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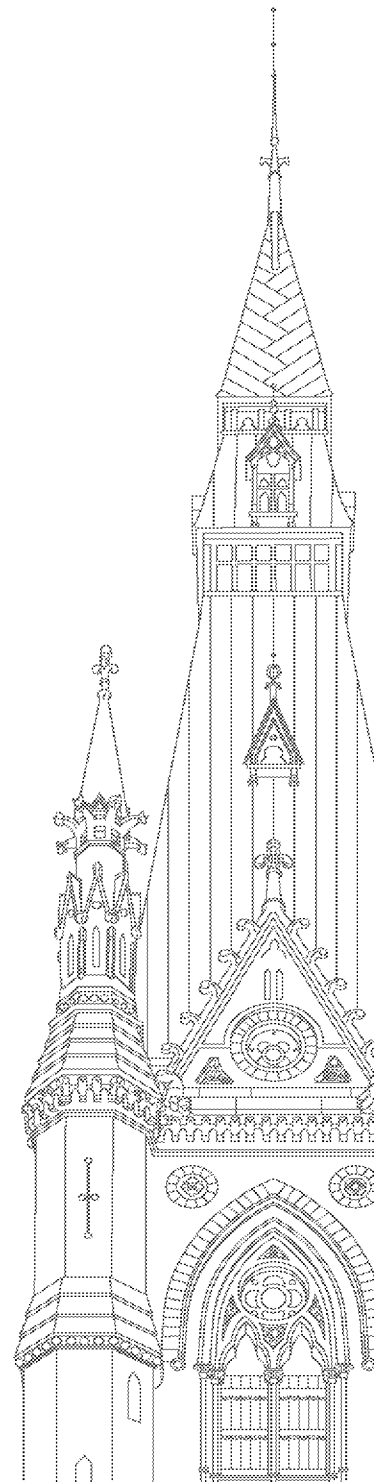
Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics

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Friday, March 10, 2023

Chair: Mr. John Brassard



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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

I'm going to call the meeting to order.

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 61 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

[English]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members can attend in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. Should any difficult and technical challenges arise, please advise me. Please note that we may need to suspend for a few minutes to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, December 7, 2022, the committee is commencing its study of foreign interference and threats to the integrity of democratic institutions, intellectual property and the Canadian state.

The committee has a routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses.

[Translation]

Pursuant to that motion, I am informing you that all of the witnesses completed the required connection tests before the meeting.

[English]

Everybody's connection is perfect.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour. As an individual, we have Gabrielle Lim, doctoral fellow, Citizen Lab at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, University of Toronto, who is with us today on Zoom. We welcome, from the Toronto Association for Democracy in China, Cheuk Kwan, co-chair. From the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project, we have Mehmet Tohti, the executive director.

Ms. Lim, we're going to start with you. You have up to five minutes for your opening statement.

Ms. Gabrielle Lim (Doctoral Fellow, Citizen Lab, Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Good morning. I'm Gabrielle Lim, a doctoral fellow at the Citizen Lab. I'm also a researcher at the Harvard

Shorenstein Center. My research focuses primarily on information technology, civil liberties and security, with a specialization in mis- and disinformation.

While the views I present are my own, they are based on research carried out by me and my colleagues. The following comments will briefly cover some of the effects of foreign interference, the contributing factors that give rise to their effectiveness and recommendations.

Firstly, I want to stress that evidence of activity is not evidence of impact. For example, although it has been suggested that the Russian-based Internet Research Agency influenced U.S. public opinion, there is little evidence of a direct impact on the U.S. 2016 presidential election. The bulk of their activity was actually engaged in audience building. When compared with the volumes of media consumed by the average American across the mainstream, independent and social media, Russian-sponsored activities were but a small fraction. As such, we should avoid exaggeration when discussing such activities. To do otherwise risks undermining trust in our elections and sowing division amongst ourselves, including potentially alienating certain communities and increasing xenophobia.

Secondly, I would like to draw attention to a different kind of foreign interference—digital transnational repression—namely, foreign-directed digital operations that target individuals in Canada's diaspora communities. In other words, this is happening on our land. This could include online stalking, harassment, threats, often gender-based attacks, hacking attempts and other forms of intimidation. These may start off digitally, but often cross over into the real world.

Even though transnational digital repression remains understudied, there is very strong evidence of its negative impact. My colleagues at Citizen Lab have documented its effects on mental health, self-censorship and fear of political participation. I highlight transnational repression because while it is a form of foreign interference, it shouldn't be equated with, say, online information ops that seek to sway large audiences, or some of the direct influencing of political parties that's being alleged. It's a very different beast, and I just want to stress that.

Thirdly, I'd like to address some of the risk factors that make individuals susceptible to foreign-operated misinformation or foreign influence operations. Online influence operations can be thought of as an issue of supply and demand. From the supply side, we have foreign actors producing and distributing content targeted at Canadians. But we can also conceptualize influence ops as a result of the demand, where certain communities or individuals might be predisposed to receiving and believing false or misleading information. This might stem from long-standing grievances, discrimination or other forms of marginalization and inequality.

Mitigations against potentially harmful influence operations, then, require addressing these grievances and inequities among Canadians because as long as these social cleavages are left to fester, adversaries will be motivated to exploit them. As an example, the Nazis exploited racism in the U.S. as part of their propaganda during World War II, and the same divisions were exploited again by the Russians in an attempt to further divide Americans in 2016.

Lastly, I just want to say that you should exercise great caution if you're considering any legislation. Some of my colleagues and I have documented over 60 countries that have enacted laws regarding misinformation or foreign online operations, and truly there is no good evidence that they are effective. Instead they tend to face mounting criticism by activists and rights groups that they have the effect of silencing dissent and critical voices. If Canada also tightened control over the Internet this would legitimize illiberal and authoritarian-leaning governments' own censorship-enabling laws.

Introducing information controls through legislation also risks playing into Russia and China's desire that information security, the control of information available to their publics, is a legitimate practice in both democratic and non-democratic states alike. The ceding of democratic rights to speak and access information to state monitors is antithetical to the open Internet and the democratic norms Canada has staked its reputation on. Moreover, such information controls would likely do little to stop foreign interference.

I would advise exploring alternative policies, such as finding ways to build trust in our institutions and media, better connecting with diaspora communities, supporting targeted individuals and exploring ways to address the for-profit models that drive our media ecosystem. Should legislative mechanisms be considered, we should be wary of how this might affect already victimized or targeted individuals and communities.

In conclusion, while we should not dismiss the potential effects that foreign interference has on our democratic processes, we should not exaggerate their impact and should discern between the different types of interference and their effects. Our response should reflect sound analysis and evidence. To do otherwise would risk imposing ineffective information controls, lending legitimacy to illiberal states to engage in censorship and surveillance, while simultaneously failing to build resiliency and trust in our government.

Thank you.

• (0850)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lim. I know five minutes is a short time, and you really packed it in there. Thank you for that.

Mr. Kwan, who is the co-chair of the Toronto Association for Democracy in China, sir, you have five minutes to address the committee.

Mr. Cheuk Kwan (Co-Chair, Toronto Association for Democracy in China): Good morning, Mr. Chair.

The Toronto Association for Democracy in China was founded on the eve of the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 4, 1989. Our organization supports democracy and advocates for human rights in China. As well, in recent years, we have been a watchdog for Chinese interference on Canadian soil.

The first foray by China to exert soft power on Canadian society occurred in the early 1990s when China was eager to polish its international image post-Tiananmen Square. Urged on and supported by Chinese consulates, organizations were set up by individuals who were sympathetic to the regime. Chief among them are the National Congress of Chinese Canadians, NCCC, and its successor, the Confederation of Toronto Chinese Canadian Organizations, CTCCO. These and many other proxy organizations practice the art of astroturfing and echoing the party line to defend China's foreign and domestic policies.

In addition to engaging friendly academics and business people to advocate on its behalf, China also spreads its tentacles to cultivate elected officials and infiltrate political institutions at all levels of Canadian society. All of this is documented in journalist Jonathan Manthorpe's book, *Claws of the Panda*.

One of these instruments of interference is the United Front Work Department. According to official documents, United Front takes special interest in people of Chinese descent living abroad, viewing them as powerful external threats, as well as potential allies. It also employs thousands of agents to pursue the Chinese Communist Party's political strategy to use international networks to advance its global interests. It also harasses and intimidates Canadians who are critical of China—activists, dissidents and human rights defenders—rendering the Chinese Canadian community the real victims of this game.

We were therefore not surprised by the findings of the recent CSIS report. There's no doubt that the interference in Canadian electoral process is of grave concern, but I argue that this is but the tip of the iceberg. China's interference in Canada has been soft, intangible and gradual. As a result, this build-up over the years—the 90% of the iceberg, if you will—remains invisible to many Canadians.

Irrespective of whether the past elections have been fair or not, I argue that this invisible part of the iceberg should be the focus of our concern.

In 2017, the Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China, together with Amnesty International, gathered evidence of harassment and intimidation by the Chinese government on individuals in Canada working on China-related human rights concerns and published the “Harassment and Intimidation” report. The report also urged the government to set up a national hotline to allow for the reporting of these harassment and intimidation incidents that are otherwise ignored by the local police or the RCMP.

We therefore urge Canada to address China's interference on these multiple fronts: Take a strong and principled stance on the issues highlighted in the CSIS reporting, establish a national reporting hotline on harassment and intimidation, and set up a foreign agent registry, similar to the one in Australia.

While these actions may not completely eliminate the problem, at least they can act as a deterrent and serve notice to foreign powers and their proxies that we guard our democratic institutions and our sovereignty seriously.

At this time I would like to add a few lines that are not in my prepared statement.

I just watched the live press conference carried out by Minister Mendicino, in which the establishment of a foreign agent registry is seen as an attack on the Chinese Canadian community. Let me assure you, this is not the case.

• (0855)

The Chinese Canadian community, together with our Uyghur community, Tibetan community and other people, welcome this foreign agent registry. A registry on foreign agents is not the same as a registry on all Chinese Canadians.

I welcome your further questions on this.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kwan.

Mr. Tohti, you have five minutes to address the committee, sir.

Mr. Mehmet Tohti (Executive Director, Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to everyone. Thanks for this invitation.

My name is Mehmet Tohti, and I call myself a lifelong activist. I currently work as executive director of the Ottawa-based Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project. As a leading voice of Uyghur Canadians, we do research, documentation and advocacy work to promote the rights of Uyghurs and other Turkic people in East Turkestan who are facing ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity by the Government of China.

I would make one quick note here. We are Uyghur Canadians, not members of the Chinese diaspora. It is precisely because we refuse to become Chinese and to assimilate into Chinese culture by stubbornly preserving our ethnic, religious and linguistic identities that we are subjected to ongoing genocide in China. Similarly in that re-

gard, Tibetans and Mongols are also not identifying themselves as Chinese Canadians or as members of the Chinese diaspora.

The topic of Chinese state interference is not a novelty for us. For decades, Uyghur Canadians have been subjected to all forms of intimidation and harassment by the Chinese Communist Party. Since my exile life began more than 33 years ago, I personally have experienced all forms of China's interference in my personal life, including total isolation from my family members and siblings in East Turkestan, constant threats, intimidation and harassment.

In December 2003, China's Ministry of Public Security announced the first batch on the so-called terrorist organizations list. An organization that I chaired at the time, called the World Uyghur Youth Congress, registered in Germany, was included on the terrorist list. Because of that misinformation and attack against us, I personally am banned or cannot travel to many states, such as Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan or central Asian states and Middle Eastern countries. For the past 32 years since I left my homeland, I have been unable to visit my relatives. They cannot come and visit me in Canada. No one in my family has been given a visa. That's why I call it total isolation.

Exactly 17 years ago, I engaged in the case of the Uyghur Canadian Huseyin Celil, who was kidnapped in Uzbekistan and sentenced to life in prison in China. I started noticing suspicious activities around me after my campaign.

I would like to give you a comparison of what we are talking about today and what the topic was 16 years ago. This is a passage from the Maclean's magazine coverage by Charlie Gillis, dated May 14, 2007. The headline of the article is “Beijing is always watching”:

The official, who identified himself only as a member of China's infamous Overseas Affairs Commission, had a laundry list of instructions. Tohti was to cease efforts to draw sympathy in Canada to the Uyghurs—the oppressed, largely Muslim population of Xinjiang province that has become a thorn in Beijing's side; he was to stop spreading allegations of cultural genocide against the People's Republic; most importantly, he was not to attend an upcoming conference in Germany where Uyghur groups from around the world planned to form an international congress. “We have your mother here, and your brother, too,” he added cryptically, noting that police had driven the pair some 260 km to a regional police headquarters in Kashgar to help deliver Beijing's message. “We can do whatever we want.”

Indeed. In the three years since that night, the 43-year-old Tohti has had enough brushes with China's long-armed security apparatus to conclude Beijing's agents are still doing much as they please—not just in China, but [here] in Canada....

I would refer that to you for a later read.

In July 2020, right before testifying before a parliamentary committee, I received a Twitter message that said, “YOUR F*** MOTHER IS DEAD”. It came from someone in Kunming city, nearly 4,000 kilometres from where my mother lived, just to stop me from testifying before the parliamentary committee.

I'll give you another recent example. On January 16, less than two months ago, I received a phone call again from the Chinese state police in Urumchi, who had taken my uncle, my mother's brother, hostage.

● (0900)

I was told that my two sisters were dead, and so was my mother. The whereabouts of my three brothers, their spouses and children are unknown.

It was 15 days prior to the vote on Motion M-62 in the House for the resettlement of 10,000 Uighur refugees. That was the campaign I started in 2017. Beijing is watching every day. There are threats, intimidation and harassment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tohti.

I really appreciate your words and the opening statements of all of our witnesses today. I know our committee members are going to have lots of questions. I hate the committee process because of the timelines, but we do have six minutes in the first round. I'm going to have to stick to that because we do have another full panel after our first round is complete.

We're going to start with Mr. Barrett for six minutes.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Lim, Mr. Tohti and Mr. Kwan, for joining us today.

I note that doing so is not without personal risk and that it's never easy for one to appear in front of a parliamentary committee, particularly given the situation you've just outlined, Mr. Tohti. The gravity of this is not lost on us.

My first question is for you, Mr. Tohti.

What does the Communist regime in Beijing do to the Uighur people in Canada, and why do they do that?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: The Communist regime in Beijing is not a democratically elected regime. That regime is not accountable to its people. It acts like a criminal organization.

For that regime, it is important to keep the Uighurs and the other people under their control, and for that reason, they take our family members hostage—I'm speaking on behalf of Uighur Canadians—just to control our life here in Canada. Even in the democratic and free country we live in here in Canada, Uighur Canadians are not free just because of the Chinese pressure and the Chinese threat of taking hostage their family members hostage.

Basically, they don't want the Uighur Canadians to exercise their right to protest and to exercise their right to speak about the atrocity of the crimes the Chinese Communist Party is committing. That is

the biggest threat for the Chinese government, and for that reason, these kinds of peaceful activities are regarded as matters of national security, and for that reason, they apply very harsh measures to crack down.

● (0905)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thank you.

Mr. Kwan, you have talked about some of the coercion that Beijing uses. Can you share some examples of how the Communist regime in Beijing attempts to coerce and intimidate Chinese Canadians?

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: I can share many incidents with you. Just to illustrate the kind of strong arm of the law, if you will, of the Chinese here in Canada and the kind of subtle way they can do this by exerting fear on the Chinese Canadian community, in a very typical example, you get a phone call, not just in the middle of the night but also in the middle of the day and they say, “So, how are your parents doing back in Sichuan, China?” and then you get the message. That means that if you don't behave, your parents' phone numbers, address, or even their physical well-being is under threat.

In that sense, the threat is very subtle, and they've used this on many Chinese Canadians. I'm sure they have done this to Mr. Tohti as well. This is something that I can vouch for.

In a very innocuous kind of way, they did to me. I was travelling to Hong Kong for a cultural event. I'm a filmmaker. I went to a film festival in Hong Kong to present my film, and I was followed in Hong Kong, back in 2005. I was questioned during the Q and A period by what seemed to be an agent of the Chinese Communist regime. These are little things that they do: “You know that I know that you know that I'm watching you”. That's the kind of way in which they exert pressure on you.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thank you.

You have talked about observations that you have suspected, or you've spoken to media about suspected interference by the regime in Beijing in the electoral process in Canada—specifically, federal nominations. I believe that in one instance you were talking about busloads of people who had been sent to a nomination as arranged by agents of Beijing operating in Canada.

With about a minute left, could you tell us about that?

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: It's standard modus operandi. Chinese consulates may not do it directly. They have their proxies as a wink-wink thing. This is business people arranging for buses and paying stipends, something like \$20 or \$50 a day, to bus in people either to nomination meetings or to do counterprotesting. We have seen this in one of the fights at the Toronto District School Board, where they bused international students from Waterloo and from Guelph into Toronto to do this kind of thing.

This is something that I have seen first-hand and this is something that I have been told about first-hand by many other ridings as well.

Mr. Michael Barrett: I think that's my time. We will come back to it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Fergus, you're next for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): I normally ask my questions in French.

[*English*]

I will speak in English for my guests here today.

First of all, thank you very much for your testimony, both Mr. Tohti and Mr. Kwan, as well as our guest from the Munk School.

I think I'm going to start with you, Mr. Kwan, if I could. You talked about how the United Front Work Department, UFWD, had come together to engage in astroturfing. Can you give us a recent example of astroturfing?

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: The astroturfing during the head tax redress fight, in which the Chinese Canadian community asked the government to pay restoration and apologize for the Chinese Exclusion Act and its head tax, was a campaign that was carried out over 20 years before that by people in the Chinese Canadian community. I represented one of the organizations, the main organization at that time, to lead this fight.

As I mentioned, right after Tiananmen Square, the Chinese set up an umbrella organization called the National Congress of Chinese Canadians, NCCC. They usurped the issue by themselves, which they have no connection to. These are recent Chinese immigrants. They have nothing to do with the Chinese Exclusion Act, and yet they took up the topic. They issued press releases. They formed over 300 proxy organizations, registered with Corporations Canada, some of which share directors and postal addresses and so forth.

These are examples of astroturfing. They set up these fake organizations, issue press releases and have press conferences.

• (0910)

Hon. Greg Fergus: I'm glad that you keep track and that your organization keeps track of examples of foreign interference. I don't need you to get into detail about it today, but would you feel comfortable with providing the committee with examples of these organizations that you feel are acting in that way?

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: It would be my pleasure to do that.

Hon. Greg Fergus: That would be great.

When you track those organizations, do you also track the members of the boards of directors of these organizations, of the leadership?

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: Yes.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Would you be comfortable sharing that with us as well?

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: It has been so long. I certainly will try my best.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Okay. That's an interesting question: Are there recent examples that your organization tracks?

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: Not our organization, but certainly I can get you the information if you would like.

Hon. Greg Fergus: That would be very helpful.

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: These are basically public records.

One of the things I want to talk about is that I speak the language, I live the culture and I understand the modus operandi of the Chinese Communist Party, as well as many of its proxies, so we are in a sense on the ground. We pretty much know who's who. I mean, if we want to say who are the 11 potential nominees that CSIS has mentioned, I could pretty much guess who they are. It's an open secret that both Mr. Tohti and I have been living with and knowing who's who. That's why, after so many years, it's no longer a surprise to us that the recent CSIS report has come out with this explosive intelligence, if you will.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I think this question will go to our guest from the Munk School.

In various testimonies the Australian model of the foreign agent registry was mentioned. Have you done research as to its effectiveness? What are the things we should be adapting to a Canadian context? What things shouldn't we be adapting to a Canadian context?

Ms. Gabrielle Lim: I haven't researched specifically the Australian foreign agent registry. My sense though is that Canada could set one up. How effective it would be....

A lot of these operations are covert or clandestine by nature. Even if you were to put agents and register everyone, my sense is they will find alternate means to evade or circumvent the registry.

There's also no strong evidence one way or another that labelling someone as a foreign agent or an entity might change an audience's mind. For example, YouTube has a labelling procedure. They label anything that comes from, say, a Russian state agency, a Chinese state agency or any state agency. The effects are mixed. People still watch these videos. They still comment on these videos. They still consume these videos. Whether or not that actually deters people from watching or believing it, to be honest, the research is still out.

However, I think Mr. Kwan mentioned something earlier that I think would be worth exploring. That's having a dedicated rapid response hotline for individuals or communities that really need to seek security. This could be helping them with their devices if they're being harassed online, off-line or both. It usually happens at the same time.

We could also explore having an independent agency that's separate from law enforcement, CBSA or CSIS, to address specifically transnational repression. I think that would be really helpful in supporting victims and targeted communities.

I think there are other methods.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lim. We may get to those in a second.

Before we go to Mr. Villemure, I want to ensure, Mr. Kwan, that you have your interpretation device available. Ms. Lim, make sure you're on the proper interpretation channel.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Kwan, thank you for being with us this morning.

Do you believe that the Government of Canada is abandoning the Chinese diaspora who are being retaliated against by the Chinese regime?

[*English*]

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: I would say that “abandoning” is a very strong word. I would say “ignore” is a better word to describe that kind of thing.

For many years we've been shouting the same messages. Even back in 2006 when I presented to this committee, we basically said that China controls everything. They know everything. Even if you change your cellphone, they can quickly find you, from Beijing and Toronto. It is something that I believe the government should take a stronger message and stance on.

I agree with many of the critics about the registry, saying that it may not be 100% effective. Certainly, we understand that. We think that as long as we're not ignoring.... As long as the government is seen as actively trying to protect the integrity of its election as well as its community, then it will send a strong message back to hostile countries and forces like China, Russia and Iran saying, “We are watching over our citizens as well, so don't ever try to exert pressure, harass or intimidate any of our Canadians.”

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: In your opinion, the Canadian government is not currently sending this message to the Chinese leadership.

[*English*]

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: Can you repeat the question? Sorry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Certainly.

In your opinion, right now, Canada is not conveying the message to the Chinese government that Canada will protect its citizens.

[*English*]

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: I strongly believe that a more external, more explicit public display is worth it.

Right now, as you know, we are under COVID. People are looking at the racism of Chinese Canadians. This line that setting up a registry is an attack on the Chinese Canadian community, I will not buy. This is a standard line given by the Chinese Communist Party.

They're using the same line for everything, for COVID and anything else.

I hope that the government would not buy into the fact that just because you're setting up a foreign agent registry you're setting up a registry for all Chinese Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: The distinction is fundamental.

Can you tell us a little bit about the Chinese police stations we hear about in the media?

[*English*]

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: Yes, this is something that has been exposed by a Spanish non-governmental organization and we had not known about it before. However, once it was pointed out to us who runs these stations and who is behind them, who the civil organizations behind these police stations are, we were not surprised because these are well-known names.

I want to point out to you, Monsieur, that the Journal de Montréal just yesterday had an article about two police stations in Brossard and in Montreal, and they were run by the same woman who is a city councillor of Brossard. She openly advertised herself as being a partner of the Chinese Communist Party, so this is a thing, first of all, we are not surprised actually happens.

• (0920)

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Do you believe that such tactics have been used elsewhere in the world or that what is happening in Canada is a first?

[*English*]

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: These tactics have been used in a great many other countries. I believe they have identified 100 stations around the world, of which Canada has five or six, I believe, three in Toronto and now two in Montreal and one in Vancouver.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: The Canadian Security Intelligence Service should therefore not be surprised that such places exist, since they are already operating elsewhere in the world.

[*English*]

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: Right. The report was issued by Safeguard Defenders. It is a Spanish organization.

I know that China has very similar, in fact more severe, operations in Australia, in Spain, and in many other European countries, and, of course, in other non-European countries as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: You mentioned a little earlier that you knew the names of the ridings of the parliamentarians who were involved here. If I am to believe your opinion, it was common knowledge.

Would you be able to name the constituencies or the regions?

[English]

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: I can share with you two highly suspected cases of electoral influencing. In Kenny Chiu's riding, the Conservative MP lost his seat because he was the one who had a private member's bill on the foreign agent registry. The second riding of which we are very highly suspicious is Bob Saroya's in Markham. He'd been winning by 20,000, or 15,000 votes every other election, but this election a Chinese-aligned candidate from the other party has taken over by at least 5,000 or 7,000 votes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kwan.

Merci, Monsieur Villemure.

Mr. Green, you're up next, for six minutes.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses who've made it here today. It was important for this committee that we took the opportunity to cover topics that hadn't previously been explored at other committees so as not to duplicate work. I think starting in this way, particularly as it relates to the material impacts for people who are here, is an important part of the process, and I'm glad we are able to embark on it.

Ms. Lim, in the article entitled "The Risks of Exaggerating Foreign-Influence Operations and Disinformation" you stated that our fears and concerns that foreign actors are somehow interfering with democracy in deliberative discourse are counterintuitively allowing for the further erosion of democracy and deliberative discourse. Can you expand on this in relation to the current allegations of foreign interference?

Ms. Gabrielle Lim: Yes, I think we tracked 79 countries that, in the last 10 years, have passed laws on misinformation and foreign interference in elections. They will very frequently cite or point to democratic nations such as the U.S., Canada, France, Germany, the U.K. or Australia for why they're doing what they're doing. The justification tends to fall under the broad rubric of national security. That's why I think only using legislative means to curtail some of this stuff is dangerous. Other, less democratic countries without the guardrails we have in Canada will use our rhetoric to pass and justify their own laws.

One example is, I believe, Kyrgyzstan. They passed a pretty broad law that allows the government to take down content and censor whatever they dislike. As reasons for doing this, they specifically cited the U.K. white paper on online harms and NetzDG, the German bill. I think they also cited a French fake news bill.

Again, I don't want to say we should ignore what's happening in Canada. I just think we have to be very careful about how we frame it and specifically call out the effects and outcomes. I think the testimonies of the other panellists are really important for bringing that out. That's why I also highlight transnational repression. It's not the same as other types of foreign interference.

• (0925)

Mr. Matthew Green: How would you specifically define "transnational repression"?

Ms. Gabrielle Lim: I think there are two big points to it.

One, it's directed by a foreign government and happening on our territory.

Mr. Matthew Green: I raised that because I'm from Hamilton. Anecdotally, we witnessed this back in September 2019, when McMaster students hosted a well-known Uighur activist, Rukiye Turdush. The event was disrupted by students who were bussed in.

Would this fit that kind of action?

Ms. Gabrielle Lim: It could, but we would also need more evidence, right? We can't assume that, just because people are against the speaker, they are automatically being influenced and told what to do by the Chinese government.

Mr. Matthew Green: Sure.

The title of your article, which I referenced, starts with, "The Risks of Exaggerating Foreign Influence...". Is it your opinion these risks are being exaggerated in the case of the allegations before us in Canada, today?

Ms. Gabrielle Lim: I think it comes back to this: which allegations? Are we talking about online influence operations, writ large, or very targeted harassment? With target harassment, I don't think we're exaggerating those impacts. Those are very clear. They have pretty long-lasting impacts, as evidenced by the other panellists.

Where I'm a little more ambivalent, in terms of effects and effectiveness, is in these broad misinformation campaigns or influence operations. It's hard to tell exactly what the impact of those are. That's one area I'm a little more hesitant to speculate about.

Mr. Matthew Green: Over the last five or six years, watching the way AI, algorithms, online information, disinformation and troll farms.... You know, I would suggest I've been the target of troll farms, myself. They were obviously artificial accounts targeted and directed at any given political decision.

I would make the following statement: In Canada, particularly given the convoy occupation and rise of right-wing populism, democracy is fragile. People are cynical. They've lost trust in a lot of our democratic institutions. This prevalence of information online, particularly as it relates to targeting, and the studies around how the brain interacts with social media....

Do you not see those as potentially hostile actors, within the context of Canadian democracy?

Ms. Gabrielle Lim: Yes. I don't think you're wrong on any of the points you just made.

Going back to my statement, I think we also have to understand why people might be consuming this. This gets back to the grievances. How do we rebuild trust in institutions and the media?

Mr. Matthew Green: You referenced this. You stated that an overemphasis on bad actors and the supply of disinformation diverts our attention from the material problems that drive demand for, and receptivity to, dubious content of suspicious origin.

Can you describe how ignoring the material problems Canadians are facing can make them more susceptible to foreign influence?

The Chair: Be as brief as you can, Ms. Lim. You have 12 seconds.

Mr. Matthew Green: That's fine. I'll set that aside. I'm going to have a round of two and a half minutes later, and you can just open with that.

The Chair: Thank you, that completes our first round. We're going to go to our second round of questioning.

Just to advise the committee, we're going to have Conservatives for five, Liberals for five, the Bloc for two and a half and Mr. Green for two and a half, and then we're going to move into our next panel after that.

Mr. Kurek, you have five minutes.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you very much.

Let me start by saying a big thank you to the witnesses for your bravery in coming today and for your continued advocacy in speaking out about these and all of the associated issues.

Mr. Tohti, can you expand a little as to how Uighurs who live in Canada have faced pressure, influence, threats and intimidation by the communist dictatorship in Beijing? Could you expand a little on what that has looked like and some personal experience or those who you know?

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Thank you.

It is a long list, and we have been passing this information to our government officials since the early 2000s. For example, I'm a Canadian citizen, but I'm a Uighur Canadian, and you are also a Canadian citizen and a holder of the same passport. If the one Uighur Canadian and another Canadian citizen go to the Chinese consulate to get a Chinese visa, you get totally different forms and procedures than the Uighur Canadians. It's totally different.

They will ask, for example, how you remain in Canada, whether you applied for asylum or not, and you have to receive an invitation from your parents. Your relatives need to have security clearance. There are so many things. Also, you have to sign a pledge of loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party if you are a Uighur Canadian, as an example. That also effectively isolates the Uighur Canadian from their family members. It creates that kind of fear that if I go to protest, here's a consequence, and I may not see my parents again, or I cannot invite my parents to come to see me because the passport is given by the government.

Uighur Canadians are subject to a totally different set of rules by the Chinese government, not only in China but here in Canada as well. For that reason, regular phone calls threatening them not to

participate in any protests are very standard, but it goes much further: to be an informant for the Chinese government and report on whatever's happening in Canada. Don't do anything that is against the interests of the Chinese Communist Party.

● (0930)

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you very much for that.

I know time is limited, so if there are further examples or stories you have, please feel free to follow up with this committee. Certainly, I think what you've shared today behooves us to take this seriously, and I appreciate that.

Mr. Kwan, you've talked about some of the examples of how the communist dictatorship in Beijing puts pressure on Canadians and Canadian democratic infrastructure. How commonly known was this prior to some of these recent revelations? Can you expand as to how well known it was among yourself and others within the Chinese diaspora in this country?

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: Very commonly known. In fact, we've been saying it all along for the last 15 or 20 years. We've seen a lot of this on the ground, obviously, and many of these have not been reported, or if they were reported to the local police or the RCMP, they will not be handled because there's a lack of evidence. That's why, in 2017, many of us banded together and collected evidence and testimonies from which we produced the harassment and intimidation report together with Amnesty International and submitted it to the relevant government departments.

Mr. Damien Kurek: In the time I have left, if we have all this evidence, why do you think there has been a hesitancy or a refusal to act on behalf of the government?

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: I'm not sure. We have not gotten any acknowledgement, so far. Normally, when you write a letter to an MP or to a minister, you at least get acknowledgement saying we received your letter and we'll pass it along to somebody else. We did not even get these letters.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Can I ask who you sent this information to?

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: First of all, we sent it to GAC and then, of course, to the RCMP. The RCMP is the primary one that we are trying to deal with.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Were there any ministers you had it sent to?

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: I believe we had copied some ministers. I don't remember who exactly was copied.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Would you be able to send us that information?

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: If I can find it, yes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kurek.

Next we're going to go to Ms. Hepfner for five minutes.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I also want to thank all the witnesses for being here to testify with us today.

Mr. Kwan, I want to go back to something that you mentioned about Markham—Unionville. I want to say that I'm not the least bit surprised that Paul Chiang won that election. He was a police officer in the region for 28 years. He speaks eight languages, and he's been an excellent member of Parliament for the last two years. I just wanted to put that on the record.

I want to ask you about the length of time that you believe there's been foreign influence by China in Canada. You mentioned that this has been going on since the 1990s. You testified before a parliamentary committee in 2006, so this is a problem that spans several governments.

I would like you to give us an idea about how the problem has maybe changed or developed over that time.

● (0935)

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: For one, China has become more sophisticated, more subtle. In the early efforts, China was seen as kind of bumbling in many ways and perhaps not taken seriously by our elected officials or law enforcement, but China has now upped their game, if you will, in such a way that many of these things that we're dealing with are very subtle.

I can point you to one thing. China does not play by the rules of engagement that we know in the West. We think that we have a contract with a Chinese company to install X-ray machines in all our embassies around the world, and the contract says, "Thou shall not do this, thou shall not do that, thou shall not share the information." We don't believe the Chinese will follow that kind of contract, because we in the Western world think a contract is a contract.

If I engage a Chinese company to process visas in China for Canadian consulates, we think that the employees they hire will abide by the rules of privacy and whatever the contract says, but that, in fact, is not the case. The Chinese government has a way to get their people loyal to the party, loyal to the government and loyal to the country to do what is needed to do. I don't think there should be any surprises that they would do that.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Thank you.

I will turn now to Ms. Lim.

You mentioned xenophobia in your opening statement, and I'm wondering if you can describe how foreign interference and conversations about foreign interference can affect the experience of Chinese Canadians and perhaps their participation in the democratic process in Canada.

Ms. Gabrielle Lim: Yes, for sure.

Very briefly, again, I don't want to directly say correlation is causation, but we see this in other communities as well. When there's criticism of Israel, for example, there are reports of increased anti-Semitic attacks. Similarly, over COVID, the coronavirus, there was increased resentment towards Chinese immigrants. Similarly, after 9/11, there was a lot of backlash against people who were perceived brown, not just Arabic. This is the general ballpark we're dealing with.

I think we have to be careful about how we word certain things. I think repeatedly stating, "This is the CCP, the actions of the Chinese Communist Party", as opposed to writ large Chinese people.... I think—and most of you know this already, so this is old hat—that just being wary of what language we use.... We should be criticizing the CCP and bringing light to everything they're doing, but I would also like to not risk getting spat in my face or called a racial slur on the street. I think that's just my caveat. We just have to be careful about how we frame things.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Would you say that even allegations of foreign influence have an effect on whether a Chinese Canadian would, say, volunteer in a political campaign or work in a political office? Does that affect the way they can fully participate in our democratic process the way they may want to?

The Chair: Could we have a short answer, please?

Ms. Gabrielle Lim: Yes, I would say that with the current evidence, no, I can't give you a definitive answer.

The Chair: Again, I apologize, Ms. Lim. You always seem to be at the tail-end of the time. I don't like doing this, believe me.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll get back to Mr. Kwan.

Mr. Kwan, if you would be so kind as to send us the 2017 report, we would be very grateful.

[*English*]

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: Yes. It's the court report.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you.

In your opinion, has Chinese interference in Canadian affairs increased since the Liberal Party came to power in 2015?

● (0940)

[*English*]

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: I don't think I can say anything about that just because, as Ms. Lim said, there is no causation involved in this. I think it was just as strong during the Conservative times of Prime Minister Harper.

However, just because it has increased in the last seven years doesn't mean it was because of the Liberal government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: It may just be that interference has increased during this period.

[*English*]

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: Yes, it just happened to coincide.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: What is the advantage to the Chinese regime of trying to destabilize democratic states?

[English]

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: Yes, Beijing has been doing that all over the world, and Canada is no exception.

I point to Australia, our cousin, a country of basically very similar size, population and demographics. China has been working on Australia for many years. Australia stood up, first by having very strong rules about engagement with China's CCP by its elected officials, as well as by enforcing and establishing the foreign agent registry.

Of course, Australia suffered. They had trade sanctions. They have been harassed by China, but I admire their courage in standing up to China.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: I have a few seconds left for one last question.

Do you believe that an independent public inquiry is needed to make the public feel safer?

[English]

Mr. Cheuk Kwan: Yes, I think so. I think a former prime minister of Australia mentioned just a week ago on TV that all you need is sunshine, to shine a light on these things in the public mode. It not only helps us look at these things, but it also tells China that they cannot go under the table anymore. Everything you do is currently exposed to the public, and let the public judge.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you, Mr. Kwan.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villemure and Mr. Kwan.

[English]

Mr. Green, you have a final intervention for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

Ms. Lim, in one of your previous interventions you had started offering some of your additional policy specifics. I want to give you some short time right now just to expand on other things to put on the record that we should be considering.

Ms. Gabrielle Lim: Yes, for sure.

I think this has probably been touched upon already, but accountability, really calling out officials if needed and necessary, is important. This could be calling in diplomats of the relevant countries; putting out very public statements condemning these kinds of actions; and increasing the evidence, again like Mr. Kwan said, and shedding sunlight on what's happening. I think that's really important.

I think there needs to be a lot more done to support victims and targeted communities. I think the FBI has a hotline, and I think in the U.K. when there were attacks against the Iranian diaspora, law enforcement had offered protection.

There should be digital training, very basic security training, and also training so if there were an agency set up to deal specifically with transnational repression, there would be good training so they understand what's actually happening for the victims.

Also, do not revictimize folks who have already been targeted. For example, you could be targeted as a diaspora community, but that might also put you under more law enforcement surveillance, and that's not necessarily good when they've already had really bad experiences with law enforcement.

It's just being cognizant of all of those things.

I think the last point is engaging with the private sector. We know that a lot of the harassment comes through Twitter, Facebook, Telegram, WeChat and what have you. It's hard because they're for-profit companies and they're often located or headquartered elsewhere, but see how they can play a role in this.

Also—I'm sorry, but I'm just rattling off things—

Mr. Matthew Green: No, this is why we need you on the record.

Ms. Gabrielle Lim: —exploring targeted sanctions against companies that are exporting or selling technology to countries that use us against individuals.

I will leave it at that.

Mr. Matthew Green: I have one final question, because you talk about foreign interference. Many of the examples are from non-western countries interfering in western democracies.

Would you be able to comment on the ways in which western democracies also interfere in foreign elections around the world?

● (0945)

Ms. Gabrielle Lim: Yes, 100%, this happens all the time. Look at the U.S. and Canada. The United States is our biggest neighbour. They are constantly influencing us, whether or not we like it. That's why we have CanCon laws.

With the trucker convoy you mentioned earlier, there was a lot of influence from the U.S. and even U.S. politicians. There was money being funnelled from the United States. We should also be cognizant of that. It could have been harassment as well.

The Chair: We're 30 seconds over, Mr. Green.

Ms. Gabrielle Lim: I will just say that, yes, it happens between democracies as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lim.

That concludes our first round.

I want to thank all our witnesses for being here and providing us with what I believe was valuable and compelling information today.

Mr. Kwan, Mr. Tohti and Ms. Lim, thank you, on behalf of the committee and Canadians, for appearing.

We are going to suspend for a few minutes in order to prepare for the next panel.

I am going to give advance warning to committee members that we're going to have the same amount of time in the rounds. It will be very similar to what we did in this first panel.

Thanks.

● (0945) _____ (Pause) _____

● (0950)

The Chair: Welcome back to the meeting, everyone.

We're just about to start our second panel.

[*Translation*]

I want to inform the committee that all required technical tests have been completed.

Mr. Villemure, I also confirm that the tests for interpretation have been done.

[*English*]

We have three witnesses in front of us for our second panel.

I want to welcome, from the Chinese-Canadian Concerned Group on the Chinese Communist Party's Human Rights Violation, Bill Chu, who is the spokesperson. From Alliance Canada Hong Kong, we have Cherie Wong, who is the executive director—thank you, Cherie, for being here this morning—and Ai-Men Lau, who is an adviser.

As you can see, all of our witnesses are here via video conference today.

Mr. Chu, we're going to start with you. You have five minutes to address the committee. Please, go ahead.

Mr. Bill Chu (Spokesperson, Chinese Canadian Concern Group on the Chinese Communist Party's Human Rights Violation): Good morning, Chair and honourable members of the committee.

I am Bill Chu, from Vancouver, B.C., arguably the beachhead for the PRC's unrestricted warfare in Canada.

“Unrestricted warfare” is coined from a 1999 book of the same name by two PLA corporals describing a new warfare which does not use conventional weapons, like guns and bombs, but stealth weapons ranging from disinformation via media, influence buying by bribes, sex, trade, fame, threats, etc., as well as cyber-hacking, data harvesting and intellectual espionage. No soldiers are required to be transported, as the idea is to convert locals into its foot soldiers. It is a perfect plan, as by blurring the boundaries, or even presence of a war, the PRC has also gained the image of a so-called peace-seeking country.

However, through WeChat and other things, the PRC has been silently sending official news and directives to tens of thousands of Chinese students and immigrants here. Coupled with pro-PRC local Chinese language media and social platforms, PRC has gained more influence over a large part of the local Chinese community

than arguably Canada itself. It can mobilize, and has mobilized, large groups of Chinese here when needed.

Undoubtedly, Canadians have sensed something amiss after hearing all kinds of the PRC's undue influences in Canada, but are unsure whether the government is aware of the seriousness or has a plan to deal with them.

Sadly, such unpreparedness and attempts to even trivialize the danger were exposed in the Prime Minister's latest reactions to the news of the PRC's election interference. It is easy to underestimate China, which for decades kept its head low.

Fast-forward to its entry into WTO and the world has since been so bedazzled by its rocket-like rise that most forgot that PRC is a one-party authoritarian state that outlaws ideological pluralism. So communism should never be mixed up even by self-claimed progressives as a legitimate choice, since accepting it ironically means no more choice.

Accordingly, China's leaders do not need a popular vote to get in to or stay in power. For seven decades, they have developed a habit of ignoring the people's outcries or rights, but rely on propaganda, lies and brutal suppression to control dissent, which is easy to do when the three branches in the government are only supposed to serve the party's interest, and for decades China was separated from the world. With the PRC entering the world stage, its leaders have to struggle to maintain the validity of its problematic ideology and related wild claims in front of not just its people, but the world.

Within the secret warfare it is waging globally, it has spent billions on buying or expanding media, on propaganda, including getting full-page ads and inserts in prominent western papers, and by dismissing any criticism of the CCP as baseless lies or, lately, as—quote, unquote—anti-Chinese racism.

To prepare for the latter, they have for decades intentionally mixed up the use of the terms “CCP” the party, “China” the state, and “Chinese” the people. The purpose is to silence criticism against the CCP by equating that to criticism of all Chinese and also to rouse up a distorted sense of nationalism among all Chinese, including the diaspora.

The fact is the PRC's United Front Work Department has long been at work within the Chinese diaspora communities. The 1970s in particular were an opportune time for the CCP in Canada as Canada had just removed the last of all the discriminatory legislation against the Chinese, and with Chinese Canadians entering a more equitable and stable life, most old, local Chinese clan organizations discovered their historical mandate was suddenly gone.

In Vancouver, a notable example is the CBA of Vancouver. It is a sad story of a century-old Chinatown association whose name recognition was quickly identified as exploitable by the CCP and which in recent years was seen on full-page ads in Chinese-language papers dutifully leading hundreds of Chinese organizations echoing their support for China's draconian policies.

• (0955)

The above—

The Chair: Mr. Chu, we're beyond the five minutes at this point. I know that members of the committee are going to have lots of questions, so perhaps we can stop it there. I'm sorry to interrupt.

We're going to go to Ms. Wong and Ms. Lau, who, I understand, are going to be splitting the five minutes.

Will we start with you, Ms. Wong or Ms. Lau?

Ms. Ai-Men Lau (Advisor, Alliance Canada Hong Kong): We're going to be doing a little bit of back and forth, but—

• (1000)

The Chair: Okay. That's wonderful.

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: Hello.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for inviting us to testify today.

[*English*]

My name is Ai-Men Lau, and I'm an adviser to Alliance Canada Hong Kong. I'm currently based in Taiwan as a research analyst at the Chinese civil society organization Doublethink Lab.

Ms. Cherie Wong (Executive Director, Alliance Canada Hong Kong): Good morning, folks.

My name is Cherie Wong. I'm in Ottawa, and I am the executive director of Alliance Canada Hong Kong. Thank you for having us.

Foreign interference in our institutions is not new. Since the 1990s, Chinese dissident communities have raised attention regarding foreign overreach in every aspect of Canadian society—not just in elections but also in research, in civil society, in academic spaces and in private businesses. Though the diaspora are the primary target of foreign interference operations, Beijing targets all persons of influence, and many Canadians are unaware of their tactics.

This committee has also convened to discuss the issue of rising xenophobia in Canada. While I am glad to see such an open discussion on foreign interference in Canadian elections, it is disappointing to see media, political and social discourses leaving out important cultural insights from diaspora communities that have valuable and first-hand knowledge about things such as how to differentiate between a person of interest, a target of foreign influence, a willing accomplice, an active agent and someone with ties to the consulate. Some of these sensationalized perspectives have stoked racist and xenophobic sentiments towards Asians in Canada, and they do not offer the nuances that dissident voices from Tibet, Hong Kong and the Uighur communities can bring.

As a racialized diasporic organization, we are invited to comment only on xenophobia even when we have written reports and

heavily consulted on foreign influence in Canada. Meanwhile, governments and media are engaging with experts not in these spaces and trying to summarize their research on the very things that we, the diaspora, are seeing on the front lines.

Anti-Asian racism is growing in Canada, and threats of transnational state-sponsored violence have also intensified in recent years. The diaspora communities are excluded in the Canadian discourse while surviving Beijing's overreach in our communities. The notion that all ethnic Chinese communities are supporters of the Chinese authorities is racist and reductive. These communities are not a monolith but are vibrant and diverse in language, culture and politics.

Our community members have long observed foreign interference activities under our noses: riding nomination forms handed out during consulate-affiliated demonstrations, officials from the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office cozying up to elected officials, ethnic reporters attending Beijing-backed conferences, as well as photo ops and efforts to wine and dine business and political elites.

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: When the diaspora resists Beijing's transnational controls, dissidents' tires are slashed, activists are harassed and threatened, international students' study permits are declined and passport applications are rejected. Overt criticism of Beijing or pointing out the PRC's influence operations could cost people career opportunities, business prospects or research funding. They could be barred from going to the PRC, and even their personal safety and that of their extended family members could be jeopardized. Is it any wonder that many people self-censor due to Beijing's effective global system of control and surveillance?

Therefore, I would like to make the following recommendations for the committee to consider.

First, take a whole-of-society approach to addressing foreign interference as it is interconnected within all facets of Canadian society. Overlooking any aspect will only harm the most vulnerable communities.

Second, provide anonymous and secured spaces in which people can voice concerns in order to minimize repercussions from hostile foreign actors.

Third, engage with marginalized communities and centre cultural and linguistic sensitivity in your approach.

Our testimony today focuses on the communities' lived experience and expert knowledge of Beijing's foreign influence activities. I also want to take this opportunity to urge policy-makers to rebuild trust with diaspora communities, many of which have long felt unheard and erased.

It would also be naive to think that the PRC is the only nation engaging in these actions. We urge the committee to pursue country-agnostic solutions and also to look to the other diasporas for their insights.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

We look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lau and Ms. Wong.

It's probably late in Taiwan right now, I would imagine.

Mr. Barrett, you have six minutes for your intervention.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for joining us. I appreciate your work. You are experts in your field.

I'll start with you, Ms. Wong, because I saw a clip of your appearance on a Canadian panel show. You talked about the threat for you in appearing on the show. Just by virtue of appearing on television, it isn't the risk. The risk is a result of your work, where you've gained your expertise on foreign election interference.

Can you speak to what led to that point and how that threat would manifest itself for you?

• (1005)

Ms. Cherie Wong: I'd be happy to.

This is where the conversation gets a little complicated. When we talk about foreign interference and influence, it's not necessarily activities that we can outright identify and say, this is a foreign state intervening in my life.

Some of the examples I could give are that since last Friday when I appeared on CBC my home Internet has been incredibly slow, and I've been getting more spam calls, more phishing emails and more spam texts. Is that an act of foreign interference or influence? I don't know. I do not have the expertise to identify whether these are as a result of my appearance on media.

The overarching issue is that the community is afraid to appear because they have seen extreme cases where activists and dissidents are threatened through social media, through in-person events. We've had community members talk about their tires getting slashed after attending a June 4 memorial event.

The range of threats and interference into our lives is not a simple "this happened", or we could be able to identify it. We're not security experts.

I will point the committee to one of our past reports.

It's an investigation into Beijing's overreach globally in response to Hong Kongers' democratic demonstrations. We saw that there were global coordinated efforts in countering Hong Kongers' efforts to protest overseas.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Would you be able to send that report to the committee clerk?

Thank you.

Ms. Lau, could you talk about how Beijing attempts to influence politics in Canada?

I'm picking up on something Ms. Wong said about these tires being slashed and other activities. Is the climate of fear that's used, particularly against diaspora communities in Canada, one of the main tools of their influence and interference attempts?

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: A climate of fear is definitely a tool, however I wouldn't say it is necessarily a main tool. This is very much one of the strategies in a whole range of tactics that can be used.

Here is the tricky part that we need to address in discussing foreign interference. It is not just influencing politics, it's not just siloed to the ballot on the voting day, or whatnot. This reaches into our cultural and social infrastructures. It reaches into the research. I had mentioned research was another area.

In terms of politics, I would say that we have certainly seen efforts to increase civic engagement. We observed efforts to increase civic engagement by affiliated organizations. But it is very difficult for us to to outright point to one example and say, that is foreign interference.

It's a very tricky and nuanced subject to navigate through.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thank you.

Mr. Chu, with about a minute remaining for my time, can you share some examples of intimidation or influence attempts that targeted your group?

• (1010)

Mr. Bill Chu: [*Inaudible—Editor*] address it to the community rather than just out outgrowth, because over time, we have been in the community watching or monitoring how things are developing within the Chinese community in the Vancouver area, and we have seen the pro-CCP elements that enable the mobilization of a large group of people to do counterprotests.

Even when a group of people is concerned about the situation in Hong Kong, we noticed that there have been—and you have probably noticed—physical crashes, public ones on the street. That's something that, to us, is not acceptable. It's one of the prime examples. In my own group, by the way, there's also one individual who has received phone threats, direct threats in the evening at her home number, threatening her.

Those things are happening.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chu.

Mr. Fergus, you have six minutes.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much to our witnesses who are here.

My first questions will be for Ms. Lau and Ms. Wong. I really appreciated your presentation, as well as the recommendations that you had.

I understand the recommendation in terms of the whole-of-society approach.

Regarding your second one, to create an anonymous and secure space for people to be able to share information with Canadian authorities, so that we can have a better idea of who is acting in ways that put extraordinary pressure on the diaspora communities, could you elaborate on that?

Could you elaborate on it also with a view to how we ensure that the United Front Work Department doesn't use that same tool to spread more misinformation and mix up the cards by identifying people who we know are doing good work, like the work that the two of you are doing?

Ms. Cherie Wong: Thank you for that important question.

First off, we speak about the climate of fear, and that's why we need those anonymous and secure spaces where diaspora can have that trust and have that ability to express their concerns and their observations. It is true that the United Front Work Department and its agents will probably use that very same space to dilute the information that is being received by the Canadian government.

I think this is where we need to be proactive, not only in identifying the state actors who are active in Canada—this is the job of our enforcement and intelligence agencies—but also in doing public-source research. A lot of the time, the United Front publishes the individuals, the names and the organizations that are affiliated with them. If you use Chinese-language research and open-source research, you'll be able to identify these agencies and organizations.

I can hand it to Ai-Men, if she has anything to add.

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: Yes. I would say that if this is the concern, I would also look to civil society. I think public-source information is a really useful tool in this case. The information is quite easily searched. We just need the capacity to search for it, so civil society organizations can come and fill this gap.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

To the two of you, I hope you watched the previous panel. There was a suggestion that we should take a look at the Australian model of a public foreign agent registry.

Do you think that's a good move to take?

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: I would say that a foreign agent registry is certainly a good first step. However, I agree with the criticisms we heard at the previous panel. We also need to be cognizant of the fact that it is limited in scope.

I think looking toward Australia to see how the implementation of such an act has gone—or to other countries that may have also implemented similar acts—and what the impacts are.... Are we seeing the objectives being achieved? What are the lessons to learn from there?

• (1015)

Ms. Cherie Wong: I will jump in as well. The foreign influence transparency scheme in Australia is actually limited to political engagement. It still leaves a huge gap in other sectors such as research, private sector and civil society, where foreign agents and foreign-affiliated agents are able to use their resources and money to intervene. It is something to consider.

I think it's the right step, but it has to have a broader reach to be truly effective in countering foreign influence in Canada.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I can easily see that.

Is there a gold standard, internationally, of that kind of registry that does go across different fields...to make sure we have a fuller approach to making sure that we could identify these actors?

Ms. Cherie Wong: I think we can learn from a wide variety of different countries' legislation and take the best pieces of them. In my opinion, I don't see a gold standard anywhere in the world right now.

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: I would agree with Cherie on that.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I have one last point.

I couldn't agree more with your third recommendation in terms of engaging with diaspora communities, and for our intelligence services to have a better and deeper relationship to make sure that they have a fuller understanding of what is felt on the ground.

Very briefly, what recommendation would you have for us for making sure that our intelligence agencies do have connections? What steps can they take to have a connection with diaspora communities?

The Chair: This will have to be very brief.

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: First and foremost, it's having the understanding that the diaspora is not a monolithic community. We have Chinese Canadians who have histories with Canada for a very long time and then we have newcomers from all over the world.

It's understanding that the Chinese Canadian community may not have ties to the PRC, as well as understanding that, linguistically, Chinese is not the sole language of these groups.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will put my first question to Ms. Lau.

In your opinion, is the Government of Canada doing enough to make the members of the diaspora feel confident?

[English]

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: I would say that we certainly could take more steps.

I would really like to go back and highlight the point that we're asked to comment on certain tactics, but we should also be part of the solution moving forward. I would say that when we take a whole-of-society approach, you also need to centre the Chinese diaspora in these conversations and also engage with us to help come up with solutions.

Additionally, this includes not just the diaspora, but other targeted communities and the ones that are most vulnerable. One reason that we may be feeling ignored right now is that certainly there is a dominant voice. Today, it is very heartening to see that we have a diversity of voices coming to panels like this, but we definitely need to think about how the diaspora can help support addressing foreign interference.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you very much, Ms. Lau.

Ms. Wong, in the brief you filed, you talk about tactics used by the Chinese Communist Party. You list seven of them.

Could you briefly go through those seven tactics, to help us understand them a little better?

[English]

Ms. Cherie Wong: Absolutely.

I think, particularly in relation to this conversation, we recorded various acts of political influence and elite capture. These activities are aimed at powerful people in this country, particularly at the lower levels of governance, such as school boards, municipalities and regional governance. The goal is not necessarily to advance certain candidates but to achieve a more favourable environment for Beijing. That includes the private sector in China.

Another is the information and this narrative-discussion strategy. I think Cheuk earlier spoke about the astroturfing that exists in community spaces. That type of astroturfing happens in the media and in public discourse. United Front agents aim to present themselves as the sole voice and the sole authority on Chinese communities. They try to dominate the conversation and turn it into a more favourable narrative for Beijing.

Another very key section that this committee should definitely review is the United Front Work Department. It is not just a state agency but actually a party agency of the Chinese Communist Party. It aims to influence and expand the loyalty towards Beijing. It is occurring at all levels of government. It is happening globally, as well. We can learn from our partners on the global stage where and when we can counter United Front activities.

The other ones I think are pretty obvious: the harassment and intimidation facing diaspora communities. This continues to be a very huge challenge and concern for us. We'll see whether there will be safety for diaspora communities after they speak out. It's quite concerning.

The last one I would like to go over quickly is academic influence and vulnerability on intellectual property transfer. Due to the vulnerable funding environment in Canada, a lot of the time the CCP utilizes its capital and resources so that it is able to fund specific research in Canadian institutions. In the end, it'll be able to trade the intellectual property for a very low cost.

• (1020)

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: In your report you also mention that many people are afraid to criticize the Chinese government because it could cost them career or business opportunities.

On a macroeconomic level, do you believe that Canada is too dependent on its economic relationship with China and that this prevents it from acting in certain circumstances?

[English]

Ms. Cherie Wong: I think it's true to say that there is a level of dependency on the community level. Due to the underfunding of diaspora and racialized communities, we often have to look elsewhere for funding resources. That becomes a point of vulnerability where we're able to obtain funding from less reliable or suspicious sources.

That goes for every sector in Canada, really. In academic institutions, when researchers lack funding, they look for funding elsewhere. Whoever gives them the most funding for the least amount of burden.... That becomes a very vulnerable position for Canadians and Canadian institutions.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: In a few words, since I don't have much time left, could you describe the purpose of the Chinese Communist Party when it carries out such interference?

[English]

Ms. Cherie Wong: There is a global ambition that is being intensified under the current CCP leadership. It's not only to seek ideological alliance. It's really about advancing its economic and political power globally. We see that in various means, not only through foreign influence and interference but also through the economic investments that it's undertaking. Examples are its belt and road initiative and its Arctic silk road initiative. Really, it's just trying to expand its powers where possible, challenge international norms and ultimately aim to rewrite them.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Wong.

We have Mr. Green next for six minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Green.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you.

Welcome to all the witnesses, some of whom I've engaged with directly, and I'm certainly familiar with your work.

Ms. Wong, in the CBC article entitled, “We know where your parents live”, Hong Kong activists say that the Canadian police are helpless against online threats. You recounted the threats you've received and the inability of police to hold those accountable.

I wanted to bring that up, because this tactic was also referenced, I think, in our previous panel as well. I can imagine how unsettling that would be for anybody, specifically people who might have family back home or even receive threats here locally that might be veiled.

Can you describe the impacts of our law enforcement's being unable to help when it comes to doxing or any other forms of harassment?

• (1025)

Ms. Cherie Wong: First and foremost, we live in a country where there's a long history of systemic and institutionalized violence towards racialized peoples. I think, particularly for the Chinese community, many of us are still fresh with the memories of head tax and other forms of exclusion.

To begin with, there is a level of distrust and a level of insecurity to approach the police on this issue. On the other hand, when our fellow activists like Cheuk—and I'm fairly new at this compared to activists like Cheuk—tell me that they've been reporting acts of harassment and intimidation, that they've been reporting since the 1990s, and no action has been taken, then it really deters me from ever going to the police in the first place.

I, however, have reported one of my incidents to the Vancouver Police Department, who didn't even bother enough to meet me in person to talk about the threat that I faced that day. I think in that moment I realized that policing is not the solution to the threats and intimidation we are facing.

Mr. Matthew Green: I can certainly appreciate that perspective.

Previous testimony suggested that resources be made available perhaps to help scan phones and devices and provide technological solutions for counter-intelligence, basically to help in a defensive role.

I want to try to ensure that we have some good recommendations coming forward about things that we can control as a Canadian government versus things that just might be out there on the Internet and so on and so forth.

One of your recommendations also included increasing government funding for grassroots and diasporic organizations. Has your organization considered ways within your own community that you can help keep yourselves safe in terms of providing resources to community members that might be beneficial for, as you referenced, your Internet, the potential for surveillance and that type of thing, kind of countersurveillance measures that we might be able to help support?

Ms. Cherie Wong: I really appreciate what you mentioned. Having someone who could help check our phones and help check our cybersecurity network, I think that's something that most dissidents—almost all dissidents—would take advantage of. We do not have any guidelines aside from what we develop. It is community knowledge that allows us to help each other right now.

For our organization, we have certain security measures that we ask all of our volunteers to follow such as having a VPN, having an alias email and having a second phone, if necessary. These are all extra steps that require resources and dedicated funding, and it is simply not possible for all dissidents and all Chinese Canadians to have all of these resources so they can protect themselves. I think there needs to be a bit more of a systemic change and attitude change in how we address these types of issues.

Mr. Matthew Green: Mr. Chu, from your life's work, can you comment on other resources that might be made available to folks in the diaspora who are living here that might be helpful in counter-surveillance types of efforts, or I should say an effort to defend against foreign surveillance and foreign intimidation?

Mr. Bill Chu: I think in our work we constantly run into the almost dysfunctional narrative between the RCMP and CSIS, both of which are supposed to work together, but we find that there's a big gap there. We complain to the RCMP, but nothing really happens, as the others have mentioned.

As far as CSIS is concerned, they are also painfully aware that some of their research and information did not really trickle down to all the politicians.

I think, right off the bat, that it's also the system itself that is not functioning well.

Mr. Matthew Green: Can I ask a question specific to that? Please feel free not to answer, as I don't want to put anybody in jeopardy asking this.

Could it be helpful or has it ever been the case...does CSIS ever let folks in your community know that they're a target? Is that information ever shared? That might help them safeguard.... Is that something you might think could be helpful if they had information to share with you as a target or is that maybe a national security kind of...?

• (1030)

Mr. Bill Chu: I think for the average Chinese Canadian, they are not aware of the exact role of CSIS. Most people, if they ever got threatened, would go to the RCMP, but if they approach the RCMP and it doesn't go anywhere, as far as they are concerned, then they lose trust in the system.

That rebuilding of the trust is very important. It goes right up to the top, including what our Prime Minister has been responding with, which is very disappointing to say the least.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Thank you, Mr. Chu.

That concludes our first round of questioning. This is just a reminder that we're going to go Conservative, Liberal and then two and a half, and two and a half, for the Bloc and the NDP. That will be the end of the panel.

I know Mr. Villemure has something he'd like to say at the end.

Mr. Kurek, I have you on the list.

Mr. Barrett, go ahead.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to split my time with Mr. Kurek.

If you'll just indulge me, first I'm going to give notice of motion:

That the Committee, in relation to its study of foreign interference, invite Katie Telford, Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, to appear alone for three hours, provided that she be sworn or affirmed.

I'll turn the floor over to Mr. Kurek.

The Chair: Thank you.

The notice of motion is accepted.

Go ahead, Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let me first, again, with this panel thank the witnesses for their bravery and activism and work in fighting both for your community and for the rights of the Chinese diaspora in Canada and around the world. I appreciate that you are involved in this conversation.

Mr. Chu, in your opening statement you talked about the Prime Minister's reaction and that it seemed to "trivialize"—I think it was the word that you used—the seriousness of the issue.

I understand that you have written the Prime Minister outlining some of your concerns about the communist dictatorship and Beijing's interference in Canada.

I'd like to give you about a minute, if you could, to expand on what you wrote to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Bill Chu: I think it's not so much what I wrote, but our group actually wrote an open letter. Essentially, it's trying to underline the fact that so much has been happening, right in our community, and we are not seeing the appropriate responses. We urge the government to focus on simple things like the Chinese language media and what they are doing within the community.

I can't recall exactly the words we said, but essentially it's that under the cover of another language they can get away with a different version of reality. That's what we are facing as a community and that's also been causing fear among so many people because once you have a government, which is a one-party government and only has one focus, then we are not.... We are the only community that's really exposed to that kind of brainwashing, almost. In other words, the kinds of narratives and philosophy, ideology, are different from what the average Canadian is exposed to and that's a very oppressive feeling.

We don't have diversity in terms of our news commentating. It is getting narrower and narrower. It's a shrinking kind of freedom that we're having in that sense.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you for that.

Just to clarify, for that open letter that you sent to the Prime Minister and the government, did you receive a response?

Mr. Bill Chu: Not that we can recall.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Thank you for that.

You mentioned something that I found really concerning and it's that the communist dictatorship in Beijing is exploiting the Chinese diaspora and, in particular, the history—and in many cases the rich history—that makes up much of Canada.

I'd like to give you an opportunity to expand a little bit on that. You had mentioned an organization in Vancouver. How does the CCP exploit the Chinese diaspora? You'd mentioned language newspapers and news sources and heritage. In about the 50 seconds that I have left, could you expand on that a little bit?

• (1035)

Mr. Bill Chu: First of all, the Chinese community underwent a long history of discrimination in Canada until the 1960s and 1970s. Only then was all of that legislation removed. The CCP is trying to exploit that history, in order to remind most Chinese Canadians they need the motherland to protect them; that's almost their way of expressing it. They are trying to combine it with the current situation—the tension between east and west—to suggest that all of this is China-bullying. They use the word "racism" as an excuse to deflect any criticisms launched against the CCP.

Those are the ways in which they use history to try to pull at the heartstrings of so many Chinese Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chu.

Mr. Bains, you have five minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for coming here, joining us and trying to be part of the solution.

I'm trying to determine the impact of multimedia messages and what it means to participate in our electoral process.

I live in Richmond, British Columbia. It's probably one of the most diverse cities in all of Canada. In fact, the United Nations recognized a five-kilometre stretch in the city called the "Highway to Heaven." We have over 28 different faith-based organizations situated side by side. I've lived there my whole life.

I've tried to engage with communities. One community stands out. I know Ms. Wong mentioned the fear, earlier—everybody has. We often try to engage the Chinese community. If you're knocking on their door, they're not opening it. There's a lack of registering and giving out personal information and those kinds of things.

If we look at messages they're receiving on social media platforms, how can our security services distinguish between materials written in Cantonese or Mandarin that originate from a government source in China and those written by Chinese Canadians here in Canada?

Could Ms. Wong answer, please?

Ms. Cherie Wong: I can point folks to our report, “In Plain Sight”, particularly the “Information and Narrative Discursion Warfare” section. While the CCP uses their foremost state platforms on WeChat or Weibo to talk about their ideology and narratives, those narratives are also repeated by media outlets that have friendly relationships with the CCP. We see that through training camps, where Beijing hosts ethnic Chinese-language media from all around the world. They talk about how to tell a good China story. While these ethnic Chinese-language media aren't exactly state outlets, they are repeating state narratives. These are the types of grey areas and nuances we have to navigate and learn how to counter.

Another aspect is the use of influencers and key social media opinion leaders to tell China's story. While these are individuals who are not state-affiliated, their narratives parrot the state's narrative points. When we read this coverage and these types of posts, it's clear to us, in the community, that they're parroting exactly what the state would have said. It would be a lot more difficult—

• (1040)

Mr. Parm Bains: I'm going to—

Ms. Cherie Wong: —for people who don't have digital literacy training or background knowledge to identify these as state narratives.

Mr. Parm Bains: If we're comparing—

Ms. Cherie Wong: I think my colleague, Ms. Lau, would actually have a lot to add on this.

Mr. Parm Bains: Yes, maybe Ms. Lau can join in and just give us a comparison of, say, domestic misinformation or disinformation, even in local Canadian content or American content.

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: I just want to also point out, when we talk about the interconnected facets of foreign interference, Cherie had brought up the point that a lot of the underfunding of these communities also contributes to these problems. For example, for media, a lot of the incentive to reproduce party lines is due to business deals being opened up to the China market. There are levers there that would also...for example, the difference between different social media platforms in China and how they interact with overseas media. That's something to look into, certainly.

I can say that in observing Chinese language media, there are not a lot of resources being funded for ethnic reporters. A lot of these companies are marketing companies instead. There's no real, I would say, original reporting being done in Chinese language media that is being reproduced.

Mr. Parm Bains: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: That's the time, Mr. Bains.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chu, in a few words, do you think the Canadian government understands China well?

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Chu: Simply by looking at their responses to so many infiltrations and interferences that happen, I don't think they are

aware of the fact that China is using a lot of government-organized but non-governmental organizations, both locally and overseas. Some even have totally apparently harmless names, for example, the Chinese Students and Scholars Association. Those kinds of global organizations are literally controlling so many university student bodies in Canada and elsewhere.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you, Mr. Chu. I apologize, but I don't have much time to speak.

Ms. Wong, I'll ask you the same question: do you think the Canadian government understands China well?

[*English*]

Ms. Cherie Wong: Without people with cultural and linguistic expertise in making these decisions, no, we do not have the capacity to truly understand Beijing or the leadership right now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure: Ms. Wong, do you believe that a public and independent inquiry into Canada-China relations and all the interference that we currently see would be a good thing?

[*English*]

The Chair: We may have lost Ms. Wong here. I'll stop your time, Mr. Villemure. I see her screen has been frozen.

Ms. Wong, are you back?

Ms. Cherie Wong: I apologize. I believe I'm having some Internet issues, but if you can hear me, I can provide an answer.

The Chair: I think you referenced that in your opening statement, did you not?

Ms. Cherie Wong: Yes, it's almost as if they were watching.

The Chair: Go ahead. I'm starting the time again.

Ms. Cherie Wong: Thank you so much.

I think there are crucial needs to rebuild trust in our democratic institutions and for the public to be able to watch and understand what's happening. It's very important.

On the other hand, I also understand that the diaspora communities who would have wanted to participate in this conversation and in this inquiry may not feel safe in a public forum and may not feel safe in an open investigation. I look to my community to see what type of engagement they would like to have in looking into foreign interference and influence in Canada.

• (1045)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Wong.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

[English]

Mr. Green, for the final intervention, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much.

Ms. Lau, you had mentioned, I think, a very important point about country-agnostic solutions. Would you agree that the sole fixation in this particular case, solely pertaining to the allegations of Chinese interference, perhaps might miss the point, particularly as it arises to finding solutions that would hopefully safeguard against other diaspora communities?

Could you just reflect on that, and maybe share why you think it's important to have all of the communities involved be a part of this process and not just to leave it up to one diaspora community?

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: That's a great question.

With respect to the sole focus right now, I think one of the benefits might be.... As was previously mentioned in the other panel, sunlight is best. We definitely need to learn from the tactics. We definitely need to see what these tactics are to inoculate ourselves from them. At the same time, however, foreign interference and electoral meddling are nothing new, and we can reasonably expect them to be a problem and a challenge in the future for all of us to address.

I do hope that while this is in the spotlight at the moment, we are considering what solutions we have moving forward and how we can protect ourselves and be proactive with these solutions.

I also think, for example, on the issue of foreign transnational repression, which is something that was brought up as well, it is not just the Chinese diaspora that is facing this issue. It is other communities, such as Syrian, Iranian or Ukrainian. We need to look at these other communities to see not only that this is a challenge that is siloed but also that we are interconnected and that we have lessons and things we can learn from each other.

I think as well, as do, I'm sure, many of my fellow activists—Cherie and Bill can also speak to this—that it's a very lonely world to be targeted by foreign transnational repression. Something we always say to each other is that we think we are crazy for thinking that something is happening. When we talk about it and we see that this is an actual issue for other people as well, we also build community resilience.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you so much to all the witnesses present. We certainly appreciate your testimony here today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

That concludes this round of questioning and this panel.

On behalf of the committee and on behalf of Canadians, I want to thank you, Mr. Chu, Ms. Wong and Ms. Lau, for taking the time today to appear before this committee. The information you provided and will provide has been extremely valuable. I think all committee members will agree on that. Thank you.

We're going to continue on right now.

[Translation]

Mr. Villemure, I understand you have a notice of motion to present. You have the floor.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you.

I will table a motion, which may have been distributed by the clerk in both official languages. I think all parties have a copy already. I will read it:

That, as part of its study on foreign interference, the committee invite Mr. Raphaël Glucksmann to testify as Chair of the Special Commission on Interference in the Democratic Processes of the European Union, including Disinformation; that the committee allocate a minimum of one hour to hear the said witness during one of the first three Friday morning meetings scheduled for study, prioritizing first the meeting on Friday, March 24, and then the one on March 31 or April 17, 2023.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Villemure.

I would like to say that Mr. Glucksmann is already on our witness list. I think you want to specify dates for his appearance. It may be difficult for March 24.

[English]

However, it's within my purview as chair to make sure we can look at March 31 or April 17.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. René Villemure: My main request, beyond the date, is that he be heard alone for one hour, given his function and the reports he has written in the past that directly relate to our study.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Villemure has put the motion on the floor. Is there any objection to this? I think we can have consensus on this.

Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

Hon. Greg Fergus: The only objection I would have is to having a single-person panel. I think it's a good idea to have more discussion, but I think there are some other people similar to the witness proposed by Mr. Villemure who could accompany that person on the panel. I would be happy to submit some names to you.

● (1050)

The Chair: We do have a motion.

Mr. Green, I see your hand up.

Mr. Matthew Green: Thank you very much.

I support the motion. I think the higher the subject matter expertise the better. But if it is the case that there isn't consensus around the table to have the witness solely for one hour, what might help—because, respectfully, some are limited to two-and-a-half-minute rounds in this quick, rapid-fire kind of way—would be the committee's considering of the possibility of allowing that witness to stay over both panels so we could continue the questioning.

That's another option I just thought of here, but I'm willing to support the motion as it is.

The Chair: Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Chair, will this be the last meeting on this issue?

The Chair: I think we need to have that discussion as a committee. I'm going to leave a little time when we get back to that first meeting. I have spoken to all of you about where we go with this given the circumstances at PROC. I thought today's meeting was extremely valuable; it kind of gave us a different perspective. I think we need to have further discussions. I would anticipate that we're going to have at least one more meeting on this particular issue. Then we need to have that discussion perhaps as early as the Tuesday when we get back as to which direction we want to go.

This will happen, though it may not happen actually on the 24th. That may be difficult. The 31st or the 17th are probably two likely dates this particular situation will occur if this motion passes.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Is there a possibility that we can have this discussion at subcommittee to try to figure out what the frame is?

If it's going to be one last meeting, we would want to make sure that even if it's two panels.... I like the suggestion of maybe having an overlap. Having this guest overlap, or if there is an opportunity to have a couple more people put on or if we're going to have two or three more meetings, I would just like to know.

The Chair: We do have a fairly robust witness list at this point that we could draw from. It's not like we're cherry-picking witnesses here. If we're going to agree on this or not, I would like to see this happen by March 31 if possible.

Mr. Villemure, would you be amenable to having this witness appear on two panels for that day?

[*Translation*]

Would that be possible, or do you insist on this witness appearing for an hour?

Mr. René Villemure: I would not want to delay or impede the work of the committee. That said, since Mr. Glucksmann was the chair of a committee that wrote two reports on the subject, we will surely have several questions for him. It's not set in stone, but the reason I'm moving this motion is simply so that we have enough time to give everyone an opportunity to ask him questions.

The Chair: All right.

So the motion is before us. I would prefer that we settle this matter. If the motion does not receive unanimous consent, we can proceed to a vote.

[*English*]

Mr. Fergus, go ahead.

Hon. Greg Fergus: We want to support this. I just want to know in what context.

Is this in the context of six more meetings or in the context of one or two more meetings?

The Chair: I agree with your position that we should have a subcommittee meeting on this. I'm going to propose that to the vice-chairs. I would suggest that this would likely be just one more

meeting on this particular issue. Of course, that's subject to any discussion with the subcommittee.

• (1055)

Hon. Greg Fergus: With that understanding, then we're comfortable with this. We don't need to do a vote. We're always depending on everybody to act in good faith.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mike.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Will it be one more meeting following that meeting, or one more meeting after today?

I'm still unclear on that point.

The Chair: You see, that's the problem I'm having, because I can't commit to the 24th.

Mr. Michael Barrett: No, no, I appreciate that.

The Chair: So, if we're going to have this, then we're going to have to have it on the 31st.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Sorry, Mr. Chair, what was the initial motion? It prescribed six?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Okay. We're good. We can take the other stuff, the broader discussion, to a future meeting or a subcommittee.

The Chair: In the original motion there were six meetings for the foreign interference study. Today was the start of that. If you recall, the work plan was that we were going to deal with foreign interference every Friday for the next five weeks. The 24th, I don't believe is possible to include that. That would likely mean that if we were to do this on the 31st, we would have two more meetings on this. However, I would subject that to any discussion that we have at subcommittee at this point.

That's the problem I'm running into.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I don't want to drag this out. I'm sorry. This is a genuine question.

I just thought that when we had talked about it, there were informal discussions where we had talked about not wanting to duplicate the efforts of other committees, so chances are it's not going to run out the whole six.

The Chair: It may not. Where this discussion has to happen is at subcommittee. That's the direction I would want to take with this. I'm not even sure at this point. Again, it's subject to subcommittee. We may in fact take the 24th meeting and have that on a different subject. If we're not able to have it.... I don't know at this point.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Villemure, you have the floor.

Mr. René Villemure: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We had asked for and agreed on six meetings. We had agreed not to do any duplicate work, and so far I don't think we have done any. Proposing that Mr. Glucksmann appear is not duplication of work either.

It is difficult to determine whether there will be one, two or three meetings. I, for one, respect the fact that we should avoid duplication of work. However, our committee can approach the subject from a different angle than the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, and I want to see that happen.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Could we ask the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, where you have a majority, to discuss the motion?

Mr. René Villemure: I request the vote.

The Chair: All right.

The motion has been made and it is in order. It's clear to me as chair that we don't have unanimous consent.

I therefore move that we proceed to a vote.

[*English*]

Madam Clerk, would you take the vote on the motion that was presented.

I'll remind committee as well that this witness is scheduled to appear. He is on the list. It's just the one hour and very specific dates. That's what directs this.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 8; nays 0)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Clerk.

The motion does carry. I will take the advice of Mr. Fergus and call a subcommittee meeting so that we can discuss this further. Leave it at my discretion to work with the clerk on when this particular witness will come. We will accommodate the motion that has just passed.

That's it. Have a great break week. Enjoy time with your family, everyone.

Thank you to the analysts, and thank you to the clerk and all the technicians in the room.

I especially want to thank my wife, who is here today.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: She has been here this week, looking after me with my bad back: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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