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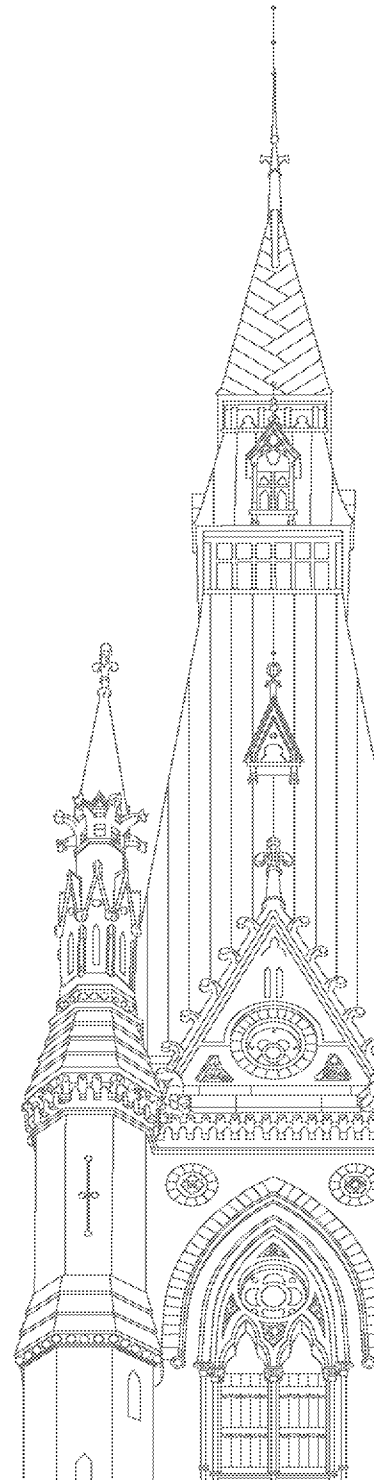
Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



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• (1005)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 56 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The committee is meeting today pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a) and the motion agreed to on February 21, 2023, concerning foreign election interference.

Before we start, I remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the chair. The clerk and I will maintain a consolidated speaking list of members wishing to speak.

Before I get into the first hour, Mr. Julian, I see that your hand is up. We love hearing your voice, and I can't hear it. Would you like to unplug and plug in again? I understand a sound check has taken place for all members joining us in a virtual capacity.

I can hear you now, Mr. Julian. Go ahead.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm not sure why, even when the sound check works, there's an initial problem, but I appreciate your patience.

I want to flag, as Mr. Cooper did yesterday, that following our questioning of the witnesses today, I will be moving the motion that I advised the committee of yesterday. My intention is to move it following the witnesses. It could mean an extension of time past the scheduled deadline, but hopefully we will come to a consensus and a quick conclusion on it. This is the notice of motion around the public inquiry.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian. I recall your mentioning that several times yesterday. I will respect that and give you the floor after our witnesses. I appreciate your providing the space to ensure that people who have confirmed their attendance are able to come and provide us information.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Chair, very briefly, we will be dealing with motions after we hear from witnesses, as Mr. Julian has indicated, but we will be dealing with the Conservative motion first, which was shut down by Peter Julian to cover up for the Prime Minister and to block Katie Telford from appearing before this committee. She was a material witness for getting to the bottom of what the Prime Minister knew, when he knew it and what he did or failed to do about Beijing's election interference.

Lastly, I have to say that while I recognize our clerk is working hard under tight timelines to have Elections Canada, CSIS and the RCMP—all critical agencies with respect to the matter of interference—crammed in a two-hour period, it is really inadequate. While I appreciate the witnesses being here today, given those two hours for the RCMP, Elections Canada and CSIS, the only answer following today is that we'll need to hear from them again.

The Chair: That's excellent.

I see your hand, Mr. Julian.

These are public meetings, and I think we were able to see yesterday the courtesy offered to you, Mr. Cooper, when you asked for the floor following the panels. Members came together to ensure that was addressed. Mr. Julian has followed a similar model. We actually have three hours, not two hours, for today's meeting, and perhaps we can come to an understanding as to the order.

Right now, Mr. Julian has asked me if he can have the floor following the panels, and then I will let you have conversations.

Mr. Julian, do you have to add anything to this right now?

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to clarify the marked and disturbing misinformation of Mr. Cooper. We were actually discussing the dating and amendment that would have allowed Ms. Telford to come to committee, and he tried to monkey with it. It was unfortunate and ridiculous.

The Chair: With that, I am going to let everyone watching and present know that we'll be here for more than three hours today.

I would like to proceed with our business of the day, as I know people are very interested in it.

For the first hour, from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m., we will have Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer from Elections Canada, and Caroline Simard, commissioner of Canada elections from the office of the commissioner of Canada elections. I understand each of you will be providing remarks.

Mr. Perrault, we will begin with you, and then we'll come to Madam Simard.

Mr. Perrault, the floor is yours. Welcome to PROC.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Perrault (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to be clear up front that I am not in a position to comment on the accuracy of the information in the Globe and Mail article referenced in the motion passed by the committee on February 21, as this information has not been shared with me, before or since.

While I urge you to consider the article with some caution, it raises issues that are extremely concerning for our democracy and for our sovereignty.

Foreign interference is not a partisan issue. It can target elected officials and members of all levels of government, from any party.

[*English*]

Canadians have a right to know that our institutions have clear mandates, that they have the tools to pursue those mandates, that there are mechanisms for collaboration and sharing information where appropriate, and that the laws are adequate. Canadians also have a right to know that every effort is deployed to tackle the threat of foreign interference. I would add in that regard that I commend the work of this committee. While it is not possible to draw a straight line between foreign influence and the outcome of a particular election, acts of foreign interference attack the fairness of the electoral process and must be addressed to protect our democracy.

When I appeared on November 1, I spoke of the importance of a whole-of-government approach. I would add that political parties, electoral district associations and local campaigns also have crucial roles to play. Foreign interference is conducted through a range of tactics, and countering those tactics requires an array of measures, both legislative and non-legislative.

Several suggestions have been made within and outside of this committee. None of them, including recommendations that I have made, provide a full and complete answer. We cannot totally shield ourselves from foreign interference, especially in an open and free society, but we can and we must increase our resiliency.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perrault.

Go ahead, Madam Simard.

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard (Commissioner of Canada Elections, Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate the invitation to appear before the committee again today.

As Commissioner of Canada Elections, I take the issue of foreign interference in our elections very seriously.

The Canada Elections Act defines the scope of my mandate and covers very specific activities related to foreign interference. This role is complementary to others who play a key role in protecting our democracy and with whom we collaborate.

Since my last appearance on November 1, additional allegations of foreign interference have circulated in the public environment and have led to complaints to my office.

I am seized with the importance of this issue, as well as the need to reassure Canadians under these exceptional circumstances.

I would therefore like to inform you that we have conducted a rigorous and thorough review of every piece of information that is being brought to our attention concerning allegations of foreign interference in both the 2019 and 2021 general elections.

[*English*]

I can also confirm that, as I speak, this review is ongoing to determine whether there is any tangible evidence of wrongdoing under the Canada Elections Act. This work is being conducted impartially and independently from the government of the day, the public service and even the Chief Electoral Officer.

I know that the outcome of this work will allow me to determine whether the allegations have merit under our act. This will not permit me to draw conclusions about the validity of election results overall or in a particular riding.

For reasons of confidentiality, I will not be able to provide further details regarding the ongoing review, complaints or any other information received by my office. As it is with any investigative body, confidentiality is essential to protect the presumption of innocence and, of course, to avoid compromising the integrity of our work. I would, however, invite anyone who has tangible information about potential wrongdoing under the Canada Elections Act, including any attempts at foreign interference in a federal election, to contact my office.

I would be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Madam Simard.

Now we will get into six-minute rounds of questions and answers or questions and comments, however you want to do them.

We will start with Mr. Cooper, who will be followed by Ms. Sahota.

[*Translation*]

Then it will be Ms. Normandin's turn, followed by Mr. Julian's.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Commissioner Simard, it's really simple: When did the Prime Minister's Office contact you about Beijing's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections so that investigations could be opened?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: I thank the member for his question.

As I pointed out in my opening remarks, information surrounding the work we're doing is protected by confidentiality. Therefore, I can't provide that information.

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Did the Prime Minister's Office contact you, and if so, on what date?

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: Once again, I will give the same answer. Confidentiality—

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay. You're not going to answer that. That's fine.

You've said that complaints have been provided to Elections Canada. How many? Did they pertain to Beijing's interference in our elections, yes or no?

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: First of all, I'd like to clarify that complaints are directed to my office, the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections, and not to Elections Canada. So I'm going to speak for the organization that I lead, the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections.

In my first appearance, I did refer to the complaints that had been submitted to my office. I will not repeat that here, so as not to take up too much of Mr. Cooper's time. I've already provided the information on the number of complaints. I have also confirmed that—

• (1015)

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper: How many?

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: For the 2019 election, we received 158 complaints regarding 10 situations.

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Were there four complaints?

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: No. There were 158 complaints related to the 2019 election, and those concerned 10 different situations. For the 2021 election, we received 16 complaints about 13 different situations.

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper: I asked you how many complaints have been brought forward. My question, if it wasn't clear, is this: How many complaints have been brought forward since you last appeared here, and are they related to Beijing's election interference?

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: Those issues have been dealt with. To respond to that question specifically, I will say that we have received complaints. Some of them are in the public domain, which is why I can provide that information here today.

Members will understand that, ordinarily, the confidentiality rule would prevent me from even answering that question. However, to reassure Canadians, once again, I am providing as much information as I can, and I can confirm that we have received complaints related to—

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

Mr. Perrault, I seek clarification to ensure that I understood you correctly. Did you say regarding the information contained in the Globe and Mail report that no one has shared the contents of that report with Elections Canada?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That is correct. Any information that on the face of it may relate to a possible offence under the Canada Elections Act would normally flow directly to the commissioner.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Commissioner, has that information—the contents of the allegations contained in the Globe and Mail report—been shared with Elections Canada, with your office?

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: If I understand the question correctly, I am being asked if I share information I receive about complaints made to me with Elections Canada. The answer is no. All information I receive is considered confidential. I act independently.

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Look, journalists have reviewed CSIS documents that indicate there was interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections. Why does Elections Canada not have that information? If journalists have that information, why don't you?

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: Is the question directed at me?

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper: It's for whomever.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That is a question to ask the sources of the journalists.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Sir, are you saying to me that CSIS has not provided Elections Canada with any information about interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections and that you don't have any information?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We have been working with security agencies, and we understand the security environment. There are known risks and known threats regarding foreign interference. This is not news, but in terms of specific elements, factual elements, they have not shared them with me, as I said.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Have you ask for that?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Any matters that relate to compliance with rules in the Canada Elections Act—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Has Ms. Simard asked for it?

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: We have memoranda of understanding with CSIS that frame the sharing of information and assistance when required. We have the same kind of protocols with the RCMP. Again, I would tell you that all of that is covered by confidentiality, as far as I'm concerned.

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper: You can't say, or you won't say.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We can't.

Mr. Michael Cooper: How much time do I have?

The Chair: Thank you for that exchange.

As a reminder, if there are two people speaking on the mike at the same time, the interpreters have to pick a language. There are many people, I'm sure, who are interested in this, so I would be mindful of making sure that one person is speaking at a time.

Ms. Sahota, you have up to six minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Going off the interaction just now, I want to ask the Chief Electoral Officer and the commissioner whether what they can say today in their testimony is any different from what they would be able to review at a public inquiry.

• (1020)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: As far as I'm concerned, for one or the other, it's the same thing.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Go ahead, Commissioner.

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: It's the same thing for me.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'm going to move on to the Canada Elections Act. Some changes were made previously by the current government through Bill C-76. There were measures introduced in legislation to keep out foreign influence, including through money, in our elections.

I'll start with Mr. Perrault. I'm wondering if you could explain a bit about what changes were implemented by the current government.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: The main rule that I can speak to is related to what is called "undue influence by foreigners" in the act. That relates to a prohibition of incurring any expense during the election period to promote or oppose a candidate or a party. There are exceptions for a personal opinion or for media, for example. This is a restriction that applies only during the election period, and in my recommendation to Parliament, I suggested that it be extended beyond that period.

There was also a significant review of the third party funding regime. That was not specifically aimed at foreign interference, but there are aspects of the regime that do target that. I have also made some recommendations to Parliament there to reinforce rules on how third parties may use their own funds for regulated activities, given how this could allow foreign funding to penetrate our system. I have made some recommendations in that regard.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Were additional powers provided to the commissioner through that piece of legislation, through the Canada Elections Act, implemented by the current government?

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: Yes, administrative powers, more specifically administrative monetary penalties, were added to the Canada Elections Act. It's a good start. That said, I have been asked before if any improvements could be made. It's important to note that right

now I have to use criminal powers to get the job done. So specific administrative powers are missing.

It is certainly counterintuitive to talk about administrative monetary penalties when foreign interference is involved, but that is already in the act. What's missing are the powers of preservation and disclosure of evidence, as well as the power to compel someone to testify and the power to compel someone to produce documents, among other things.

In addition, current sanctions are grossly inadequate. For example, with respect to businesses, the cap is \$5,000. They see it as the cost of doing business in some circumstances.

Therefore, to take full advantage of the advances made in the past in this area, it would be important to add powers and also increase the penalty amounts.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you. I think that is something this committee can definitely recommend doing, since we are all interested in making sure that the integrity of our elections is kept strong.

You mentioned a little while ago a mechanism. A memorandum of understanding is perhaps what you had referred to, and that is in place for Elections Canada to receive information. You mentioned just now that you have to use criminal powers to investigate any further, lay charges or give penalties. You said that you have a relationship with CSIS for this memorandum of understanding and with the RCMP. Can you elaborate a bit on how that co-operation works?

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: First, I would like to clarify that the memoranda of understanding I was talking about were established long before these allegations of foreign interference. The allegations are getting stronger, and I feel that other such memoranda of understanding they emerge in the future.

The important thing to remember is that we must work together. I can assure you that our partners can count on our full cooperation, and CSIS and the RCMP have confirmed this to me recently.

• (1025)

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: This question is for the commissioner specifically.

Have you found that through the investigations you're currently undertaking, CSIS and the RCMP have been bringing you information in order for you to undertake those investigations?

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: As I explained, I can't share information that is provided to me. I can simply confirm that the relationships are well established and productive.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

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

Thank you for being here, Ms. Simard and Mr. Perrault.

I will begin with some background. The Globe and Mail reported that the Chinese Consulate allegedly assisted a Toronto area candidate in his campaign and that CSIS recommended to the Prime Minister that the candidate be removed from the list of candidates. The Prime Minister responded that it was not within CSIS' purview to make recommendations on who should be a candidate.

As Commissioner of Canada Elections or Chief Electoral Officer, would you feel you had the legitimacy needed to make that kind of recommendation if you received credible information that a candidate was subject to foreign interference?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I can only speak hypothetically, because I don't know where information like that would come from. Normally, it would come from CSIS, not from some other source. That said, if I had the information, CSIS is the one I would share it with.

Ms. Christine Normandin: What about you, Commissioner?

Ms. Caroline Simard: Again, in my case, I could report the information based on a very specific framework. On the other hand, if work was being done under those circumstances, the information would be made public once official action was taken.

Ms. Christine Normandin: So I understand that if you had information that a candidate was subject to foreign interference, neither of you could make a recommendation to have that candidate removed from the ballot.

Ms. Caroline Simard: As far as I'm concerned, I have a mandate to ensure compliance and enforce the law. I do that job, and it doesn't include making that type of recommendation.

Ms. Christine Normandin: What about you, as Chief Electoral Officer?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: The rules governing the nomination race are set by each party. However, in the event of national security issues, CSIS deals with the situation.

Ms. Christine Normandin: To your knowledge, is there anyone other than a party who can make a recommendation to expel a candidate for foreign interference, for example?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No one I know of has the authority to make that recommendation.

Ms. Christine Normandin: If you are informed of potential wrongdoing during an election, do you typically get that information in time to be able to correct the situation? I'm not asking for details, because I understand that you can't give me any. That said, is your authority limited to confirming after the fact that wrongdoing took place and suggesting jail time or fines, or do you have any authority to prevent certain situations?

Ms. Caroline Simard: As far as I'm concerned, I have a compliance and enforcement role and, in that context, I have no prevention role. To put it plainly, my office does no monitoring. Specifically, I can do my job through criminal powers, exercising my authority to lay charges, or through administrative powers, potentially imposing official action.

• (1030)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Does information leading to charges need to have been made public? We've often been told that certain national security issues many pieces of information can't be made public due to national security issues. Whatever the case may be, can you lay charges based on information that is not public?

Ms. Caroline Simard: Let me make something clear.

My office is bound by confidentiality, as is any investigative agency, for legal reasons. That's because we need to preserve the presumption of innocence and make sure we don't compromise investigations.

So we do that job largely behind the scenes, in complete compliance with confidentiality. Only once we've reached certain thresholds are we permitted to take certain actions.

Ms. Christine Normandin: In any event, if charges were potentially going to be laid on a candidate, I imagine the candidate would be notified.

Ms. Caroline Simard: I imagine that, in the course of an investigation, the individual would ultimately be called to testify. This is all hypothetical, of course.

Ms. Christine Normandin: As I understand it, in the course of an investigation and when charges are laid, information can be made public. Can national security become a barrier to potentially laying charges against a candidate who is alleged to have interfered or participated in interference?

Ms. Caroline Simard: I act independently of the government of the day, the Chief Electoral Officer and the public service. I exercise my role independently.

Ms. Christine Normandin: So the fact that information can't be made public because of a national security issue cannot be used as an excuse to prevent charges from being laid, for example.

Ms. Caroline Simard: No.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

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

[English]

Now, Mr. Julian, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Perrault and Ms. Simard, thank you for the non-partisan work you do every day to protect democracy. I'm grateful for that. It's a heavy burden, but your work is important.

I know you can't take a position on this, but former Chief Electoral Officer Jean-Pierre Kingsley also called for a public inquiry into foreign interference by China or Russia. That is significant. I know you can't comment on it, but I feel we're moving towards a public inquiry. In fact, the committee is going to discuss it in a few hours.

[English]

I wanted to start off by asking questions around the nomination process.

It is true that Elections Canada does not interfere with the nominations process, but every candidate for nomination does have to file expense claims and file a full and comprehensive review of the contributions they've received. In that case, for a nomination, if, for example, a bus was rented to transport people to a nomination meeting, should that have been included in the nomination expense declaration?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: To be clear, not all nomination contestants have the obligation to file a financial return. Those who have spent or received more than \$1,000 do have to file that return.

Specifically to the question, if a nomination contestant needs to file a return and has incurred expenses to promote his or her nomination, then that should be in the return, including the bus that you referred to.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

On that same note, then, if somebody else paid for that bus to transport people to a nomination meeting, that contribution in kind is governed by what rules? What are the limits and how is that declared?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Contributions, whether in kind or monetary, are governed essentially by the same rules. They are subject to the same limits and are subject to the same disclosure requirements.

Mr. Peter Julian: If somebody rented a number of buses and the cost was over \$1,600, for example, or \$1,700, and that was declared as a contribution in kind—somebody else paid for it—would that be a violation of the Elections Act?

• (1035)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: A contribution, in kind or financial, that is above the \$1,600 limit would be in violation of the act. Yes.

Mr. Peter Julian: Could a contribution in kind come from somebody who is not a Canadian citizen or not a Canadian resident?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It has to come from a citizen or a permanent resident.

Mr. Peter Julian: Anyone else paying for that contribution in kind would also constitute a violation of the Elections Act.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It would.

Mr. Peter Julian: If somebody who was a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident made a contribution and that money was reimbursed to them but they were still given the credit and the tax receipt for the contribution, is that in violation of the Canada Elections Act?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That would be a violation. There are many scenarios around that, but essentially, if a contribution is returned, it's not a true contribution and there are violations around that scenario.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. These are all cases that could be violations.

If a complaint was issued, even after the fact, for a filing of a nomination candidate or for a candidate in the election, is that not something that Elections Canada would refer to the commissioner of elections?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: If there was a factual element at any point, if there was any basis to refer that to the commissioner, yes, we would.

Mr. Peter Julian: You would investigate it initially. You would look at the candidate's return or the candidate's nomination return, and if you see discrepancies or if the complaint touches on things that have not been declared within those declarations, you would be investigating it and then referring it to the commissioner of elections.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We would use that information as part of the audit to inform the audit, but depending on the nature of the information and what we find in the audit, if there is any potential violation, we don't make that determination. If there's a possible violation of the act, then it is referred to the commissioner, and it is her decision alone to decide how to deal with the matter.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: In the event that the individual has already made a statement, and verification has been completed and accepted by Elections Canada, you can still reopen a file should new information arise.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Closing a verification file does not condone behaviour. Closing a file simply states that we've completed the verification steps and no further review is required at this time. Should we receive any additional information that could influence how we interpret the file, we may reopen verification and, if appropriate, refer the case to the Commissioner's office.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'd now like to talk about breaches of the Canada Elections Act. Many will recall the Dean Del Mastro case: He violated the Canada Elections Act and tried to hide it.

What is the range of penalties for this type of breach, either not fully disclosing information or attempting to conceal violations?

The Chair: Please be very brief.

Ms. Caroline Simard: My office has prepared a document outlining maximum penalties based on offences. I believe that document might answer your questions. So it would be more efficient if you would review that document.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Now we will start the five-minute rounds with Mr. Cooper, followed by Mr. Turnbull.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Berthold.

Would it violate the Canada Elections Act to funnel money through proxies to a nomination or election candidate?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Directed contributions are unlawful under the Canada Elections Act, yes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you.

Would it violate the Canada Elections Act for a business to hire an individual under the pretense that the individual works for that business, and then pay that individual to work on a political campaign?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That would amount to an illegal, non-monetary contribution by the business.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you.

Would it violate the Canada Elections Act for consular officials or staff at a foreign consulate or embassy to assist a candidate or campaign during work hours?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: There are rules on volunteer labour. I'd have to verify the specifics on that.

• (1040)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

With respect to the penalties that would apply, could you elaborate briefly on those, with respect to those circumstances you identified as contravening the act?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: As I just explained, the document that my office prepared contains a table that describes all that. It also talks about violations and breaches, and that is important. The document includes all that information, including jail time.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Perrault, will you be able to send the committee your response regarding volunteer work?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: There are exceptions and I don't want to get too far ahead of myself on that at this point, but I will send my response to the committee, absolutely.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you. I wanted to make sure we were going to get the information.

Mr. Perrault, since the 2019 election, have you had any meetings with the Prime Minister or anyone in his office about foreign influence by the Chinese regime?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No, I have never had any, before or since.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Has anyone from the government tried to contact you to inform you of the problem, to ask for advice or to try to find solutions?

This is a growing problem. Government members have said repeatedly that this is a major issue they are very concerned about, but you say that no one has tried to contact you.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We work with our security partners, particularly on cybersecurity issues in our infrastructure. In preparation for an election, we also work with all of our partners, including the RCMP and CSIS, to develop hypothetical scenarios or what we call tabletop exercises.

Mr. Luc Berthold: The Prime Minister never felt it was important to contact your office to share his concerns about this issue.

Do you have all the required clearance levels to receive information from CSIS?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Yes, I have the security clearance to see top secret documents.

Mr. Luc Berthold: So CSIS is sharing information with you that you cannot currently share with members of Parliament.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I have not received any factual information from CSIS about foreign interference. I received briefings on the level of risk prior to the election, but I have not received briefings specifically on actions that took place during the election.

Mr. Luc Berthold: So you have had no discussions with the Prime Minister's Office or with the Prime Minister about what steps need to be taken or what legislative changes need to be made in order to prevent a recurrence of foreign interference, particularly from the Chinese regime, in our elections.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I provide Parliament with my recommendations for improving the Canada Elections Act. I submitted a number of recommendations last June. At that time, we were not dealing with the current issues, but I did submit recommendations that are relevant to the current context.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Have you received any responses?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: The committee needs to consider my recommendations. I look forward to discussing those recommendations before this committee.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Ms. Simard, in your opening remarks, you said that there were 16 complaints involving 13 situations. A little later, you said that all of those files had been closed. Is that correct?

Ms. Caroline Simard: Yes. I also said so during my first appearance.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Briefing notes released yesterday, I believe, indicate that Mr. Perrault sent three complaints to your office.

Did those three complaints, which were deemed of concern by the Chief Electoral Officer, result in any charges or inquiries, or anything like that?

Ms. Caroline Simard: I would like to have more details. We handle thousands of complaints a year. For example, there were 8,000 of them in 2019. So I don't know what complaints you are talking about.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I'm talking about the only three that were sent to you by the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer for the 2021 election.

Ms. Caroline Simard: Again, I don't know what complaints you are talking about.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Turnbull, you have up to five minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I want to clarify some things that I've heard, and I want a recap. The RCMP is responsible for investigating incidents of foreign actor interference across Canada, and it does so based on information from its own intelligence and partner agencies. The commissioner of elections is responsible for ensuring compliance with and enforcement of the Canada Elections Act, and you, Ms. Simard, do so based on your own investigative work as well as the intelligence provided by partner agencies and departments.

In both these two functions, the RCMP and the commissioner of elections make independent decisions as to whether to investigate based on complaints or information received. Would you say that is true, Ms. Simard?

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: In general, I would say that your description is accurate.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

We've seen, circulating in the media, reports that CSIS allegedly became aware of instances where the difference between the original political contribution and the refund a person gets at tax time was returned to donors.

Can you confirm, Ms. Simard, that this would be a contravention of the Canada Elections Act?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: Again, this is a hypothetical scenario. In this context, I can confirm that provisions of part 18 of the Canada Elections Act could apply.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Great.

What about the report that CSIS allegedly found that business owners hired international Chinese students and assigned them to volunteer in electoral campaigns on a full-time basis? Is that also in contravention of the Canada Elections Act?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: Again, this is a hypothetical scenario. With respect to financing, I would say that certain provisions could apply. They are, again, in part 18 of the Canada Elections Act.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Great.

You, being the commissioner, have the authority to investigate those types of matters. Is that correct?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: Yes, my power is well defined in the Canada Elections Act. It is a power of observation and enforcement of the act.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

I'm sorry. I have short-answer questions.

If CSIS became aware of illegal activity, would you expect it to hand that over to you for an investigation to take place and appropriate action?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: What I expect from my partners is of course that they provide me with that information. As soon as they have information on a situation that could contravene the Canada Elections Act, I expect that information to be shared with me, without prior assessment. You will understand that the assessment is done here.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: If there was action taken as a result of an investigation, would that be made public?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: Investigations are confidential, for the reasons I explained earlier. Once official action is taken, certain information becomes public.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Within Bill C-76, you were given new powers and authorities to compel testimony by applying to a judge to have individuals basically be compelled under oath to testify on these matters. Is that not correct?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: Generally speaking, I would say yes. If you want more details, I can provide them later.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have no more questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Go ahead, Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Since the beginning of the question and answer period, we have heard several examples reported in the media, which you concluded would hypothetically constitute violations of the Canada Elections Act.

I asked you in what way the RCMP and CSIS collaborated with you. You said that, if you had information that led you to believe there was interference, you would pass it on to the RCMP or CSIS, and that you would also expect the RCMP or CSIS to pass on information to you if there was potential foreign interference.

The Prime Minister mentioned yesterday that he felt that the existing systems were effective in preventing foreign interference. I don't seem to be hearing that from you; quite the contrary.

I would like to know what enables both the Chief Electoral Officer and the Commissioner of Canada Elections to have the authority to act preventively in cases of foreign interference, rather than to remedy the situation after the fact.

• (1050)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We have to realize that we live in a free and open society, and that's a very good thing. In Canada, people can say whatever they want on social media. They can withdraw money from the bank, meet with people and give them that money, without government oversight. But an open society also has constraints. For example, there is a risk that foreign states will take advantage of it. We don't have measures that would allow us to monitor citizens, and we don't want to have them.

What has emerged from the media revelations over the past few days and from the committee's work is the importance of educating not only the public, but also political parties, candidates and local associations about the risks of foreign interference, so as to build resilience to that interference. However, there is no mechanism to prevent foreign interference.

Ms. Christine Normandin: However, once you receive information that there is foreign interference in a candidate's favour, you have no power to remedy the situation. Do I understand correctly?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We have to be careful. I don't know exactly what scenario we are talking about. We would have to know what the nature of the information is, whether it's intelligence or whether concrete evidence is available. There is a whole range of scenarios. It's difficult for me to comment on something so abstract.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

[*English*]

Mr. Julian, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Perrault and Ms. Simard, articles have been published that raise allegations of violations of the Canada Elections Act. My understanding is that this is not sufficient to reopen a file or to review a candidate's declaration or a nomination declaration again.

If this information is also provided to you by CSIS or through a complaint from the public, is that sufficient to review that declaration again to ensure that no violation of the Canada Elections Act with respect to finances has occurred?

We just talked about all the things that constitute violations of the act. If there are serious allegations about such violations, what does it take to reopen a file?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: On our end, as I mentioned, we can reopen files for audits. We do that. Sometimes we do audits based on public information in the media. When we see things, we can carry out reviews. In fact, we have done so in response to media reports. But that is just an audit. If nothing comes out of it, I won't pass anything on to the commissioner's office. If something does come out of it, I'll pass the information on to her.

Mr. Peter Julian: I know you can't disclose this information to us, but you may already be reviewing files or investigating those files. It is important to point that out.

I would like to go back to the maximum penalties that could be imposed. For example, imprisonment is a possibility. In the case of an elected member of Parliament, that person could potentially lose their seat. Those are possibilities when a serious violation of the Canada Elections Act is committed, right?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: The act provides for a range of penalties. The commissioner has a chart that she will provide to you. Generally, the most severe penalties are about five years in prison for an indictable offence. There are indeed cases where a member or a candidate could lose their seat.

Mr. Peter Julian: Have you taken specific steps to address foreign interference not only from China, but also from Russia, which is a major source of concern?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: For our part, in preparation for the election, we make sure to protect our IT infrastructure as best we can. We work with the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security. We also monitor social media. Our goal is to ensure that voters have the right information to vote. We don't look at the source, and it's often very difficult to know the real source anyway. We are interested in the content. In the content, we are interested in information about the voting process, so that voters would have the right information. We are not interested in whether or not what a candidate is saying critically is right or where the information is coming from.

• (1055)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Just so our witnesses know, for the rest of the day we'll be going slightly over to make sure we get this round done and that we have the hour with our guests.

Mr. Cooper, there are five minutes for you, followed by Mr. Gerretsen, before we let them go.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Commissioner Simard, with the greatest of respect, I find it astounding that in response to the last question posed by Mr. Berthold you said that you had no knowledge or understanding of the particulars of the three new complaints. You're appearing here on a matter relating to serious allegations of foreign interference. Elections Canada is essentially the body—your office as commissioner—to enforce the law and, again, I'd submit that it's unacceptable that you'd come to this committee that ill prepared.

Moving on, I will ask either of you, have you met with Katie Telford since 2019?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, I've never met Ms. Telford.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: I have also never met her.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Have you met with any minister in the government since 2019?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: I took office six months ago. In the last six months, I have not met with any of the ministers you mention.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Has the previous commissioner, to your knowledge?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: I have no idea.

[*English*]

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, I do meet the minister responsible for democratic institutions, as I do meet opposition critics. I've shared an invitation to all parties to hear from them the concerns they have and to talk about some of the major priorities for our agency. That's whom I have met.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

Have you met with any minister's office staff since 2019? That's for both of you.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: In the context of the minister, he or she is accompanied typically by staff.

Mr. Michael Cooper: But never staff independent of the minister...?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No, never.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: Me neither.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: What about security-cleared staff or other officials with the Liberal Party of Canada?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: We meet with all the political parties only at the June advisory committee. At that time, I met with people. Other than that, it hasn't happened.

[*English*]

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We meet periodically through the advisory committee of political parties. At that committee, I have a standing invitation for the commissioner, but we meet regularly with senior executives from all parties.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay. Thank you for that.

I would ask if you'd be prepared to undertake to provide to this committee the dates and names of the ministers and ministers' office staff, to the degree that is possible, along with any Liberal Party staff or officials whom you have met with since 2019. Will you undertake that?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Since, presumably, January 2019...?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Yes, since January 2019.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: The minutes of the meetings are on our website and the membership is public, so there's no confidential information. I will provide that to the chair.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Will you provide a detailed list to this committee?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I will do that, Madam Chair.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Although you indicated that you did not meet with the Prime Minister or anyone at the PMO, will you go back and verify that as well?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That will not be difficult. I've never met them.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Perrault, have you received any reports from the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I have not received any reports of specific cases. It should be noted that my mandate is really related to the administration of the voting process. Therefore, there were no problems that prevented electoral events from taking place.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Yesterday, I was surprised to learn that Elections Canada was not part of that task force to protect our elections. The task force does not report to you, but reports to a committee that determines whether or not information should be made public. If I understand correctly, your role is limited to the information that is provided to you.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: One of the things we do in preparation for elections is meet with the various partners to understand everyone's roles and responsibilities to ensure that communication mechanisms are in place. That way, if issues arise, we know where the information needs to go, depending on the nature of the issue. Communication mechanisms are well established.

● (1100)

Mr. Luc Berthold: I understand.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We are not part of that task force, but that does not mean that we are outside its purview.

Mr. Luc Berthold: As you know better than anyone, Mr. Perrault, election periods are very short. When you know about something that happens at the beginning of an election, and you follow a process, and the results come in afterwards, it's too late for anyone to take action.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It will also depend on the quality of the information, as there is a wide range between facts and rumours.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Simard and Mr. Perrault, I want to thank you, notwithstanding some of the unfortunate comments that have been shared around the table today, for the incredible work that you and Elections Canada do. The reality of the situation is that we live in one of the freest and most open democracies in the world. That's as a result, not of partisan members of Parliament or politicians, but of the incredible work that you do. Therefore, in any capacity that I can, I apologize for some of the comments that have been expressed today, and I thank you for the incredible work that you do.

I just want to recap so that I fully understand this. Please feel free to answer with just yes or no if I have it correctly.

CSIS will receive complaints. CSIS will assess those and, if required, if it feels it's necessary, then turn it over to the commissioner to further investigate and take action on. Is that correct?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: CSIS officials will be appearing before the committee later today, when you can ask them about the work that CSIS does.

My office receives thousands of complaints a year, and foreign interference accounts for a very small portion of those complaints. We receive complaints directly or they come to us from our partners.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I will ask CSIS that question too.

Just to confirm.... It would be reasonably acceptable to assume that CSIS might get some information that it doesn't end up turning over to you, because it doesn't deem it necessary to go to you. Is that correct? CSIS must receive a lot of information. Maybe that's a hypothetical and you would rather not answer it—I understand.

Ms. Caroline Simard: I don't know the unknown.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Fair enough.

Just to go back to Mr. Cooper's question in the first round.... CSIS did not provide any information regarding this global report to Elections Canada, to you, Commissioner.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: As I explained, I cannot disclose this information for good legal reasons. The information is confidential.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

Bill C-76, which came about in 2018, significantly increased the powers of Elections Canada to look into and investigate foreign interference. Is that correct?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: I'll correct what you're saying. Elections Canada does not have these powers, but rather the Commissioner of Canada Elections does. As has already been mentioned, the power to compel testimony now exists. That was added administratively.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Would you say that it's working? Has it improved the ability of the commissioner of Canada elections to do the work?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: Any improvement is welcome. Again, it would make our job easier in the future if we had these administrative powers as a complement. All means must be considered to address such serious threats.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I won't direct this comment to the witnesses, because they do an incredible job of being non-partisan. I would just say, in conclusion, that perhaps it would be beneficial for us to reflect on the fact that the Conservatives voted against Bill C-76 when it came before the House of Commons and gave those powers to the commissioner to be able to do this incredible work on our behalf today.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (1105)

The Chair: Thank you. That was very appreciated.

On behalf of PROC committee members, I would like to thank both of you for your time today. I will echo the comments of members and thank you and your teams for the service you provide.

With that, we wish you a good day. If there is any information outstanding that you would like to provide the committee or need to provide, please share it with the clerk. We'll make sure all members have it.

With that, committee members, we will suspend and really quickly switch over to the next panel so that we can continue with this exciting day.

Thank you.

• (1105) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone.

I would like to welcome our witnesses from the second panel.

From the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, we have David Vigneault, director, and Michelle Tessier, deputy director of operations.

We also have Caroline Xavier, chief of the Communications Security Establishment.

Finally, we have Michael Duheme, deputy commissioner of federal policing for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

We're going to be together until noon, but we may need a little more time.

I understand that Mr. Vigneault will be making the opening remarks for CSIS.

[*English*]

Mr. David Vigneault (Director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Members of the committee, thank you very much for welcoming us this morning.

[*English*]

I would like to thank you for inviting CSIS and our colleagues to appear on foreign interference threats to Canada's democratic institutions.

CSIS continues to view hostile activities by foreign-state actors as the most significant threat to Canada's national security community. Foreign interference, in our democratic institutions in particular, undermines Canadian society. Foreign-state actors who engage in these deceptive, covert and hostile activities seek to weaken trust in our fundamental institutions and processes, threaten communities, sow division and, ultimately, influence policy.

[*Translation*]

As a CSIS official recently told this committee, foreign interference can take multiple forms. For instance, threat actors may aggressively threaten or coerce their targets into acting in a certain way. This is unfortunately a common activity impacting Canada's diverse communities and can involve threats to them or their family outside Canada.

Threat actors may also cultivate relationships with targets to manipulate them into providing favours and valuable information, or may conduct corrupt or illicit financing activities. It is also important to note that threat actors may use others as proxies to conduct these activities on their behalf.

[*English*]

These are just a few of the techniques that foreign state-actors employ to influence public discourse, the behaviour of individual Canadians and even our democratic processes to their advantage.

We have also observed them deploy cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns and espionage to these ends. Foreign interference is therefore a complex and enduring threat to Canada's sovereignty. I can assure you that CSIS takes all allegations of foreign interference very seriously and uses its authority under the CSIS Act to investigate, provide advice to government and, where appropriate, take measures to reduce the threat. Building resilience to foreign interference is one way to mitigate its corrosive effects.

CSIS has spoken publicly in a variety of forums to warn Canadians about these threats and techniques and to inform them of ways they can protect themselves. We have also provided defensive briefings to elected officials from all orders of government across Canada. Perhaps most central to these efforts is our engagement with Canadian communities. We have been clear that the principal threat to Canada comes from the People's Republic of China but, to be clear, the threat comes not from the Chinese people but rather from the Chinese Communist Party and the Government of China. Indeed, we are keenly aware that Chinese communities are often the primary victims of PRC foreign interference efforts in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Therefore, we continue to invest significant efforts in building relationships with individuals, communities and community leaders to establish and sustain trust, and to offer our support and partnership in their protection. Furthermore, these efforts are not limited to Chinese-Canadian communities.

[*English*]

I would like to conclude by stating that CSIS takes allegations of unauthorized release of classified information very seriously. Compromises of this kind can reveal sensitive sources, methodologies and techniques to Canada's adversaries. They are listening. This can subsequently threaten the integrity of our operations and even the physical safety and security of human sources and employees. Ultimately such releases can hinder our ability to protect Canadians. Therefore, I would like to remind the committee that, just as with other recent appearances in front of PROC and other committees here, we are limited in what we can say in an unclassified setting. CSIS cannot publicly comment and in fact is prohibited from publicly commenting on operational matters and classified information in order to protect the safety and security of Canadians. Nonetheless, I welcome this opportunity for a frank and transparent discussion, to the extent possible, on the foreign interference threats that Canada faces.

We'd be happy to answer your questions.

• (1115)

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

We will start with our six-minute rounds.

We will start with Mr. Cooper, followed by Mrs. Romanado.

[*Translation*]

It will then be Ms. Normandin's turn.

[*English*]

I would remind everyone that comments should go through the chair, and there should be one voice being heard at a time.

Mr. Cooper, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

I would like to just express and associate myself with the remarks of Mr. Vigneault in saying that the interference we see and the threat posed by the Beijing communist party has nothing to do with Chinese Canadians, who are victims of the regime and its interference activities. It's very important that we keep that in mind at all times during our deliberations on this matter.

Mr. Vigneault, how many times did CSIS brief the Prime Minister regarding Beijing's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections?

Mr. David Vigneault: I have been the director of CSIS since 2017. I have had many opportunities to brief the Prime Minister, cabinet and different ministers on the subject of national security, including specifically on foreign interference. I would not have a specific breakdown of the number of times since 2017, but this has been a topic of ongoing briefings.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Will you undertake to provide the committee with a list of all the dates when CSIS briefed the Prime Minister in regard to interference activities by Beijing related to the 2019 and 2021 elections?

Mr. David Vigneault: I understand that the national security intelligence adviser was asked a similar request yesterday. My reaction to this would probably be to work with the Privy Council Office to have a consolidated response to the committee.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Will you also undertake to do the same with respect to a list of all the dates that CSIS briefed any minister, PMO staff, ministers' office staff or security-cleared Liberal Party staff related to Beijing's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections?

Mr. David Vigneault: I think, as just mentioned, we will endeavour to collect as much of that information as possible and, barring any specific national security considerations, we will endeavour to provide as much as possible to the committee.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Consistent with or in addition to that, will you undertake to provide a list of all individuals who were present at these briefings to the degree that this is possible?

Mr. David Vigneault: I will probably have to defer.... To the extent to which we know, we will provide the information, barring any other national security considerations.

We'll probably have to also rely on the Privy Council Office for some of the attendants of these briefings. That consolidated piece will, hopefully, answer many of these questions.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much.

On February 24, 2023, Sam Cooper of Global News reported that three weeks before the 2019 election, CSIS officials gave an urgent briefing to senior aides in the Prime Minister's Office warning them that a Liberal candidate, who is a sitting Liberal MP, had received assistance from Beijing's Toronto consulate in his nomination campaign.

What are the names of the PMO aides who were briefed?

Mr. David Vigneault: As I just indicated, we'll have to review the list and the dates of such briefings.

It is important to remind this committee that I do not take the premise of the question at face value. I need to be able to provide information respecting the proper classification of the information. The spirit of that question will be answered through the consolidated response.

• (1120)

Mr. Michael Cooper: To that end, did CSIS brief the Prime Minister?

Mr. David Vigneault: As I mentioned—

Mr. Michael Cooper: I mean specifically in relation to the 2019 circumstances surrounding a Liberal candidate and Beijing's consulate in Toronto assisting him in his nomination campaign.

Mr. David Vigneault: On that question, I think it's important to put it in context. The information that is in the public domain may or may not be coming from the service or from other agencies.

Information has indeed been reported by media. It is not because the information is in the media that I'm at liberty to confirm or deny the specific nature of classified information. Along these lines, I will not be able to provide a specific answer to that allegation.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I understand that you're not able to provide a specific answer at this time. Again, would you undertake to go back and provide this committee with any date or dates that the Prime Minister was briefed on this matter?

Mr. David Vigneault: I will be able to provide a consolidated response from the PCO of dates when the subject of foreign interference was discussed. However, I am not at liberty to disclose information, directly or indirectly, that would provide classified information in a public setting. There will be a limit to the specificity of the topic discussed, but as I said, it is important that people understand that foreign interference was indeed briefed on regularly.

Mr. Michael Cooper: The same would apply to Liberal Party staff or other officials who may have been briefed. If you could, please undertake that, if they were briefed, and come back to this committee, having regard for what you previously said unless it doesn't apply in that case.

Mr. David Vigneault: In the spirit of these hearings, we will absolutely endeavour to provide the most consolidated and thorough response possible to the committee.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Romanado, you have up to six minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today and for providing the information they are able to provide. I understand full well that, given security issues, we can't publicly discuss things that we do not have clearance for.

My first question is for Monsieur Vigneault. I'd like to know a bit about the tools that CSIS has for disrupting foreign interference. The Rosenberg report that was released this week says that one of the options CSIS has is to engage with diplomats who may try to interfere in our elections. If a foreign official were trying to interfere in our election, does CSIS have the tools in its mandate to address that?

Mr. David Vigneault: The CSIS Act provides a number of tools for CSIS to investigate foreign interference activities, including when it comes to diplomats posted here in Canada. As an intelligence service, our professionals are looking at the best way possible to get intelligence, using all the techniques that are available to it. When we do face questions or situations where there's a specific threat activity, we also use, have used and will continue to use our threat reduction measures mandate to engage in those activities.

We will often work with partners; we will not work in isolation. These issues are very complex, and you do not want to take an action and have unintended consequences, so we work in partnerships. In this case, when it comes to diplomats, we'd likely be working with Global Affairs Canada, GAC, to do so.

I can assure the committee, as I said in my opening remarks, that CSIS and our partners at this table take any allegations of foreign interference extremely seriously. We investigate these allegations, and we use all the tools at our disposal to try to better understand and characterize these activities and reduce the threat where possible.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

CSIS has the ability to share information with the RCMP for it to launch an investigation. Is that correct?

• (1125)

Mr. David Vigneault: Yes. Actually, over the years since the inception of CSIS in 1984, we have developed, between CSIS and the RCMP, very elaborate processes to share information. I think the committee has heard some of the challenges that exist in using intelligence and passing it on to law enforcement agencies or investigative bodies. Intelligence is not a question of evidence, so the RCMP in a specific case needs to determine how to use the information and further its own investigation.

It is a complex process. The two organizations, working with the Department of Justice, continue to work on this issue. The notion of using intelligence to pursue law enforcement matters continues to be a challenge on which a number of organizations are actively working, but we do have robust processes with the RCMP and with other law enforcement and investigative bodies to do such an exchange.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Vigneault, I'm sure you're aware that yesterday the deputy minister of public safety confirmed that

there are no investigations under way looking into allegations of foreign interference from the last election. Based on your previous response that information is shared, what they have in front of them is that they do not have any active investigations.

I'd like to talk a bit about the briefings next. You mentioned that you do participate in briefings of the panel. Do you personally do that briefing, or does somebody else on your team do it or do it along with you?

Mr. David Vigneault: Normally I'm the one who would be doing these briefings. There may have been one or two that my colleague, the deputy director of operations, may have undertaken, but normally it would be me briefing the panel directly.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: From what I understand, based on those briefings, there have been no incidents of interference that have threatened the integrity of the election. Is that correct?

Mr. David Vigneault: It's indeed the conclusion that the panel has taken.

They received a lot of information, a lot of briefings. I can tell you, having been part of the discussions, that the panel challenged us on our information to get a better understanding. The panel members wanted to better understand what we had, and it was a very robust exchange.

The panel came to the conclusion in 2019 and for the election in 2021 that, indeed, the information did not reach that threshold. Based on my information and my experience, for what it's worth, I would say that I concur with that conclusion.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: That's perfect.

I have only about 30 seconds left. You mentioned that you cannot comment on media reports that may or may not have come from CSIS and on leaks and so on. As you probably know, my son is an intelligence officer in the Canadian Armed Forces, and I take the issue of security and national security extremely seriously.

Could you explain quickly what a leak could mean to the intelligence sharing of the Five Eyes and what would happen if we were to have leaks of top secret information?

Mr. David Vigneault: Very quickly, I would say that the bread and butter of an intelligence organization is the ability to collect secrets, keep secrets and use those secrets with the appropriate people. When that ability is threatened, it undermines the confidence of our partners domestically and internationally. This is something we take very seriously, and I would say it's also about the ability to protect our people and our sources, people who put their lives at risk to protect Canada.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Would you say that—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry. You're out of time.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: —letting information like this out would put our members of the Canadian Armed Forces at risk?

The Chair: If you can give a quick answer, I would take it.

Mr. David Vigneault: For any information that is disclosed in an unauthorized way, you do not know the consequences. You cannot foresee the consequences down the road, so I think it's a very serious matter—

The Chair: Thank you. I have to end your time there. I'd just like to keep it tight.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank the witnesses for joining us.

You just mentioned the hypothesis that leaks at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, CSIS, led to the Global News article. If so, these leaks would be subject to very severe penalties. On the other hand, this raises the possibility that the people who potentially leaked that information were dissatisfied with the way certain information within CSIS was handled and taken seriously by the government.

I wonder if it is possible to determine whether there was any internal conflict in the way interference issues were handled. Did it create tensions within CSIS?

• (1130)

Mr. David Vigneault: Madam Chair, in an intelligence agency where professionals like ours work, there are always points of view. I can tell you that the discussions are very serious.

On the other hand, I would like to reassure the committee that the issues specifically related to interference are among the most important issues we discuss. That is something my colleague the director of operations and I discuss very seriously with all of our people. I don't think there's a problem in that respect.

I should also say that there are measures within CSIS for people to raise issues in a structured way if they are not satisfied. The National Security and Intelligence Review Agency also has a complaint process specifically designed to deal with classified information. There are forums for people to raise these issues.

Concerning the possibility of tension about this within the service, I have to tell you that it is not an issue of concern.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I would like to come back to the issue of the donations that were made to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. When the Chinese Communist Party sends money, we can assume it is not written on the back of the check that it is an attempt to interfere.

I would like to know who has the final say in determining whether an action is indeed an attempt to interfere. Is it CSIS, or are there other entities that may have a say in qualifying the action taken?

Mr. David Vigneault: This is an important and rather complex issue. The specific case that you raise, to my knowledge, involves an independent foundation that is not part of the government apparatus. So it's not something that would be of direct concern to CSIS.

That said, if we learned that a foreign entity was interfering through various means and targeting people inside or outside of government, we would have the authority to investigate that directly.

To answer the question more specifically, CSIS does not necessarily have the final say. Indeed, depending on the scenario, other agencies and organizations may be involved. However, in my experience, these issues are discussed with CSIS, which always has a say.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Vigneault, in your opening remarks, you mentioned that, where appropriate, one of the roles of CSIS is to take action to reduce the threat.

Can you tell us who decides when it is appropriate? Can anyone else have a say in when it is appropriate to take action to counter interference?

Mr. David Vigneault: If I recall correctly, it was through legislative changes in 2018 that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service was given the authority to take action to mitigate threats. This is evolving, and ministerial guidance frames how the service can use this power.

As I mentioned earlier, we don't generally work in a vacuum. We work with partners to fully understand the context in which such actions are taken and their potential impact. It's about making sure that we're taking the most specific action possible to mitigate those threats, but without creating additional problems. It would therefore be rare for the service to take such action without consulting its partners. That said, this is ultimately within the powers vested in the director of the service.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

During the previous hour, we welcomed the Chief Electoral Officer and the Commissioner of Canada Elections. While there seems to be a lot of information sharing between the two, there doesn't seem to be a truly strong apparatus that can take concrete action in the event of interference in the context of an election.

I'd like to hear your views on election interference, since the Prime Minister seems to have brushed aside the Canadian Security Intelligence Service's recommendation to withdraw a candidate. More to the point, is there a strong arm that can take concrete action to prevent threats?

Mr. David Vigneault: In my opening remarks, I mentioned the complexity of foreign interference. I think the committee is now seeing what we have noticed over the last few years, which is that the nature of foreign interference is changing and is becoming more sophisticated. Some countries, some actors, are not doing today what they did 10 years ago, because they have learned. They understand how we work. They understand the powers we have and what we can do. So there is a need to protect some information to prevent these actors from adapting to our measures.

In this case, I would say that the powers of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Communications Security Establishment, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the commissioner are all complementary. Is there a way to improve the toolbox? That's one of the things we're definitely going to look at, and hopefully get some recommendations from this committee on that. People are working very well together, but, as with any issue, there is obviously room for improvement.

• (1135)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much to our witnesses.

Monsieur Vigneault, I was tempted to ask the same question I asked yesterday about the articles by Robert Fife and Steven Chase in *The Globe and Mail* and by Sam Cooper at *Global News* and wondered if you could acknowledge if they were factual articles. I don't believe you are willing to do that. However, I do want to ask whether the concerns around multiple Liberal and Conservative candidates being involved in this and potentially being favoured by Beijing is something you can confirm. Were there multiple Liberal and Conservative candidates who were of concern?

Mr. David Vigneault: I think the member has had a preview of my answer. I will not be able to speak specifically about who may or may not have been the subject of interference.

What I can say, and what we have said publicly many times over the last number of years, is that the actors who are engaged in foreign interference against Canadians do so at all levels of government—at the federal, provincial and municipal levels—and they are doing it across party lines. The goal here for the country organizations that want to interfere is to favour their own interests. Therefore, whatever way they decide or determine that those interests

will be pursued most effectively, they will engage. That's why we have seen foreign interference across party lines and across different levels of government.

Mr. Peter Julian: Following up on Madam Romanado's question around foreign diplomats, when we have a case of a foreign diplomat who is involved in potentially provoking violations of our laws—in this case the *Canada Elections Act*—what steps can CSIS take in the case of that diplomat? What is open to the Canadian government as well?

Mr. David Vigneault: I'll structure my answer in two ways.

The first is what CSIS can do. We would investigate the information using all techniques to find out as much as possible about the interference of diplomats based in Canada. When we have that information, the service has the option of taking direct measures using our threat reduction mandate. In the case of a foreign diplomat, I do not foresee a scenario in which we would not engage GAC. Global Affairs Canada is the authority in Canada for ensuring the enforcement of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. They interact on a day-to-day basis with foreign diplomats. At that point, there are different tools at the disposal of the government through Global Affairs Canada to enforce the Vienna convention, up to and including declaring someone *persona non grata* from the country.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you. That responds to my question.

You said something a few minutes ago that disturbed me. You said, "Intelligence is not a question of evidence", making the distinction between intelligence you receive and evidence that the RCMP or the commissioner of elections can act on.

My question is this. How do you validate intelligence in that case, then, to ensure that you're moving from intelligence to actual evidence that is actionable?

• (1140)

Ms. Michelle Tessier (Deputy Director, Operations, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Thank you for the question. I'll respond if that's okay.

We constantly work with our partners in law enforcement, as the director mentioned, and with the commissioner of Canada elections. We share that information and have those discussions. They are really the ultimate authority to know what could be of use to them.

The challenge for us, and the challenge in the system currently, is that we need to be able to protect our methods of operation. We need to be able to protect our human and technical sources and our employees. That sometimes poses challenges, as mentioned by the panel yesterday, in terms of converting intelligence into evidence. The decision over whether to use that information could belong to the public prosecutor's office and could belong, of course, to RCMP colleagues.

Perhaps I'll turn to my RCMP colleague to see if there's anything he wants to add from his perspective in terms of sharing information. I can say that it is a very close partnership. There are ongoing discussions, and we work quite closely with all agencies involved in trying to action that information.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay.

[*Translation*]

I'll move on to my next question, which is about diasporas.

You talked about measures to reduce the threat of foreign interference. What measures are you taking in relation to the Chinese, Russian and Iranian diasporas, among others?

Mr. David Vigneault: That is a very good question. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, this is something that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service focuses on a great deal.

Members of ethnocultural communities in Canada are often caught in this vice. These are the people who are the victims, the people who are pressured to practise this foreign interference.

To answer the question in a very concrete way, over the past year we have published a report on foreign interference, a guide in different Chinese dialects, Persian and Russian, to talk to members of these communities about foreign interference and to explain what they can do.

This is a very important issue that must be talked about publicly. We need to continue to do that. We encourage people to contact us, so that we can see what more we can do.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Dancho, we will continue with you for five minutes. You have the floor.

[*English*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being with us today.

The specific allegations reported in *The Globe and Mail* from CSIS documents note that Beijing was responsible for illegal cash donations, tax receipts and hiring campaign workers using illegal methods, as well as disinformation campaigns in the 2021 election. This information from CSIS would have been shared with our Five Eyes intelligence allies. Is that correct?

Mr. David Vigneault: As I mentioned earlier, I am not in a position to comment specifically on these allegations and on this information. What I can say, however, is that CSIS and our intelligence partners do indeed share information extensively with international partners. Foreign interference, among other threats, is a threat shared by many countries.

The PRC specifically and other countries are engaging in foreign interference in other countries. One of the advantages we have is the co-operation of a number of countries not only among the Five Eyes but more broadly in western Europe, in Asia and in the Middle East. We work very closely with these partners to share information, and that is one way to protect Canadians. They benefit from the enriched picture here.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: It was also reported that a consul general of Beijing took credit for the defeat of a Conservative MP in the 2021 election. Is that correct?

Mr. David Vigneault: I will unfortunately have to reiterate my answer. I cannot specifically confirm in this current setting some of the information in the public domain.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: This has been asked, but I'll ask it again. Was the Prime Minister briefed on any of this information, and if so, when would that have been? What would have been the dates?

Mr. David Vigneault: As I said in answer to your previous question, we endeavour to provide information, working with PCO, to this committee on what has been briefed and would have been briefed, but I'm not in a position to specifically answer the question.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Vigneault. I appreciate your service to this country, but I am surprised. Of course you were all aware that you were coming to this committee today, and I'm sure you all take very detailed notes in your calendars. I'm a bit surprised that that information is not readily available to committee members, since I'm sure you anticipated the questions on when the Prime Minister would or would not have been briefed by you or by others in CSIS. I would appreciate your providing that in short order to the committee. Thank you.

For the RCMP, has CSIS shared with you any of the information regarding election interference?

● (1145)

Deputy Commissioner Michael Duheme (Deputy Commissioner, Federal Policing, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Any information would have been shared through the SITE committee. If it fell into the criminal space, the RCMP would investigate.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You are not investigating. Is that correct?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: We are not investigating any elements from the 2019 and 2021 elections. We did not receive any actionable intelligence that would warrant our initiating a criminal investigation.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: So no charges have been laid against anyone concerning any election interference. Is that correct?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: No charges have been laid.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: No charges have been laid concerning the Beijing police stations illegally operating in Canada for the purpose of terrorizing Chinese Canadians. No charges have been laid in that regard either.

D/Commr Michael Duheme: No, but the RCMP has taken overt action at four specific sites, where we were present in uniform with marked vehicles, to demonstrate to the community that we're taking this seriously, and we've had a positive impact through the actions we have taken.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: With respect to that positive impact in particular, does that mean the operations out of those illegal Beijing police stations have ceased?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: Our understanding is that they have ceased, and we're continuing our investigation. It is ongoing. Anytime a law enforcement liaison officer from an embassy comes up to us and is not pleased with the actions we have taken, that is a sign we have done our job, and we continue to do our job.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I appreciate your work very much in that regard.

Yesterday, I believe the deputy minister of public safety shared with the committee that legislative changes would need to be made, or he implied that they would need to be made, for charges to be laid. Is that correct? Would legislative changes need to be made for the RCMP to lay charges?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: When we talk about legislative changes, the RCMP operates in the criminal environment. This is the work that my colleague Michelle alluded to earlier with regard to the work we do with the service.

The service is in the intel business, but as the intel starts building toward a criminal offence, it's shifted to the RCMP. We work with the existing legislation we have under the Criminal Code.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

Would a change to the Criminal Code be needed to lay charges based on the evidence that you have concerning the police stations or election interference?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: We always entertain new tools under the code.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Has the Minister of Public Safety or anybody from the government or the Prime Minister's Office been briefed that legislative changes would need to be made for charges to be laid?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: They have not, to my knowledge.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: They have not on any of those briefings that happened.

D/Commr Michael Duheme: I'm saying they have not, to my knowledge.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay, so the RCMP has not informed the Prime Minister or any of his cabinet that legislative changes are needed for charges to be laid.

D/Commr Michael Duheme: The RCMP will go through Public Safety if we need changes to legislation.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Will you be pursuing any of those—

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

Thank you to everyone for your feedback.

The Chair: That's excellent.

This brings us to Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank the witnesses who are here today.

I am very pleased to see the coordination that exists between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Communications Security Establishment and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. This coordination is very important to protect Canadians, and to allow Canada to play its role with its international allies.

Mr. Vigneault, I'd like to pick up on an answer you gave to Mr. Cooper about the allegations in the newspapers. If memory serves, you said that you did not want to confirm or deny the veracity of these allegations.

[*English*]

You said that these allegations “may or may not” have come from CSIS, and this leads me to a sensitive question. I know you can't comment about the specific case, so let me take this into a hypothetical range. With your knowledge of foreign interference and the different techniques that are used in foreign interference, is it possible, in your opinion, that unverified or unconfirmed leaks from secret sources that may or may not have come from official sources could in themselves represent a form of foreign interference?

[*Translation*]

Mr. David Vigneault: I'll start answering in French.

This is one of the key elements of this whole issue. Foreign interference is very complex and covers a whole spectrum of activities, from diplomats who will speak openly to advance their country's interests, which is perfectly acceptable, to a whole category of activities that fall into a grey area, because they are a little more veiled or because they will be carried out clandestinely later on, and then become foreign interference. The point is that it's very complex.

I will continue in English.

• (1150)

[*English*]

The United Front Work Department, the UFWD, is an organization of the Communist Party. It is as old as the Chinese Communist Party. Under Xi Jinping, this organization has been provided new budgets. The budget of the organization dedicated to engaging the Chinese abroad and interfering in other countries' internal affairs, which is done by the UFWD, is now bigger than their entire department of foreign affairs. The budget of an organization dedicated to foreign interference is now larger than the entire overt diplomatic work that the PRC is engaging in. It gives you a sense of how important this is. I will say very quickly that this is why the President of China, Xi Jinping, calls the UFWD one of its "magic weapons".

Hon. Greg Fergus: Then it is not beyond reasonable to think that undermining democratic systems and democratic institutions could be a primary purpose of the UFWD.

Mr. David Vigneault: In terms of the foreign interference writ large carried out by the PRC and, as we have seen, by Russia, disinformation is one of the very specific tools being used. That is why, as an intelligence service, we have very rigorous processes to ingest information, challenge that information, validate it and assess it. That's how intelligence is then put together in the end.

I would invite everybody to be mindful of the fact that some of the information that may be in the public domain could be accurate and could be information that is part of that process, but it's still part of an evaluation and assessment process. This is why we are very concerned when we see this in the public domain, because you need to ensure experts are also able to assess the specific information.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Vigneault, I understand that you are not going to deny or confirm the information that was given to the Globe and Mail, but we still have information that officers from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, CSIS, leaked information, perhaps out of dissatisfaction with the way the Prime Minister's Office handled this information.

We have a Prime Minister who is reputed to have brushed aside a recommendation to withdraw a candidate. We have a Prime Minister who almost says that those who suggest that a candidate might be on the payroll of the Chinese Communist Party are racists. This may give the impression that there is tension between the Prime Minister's Office and CSIS.

I would like to hear from you about the state of relations between your agency and the Prime Minister's Office: are they good?

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you for this question, which has several parts.

I would quickly reiterate that CSIS is currently conducting an investigation with its partners into the source of this information, for the reasons I gave earlier. I repeat that the service operates within a democracy. So it's very clear that people have to be given the right to speak out, and there are ways to speak out. As I said in my reply to you earlier, there are ways for people to express their dissatisfaction.

With respect to the relationship with the Prime Minister's Office in general, our work is very clear. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act says that our job is to conduct investigations and inform the government. We have all the necessary means to do that job. I can say that the communication channels for CSIS to pass on all the required information are there, and they are open.

• (1155)

Ms. Christine Normandin: I want to quickly touch on another topic, because I don't have much time left to speak.

Would a public registry of agents acting on behalf of countries that may be interfering be an interesting tool for CSIS?

Mr. David Vigneault: Yes. I had the opportunity to testify before another parliamentary committee with Minister Mendicino a few weeks ago. In response to that same question, I said I believed it was an important tool.

CSIS has been doing this for several years. We talk publicly about foreign interference. Every possible tool, including a registry, would be helpful. I just want people to understand that this tool would not solve all the problems, but I think it would allow for more transparency.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Julian, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Vigneault, I know you cannot share information related to the Group of Five. That said, there are similar measures that our partners must take. For example, with regard to Chinese interference, there are other rather public examples that suggest potential solutions.

I can give examples of Russian interference. There was extensive Russian interference in Donald Trump's election. We also saw that in the Brexit referendum. We also saw it in the funding that was given to the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom. Of course, in Canada, we saw the so-called convoy being helped by Russian state actors.

My question is this. What lessons can we learn from our partners' experience that can be applied to Canada? Are you also concerned about the involvement of other countries in other groups like the convoy? In this case, it was foreign interference by Russia.

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you for the question.

I'm not sure I have the same information about some of the things that have been mentioned, particularly in relation to the funding of the convoy by a foreign state. That is not the information we have.

Having said that, it is very relevant to talk about lessons learned from other countries. To answer a question that was asked earlier, Canadians are very fortunate in that we have a lot of allies and partners around the world. We work with people we can trust. Yes, there is the Group of Five, but there are also many other very capable partners who share their information with us.

We've learned lessons from the experience of other countries, such as with the registry that the member for Saint-Jean was talking about. I would say that there are also some things that we do in Canada that benefit our partners. This sharing of information, both classified and public, builds the resilience of our Canadian institutions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor for four minutes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Vigneault, I am a bit of a novice when it comes to classified matters and national security. I admit that it is not something that I study every day. I have a question for you, which I put to Jody Thomas yesterday.

If the Canadian Security Intelligence Service passes classified information to an authorized person who is a member of a political party as part of a briefing, is that person allowed to pass the information on to others?

Mr. David Vigneault: That is one of the things I talked about earlier, that we need to continue to work on.

Mr. Luc Berthold: If I understand correctly, the answer is no.

Mr. David Vigneault: The process is not as clear as that. The person who has classified information has certain means to convey certain lessons or to give advice. The same goes for the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians.

Mr. Luc Berthold: So the classified information remains classified throughout the operation, is that right?

• (1200)

Mr. David Vigneault: The specific information and the specific facts it mentions remain classified throughout the operation, yes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: If I understand correctly, a person who passes this classified information to someone else is committing an illegal act, according to the security classification system.

Mr. David Vigneault: Transmitting specific information is probably an activity that contravenes the act. On the other hand, I have to say that in my experience, you have to think about how people can use that information without giving all the details. That's a conversation we need to have.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I understand, but the fact remains that it is illegal to pass on this specific information. So if the campaign team of a candidate who is targeted by a CSIS investigation is informed of that investigation, repeating that would be illegal.

Mr. David Vigneault: I understand the need for committee members to have very specific answers regarding certain points.

On the other hand, I have to say that it is not just a matter of giving information and washing your hands of it. Indeed, you have to work with people and determine how they can use the classified information.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I understand that, Mr. Vigneault. However, under the current system, when information is classified, a person who has the necessary security clearance cannot pass that specific information to someone else.

Mr. David Vigneault: The very specific information could not be conveyed directly.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you.

Mr. Duheme, Mr. Vigneault and Ms. Thomas confirmed that the Prime Minister had been informed on several occasions of the Chinese regime's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections.

Did the Prime Minister refer any aspect of the Chinese regime's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the RCMP?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: No. It is very rare for the Prime Minister to submit something directly to the RCMP. If something is submitted, it is through Public Safety Canada. We did not receive anything.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Did you receive any information from any member of the Prime Minister's Office staff regarding the numerous allegations of Chinese regime interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: Not to my knowledge. The information we receive during the election process is given to us by the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force, or by the service, as required.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Did you receive any information from the Minister of Public Safety regarding the Chinese regime's interference in our electoral system in any way during the 2019 and 2021 elections?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: To my knowledge, we did not receive anything directly from his office.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Are you saying that you did not receive anything from the minister, nor from cabinet?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: Not to my knowledge, but it is possible that someone passed on information without going through channels.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Duheme, instead of relying on your memory, could you please consult the various records that list meetings and communications between the Prime Minister's Office and the Minister of Public Safety, and tell the committee whether such exchanges took place following the 2019 and 2021 elections?

D/Commr Michael Duheme: The RCMP is committed to answering this question.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

[English]

Ms. Sahota, you have four minutes and 20 seconds.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you. There are so many more questions and there's never enough time.

I want to thank the witnesses, first and foremost.

At the beginning of the statements, it was mentioned that many Chinese Canadians become victims of the type of foreign interference that occurs. Would you also say that candidates could be blindsided and become victims of this type of foreign interference?

Mr. David Vigneault: The purpose of foreign interference is, again, to push the agenda of a foreign country. As we have mentioned, it takes many different forms. Absolutely that could include engaging candidates, engaging staff and engaging people of different parts of Canadian civil society. As we have said, everybody, potentially, depending on their position, could be subject to foreign interference.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Does your agency regularly brief parliamentarians on foreign interference and how to protect themselves? Especially if a candidate may be a victim of foreign interference, would your agency brief them about it? Has it done so for these occurrences in the past?

Mr. David Vigneault: We brief many parliamentarians across party lines and across different levels of government, as I mentioned before.

We also continue to publicly speak about foreign interference. We have publications that exist specifically in terms of foreign interference. A guide is available in multiple languages to help people understand very concretely what foreign interference is and what they could do about it.

CSIS has been engaged with its partners. I believe the chief also has examples.

● (1205)

Ms. Caroline Xavier (Chief, Communications Security Establishment): I would just add that since 2017, the CSE has been putting out publications with regard to threats to democratic institutions.

One thing we clearly outline in the guidance that we provided to democratic institutions around general elections is that foreign interference could happen to voters, candidates and politicians—as recently as the 2021 election, as well.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Because I don't have that much time, I also want to get in two more things.

How many countries might be involved in these types of activities in Canada? Do you have a ballpark figure of how many countries are involved?

Mr. David Vigneault: Madam Chair, I would say we have publicly acknowledged the different activities of the PRC, Iran and Russia. There are also other countries involved in foreign interference in our country overall—not just in democratic electoral processes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: There are a few countries that you acknowledge publicly. How many countries? Is there an idea of a number? Is it a lot greater than three or just a few greater than three?

Mr. David Vigneault: Madam Chair, I would say that it is more than three. We're not talking about every country engaging in these activities. Most countries do not resort to these types of actions, but indeed we are concerned about a few other countries.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Many former directors of CSIS have commented on this recently. Do you believe a public inquiry might be a good forum for us to continue this conversation? Do you think that CSIS and our country would have something to gain from that, instead of having it in a committee hearing like this, at NSICOP or in briefings to SITE?

The Rosenberg report has recently come out. I'm sure you were involved in briefings with them in order for them to reach their conclusions.

Having done all these things and being engaged in these ways, do you think a public inquiry on top of that would be beneficial?

Mr. David Vigneault: I would say that the focus of CSIS over the last number of years has been to publicly engage in talking about foreign interference. We're using all platforms available to us, including parliamentary committees. Whatever decision is made to continue these discussions, CSIS will be engaged actively in contributing to the discussion.

Of course, the one remaining consideration is the classified information. How we can find the best possible way of having classified information inform proper debate without becoming public is the key conundrum.

The Chair: With that, I would like to thank all of our guests for coming. It's been really interesting. Something I often hear is, when does the public get to know? These meetings are taking place in public. You've really demonstrated the level of detail and the layers of it.

I can speak for myself that I appreciate that you are responsible for our security. You are doing really important work. I thank you for being available today.

I'm going to let the witnesses go, so we can get to the next—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Very briefly, it's related to the witnesses, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Vigneault undertook to provide a consolidated response in consultation with the PCO. I would ask that the clerk contact the PCO to request that response be provided within a week. The briefings were matters that were easy to anticipate, and it would not require a significant amount of time for calendars to be checked.

The Chair: I appreciate that, and I have full confidence that everyone who is appearing here will get us information as quickly as possible. I have not found one person yet who does not take this matter seriously and who does not want to ensure that our elections are protected, open, transparent and fair.

I would ask that you provide information as quickly as possible to the clerk. If there's other information you would like to provide us, give it to the clerk and we'll make sure it's circulated to all members.

With that, on behalf of committee members, thank you to you and your teams for your service. Have a great day.

We'll get ready for the next panel.

For committee members, I am going to suspend until 12:20 p.m., so that everyone has time to go to the washroom, take a health break or whatever they need to do. We will resume at 12:20 p.m. with the next panel.

Thank you.

• (1210) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1220)

The Chair: Welcome back. Good afternoon, everyone. For our third and final panel today I would welcome from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, David Morrison, deputy minister of foreign affairs, and Rob Stewart, deputy minister of international trade.

Mr. Morrison, I understand you will be delivering opening remarks on behalf of both of you. We will give you up to seven minutes. You can return any time that you need to.

Thank you.

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

I am pleased to appear before this committee to discuss foreign election interference. I am joined today by a fellow member of the panel that stands at the heart of Canada's critical election incident public protocol, Mr. Rob Stewart, deputy minister of international trade and previously deputy minister of public safety.

I thank the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for looking into the issue of foreign electoral interference. Ensuring that we defend Canada's federal elections against electoral interference is a critical part of keeping Canada's democratic processes legitimate, credible and trustworthy.

Madam Chair, the critical election incident public protocol was created ahead of the 2019 general election as part of the plan to protect Canada's democracy, which put in place a number of measures to safeguard Canada's democratic institutions and processes, including our elections.

The plan is a whole-of-government effort based on four pillars, which are enhancing citizen preparedness, improving organization readiness, combatting foreign interference and ensuring a healthy information ecosystem.

The protocol lays out a simple, clear and impartial process by which Canadians would be notified of a threat to the integrity of a general election during the caretaker period, whether national or in one or more individual ridings. The government created a panel so that there would be clear, non-partisan oversight of the election as well as a clear process for informing Canadians about any incident or incidents that could impair our ability to have a free and fair election. The decision to make such an announcement must be agreed on by all panel members, that is, by consensus.

The panel members are responsible for determining whether the threshold for informing Canadians of a threat to the integrity of a general election has been met. That threshold is high and limited to exceptional circumstances that could impair Canadians' ability to have a free and fair election, whether due to a single incident or an accumulation of incidents.

The incidents in question would need to pose a significant risk of undermining Canadians' democratic rights, or have the potential to undermine the credibility of the election.

It is important to note that an announcement by the panel is a last resort. There are other actors in the ecosystem that may also speak up before an incident meets the threshold for an announcement by the panel. For example, the media could be in a position to call out disinformation, or a candidate themselves may step in to provide correct information. Civil society also plays a key role in fact-checking and correcting false narratives.

The mandate of the protocol is limited. It is initiated only to respond to incidents that occur within the caretaker period and that do not fall within Elections Canada's areas of responsibility, as identified in the Canada Elections Act.

At the centre of the protocol are the panel members who bring different perspectives to the decision-making table based on experiences working in national security, foreign affairs and democratic governance, and based on a deep understanding of the democratic rights enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

During the 2019 and 2021 elections, members of the panel received regular and frequent security briefings from the security and intelligence threats to elections task force, known as SITE, including a daily sitrep update note during the election period. As you know, SITE is comprised of CSIS, CSE, the RCMP and Global Affairs Canada. Officials from each of these organizations have appeared before you.

Moreover, the cabinet directive on the protocol states very clearly that whenever national security agencies become aware of interference they must consider all options to effectively address the interference.

As part of this process, they inform the panel, but in addition to that, barring any overriding national or public security reasons, the agencies may also directly inform the affected party of the incident. As the committee is aware, there is always a baseline threat of foreign interference. However, the two most recent panels did not see activity that met the threshold related to those elections. Here I would refer you to my own testimony when I last appeared before you, on December 13 of last year, when I spoke of the baseline threat but stated that I was not aware of any spike in foreign interference during the 2019 or 2021 elections. That remains the case today.

As the committee is aware, both the Judd and Rosenberg reports validated that the threshold used by the panel is appropriately high and that the panel is intended to be used as a last resort.

Before concluding, Madam Chair, allow me to speak as a former acting national security and intelligence adviser, a role I performed during the latter half of 2021, including throughout the electoral period, before Jody Thomas assumed the position in early 2022.

● (1225)

Like Ms. Thomas, I will not be commenting on any individual media reports, but I wish to acknowledge—as members of the committee are well aware—that there is an active debate going on right now about how reputable media organizations could be reporting that highly classified intelligence documents describe how a foreign power did this or that to influence the most recent Canadian elections, including by engaging in patently illegal activity, such as funneling money to candidates. How could that be going on while, at the same time, others, including me, maintain there was no foreign interference detected in 2019 or 2021 that threatened Canada's ability to have a free and fair election nationally or at the level of individual ridings? How can these two sides of this ongoing debate be reconciled?

I believe much of the answer lies in the questions recently addressed on social media by professor Stephanie Carvin of Carleton University. These same questions form the crux of a recent interview given by former clerk of the Privy Council Ian Shugart, who, as you know, was a member of this panel in 2019.

The key questions are these: What is intelligence, and how is it used? Without repeating all the points made by Dr. Carvin and Mr. Shugart, let me simply say that intelligence rarely paints a full, concrete or actionable picture. Intelligence almost always comes heavily caveated and qualified in ways designed to caution consumers such as me from jumping to conclusions, while at the same time helping us at least to gain a little more awareness.

An example would be a report based on “an uncorroborated source of unknown reliability”. In layman's terms, I would call this a report based on rumour. Now I, for one, am very glad we live in a country where even information of unknown reliability is passed up the chain, because that allows people like me, daily consumers of intelligence, to begin to form a picture of what might be going on

and the steps that might need to be taken if the information turns out to be accurate or part of a larger pattern. However, let me say that it is extremely rare to come across an intel report that is concrete enough to constitute a smoking gun. Intelligence is much more a game of disparate pieces of information, many of which don't seem to fit together, at least initially.

Keep in mind that people doing nefarious things don't want us to know about those things. It is often only after one reads the full body of intelligence over time that one can approximate an actual picture of what might be happening and why. There are glaring historical examples, Madam Chair, even when that picture finally emerges, of the intel's being just plainly wrong. The war in Iraq comes to mind.

In this context, I would make one final point. Intel that gets leaked and is then taken out of context—for example, a report from a single uncorroborated source.... If that report instantly becomes taken as fact, this can actually be prejudicial to Canada's national security. I believe Jody Thomas tried to make this point yesterday. There is nothing our adversaries would like more than to divide Canadians and have us call into question the very institutions that keep us safe and free, including our electoral processes. We must take all suggestions of foreign interference seriously, even where we have only partial or dubious information. Let me assure you that we do just that. However, the larger point is that intelligence needs to be seen for what it is and what it is not, and if that doesn't happen, we will all end up much worse off.

Thank you.

● (1230)

The Chair: Thank you.

Because one person was speaking out of the two of you, I was able to provide some leniency. Both of you combined would have had 10 minutes, and you are under 10 minutes. Thank you for those opening comments.

We will proceed with six-minute rounds, starting with Mr. Cooper followed by Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My questions will be for Mr. Stewart, since he is the first member of the critical election incident public protocol panel to appear before this committee.

Mr. Stewart, did the panel, during the 2021 election, refer any intelligence or other information that it had to the RCMP or to the commissioner of Canada elections?

Mr. Rob Stewart (Deputy Minister, International Trade, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): For the record, Madam Chair, Mr. Morrison was also on the panel for the 2021 elections.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I'm sorry. I stand corrected.

Mr. Rob Stewart: "No" is my answer.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Morrison said that foreign election interference is a serious matter and that partial intelligence has to be taken seriously and looked at carefully. I find it incredible that nothing was passed on to the RCMP or the commissioner of Canada elections, notwithstanding the fact that based on the Rosenberg report, it's evident that there was information the panel had about foreign interference.

At any time, did the panel consult with or report to the Prime Minister, the PMO, any minister or any minister's office?

Mr. Rob Stewart: No.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Did the panel alert any candidates in the 2021 election that they may be a target or a victim of foreign interference?

Mr. Rob Stewart: We did not, as such. There were regular briefings of political parties and representatives of political parties by officials, but not by the panel.

Mr. Michael Cooper: The cabinet directive provides, barring national security considerations, that candidates who are a target of foreign interference be informed. Why didn't that happen when the rapid response mechanism provided and shared information with the panel about disinformation on Chinese-language social media platforms that was targeted against Conservative candidates in the Lower Mainland, including former member of Parliament Kenny Chiu?

In the face of that information, why weren't Kenny Chiu and those candidates informed, having regard for cabinet protocol?

• (1235)

Mr. Rob Stewart: Your question embeds many assumptions, sir.

To go back to your prior question, the panel was briefed regularly by the RCMP and intelligence agency. It wasn't really in the ambit of the panel to refer things to the RCMP.

Secondly, based on what the panel was being informed of, the panel did not come to the conclusion that there was a level of foreign interference that would impact the integrity of the election. Having said that, on a regular basis, as part of the process, political parties were briefed about—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Let me be clear. Under the cabinet protocol, it's not about the overall integrity of the election. That's under section 6 of the protocol, which is related to informing the public.

I'm talking about the section related to informing candidates, which is a different section.

Mr. Rob Stewart: I am saying, sir, that parties are briefed regularly by officials about what is going on. To the point about what you have assumed to be the case, that was not being told to the political parties by officials.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Are you aware that the Conservative Party of Canada alerted the SITE task force that there was suspected foreign interference by Beijing targeted at Conservative candidates?

Did the SITE task force relay that information to the panel?

Mr. Rob Stewart: I'm aware that there was a meeting after the election with representatives of the Conservative Party on that day.

Mr. Michael Cooper: No. During the election campaign, the Conservative Party of Canada informed the SITE task force about interference that was suspected by Beijing, targeted at Conservative candidates.

Was that information passed on to the panel? Answer yes or no.

Mr. Rob Stewart: The panel was briefed by intelligence agencies and the RCMP on the best information they had available.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Was that information passed on to the panel? Answer yes or no.

Were you aware? Was the panel aware that the Conservative Party had provided concerns about interference targeted at Conservative candidates?

Answer yes or no.

Mr. Rob Stewart: The panel was briefed about activities that were happening in ridings that were difficult to attribute to foreign interference at the time, and that were potentially of interest. It did not rise to the level of the panel adjudicating it as a matter of foreign interference in the election of a riding or at a national level.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Well, it's really not comforting to think that, in the face of what we know with respect to types of disinformation that was being circulated, the panel didn't even see fit to inform any of the candidates. What did the panel do with that information? You said, "It doesn't meet some threshold; therefore, we're not going to inform the public and we're not going to inform the candidates. We're going to keep everyone in the dark." That's completely unacceptable.

The Chair: I will ask Mr. Morrison or Mr. Stewart to answer, please.

Mr. David Morrison: Can I just say, through the Chair, that in the online space, one needs to be certain that the disinformation circulating comes from abroad and that it is sponsored by a state. That's what would constitute foreign interference, as opposed to just the rough-and-tumble of an electoral campaign.

We were aware of what I think the rapid response mechanism called activity, or unusual activity, but we were advised by the rapid response mechanism that it was not possible—and they read everything in Chinese—to attribute that necessarily to non-Canadian sources, non-Canadian citizen sources or state-sponsored sources.

• (1240)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Turnbull, you have up to six minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks, Madam Chair.

To both witnesses, thank you for being here today and for the incredible expertise you provide on these matters. I greatly respect your work and your service.

Maybe, Mr. Morrison, you could give us.... I feel that with the last line of questioning there seems to be a misunderstanding among my colleagues around the table as to what the protocol is and how the protocol and the panel function and work. Could you give a very brief overview of that, Mr. Morrison?

Mr. David Morrison: Sure. The panel exists, by design, only during the caretaker period. The relevant agencies and ministers are live to the possibilities of foreign interference before, during and after the writ period. However, during the writ period, the caretaker period, where parties are out campaigning, the panel functions as a mechanism of last resort in case something rises to the level that would threaten the integrity of the electoral process at either a national or an individual riding level.

The experts' information comes to the panel via the SITE task force. As I said in my opening remarks, that involved, during the time of the election after a number of preparatory meetings—I believe there were four meetings before the election and six meetings during the election—the SITE task force providing daily updates as to what it was seeing or what it was not seeing. We had weekly meetings to ensure we had a shared understanding of what the SITE task force was reporting to us. Then we would deliberate on what we had learned.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you. That's a great overview.

Just to be clear, that panel and protocol were set up in 2019. Prior to that, was there any mechanism like this that would operate to identify and notify the public of a potential threat during an election?

Mr. David Morrison: There was not—not that I'm aware of.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

As both of you were members of the 2021 panel, my understanding is you were briefed by security officials at every meeting during the election. Is that correct?

Mr. David Morrison: Yes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That's great.

The panel relied on the input from our security agencies through the SITE task force to inform its discussions and deliberations. Is that right?

Mr. David Morrison: That's correct.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: We heard from the director of CSIS, Mr. Vigneault, that he had concurred with the findings of the panel that no attempted foreign interference during the election rose to the level of compromising the integrity of the election. Is that correct?

Mr. David Morrison: That is correct.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you.

I want to quote something from Ian Shugart, whom you mentioned in your opening remarks, Mr. Morrison. Recently, Ian

Shugart, former clerk of the privy council and member of the panel in 2019, was on CBC and said this: “Yes, we would have been prepared to intervene and to go public and alert the public of a situation, had it arisen, even on the basis of one or two ridings or if something had been national in its scope. It would have depended on the nature of the intervention.

“But we need to understand that often intelligence information is partial, and it is incomplete in the sense that you have indications of interest, but it stops well short of having any effect. Do you intervene because the other side is interested and even that the other side may be at work? No, you don't, necessarily, because you may simply want to gather more evidence, or you might not have evidence that is clear enough about what their intentions are.

“So the intelligence agencies watch, and they pay attention, and they continue to gather information, but we on the panel at no point in the 2019 election were presented with information that said, 'This has the potential to distort things in such a way that the outcome of the election, either locally or nationally, could be affected.' Our mandate, our remit, would have allowed us to do interventions on either scale—either local or national.”

Mr. Morrison, given your opening remarks I think you've already made some comments in relation to the partial nature of intelligence being pieces that we're putting together to approximate some conclusions. Do you want to react to or comment on Mr. Shugart's statement?

● (1245)

Mr. David Morrison: No, I think it's self-explanatory. For those of us who consume intelligence on a daily basis, it really is a mosaic that helps us weigh what we learn against all our other sources of information and then provide advice to the government.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Then you agree with his statement—

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Morrison, I can't help but return to both the end of your opening remarks and the questions and answers we just heard.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but my analysis of your answers is that you take the information that is provided to you by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, CSIS, with a certain grain of salt. You mention that you have to take some and leave some and that you can't draw conclusions from information that sometimes seems patchy.

It almost gives me the impression that you are in some way substituting your own expertise for that of CSIS when it proposes conclusions based on the information it obtains. Am I wrong? Can I even perhaps see this as a questioning of CSIS expertise on your part?

Mr. David Morrison: Thank you for your question.

I want to be very clear that what I said before was not intended to question the competence of CSIS.

[English]

To be very clear on this very important point, I will respond in English.

The point I was trying to make is that intelligence reports that come across my desk every morning—and that have come across my desk every morning for five or six years—come with qualifiers and caveats. They are not an account of what happened. They are often an account of what somebody said might have happened.

The qualifications, the qualifiers and the caveats come as parts of the documents that our intelligence agencies produce, and that is to help us, as consumers, understand the reliability of what we are reading. They use phrases such as “a news source”, “a news source of unknown reliability” or “a single uncorroborated source alleges that”—this means that one person said it and that they have not heard it anywhere else by any other means. That is how intel comes to those of us who read it on a daily basis.

The point I am trying to make is that when leaked reports are circulating and those caveats are not taken into account, people can get a very distorted view of what the national security community in this country actually believes.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you for the clarifications. Despite this, I still get the sense that your perspective on CSIS seems to be that you can place your own views above its analyses and conclusions. Am I wrong?

• (1250)

[English]

Mr. David Morrison: I will respond in two ways.

What I tried to say in my opening remarks is that I'm proud to live in a country where we have intelligence agencies that are on the job 24-7 and are reporting what they hear. They have various means to hear things from human sources, from electronic sources and so on. It is their responsibility to pass that information up to people such as me and others who are senior members of the national security community.

The information always comes with.... I never know who it's from, but it is characterized as to its degree of newness or reliability and what we know about the source. Sometimes it openly says, “We don't know why the person is.... We may be being told this to influence us rather than to inform us.” The consummation of the daily receipt of intelligence comes with grains of salt. I, myself, am not putting those grains of salt in.

The second point is that it is one input into how people such as me form a world view and use that world view to inform the government. Here I would point to the example used in my introductory remarks, that there was a consensus view in the western intelligence community or the U.S. intelligence community that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. That was wrong.

Therefore, it is entirely appropriate for intelligence to be one stream of information that goes into the decision-making process of policy-makers.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will continue in the next round.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I believe it was Mr. Stewart who answered Mr. Cooper's question about referring intelligence to the RCMP or to Elections Canada. In the previous panel with Elections Canada, the commissioner of elections identified half a dozen areas touched by the allegations contained in the reports by Robert Fife, Steven Chase and Sam Cooper. Each one of them constitutes a violation of our electoral laws.

I'm concerned if that intelligence wasn't passed on to Elections Canada. Elections Canada and the commissioner of elections can take action on intelligence. They gather the evidence; that's part of their jobs. Why would suspicions or allegations not be passed on to Elections Canada? Is it because there was a verification done internally that showed there was no evidence at all of some of the allegations?

Mr. Rob Stewart: Allow me to clarify my prior answer, which was to the question of whether the panel had referred information to the RCMP. My point was that we know the panel receives information from the RCMP and, indeed, from other sources. Prior to the meetings of the panel, which at times included the Chief Electoral Officer, there was a process of gathering and distilling information by the SITE task force.

I am not privy to the discussions that the SITE task force had with the Chief Electoral Officer or the commissioner of elections, but I am confident that the information that was in the hands of our intelligence community that was deemed to be of importance was shared.

Mr. Peter Julian: That's with Elections Canada.

Mr. Rob Stewart: That is correct.

Mr. Peter Julian: Okay. Thank you for clarifying that.

Mr. Morrison, you mentioned the threshold. This is a question that has come up before. There's an issue of a threshold in terms of a national campaign and having an influence in a national campaign, but there are also thresholds at the riding level.

I wanted to know whether there is an evaluation of something that can have an impact at the riding level and what that threshold is, or whether this is something that is simply not considered. Ultimately, the threshold in each riding can have an impact, unfortunately, on the overall campaign.

• (1255)

Mr. David Morrison: It's a very important question. It is one that was addressed by Ian Shugart, a member of the 2019 panel, in his remarks, which I think have already been referenced today.

The threshold exists at the national level and it also exists at the level of individual ridings, because as it has just been pointed out, mathematically, an individual riding or handful of ridings could be material nationally.

Let me say, as Mr. Shugart has said before me, that the context within which allegations are made or interference is examined is very important, and the threshold for the panel to act is very high. Both the Judd report on the 2019 election and the Rosenberg report on the 2021 election affirmed that the high threshold is appropriate, given the remit of the panel.

I would also say, as I tried to say in my remarks, that the panel is but one mechanism, and it is designed as a mechanism of last resort. If there are things going on at the riding level or at the national level, there are others that can also call them out, including the parties or the candidates.

The answer to the question is yes. It's equally operative at the level of individual ridings.

Thank you.

Mr. Peter Julian: I'd like to follow up with a question that came from Madam Romanado in the earlier panel, which is the issue of foreign diplomats who are not respecting our laws, or who are suspected of or have been shown to be breaking Canadian law when it comes to the Canada Elections Act, which is criminal behaviour subject to criminal sanctions.

What are the steps that we take from acting on the intelligence to ultimately, in your other hat as deputy minister of foreign affairs, coming to the point when we may take action against that diplomat, including, as we heard in the previous panel, declaring that person *persona non grata*?

Mr. David Morrison: As the honourable member has pointed out, there is a range of diplomatic tools that can be used. We begin, first off, simply by reminding all the foreign missions in Canada of their responsibilities under the Vienna convention not to interfere in our electoral processes.

Here we're talking about elections, but when any kind of interference comes to light, as is the case with the recent publicity around police stations, we take it seriously. We refer it to the appropriate authorities. In the case of the police stations, they have been shut down.

There is a tool in the diplomatic tool kit to declare someone *persona non grata*. That is allowed under the Vienna convention. It is a tool of last resort, because it almost always results in a tit-for-tat declaration of *persona non grata* that can be asymmetric, and that is often not in anyone's interest.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Morrison.

We will now go to a five-minute round, starting with Mr. Cooper and followed by Mrs. Romanado.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I want to ask a question with respect to informing candidates. Given that no candidates were informed of interference, what is the threshold for informing a candidate?

Mr. Rob Stewart: I will go back to a point that Mr. Morrison just made.

The panel is briefed by the SITE task force. It looks at the evidence that it has to hand and the threshold for deciding that foreign interference committed by a foreign entity with covert and clandestine properties has occurred. The threshold for that determination is high.

In retrospect, looking back at the 2019 and 2021 elections, that threshold was not met. It was adjudicated as not met at a riding level and at a national level by the panel. It would be a hypothetical for me to answer the question as to what the threshold is.

• (1300)

Mr. Michael Cooper: I appreciate your answer. You said it was a high threshold.

Mr. Rob Stewart: That's correct.

Mr. Michael Cooper: It seems to me it's a threshold that almost renders the process useless, given the fact that if you're going to combat foreign interference then the most effective way of doing it is in real time, when it's happening. That didn't happen.

With that, I want to make note of recommendation 11 of the Rosenberg report. It states, "There should be further study of the issue of whether the Protocol should be amended to provide for the possibility of announcements below the threshold set out in section 6.0." Section 6.0 is the section relating to informing the public.

Recommendations do not come out of thin air. Was there a disagreement amongst panel members about whether that threshold had been met?

Mr. Rob Stewart: The panel operates by consensus. There was no disagreement. The recommendation Mr. Rosenberg makes is a worthy recommendation, but as things stand under the protocol, the announcement would occur only were the threshold to be met.

Mr. David Morrison: I would simply add that we as a panel were informed by SITE on a regular basis of things that the various intel agencies were picking up. We had vigorous debates as a panel as to whether what they were picking up constituted foreign interference. We did not have in this election year—to the best of my recollection—any debates on whether a threshold had been met, because as per my comments in my appearance before this committee on December 13, we did not see a spike in foreign interference activities during the 2021 election.

Mr. Michael Cooper: It just seems incredible that you would say that there was no spike in the 2021 election. That's notwithstanding the hundreds of complaints that were received by Elections Canada. That's notwithstanding the alarming reports of interference by Beijing based upon a review of CSIS documents by reputable journalists at Global News and The Globe and Mail.

Here you are, citing one of the Prime Minister's favourite talking points, that there was no spike in foreign interference. I have some difficulty believing that. It really begs the question of whether this panel was really interested in getting to the bottom of foreign interference to respond in real time, or whether what we have is just a reiteration of the Prime Minister's talking points.

It just doesn't add up. On what basis can you conclude that?

Mr. David Morrison: I said in my opening remarks that I continue to believe—as I did when the question was first asked in December of last year—that there is a baseline amount of foreign interference going on every day in Canada that we need to be mindful of, but that I was not aware of any spike in foreign interference during either the 2019 or 2021 election campaigns. I stand by that.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I just want to assure you that we appreciate your being here today. I am confident that you come here in the capacity in which we've asked you to come and that the information you are providing is from within that capacity. Perhaps sometimes people might imply otherwise, but rest assured that I am confident that you are here to provide information you have access to, so that we can do our important work.

Mrs. Romanado, you have five minutes.

• (1305)

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

I'll be quick because I'll be sharing my time.

If I understood correctly, Mr. Cooper mentioned that complaints were filed by the Conservative Party during the election, saying that they were seeing some instances of things of concern. Then we heard that these did not meet the threshold.

My question to you is this. If a political party was aware of information it felt was a concern, would it not share that with its own candidate, or would it rely on an external body to advise it?

Mr. Rob Stewart: If you'll forgive me, I think the question is for someone other than us.

Let me take the opportunity, if I may, to make a couple of points. The information that eventually flows to the panel is about what's going on in the public domain, to which many people have access. We have institutions that are reviewing it, assessing it and providing advice to the panel.

We also have lots of other people who are seeing what is going on in, say, social media. It is entirely open to other individuals or institutions, be they civil society organizations, some of which take on the responsibility of election oversight, or the intelligence institutions for that matter, which have in their own remits the capacity to say something about it.

I think that putting this in the realm of the panel itself as the sole source of valid information is not appropriate.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

Madam Chair, I'll turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Morrison, I'm going to ask you a question similar to the one I put to your CSIS colleague, David Vigneault.

Given your experience and knowledge of foreign interference techniques, is it possible that unconfirmed and unverified leaks could be in themselves a form of foreign interference?

Mr. David Morrison: I don't know where leaks are coming from. That's where I would start.

I did try to say in my prepared remarks that with the current debate going on in social media, the mainstream press and this committee, Canadians would be better served if the debate took into account what intelligence is and what intelligence is not. Misreading or taking out of context an intel report can lead to divisiveness, which in itself plays into the hands of some of our adversaries.

Without speculating about whether a foreign power might be behind something—I think your question was whether this could be a form of foreign interference—the outcome is the same. They seek to weaken our societies and the glue that holds our societies together. That's why I went on at such length to try to suggest that intel taken out of context and without the normal caveats and qualifiers can be very pernicious.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I'd also like to share my time with Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Mr. Fergus and Madam Chair.

I have a question for Mr. Morrison.

My understanding is that our government set up the critical election incident public protocol panel and took a lead on setting up, with the G7 countries, the rapid response mechanism. It also stood up the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security. It also implemented the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. It set up the security and intelligence threats to elections task force and implemented the four-pillar plan to protect Canadian democracy. I think there's a whole host of others, too, in Rosenberg's report.

Is it fair to say that we have done nothing on foreign election interference, in your professional opinion?

• (1310)

Mr. David Morrison: I would say that the threat of foreign interference, including from our major adversaries, has increased in recent years, and it is therefore reassuring to know that our mechanisms and tools and, I would hope, the vigilance of Canadians, particularly within the political process, are also increasing.

The final point I would make is that we will, as officials, certainly do our best to continue to implement and continue to use the tools we have, but it is awareness of the threats throughout the country that will be the best antidote.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Morrison, I'm going to go back to my questions and your answers, particularly on the link you made to Saddam Hussein. We know that this was a very political question that went beyond the information we had. However, as for Chinese interference, it is not only the Canadian Security Intelligence Service that is talking about it: reports from intelligence services around the world point to interference activities on its part.

I can't help but get the impression that there is a kind of lack of deference to CSIS expertise and that you dismiss information they provide when it doesn't suit you.

In this context, I feel like asking you the same question I asked Mr. Vigneault earlier. What is the relationship between the government apparatus and CSIS like? Is it a good one? Are there any conflicts between the two?

Mr. David Morrison: Once again, this is a very important question.

[*English*]

My intent in using the example of what happened in Iraq was to suggest that even when there is a consensus view within an intel community, that view can sometimes be wrong, so I think it is entirely appropriate within our system, and within all pluralistic systems, to welcome a range of views on any one subject, particularly something as threatening as foreign interference.

There is absolutely no intention on my part to question the expertise, the authority and the judgment of our security agencies on questions of foreign interference, but equally, for all the reasons that I have tried to set out here today, that is but one stream of information that goes into the policy-making process.

Intelligence is not truth, and it is often inaccurate, or partial, or incomplete, or in fact designed to throw us off our track, and therefore I believe it is.... There are no tensions between Global Affairs Canada and CSIS. We do have healthy debates, as Canada would expect, when the stakes are so high on something like foreign interference, and I would expect that there are healthy debates within CSIS as well, because of the picture I've tried to paint on what intelligence is and what intelligence is not.

• (1315)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Julian is next.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We in the NDP believe that we need to have, urgently, a national public inquiry on the issue of foreign interference. We've certainly seen the examples: the allegations from China and the allegations

from Russia. There is no doubt that we need to clear the air on a number of issues.

I wanted to put that forward in the context of your reply, Mr. Stewart—and I believe, Mr. Morrison, that you contributed as well—around the threshold at the riding level. Your comment was that the political parties as well can step up on this, but if the candidates are not aware, if the threshold is different in informing the candidates, then it's very difficult, I think, for political parties to intervene in the case where foreign interference may make a difference in a riding.

How do you reconcile that issue of, understandably, not acting with information that is not necessarily complete, but at the same time, non-action or non-information could mean a difference in a riding? I'm thinking particularly of an upcoming election campaign.

Mr. Rob Stewart: Thank you for that question. It will allow me, I hope, to clarify.

In the instance we have been talking about, the 2021 election, for which I was a member of the election panel, through a series of meetings and a significant amount of discussion based on information flowing to the panel, we determined that a threshold—and this is not a bright line; this is a value judgment on the part of the panel—had not been met. As it happened, that meant we did not define a threshold since it was not met.

However, we were seeing indications that foreign interference could be occurring. Indeed, I think it's been on the public record for a long time that this is an ongoing issue. Reports by intelligence agencies and reports by the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians and so on have pointed to the fact that foreign intelligence is an issue, and it's a growing issue, as Mr. Morrison has said.

I think the problem here becomes understanding what you're seeing on the ground and whether social media campaigns, to pick an example, are a reflection of the politics of the day or whether they are in fact instigated by foreign actors. There is a very difficult and grey area there.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor for four minutes.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Gentlemen, I have been listening to you from the beginning, and I sincerely doubt the usefulness of the working group. An election campaign lasts just over 30 days. Since the threshold you mention must be met, it is virtually impossible for this group to notify people that an ongoing election campaign is the target of foreign interference. This process is only intended to roundly postpone decisions that need to be made immediately.

And yet, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service has been clear. Here is what it said in July 2021:

[...] foreign state actors are engaged in interference activities directed at Canadian democratic institutions and processes. These activities are effective. They are ongoing and some are escalating. They are carried out by foreign states to achieve immediate, medium and long-term strategic objectives. They pose serious threats to Canada's national security, prosperity and strategic interests, its social fabric, and the people within it [...] Given the current geopolitical situation, these activities will almost certainly increase.

We have learned from the newspapers about the illegal financing of an underground network of potential candidates, the presence of fake volunteers in election campaigns, the existence of a campaign orchestrated by the Chinese regime to promote the re-election of a Liberal government and defeat Conservative candidates, and the conduct of a massive disinformation campaign by the Chinese regime in some ridings, all of which may have led to the defeat of some Conservative candidates.

Despite all this, you tell us that absolutely nothing is happening and that there has been no increase in threats of foreign interference. What is it going to take for the threshold to be reached? Does it take President Xi Jinping making a recorded statement saying that any Canadian who does not vote Liberal will face the wrath of the Chinese communist regime? What is the threshold? What is the limit?

We're having trouble following you.

● (1320)

[English]

Mr. David Morrison: On the question of a 30-day period, the panel exists because it's in the caretaker period. Before that period and after that period, there are elected officials whose remit is to keep Canada safe from foreign interference. It would be inappropriate for a panel of unelected officials to be doing that when there is a ministry in place. I would say that there was an incident in the 2016 U.S. election, a data dump, an email dump, which many scholars believe had a material effect on the election, and no such panel existed—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: With all due respect, Mr. Morrison, I asked you a simple question, but you are beating around the bush.

It is impossible to reach the threshold you have set because it is too high. What matters is what happens during the election campaign because interference can really affect the outcome of the vote in a riding. I'm not referring to the integrity of the democratic process, I'm talking about the impact on the ground. You will never get everyone to agree on getting involved during that period of time.

Madam Chair, I think my colleague would like to ask a final question.

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Morrison, how many PRC diplomats were expelled from Canada in 2019?

Mr. David Morrison: None that I'm aware of.

Mr. Michael Cooper: What about in 2020?

Mr. David Morrison: None that I'm aware of.

Mr. Michael Cooper: What about in 2021?

Mr. David Morrison: None that I'm aware of.

Mr. Michael Cooper: How about in 2022?

Mr. David Morrison: None that I'm aware of.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Zero. Zero. Zero. Zero.

This is clearly a government that doesn't take foreign interference by Beijing seriously.

Mr. David Morrison: I've already given a response on the diplomatic tool kit we have. I characterize expulsion, or *persona non grata*, as a fairly heavy tool. I am absolutely certain that, if we had concrete evidence of electoral interference that we could present to the officials of any government, our government would take the appropriate action on expulsions.

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen, go ahead.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, Mr. Morrison, I want to apologize for what you've been subject to today, particularly in the last few rants.

I can tell you—somebody who occupies himself completely and entirely with the running of an election during a writ period—that it gives me great comfort to know there are people like you who are watching over the democratic process in our country during those times, and I mean that genuinely. We don't have time for that, and the government doesn't have time for that. The most ideal time for a foreign influencer to act upon our democracy would be then, and knowing that there's a panel in place to safeguard that, and act where appropriate, is truly valued by many members of Parliament—I would say a vast majority—despite the way you've been treated today in terms of identifying the quality of your work.

Mr. Morrison, I want to go back to something you said. I reviewed it, and you said:

intelligence rarely paints a full, concrete or actionable picture. Intelligence almost always comes heavily caveated and qualified in ways designed to caution consumers such as me from jumping to conclusions, while at the same time helping us at least to gain a little more awareness.

An example would be a report based on "an uncorroborated source of unknown reliability". In layman's terms, I would call this a report based on rumour.

What you're basically saying, if I understand you correctly, is that you have multiple reports of intelligence coming across your desk. Some of them could turn out to be quite legitimate and verified based on how you assess the variables and the caveats that go into that, but some of them could be complete nonsense, unreliable and baseless. Is that correct?

● (1325)

Mr. David Morrison: I will respond by saying that I'm glad all of the reports come across my desk because they help me and my colleagues form a better picture of what may be going on in the shadows. So—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm really sorry, but I'm limited on time, and I have a number of questions for you.

Is it true that some reports would be legit, and some wouldn't be legit?

Mr. David Morrison: It is accurate to say that sometimes we see a report with allegations that we say need to be followed up on or that seem alarming, and that report is followed up on because it is alarming, but it turns out that nothing comes of it, so yes, that is correct.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Is it safe to say that the report that is apparently the bombshell report Global News got a hold of, and is basing this entire circus on, could be a report that was really just a rumour?

Mr. David Morrison: I am not going to speculate on any particular reports. I've tried to give a comprehensive answer as to why there are reports circulating in the press and on social media, and why I and Mr. Stewart can say—with, I believe, absolute confidence—that Canada and Canadians can have full confidence in the results of the recent election.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Morrison, who stands to gain the most from this circus?

Mr. David Morrison: I can't speculate on that.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Is it safe to say that foreign actors stand to gain by watching us question our democracy like this?

Mr. David Morrison: I have already said in my prepared remarks, and in response to a couple of questions, that foreign adversaries do try to sow divisions within our society, and when those divisions call into question the very institutions and processes that keep us free and safe, I do think it's alarming.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have one final question. You can't deliver some information to us here because of the nature of that information. Would you be able to deliver that to NSICOP, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians?

Mr. Rob Stewart: Yes. They are able to receive classified material. They would be able to receive all of it.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, gentlemen.

The Chair: With that, our time has come to an end.

I want to thank both you and your teams for your service and for being available to us as quickly as you were. I would like to thank you for your work.

If there is any additional information, as has been requested, can you please provide it to the clerk? We'll make sure it is circulated to members.

We know that at the top of this meeting.... This meeting is going to continue, but Mr. Cooper is asking for my attention.

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

I want to thank the witnesses on behalf of the official opposition.

I know that Mr. Julian does have a motion on notice. However, it's my position that we need to finish unfinished business from last evening first, based upon a notice of motion that we had put and that resulted in an abrupt adjournment as a result of Mr. Julian.

I believe there is a very easy path forward. Mr. Julian has stated that he does want to see Katie Telford appear before this committee, just as the Bloc does, and certainly we want to see—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have a point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian: Point of order.

The Chair: Yes. Okay.

I believe we can release our witnesses.

I have said to you that we would come back. I have said this now multiple times. I'm not sure how much more I can demonstrate that I would like our committee to function. I too believe we can find a quick path forward.

Mr. Gerretsen has a point of order first.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I was just going to encourage that we allow the witnesses to leave rather than subject them to this.

The Chair: Mr. Julian, was it you who asked for a point of order?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, Madam Chair.

I think we should allow the witnesses to leave and have a brief suspension. As I have already indicated, I will be moving my motion on the public inquiry right after that.

● (1330)

The Chair: We are going to suspend for about five minutes and we are going to come back as members of the committee to figure out a way forward. Is that fine? Excellent.

With that, I'd like to thank our guests for joining us. Have a great day.

We'll be back in five.

● (1330)

(Pause)

● (1340)

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, very clearly we suspended the meeting. We're returning to the meeting. As the chair, I am acknowledging Mr. Julian, and then you can have the floor.

Go ahead on a point of order, Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, suspending the meeting does not mean starting over again.

Just before you suspended the meeting, you gave the floor to Mr. Cooper. That was followed by two points of order, but Mr. Cooper still had the floor when you suspended.

I am saying and am convinced that you must, according to the long-standing rules, give the floor back to Mr. Cooper.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Berthold.

I have confirmed that when we return to a meeting, it is a matter of who gets the chair's attention.

Before I even said anything, Mr. Julian had his hand up. I saw it on the screen in front of me, as I see people. Therefore—

Mr. Cooper, go ahead on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I proposed a path forward rather than blowing up six hours of work from yesterday.

There were two points of order. You said that we would suspend and then we would deal with finding a path forward, and that's what I am seeking to do, because I wasn't even able to present my subamendment before I was cut off yesterday and the meeting was shut down.

I think if we're going to deal with the motions before us—and I am eager to get to Mr. Julian's motion, but I think it is appropriate that we deal with the motion that had been put on notice before and that had resulted in Mr. Julian shutting down debate yesterday. We all agree—or at least the NDP, the Bloc and Conservatives agree—that it is important that Katie Telford appear before this committee—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: On a point of order, this is not a point of order.

Mr. Michael Cooper: —to answer questions about what she knows about Beijing's interference. I had put forward a very minor subamendment to Mr. Julian's amendment that would simply establish a panel comprising all chiefs of staff and national campaign chairs of all the parties for the 2019 and 2021 elections. The only person who would not be included in that panel was Katie Telford, and I gave reasons as to why she needs to appear before this committee alone.

The second part of my motion was simply to provide for—

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, as you know, on a point of order, when you say “point of order”, I need to know the point of order.

I would have to agree—I have another point of order now—that this is not a point of order. I know you're going to say no, but that's not how this works.

On your point of order, thank you for your comments.

Mr. Gerretsen, go ahead on a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: First, Madam Chair, the screen keeps flickering in and out. Perhaps there is a way to fix that.

Yes, Madam Chair, I would concur that a point of order is to address a point about the manner in which the meeting has been conducted, not to enter into a debate about something one wishes they had had the opportunity to speak to.

In terms of a point of order, last night there was a motion on the table. There was a motion to adjourn, and then the committee adjourned. Whenever the committee restarts after that, the motion that had previously been debated is not subject to be initiated again. The mover of the motion has to move the motion again at their own discretion and when they decide to.

Mr. Cooper clearly heard Mr. Julian say earlier on that he was going to move a motion, so rather than following the normal customary practice of allowing the witnesses to leave before getting in-

to committee business, Mr. Cooper tried to seize on an opportunity to circumvent the fact that he knew Mr. Julian was going to do that.

In terms of a point of order, there is no motion that is on the floor right now because we adjourned last night, and now we are at a starting point again, and I think it is incumbent upon you to respect the rules and to allow Mr. Julian to go first.

● (1345)

The Chair: I'm just going to say, with respect to members saying “point of order”, yes, it gives you the floor but you can't just say “point of order” for the sake of saying “point of order”. That's what's happening right now.

Mr. Cooper, I'm going to try this one more time and then I am going to proceed with running the meeting.

What is your point of order?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, what I am trying to do is to be reasonable here, which is to provide a path forward for this committee to, I would hope, deal with my amendment quickly, deal with Mr. Julian's amendment to my motion quickly, vote on the motion, and then turn to Mr. Julian's motion.

The points pro and con have largely been made. I've attempted to explain the rationale for my subamendment, but Mr. Julian and others have tried to shut me down in that regard. I don't know why this is so difficult. It shouldn't be difficult.

The Chair: I agree with you. Why is this being difficult?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Well, it's because Mr. Julian took it upon himself to shut down debate midway through my intent to present—

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I'd like the member opposite to tell us what standing order he is referencing in terms of his point of order, because all we're doing right now is giving him the floor for debate.

The Chair: I'm actually going to take back my role—

Mr. Luc Berthold: Point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Berthold, refer to your point of order.

I think by doing this we're clearly demonstrating what the intentions are. I think that might be unfortunate, because we say this is something that is really important and that all parties want to work on, and now I'm seeing perhaps true intentions coming out.

What is your point of order, Mr. Berthold?

Mr. Luc Berthold: I would be glad to learn what you think our intentions are.

The Chair: I'm trying to figure it out.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Yes, but I look forward to seeing and hearing it, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

I simply wanted to say that at the end of the last panel's testimony, you gave the floor to Mr. Cooper. That was followed by two points of order. You then kindly and correctly asked that the meeting be suspended to allow the witnesses to leave. Since that request seemed perfectly legitimate, Mr. Cooper agreed while assuming he would have the floor again when the meeting resumed.

Mr. Cooper was going to introduce a motion to resume debate after it was interrupted by the two points of order, which called for releasing the witnesses. However, at no point did Mr. Cooper agree to give up the floor or let someone else speak.

Therefore, in my view, we must pick up where we left off, namely, with Mr. Cooper. That is my understanding based on how we left things a little earlier. I hope that we can resume our deliberations in good faith and in that manner.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for your comments on that, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Michael Cooper: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I just emphasize that after six hours of work yesterday we came this close to dealing with the motion that had been on notice in advance, in priority of Mr. Julian's.

Now, we can do what is reasonable and try to deal with the business of yesterday that was interrupted by Mr. Julian last night and dispense with it with a vote on my subamendment, get to Mr. Julian's amendment, get to my main motion, and then take up Mr. Julian's motion.

It's perfectly reasonable, after all, if Mr. Julian is sincere that he wants Katie Telford to appear before this committee. Then I would submit that he would very much welcome dealing with my very minor subamendment, letting the committee vote on it and then take up his amendment.

What I proposed in my subamendment is setting up a panel with the chiefs of staff, the national campaign directors of all the parties. The only chief of staff who wouldn't be present would be Ms. Telford. If it doesn't pass, it doesn't pass.

I'm not trying to tie this committee up. I would like to deal with Mr. Julian's motion that is on notice today, but in order to do so, I think it's only reasonable, having regard for the amount of time and debate that went into the motion yesterday, that we, as expeditiously as possible—

• (1350)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: What standing order is being violated right now, Madam Chair?

The Chair: I think, Mr. Cooper, you've made your point. Mr. Berthold has made his point. I appreciate everybody's points.

We'll go back to the meeting.

Mr. Julian, you have the floor.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to move that.... This is about the national public inquiry—

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Julian, I'm sorry—

Mr. Peter Julian: I don't understand why the Conservatives don't want a national public inquiry—

The Chair: Mr. Julian, you actually have the floor. Because Mr. Berthold is choosing to move another point of order, the floor will be returned to you because you have the floor.

What we talked about earlier, before we get into points of order that are not actually points of order... Three, almost four hours ago, I suggested that if we wanted to be reasonable and find a path forward, we should be talking to each other and finding that path forward. Clearly, something was not able to happen, and that's why we are having this here. If we want to be reasonable, as people who are choosing to use words as convenient to them, we can get to our work and get it all done. That's the way the committee has always operated.

Mr. Julian, rest assured that you have the floor. If somebody is concerned with this, they know the standing orders and how they can proceed.

We have Mr. Berthold on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I challenge the chair on that ruling.

The Chair: You are welcome to appeal it.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Can we get clarification on the ruling? The ruling is that Mr. Julian has the floor. Is that the ruling? We're voting on whether it shall be sustained.

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: The ruling has been sustained.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I have a point of order. There's no volume in the room.

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

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I understand the Conservative opposition—

Mr. Michael Cooper: There's no volume on the feed. That is what I understand.

I have a point of order. There's no volume on the feed.

The Chair: Mr. Julian, one more time, there is no—

Mr. Michael Cooper: There is no volume on the feed. That is what I've been advised. It's the English feed.

The Chair: When somebody speaks in French, you can't hear it in English.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That's correct.

The Chair: Can we just test the English feed? There is no volume on the English feed.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: We don't even get the floor feed.

The Chair: Okay. We will take a moment to pause and look at the technical issues.

For people on the screen, do you hear us in the room? You are able to hear us, so it's in the room.

● (1355)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): The other thing that's happening is there's a lot of feedback on Peter's microphone that's coming through online.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, well why don't you let me speak?

The Chair: Commentary aside, do other people who are on the screen also hear feedback when Mr. Julian speaks?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Chair, the problem, as we were hearing in the last panel, is that if someone in the room has their microphone open and one of us is speaking, we get the feedback.

The Chair: Okay, but otherwise you do not get feedback.

Mr. Brassard, when Mrs. Romanado was speaking, could you hear her without feedback?

Mr. John Brassard: There was no feedback when Mrs. Romanado was speaking.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Romanado might have a point that sometimes our mikes are left on and that might cause it, so we'll just be mindful to make sure there are no microphones on in the room.

I think everything is now functioning. I'm just confirming that you can hear the sound of my voice.

I think we're all good.

Mr. Julian.

● (1400)

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to read into the record the notice of motion that I provided yesterday morning. It was distributed Tuesday afternoon to committee, and of course I also gave notice this morning that it would be moved immediately following our witnesses. Therefore, there's been ample notice for all parties to know what is coming forward, when it is coming forward, and how I'm moving it.

I will now read the motion into the record. Then I will have some comments afterward, Madam Chair.

That the committee report to the House that it calls on the Government of Canada to launch a national public inquiry into allegations of foreign interference in Canada's democratic system, including but not limited to allegations of interference in general elections by foreign governments;

That this inquiry be granted all necessary powers to call witnesses from the government and from political parties, including but not limited to Ministers, former Ministers, chiefs of staff to the Prime Minister and to the Leader of the Official Opposition during the 2019 and 2021 federal election campaigns and national campaign directors for the 2019 and 2021 federal election campaigns of the Liberal Party of Canada and the Conservative Party of Canada;

And that this inquiry have to power to order and review all documents it deems necessary for this work, including documents which are related to national security.

● (1405)

I'm glad to have finally been able to move this after two days and after an hour of procedural circus.

Madam Chair, I'd like to start off by saying I think Mr. Cooper has made the case for this national public inquiry through his own actions, because this was a circus both last night and today. It clearly indicates that what we need is a non-partisan national public inquiry to get answers for Canadians. What answers do we need? Well, certainly, I think there have been disturbing allegations that have come out of news reports published by Robert Fife and Steven Chase in *The Globe and Mail* and by Sam Cooper for *Global News*. Those allegations, as I mentioned earlier today, could possibly involve violations of the *Canada Elections Act*. They are very serious allegations.

I would have to profoundly disagree with the Prime Minister's statement that he doesn't believe a national public inquiry is warranted. The member for Burnaby South, Jagmeet Singh, raised this on Sunday, as you know. We've had other political parties subsequently weigh in. It should be a matter of consensus that this committee direct the House that a national public inquiry is the best method to ensure that Canadians get answers.

Some might say, "Well, let's just limit it to the influence that Beijing has had in elections." I'd like to remind committee members about the testimony we have heard—and I'll quote from November 3, 2022—in which a witness said the following:

Russian information and influence operations are persistent and they are growing. They do not turn on and off with election cycles and have intensified during the course of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

He went on:

Russia's primary and full-time focus is to undermine and destabilize our democracy by exploiting the most polarizing issues of the day.

Further:

These attacks affect our political environment and choices every day, not just during election periods.

There are allegations that interference by Beijing may have touched up to 11 candidates. Those allegations need to be investigated through a national public inquiry.

Ongoing concerns have been raised about Russia, not just in the articles published by the *National Observer* but also, as I mentioned yesterday, by the University of Calgary School of Public Policy, which very clearly indicated in its research that Russian state agents were involved in disinformation, and, of course, by witnesses who have come to our committee.

Does that exclude other foreign governments or state actors? Obviously it does not. That's why I believe we should include the allegations of foreign interference in Canada's democratic system as part of this national public inquiry and not limit it to any one of the foreign powers that are potentially interfering in our democracy and potentially interfering in our general elections.

Who should be called? We're providing some direction in that regard, but clearly the allegations so far have indicated connection to both the Liberal Party campaign and the Conservative Party campaign, and we believe that direction is something that should be provided as part of the national public inquiry.

Do we believe people should be taken off the street and other names should be mentioned? Clearly we do not, although the national public inquiry does have the ability to look where it needs to in terms of witness testimony, so this is not a restrictive list at all. However, it is also important that the national public inquiry have the power to order and review all documents, and that includes documents related to national security.

This is an issue that Canadians are concerned about. This is an issue we need to take a position on. That is why I'm putting forward this motion, and hopefully we'll have the consensus to move it through to the House and to say to the government that this is something that needs to be acted on within the framework of a non-partisan and independent national public inquiry.

● (1410)

[*Translation*]

In light of the many serious allegations of interference by China and Russia, which could also include violations of the Canada Elections Act, it seems important, as Mr. Jagmeet Singh stated so well last Sunday, that we have a national public and non-partisan inquiry. We saw a little earlier how partisanship can lead to a circus atmosphere rather than to a valid and important inquiry.

We are therefore simply requesting that our committee present a report to the House and that it then call on the government to launch a national public inquiry. The Prime Minister has said that we don't need one, but I personally believe that it is very important to have one so Canadians can get all answers they need.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

So that everyone knows what is happening, my speaking list currently has Mr. Cooper, Monsieur Berthold, Mr. Fergus and Ms. Romanado.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

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

I will be moving an amendment to Mr. Julian's motion, and I'll read that into the record. We will distribute a copy of that.

The Chair: Why don't we get it distributed, and then I'll give you back the floor. Is that okay?

For me to maintain order and sanity, can I proceed with the meeting as I usually would? I will offer you the list I have and then return to it when we come back to the main amendment. Or would you like me to start a new list for the subamendment? Can I maintain the way I usually run the meeting so that we can give a turn to everybody who wants one? Can I see some nodding of heads?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The way I read it yesterday is okay, is it? That's perfect.

Mr. Cooper, you will have the floor once we get it distributed. Has it been sent to the clerk in both official languages?

Mr. Michael Cooper: It has.

The Chair: Stay tuned. It is coming, and we will proceed then.

Colleagues, I believe you should have it in your inboxes. Some people in the room don't have it yet.

For colleagues who are online, can you give me a nod of the head to say you've received the amendment?

I see thumbs-up and some heads nodding. That's perfect. We'll be starting in a couple of seconds.

We'll go back to Mr. Cooper.

● (1415)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will read my amendment into the record.

I move that the amendment be amended in the first paragraph by replacing all of the words after the words "foreign interference" with the following: "by Beijing in the 2019 and 2021 federal elections"; in the second paragraph by replacing all of the words after the words "the government" with the following: "and from all political parties"; by adding the following after the second paragraph: "that the inquiry investigate abuse of diaspora groups by hostile foreign governments"; and by adding the following after the last paragraph: "that the individual heading this inquiry be selected by unanimous agreement by the House leaders of the officially recognized parties in the House of Commons and that this inquiry does not impede or stop the committee's study on foreign election interference, including the production of documents and calling of witnesses".

Now, Madam Chair, I will speak to my motion.

This is—

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Chair, on a point of order, is this admissible? This is completely changing the original motion. It's been completely rewritten.

The Chair: If you would provide me a moment to consult with the clerk, that would be great.

Mrs. Romanado, the clerk and I have spoken. It does narrow the scope of the intention of Mr. Julian, so the clerk does feel, and thereby I feel, that it is in order and that the committee members will get to choose if they want to narrow the scope or broaden the scope.

With that, I'm going to proceed by returning the floor to Mr. Cooper.

● (1420)

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

The amendment I have put forward is fair, reasonable and measured. It reflects the position taken by the leader of the official opposition, who is in support and spoke yesterday about the need for a national inquiry. With respect to the overriding purpose of Mr. Julian's motion, we support it and welcome it, but at the same time, we would submit that while there are other instances of foreign interference and other bad actors, Beijing—

Pardon; I see there is no camera, as I'm being told.

The Chair: It sees me and it should see....

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Can someone please put the camera on Mr. Cooper?

The Chair: The camera should always be on the person who's speaking and the camera definitely should not be on me when I'm not speaking.

Mr. Cooper, could you speak again, and we'll see if the camera goes to you?

Mr. Michael Cooper: It's on me now. Okay.

Madam Chair, as I was saying, there's no question that there are other foreign state bad actors—including Russia, which Mr. Julian has cited—and that we need to take those threats seriously, but at the same time, the biggest threat posed to Canada by any state is that of the Beijing Communist regime. That has been made clear by our security and intelligence agencies. It's what we heard this morning from CSIS.

Moreover, there have been alarming reports of a sophisticated and vast campaign of interference in our elections in 2019 and 2021, based upon a review of CSIS documents by reputable journalists. Although that interference in no way impacted the overall result of either the 2019 or 2021 election, it did have, or may have had, an impact in certain ridings.

If even one riding is impacted, that's something that should be of grave concern for all Canadians who care about protecting our democracy and our democratic institutions. It should be Canadians and Canadians alone who decide elections, both overall election outcomes and outcomes in ridings, and not hostile foreign state actors.

In the face of that, what I believe is appropriate to get to the bottom of this interference by way of an inquiry is an inquiry that is targeted and focused and that can produce a report in the near future. I would hope that this would be before the next election, which could happen at any time. It would not be desirable to have an inquiry that was expansive and that did not provide a report until perhaps a year or two years down the road. We need answers and we need answers now. That is why a targeted, narrow inquiry makes sense and deals with these very specific allegations and revelations that have been brought forward.

The other aspect of this amendment is to ensure that Justin Trudeau, the Prime Minister, doesn't get to decide unilaterally who the commissioner is. We all really—

• (1425)

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair. I'm so sorry, but I'm hearing a lot of feedback. I'm not sure if there's another mike on in the room.

The Chair: When Mr. Cooper is speaking, are you hearing feedback?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes, I am.

The Chair: Do you hear feedback when I speak?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: No. I'm not hearing it right now.

Maybe Mr. Cooper can try again. I think there was some kind of technical glitch. I'm not sure if it was on my end or in the room.

The Chair: Well, we want to make sure that every member is heard. I'll return the floor to Mr. Cooper, but should it happen again, do exactly as you've just done.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I hope I'm coming through more clearly now.

As I was saying, we don't think it's appropriate that Mr. Trudeau, the Prime Minister, should be able to unilaterally decide who heads this inquiry. After all, the Prime Minister is implicated to the degree that his office was reportedly—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Madam Chair, my sincerest apologies to you and Mr. Cooper. I'm not sure if it's on my end, but I'm just hearing a lot of feedback. I don't know what it is.

The Chair: Thank you.

Can I just ask other colleagues who are on screen if they are hearing feedback as well?

Ms. Romanado, do you hear feedback when he speaks?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm getting a bit of scratchiness. I'm going to unplug and plug back in and see if it's me.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull or Mr. Brassard, are you hearing feedback when Mr. Cooper speaks?

Mr. John Brassard: I'm not hearing feedback. I'm hearing feedback when Ms. Khalid is speaking.

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, do you hear any feedback?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I haven't heard any feedback, other than when a mike is on in the room and someone else online is trying to speak.

The Chair: The technicians are going to call Ms. Khalid and maybe touch base with Ms. Romanado, who's hearing scratching as well.

Now it's sounding better. It's not scratching.

Mr. Cooper, we'll go back to you.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We don't believe that it's appropriate that Mr. Trudeau, the Prime Minister, should decide unilaterally who heads this inquiry. The Prime Minister has a conflict. He has a conflict to the degree that serious allegations were made in a Global News report last week that several of the Prime Minister's senior aides were briefed by CSIS in 2019 that a Liberal candidate and now sitting MP had the assistance of Beijing's Toronto consulate in his nomination campaign and that they turned a blind eye. They did nothing about that in the face of those warnings from CSIS. We have also seen no answer from the Prime Minister on the veracity of those reports. He has refused to answer basic questions, including whether he had been briefed.

Needless to say, the Prime Minister's office is involved in matters that go to the heart of what this inquiry is about, and the heart of the matter is about what the Prime Minister knew, when he knew it and what he did or did not do about Beijing's interference in our elections. In order for there to be confidence in such an inquiry, it needs to be not only an impartial and fair process; it needs to be seen as such. This amendment to Mr. Julian's motion would do just that. It would provide an opportunity for all of the House leaders of all of the recognized parties to reach agreement unanimously as to the individual who should head the inquiry.

While this inquiry is important, it is also important to recognize that much of the work of the commissioner and the panel members may be in a venue that is not open, that is not before the public, having regard for classified documents and other information that might be subject to the review of the inquiry. Given the very serious allegations that have been made, given the almost daily reports of some new aspect, some new issue, some new scandal involving election interference by Beijing in the 2019 and 2021 elections, it's not enough to simply say that we should let the inquiry do its work behind closed doors and at the end of it issue a heavily redacted report.

Again, we welcome an inquiry, but we don't welcome it as a substitute or a replacement for the work that this committee is doing to undertake a study of election foreign interference and the work that we have been tasked to undertake specifically with respect to interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections by Beijing.

The advice of CSIS in respect to the manner in which foreign interference should be responded to is based upon sunlight and transparency. It is that the interference should be made known to the public, and this committee provides a forum for there to be sunshine and transparency now and to get answers now, although we might not be able to get all the answers. That's why I support the objective of Mr. Julian's motion, which is to establish an inquiry.

• (1430)

It would not be, I believe, in the interests of getting to the truth and getting to the bottom of this to simply shut down the work of this committee. We need to continue to do our work. We need to continue to hear from witnesses and we need to continue to insist on the production of documents. There are lots of witnesses we need to hear from, including Katie Telford, the Prime Minister's chief of staff. The Prime Minister said that when you're talking to Katie Telford, it's like talking to him. She is a key witness in getting to the bottom of the central issue at hand, which is what the Prime

Minister knew, when he knew it and what he did or didn't do in respect to Beijing's interference in our election.

Given that, I think this would strike the right balance with the openness and transparency of this committee to be able to move forward today, next week and in the weeks to come as we learn more about this very serious interference, which the Prime Minister, up until now, has been anything but transparent about, as he seeks to deflect and block and cover up his inaction based on everything that has been made available up until now.

I will probably have other comments to make, but I will leave it at that for now. I'm hopeful that this amendment will be well received and will be adopted.

• (1435)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

I will continue with the list as it was. It will be Mr. Berthold, followed by Mr. Fergus and then Mrs. Romanado. I also have Madame Normandin, Mr. Turnbull, Mr. Julian and Mr. Gerretsen. For the main motion, when we get to it, my list will still be Berthold, Fergus and Romanado. The others were added on after the amendment was moved. This is just so we're on the same page.

Go ahead, Monsieur Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Madam Chair.

What did Prime Minister Justin Trudeau know and when did he know it? What did Prime Minister Justin Trudeau do, or rather, what did he not do, when he learned about the many allegations of interference by China in Canada's democratic process? That is the basic question that requires a public inquiry. In fact, yesterday the Leader of the Conservative Party said as much.

Why? Because, as the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau is ultimately responsible to Canadians for all matters relating to national security and the respect of our democratic process. Unfortunately, despite the fact that the Prime Minister was briefed several times on foreign election interference by the Chinese communist regime, as we learned and as witnesses in the know and who were involved have confirmed, never once did the Prime Minister's Office feel it was necessary to share its concerns with the RCMP or CSIS. It was as if there was nothing unusual going on.

I would like to remind you that these are indeed serious allegations. There's talk of a clandestine network of 11 candidates who received financial support from the Chinese regime. There's talk of so-called volunteers who in actual fact were not volunteers and who were subsidized by people close to the Chinese regime to help candidates during the election campaign. There's talk of orchestrated campaigns to help elect a minority liberal government and defeat certain Conservative candidates.

Not a day goes by without new information appearing in the news or on social media about interference by the Chinese regime in our democratic process.

Today we learned that the amount of information and evidence needed to brief candidates on election interference by the Chinese regime was so significant that it was unlikely the threshold would ever be met.

Yet, the first thing the Prime Minister said in his defence was that all of the information was given to the panel charged with determining whether the election had been undermined by foreign interference, and that the panel had determined that there was no foreign election interference, and that the process unfolded as it should have. That's a fact: this is what we have heard from the Prime Minister from the outset. Incidentally, the Prime Minister himself struck the panel. That can mean many things and raises too many questions.

That is why my colleague's amendment is very relevant. You can't just let the government decide who will conduct the public inquiry, since the government is led by the Prime Minister, who is himself directly implicated in the many allegations reported by media, be it Global News or The Globe and Mail, other media or reporters' news feeds.

• (1440)

As well, we need to absolutely ensure that the public inquiry is done responsibly, of course, and that it focuses on all political parties. This is where I'd like to reach out to my NDP colleague, who pleaded for consensus and unanimity at the start of his presentation. The NDP said that the inquiry must absolutely be non-partisan, that we must absolutely be on the same page and send a unanimous message to the House of Commons and to the government that we are calling for an inquiry that is in line with what we are asking for. In its motion, however, the NDP is forgetting its own party. It doesn't want to hear from anyone from the NDP. It doesn't want the national inquiry to hear from people from the NDP.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Julian: It is simply because the NDP is in no way involved in those activities.

Mr. Luc Berthold: That is a matter of debate, Madam Chair, not a point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian: My colleague has to tell the truth.

[English]

The Chair: Today we are learning a lot about what is and is not a point of order. Maybe that's a study we'd want to take on. It would be within PROC's purview.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: In that case, Madam Chair, I will continue.

So, I take at face value—

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Berthold, you will get to continue when I give you the floor.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I thought you did.

[Translation]

My apologies.

[English]

The Chair: I would hope so.

Mr. Berthold, I give you the floor.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Okay, I will continue then.

Mr. Julian, if you are so convinced of what you are saying, you should find our proposal completely legitimate. You should not have any fear that a national commission of inquiry might also be interested in all the political parties. If we adopt the motion as presented today and it is supported by the majority of leaders in the House, we will then let the person chosen as commissioner decide what is appropriate in this situation. I think the investigation itself will show the same thing as what you are saying, Mr. Julian.

A lot has been left unsaid about what could or could not be made public. Sometimes what is unsaid is more important than what is said. If this inquiry is conducted behind closed doors and we are unfortunately unable to obtain information, that would seriously undermine the process of getting to the bottom of foreign interference by China. That is why the committee must definitely continue its study of foreign interference in the electoral process, concurrently with the public inquiry. We must also insist on our request to obtain certain documents. That is how we can get to the bottom of things.

In closing, I reiterate that we must focus on the role of the Chinese regime in the 2019 and 2021 elections. That way, our report will not cover too long a period of time and it will not be too watered down by an overabundance of information.

The allegations are clear, straightforward and specific: the Chinese communist regime devised a system to influence the election results in certain ridings in Canada and to change people's voting intentions. All kinds of methods and techniques were used to do this, ranging from intimidation to fear. That should not happen in Canada or in any other democracy.

That is why we must absolutely focus on these allegations, which have also been highlighted in various articles. We have seen many revelations in this regard in recent weeks.

We must also remember that the diaspora groups that are targeted by hostile foreign governments are the first victims in all of this. They are the first victims since their right to vote freely in our country has been restricted. For the sake of those people, we need to get to the bottom of this and get the full story on China's interference in our democratic process.

I appeal to all my colleagues to adopt our amendments, especially to my colleague from the NDP. Our amendments are simple and will enable us to achieve the same goal, namely, to get to the bottom of foreign interference. I hope my colleague will agree so that the opposition parties can speak unanimously. I remind you that the same thing could happen again in a future election, which could very well be sooner than we might expect since we have a minority government.

● (1445)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

You have the floor, Mr. Fergus.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Madam Chair, thank you for the opportunity to speak to this amendment to Mr. Julian's motion.

Let me say first that I am still undecided about the main motion. I think it has some merits. It is indeed important to understand that foreign interference is not limited to a single country, as the witnesses who appeared yesterday and today have told us. Three or four countries in particular were mentioned. When we asked them to indicate the number of countries interfering in Canada, the witnesses were not prepared to limit it to four countries. So this is a strong feature of Mr. Julian's proposal.

His motion also has certain weaknesses, however. One of them is that a national public inquiry would be subject to the same limitations we are facing today. The issue is what kind of information can be disclosed to the general public without jeopardizing our ties with our allies' intelligence services, without jeopardizing the methods our services use to counter interference by other countries, and without risking the very lives of our agents in the field.

So the motion includes some important features which we can perhaps agree on. We have to find a non-partisan way to investigate this important matter, and I congratulate my colleague in that regard once again. Unfortunately, the MPs from a particular party have not yet shown that they are able to resist the temptation to engage in partisanship. I come to this sad conclusion because this amendment is intended to greatly reduce the scope of Mr. Julian's motion, without taking into account the evidence we have heard. As I said at the outset, this is regrettable.

As to Mr. Cooper's proposal, he is playing political games and targeting Ms. Telford in particular. In my opinion, that does not help matters at all.

● (1450)

Further, it is limited to two elections, when we know very well that this has been going on for longer than those two elections, as the evidence has shown.

Finally, based on what I have seen in more than the past 24 hours that we have been in committee and discussing these matters, I am afraid that the official opposition would exercise a veto in the selection of the person chairing the commission of inquiry. Perhaps the opposition MPs will prove me wrong, and I would be pleased if they do.

So I will definitely vote against your amendment because, for the reasons I have just mentioned, it would completely change the main motion.

I look forward to hearing what my colleagues have to say about the main motion. Perhaps they will make proposals that would improve the main motion.

I will stop here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

You have the floor, Ms. Romanado.

[*English*]

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

Further to my colleague's intervention, I'm looking at this amendment to the motion and I want to make it clear that the one reason that I can't support it, which is glaring to me, is the reference to including documents that are related to national security. I want to explain why.

We've heard over the course of the last two days that the Chief Electoral Officer, the commissioner of elections—

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: A point of order, Madam Chair. If I am not mistaken, Ms. Romanado is talking about something that is not part of the amendment, but instead part of the initial proposal.

I just want to make sure that we are still taking about the amendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: We are debating the amendment. I do think it's fair to provide some opportunity for her to come back to that point.

The way I was hearing it is that you are going to circle back. Is that correct?

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I am, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mrs. Romanado sometimes does start large and then.... I'm going to give her some time.

Mrs. Romanado, we'll go back to you.

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

I will get to my point.

We've heard multiple people who are experts in their field—whether it be the national security and intelligence officer, SITE, the director of CSIS today, the CSE or the RCMP—very clearly state that there would be no difference in the access to information that a public inquiry would have compared to what this committee would have.

The reason I'm bringing this up is in reference to the production of documents and calling of witnesses. For the purpose of national security, we cannot have information out there in a public forum that would have a direct impact on our Five Eyes intelligence partners. The impact of that, as we heard in the last panel, would be devastating, not only in terms of our alliance and our partnerships but also in terms of the intelligence assets that we have around the world, including Canadian Armed Forces members.

● (1455)

[*Translation*]

I know very well that Saint-Jean Garrison and Saint-Jean Royal Military College are in Ms. Normandin's riding, and I am sure she does not want to jeopardize the health and safety of members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

[*English*]

I'm strictly against the fact that we keep having a conversation about our not wanting to provide this information. We cannot. This is not partisan. We cannot have this kind of information in the public domain. We can keep putting it out there to pretend and wave it around that we should get unredacted documents when we know full well that we cannot. Rather than playing games with respect to our national security, is there not another venue that has the proper clearance to look at that, whether it be NSICOP or something else?

This is the big beef that I'm having with this conversation. I'm not making this up. This is being told to us by the experts. We cannot have this information out there.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I will try to be brief. We have spent a lot of time together. It's not that I do not enjoy my colleagues' company, but I am sure they want to deal with this matter effectively as much as I do.

Regarding the proposed amendment, I will propose subamendments starting with the end of the amendment. Then I will call upon our clerk on a procedural matter, but that will be later on. There is no stress, no rush.

The end of the amendment suggests that holding an independent public inquiry, as the Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the Conservative Party want, would not affect a study being conducted by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I think they should be conducted concurrently, as was the case with the Rouleau Commission. The joint parliamentary committee continued its work while the Rouleau Commission was ongoing. Each body might have different mandates, raise different questions, and make different recommendations. I think that is entirely appropriate. One does not prevent the other from existing.

As to the appointment of the person heading up the independent public inquiry, the Bloc Québécois has also insisted from the outset

that all parties must agree upon the person selected. I completely agree with that part of the amendment. I would even say that is the most important part of the amendment. If we want to restore voters' confidence in their democratic institutions, it is absolutely essential to ensure from the outset that the person conducting the inquiry has credibility. I fully support that proposal.

It is also proposed that the inquiry also look into hostile foreign governments that violate the rights of diaspora groups. Something was just mentioned that I would like to see included in an independent public inquiry, without limiting the commissioner's mandate. I think this is relevant. We can easily stipulate at the outset that there are aspects that we want included in an inquiry. Given the various information we have seen in the media, in addition to what certain witnesses have said here, it is practically stating the obvious that foreign interference is affecting members of diaspora groups here. We cannot ignore this issue in our analysis of foreign interference.

Now for the portion of the amendment that would eliminate the stipulation that the witnesses would include, but not be limited to, ministers, former ministers and so forth. I am especially in favour of the idea of stipulating that the witnesses would be from the government and all political parties. The commissioner could then call upon a wide range of individuals to appear. If we insist on the commissioner being selected essentially jointly by all the parties so that we can have confidence in him, that would also give him a broad mandate. I think this amendment addresses this desire not to tie the commissioner's hands.

Now for the first part of the amendment. That is the problem, I think. Rather than giving the commissioner the greatest latitude possible, it stipulates instead that the issue is China's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections. I am sure that a commissioner who has the freedom to conduct an inquiry into foreign interference would examine China's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections. I have no doubt about that. We do not need to give that direction; the commissioner would do that, because it would be dictated by current events. On the other hand, I would not want to limit a commissioner from the outset by asking him to look at foreign interference by China only, and in those two elections only.

For these reasons, I am not as favourable to the part of the amendment pertaining to the first paragraph of the initial motion. This is where I would like the clerk's opinion. Rather than table a subamendment, would it be possible to divide the amendment into two parts, and let us vote on each part separately? I would really like to vote on the first part separately, and then vote on the rest of the amendment, rather than go through successive subamendments and ultimately return to what was initially proposed.

• (1500)

In that case, is it the type of motion that I need to move right now, or do I move it when we are about to vote on the amendment?

[*English*]

The Chair: Madame Normandin, just to confirm, you basically want to divide the amendment into two parts and deal with the parts separately.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: It would be a motion to divide the amendment, which would allow us to vote on the two parts of the amendment separately. I would like us to be able to vote on the portion of the amendment on the first paragraph of the motion, and vote again on the rest of the amendment.

The Chair: Have you spoken with Mr. Cooper to see whether he agrees?

Ms. Christine Normandin: I suggested it to him, but it might be good to ask him again officially.

The Chair: Actually, it would be better if he agreed with your suggestion. I'll check a few things with the clerk. You have a few moments before the clerk gives us an answer about the rules.

[*English*]

I'm pausing for a couple of seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, we could continue our discussion while we think about Ms. Normandin's proposal. Members could continue to talk about the issue while waiting for the answer to my colleague's question.

• (1505)

The Chair: Ms. Normandin, do you agree with Mr. Berthold's suggestion?

Ms. Christine Normandin: That's fine.

Personally, I've covered everything I wanted to say. As I mentioned, I agree with the overall amendment, aside from the first portion.

The Chair: Mr. Berthold, that's a good idea. We will continue to hear from members, and the clerk can provide an answer as needed. It's always helpful to find other ways to proceed.

Mr. Turnbull, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I've been listening very intently to the debate on this amendment. I have a number of reflections to share. I think my colleagues have brought up some really important points.

We've heard from quite a number of witnesses that we're talking about highly sensitive intelligence information and data that go through a process of accumulation, validation and assessment. I think we've heard that it can be injurious to national security if it's disclosed. I share Ms. Romanado's position on the original motion and the amendment. The amendment keeps this section that relates

to including documents that are related to national security, and I think that's problematic for a lot of reasons.

The other thing that strikes me about the public inquiry in general is that in my understanding, they take quite a long time on average. I don't know if members are comfortable with a two- to three-year process of some kind. That seems to be, in my understanding, what the standard is.

I know that recently there was an article by Wesley Wark, who recommended—in opposition to some others, who have called for a public inquiry—that it's not the best option. One reason is that it's quite lengthy. I think the other is that it encounters and runs into many of the same problems that PROC does, or other parliamentary committees do, in dealing with these highly sensitive and classified documents.

We've heard from every witness with expertise in this area that yes, we want to promote national security literacy and have more of the public be aware of the very real national security threats, which we all take seriously, but we can't do it in an irresponsible manner. We have to take these concerns about real threats and dangers in flipantly disclosing that information very seriously.

I certainly take them seriously. I think they can threaten relations with our international partners. I think they can cause harm to come to agents and others who are involved in the agencies that protect us every day. I wouldn't want to see any harm come to those individuals.

I would also say, based on my assessment of the amendment, that there seems to be quite a narrowing of what Mr. Julian had proposed. Beijing is not the only threat to our elections. We've heard that foreign interference is coming from a number of other countries. I know that our security agencies have specifically referenced, as I believe Mr. Rosenberg did in his report, Russia and Iran. I think there was some indication today with the CSIS director that there are others. If we're going to do something like this—which is important work—then there's no doubt we have to understand these threats.

Based on the facts in Mr. Rosenberg's report of all of the initiatives and things that the government has implemented since about 2018, I think our government has demonstrated very clearly that they have built up a robust ecosystem that approaches foreign election interference in a whole-of-government approach. I just don't think focusing on one set of allegations that have come through the media... I think we've heard today that CSIS can neither confirm nor deny whether those are coming from CSIS or not.

• (1510)

I think it would do a disservice to the overall topic for us to narrow the scope down to focusing on one country, even though I recognize that all of our security agencies are resoundingly in agreement that Beijing presents the greatest threat. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't be preparing ourselves for others and understanding what those very real threats are.

I don't think I would support.... I'm sort of mulling this over as I read through it, but there are other aspects of this amendment that Mr. Cooper has put forward that I think narrow the scope significantly from what Mr. Julian proposed, and I'm not quite all that comfortable with them.

Referring to just the 2019 and 2021 federal elections seems to be a narrowing of the scope as well. Although Mr. Julian's original motion has reference to those two elections, it seems that it has a breadth that would include other elections as well. I think we ought to consider a timeline that goes back a little bit further than just the last two elections, although I can say with full confidence that the last two elections have had processes and many structures and mechanisms in place to protect against foreign interference. I think that this information is very clearly laid out in Morris Rosenberg's recent report, and I have an overview of it that I would like to share. Maybe I'll save that for a little bit later, but I think there's quite a lot of evidence, and I referenced this in my question to Mr. Morrison when he came before our committee today. Those are some of my comments.

There is another thing I wanted to say. I think we had this come up in our debate last night, and I find it a bit troubling. The very last section in the amendment suggests that there are numerous committees studying this topic. I think Mr. Fergus spoke to this quite eloquently, as he always does. I notice that in Mr. Cooper's amendment, what is added here at the end is that this inquiry does not impede or stop the committee's study on foreign election interference, including the production of documents and the calling of witnesses. I'm assuming that's referring to this committee. Now in this motion we want to set up another body, in a sense, or a public inquiry, and then still study it in this committee. We have numerous other committees studying this topic as well, so is Mr. Cooper's intention to have every committee in the House of Commons study this topic, or would a public inquiry, if we were to support that, which I've obviously suggested I'm not convinced is the way to go...?

The fact that these things are stuck in there made no sense to me. They're contradictory to having a more comprehensive public inquiry that would really do justice to this topic. I thought that was the initial intention of Mr. Julian at least, so that's a significant deviation as well.

For all of those reasons, I'm struggling to feel supportive of this particular amendment, although I'm considering all the arguments and points that are made by my colleagues. This is an important topic, so whatever we decide as a committee, I hope we get it right. I hope that we don't end up embroiled in these partisan quarrels and games that we seem to be playing—at least today, from what I'm seeing—and that we take this matter really seriously and take a comprehensive approach to this important topic. I hope we can find a way forward.

• (1515)

One other thing I wanted to bring up that I neglected to cover in my remarks just a minute ago is that I think there was, at least from the article that Wesley Wark produced.... Maybe I'll quote him instead of paraphrasing. He says:

Judicial inquiries are meant to be fact-finding exercises. The “facts” in the case of Chinese election interference are thin on the ground, subject to media interpretation, and political brinkmanship.

That's a direct quote.

For me, if a judicial inquiry is trying to find the facts—and we've heard from our intelligence experts that it actually takes expertise to interpret intelligence—are we certain that the fact-finding exercise of a public inquiry would actually be the right approach? Certainly it would depend upon who leads that process and whether they have the expertise, but from what Wesley Wark has said, he at least feels that the facts are slightly thin on the ground.

Maybe I'll wrap up there for now, but I certainly think the debate will continue. I hope we'll find some path forward that we can reach consensus on soon.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

I think Ms. Normandin's proposal makes sense. Since most of the amendments are small, I won't go into them in detail.

I am perplexed by this idea of limiting the national public inquiry to 70 days and having it deal only with the implications of interference by the Chinese regime. What are the Conservatives afraid of?

[*English*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I have a point of order.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Julian. We have a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I don't know where Mr. Julian sees 70 days. There's nothing.... We don't talk about it in our amendment.

The Chair: Thank you for that clarification.

Mr. Julian, we'll go back to you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: It mentions the 2019 and 2021 federal elections, so that is in fact a 70-day period. What's more, it is limited to the Chinese regime. At the same time, however, it says that all governments should be looked at as far as diaspora groups go. What's not clear is whether it's just for the election periods.

The amendment is badly drafted and does not respect the principle of a national public inquiry. That is why I am against the first part of the amendment.

[*English*]

From what we have as a Conservative amendment, you have to ask what the Conservatives are afraid of.

I'm going to come back to all of the allegations that have come forward about Russian involvement or interference, not just in Canada but also in other jurisdictions. We're already aware of the collusion that took place in the Donald Trump example. We're already aware of the implications in Brexit, in a report that came out following the 2019 election, which also raised concerns about financing at the United Kingdom's Conservative Party.

In Canada, I think it's important to note the concerns that have been raised in the series that was produced in Canada's National Observer, which stated "In January and February of 2022, a large number of public Telegram channels were created or repurposed under the auspices of supporting the "Freedom Convoy"...including some with tens of thousands of members. [These channels] started to feature Russian propaganda intermingled with convoy-related content.

"Eventually, part of this network of Telegram channels effectively became a repository for Russian propaganda".

The articles that came forward in that series are very disturbing, but there are more, and I could certainly spend hours reading through the concerns that have been raised.

Now I'll reference The Canadian Press. Marie Woolf, on June 8, 2022, wrote about the study that was undertaken by the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy:

An analysis of over six million tweets and retweets—and where they originate from—has found that Canada is being targeted by Russia to influence public opinion here.

The study by the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy found that huge numbers of tweets and retweets about the war in Ukraine can be traced back to Russia and China, with even more tweets expressing pro-Russian sentiment traced to the United States.

Assistant professor Jean-Christophe Boucher said in an interview that the Russian "state apparatus" is associated with many accounts tweeting in Canada, and is influencing posts that are retweeted, liked or repeated by different accounts again and again.

The study found that "in 'the Canadian Twitter ecosystem' discussing the war, around 25 per cent of the accounts were spreading pro-Russian talking points. ... The analysis of the content of the tweets found similar pro-Russian views expressed among right-wing figures and their supporters in the U.S. and Canada."

Professor Boucher said that "supporters of the 'Freedom Convoy' and anti-vaccine movement, some of whom may not realize they have been digesting messaging originating from Russia, were also tweeting messages in support of the invasion of Ukraine."

We have heard testimony here at this committee. I will cite November 3, when Mr. Marcus Kolga said the following:

Russian information and influence operations are persistent and they are growing. They do not turn on and off with election cycles and have intensified during the course of the Russian invasion of Ukraine....

Russia's primary and full-time focus is to undermine and destabilize our democracy by exploiting the most polarizing issues of the day. ...These attacks affect our political environment and choices every day, not just during election periods.

The motion that I moved for a public inquiry, which seems to have support generally, is that we launch a national public inquiry into allegations of foreign interference in the 2019 and 2021 federal elections and in Canada's democratic system, including but not lim-

ited to allegations of interference in general elections by foreign governments.

• (1520)

This isn't something that anyone should oppose, so it's perplexing to me that the Conservatives are trying to gut the sense of concern that many Canadians are feeling about foreign interference. I believe it's disrespectful to a million and a half Canadians of Ukrainian origin who have been subjected to these campaigns that we have been talking about. These are campaigns that have been identified, as we heard earlier today, by CSIS and other agencies. Why would the Conservatives want to strip out the possibility of a national public inquiry that includes foreign interference not just from Beijing, which I agree is important, but also Russia, Iran and other players that are hostile to Canada and to Canada's democracy?

This is where the contradiction takes place. We have this amendment that strips out the whole principal clause and limits the ability of the commissioner or commissioners to do anything beyond the allegations of foreign interference by Beijing, and only in the 2019 and 2021 federal elections, which is a period, as I've mentioned, of 70 days. Then, in the same breath, the Conservatives say that the inquiry can investigate abuse of "diaspora groups by hostile foreign governments" writ large. Is it just during the 70 days? Is it for the last few years? I mean, the incomprehension of how this was drafted is unbelievable to me.

I find it disturbing that Conservatives want to play a game around something as important as a national public inquiry, but that reinforces the point I made initially: that these kinds of games and the circus that Conservatives love to engage in are not things that will give answers to Canadians. I believe Canadians from coast to coast to coast have a sincere interest in getting answers to questions and getting answers for the allegations of potential violations of the Elections Act and how serious that is. We heard from Elections Canada earlier today that if the allegations are right about Beijing's support, potentially up to half a dozen violations of the Canada Elections Act could have occurred. This is serious. These are criminal activities, criminal violations that are alleged, and obviously the national public inquiry has to go there.

With all the evidence I've just read into the record about Russia and the Putin dictatorship's attempt to have an impact on our democracy, I don't understand why the Conservatives are afraid of a public inquiry that actually examines that interference. They have these two contradictory amendments. One says, yes, go to the "diaspora groups by hostile foreign governments"—that's what the Conservatives wrote—but, oh, don't touch anything with foreign interference, aside from Beijing and aside from those very strict two 35-day election periods. It is very strange to me that they offered this amendment.

I have expressed my opposition to that amendment.

I have heard my colleagues, both Conservatives and Liberals, speak about the naming in terms of the inquiry, giving necessary powers to the inquiry and not necessarily spelling out who would be invited. I certainly would accept these as amendments. I think that would help to move us to a consensus. I do believe that we need to investigate abuse of diaspora groups, but that means the original principal clause that I moved, which is ensuring we address foreign interference by any sources in Canada's democratic systems, "including but not limited to allegations of interference in general elections by foreign governments".

Does the inquiry have the power to order a review? Absolutely. That's a normal term of reference, and there can be provisions made for national security. I don't accept the argument that terms of reference might in some way be threatening to national security.

I also agree that having the individual or individuals heading the inquiry selected by unanimous agreement by the House leaders does make sense. We do this often, Madam Chair. We've done this for a variety of issues, most recently even in the appointment of the interim Clerk of the House of Commons.

● (1525)

This is something that is a regular practice. What it actually ensures is that each party has a veto, so, yes, it's true that it would mean the Conservatives might have a veto. It would also mean that the Liberals have a veto on that, and it could be somebody who is beyond reproach. I think we would find many names that we could offer—all of us—to ensure that this inquiry is done properly.

Finally, that this inquiry not stop the committee study, that's really up to the committee. I don't see the appropriateness of that. The committee can decide to continue the study or not. That depends on committee business. That's not up to any of us, Madam Chair. I don't see that as a clause that is particularly useful. It's more for cosmetic purposes.

Ultimately, what really offends me in this is that the Conservatives would seek to eliminate a proper investigation and answers to Canadians beyond that very narrow scope they want to place on this public inquiry. I am not going to vote in favour of their modifications to the first clause. I think it's disrespectful to Ukrainian Canadians and other Canadians who have been impacted by foreign interference beyond Beijing. As well, I think it circumscribes the inquiry to the point where it can't produce the answers that Canadians are looking for.

I'm surprised the Conservatives would put forward such a series of amendments, some of which contradict other amendments, at a time when we really need adults in the room working together so that, hopefully, we can produce this national public inquiry and get answers for Canadians.

Thank you.

● (1530)

The Chair: Thank you.

On my list, just so that we are all in the loop, is Mr. Gerretsen, followed by Monsieur Berthold, then Mr. Cooper, Madame Normandin, Mrs. Sahota and Mr. Ferguson.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: You said we were very close.

The Chair: I always think the end is close, but I find out sometimes it takes six or 10 hours.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I want to speak to this amendment. We're just about to move off it, but I've been captivated by the discussion so far. I want to hear what Mr. Berthold has to say, and Madame Normandin.

The Chair: Monsieur Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I'm going to give my time to Mr. Cooper.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

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

I have to say it's quite rich for Mr. Julian to be talking about his great concern about foreign interference and diaspora communities being targeted.

He cited Iran. He's absolutely right that Iran is the leading state sponsor of terrorism in the world. It is a major security threat, the greatest security threat to peace and stability in the Middle East. It is a regime that has extended its tentacles into Canada.

When Mr. Julian and the NDP had an opportunity to designate the IRGC as a terrorist entity, he voted against it. He voted against designating the IRGC as a terrorist entity, the same IRGC that is raising money, recruiting and intimidating Iranians on Canadian soil. They are doing it now, and they were doing it in 2018 when Mr. Julian voted against designating the IRGC as a terrorist entity.

Now he professes to be so concerned about the Iranian regime. Well, actions speak louder than words. When Mr. Julian had a chance to stand up and vote, he voted on the side of the Iranian terrorist regime. That's what he did.

Make no mistake about it. The IRGC is the enforcer of the regime. It is the arm of the regime that has exported terrorism around the world, armed other terrorist organizations, such as Hezbollah, and has on its hands the blood of 55 Canadians and 30 permanent residents from when the IRGC took down PS752 in what an Ontario superior court judge determined to be an act of terrorism.

Mr. Julian, when he had a chance to do the right thing, to stand up for Iranian Canadians and to stop the IRGC from fundraising, recruiting and intimidating Canadians in the Iranian community, he stood against that. That's Mr. Julian's record. Now he turns around and talks about how concerned he is. What hypocrisy.

Mr. Julian talks about other actors, other states such as Russia. I said very clearly when I put forward my amendment that Russia is indeed a cause for concern. It is a real threat. Russia is a cause for grave concern in terms of its activities in Canada. That needs to be dealt with. It needs to be followed. It must not be ignored. I'm not suggesting anything else. It's serious.

We have before this committee a study in which we have a series of motions that have been passed to expand the study on foreign interference dealing with very specific allegations of interference by Beijing in the 2019 and 2021 elections. Iran, Russia and all of these hostile foreign bad actors, their activities are not new. Beijing's interference is not new.

● (1535)

At the same time, it's only now that Mr. Julian is advocating for a public inquiry on all aspects of foreign interference, which I would submit, muddies the waters in addressing the very specific allegations and revelations that have been reported in *The Globe and Mail* and on *Global News*, which have been lent support by the Prime Minister's response to them, which is to deflect, deny, cover up, hide and not be transparent about what he knows.

That's what we have to get to the bottom of, and that's why, in our motion, we would amend this in a way that would allow for a targeted, focused inquiry. It wouldn't preclude other hearings. It wouldn't preclude perhaps another inquiry at some later point. However, if this inquiry is going to go ahead, it needs to be timely. We need a report sooner rather than later, hopefully before the next election. For that practical purpose, it's important that it be limited and targeted to Beijing's interference activities.

Mr. Julian professes to want to get to the bottom of Beijing's interference, but what he seems to be not very interested in doing is getting to the bottom of the Prime Minister's role in Beijing's interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections. He doesn't seem interested in getting to the heart of the scandal, which is what the Prime Minister knew, what he did about it and what he failed to do about it.

The Prime Minister, based on everything we have heard, has done very little. His senior PMO officials may have turned a blind eye to CSIS's warnings, among other failures. I can appreciate why, at some level, although it's hardly commendable, the Prime Minister would like to cover this up, but it is astonishing that Mr. Julian and the NDP are prepared to join the Prime Minister in covering this up.

Yesterday evening there was an opportunity to deal with a motion that I had put forward—

● (1540)

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

These are unbelievable untruths Mr. Cooper is putting out there. He must stick to the issue, which is the amendment.

At the same time, I would ask, through you, Madam Chair, that he stop repeating himself and speak to relevance because this is becoming a circus.

The Chair: I think Mr. Cooper will note the comments because I'm sure he wants to have a productive meeting.

Mr. Cooper, with that, I will pass the floor back to you, bearing in mind that we are on the amendment.

Mr. Michael Cooper: It's absolutely relevant to the amendment, which is that all political parties have the opportunity to have a say, and that there be consensus, a unanimous agreement among political parties, all the recognized parties, as to who heads the inquiry.

Mr. Julian, I would think, would welcome that. He, after all, professes to be concerned about Beijing's interference. He professes to be concerned about the Prime Minister's role, or potential role, and that of the PMO. He professes to want to get answers from the Prime Minister and PMO officials, yet last night, when he had an opportunity to help that process work itself out by—

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

Again, I'm speaking to relevance and repetition. I think the member has experience. He is violating both rules. If he wants to pull a filibuster, he's going to have to come up with new content, and it's going to have to be relevant to the amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'm going to encourage all members to take a breath and stay the course. Let's do this and stay focused. I know we can do it.

Mr. Cooper, go ahead on the amendment.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I know the truth sometimes hurts, but Mr. Julian had an opportunity last night and instead he had a temper tantrum and shut down this committee, shutting down six hours of work. One can only wonder why.

Mr. Peter Julian: I have a point of order.

Madam Chair, he is ignoring your clear direction. It's repetition. He's repeating himself yet again, and he's not speaking to the amendment.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Julian—

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, you don't have the floor.

Mr. Peter Julian: If he has nothing more to add, he can certainly cede his place, but he is repeating himself and he is not relevant to the matter that is before this committee.

The Chair: I'm going to take a moment, and perhaps this will allow all of us to take a pause, to take a breath. I do believe that if certain comments are not helpful, then they perhaps don't need to be made. We are debating a motion, which means we need to advance relevant points.

I will also say that a lot of what we experience or believe might be founded in our own experiences, our own values, ideologies and so forth. For us to label others, I'm not sure that this is helpful. What one might perceive in what Mr. Cooper referred to as a tantrum and what somebody else might perceive is a debatable point.

Right now, the issue in front of us is an amendment that I understand you proposed, so let's stay focused on that and let's get this work done. If we're not able to, I will use my prerogative as chair to suspend this meeting, but I think we all want to get to work and get it done.

Mr. Cooper, I suggest we all—every single one of us—take a breath and stay focused. Let's get there.

Mr. Cooper, you have the floor.

• (1545)

Mr. Michael Cooper: I've listened very patiently to Mr. Julian, despite much of what he stated on the record having very little relevance to the amendment and during which he made certain completely unsubstantiated insinuations. Be that as it may, it is absolutely imperative that, if there is an inquiry, the Prime Minister doesn't get to do a do-over of the Rosenberg commission.

We had, just a couple of days ago, a report that was released from the person tasked with reviewing the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol of the 2021 election. Mr. Rosenberg is someone who had a conflict. He had a conflict, real or perceived—certainly perceived—by virtue of his role as the former CEO of the Trudeau Foundation, as someone who was involved in facilitating a \$200,000 contribution from a business person and political person affiliated with the Beijing Chinese Communist regime who was implicated in the Prime Minister's billionaire cash-for-access scandal in 2016. That individual, Mr. Rosenberg, whatever his credentials are, certainly should never have been tasked with undertaking such a review, given the circumstances and all of the questions around interference by the Beijing regime and his affiliation, association and closeness to the Prime Minister.

It undermines the credibility of the report. It undermines confidence in the report. We can't afford that in the case of an inquiry. We need to have confidence in the outcome of such an inquiry. That's why we're insistent that all parties, including the NDP, which I hope Mr. Julian would welcome, would have that opportunity.

I will leave it there. I may have other comments, but I will leave it there for now. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

I will now go to Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to propose a subamendment that will be fairly simple. I'm waiting for the official text, but it would essentially remove point (a) of the amendment.

[*English*]

The Chair: We've just sent it around. Everyone should be able to see that. It's the email that we received earlier. The amendment that Mr. Cooper proposed had paragraphs (a), (b) and (c). She's just removing paragraph (a). The subamendment that's come around will just strike paragraph (a), and debate—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Point of order, Madam Chair.

I would just like Ms. Normandin to confirm something. Does that mean the first paragraph would stay as I proposed earlier?

Ms. Christine Normandin: Yes, that's right.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

Ms. Sahota, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

I'm just looking over this new amendment now.

The Chair: It's a subamendment.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay. The subamendment is removing the first part. It's the first part that I mostly have issues with.

Madam Chair, who is next on the speakers list? It really is the first part that I was speaking to, and I didn't foresee Madame Normandin's moving this subamendment at this point, so I want to know what the speakers list looks like.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sahota, for that comment.

Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Julian asked a really important question, and that was: Why are Conservatives only interested in 2019 and 2021?

I would direct everybody's attention back to another Globe and Mail report from February 28, just a couple of days ago, which said:

The source said the Canadian Security Intelligence Service captured a conversation in 2014 between an unnamed commercial attaché at one of China's consulates in Canada and billionaire Zhang Bin, a political adviser to the government in Beijing and a senior official in China's network of state promoters around the world.

They discussed the federal election that was expected to take place in 2015, and the possibility that the Liberals would defeat Stephen Harper's Conservatives and form the next government. The source said the diplomat instructed Mr. Zhang to donate \$1-million to the Trudeau Foundation, and told him the Chinese government would reimburse him for the entire amount.

In other words, Madam Chair, while Stephen Harper was the prime minister, the Chinese government attempted to influence the leader of a national political party in the year before the election. The first time that the information that CSIS was tracking this donation came to light was two days ago.

It begs the question: Did Harper keep quiet for political reasons, either because of an upcoming election or because of his efforts to sign the secret foreign investment promotion and protection agreement? Conservatives make it sound like their work at the committee has forced a response on this issue, but they were in power when the alleged incident took place.

To Mr. Julian's question, and to the bigger issue of non-partisanship as it relates to trying to do this very important work, if we're supposed to take this report from one news outlet that is basically the foundation for everything that we're doing here today and everything that Mr. Cooper has been railing on about for the last little while.... If we're supposed to take that, why aren't we taking this other one from 2014? Why aren't we getting to the bottom of what Stephen Harper knew and what Conservatives knew at the time?

That could be the only reason to explain why Mr. Cooper is not interested in looking into the details of 2014. That could be the only reason Mr. Cooper would want to insist that we focus on just 2019 and 2021. I can't see any other reason.

To Mr. Julian's point, and to the point I've been trying to make the whole time, this is all politics for the Conservatives. They don't care about the report. They don't care about....

By the way, this commission or this public inquiry would take two to four years to complete. Another election will have likely taken place, especially if you go longer than the four years. They don't care about that. All the Conservatives are focused on is getting the little gotcha sound bite moments that happen to come along in the process of the inquiry. Trying to pick at one thing or another is all that they're interested in. In my opinion, if you really want to do this genuinely and in a non-partisan way, you would listen to the experts.

Although I agree with a lot of what Mr. Julian said, I guess we part ways in the venue by which this should be taking place. I don't believe that the appropriate venue is in the public forum, for the reasons that were outlined by just about every expert who's come before this committee already. A public inquiry is not going to have access to any more information than this committee would have access to. This committee is going to be limited, based on the security classifications of the various different documents.

Of course, that makes a great optic for the Leader of the Opposition when he strolls out into a hallway and waves around documents that have been redacted, because then he'll say, "The Liberals are trying to keep secrets from us. The Liberals went behind their party office doors and blacked out all the information in here," like the Conservatives usually do. That's just their game. That's the game. Nobody here at this table and no Canadian should think that the motivation of the Conservative Party of Canada right now is to deal with foreign interference.

• (1555)

However, I don't feel that's the same situation coming from the NDP. I don't feel that's the same situation coming from the Bloc. I feel as though they genuinely think they're coming from a good place by having a public inquiry. Of course, a public inquiry and getting things out in the open with sunshine and transparency—as Mr. Cooper has said repeatedly in this meeting—are the best ways

to expose information to the public, but sometimes information is so sensitive and classified that you just can't do that.

I asked the last panel that came here if there was a lot of information they couldn't share with us. They agreed with that. I said, can you share that at NSICOP? The response they gave was that, yes, they could. That's where the proper classifications are in place.

I don't need to go on and on. I think Mr. Cooper and his colleagues want to talk about this some more at great length. They're entitled to do so. I'm happy to sit here and listen to it.

At the end of the day, this just comes down to whether or not we believe this is genuinely about protecting our democracy or this is just taking cheap shots at the Prime Minister and trying to get a gotcha moment. I don't blame the Conservatives for wanting to do that. It's what their leader does repeatedly. That's all he cares about. It's very disingenuous, but it's the reality of the situation. Here we are.

I want to understand this more. Foreign interference goes on in many different parts of the world, especially where democracies are alive. As we heard today from a witness, by its very nature, a democracy is open and is much more subject to foreign interference. Foreign interference is not a new thing.

Since this committee was formed over a year ago, we've been talking about studying this. We've been talking about doing it. It's not new. Suddenly it has become this sensationalized issue for the Conservatives, so they're running around town trying to tout the fact that the Prime Minister was covering something up, or one thing or another. It's so disingenuous when members of Parliament actually think that we would allow, knowingly, anybody.... As much as I disagree with Conservatives, I do not actually believe that any Conservative who sits on the other side of the aisle would actually knowingly go along with something like allowing foreign interference to occur. I hope the same is reciprocated by the other side. Who would ever actually allow that?

Then we have Mr. Calkins, who, by the way, I believe it was yesterday, said he would sit here for as long as it took to make sure that his position was defended and hasn't been here since two hours into yesterday's meeting. He called a member of Parliament an agent of China.

I'm sorry—it was an agent of Beijing. Thank you, Madam Chair, for the correction.

Is that appropriate or is that just Conservative fundraising? That's all that it is. Calling another sitting member of Parliament an agent of Beijing, do you think that's completely appropriate and there's nothing wrong with that? The Twitter trolls will love it. They'll jump all over it. The Conservatives will raise a little bit more money. Don't worry about what it does to the foundations of our democracy in the process.

Here we are, once again just debating endlessly in circles about how Conservatives can get their gotcha moment on the Prime Minister. It's not serving any purpose. If you really want to serve a purpose, then let's listen to the experts and do what they say to do, which is to allow the people who have the clearances, who are charged by the House of Commons to be the oversight, to view this stuff. Let them do the work that they're supposed to do to safeguard against any kind of foreign interference and monitor any kind of foreign actors who are trying to get into our democracy one way or another.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fergus, you have the floor.

Hon. Greg Fergus: That was a very powerful statement.

I am pleased to see the subamendment to remove the overly restrictive aspects limiting Mr. Julian's study to just China, for all of the reasons that we have heard from our witnesses. I'm very supportive of that aspect of it. I thank Madame Normandin for making that change.

Where I still have discomfort with the changes proposed by Mr. Cooper, it's a matter of—I regret to say—good faith.

[*Translation*]

I already spoke with a few members yesterday about the idea of obtaining unanimous support from all political parties in the House of Commons. If a party were to decide, for partisan reasons, not to agree to the candidate selected by consensus to chair the inquiry, I'm afraid the inquiry would never see the light of day.

I think it would be much better for the candidate to need the support of three of the four recognized parties in the House of Commons. Nobody would have the right to veto the choice of a chair for the inquiry, not even the party in power. That would force people to compromise in order to get the best person for the job.

I think this is a very important, if not critical, issue. Since we have to deal with the current subamendment, I can't put another one forward. I hope my colleagues will see the sense in this and find a way to compromise.

[*English*]

Madam Chair, just to make sure that all the folks at home who are watching us.... I expressed in French my concern that seeking a unanimous choice for the new president allows one party to perhaps delay the selection of the person who would be responsible for presiding over this commission of inquiry.

If so, for very partisan reasons, that does not serve the needs and interests of Canadians. I would propose...and I cannot formally because there is a subamendment already proposed. However, I had some discussions with members of the opposition, saying that if they were willing to make a change to, say, rather than all four parties in the House of Commons having to agree for the selection, that three of the four would have to agree, this gives no one a veto and allows everyone to come to the table with good sense and seeking out the interests of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (1605)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: I think we are ready to vote, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Berthold, you're just full of these great ideas in the last couple of interventions you've had. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I always have good ideas.

The Chair: We are all ready for a vote. You were the end of my list, so that's perfect.

Madam Clerk, can you call the question on Madame Normandin's subamendment, please?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Can we have two minutes to talk about this, please?

Hon. Greg Fergus: You don't mean in public. You're talking about a two-minute break.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Yes. Can we just have two minutes?

The Chair: The vote's been called.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That's fine.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke): Madam Chair, the result of the vote is two yeas and nine nays.

The Chair: The subamendment is defeated.

Mr. Julian, are you raising a point of order or do you want the floor?

Mr. Peter Julian: I'd like the floor.

The Chair: I have to add you to the list.

As the subamendment was defeated, we're going back to the amendment. This is the amendment moved by Mr. Cooper.

Would I continue with my list or start a new list?

Mr. Michael Cooper: I'd like to speak however you continue your list.

The Chair: We would continue with the list, so we would actually go to Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Luc Berthold: I'm good for now.

The Chair: Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Cooper's proposal, with no amendments, is completely unacceptable for the reasons we have already covered. First, it would limit the scope of the motion too much. Also, for the reasons I mentioned, requiring unanimous consent is not the way forward, and it would be better to seek the support of three of the four political parties. For these two reasons, I cannot vote for Mr. Cooper's amendment.

The Chair: Mrs. Romanado, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Chair, you can take me off the list.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I think there was some confusion around that last vote. I understand that when a vote is called, you can't necessarily suspend, but I think it would be a good idea to suspend for a moment just to have the discussion as I'm not sure everybody understood exactly what the impact of Madame Normandin's subamendment was.

• (1610)

The Chair: Perhaps what we'll do is we'll suspend for a health break, and we will return at 4:20 p.m., in 10 minutes.

See you shortly.

• (1610)

(Pause)

• (1625)

The Chair: Mr. Julian, you had the floor when I suspended. Did you want it back?

Mr. Peter Julian: I think it might be good for you to canvass. I think there was some confusion around the vote on the subamendment by Ms. Normandin.

The Chair: Mr. Julian, are you suggesting...on the amendment? What are you suggesting?

Would you like me to bump you to the bottom of the list, Mr. Julian?

Mr. Peter Julian: No.

An hon. member: I think he wants to move that we reconsider that last vote.

The Chair: There's only one person after you right now. It's just Mr. Berthold. I can come back to you if you like.

Mr. Peter Julian: Certainly.

The Chair: I think that's all right. Why don't I do that?

Let's go to Mr. Berthold. Then I'll go to Mr. Julian and then Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Luc Berthold: We are just really curious about what Mr. Julian has to say. I think you need a few more seconds of the suspension.

The Chair: I'm going to let Mr. Julian figure this out because I want to understand. We have to make sure we're running a functional meeting. Everything in this committee goes sideways really quickly.

I'm going to go to Mr. Gerretsen before I come to Mr. Julian.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: To Mr. Julian's point, I would like to reconsider the previous vote. I'd ask you and the clerk, through you, for guidance on the best way to do that.

Can I move a motion to reconsider it? Can I move it separately, on its own? How does that happen?

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen, yesterday the conversation that took place was that, when the committee has taken a decision on anything, it cannot be retaken unless there's unanimous consent. If we would like to see it repeated.... I see some heads nodding.

Would we like to see the subamendment revoked on?

• (1630)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'll ask for reconsideration of that, if there's unanimous consent.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent to reconsider it?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Just to be clear, we're now back on Ms. Normandin's subamendment.

The Chair: Is that suitable? Can I get some heads nodding on the screen—up and down, or left and right?

Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: I support that, Madam Chair.

Could you just reread it so that everybody understands what the subamendment does?

The Chair: The subamendment will be removing the changes to (a) in the amendment, which means that the original paragraph as per your motion would stand. Then the other changes would remain, which are in Mr. Cooper's amendment.

Are we all on the same page? We have unanimous consent to redo the vote on the subamendment.

Madam Clerk, I am calling the question on Ms. Normandin's subamendment.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We will now go back to the amendment.

I'm starting a new list, so if you want to be on the speakers list, please put your hand up.

We'll start with Mr. Julian on the amendment.

Mr. Peter Julian: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I think the best—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Julian. If I can just clarify, it is the amendment as amended.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes, and since we have amended by defeating the first clause, I want to offer a subamendment to the second clause.

I think that probably the best way to go through this is to have votes on each of the individual clauses given the scope of it. I would strike "all" from the amendment. It would read: "That this inquiry be granted all necessary powers to call witnesses from the government and from political parties", and I'll speak briefly to that. Again, there may be consensus around some clauses—

The Chair: Mr. Julian, if I may, I'm seeking clarification. In the amendment as amended, you are just removing the word "all" and—

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes.

The Chair: —it's now the new first paragraph.

Mr. Peter Julian: No. It's the second paragraph.

The Chair: All right.

Is everyone okay? Do we all get it? He's just removing the word "all" in the amendment as amended.

Go ahead, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Peter Julian: Again, I think it's good to be treating each of these paragraphs separately as we work through. Hopefully, we've resolved the first paragraph and, hopefully, we have consensus around the second. The amendment that was offered takes away the specific references I had put in my motion, but at the same time, I think there has been an indication from a number of quarters around the table that they don't necessarily like these specific mentions.

In any event, the inquiry can call witnesses from the government and from political parties. I would support the subamendment and then the amendment that is ultimately stripping away the specific references that were in my motion.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Julian.

Mr. Turnbull's hand is up, and I want to take names.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I just need to clarify. I'm utterly baffled as to where we're at. Could someone maybe just cover and restate what's going on now? I realize that we went back, with unanimous consent, to Ms. Normandin's subamendment. We voted in favour of that, or that did pass, and now I'm not quite understanding what Mr. Julian is proposing. Maybe he can restate and clarify for the committee.

The Chair: Mr. Julian is removing the word "all" from the amendment as a subamendment.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I have a point of clarification, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Before I go to you, Ms. Khalid, in the amendment in the second paragraph, it says, "That this inquiry be granted all necessary powers to call witnesses from the government". He is removing the word "all" before "political parties". Is that correct, Mr. Julian?

Mr. Peter Julian: Yes.

The Chair: In the second paragraph of the amendment, the subamendment is removing the second "all".

Go ahead, Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I'm just wondering what the implications of removing that "all" would be in the context of this motion.

The Chair: I think that's part of the debate. If you would like my understanding, instead of it being "all political parties", it could then thereby be some. It could be one, but it could just not be "all". What are "all" of them? That's a good question too.

I'm going to Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to mention that we support Mr. Julian's proposal.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Could the clerk distribute Mr. Julian's motion so that we can read it in its entirety, in black and white?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Julian, while the committee is on pause, perhaps I can ask you your intention.

I'm assuming, just with the pace of the conversation, that you want to go clause by clause. Will you be moving multiple subamendments? If you don't want to share, you don't have to, but if it's this complicated to remove one word, I figure maybe there's some way that people can all be on the same page.

• (1640)

Mr. Peter Julian: I think we've had some go-arounds, Madam Chair. There are different reactions to different parts of the amendment.

[*Translation*]

Earlier, Ms. Normandin moved to divide the amendment. It would probably be the best way to proceed. I tried to do it another way, but since you are a very good chair, I will leave it to you to figure out how we can look at all the elements individually, those we support and those we don't.

[English]

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: If no one else wishes to speak, Madam Chair, I move that we vote.

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fergus.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: I have concerns regarding this motion, since there could be a series of changes. The document with Mr. Cooper's amendments in red and black has been distributed by the clerk.

First, Ms. Normandin moved that paragraph (a) be removed, and we are now coming back to the text before us, that is, the original wording proposed by Mr. Julian. In the second part, he is proposing to change Mr. Cooper's amendment by removing the word "all". Once again, it may be better for Mr. Julian to propose all his amendments together, so that we can have a complete picture.

I understand why he wants to proceed like this, to obtain unanimous consent for each element. I understand, but it is confusing.

[English]

The Chair: I appreciate the feedback and I always appreciate ways to do this better. I think this also reflects upon discussions and where we stand on things or hear things. Everybody hears them differently. We interpret them differently, and our ideas of what is easier are very different as well.

Since I have nobody left on my speaking list, I am calling the question on the subamendment as proposed by Mr. Julian.

(Subamendment agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: We go back to the amendment as amended as amended. Is there discussion or shall we call the vote?

● (1645)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I want to clarify what we're voting on, because what you said wasn't clear to me.

The Chair: It's the amendment as amended. It was amended by Madame Normandin, followed by the subamendment by Mr. Julian. It's Mr. Cooper's amendment.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Could we have that read out to make sure we know what we're voting on? I'm now confused with so many subamendments and amendments and how many different changes there have been. I'd like to be very clear on what we're voting on, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Paragraph (a) has been removed.... Sophia's going to read it all to you, as amended twice.

Sophia, go ahead, please.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Sophia Nickel): It is that the motion be amended, (b), in the second paragraph by replacing all the words after the words "the government" with the following: "and from political parties"; (c), by adding the following after the second paragraph: "that the inquiry investigate abuse of diaspora groups by hostile foreign governments"; and, (d), by adding the fol-

lowing after the last paragraph: "that the individual heading this inquiry be selected by unanimous agreement by the House leaders of the officially recognized parties in the House of Commons and that this inquiry does not impede or stop the committee's study on foreign election interference, including the production of documents and calling of witnesses".

(Amendment as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: The debate goes to the motion as amended.

Mr. Cooper has the floor. If anyone would like to speak, please raise your hand or give me a signal.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to indicate that, once we vote on Mr. Julian's motion, you do not have the implied consent of the official opposition to adjourn the meeting, as we expect to take up the unfinished business from yesterday.

The Chair: Thank you for repeating that to me, Mr. Cooper. I appreciate the reminder.

If I'm not seeing any debate on the motion as amended, are we okay to call the question?

(Motion as amended agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

● (1650)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, I move to resume debate on the subamendment.

The Chair: The clerk has informed me that is absolutely suitable, and that means we are now voting on the subamendment where we left off yesterday.

I'm sorry. I got that wrong. We vote to resume debate because that is what Mr. Cooper has asked for.

Mr. Julian, do you have a point of clarification or a point of order?

Mr. Peter Julian: He's asked to resume debate.

Is your ruling that it's not debatable?

The Chair: The clerk is telling me that we would vote on that. I would call it to a vote.

Mr. Peter Julian: I made my point yesterday. I thought the subamendment was ridiculous and unhelpful.

The Chair: We're not voting on the subamendment. We are voting with respect to resuming debate where we left off. The question is to resume debate on the subamendment where we were yesterday at about 9 p.m.

Welcome to the House of Commons and technology. We've been informed that the phone lines have timed out. We just need to reboot the system and come back. I'm going to suspend for five minutes, and then we'll be ready to vote. Thank you.

• (1650) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1650)

The Chair: This is your chair letting you know that we are proceeding with our vote to resume from yesterday.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I think it is important to clarify exactly what we are voting on.

The Chair: We are voting on resuming debate where we left off on the subamendment yesterday.

Madam Clerk, please call the vote.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Chair, we're hearing the interpretation over the mikes. We can't hear very well.

• (1700)

The Chair: I'm sorry. Can you hear me now?

Do the people online hear me in English and French at the same time?

[*Translation*]

I see. If I speak French, do you hear me in both languages or just in French?

You hear me in both languages. That is a problem, then. Can that be fixed so that only one language comes through?

• (1705)

[*English*]

I will pause the meeting. We'll be right back.

• (1705)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1710)

The Chair: We are ready. We're going to continue with the vote.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: Mr. Turnbull, I'll come to you next. I see Mr. Turnbull's hand up.

Mr. Cooper, I'm running a meeting. Everybody gets a turn. All members are equal.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I move that the meeting do now adjourn.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

The Chair: We'll see you on Tuesday for our regular PROC meeting time. Thank you.

Have a good night everyone. I appreciate all the teams and everybody on the support teams. Thank you.

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