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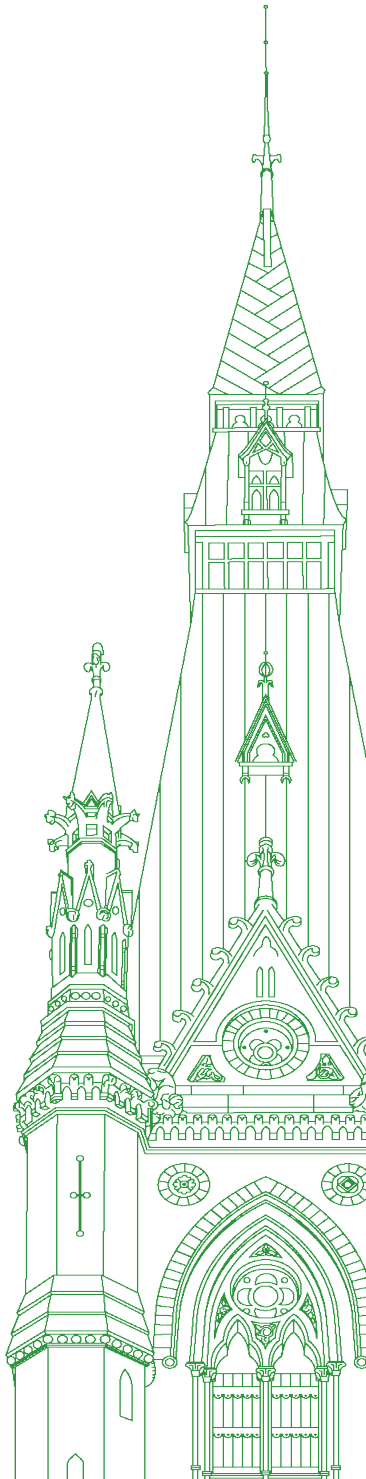

Chair: The Honourable Jim Carr

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Thursday, April 7, 2022

● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Jim Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Good morning, everybody.

Welcome to meeting number 18 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

We will start by acknowledging that I am meeting on Treaty 1 territory and the home of the Métis nation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely by using the Zoom application. Members and witnesses participating virtually may speak in the official language of their choice. They have the choice at the bottom of the screen of “floor”, “English” or “French”.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motions adopted by the committee on Thursday, March 3, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of the assessment of Canada's security posture in relation to Russia.

With us today by video conference, as individuals, are David Etkin, professor, disaster and emergency management, York University; Dr. Paul Goode, McMillan chair in Russian studies, Carleton University; and Dr. Adam Lajeunesse, Irving Shipbuilding chair in Canadian Arctic marine security, Brian Mulroney Institute of Government, St. Francis Xavier University.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions. I have a 30-second reminder card for everybody. That is just part of the constraints of committee work.

Welcome to all. I now invite Mr. Etkin to make an opening statement for up to five minutes.

Sir, the floor is yours.

Professor David A Etkin (Professor, Disaster and Emergency Management, York University, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

Thank you for inviting me. It's an honour to be here.

In terms of our stance towards Russia, the first comment I'd like to make is that in the long term, running forward to think in terms of decades, the world is going to have to co-operate in terms of dealing with global risks such as climate change and other things. Whatever stance we take towards Russia, I believe we should keep in mind that at some point we're going have to be co-operative with them and other countries that we meet.

I'm going to be speaking from the perspective of the emergency management system in Canada, which is where I live professionally. I really can't speak to the military side of things. I'm going to be speaking more from a civil society perspective.

I have put together a list of recommendations that I think, in a very practical way, would enhance our ability to manage some of these threats. I divided them into the categories of capacity, research, training, and governance. Again, this is just speaking from my particular areas of work in disaster risk reduction.

In terms of capacity, I think it would be of great help if Canada had an interdisciplinary national centre of excellence on disaster studies so that people from different disciplines and fields, as well as academics and professionals, could coagulate around that and work together.

From a local community perspective, all local communities need to do risk assessments, which is a difficult and complicated process that tends to be poorly done. There is a lack of support for local communities in terms of doing these things. I'd recommend that the Government of Canada, perhaps under the leadership of Public Safety Canada, create a group of people, of experts, who could assist local communities with methodologies and access to data and interpretation of data so that they could do the risk assessments.

Critical infrastructure is a particular area of vulnerability from a threat perspective. There's a lot that we don't know about the interconnections between them. It's a complex, tightly connected system. I'd recommend funding a long-term study looking at the interconnections and vulnerabilities of critical Canadian infrastructures.

Under training, Emergency Preparedness Canada used to have an emergency management college, which performed a very important function. It was disbanded a number of years ago. Even though colleges and universities in Canada now have programs in emergency management, they do not replace the functions that were carried out by the emergency management college, which particularly addressed mayors and local people involved in emergency management who would never go to a program at a college or university. It had the function not just of education and training but also of creating a community and culture across Canada of people involved in emergency management issues.

Finally, on the governance side, about 85% of Canada's critical infrastructure is owned within the private sector. That creates, I think, a tension in terms of priorities. One of the main priorities of the private sector is creating profit and serving the interests of their shareholders, whereas I would argue that critical infrastructure is basically a public good. The role of governments in terms of owning and [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] critical infrastructure. I think it needs to be revisited, because many of the disasters we've seen have resulted from reductions in safety that originated in a neo-liberal economic environment.

Our system of emergency and disaster management is rooted historically. Particularly, it evolved out of civil defence after World War II, but we live in a world that is now moving in a direction that is very different. I would want to take a close look at the system we have now and see to what extent it's serving our current needs and future needs.

I will end my remarks there.

● (1105)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now turn to Dr. Goode.

You have five minutes to make an opening statement, sir. The floor is yours.

Dr. Paul Goode (McMillan Chair of Russian Studies, Carleton University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As a recent arrival in Canada, I'd first like to say that it is a great honour to be invited to speak before this committee, and I'm grateful for the opportunity.

This committee has so far heard witnesses who have focused on a variety of near-term threats to Canada's security. As an expert on Russia's domestic politics and more broadly on nationalism and authoritarianism, I'd like to take this opportunity to explain why we need to think about this war as a long-term concern and what this means for Canada.

First, we should not expect any political change to emerge from within Russia's elite that would end the war. Russia is a personalist autocracy, meaning power is exercised through clientelist networks that pervade both the state and the economy. Autocratic rule is sustained by granting subordinates access to jobs, resources, wealth or status. In turn, subordinates compete to demonstrate their loyalty and value to their superiors.

Today Putin has no real political challengers. Members of the elite initially appeared dismayed by the decision to go to war, which does not appear to have been shared widely among Putin's inner circle. Nevertheless, they have doubled down on Putin's war as they attempt to outbid one another in demonstrating their patriotic credentials. As sanctions and the cost of war continue to squeeze Russia's economy, elites are thus more likely to turn on one another rather than turning on Putin.

Second, we should not underestimate the power of nationalism and disinformation as sources of popular support for the war. The Kremlin has promoted a Soviet style of patriotic education since the early 2000s, which dovetails with neo-imperial visions of Russia as a civilizational power in Eurasia. This form of patriotism was fused with anti-westernism, especially following electoral revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, which the Kremlin viewed as the machinations of western intelligence agencies.

In 2014, the annexation of Crimea stimulated a burst of patriotic sentiment that saw Putin's approval ratings soaring upwards of 80%. In my own research in Russia between 2014 and 2016, I found that many ordinary Russians understood official patriotism to mean loyalty to the Kremlin, and loyalty, in turn, was associated with being ethnically Russian. Putin has combined this ethnicized patriotism with anti-westernism and dreams of Soviet power to forge a neo-imperial form of nationalism, culminating today in the claim that Ukraine is not Ukraine and Ukrainians are not Ukrainians.

The domestic information environment is a big part of popular support for Russia's war. I am currently tracking Russia's war narratives on broadcast media, and they are aswirl with western conspiracies and enemy images of inhuman fascists. Domestic disinformation emboldens opportunists to attack critics of the war, and it leads ordinary Russians to disregard information about the war, to dissimulate and to disengage. While more than 15,000 brave Russians have been arrested for anti-war protests so far, this is just 1/100 of 1% of Russia's total population.

In sum, Russia's war is here to stay. There is little reason to expect that there will be any significant movement for regime change arising either from Russia's elite or the masses.

In preparing for a long war, I would suggest two ways that Canada can enhance its security.

First, this is the time to build expertise in the region. Canada is already regarded as a global hub for Ukrainian studies. The longer Russia remains a closed regime that threatens its neighbours, the more important area expertise will become for international security. Canada can take the lead now in decolonizing and bridging between expert communities in Russian studies in the United Kingdom and in the United States.

Second, Canada can provide refuge for scholars, journalists and activists who are persecuted for opposing Russia's war. We know from experience that the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada played a key role in shaping Ukraine's independence and its democratic development. Today we need the Russian diaspora as allies rather than bystanders, and we can advance that cause by providing shelter for Russia's moral and intellectual leaders.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to your questions.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I invite Dr. Lajeunesse to give us up to five minutes in an opening statement. The floor is yours, sir.

Dr. Adam Lajeunesse (Irving Shipbuilding Chair on Canadian Arctic Marine Security, Brian Mulroney Institute of Government, St. Francis Xavier University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a pleasure to be here and take part in these important discussions.

My research and expertise lie in the field of Arctic defence, safety and security, and it's in that area that I would like to offer some comments.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Canada has been forced to reconsider its national security situation. Given the proximity of our Arctic to Russia's, the north has naturally featured heavily in these discussions.

The first point I would like to make is that in considering the Arctic defence and security dynamic, the committee should keep in mind that there is no such thing as an Arctic defence and security dynamic. One can no more speak of Arctic security than Asian or African security with any precision. The Arctic is a big place, and the different sub-regions must be viewed through very different lenses.

While the European Arctic is absolutely seeing a resurgence of hard security threats, I would caution the committee not to see these as common circumpolar dangers. Simply put, the Russian threat to the Arctic is largely confined to the European Arctic now and for the foreseeable future. Discussions of stationing Canadian forces in the north or of adding more combat capability to defend the Canadian Arctic miss the point and risk stranding resources in a region that is not the centre of gravity of this new geostrategic contest. This assessment stems not from any naive belief that Canada's Arctic is somehow detached from global security; rather, a simple survey of the Canadian Arctic raises the question of what, if any, strategic value a Russian attack could achieve.

This is not to say that there is no military dimension to the Canadian Arctic. The region has long been an avenue through which the Soviets—now Russians—may project power. Ballistic and cruise missiles, as well as submarines, could use the Arctic as a transit route to hit critical infrastructure further south or to strike at the Atlantic sea lanes of communication.

Given this threat, new investments should be made to upgrade NORAD's aerospace and maritime detection capabilities, and I know the government is already looking at those options. I also know that other witnesses have provided analysis and recommendations in this area, so I won't belabour the point.

What is needed to augment Canadian Arctic safety, security and defence is not, therefore, a ground military presence, or even a military guard against Russia per se, rather a more comprehensive system of surveillance and situational awareness. The renovation of Canada's aerospace surveillance to detect Russian bombers and cruise missiles is a part of that.

However, the threat to the north is now far more complex than it was when either the DEW line or the north warning system was developed. As Canada works with the United States to augment and expand NORAD's capabilities in the region, what we need now is all-domain awareness. That means tracking not just incoming weapons systems but also illegal fishing vessels, trespassing craft and other hybrid threats. The Arctic is opening up, and an ice-free or ice-reduced future means that more activity must be monitored and policed. These threats span the safety, security and defence spectrum, and while Russian hypersonic weapons pose the most dire threat, their deployment is unlikely. Meanwhile, illegal fishing by, for instance, Chinese state-backed fleets or trespassing by criminal organizations is less dangerous but far more likely to emerge.

Canada has important elements of this all-domain system already. There's the RADARSAT constellation, a growing fleet of navy and Coast Guard icebreakers and patrol ships, and the ongoing DRDC efforts to build choke point surveillance and above-ice and under-ice detection systems. These are dispersed assets that can be tied together into a bigger picture as part of this effort.

What this means is that the renewal of NORAD's capabilities in the north must be all-domain, looking at aerospace, maritime and even under-ice detection and monitoring. These systems have been under development in various stages for decades, but there has never been a concerted push to realize a system of systems. The Russian threat to use the Arctic as an avenue of approach is real. So too is China's emerging Arctic interest. Coupled with the increasing accessibility of the Arctic Ocean and Canada's internal and territorial waters, the time to take a holistic view of northern surveillance has clearly arrived.

This is only a very basic overview, of course, but I'm certainly happy to take questions.

● (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Questions are where we are now. The opening round of six minutes each will be led by Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Dancho, you have the floor whenever you're ready.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our expert witnesses for being with us today for this important study.

My opening question will be for you, Dr. Lajeunesse. I'm wondering if you believe that Canada should meet its 2% NATO target. If so, where do you think those funds should be directed?

Dr. Adam Lajeunesse: Absolutely I believe that the 2% should be our minimum target. I think we do need to be a little more specific in directing those funds towards the most significant state-based threats. That means taking a clear-eyed look at who future great-power adversaries may be—in this case, it's clearly Russia and/or China—and what forces we will need to fight future conflicts.

In this sense, I would say that our historical defence spending priorities are a little bit askew. In the future, I would suggest spending on the air force and the navy, as any war against either Russia or China would be expeditionary in nature, and the navy and the air force would be more valuable.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Do you suggest that we increase our naval and air force spending to be on a par with army spending, or where do you think that should land?

Dr. Adam Lajeunesse: I can't give you any specific numbers. That's a degree of complexity that I won't get into, but historically the Canadian army has received the lion's share of Canadian defence spending. There is probably a rationale for adjusting that to provide more consideration for the navy and the air force.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Can you comment on our surveillance technology and where we should direct resources to improve it? We've heard consistently from witnesses that our surveillance is not nearly what it needs to be to accurately assess any incoming threats.

Dr. Adam Lajeunesse: Well, surveillance in the north is not up to the challenge of detecting modern incoming conventional weapons. Russian hypersonic weapons, for instance, cannot be detected with any accuracy with the north warning system. I believe you heard from Dr. Huebert on this question yesterday.

From a maritime threat perspective, Canada lacks both underwater and under-ice detection capability. As well, simply because of the size of the Arctic, we do not have a very good idea of what surface ships are operating—at least, outside the Northwest Passage. Right now that's not a critical threat, because ice renders most of those areas inaccessible, but over the next 10 years it's very likely that we will see the emergence of new civilian and hybrid threats using those waters.

● (1120)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Can you comment on Canada's technology sector? Halifax has a company called Kraken that invests in autonomous underwater vehicle technology. Would the government be well placed to look at utilizing the made-in-Canada advanced technology that we have? If so, how would we best use it?

Dr. Adam Lajeunesse: Canada actually has a long history of maritime surveillance capability. We were one of the pioneers in the underwater autonomous vehicle sector. Halifax and several technology start-ups and more established companies here have quite a bit of very useful technology that is dual purpose and is used for civilian purposes to survey underwater pipelines and so forth. With the application of a passive sonar array, we now have UAVs capable of travelling up to 2,000 nautical miles, give or take, semi-autonomously, powered by AI and feeding information back into mother ships or ground-based stations.

If we are going to surveil and maintain active surveillance across a large area like the Arctic, then yes, absolutely we are going to lean more heavily on underwater autonomous or above-water autonomous vehicles using artificial intelligence and various sensor systems that Canada is actually in a good position to provide right now.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Can you comment on investment in new submarines generally and in our F-35s? Are these areas in which we should be seeing, or in which you'd like to see, investment or further investment in the budget that's being announced today?

Dr. Adam Lajeunesse: Absolutely. If you listen to the Ukrainian fighters and to what the Ukrainian army is saying on the ground when they're asked what concerns them most, the answer is almost always air power. Looking forward at a great-power conflict, air power is crucial. Canada absolutely needs to speed along its acquisition of the F-35s.

From a maritime perspective, submarines are a strategic asset. They are extraordinarily important. They can greatly expand Canada's surveillance of a maritime area and also its ability to exclude hostile powers from that area. The next major capital acquisition that Canada will need to decide upon—and very quickly, might I add—is the purchase of a new conventional submarine fleet.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Can you comment on some of the challenges we're seeing in procurement? Do you feel that the government should prioritize that to a greater degree than they have?

Dr. Adam Lajeunesse: Absolutely. The question is asked about how much more money the Canadian military needs. I think that question somewhat misses the point. Money is obviously very important, but the ability to spend it effectively is just as important, if not more so.

Canada has a very long bipartisan tradition of doing procurement poorly. At least since the end of the Cold War, a big part of this stems from a prioritization of industrial benefits, jobs and the political partitioning of benefits to different sectors around the world.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

The Chair: The next six-minute block will go to Mr. Chiang.

Sir, take the floor whenever you're ready.

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses participating today for your expertise and your time.

My question is directed to Dr. Goode.

Doctor, nowhere is Russian disinformation more rampant than in Russia itself. What strategy does the Russian government use to block narratives that run counter to their propaganda?

Dr. Paul Goode: Thank you for that question.

The government's approach is multipronged. On the one hand, there has been an active effort to block platforms that provide people with access to alternative or countervailing forms of information that would challenge the government's narratives as well as its lexicon. That means that prominent platforms such as Facebook have been formally blocked within Russia, although they are still accessible for those who have access to VPNs. That's a loophole that may be closing at some point.

The goal has been to drive people to state-sponsored or state-controlled media, including social media. These are not just the major broadcast media but also organizations like VKontakte, which is the Russian version of Facebook, which are very much under the control of state managers.

The other approach is a common tactic in all disinformation campaigns, which is to sow the airwaves and social media channels with multiple and sometimes contradictory narratives. The idea here is not necessarily to persuade anybody of any particular narrative, but rather to generate a distrust in all potential narratives. It's to drive people away from the search for information and confirmation and to generally create the likelihood that it is impossible to find the truth, so people shouldn't bother.

In this regard, disinformation succeeds insofar as it reinforces the ambivalence of people towards the war and makes them feel powerless to do anything about it.

● (1125)

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Dr. Goode.

Having said all that, how can the Canadian government counter these strategies of disinformation?

Dr. Paul Goode: Well, I'm not sure to what extent the Canadian government can counter those strategies within Russia.

One thing that we can support, of course, is access to alternative sources of information. That means pushing back on any sort of moves to potentially exclude ordinary Russians from access to channels that provide them with those kinds of access. For instance, excluding people from YouTube is not necessarily going to benefit people within Russia, much less outside of it, because so many are dependent upon those sorts of channels for access.

I think it's important that the government does support a free circulation of alternative sources of information so that people who are willing to seek that information out are able to find it. That is something that can be done from within Canada's borders.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you.

Yesterday Twitter deleted a post from the Russian embassy in Canada that was rife with disinformation and laden with conspiracy theories regarding the Russian massacre in Bucha. We also heard that more Russian embassies around the western world are becoming the authors of disinformation being disseminated on social media.

As a government, what do you think we can do about these types of disinformation?

Dr. Paul Goode: The ways that the government can potentially manage these kinds of disinformation is simply to provide citizens with a means to identify and debunk disinformation. I think that there are already media outlets that are starting to do this. I believe that governments can also assist with that.

The information that is being circulated by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I should add, is also useful data for us, so I am also hesitant to completely silence them. There is a clear link between the kinds of narratives and conspiracy theories that are promoted by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other state actors and the dynamics of the war. In this sense, we gain a lot of vital information that might be lost if they were summarily dismissed.

That's not to, in any way, shape or form, justify the disinformation that is being put out by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or by other Russian state actors. It's merely to point out that we would lose a great deal from completely cutting them out from access, not just in terms of our observations but also in our understanding of Russia's motives and the valences in the war.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much, Dr. Goode.

My time is running short, but my next question is for Dr. Etkin.

Have you researched the relationship that exists between the Government of Canada and critical infrastructure providers to ensure that critical infrastructure providers continue to practise excellent cyber-hygiene?

Prof. David A Etkin: I'm not really very familiar with that cyber-threat in particular, but in terms of our critical infrastructure in general, for decades pandemic planning has been a high priority for everybody. In spite of that, when we were faced with a pandemic, our plans failed miserably. We do really well with small events, but when we get into major events, I really believe we don't have the knowledge and systems in place to deal with them.

● (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now turn questioning over to Ms. Michaud for six minutes.

Whenever you're ready, go ahead, Ms. Michaud.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome and thank you to the witnesses.

I have a few questions for you, Mr. Goode.

I have here a La Presse article that discusses the overall issue of cyber-attacks and related fears. Author Richard Hétu states that, as soon as it was revealed that Russia was preparing to invade Ukraine, the threat of mounting Russian cyber-attacks loomed. According to him, many of Ukraine's banks and government departments were the target of denial-of-service attacks in the hours leading up to the arrival of Russian troops in the Donbass. Experts also detected malware on hundreds of computers in Ukraine.

Russia's capacity to shut down entire systems, including the Internet, is very worrisome.

The author goes on to say that, in the fog of war, it can be difficult to know what is really going on, even more so in cyberspace.

As we all know, the cyber threat landscape is rapidly evolving and Russia appears to be a fierce adversary. Even if we have strong defence capability, Russia could still hack into our networks.

In your view, how do we properly defend ourselves or protect our cyberspace against an adversary like Russia?

[*English*]

Dr. Paul Goode: That's an extremely important question. I am not an expert on cybersecurity, so I don't know that I am the best person to answer this question. I do have a number of colleagues and students who are working on this topic at the moment, and they are deeply invested.

I speak here more as an observer than as an expert on cybersecurity, but we have seen that there has not been a radical evolution in Russia's cyberwarfare capabilities since 2014. A lot of the forms and means of attack, as well as the non-attributable forms and means of attack, have not altered radically. That probably lends a certain degree of predictability. We may have seen that already, as the extent of cyber-attacks on Ukraine, and more broadly on western targets, has not met the expectations we had prior to the start of the war.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

You're an expert on Russia, so in light of world events and the rise of the far right, do you think the reach of pro-Russian nationalist groups could extend all the way to Canada? Should we be worried for the security of our critical infrastructure and democratic institutions?

[*English*]

Dr. Paul Goode: I think this is the threat. I think you have correctly identified it, or at least I agree with your identification of this kind of threat. We know the Russian government has promoted far-right actors throughout Europe as well as in the U.S. and North America generally.

The way these groups are funded often tends to be cloaked in a variety of secrecies, but the way you counteract that is partly by means of first cutting the purse strings where possible, cutting off the flow of resources to these groups. The second way you approach it is by making sure that we are working closely, where possible, with Russian diaspora communities to ensure they understand that they are part of this national community and a valued part of this national community, and that they have benefited from the freedoms and benefits of living in this society. They usually have a sense of responsibility in that regard, and I think we should appeal to that. We should promote that where possible. We need allies in the Russian community to be able to fight this kind of threat precisely.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

How do we guard against disinformation?

Russia leverages a number of tools in its disinformation campaign, especially social media. That disinformation reaches all the way to Canada, showing up on our platforms, and it's hard to tell what's true and what isn't.

How can Quebec and Canada guard against this disinformation, to protect and help not just citizens, but also businesses and communities?

● (1135)

[*English*]

Dr. Paul Goode: I am perhaps biased, being in higher education, but I think education and training can go a long way towards helping people to be able to fight this threat on their own, to be able to recognize that this is disinformation and understand where it comes from and understand that the purpose is not to persuade but to disempower and divide. These are the things that I think are often forgotten.

Disinformation typically plays on emotive characteristics or emotive themes, so I think having a dispassionate response, a trained response, is perhaps the most efficient way to be able to counter it, because widespread suppression is not a democratic response to this kind of threat.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

My next questions are for Mr. Etkin. I'm going to call on his environmental expertise.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have just 10 seconds left.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Very well.

I will save my questions for the next round, Mr. Etkin.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, you are next and the last for the first round of questions. You have a six-minute block. Whenever you're ready, the floor is yours, sir.

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

Dr. Goode, I'd like to start with you. There have been calls within Canada to expel the Russian ambassador and to also expel Russian diplomats. Of course, that would put our Canadian embassy in a similar position for reciprocal actions.

How important is our on-the-ground diplomatic intelligence-gathering for informing Canada's national security stance vis-à-vis Russia?

Dr. Paul Goode: I can't claim specific knowledge of the relationship between Canadian diplomatic presence and its information-gathering or intelligence-gathering functions. In general I would say that they are extremely important, especially when you have trained civil servants who have been integrated in local spaces for years and perhaps decades.

Severing those diplomatic ties is often treated as an important signal in international relations, but rebuilding those ties takes much longer. It's not something that can be simply reinserted. You would definitely run the risk of losing access to whatever back-channel sources of information are currently still available.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

A lot of your opening remarks echoed what we heard in our meeting two days ago from Dr. Cooley. He was talking a lot about the new Russian exiles: journalists, IT workers and academics. He was really recommending that our committee find ways to enhance and strengthen those networks. I think your opening remarks were very much along that vein.

You talked about strengthening the ties in Russian studies among universities here in Canada, overseas, in the U.K. and in the United States. If our committee is going to make a recommendation to the federal government in a national security context, I would like to know how we can best partner think tanks at universities and abroad with these Russian exiles as well as with our security and intelligence agencies.

If we're going to make recommendations to the RCMP and CSIS, do they need to have more in-depth training of their personnel and a better understanding of how Russians operate and what Russian society is like, etc.?

Dr. Paul Goode: I believe this is one of the crucial lessons that we drew from the Cold War, in learning that it was very important to have an understanding, not just culturally but also politically and organizationally, of how things worked in the Soviet system. I believe that was still the case throughout the last 20 to 30 years, even though other international security priorities took the forefront of attention. This is especially the case today, and certainly one way that we can facilitate it is by accommodating the Russian exiles to become integrated in various different ways.

I think that academic centres have always been willing to reach out to provide some sort of public access. I think those could be institutionalized. The federal government could certainly incentivize its own institutions and agencies to work with existing academic centres or provide funding to set up new academic centres or umbrella groups that could coordinate with them.

Certainly we would need the ability to create places for these new Russian exiles to be able to move into, to give them the opportunity to provide advice and a voice. They can also be very critical in speaking to the domestic threat of disinformation from far-right groups, which was mentioned earlier in the questions.

● (1140)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you. Those are some great recommendations for us.

Dr. Etkin, I appreciate your comments putting Canada's national security in a climate change context and realizing that it may be some time before Canada and Russia have normal relations.

Can you talk about your reference to the importance of our two countries one day going back to co-operating in the Arctic? How important is that co-operation in terms of addressing climate change within the context of national security? I ask because national security is really what our committee's mandate is.

Prof. David A Etkin: That's a great question.

I think it's critically important.

When we're talking about climate change, it's a tragedy of common issues. Unless all the countries work co-operatively together, we're just not going to be able to deal with it effectively. The future threats associated with climate change are, in my opinion, just going to be simply catastrophic eventually.

It is absolutely critical that eventually we work together as partners to try to solve these things down the road, so it cannot be more important that we have some sort of global co-operation in terms of dealing with it in the future.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Chair, I'll cede my time back to you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we now move into the second round of questions. My look at the clock says that if I cut a minute off all of us, then we'll end more or less on time.

The first questioner, with four minutes, is Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Lloyd, the floor is yours when you want to have it.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair. My questions will be for Professor Goode.

I really enjoyed your feedback today.

Russians don't handle defeat well. After the 1905 Russo-Japanese War, less than a decade or so later they got rid of the czars, and in the 1980s the defeat in Afghanistan probably led to the fall of the Soviet Union.

Do you think Ukraine in 2022, with the setbacks we've seen at Kyiv, could spell the end of the Putin regime in a number of years?

Dr. Paul Goode: It's an important question.

I think the biggest wild card here is awareness of the extent of casualties and whether or not those will actually impact public opinion. At the moment it's difficult to predict, but it is very clear that the number of casualties is being played down on the Putin side.

There has been also some speculation that the use of groups of volunteers, as well as ordinary soldiers from parts of Russia like the Caucasus, is specifically aimed to ensure that casualties are primarily ethnic minorities and that as a result the casualties will not resonate widely through Russian public opinion, which is 80% ethnically Russian—

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you for that. I'm sorry, but I have only a limited amount of time.

We've seen how oil and gas has been funding Putin's war machine. All this equipment they're losing in Ukraine must be costing their treasury quite a bit, but we've also seen reports that over the last few decades Russians have been funding groups that seek to oppose the development of oil and gas resources in the west and in other areas.

How effective do you think the Russians have been at using this sort of propaganda to ensure that Europe in particular remains dependent on Russian energy?

Dr. Paul Goode: I don't want to speculate, because I don't have any specific data on that. I will say this: I think it's well known that Europe turned primarily to Russian energy for what appeared to be a stable alternative to Middle Eastern energy, especially from the 1990s onwards.

A lot of that, I think, was not so much to do with Russian propaganda, although certainly I can see how that would play a role in ensuring that public sentiment in areas that have traditionally been more cordial towards Russia, as well as parts of old Europe, remained opposed to weaning Europe off of Russian energy.

● (1145)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you for that.

We've seen some reports of people cancelling certain aspects of Russian culture, like Dostoevsky, but I really appreciate your recommendation about supporting Russian exiles and émigré communities as a means of providing a bulwark against Putin's regime.

Do you think that this “cancel culture” which we've seen—not from governments, necessarily—would be unhelpful to supporting Russian émigrés?

Dr. Paul Goode: I do. I think there are some things that make sense. A lot of this has been focused on, for instance, the cancelling of appearances or competitions by Russian sports competitors. Sports have been an important source of Russia's self-power and an important part of its claim to international legitimacy, so there is a rationale there.

More broadly, though, it's important to remember that nobody does a better job of cancelling Russians than the Russian government. That's the thing that really needs to drive our support for émigrés and exiles who could be allies.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I have only a little bit of time left. We've seen a lot of Russian propaganda saying they're fighting fascism in Ukraine. Do you think that spreading disinformation in the west about the far right in Ukraine as a real threat has been an effective narrative for the past few years?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Dr. Paul Goode: I would say, very briefly, yes, it has been effective and it has been a stable part of Russian propaganda.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. McKinnon, we turn it over to you for four minutes of questioning. The floor is yours.

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here.

My questions will, initially at least, be addressed to Dr. Lajeunesse.

Doctor, in your remarks you talked about the importance of enhancing surveillance capabilities in the north. You mentioned the DEW Line and the northern warning network, which seems to follow the track of the old DEW Line.

The DEW Line was created in an era of ICBMs and threats of long-range bombers and so forth. Is that still relevant today, and in what way do these systems need to be upgraded? Do we need a warning line even farther north than that?

If you could speak to this point, I'd appreciate it.

Dr. Adam Lajeunesse: The DEW Line and the NWS were put into place at a time of very different strategic context. Both of them were looking for Russian bombers, simply put. The DEW Line was quickly made obsolete by the arrival of ICBMs, but the NWS was brought in as an upgrade with the advent of Russian cruise missiles. The hard security threat we're facing today comes from new Russian weapons with much longer ranges. If this is of particular interest, I would direct committee members to a paper written by two NORAD officers, Fesler and O'Shaughnessy, called “Hardening the Shield”. They do a very good job of outlining the strategic considerations and threat.

Today that danger is still Russian hard power. It is still Russian bombers and weapons that could theoretically be launched from the Arctic as first-strike weapons. However, it's a very different context in the sense that we need a much more holistic look at surveillance, because it is not just Russian bombers we're looking for, as was the case in the 1950s, but now civilian craft, maritime militia, hybrid threats, illegal fishing fleets, trespassing and pollution threats. All manner of different aerospace and maritime threats are emerging.

What is required is a much more complex, holistic system of systems that allows Canada and the United States to gain a much more complete situational awareness.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Are you talking about an integration amongst subsea detectors as well as CWS and satellite surveillance as well?

In terms of satellites, those are vulnerable to attack. I'm wondering how that vulnerability affects the integrity of the system.

Dr. Adam Lajeunesse: We have been developing the subsea systems since the 1970s at least. How effective they are remains classified and beyond my pay grade.

On the satellite networks that you're talking about, we do have a fairly good satellite imaging capability through our RADARSAT system.

You are right that the Chinese and the Russians have both successfully tested anti-satellite weapons. However, we are in a different world in 2022 than we were 10 years ago, say, with the extraordinary decrease in the cost of launching satellites in a crisis scenario. For instance, if we had backup surveillance satellites, we could launch much more quickly at a much more affordable cost. I believe that Elon Musk, even just a week or two ago, said that he could launch satellites faster than Russians could shoot them down—

● (1150)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now invite Ms. Michaud to make the most of her minute and a half. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Etkin, in a media report, you commented on the flooding that hit Sainte-Marthe-sur-le-Lac in 2019. This is what you said:

[*English*]

> Sainte-Marthe-sur-le-Lac was flooded not because there was a lot of rain but because we build communities in flood plains.
>
> We are our own worst enemies in terms of how we create risks in society by short-term thinking, pursuit of profit and denial.

[*Translation*]

When it comes to disaster, risk and incident management, would you say that Canada is in prevention and preparation mode, or reaction mode?

[*English*]

Dr. Paul Goode: First of all, I have to apologize. I'm not sure I got the entire question there.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: The question was for Mr. Etkin, the disaster and emergency management expert.

[*English*]

Prof. David A Etkin: Thank you.

I think we don't do nearly enough in the sense of mitigation and being proactive. The risks we create are significantly caused by poor decisions that we make. There's too much emphasis on being reactive on response and not nearly enough on mitigation and prevention.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, now it's your turn with a minute and a half. Go ahead.

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

Professor Goode, I'll pose my last question to you. You spoke a lot about the way in which sanctions have impacted oligarchs and the fact that they are very much competing with one another for Putin's favour. I'm just wondering, though, if your department has been reviewing any open-source intelligence about how the sanctions from the west are impacting Russian citizens.

I know that there's a fervent amount of nationalism and patriotism among Russian society, but is the fact that they can't get access to high-tech consumer electronics and certain foodstuffs...? They must be noticing a shortage on the shelves. This is a society that's become used to having access to those, especially since the downfall of the Soviet Union. Is there anything you can inform our committee about in that regard?

Dr. Paul Goode: This is something that I've been keeping an eye on.

I will say that the impact is differential. It's hitting first in the areas that are already fairly internationalized, especially, for instance, in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Deeper into the country, though, it takes a while for these sorts of effects to work their way through the supply chain. People in western Siberia have noticed that iPhones suddenly cost twice as much, but they have not been hit with the shortages of supplies yet.

There have been growing public concerns about the cost of staples too—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Shipley, when you're ready, the floor is yours for four minutes.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Chair. Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I'd like to start with Dr. Goode.

Dr. Goode, some of your opening remarks I found very interesting. You mentioned that sanctions would cause the oligarchs to turn on one another and not necessarily on Putin. Could you please expand on that and tell me that if you don't think this is a good area that we should be in, what could we do to help in the Ukrainian situation?

Dr. Paul Goode: First of all, I'm not opposed to sanctions. I think the problem with sanctions is that oftentimes they do not have the effect of shifting people's understanding that the world has changed without them. The effect of the last round of sanctions from 2014 up until the present crisis was to demonstrate to most people that sanctions are something they can live with.

At present, the new sanctions are far more far-reaching, but they could go further. Turning the oligarchs against one another is, ultimately, still weakening the regime, so I think they are worth pursuing. However, we need to go much further—by "we" I mean the west—in completely cutting off Russian energy.

● (1155)

Mr. Doug Shipley: You also mentioned a couple of times in your opening remarks that you were aware of Putin's approval rating. I know this could be a tough question to answer, but since the war has broken out, do you have any indication of whether his approval rating with the Russian population is up or down?

Dr. Paul Goode: There has been some evidence from surveys coming out of Russia that his approval rating has increased. This is probably to be expected. However, if you were to dive into it very closely, there's been a lot of debate over what that means.

I'll say, from my own evaluation, that the one thing that's been striking is that while his approval has increased, people don't trust him. This discrepancy between trust and approval is not what we observed in 2014. That should give us cause to stop and think about whether these indications of approval are simply a momentary "rally around the flag" effect that one would expect during any military campaign or whether they genuinely reflect support. I would argue it's more the former than the latter.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that.

Next, I'd like to address a quick question to Dr. Lajeunesse. If I butchered your last name, I apologize.

In your opening remarks, you mentioned there's no such thing as Arctic security; there are sub-regions that must be viewed differently. Could you expand on that?

Dr. Adam Lajeunesse: I think far too often we look at Arctic security through a single lens. We examine, for instance, the proliferation of Russian military bases and missile infrastructure in Siberia and we extrapolate that to mean a threat to the North American Arctic. We have to look at Arctic regions somewhat in isolation. The security and defence threat to the North American Arctic is so very different from, for instance, the Scandinavian Arctic.

We will produce much better policy if we have a much clearer eye as to what those threats are, where they are present and where they're not.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that.

My last bit of remaining time I'll pass over to Mr. Lloyd.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll go back to Professor Goode.

On my final question on Russian propaganda finding fertile ground in Canada in relation to the spectre of the Ukrainian far right, can you provide examples of where you've seen this happen in Canada in the last couple of years?

Dr. Paul Goode: Having arrived in Canada only last year, I'm not sure I can give you that kind of perspective. However, I have heard reports from colleagues who have been here and said that they have seen it mainly manifesting through social media, especially through YouTube channels.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: This fear that.... I just saw an election result in which the Russian far right got less than 3% of the vote, I believe. I've seen some figures on the far left in Canada kind of parroting Russian lines about fascists in Ukraine. Can you elaborate more on that in the rest of my time?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Lloyd. We're out of time.

Mr. Zuberi, we'll go to you for the last four minutes for this round with this panel. Begin whenever you're ready.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the witnesses for being here. I would like to focus on Dr. Goode.

Your testimony is very fascinating and interesting. I'd like to dive into something we haven't yet addressed, which is harassment and intimidation.

Through different parliamentary committees, I've heard of harassment and intimidation by other countries. When it comes to Russia, is there harassment and intimidation of people on Canadian soil from those linked to the Russian government? I'm thinking about people who are dissenting or who disagree with the government.

Can you elaborate on that, if it's happening?

Dr. Paul Goode: It does happen. It does not happen directly at the hand of state actors, but usually by way of proxies. This is something that is fairly commonly done, especially on social media. You have cut-out accounts—people who advance the Russian state's narratives—and they will specifically aim to attack those who are, for instance, promoting anti-war messages, or derail and drive away what might otherwise be productive social conversations about these kinds of issues.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Do you find that this pressure is effective on legitimate dissenting conversation?

● (1200)

Dr. Paul Goode: It is effective in the sense that it derails the ability to treat dissent as dissent as opposed to simply making it appear to be, "Oh, well, they're just separate sides of a single issue. Who's possibly to know what the actual sort of truth is?" In this sense, it contributes to a post-truth kind of nihilism rather than facilitating dissent.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: What do you think we should do to counter that inappropriate pressure being applied on individuals?

Dr. Paul Goode: I think it's a difficult topic, and if we're talking about the ways that this most commonly happens through social media, then we need to look very closely at the ways that social media platforms patrol and implement their moderation policies. Too often it's that [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] or under-sourced in such a way that this sort of thing happens rampantly without any sort of attention.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: This kind of segues into something else I want to go into, which is recognizing disinformation. You said that we should, instead of playing whack-a-mole.... Obviously there are some egregious instances. For example, the Russian embassy recently tweeted about the massacre in Bucha. They tweeted out some misinformation around that. That needed to be taken down, and it was taken down, to my knowledge.

What role is there for civil society and government to help educate Canadians around recognizing disinformation? Can you give some examples of how we can do that more effectively?

Dr. Paul Goode: Deutsche Welle had a very interesting video that they put out recently. In it, they analyzed various disinformation and fake claims and then explained how they could go through them using available open-source intelligence and how individuals can determine for themselves whether or not this is useful or reliable information. I think it can be extremely empowering to show people that they have the tools to be able to—

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: In the very few moments that are left, do you think disinformation is going to be an increasing problem in the future?

Dr. Paul Goode: Yes, I think this is a feature of an increasingly interconnected society.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That completes the second round of questioning.

On the committee's behalf, I would like to thank the witnesses for their very important, valuable insights in a complex and ever-moving situation for our country. We appreciate your generosity with your time.

We will now, colleagues, take a five-minute suspension and prepare for the second panel.

● (1200)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1205)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

With us this second hour, by video conference, is Dr. Andrea Charron, director and associate professor, Centre for Defence and Security Studies at the University of Manitoba, and Marcus Kolga, senior fellow, Macdonald-Laurier Institute.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

Welcome to all.

I now invite Dr. Charron to make an opening statement of up to five minutes. You can start whenever you're ready.

Dr. Andrea Charron (Director and Associate Professor, Centre for Defence and Security Studies, University of Manitoba, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

My remarks are prefaced on the assumption that Russia is a persistent threat and that we need to think about North America's security posture, not simply Canada's. Since 1938, a threat to either the U.S. or Canada is a threat to the other, and they are indivisible with respect to Russia. Likewise, the individual requirements of both states cannot be separated.

I will speak to my research area of expertise, which is continental defence, but there are wider implications. Part of the continental defence relationship is binational, as embodied in NORAD's functional responsibility for aerospace and maritime warning and aerospace control. The remaining parts to continental defence are bilateral and include civilian agencies, private companies and citizens.

We have the makings of a dangerous and reinforcing feedback loop, assuming the status quo. Russia has come to believe it can exploit our continental defence vulnerabilities, thus emboldening it to undertake a regional challenge by threatening actions to deter an overseas response. North America recognizes its vulnerability, as well as those vital to overseas allies, and is unwilling to respond effectively, being forced to fall back on deterrence by punishment, which we cannot allow to happen. This in turn further emboldens Russia to undertake further challenges, which raises doubts among overseas allies that the U.S. can defend North America, let alone other allies. In essence, it is the situation we face now with Russia and Ukraine.

We have been warned for nearly a decade by successive NORAD and USNORTHCOM commanders that North America has multiple simultaneous challenges and that threats emanate from multiple domains and axes. Russia is an acute threat to North America, while China is the longer-term peer challenger to the U.S.'s waning hegemony. To be defended is no longer the exclusive purview of the Canadian and U.S. militaries, but requires whole-of-government and whole-of-population efforts.

North America has four priorities. First is deterrence, especially by denial. Second are kinetic and non-kinetic defeat options, the latter being most likely. Third is readiness and fourth is resilience.

Meanwhile, our adversaries have two strategies with respect to North America. First is bombarding us with cyber-disinformation and disruptive attacks, and second is using an anti-access area denial strategy to deny the U.S. and allies freedom of movement around the world and increasingly in all domains.

The U.S. and NATO allies have depended on deterrence by punishment for decades. It is the idea that we promise a cost so high to adversaries that they wouldn't dare attack us. Dependence on punishment alone risks uncontrollable escalation and narrows our response options considerably.

The focus needs to shift to deterrence by denial, which means taking advantage of the fact that we have allies and partners. We need to ensure that North America and our allies have all-domain awareness, are resilient to a variety of attacks, especially below the threshold of use of force, and ensure that attacks are identified and addressed quickly to prevent escalation. In other words, we need to change Russia's calculus to strip away the benefits of attacks on North America, rather than focusing solely on increasing the costs.

Deterrence by denial means North America needs to ensure there are no command seams that can be exploited or, conversely, that constrain us. We need particular capabilities, especially sensors for radar's digital transformation, and the means to create common operating pictures that can be shared efficiently and appropriately. We need to integrate data and information from all domains, working with a range of allies and partners, including with civilian agencies and private companies.

My analysis counsels the importance of modernizing continental defence, with a primary focus on NORAD and deterrence by denial. It is vital that the structural changes to the North American deterrence posture are made to alter adversarial perceptions so that North America cannot be held hostage. Beyond the need to modernize NORAD's early warning and defence control capabilities is the need for both countries to rethink fundamentally what it means to defend the continent. It is a whole-of-society effort, not simply a military-only endeavour.

Thank you.

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now invite Dr. Kolga to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Go ahead whenever you're ready.

Mr. Marcus Kolga (Senior Fellow, Macdonald-Laurier Institute, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for inviting me to speak with you today.

I've worked very closely with the Russian pro-democracy and human rights movements for nearly 20 years. I also led the civil society campaign for Magnitsky human rights sanctioning legislation. I've also been monitoring and writing about Russian threats, including information and cognitive warfare, for the past 15 years.

You've already heard much about Russian disinformation, but I'd like to look more specifically at the Russian cognitive warfare targeting Canada and our allies and the threat of Vladimir Putin's militarization and resource imperialism in the Arctic. I'd be happy to answer questions about the war in Ukraine, Putin's broader objectives, sanctions and influence operations as well.

Russian information warfare is not a new phenomenon. The Soviets became expert at it during the Cold War. Vladimir Putin, who is a product of the KGB, restored cognitive warfare 20 years ago as a primary tool to repress his own people, undermine western democracies and erode cohesion within the NATO alliance.

While some may still doubt the threat that Russian cognitive warfare poses to Canada, there is irrefutable evidence of it. Canada's national intelligence and security committee of Parliament has repeatedly warned about this persistent and growing threat in its annual reports.

Putin's objectives in terms of cognitive warfare are mostly agnostic of any mainstream ideology, but it does align with his support for both far-left and far-right groups. As we've heard, Russian information warfare targets socially sensitive issues in order to polarize us. Once those issues are identified, they are amplified by a complex Russian information laundromat that includes the weaponization of information through Russian state media and a constellation of proxy groups and platforms, including right here in Canada, that regurgitate this information. It is then further amplified by Canadian extremist groups on both the far left and far right.

The objective of Russian information and cognitive warfare is to undermine and subvert our democracy through polarization. We saw the impact this can have during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. We also saw this during the COVID pandemic; I warned in March 2020 that the Russian government would exploit the pandemic with anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination narratives. Those anti-lockdown movements were injected with anti-government narratives. During the Ottawa trucker protest, we observed Russian state media exploiting the protests and the protesters to legitimize and amplify fringe voices within it who advocated for the violent overthrow of our democratically elected government.

The Ukrainian conflict has seen an intensification of Russian information operations around the world. Among Putin's many false claims to justify his barbaric invasion is that Ukraine is a nation run by Nazis and that the Ukrainian nation needs to be eliminated. That same Nazi narrative has targeted Canadians of Ukrainian heritage, including Canadian elected officials—Liberals and Conservatives—who support Ukraine. This is intended to delegitimize their status and voices as Canadian citizens and promote hate towards them.

Our research has demonstrated that Russian disinformation has directly targeted Canadian elected officials, including Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau, as well as our geopolitical interests over the past years. This includes narratives—which are tailored for both the far right and the far left—that are intended to exploit and intensify negative emotional reactions to sensitive issues like residential schools, the environment and anti-LGBTQ issues.

NATO and the Arctic have also been targeted. In the Arctic, Russia has engaged in a rapid militarization over the past decade. This includes underwater nuclear super-weapons and torpedoes that glide undetected underneath the ice to irradiate our Arctic coastlines. Dozens of nuclear icebreakers, airfields and specialized Arctic warfare bases have been established. The new high-tech Nagurskoye long-range bomber airfield is as close to Canada as Winnipeg is to Ottawa.

Last year, Russia claimed all of the resources underneath the Arctic sea—all of them—right up to Canada's 200-mile economic exclusive zone. Indeed, Russia's official 2035 Arctic strategy calls for aggressive Arctic resource expansion and warns about a potential conflict in the Arctic. It orders the continuous militarization of the Arctic.

In conclusion, Canada failed to take the threat of Russia seriously in 2007 in Estonia, in 2008 in Georgia, in 2014 in Crimea and Donbas, in Syria in 2015, in the United States in 2016, and now in Ukraine, Mali and Africa. Let's not make the same dangerous mistake with the Arctic and Canadian democracy.

I look forward to your questions.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The questions begin now.

Mr. Van Popta, you can lead off the questioning with a six-minute block whenever you are ready.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to our witnesses for being with us here today.

I'm going to start with Mr. Kolga.

You commented on military buildup by Russia in the north. I've read in various sources that Russia is reopening some of its Arctic bases that were used in the Cold War. I wonder if you can comment on that. Compare and contrast that with Canada's and America's military capabilities in the north.

I ask that question in the context of evidence from Professor Lajeunesse earlier today. He said the biggest threat to North America is not that we will be invaded. I think he used the term “avenue of approach”. I'm assuming that's missiles coming over the north heading to the south. He said that when it comes to an invasion, Europe should be more worried than North America is. Perhaps you can comment on that.

Mr. Marcus Kolga: If I were in Europe, especially in the Baltic states, I'd be far more concerned about a Russian invasion than I would be in North America.

I think that Russia's primary objective—Vladimir Putin's primary objective—is to expand the availability of resources. They have already been engaging in research in the Arctic and have been increasing their claims of the resources underneath the Arctic sea for the past decade. They have a very clear aim.

This still represents a challenge to Canada's own claims and claims of other Arctic nations in that region, including Norway and Denmark. I think that we need to be concerned. We've seen Vladimir Putin's escalation. We saw it already on the border with Ukraine earlier this summer. We've seen his appetite for conflict over and over again.

I don't think that we can rule out any sort of potential conflict in the Arctic region. If there were a conflict, it would probably be limited more to the European area, but again, we cannot rule out a conflict that would draw us into that, and I don't think that Canada is prepared. I think that Professor Charron can speak more directly to that. I don't think that we are prepared for any sort of serious conflict in the Arctic, and this is something that clearly Vladimir Putin has spent the past number of years building up to.

● (1220)

Mr. Tako Van Popta: We will give the opportunity to Professor Charron to answer the same question. Could you comment on immediate threats to Canadian sovereignty in the north in the face of Russian aggression? What we can do to deter them?

Dr. Andrea Charron: I think one of the things we need to do is think about sovereignty in a more nuanced way. One of the biggest deterrents to Russia is having communities in the Arctic that are healthy and that see themselves staying in the region because there are employment opportunities.

We don't want to think about the Arctic as solely a battle space, but recognize that it is part and parcel of Canada and that there are infrastructure challenges that face not only the military but also the civilians there. As we are talking about indigenous homelands, we need to have them as part of this conversation.

With regard to Russia's claim of the underwater continental shelf out to our exclusive economic zone, the one thing I would be careful of is becoming too alarmist. Russia wants us to walk away from and abandon the UN processes because they reinforce the rules-based order that we thrive under. It's fully within their right to submit whatever data they want to, but there is a process.

We need to make sure that we continue to respect that process and follow it, and not abandon it just because we think that Russia will not hold true to its obligations, because then they have won. That is exactly what I'm talking about. Deterrence by denial does not allow them to dictate our actions.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: I have one quick follow-up question to you, Professor Charron.

Do you agree that Canada should invest 2% of its GDP, as NATO is suggesting, in military defence? How much of that should go to NORAD and to upgrading our north warning system?

Dr. Andrea Charron: As for the 2%, we technically have until 2024. The Wales summit in 2014 made that indication.

Rather than thinking about the actual number, we have to think about whether we have the capacity to spend those monies. I think that NORAD modernization and a focus on continental defence are essential, but not all of them are big-ticket items. For example, a program called Pathfinder, which is an investment in artificial intelligence, allows our analysts to now see and interpret more of the data that the north warning system is picking up. We can't discount those sorts of solutions as well. It doesn't have to be spending solely on hardware.

I'm very concerned about the CAF's abilities to be able to absorb all this money, given that we are down about 10,000 personnel. We're missing key trainers and we're missing key senior NCMs, captains and majors.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now invite Mr. Noormohamed to begin his six-minute round of questioning.

We go over to you, sir.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like thank the witnesses for your very insightful comments. I would like to start with Mr. Kolga.

I really got to know you a little bit after you wrote a piece for the *Toronto Star* on January 12, 2021, long before the protests in Canada and long before the convoy. You wrote about how Canada was not immune to the Capitol Hill riot. In that article you pointed out very presciently a lot of the things that unfortunately we've seen unfold over the course of the last year. In that article you talked a lot about what misinformation does when it's spread, and of course what happens when Russians and others amplify it. Having written that article over a year ago, can you share what you have seen take hold since that article came to life? What are some of the proof points that you talked about then that trouble you most today?

Mr. Marcus Kolga: That's a great question. When we saw the emergence of the pandemic in March of 2020, a lot of us who have been keeping an eye on Russian disinformation, those tactical narratives that they use and the types of issues that they target, saw that COVID would provide a fertile ground for those Russian propagandists to sink their teeth into, with issues on the far left and far right, and pull us apart. In fact, already in 2018 and 2019 we were observing Russian propagandists promote anti-vaccination narratives regarding polio vaccines, smallpox, chickenpox vaccines, any sort of vaccines. They were promoting vaccine hesitancy about those specific narratives. It wasn't surprising that we saw those same narratives emerge around COVID.

What they did, again early on in the pandemic, was identify anti-lockdown movements that were quite small at the time, and anti-vaccination movements, and promote those narratives. On their embassy websites we actually saw the Russian embassy in Canada directly promote vaccine hesitancy using their state media platforms like RT and others, and this constellation of proxy platforms that I mentioned before. The information that was posted there was then picked up by these anti-vaccination movements, and it created a feedback loop whereby the Russian state media and those proxy organizations would then echo what was being promoted by what were then rather fringe groups to legitimize them.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, what we saw was an injection of anti-government narratives into those anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination narratives. You could see that the Russian government was going to use those narratives to try to, again, polarize our society, divide it, and we saw the result really on January 6 on Capitol Hill. That was part of it, but you could see that Canada was headed in very much the same direction and you could see Russian state media continuing to fuel that shift.

Again, with regard to the Ottawa protest I'm not suggesting that the Russian government or Russian propagandists were behind it, but they do exploit situations like that. We saw Russian state media provide a platform for fringe elements within it, which served to discredit the actual legitimate protesters in there and the narratives there. They provided a platform for these individuals who were calling for the violent overthrow of our government. This is how the Russian disinformation system works, and that's really representative of the threat that it poses to our democracy.

I should also note that for one of the larger organizations that was already promoting anti-lockdown protests early on here in Canada, starting in the summer of 2020, and that became one of the larger organizations doing it, as soon as the invasion of Ukraine occurred on February 24, their anti-vaccination, anti-lockdown narratives quickly switched to anti-Ukrainian narratives, and exactly the same ones that the Russian government was promoting about the de-nazification of Ukraine. There was a clear correlation between the two. Again, it's something that we anticipated early on, and this is something that the government should be learning from, because we can anticipate where Russia and other foreign actors will seek to try to polarize us just by keeping an eye on the most sensitive issues in society.

● (1225)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you very much, Mr. Kolga.

You've actually answered two or three of the other questions that I had. I'm going to thank you and I'm actually going to take the remainder of my time to put forward a motion for this committee, Mr. Chair, if you will permit. That motion is as follows, and it's been circulated:

> That the evidence and documentation received by the committee during the 2nd Session of the 43rd Parliament on the subject of Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism be taken into consideration by the committee in the current session.

Would you permit me to put that forward, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Notice has been given, Clerk. Would you be my eyes and ears in the room?

We have a motion from Mr. Noormohamed. Do we have consensus that this motion should pass?

I see a thumb up, but I don't hear anything.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Wassim Bouanani): Go on to the discussion, sir. I will let you know as soon as possible.

The Chair: All right.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): For explanation, this was discussed before. It just brings the evidence from the last Parliament into the study that we put forward. It's pretty straightforward, and I think everyone agreed that the evidence should be brought forward. That's for some clarity.

● (1230)

The Chair: Is there agreement, Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes, sir. It appears there's unanimous consent.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We now move to Ms. Michaud. You have six minutes in your round.

Whenever you're ready, take it away.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I want to start by apologizing to the interpreters because I don't think my mike was close enough to my mouth when I was speaking earlier. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for the extremely important work they do. I'll try to pay more attention from now on.

My questions are for you, Ms. Charron. You know a lot about Russia, and with the budget coming down today, I would be remiss if I didn't ask you about government spending on security and cybersecurity.

Do you think Canada is prepared to deal with potential cyber-attacks? Should today's budget contain additional investments to help Canada deal with potential attacks or cyber-attacks?

[*English*]

Dr. Andrea Charron: I'm not a cyber specialist, but insofar as I study continental defence, I think one of the persistent problems we have is that we are still very stovepiped. One, we tend to think about threats and particular domains, so that's land, air and maritime, including the cyberspace. We have very particular mandates for agencies and no one organization that's responsible for getting an overall cyber operation picture, so we really have no idea of where we are being hit with cyber-attacks. We know they are happening often. We know they're even happening against critical infrastructure, which is particularly worrying. Each of the different agencies and private companies and citizens are experiencing these attacks, but because we have no organization that can bring them all together so that we can see the full extent of the damage and maybe start to look at mitigation methods, we're really hamstrung.

I also note that we simply don't have a cyber-command, like the U.S. has. We have a much smaller military, but it's increasingly clear that we are going to have to go to more of a digital transformation within the military and governments. This is going to be a painful event. There are going to be setbacks, but if we are going to achieve what is ultimately called joint all-domain command and control, which is what the U.S. and allies want to achieve, we are going to have to make significant investments in our digital architecture and our knowledge and training to be able to achieve it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you, Ms. Charron.

Mr. Kolga, I was fascinated by what you said in response to Mr. Noormohamed's question. It was about the use of media tactics as a foreign policy and defence tool.

You talked about Russia's interference in the infamous “freedom convoy” that occupied Parliament Hill for weeks. You also said that the Russian embassy was promoting vaccine hesitancy, among other things.

Exactly how far can these disinformation campaigns go? What consequences can they have on our citizens?

[*English*]

Mr. Marcus Kolga: I think we've seen exactly how far they can go. In the case of the United States and the 2016 presidential elections, we saw Russian efforts to destabilize that election that came very close to successfully doing so. We've seen, with regard to the invasion of Ukraine, the effectiveness of disinformation, certainly domestically in Russia, and Vladimir Putin's ability to seal off his entire nation from outside information and to repress and suppress the independent media within Russia.

This is a very inexpensive tool for these authoritarian regimes. Often, as in the case of the U.S. presidential elections, it costs a few million dollars. There's what's called a “bot farm” that they call the St. Petersburg troll farm. It's just outside St. Petersburg and employs several hundred people who engage in this sort of activity, and the impact of it is incredibly significant. I wouldn't expect Vladimir Putin or other hostile nations to let up on these efforts, because of their impact, and the cost is low, so we can only expect this to continue.

Certainly, in the context of Russian information warfare, we know that Vladimir Putin changed the constitution of his own country last summer, and that change will potentially allow him to remain in power until 2036 and perhaps beyond. Barring any sort of change in the regime in Russia, we will see this sort of activity going on for quite some time.

● (1235)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: I don't have much time left, but I would like you to comment on the fierce adversary that is Russia.

As I said earlier, even if we have strong defence capability, the Russians can attack and paralyze entire cyber systems. How can a nation like Canada guard against a threat like that?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. We're out of time.

Perhaps the witness would be so kind as to offer a written response to that question at his leisure.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: I would ask Mr. MacGregor to take the last round of this section. Whenever you're ready, sir, go ahead.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

I'd like to start with Mr. Kolga.

Mr. Kolga, thank you for providing your testimony today, especially on the extent of Russian capabilities and cognitive warfare. I know that all members of Parliament, no matter what political party we're a part of, over the last two years have been on the front lines of disinformation. We've had to spend a lot of our time trying to clear up many of the myths that are sent to our office.

What is problematic is that misinformation and disinformation manifest themselves in physical ways, such as on January 6 in the United States and more recently in the occupation of Ottawa. The problem is the potential that exists for disinformation and misinformation to manifest itself physically and the fact that Russian operatives very much want to exploit that for their own use.

Our committee's main mandate is on national security and public safety, so if we want to effectively combat this, what kinds of recommendations should our committee be making to the federal government, with the understanding that if you clamp down too hard on social media, you're simply going to diffuse those problematic voices onto other platforms? What kinds of recommendations should we be making to have the federal government effectively counteract this?

Mr. Marcus Kolga: Thank you for that excellent question.

I think the federal government needs to take, first and foremost, an inclusive, all-of-society and all-of-democracy approach to this. Of course, government needs to be part of that discussion to develop a strategy to combat this, but it also means reaching out to civil society actors who are often, like me, on the front lines of this battle against foreign information operations.

It also means reaching out and working with the social media giants. I know from my discussions with them and observing how they have reacted to regulation in the past that they don't react well to it. There are very good examples of governments reaching out to social media and actually working with them and continuing to work with them very effectively to combat foreign disinformation.

I look to Taiwan. Taiwan has developed a strategy whereby they work very closely with civil society groups and with social media to quickly detect information operations and information warfare when it's targeting Taiwan. Taiwan is at the receiving end of a lot of that coming from China.

They've worked specifically with Facebook, quite remarkably, because they don't seem to want to co-operate too much, at least here in North America. In Taiwan, once the civil society detects an incoming information operation, the government and Facebook are alerted. Facebook has agreed to throttle those sorts of narratives when they appear, pulling them off of people's news feeds when they come in.

The government itself has produced a policy whereby when that information operation comes in, the specific ministry that's being targeted is then tasked with producing a counter-narrative within 60 minutes, usually using humour or something like that. This has turned out to be very effective for the Taiwanese, so I would look to other countries in this way.

As well, Sweden announced in January the formation of a government psychological defence unit, which also brings in civil society actors, to protect Swedes from cognitive warfare, and specifically Russian cognitive warfare.

I think this is—

● (1240)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thanks, Mr. Kolga. I'm sorry to interrupt you. I have only a couple of minutes left. I would invite you to provide our committee with a written brief if you can, if you want to delve into those subject more fully. That would be fantastic.

Mr. Marcus Kolga: Absolutely.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: My final question is for Dr. Charron.

The challenge with this study is that we are sometimes, I think, veering into the mandate of the Standing Committee on National Defence. It's very important to realize that our committee's mandate is specific to national security and public safety. The two most obvious examples are the RCMP and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

In the context of the theme of continental defence, do you have any recommendations our committee should be making in regard to those national security agencies in the face of Russia's subversive measures, espionage and spying? Are there better ways that we need to use in working with our American partners? Can you suggest any improvements?

Dr. Andrea Charron: I think you've demonstrated the issue, which is that we do tend to think there is the defence domain and there is the security and safety domain. What we're trying to say is that we need to bring these together. We cannot work in isolation anymore.

I would suggest you look at the Marine Security Operation Centres as the model. To help with the NORAD maritime warning function, members of the military, RCMP and Coast Guard, etc., share information. They use a common lexicon so they do not prejudice court cases, but then they have a common operating picture. All agencies and the military know what they're looking for. Then they can share things like surveillance time, which is very precious. It doesn't make sense to have DND looking for just one thing when they could also be looking for safety and security issues.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, that completes the allotted time we have available for these witnesses.

On your behalf, I would like to thank them for their insight. We understand just how present and intense these issues are. You have provided us with very useful information and opinion. On behalf of not only the committee but of all members of Parliament, I thank you.

Colleagues, we now move into the in camera portion.

I will have to log out and log in, so we will suspend the meeting for five minutes. I'll see you shortly.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]