943. Actually, today the next version of this brochure will be distributed to everyone in the population. It's if war comes or if the crisis comes. The brochure is some 30 pages.

Over these two years, I wouldn't say the perception has changed of the agency. It was installed with broad political support. I would say it's accepted, but it's trying to find its role within Swedish society and the governance system. Of course, a new agency finding a relationship with other agencies takes some time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing today and for your testimony. It's very helpful.

I have a couple of items of committee business before we carry on. The clerk distributed this morning two draft budgets, one in the amount of \$20,250 for the study on Russian interference and disinformation campaigns in Canada, and one in the amount of \$1,500 for the study of the growing problem of car thefts in Canada.

Is it the will of the committee to adopt these budgets?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** I would also like to announce that the next version of the auto theft study will be ready probably in the next day. It will be distributed to the committee as soon as it's available.

Thank you, all.

We are adjourned.

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