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• (1535)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 123 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

I would like to remind participants of the following points. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak, whether participating in person or via Zoom. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

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

I would like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour.

From Meta Platforms Inc., we have David Agranovich, director of threat disruption, by video conference; and in the room we have Ms. Rachel Curran, head of public policy, Canada.

From TikTok, we have Steve de Eyre, director of public policy and government affairs, Canada; and by video conference, we have Justin Erlich, global head of policy development.

From YouTube, we have Lindsay Doyle, head of government affairs and public policy for Canada; and John Hultquist, chief analyst, Mandiant Intelligence for Google, appearing by video conference.

I thank all the witnesses for being here today and for helping us with our study.

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

Please go ahead, sir.

Mr. David Agranovich (Director of Threat Disruption, Meta Platforms Inc.): Thank you so much, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is David Agranovich. I am the director of threat disruption at Meta.

My work is focused on coordinating our cross-company efforts to identify, disrupt and deter adversarial threats on our platforms.

I've worked to counter these threats at Meta for the past six years. Previously, I worked in the U.S. government on Russian interference issues, culminating as the director for intelligence and director for Russia at the National Security Council.

I'm joined today by Rachel Curran, who is our head of public policy for Canada.

At Meta, we work hard to identify and counter adversarial threats. These include hacking, spyware and cyber espionage operations, as well as influence operations or what we call "coordinated inauthentic behaviour", or CIB, which we define as any coordinated effort to manipulate public debate for a strategic goal in which fake accounts are central to the operation.

At Meta, our community standards prohibit inauthentic behaviour, including by users who seek to misrepresent themselves, use fake accounts or artificially boost the popularity of content. This policy is intended to protect the security of users and our services and create a space where people can trust the people and the communities that they interact with on our platforms.

We also know that threat actors are working to interfere with and manipulate public debate, exploit societal divisions, promote fraud, influence elections and target authentic social engagement. Stopping these bad actors is one of our highest priorities. This is why we have invested significantly in people and technologies to combat inauthentic behaviour. The security teams at Meta have developed policies, automated detection tools and enforcement frameworks to tackle deceptive actors, both foreign and domestic. These investments in technology have enabled us to stop millions of attempts to create fake accounts every day and to detect and remove millions more, often within minutes of their creation.

Just this year, Meta disabled more than two billion fake accounts, the vast majority of which, over 99%, were identified proactively before receiving any report from a user.

Our strategy to counter these adversarial threats has three main components. The first is expert-led investigations to uncover the most sophisticated operations. The second is public disclosure and information sharing to enable cross-societal defence. The third is product and engineering efforts to build the insights derived from our investigations into more effective scaled and automated detection and enforcement.

A key component of this strategy is our public quarterly threat reports. Since we began this work, we've taken down and disclosed more than 200 covert influence operations. These operated from 68 different countries and operated in at least 42 different languages, from Amharic and Urdu to Russian and Chinese.

Sharing this information has enabled our teams, investigative journalists, government officials and industry peers to better understand and expose Internet-wide security risks, including those ahead of critical elections. We also share detailed technical indicators linked to these networks in a public-facing repository hosted on GitHub, which contains more than 7,000 indicators of influence operations activity across the Internet.

I want to very briefly share the key trends we've observed in the course of our investigations into influence operations around the world.

First, Russia continues to be the most prolific source of CIB. We've disrupted more than 40 operations from Russia that targeted audiences all over the world. Second, Iran remains the second most active source of CIB globally. Third, while historically China-origin clandestine activity was limited on our platforms, we've seen a shift by Chinese operations in the past two years to target broader, more global audiences in languages other than Chinese.

Across the different geographic operations, we've seen an increasing reliance on private firms selling influence as a service; the use of generative AI tools—though, I would note, with little impact on our investigative capabilities; and finally, amplification through uncritical media coverage of these networks.

I'd be happy to discuss these operations in more detail throughout our discussion today.

Countering foreign influence operations is a whole-of-society effort, which is why we work with our industry peers—including some of the folks represented here today—as well as independent researchers, investigative journalists, government and law enforcement.

Thank you for your focus on this work. I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Agranovich.

We go now to Mr. de Eyre and Mr. Erlich to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

● (1540)

Mr. Steve de Eyre (Director, Public Policy and Government Affairs, Canada, TikTok): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members.

My name is Steve de Eyre, and I'm the director of public policy and government affairs for TikTok Canada. I'm joined today by my

colleague, Justin Erlich, the global head of policy development for TikTok's trust and safety team, who's joining us virtually from California.

Thank you for the invitation to meet today to speak about the important issue of protecting Canadians from disinformation. The topic of today's hearing is important to us, to the foundation of our community and to our platform. TikTok is a global platform where an incredibly diverse range of Canadian creators and artists have found unprecedented success with global audiences, where indigenous creators are telling their own stories in their own voices and where small business owners like Caitlin Campbell, who spreads a message of positivity while caffeinating Canadians with Street Brew Coffee, are finding new customers not just across Canada but around the world.

Canadians love TikTok because of the authenticity and the positivity of the content, so it's important and in our interest to maintain the security and integrity of our platform. To do this, we invest billions of dollars into our work on trust and safety. This includes advanced automated moderation, security technologies and thousands of safety and security experts around the world, including content moderators located in Canada. We also employ local policy experts who help ensure the application of our policies and consider the nuances of local laws and culture.

When it comes to outside manipulation and foreign interference, TikTok takes an objective and robust approach. To start, our community guidelines prohibit misinformation that may cause significant harm to individuals or society, regardless of intent. To help counter misinformation and disinformation, we work with 19 independent fact-checking organizations to enforce our policies against this content.

In addition, we invest in elevating reliable sources of information during elections and unfolding events and on topics of health and well-being. We relentlessly pursue and remove accounts that break our deceptive behaviour rules, including covert influence operations. We run highly technical investigations to identify and disrupt these operations on an ongoing basis. We've removed thousands of accounts belonging to dozens of networks operating from locations around the world, and we regularly report these removals in our publicly available transparency centre.

Addressing disinformation is an industry-wide challenge that requires a collaborative approach and collective action, including both platforms and government. As an example, TikTok has joined forces with other companies to combat the deceptive use of AI in elections. We became the first video-sharing platform to implement technology from the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity that automatically labels AI-generated content. We endorse the International Foundation for Electoral Systems' voluntary guidelines for election integrity for technology companies, which provide a shared set of expectations and practices for companies and election authorities to promote election integrity.

Such collaboration is also critical as we approach the next federal election. In 2021, TikTok worked with Elections Canada to build an in-app hub that provided authenticated information on when, where and how to vote. That year, TikTok was also the only new platform to sign on to the PCO's Canada declaration on electoral integrity online. As we approach the next election, we will be building upon these efforts and leveraging learnings and best practices from other elections taking place around the world, including in the U.S.

Before I conclude, I want to provide the committee with information regarding TikTok's actions related to the revelations made by the U.S. Department of Justice on Tenet Media. Following evidence presented by the U.S. DOJ and our own investigation, we've removed accounts belonging to Tenet Media, its founder Lauren Chen, and a fake news outlet for violating our policies on promoting deceptive behaviour and paid political promotion.

I also want to note that TikTok removed accounts associated with Rossiya Segodnya and TV-Novosti for engaging in covert influence operations on TikTok, which violates our community guidelines. We label other state-affiliated media accounts on our platform to provide the community with important context about the source of the information.

Thank you again for the invitation to speak with the committee, and we look forward to sharing more with you about how we are addressing these important issues.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, sir, for your remarks.

I now invite Ms. Doyle and Mr. Hultquist to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Lindsay Doyle (Head of Government Affairs and Public Policy for Canada, YouTube): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, my name is Lindsay Doyle, and I am head of government affairs and public policy for YouTube in Canada.

[*English*]

I'm pleased to be joined remotely by my colleague John Hultquist, chief analyst at Mandiant Intelligence.

Responsibility is our first priority at YouTube. More than 500 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute. The scale and our global reach demand that we take seriously the importance

of protecting free expression while also ensuring we are doing the right thing for our users, creators and advertisers.

A critical aspect of our responsibility efforts is doing our part to protect the integrity of democratic processes around the world. That's why we have long invested in capabilities and tools to address threats to electoral integrity. We recognize the importance of enabling the people who use our services, in Canada and abroad, to speak freely about the political issues most important to them. At the same time, we continue to take steps to prevent the misuse of our tools and platforms, particularly attempts by foreign state actors to undermine democratic elections and political discourse.

As it relates to Russia, since the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 YouTube has blocked thousands of channels and millions of videos from Russian state-sponsored organizations, including channels directly tied to RT and Sputnik. So far in 2024, we have terminated more than 11,000 YouTube channels linked to coordinated influence operations with ties to Russia. We also continue to terminate channels belonging to Russian entities and individuals subject to sanctions.

Following a U.S. Department of Justice indictment, issued on September 4, regarding covert Russian support for a U.S.-based media company, we terminated Tenet Media's channels, channels owned or operated by its owners, and material that was cross-posted to other channels. We also removed copies and re-uploads of Tenet Media content from additional channels. Our investigation is ongoing, as are our efforts to combat coordinated influence operations.

In recent weeks, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom sanctioned RT for engaging in both direct disinformation and covert influence operations. These recent developments highlight the importance of receiving information from law enforcement, government and trusted flaggers, which add to the signals we can observe about activity on our platforms. We continue to ensure compliance with applicable sanctions while upholding our terms of service.

Finally, over the last two years, the Russian government has periodically throttled access to YouTube. In the last two months, we saw frequent efforts to throttle and even block YouTube in Russia. YouTube has long been one of the last remaining sources of independent media inside Russia, and has refused to comply with a number of Russian government demands to remove political speech and similar content.

To help advance our work against foreign interference and state-sponsored activity, Google created the threat intelligence group. I will ask my colleague to briefly introduce his work.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but can we just pause for a moment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): We have an unmuted microphone, and that causes interference.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Hultquist, if you can mute yourself for the moment, we'll see whether that solves the problem...unless you were about to speak.

Mr. John Hultquist (Chief Analyst, Mandiant Intelligence, Google, YouTube): I am about to speak, that's why. I'm sorry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Perhaps we should balance the sound. When I listen to Mrs. Doyle, I have to turn the volume all the way up. Then it's the reverse when Mr. Hultquist starts speaking. I think we have a minor volume balance problem, but I don't know how to solve it because I know nothing about these things.

The Chair: That's fine; we'll continue with Mr. Hultquist.

[*English*]

By the way, for those of you online who are not familiar with our Zoom system, if you look at the bottom of your window, there's an interpretation button. You can choose whether to listen to English, French or the original.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): I hope these witnesses are tech-savvy.

The Chair: I'm an IT guy, but I am a little behind on the technology these days.

Mr. Hultquist, please go ahead.

• (1550)

Mr. John Hultquist: Thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue and discuss our work.

Within our mandate at Mandiant Intelligence, we identify, monitor and tackle threats, including coordinated influence operations and cyber-espionage campaigns. Our teams disrupt activity on a regular basis and publish our findings. We also provide expert analysis on threats originating from countries like Russia, China, Iran, North Korea and criminal organizations.

Russia has a vast covert apparatus that includes their intelligence services, as well as contractors from their private sector. These organizations have differing capabilities, which range from complex intrusion operations to coordinated inauthentic behaviour on social media platforms. Though these threats are serious, we have been successful in disrupting this type of activity on our platforms quickly and effectively.

Russian information operations activity has been used in a number of contexts to support Russia's strategic and tactical concerns, but it is most consistently focused on undermining democratic society by highlighting polarizing political and social issues. Since the launch of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, this activity has

prioritized narratives designed to erode western support for Ukraine.

Our team is constantly on the lookout, because this activity is always adapting. The actors develop new techniques to blend in with real users or scale their operations or, in the case of intrusion actors, new techniques that might help them gain illicit access to systems. We continue to monitor and adapt to the use of new techniques to proactively tackle new threats.

Mrs. Lindsay Doyle: We, our users, industry, law enforcement and civil society all play important roles in safeguarding democracy and combatting disinformation. At YouTube, we are committed to doing our part to keep the digital ecosystem safe, reliable and open to free expression.

We appreciate the committee convening this important hearing, and we look forward to hearing your questions.

The Chair: Thank you for your remarks.

We'll start our questions now with Ms. Dancho.

Please go ahead for six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. I appreciated the testimony of Facebook and Meta, YouTube and Google, and TikTok as well. I appreciate that you've brought your foreign interference intelligence experts and that you each have your own designated branch to tackle this growing issue.

I also appreciate that you each mentioned how you've been dismantling any reach of Tenet Media. I think that's priority number one, and I appreciate that you've all taken action on that.

Certainly, Conservatives are of the position that any actor taking money from a foreign government to undermine the Canadian interest should be held fully accountable and, of course, your platforms have a very strong role in ensuring that is done. Given your technology, I would imagine you would know even sooner than government, in many circumstances, when that's being done. It sounds like you're being quite proactive.

I would like to understand better what government has done tangibly to assist your platforms. We've heard a lot proclaimed by the current Liberal government that they are taking foreign interference seriously.

We could start with Meta. What tangible efforts have been made to assist Facebook, for example, in these efforts to combat foreign interference?

Ms. Rachel Curran (Head of Public Policy, Canada, Meta Platforms Inc.): We have not had any specific outreach from the Government of Canada on this issue. We do engage with government departments when we think there is information that's relevant and necessary to their mandates, and we do brief them on our work, including work related to foreign interference.

We have done those briefings for government agencies in the last year or two, but we have not had specific outreach from government departments or government agencies on this issue in the last, I would say, 12 to 24 months.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

Just to confirm, you have proactively, of your own accord, reached out to brief government, but government, in the last two years, has not reached out or provided any tangible resources regarding foreign interference. I'm just confirming that.

Ms. Rachel Curran: That's correct, yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: It's surprising, given Facebook's reach and, of course, the fact that China, Iran, Russia and others are trying to utilize your platform, that no action really has been taken, but thank you for taking the initiative.

YouTube, do you have anything different or similar to add?

Mrs. Lindsay Doyle: We do, again, regularly brief government, as well as parliamentarians, on our efforts, especially as it relates to foreign interference.

With respect to some of our internal teams, our threat analysis group, which is a team of experts and security analysts who regularly both detect and disrupt foreign campaigns, would also be the ones to likely coordinate and discuss these matters directly with law enforcement, but these have been proactive briefings on our account.

• (1555)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: As Ms. Curran has said, you have not received proactive efforts to you from government. It's been you initiating those efforts. Is that correct?

Mrs. Lindsay Doyle: We do provide those briefings proactively, yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

There have been attempts by Liberals to make a connection between the Conservative Party and Tenet Media. With your reach, are you aware at all if there's any connection between the Conservative Party and Tenet Media?

This is for Ms. Curran.

Ms. Rachel Curran: I'll turn this over to my colleague, David Agranovich. I think he has looked into the issue of whether there is a connection between Tenet Media and the Conservative Party of Canada and can answer that question directly.

Mr. David Agranovich: Based on our investigations into Tenet Media and broader Russian state-controlled media, we do not see evidence that links the Conservative Party of Canada to Tenet or RT.

I will say that we're very careful when we do the investigations to avoid speculating beyond the evidence we can see on our platform. Our investigations are focused on the behaviour we see on our family of apps. In our investigations, we tap into the things we can observe and the assessments that we can make based on what we see on our platform.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

Certainly, we've all been involved in following foreign interference for quite some time, notably foreign interference from China in our elections and the efforts that they've made through social media and other platforms to influence Canadian elections. As I mentioned, Iran is also a popular state actor with foreign interference and, of course, Russia is the topic of conversation today.

My concern, though, is that all of these actors are watching how the western world reacts to their foreign interference. For example, we recently learned in The Globe and Mail and through the foreign interference investigation that a former public safety minister of the Liberal government took 54 days to authorize a surveillance warrant for a Liberal power broker provincially—also a former Liberal cabinet minister provincially—and they dragged their feet on foreign interference. We can go on and on. It took six years to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization.

Perhaps this is more toward the intelligence individuals you've brought. What sort of message does that inaction or reluctance to act, and reluctance to take things seriously, send to Russia when they're looking to interfere with misinformation on social media platforms? Is that a strong enough message that we're sending to Russia?

This is to Facebook's intelligence officer.

Mr. David Agranovich: My role at Facebook is to investigate and disrupt networks that we see on our platform. It wouldn't be appropriate for me to speculate on how governments might perceive other governments' actions.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

This is for YouTube's counterpart.

Mr. John Hultquist: I have to echo David's comment.

I'm an expert on adversary behaviour and cyber adversary behaviour. I wouldn't be able to speculate on how the government reacted to something like that.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much for your testimony.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

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

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

Thank you, witnesses, for being here today.

Quickly, on Ms. Dancho's recent comments, I wanted to know why, if there's so much work being done on this, Tenet Media was only taken down after the U.S. indictment.

Meta could speak to that first, please.

Mrs. Lindsay Doyle: I'll turn that over to my colleague, Mr. Agranovich.

Mr. David Agranovich: I'd be happy to respond.

I'll zoom out a bit about how we handle state media entities at Meta, and then when those state media entities start to bleed into covert influence activity, like what you saw with Tenet.

For several years now at Meta, we've labelled state-controlled media entities from 10 different countries. On Russian state-controlled media specifically, we put in place additional measures that restricted Russian state-controlled media after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Those measures included things like not just labelling their pages on our platform, but also putting in what we call "interstitial friction". If someone tries to click on a link, for example, to a Rossiya Segodnya story, they actually get a pop-up window that says, "Hey, are you sure you want to visit that? That's Russian state-controlled media."

We also labelled posts by any user—

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Mr. Agranovich—

Mr. David Agranovich: I'm sorry; go ahead.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: I have some more questions. I want to make sure that I get to them, because I don't have much time.

Earlier today, I went to—

Ms. Rachel Curran: Excuse me.

Do you want the answer, or do you want to ask your questions? Mr. Agranovich is the expert on these issues.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: It's the member's time.

The Chair: Excuse me.

We have a problem, I see.

• (1600)

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: We have technical problems.

[English]

The Chair: We'll suspend for just a minute.

• (1600)

(Pause)

• (1600)

The Chair: We'll resume.

I would ask the witnesses and everybody else not to interrupt. It's hard for the interpreters to translate when that happens.

Mr. MacDonald, we'll make allowances for the time. Please carry on.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Ahead of your appearance today, I tried an experiment on my Facebook page. I tried to post an article from The Globe and Mail from September 10, written by Shannon Kari, entitled "Canadian right-wing influencer's alleged dealings with Russian media company took place despite sanctions". After posting, there was a pop-up, as you just mentioned. I have it here: "news content can't be shared" in Canada. After that post failed, I went back and tried "How Indian Scams Will Be The End of Canada", by Lauren Southern, which is still on Tenet Media's Rumble page. I was able to post that, no problem, with no pop-up. I have it here. You can try it when you are online, if you wish, because it's still there. It has a picture of the Prime Minister with a

Canadian flag on one side and an Indian flag on the other, and it says, "The New India".

You may be working very hard to accomplish what we heard in all the preambles, perhaps, but I'm wondering, with the amount of money that Meta is making—\$134 billion U.S., up from \$119 billion U.S. in 2022—do we need more legislation surrounding social media platforms through government to be able to do this? What are the issues?

Mr. David Agranovich: Maybe I can address both that question and your first question.

When we removed Tenet Media and Rossiya Segodnya, that broader Russian state-controlled media entity, the measures we had in place already had reduced engagement with our content by 94%. They had reduced their posting by about 55%. That was before we removed them.

We ultimately made the decision to remove them, not based on the DOJ indictment. We think it's important that, as a technology company, we aren't simply removing things because the U.S. Department of Justice says they're bad. It was because we actually could see on our platform violations of our policies. Rossiya Segodnya and their subordinate groups violated our policies that prohibited foreign interference in elections. They violated our policy against claiming to engage in foreign interference in our elections.

To your second question, these groups, whether it's Rossiya Segodnya, the clandestine brands they've created, or influence operators more broadly, are incredibly adversarial actors. What we saw from RT, for example, when we started labelling them, was that they began creating hundreds of look-alike domains, where they would re-host their content. What they were trying to do was avoid the interstitial pop-ups you referenced, avoid the link friction and the labelling, by creating domain after domain after domain, so that our teams would have to keep chasing them all over the Internet—which we certainly will do and continue investing in.

However, I think it is the nature of this problem set that the adversaries we and our partners in government and our partners in the tech industry are dealing with are highly motivated to continue to try to do what they're doing. They are often operating on behalf of governments. They're not operating out of commercial concern. They're operating to advance a nation-state directive. As a result, our goal is not to eliminate them from the Internet entirely, because that's unlikely to ever happen. Our goal is to make it so hard for them to get the reach they're looking for that they essentially go somewhere else or try to find other avenues for their operations.

• (1605)

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you, Mr. Agranovich.

Look, I'm not challenging you, but what I am saying is that we sat here and heard the preambles about everything taking place. When three hours ago I was able to do what I did, it's hard to believe everything that we are being told.

I have another question, maybe for all of you. To the social media platforms that are here today, do you share information on the issues that are at hand here today? How much do you communicate with one another when you come across an incident like this?

Anybody can answer that.

Mr. David Agranovich: I'm happy to take that first, but my colleagues on this panel are also all part of that information sharing.

When we do a takedown of a CIB network, we commit to sharing our findings publicly. We do that quarterly in our threat reporting. We also share detailed technical indicators with security teams across the industry.

Increasingly, we've started doing the indicator sharing publicly. We created a GitHub repository that any security team, including the ones we may not know the contact information for, can access and find indicators for, for example, Russian networks across multiple platforms across the Internet. We have about 7,000 indicators so far in that GitHub, and we'll keep adding to that as we go.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: You don't specifically share with Instagram or TikTok. There's nothing that goes directly to them. There's nothing in your policy or regulations.

The Chair: We're going to have to cut this off.

Mr. David Agranovich: We do both. We share directly with other technology companies' security teams when we see operations that target their platforms. We also share publicly, in part because these operations often target very small companies that may not have a security team.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

We will now turn the floor over to Mr. Fortin for six minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Curran, we feel that Meta has a lot of power over the information that circulates in Canada and Quebec. The Internet is a medium that's evolving quickly, even from one day to the next.

I don't want to go back over another position that was stated in another committee, but we've noticed in recent months that Meta has blocked the publication of certain newspaper articles in particular. That's obviously not the best way to inform Canadians and Quebecers about important situations that concern them.

There also seems to be a lot of false information circulating on Facebook and other social media as well. A lot of misinformation and disinformation are circulating on Facebook particularly. However, we don't sense that Meta is concerned about the situation. Instead we get the impression that Meta is trying to make a profit and that, if the profit isn't there, then it's too bad about information and democracy. I think that's quite a widespread opinion.

That may not be the case, however, and I'm giving you an opportunity to set the record straight, if necessary. If it is the case, how-

ever, please tell us honestly that your purpose is to make money and that democracy and information aren't your business. Is that the case? I'll let you answer the question.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Curran: I think that's incorrect.

Listen, I think you're talking about a couple of different issues.

The first is removal of news from our platforms. We would love to restore news to Facebook and Instagram. The reason we had to remove it from our platforms is that the current government introduced and passed Bill C-18, the Online News Act, which was going to require us to pay approximately \$80 million a year for content that had no particular commercial value to us. In fact, we think we provided great value to news publishers. We estimated there was \$230 million per year to publishers in distribution value. We worked with Le Devoir, with La Presse and with publishers in Quebec across the board to distribute their content on Facebook and Instagram and get it to larger audiences. We think we were very successful in doing that.

The current government introduced legislation that gave us no option but to remove news from our platforms or we were going to have to pay for it. My colleagues at Google are currently still enmeshed with the CRTC in trying to figure out how this scheme is going to work.

We would love to restore news to our platforms. We could do that tomorrow if we were scoped out of Bill C-18, the Online News Act, if the legislation was repealed or even if publishers were given the option to opt in or opt out of that legislation. We could restore news content to our platforms tomorrow. As a Canadian, I would love to do that. I would love to see Canadian news back on our platforms. I would love to see news from Quebec back on our platforms.

We are unable to do that within the legislative framework of Bill C-18, but I think that can be fixed.

• (1610)

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: If I understand you correctly, Ms. Curran, the problem stems from the fact that it would cost Meta \$18 million a year to publish that news. Am I to understand that this \$18 million is the price Meta would have to pay for information and democracy? Do you mean it isn't worth more than that?

[English]

Ms. Rachel Curran: No, not at all. In fact, I would argue that we still have content on our platform from non-governmental organizations. We still have content from academic institutions—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Pardon me for interrupting, but time is—

[English]

Ms. Rachel Curran: We still have content from regular Canadians that we would consider credible and accurate.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I apologize, Ms. Curran, but our time is short, and we only have a minute left.

I understand your position. I expected you would tell me exactly what you're telling me now. In the current circumstances, however, we're dealing with this problem regarding disinformation originating from Russian authorities. Everyone in Canada is concerned. However, we know that many ordinary citizens get their news from social media. Rightly or wrongly, one could wish that things were different, but that's the way they are.

I personally wonder about Meta's social responsibility. I'm talking about Meta because I'm speaking to you, but I could just as easily be talking about all other social media, which aren't exempt from responsibility in this matter. However, you have an important, even vital, role to play by making available to citizens information that may help maintain our democracy. People expected—at least we did—that organizations wielding that much power would have a greater sense of responsibility. I know that Facebook could easily pay \$18 million a year and play a significant role in supporting democracy in Canada.

Would you please tell me briefly whether you agree with that view and outline your views on this issue?

[English]

Ms. Rachel Curran: Mr. Fortin, I agree that we should have news content on our platforms. We would love to have news content on our platforms, including from news outlets in Quebec. We had private deals worth in excess of \$20 million with private news outlets. We would love to have that content back on our platforms.

We can't do it within the very restrictive framework that Bill C-18 presents. If we are scoped out of Bill C-18, or if news outlets are given the option to opt in or opt out of Bill C-18, we would love to put them back on our platforms.

We have worked with news outlets in Quebec. We would love to work with them again, and we could turn that content on again tomorrow.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

I now turn the floor over to Mr. Boulerice for six minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks as well to the witnesses who have taken the time to come and meet with us today. I will now turn to the representatives of the three companies here present.

We all use your platforms, as do millions of people in Quebec and Canada. I think it's important to take a step back and admit that your companies weren't established for the purpose of defending democracy. They weren't founded to promote the quality of public debate or democratic ideals; that's not your primary mission. They were established to encourage people to interact with each other, but ultimately to make money and profits.

However, as a result of evolving technologies, you now have an additional responsibility. That responsibility was previously borne by the mainstream media for years, but it's now up to your companies to adopt clear rules for avoiding misinformation, disinformation, manipulation and foreign interference, even though that wasn't your original purpose. As MPs and elected officials, we are concerned about the situation.

You've come here well prepared, but I know how the committees work. You itemize all the great things you've done, and you talk about the millions of dollars you've spent, all the accounts you've closed and the particular department that's working on the problem. It's hard for us to verify, in five minutes, whether it's all true. I imagine it's true.

However, we can see that, even though you've spent a lot of money, misinformation and disinformation are still out there, and we're still worried about them. Consequently, I don't want to know what you've done, but rather what you intend to do to improve the situation in circumstances where countries such as Russia only want to exploit social divisions and cause chaos in our societies. What will you do to reassure us and improve the situation in future?

• (1615)

[English]

Ms. Rachel Curran: Let me chime in here first.

Meta has the largest independent fact-checking network of any online platform. We have more than 90 independent fact-checkers in more than 60 languages who are checking information on our platforms to determine whether it is misinformation or disinformation. If they determine it is false or partly false, we label those posts and that content, or we remove it from our platforms.

My colleague, Mr. Agranovich, has talked about malicious disinformation from state actors, but disinformation or misinformation from other sources is something we send through our fact-checking network of more than 90 fact-checkers now.

In Canada, that work is done by Agence France-Presse. We are also working, potentially, with another Canadian partner in advance of the next election to review that information as well. It's very much our goal to make sure that misinformation and disinformation are removed from our platforms.

That said, though, we are also a platform to connect Canadians and ensure that Canadians are able to share information, share their views and connect with their friends and family, and we want to do that without suppressing or limiting their ability to express themselves.

As you can imagine, Mr. Boulerice, that's a fine line. We have to make sure we're not preventing Canadians from expressing themselves while removing misinformation at the same time.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much.

I would ask you to share the time with your colleagues.

Ms. Rachel Curran: Sorry, I am passionate about this.

Mrs. Lindsay Doyle: Thank you so much for the question.

First and foremost, we absolutely share your concerns with respect to broad disinformation and foreign interference.

We do know that this is a shared responsibility, and it's a responsibility that we absolutely take seriously. Ultimately, for us, the safety of users on our platform is critical, and we absolutely believe that we play a critical role in keeping people safe online.

We do have very clear and rigid policies with respect to misinformation, as well as foreign influence operations and disinformation. We have teams that apply our policies at scale 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As I mentioned earlier, we have our threat analysis group, which actively works to disrupt ongoing activity. That group also shares that information with law enforcement on the ground to ensure that we have a holistic approach across society.

I would appreciate it if my colleague, John, could weigh in perhaps a little bit on exactly what his team is doing. I recognize I have limited time, but perhaps if we still have time...

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Maybe we'll have Mr. de Eyre first, and after that, in the second round, I can come back.

Mrs. Lindsay Doyle: No problem.

Mr. Steve de Eyre: I'll actually let my colleague, Justin, talk a bit about our policies on misinformation and disinformation.

Mr. Justin Erlich (Global Head, Policy Development, TikTok): I would chime in and echo what has been said before. We take the responsibility for protecting the integrity of our platform very seriously.

Our mission is to inspire creativity and bring joy. Divisiveness is antithetical to the community that we're trying to create. That's why we work very hard to protect our platform with some of the most aggressive misinformation policies in the industry. We remove any content that we identify that may be significantly harmful to our community, and we won't amplify other content that may be unverified.

We also embrace a strategy of media literacy, knowing that we need to help strengthen the understanding of our community and our users to be more resilient. As our Meta colleague mentioned, we also partner very closely with independent fact-checkers and work with them to assess the veracity and accuracy of all content that is on our platform.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Erlich.

[*English*]

We will terminate this round with Mr. Boulerice.

We will start the second round.

Mr. Motz, please go ahead for five minutes.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for being here this afternoon.

I just want to follow up on some of the Bill C-18 conversations with Meta.

Ms. Curran, does the impact of Bill C-18 create a vacuum on your social media platform? It certainly restricts Canadians' access to reliable news content, but does it provide a way for more disinformation or misinformation to be available on those platforms?

Ms. Rachel Curran: We would say that there is lots of credible information still available on our platforms. There are academic institutions. There are government pages. There are politicians' pages. There are pages from non-governmental organizations and civic organizations. All of that information is still available on our platforms, including information from regular Canadians, which we would not characterize as misinformation either.

However, as a Canadian, I'd love to see Canadian news back on our platforms. We'd love to have the opportunity to put it back on our platforms, and we could do that tomorrow if Bill C-18 were repealed or if we were scoped out of that piece of legislation.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you very much.

The witnesses we've had so far in this study have indicated that Russian interference is used across the political spectrum. There is no right or left. In fact, contrary to what my colleagues across the way have alluded to in the past, it's not a far-right phenomenon. Media reports in fact have indicated that, of the 90 key accounts that promote pro-Moscow sentiments, 33% are controlled by people on the far left.

YouTube officials, what does this mean from your perspective with respect to Russian tactics and how you're seeing this deployed, maybe in other countries?

Mrs. Lindsay Doyle: Thank you so much for the question and for the opportunity to weigh in.

I will ask my colleague, John, to share some of his insights here.

Mr. John Hultquist: It's actually fairly common to see these actors work both sides of the political spectrum. It's important not to over-index any specific operation, because many of these operations have a counterpart that's focused on the opposing audience.

I'll give you an example. The Internet Research Agency is the group that was so active in 2016 in the elections in the United States. They're still around, or remnants of that organization are still around, and actually, there is a very recent operation that was sort of right-facing. However, prior to that, they were doing a left-facing operation or a left wing-facing operation, so it's not uncommon to see them work from both angles.

The other thing I think is really important when it comes to this activity is that there is no favoured version of the truth. The point is often to flood the zone with narratives that are often completely contradictory to each other.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you very much for that.

I want to ask this across the platforms that are here.

There seems to be a tone that, rather than taking responsibility for its role in dealing with foreign interference, it would be easy for government to point the fingers at the social media platforms, as if they're solely responsible for making sure that no foreign interference, disinformation or misinformation is ever available to the Canadian public.

Having said that, what do you think governments should do—it was alluded to just recently—about misinformation or disinformation campaigns so they don't reach Canadians, without interfering with their right to expression? Are there things that government can do to work with social media platforms to ensure that the right to expression is still upheld, but we do some work to prevent disinformation and misinformation?

I'll start with Meta.

Ms. Rachel Curran: That's a really interesting question. I'm going to turn it over to my colleague David Agranovich, who can talk about the work we have done with governments elsewhere. I'm happy to chime in with the work we've done with the Canadian government as well.

Mr. David Agranovich: Thank you for the question.

Maybe I'd break my answer into three key points.

The first is that the more we aggressively enforce networks on our platforms, the more we see them nebulize across the Internet and increasingly rely on tactics that look more like Cold War-style traditional espionage tradecraft. The people who have the best visibility into that activity are often governments or law enforcement organizations. We welcome information sharing from security organizations that might have better insight into nation-state intelligence services or their proxies so we can use that information to key our own investigations on our own platforms.

Second, we're very careful in our own public disclosures both to avoid speculating about the potential for influence activity and to make sure that we're reporting critically about the effectiveness of those operations. For example, a Russian network known as DoppelGänger has been the focus of quite a bit of public reporting re-

cently. It is less focused on reaching real people and more focused on making itself look like it's really good at reaching real people. Oftentimes, these organizations are selling a story to their bosses or their funders as much as they might be trying to sell a story to their targets. Governments, in partnership with us, civil society organizations and media, can be really careful about how we talk about these efforts so that we do not, for example, make Russia sound as all powerful as they'd like us to think they are.

Third, there are concrete tools that governments have that could make these operations meaningfully more difficult. As one of those tools, governments can levy geopolitical power, whether that's diplomatic sanctions, financial sanctions or information sharing, as we saw with the Tenet Media indictment. That can enable other actors to take action. Second, we've noted that influence networks increasingly rely on off-platform web domains. Those are websites that we can't take down even if we try to block them, but the content persists across the Internet. We published a report last year with some concrete recommendations to governments thinking about—

• (1625)

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

We'll go now to Mrs. Zahid.

Go ahead, please, for five minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. Thanks to all the witnesses for appearing before the committee.

For my first question, I would like to have answers from all three witnesses. I would appreciate a verbal answer.

Did any witness here today discuss their testimony with any members of this committee or staff before this meeting?

I would like to start with Ms. Curran.

Ms. Rachel Curran: No, we did not.

Mrs. Lindsay Doyle: We reached out to all members of the committee to offer any questions or answers in advance of our testimony today.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: You shared your testimony with all members?

Mrs. Lindsay Doyle: We did not share our testimony, but we did reach out, including to you.

Mr. Steve de Eyre: We did not.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. de Eyre from TikTok.

In 2023, ByteDance reported approximately \$120 billion U.S. in revenue. How much of this revenue was reinvested into your teams working on clearing your sites of misinformation and disinformation?

Mr. Steve de Eyre: I don't have an exact figure.

Perhaps my colleague Justin can speak a bit about how we address misinformation and disinformation.

Mr. Justin Erlich: Thanks, Steve, and thanks for the question.

First, I want to underscore how invested we are in keeping the platform safe. This year alone, we're investing over \$2 billion on trust and safety. In particular, we have several teams working on misinformation and covert influence to make that a top priority for us. We've been working in this space across 150 elections around the world over the last four years and continue to invest more resources for each election we have.

As I said earlier, we basically take a three-part approach to protecting our community: removing content, empowering our community through user literacy campaigns and partnering with experts, and working closely with independent fact checkers, who help assess the veracity of the content on the platform.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

My next question is also for you. We know that inflammatory material generates more engagement, and more engagement leads to more ad revenue. Is it fair to say that your platform benefits financially when and if you allow the dissemination of myths and disinformation on your platform?

Mr. Steve de Eyre: I disagree with that statement. As Justin mentioned earlier, our goal at TikTok is to create a place for creativity and joy. People come to TikTok for authentic and engaging content, but positively engaging content.

When you spend time on TikTok, if you engage positively with a video, whether you watch the whole video, comment on it, like it or share it, that gives us a signal of the type of content you may like. When I talk to people, that's what they say they come to TikTok for.

I'm sure that you heard earlier this year about Keith Lee going to a number of restaurants in Scarborough. He's an American food TikTok creator. There were lineups around the block to go to these restaurants. There was a shawarma restaurant and a jerk restaurant. That was the biggest thing over the summer on TikTok in Toronto. That's the type of experience we try to cultivate.

• (1630)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Mr. Chair, I will share the rest of my time with Mr. Gaheer.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Gaheer.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Mr. Chair, I wish I were in the room so I could have a longer conversation with Ms. Curran afterward. I can't believe some of the testimony I've heard today. As a generation [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], I've seen the effects of Facebook and other social media on my generation.

Ms. Curran, did you just say there are 90 fact checkers for your platform, a platform with hundreds of millions of users? It's probably in the billions. The platform is available in every single language and you have 90 fact checkers for 60 languages. What you're

saying, then, is that there is a fact checker and a half on average for every language you're fact-checking.

Do you have a statistic on how many posts are being produced on your platform per minute, and do you think 90 fact checkers is an adequate number for checking that many posts?

Ms. Rachel Curran: I will get back to the committee with an answer on posts per minute. I don't have that answer now. We have more than 90 independent fact checkers checking content on our platforms in 60 different languages. Yes, those are the numbers currently.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: I'm very scared by that statistic. You have 90 fact checkers for I don't know how many hundreds of millions of users in every single country in the world. How many posts are being produced per minute? That's a very scary thought given the state of misinformation and disinformation around the world.

Ms. Rachel Curran: I'm sorry. I can clarify. It's not 90 individuals. It's 90 different organizations doing fact-checking in more than 60 languages. For instance, in Canada, we have Agence France-Presse. We have had The Canadian Press previously doing fact-checking in Canada as well.

It's more than 90 organizations. That's not—

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: I'm sorry. I have very limited time.

Could you provide the committee with the number of individuals—not organizations but individuals—who are checking facts? It might be multiple individuals per organization.

The other thing I want to focus on is that your organization made \$134 billion last year. That was up from \$119 billion the year before. You just told the committee that you'd rather save Meta—

The Chair: Mr. Gaheer, I have to cut you off. I'm sorry.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Mr. Chair, I need about 30 more seconds to make the point.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. de Eyre, TikTok has broadcast a lot of advertisements produced by Tenet Media, a chain that has become well known thanks to your platform. How much money has Tenet Media earned from ads posted to TikTok? Do you have a number you can give us?

[English]

Mr. Steve de Eyre: I don't have a figure on that and don't know whether they were advertising. I'm happy to follow up with you and look into that. As I mentioned in my opening statement, we did remove the Tenet Media account from TikTok following the U.S. Department of Justice allegations.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Does TikTok conduct its own investigations before paying money to an organization, whatever it might be? You're telling me that the United States sounded the alarm, and TikTok closed Tenet Media's account.

[English]

Mr. Steve de Eyre: Perhaps I can let Justin talk a bit about how we investigate covert influence on the platform.

Mr. Justin Erlich: Thanks, Steve.

Thanks for the question. It's a topic we feel we invest a lot in.

We have several dedicated teams that work in this area, and they are always proactively seeking to detect and remove networks and deceptive accounts, like Tenet Media.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Erlich, I only have a few seconds left.

If you conduct those investigations, how do you explain why you needed the United States to raise a red flag before TikTok closed Tenet Media's account? You didn't discover it on your own.

[English]

Mr. Justin Erlich: I would certainly not say that's the case. We have many internal investigations going on, and we take action without external intelligence. We also leverage multiple sources of external intelligence, both with our vendors and with third parties, and leverage government investigations.

As soon as we learned of the DOJ investigation, we launched a further exploration into Tenet Media, as we can't directly adopt the conclusion of any government; we need to explore our own on-platform evidence. Once we identified that, we promptly took action and removed both Tenet Media and its founder—

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Justin Erlich: —for violation of deceptive actor policies and those on paid political promotion, both of which are clear violations of our community guidelines.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Erlich.

[Translation]

Thanks as well to all the other witnesses.

The Chair: Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to go to the representatives of the three companies here present.

I'll be completely honest with you: I don't think the answers I got to my previous questions were very satisfying. I asked you what else you were going to do to improve the situation, and you mainly answered by telling me about what you're already doing. That wasn't the answer I was looking for.

I'd like to talk to you about something else. We've discussed manipulation, misinformation and disinformation, but then there's the whole phenomenon of echo chambers, where people keep repeating to each other the same, at times false, remarks, which can lead to the radicalization of certain individuals. You get the impression that the algorithms used promote the process, probably because they foster more interaction among people, which is good for business. However, we can see on the ground that this radicalizes people who are completely mistaken about science, for example, or other topics. These echo chambers make public debate a much more difficult proposition.

I'd like to hear your comments about that.

[English]

Mr. Steve de Eyre: For TikTok, I can let Justin talk about how we address unverified information.

Mr. Justin Erlich: Thanks, Steve.

We take the information integrity ecosystem very seriously. I've spoken to you before about some of our policies for what we remove, but we also embrace media literacy and labelling. For content that we don't fully remove off the platform but that may be unverified or inconclusive, we will provide a label so that the user has a better sense of the full context. We won't amplify it on the feed to make sure that we are restricting the reach of unverified accounts.

More generally, we also offer additional content, such as a STEM feed in some markets. We're rolling it out to help lift up content that we consider nutritious or informative.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Do the YouTube or Meta representatives want to speak to this?

[English]

Mrs. Lindsay Doyle: I'm happy to weigh in here.

As it relates to YouTube, we take an approach that's similar to others'. Specifically for us, our recommendation systems raise authoritative and high-quality information and reduce the spread of low-quality information. We view our recommendation systems as one of our most effective lines of defence in combatting misinformation and preventing exactly the spread that you've referenced. Also, removing content at the source is really critical to making sure we stop the spread. That's obviously where our community guidelines come into place, as well as the content moderation policies that we do at scale.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

[*English*]

That brings this panel to a close.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Chair...

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have a suggestion that I hope the committee will agree with. It's based on the testimony we heard today, in particular Ms. Curran's comments about not sharing Canadian news. Tenet is still being shared on Facebook via Rumble, and I find it really disturbing that Tenet is still getting disinformation out. The Russian disinformation is still getting to Canadians.

I'd like to—

• (1640)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, are we going to be permitted to debate this? It's been going on for a while so I want to make sure we can respond.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I would like to invite these three witnesses back for another hour so we have more time with them. That's what I was suggesting.

With the agreement of the committee, the clerk would invite these three witnesses back for an hour.

The Chair: Do we have the agreement of the committee?

Ms. Dancho, go ahead, briefly, please.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I suggest we discuss it in the subcommittee, because there are a lot of different witnesses we can bring back.

I'm happy to discuss it in subcommittee, or openly, but with its own time.

The Chair: I'm taking it that Ms. Damoff has moved a motion.

Is the committee in agreement with this motion?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, if she hasn't given adequate notice for the motion, she'd need UC, wouldn't she, to move it?

The Chair: No. This relates directly to the matter at hand.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: We'll need it in both official languages then.

The Chair: The motion is to invite these witnesses back for another hour.

Does the committee wish to support the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We will invite the witnesses back.

We thank you for joining us today. We appreciate your testimony. Obviously we want you back, so the clerk will be in touch when we figure out a time for that. Thank you all for your valuable contributions to this study.

With that, we are suspended.

• (1640)

(Pause)

• (1645)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for the second hour. As individuals, we have Mr. Anthony Seaboyer, assistant professor at the Royal Military College of Canada, and Adam Zivojinovic, who is a journalist.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here.

I would now invite Mr. Seaboyer to make a statement of up to five minutes.

Mr. Anthony Seaboyer (Assistant Professor, Royal Military College of Canada, As an Individual): Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. It is reassuring to see how seriously the public safety and national security committee is taking the threat that Russian disinformation and influence operations are posing to Canada and Canadians and to our democracy and society.

The points I am making today are my own and do not represent the position of any organization.

My research focuses on the weaponization of information by authoritarian regimes. I research how Russia, China and Iran target democracies with hybrid grey-zone warfare and disinformation to undermine rules-based democratic countries like Canada. I look specifically at how AI-enabled applications are affecting information attacks on democracies and what we can do to defend democracies against information attacks and other attempts to influence and undermine our societies.

Today I will focus specifically on what the Kremlin is doing when it's targeting Canada, why and how it's targeting Canada, and what I recommend we can do about this.

What is Russia doing? Russia is deliberately and systematically targeting Canada and its allies 24-7 in—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I'll have to interrupt you because I don't have any interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: Let's suspend for a minute.

• (1645) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1650)

The Chair: We will resume.

Mr. Anthony Seaboyer: What is Russia doing when it's targeting Canada? Russia deliberately and systematically targets Canada's allies, 24-7, in the information space. The Kremlin sees itself as being at war with the west and believes that, as in a zero-sum game, the worst off the west is, the better off the Kremlin is.

It is important to note that this is not the position of all Russians, of course. It is the position of the governing elites and those who benefit from Putin's corrupt regime.

The Kremlin seeks to leverage and exaggerate societal fault lines and to disrupt our political system and societies as part of a strategy called Russian reflexive control, aiming at changing long-term world views and mindsets of citizens. The goal is to effect behavioural change in western countries toward Putin's personal goals.

All Canadian residents are targeted by Russian disinformation and influence operations, not just selected politicians. The targeting of Canadians and Canadian interests happens not only at home but also globally, and it is also aimed at generating an effect or impact on Canada beyond our borders.

Some Russian influence activities are designed to provoke a response, which can then be leveraged by the Kremlin to harm Canadian interests abroad. They are part of the following larger, hybrid threat that Russia is targeting the west with in general: to undermine electoral processes and the function of democratic institutions; threats against and sabotage of economic activities, services of public interest and critical infrastructure; the use of coordinated disinformation, foreign information manipulation and interference to radicalize and disenfranchise citizens; and cyber-attacks. This is a whole bouquet of which disinformation and foreign influence are a part.

Why is Russia influencing the west? For the Kremlin, like other authoritarian, undemocratic regimes such as China, the sheer existence of democracies is a threat to their regime survival. Countries like Canada show every day that the repression, violence, censorship and corruption we see in authoritarian, undemocratic regimes are not only unnecessary but harmful, and fundamentally not in the interest of citizens.

The prevention of the free flow of information and competition of ideas, violence and corruption, and the repression of dissent lead to societies that cannot compete with rule-of-law-based democracies like Canada. Neither in terms of living conditions, economic development, political stability or general happiness of the population can the system compete with us. Therefore, the way we live and how much we thrive directly challenges and threatens authoritarian systems, as this shows citizens living under authoritarian regimes how much better we live in democracies.

How is Russia influencing the west? Russian influence operations aim at eradicating organic political will formation—the actual will of the people. This is achieved through increasing the cognitive load of target audiences to the point where they turn away from the political processes. Russia achieves this cognitive overload with information in the following way. First, they flood the information space with targeted disinformation campaigns and with misinformation that additionally creates noise and confusion. This leads to a so-called information overload. At scale, which is enabled through AI applications, they create information suffocation. Citizens are then overwhelmed by information and find it so difficult to find out what is actually happening that they turn away from news sources, leading to what we call “information apathy”. Over time, this results in a “deer in the headlights” effect—an information paralysis. Target audiences are so overwhelmed that they stop participating in the political process. This leads to the end goal of authoritarian regimes exploiting information, which is the feeling of loss of agency by citizens.

In the end, this eradicates civil society and prevents organic political will formation because citizens feel they cannot participate, cannot find out what's going on and have no agency. AI-enabled applications make this much easier to achieve and faster than what was possible in the past. You see in the notes I have for you—I'm not going to read all of this—how this is actually done with AI, and how this changes what Russia can do.

In the interest of time, I'm going to go to my recommendations. I have five.

First, what I believe we need to do is consider an information policy revision across the board in the Canadian government. Where are we vulnerable to information attacks? This should be updated with what's possible with AI today.

Second, adapt a sanctions framework, similar to what the EU just introduced yesterday. That enables a much more effective targeting of individuals who support Russian influence operations.

Third, approve an updated DND information operation policy, replacing that of 2018, which clearly does not match the security situation we have right now.

Fourth, focus more on the role of influencers in Russian influence campaigns.

Finally, hold Canadian companies accountable that are helping us get around the sanctions that have been put in place to access Russian media.

I will leave it at that. You will see more in my notes.

I am looking forward to your questions.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We go now to Mr. Zivojinovic.

Mr. Adam Zivojinovic (Journalist, As an Individual): It's Zivo.

The Chair: You have up to five minutes, please.

Mr. Adam Zivojinovic: Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the privilege and opportunity to testify before you today.

I've spent the past two and a half years living part time in Ukraine. I have written, as a freelance journalist, almost 100 articles about the country. Through my work, I've tried to dispel some of Russia's disinformation narratives, mostly by working with Ukraine's LGBTQ, Jewish and racialized communities.

Reporting the truth in this context can feel Sisyphean. Russia's propaganda machine is formidable and well funded. As we saw with the recent Tenet Media scandal, influential commentators are sometimes paid to disseminate poisonous falsehoods. We also know that many people happily share Moscow's narratives for free, because they have been seduced by propaganda that has been carefully tailored to flatter their ideological world views. It is difficult to distinguish these useful idiots, who genuinely believe what they say, from paid or unpaid actors who work under the direct or indirect orders of the Russian government.

Dimitri Lascaris, an eco-socialist activist who is popular among Canada's fringe left, is a seminal example. Since Russia's full-scale invasion began, Lascaris has promoted Moscow's propaganda narratives with aggressive obsession. In the spring of 2023, he visited Russia, met with foreign ministry officials and sycophantically whitewashed Putin's regime and war crimes. He has also made repeated appearances on RT, a sanctioned Kremlin-owned media outlet that Global Affairs Canada has identified as an arm of Russia's intelligence apparatus. He has done this despite recognizing, in his own writing, that RT is propagandistic.

Lascaris's Potemkin adventures, which he says were fully self-funded, were widely criticized, including in an article I wrote for the National Post and, more importantly, in an essay written by Alexey Kovalev, a prominent Russian dissident journalist who now lives in exile. Yet it remains unclear whether Lascaris is an agent of foreign influence or just a zealot. It is also unclear to what degree he is receiving assistance from the Russians, whether wittingly or not.

As a simple journalist, I lack the capacity to make these determinations. The media may play a vital role in reporting on disinformation, national security and foreign affairs, but our resources are limited. It is up to Canada's state institutions, with their formidable investigative powers, to review ambiguous cases and build legal frameworks that define, identify and punish unacceptable collaboration with hostile foreign governments.

I want to emphasize that this is not a partisan issue. While Lascaris exemplifies the failures of the far left, the far right has been just as toxic. In early 2023, for example, there appeared to be a coordinated campaign among MAGA Twitter influencers to portray

the war in Ukraine as a hoax and to assert that no footage of it exists. Their claims were so exasperatingly absurd that they seemed impossible to respond to. How do you argue with someone who insists that the sky is red, not blue?

I cannot offer much insight into the specifics of Russia's propaganda operations, nor the tools available to thwart them, as that is beyond my expertise. What I can provide, however, is a sense of how this propaganda plays out on social media, along with analysis of the knowledge gaps that have allowed disinformation to proliferate.

Insofar as recommendations go, I advise that Canada proactively protect its information environment by funding public and media education initiatives. It is not enough to shut off a sewage leak. Some environmental remediation is needed. One way this could be done is by amplifying minority voices within Ukraine, particularly LGBTQ Ukrainians, who could dispel myths circulating in ultra-progressive circles, and Jewish Ukrainians, who could engage with conservative audiences.

I also believe that first-hand experience is a powerful, if imperfect, antidote to disinformation. Many of the journalists I met while in Ukraine said that they were surprised when they first visited the country. It seemed that, beforehand, their perceptions had been coloured by outdated, negative stereotypes about eastern Europe. Upon seeing Ukraine in real life, it was apparent to them that Russia's narratives, predominantly regarding neo-Nazism and the so-called persecution of Russian speakers, were ridiculous.

To that end, I would recommend funding opportunities for media figures and thought leaders to visit Ukraine, so long as this is done in a careful manner that does not undermine the independence of the Canadian media.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

We'll start our questions. We'll be abbreviating the question slots to four minutes.

Mr. Shipley, you have four minutes, please.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to both witnesses for being here today.

First of all, Mr. Zivo, I need to apologize. I passed you in the hallway and didn't realize who you were, so I walked right by you. I apologize for that.

My first question is for you, sir. You mentioned Dimitri Lascaris in your opening remarks. I just want to make clear who this person is and what you did in this case. Dimitri Lascaris is a left-wing Canadian influencer with tens of thousands of Twitter and YouTube followers. He also ran as leadership candidate for the Green Party in 2020 and narrowly lost, winning over 40% of the vote. Last year, you exposed his role in endorsing Kremlin propaganda and exposed the proliferation of Russian information operations against left-wing influencers in Canada.

Can you speak about your work and why the far left is a target for the Kremlin interference operations?

Mr. Adam Zivojinovic: I think there's been a problem for decades, where some individuals on the far left endorse a brain-dead version of anti-imperialism, in which anything that is considered anti-western is good. We saw, in the 1970s, people apologizing for the Khmer Rouge. We saw people shilling for Maoist China. We saw people apologizing for the Cultural Revolution. This is not a new phenomenon.

Dimitri Lascaris fits into this long tradition of people on the fringe of the left doing this kind of behaviour. Regarding his work, I was only invited to speak here about three days ago, so I wasn't able to systematically go through some of his content, but I did take a quick look today and yesterday. One example that stood out was an article that he wrote when he visited Russia. It was titled "10 Days in Moscow". There was a segment there concerning Putin's regime legitimacy. There were approximately 24 paragraphs, of which about 22 justified Putin's rule. It basically said that most Russians love Putin, and this is why their living standards are great. He did mention the repression of dissent, but there was only about a paragraph and a half of that. I thought that spoke quite loudly to his approach to this topic.

When I interviewed him last year, one of the things that stood out to me was his insistence that neo-Nazism is a problem in Ukraine, a significant one. I asked him how he was able to justify this, given that far-right parties have never had more than 2% of the vote since 2014. He seemed a little bit confused by that, and he emphasized a few anecdotal accounts that would suggest that maybe some far-right figures have outsized influence in Ukraine. At that point, I mentioned that LGBTQ and Jewish Ukrainians disagree, and they've said that there is no issue with the far right in Ukraine—not any significant one—and that it's being exaggerated. He seemed unwilling to believe that, which I thought was also quite illuminating.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you, Mr. Zivo.

Mr. Seaboyer, my next question is for you. I only have about a minute left, because we're on a short timeline today.

Could you please discuss RT's connections to the Kremlin's intelligence apparatus?

Mr. Anthony Seaboyer: RT is misleadingly labelled by many as a media organization. I would say that it's not a media organization. It's not state media. This is the wrong use of the terminology. It's basically a propaganda organization that directly coordinates with the Russian intelligence service. It's a de facto part of the Russian intelligence service, in terms of messaging.

All Russian media now functions in a similar way, in the sense that if the journalists don't say exactly what the Kremlin wants, they're shut down. They go to jail, or their organization is shut down. There is no free media or any kind of state media in Russia right now.

• (1705)

Mr. Doug Shipley: I only have 10 seconds left, so I'll give that up.

The Chair: We'll owe you 10 seconds. Thank you.

We're going to Ms. O'Connell now for four minutes, please.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

Mr. Zivo, I'm going to start with you. I'm not sure if you were able to hear it, but in our last panel, we had representatives from Meta speak about the fact that... My colleague here, Mr. MacDonald, gave an example where Canadian media content could not be shared on Facebook, but Tenet Media articles could be shared.

The reason I'm asking you this is that you mentioned that you wrote an article for the National Post and others. You are a journalist who is not paid by Russia. Because Facebook doesn't want to pay for work like yours, they're okay to keep up content—Russian propaganda—that is free and paid for by Russia.

How can the Canadian public and the public at large discern between what is misinformation and what is truth when Canadian journalists are not able to be paid by platforms for their work, but platforms are okay making profits from work that is being done and paid for by Russia?

Mr. Adam Zivojinovic: What I would say is that if Canadians are unable to access mainstream news sources on popular social media networks like Facebook or Instagram, that certainly predisposes them to consuming alternative sources, which may be less trustworthy, may have lower editorial standards and may have opaque financing. I think that is a concern. At the same time, I don't think it's the only factor at play, but I do think it is one that is often underappreciated, so I would agree with your analysis here.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Russian propaganda being free for Facebook to promote but Canadian journalism costing them too much should be of grave concern for all Canadians, I think.

Mr. Adam Zivojinovic: Well, I agree.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Mr. Seaboyer, one of the other areas of concern.... You mentioned some recommendations. In Canada, with the passage of and royal assent on Bill C-70, we were able to create a foreign agent registry.

Certainly, one of the things that came out of the U.S. indictment that actually initiated platforms to act was their Foreign Agents Registration Act. As our registry rolls out, could you speak to some of the sanctions models that you would like to see to punish those who break those rules?

Mr. Anthony Seaboyer: I recommend looking closely at what the EU just introduced yesterday, which is much more targeted and which enables preventing individuals who have been found guilty of supporting Russian influence operations from entering the country, seizing their financial resources and preventing them from flying through the country. It's much more strict, and I think we should co-operate.

This is a problem that does not affect just any one country. We should co-operate as closely as we can with our NATO allies and with partners in the European Union. To do that, we need to be able to have, within the government, capabilities and resources allocated to this, to take it to a level where we can actually co-operate with them. Right now, in NATO, we're at the level, unfortunately, where we not only can't co-operate on the same level, but we're not even interoperable with other major NATO partners, which is a huge problem in the information space.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

This isn't just a Canadian problem. This is an attack on western democracies. Is that fair to say?

You mentioned NATO. Is there a broader coordination that you're seeing in terms of dealing with the fact that, again, it's not targeting just Canada, but it's to undermine democracies around the world?

Mr. Anthony Seaboyer: Absolutely. As I said, any democracy is a threat to authoritarian regimes, because it's a model. It shows how well it functions. There is freedom of speech, and people are not arrested for posting stuff online, like in China, for example. We're a model, basically, and the citizens in those authoritarian regimes think, "Why can't we live that way?" That puts pressure on their systems. One way they're dealing with this is throwing as much dirt at western democracies as they can. They do this with disinformation and misinformation.

Yes, more and more, there are efforts within NATO—and also coordination with the EU—where countries are working together, sharing information on attacks and also sharing lessons learned on how to prevent or better defend against these attacks, but these are really all at early stages, where we are right now.

• (1710)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fortin, you now have the floor for four minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks as well to the witnesses for being here with us.

Mr. Seaboyer, in your presentation, you discussed five recommendations that you had for us. Could you please forward them to us in writing?

Mr. Anthony Seaboyer: That's already been done.

[*English*]

I gave that to the clerk, including a lot more additional points on that, because I didn't have time enough to mention them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you.

I'd like to ask you something else. I hear everything you say. We had a witness panel before you, and there were others before that. I wasn't here, but my colleague was.

In 2019, you published a research report on the impact of information generated by special Russian missions and Russian intelligence agencies. Your report concluded with a review of tactics, techniques and procedures used and potential countermeasures.

I'd like you to tell us about those countermeasures. What do you think Canada could do? What countermeasures could we establish to thwart the plans and impact of those types of Russian interference in Canada?

Mr. Anthony Seaboyer: Thank you for that question.

[*English*]

There's a lot that can be done.

First of all, the very first thing I'm going to say, as an academic, is that we need to have an understanding of how this actually works and a proper understanding of the threat that comes from this. There's still this prevalent thinking that if it doesn't explode, if there's no direct, visible blood, it's not dangerous, and that leads to resource allocations. Other security threats—and we have lots of other security threats as well—are prioritized over this, but I believe that, long-term, this is a very serious threat. The first point is to raise understanding in the population and to include leadership. We've made progress there, but it's still not anywhere close to where we need it to be.

The second approach is... There are two sides. My recommendation is hardening the target. Hardening the target is always, long-term, the best strategy. That is about making people media-literate, enabling people to better understand the difference between legitimate information and mis- and disinformation. There are promising models. We see what states like Finland, Sweden and Denmark are doing. They are very effective at this. We can take from their programs. That's one point.

The other one I mentioned is on the government side. You'll see my recommendations. We need, on the military side, to have updated policy that clearly states what the CAF can do in the space and what it can't do, and gives clear guidelines on what can be done. I also recommend more effective sanctions and implementing the current law we have—for example, going after companies that are enabling the circumventing of the sanctions for accessing Russian media in Canada.

These are some recommendations: hardening the target, on the one hand, but also understanding the threat better and providing resource and training for security services to be more effective in this space.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Seaboyer.

Earlier this week, Mr. Oksanen appeared before the committee and told us, in response to questions from my colleague Ms. Michaud, that the Russians do things differently from country to country depending on context. From what I understand, the Russian mission in Canada is to undermine Canada's support in Ukraine.

In a few seconds, since I have almost no time left, please explain what encourages Russia to use that method here, and why do its methods differ from country to country?

[*English*]

Mr. Anthony Seaboyer: Well, this is one of the goals they have: to undermine popular support for the support of Ukraine, particularly the financial support we're giving and the potential weapons support. That's one of the goals.

I want to emphasize that Russian disinformation campaigns are not electoral cycle-bound. They're not focused on one issue. Over the long term, they're generally trying to change the world views of people, citizens and democracies and make democracy appear less attractive and less well-functioning than it is.

Yes, in individual campaigns, their effort, their clear goal right now—probably their major goal—is to undermine support for Ukraine so that the Canadian government does not continue to support Ukraine as it has.

• (1715)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin and Mr. Seaboyer.

[*English*]

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

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

Thank you to both witnesses for joining us today.

Professor Seaboyer, I'll start with you. I appreciated your opening statement when you were outlining the threats that exist against Canada, particularly how the Kremlin uses that information overload strategy to find those fissures in Canadian society and blow them apart. Eventually, we end up with an apathetic populace that seems to doubt the institutions that we all once had a great deal of

trust in. Certainly, as members of Parliament, we see that effect almost on a daily basis in our dealings with constituents.

One of the interesting things about this study is that we've had the chance to interview witnesses who reside in eastern Europe and for whom Russia has always been an existential threat—we're not talking over the last decades, but for centuries. In particular, for Sweden, I've been really interested in how there is the existence of a Swedish Psychological Defence Agency.

We've also had some witnesses talk about how Canada needs to enact a digital resilience strategy and really equip our citizens with the proper tools to detect these misinformation and disinformation attempts, while still allowing—and this is the challenge, of course—a free exchange of ideas.

Do you have any thoughts on that Swedish model? Do you think it might be something that Canada has to one day employ as a stand-alone agency? Is that something you can offer some comment on?

Mr. Anthony Seaboyer: Yes, long-term, I think that's definitely a step we need. We need a much more coordinated, better-resourced and better-trained central organization that engages in that. I think the Swedish model is great.

Yes, there are challenges with this. We want, on the one hand, to keep free speech, but a clear line we can draw is that Canadians in Canada can have free speech, but foreign intelligence organizations have no right to any speech on Canadian soil. If we look at what they're doing through RT and other organizations, that's a clear line we can draw, and that is the major threat we're facing, particularly from China, Russia and Iran at this point.

Yes, we need a centralized, coordinated organization, with lots of oversight and accountability, of course, as it is our culture in Canada to have in our public institutions, so it would match that, but yes, we need that. I agree with that.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thanks.

Mr. Zivojinovic, I'll turn to you.

I think one of the challenges today is that so much of our public discourse is happening on social media platforms that are owned by a handful of billionaires, and their primary motive is to make more money for themselves. Not everyone's voice is equal on social media. It's not like all of us gathering in a town square. We know that some voices are amplified over others and that algorithms push people down certain rabbit holes. For many people, it's still a mystery how that all happens.

I think this is a similar question and, really, the theme of the challenge before us: How does the Canadian government approach this problem without there being a perception of it censoring the Canadian public? How do we put in those tools to defend our democracy so that we can still have a free exchange of ideas, but without the corrupting influence of a foreign government that is seeking to undermine us?

Mr. Adam Zivojinovic: If you're talking about some voices being privileged over others in social media, I think that X, formerly Twitter, is a great example of that. After Elon Musk purchased Twitter, many Ukrainian influencers reported that they saw a significant decrease in their reach and the impression of their posts. For months, they wondered whether this was just something they were imagining, and then it seemed as if the algorithm was revealed to actually penalize posts that mentioned Ukraine. However, it's been a while since I wrote an article about this, so I've forgotten some of the specific examples here. However, we do know, for example, that Musk did, at one point, boost his own posts over others, and we do know that at this point there is almost no real accountability at X, so it's conceivable that in the future Ukrainian content could be politically marginalized.

Now, on what the solution is, that's a very complicated question, and one that I am not qualified to answer, but intuitively I would trend towards ensuring that social media companies have a kind of widely distributed ownership between a large number of shareholders. If you have private ownership and power is concentrated with one individual or one family, then there is a complete lack of accountability, versus when you are accountable to a large number of shareholders and there is less opportunity for abuse.

• (1720)

The Chair: We will start our second round with Ms. Dancho, please.

You have three minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. I appreciate your excellent testimony. It certainly is clear that Canada faces very serious public safety and national security threats as a result of foreign interference.

Mr. Chair, as a result of that, I'd like to give verbal notice of the following motion:

Given that:

Samidoun is a proxy for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a listed terrorist organization in Canada since 2003, to raise funds to finance PFLP's violent attacks on Jewish people;

On the first-year anniversary of the horrific October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist attack in Israel, Samidoun hosted a protest in Vancouver in which a speaker told the crowd, "We are Hezbollah, and we are Hamas," and chanted "Death to Canada! Death to the United States! And death to Israel!";

Samidoun openly supports Hezbollah and Hamas, which are both listed terrorist organizations in Canada;

Samidoun is banned in Germany, with the German government saying they serve as an "international network which disseminates anti-Israel and anti-Jewish propaganda" and "supported and glorified various foreign terrorist organizations, including Hamas";

Samidoun's leadership was deported from Germany in 2019 and denied entry to the European Union in 2022;

Samidoun demonstrations promote Jew hatred and pro-terrorism messages that encourage anti-Semitic threats and violence in Canada.

And given that:

Ansar Allah, also known as the Houthis, is a Yemen-based terror proxy of Iran that, since the October 7 terror attacks, has disregarded international law by launching attacks on innocent civilians and merchant vessels in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden;

That our closest allies, the United States, Australia, and Israel, have already designated the Houthis as a terrorist group;

Canada has provided logistical support to the armed forces of the U.S. and the U.K. that have conducted air strikes against the Houthis.

The committee report to the House that it recognizes that Samidoun and the Houthis are a threat to public safety and recommends that they both be listed as terrorist entities under section 83.05 of the Anti-terrorism Act.

In fact, Chair, I would like to seek unanimous consent from all parties to adopt this motion now, at this meeting.

The Chair: You said that it was a notice, but now you want unanimous consent.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's correct.

The Chair: Do we have unanimous consent to adopt this motion at this time?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I'd like to have the text of the motion, Mr. Chair. My colleague read it quickly, and even the interpreter couldn't follow it because the member spoke so fast. I'd like to have the time to read the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will suspend for two minutes.

• (1720)

(Pause)

• (1725)

The Chair: We are resuming.

The request is for unanimous consent for this motion. There's no debate on unanimous consent. If there is unanimous consent, the motion passes. If there's no unanimous consent, since we have notice, it can be moved at a later date.

Do we have unanimous consent at this time?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Chair, I unfortunately can't agree to this motion because I'm replacing my colleague Ms. Michaud on this committee. It's a long motion that seems to me well founded, but I need to conduct some checks before giving my consent, and I also have to consult our research team. Consequently, I would ask you to table the motion until the next committee meeting. I don't think there's any urgent need to adopt it today. Committee members may make a decision at the next meeting.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

[*English*]

There is no unanimous consent.

The motion can be moved at the next meeting.

We go now to Ms. Damoff.

You have three minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to both witnesses for being here and for the important information.

I understand that Lauren Chen has declined our invitation to attend. I would like to bring forward a motion, which I hope we can deal with quickly:

That the committee summon Lauren Chen to appear for no less than two hours in relation to the study of Russian-backed interference and far-right disinformation campaigns intended to manipulate the Canadian public, and that she appear before November 8, 2024.

The Chair: First, the clerk has advised me that we do need a date and time specified.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Can I ask a question on that? If we summon someone for a date and they have a legitimate reason that they're unable to attend on that date—they're getting surgery or they're in another country—does that mean that we would have to issue another summons? That's why I didn't put a specific date on there, because people can have legitimate reasons. I thought that when we did this at another committee that I'm on, we did it by a certain date.

The Chair: That's our understanding from the chief clerk.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Simon Larouche): We can do it this way if you want to, but for the bailiff usually I need a specific date and, according to our procedure, usually we need a specific time, but we could adjust. I will have to come back to you on your question, but we can go this way and see how it goes. Usually, for the bailiff, I have to specify a specific date. I can manage through your motion to be more specific.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I think this gives you the flexibility. If you provide the date of October 22, for example, and the individual comes back and says, for very legitimate reasons, that they are unable to—not that they don't want to—come that day, then it gives you flexibility to say, “Well, could you come on October 29?”

The Clerk: I agree that it provides me with options.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. Let's leave it as “by November 8”, then.

The Chair: The motion is to invite this person—

Ms. Pam Damoff: It's to summon.

The Chair: I'm sorry. It's to summon this person by a certain date and time, and the clerk will fill in the blanks. We will sort that out.

Do you need a written copy at this point? Okay.

• (1730)

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Just don't prorogue Parliament.

Mr. Glen Motz: It's “by November 8”, so we have four meetings for her to say, “No, I'm not coming.” She has to have legitimate reasons four times.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Exactly.

The Chair: To issue a summons, basically, in the summons we have to specify a date and time. Failure to comply ultimately is a contempt of Parliament.

Are we ready to vote on this?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: I think that's pretty unanimous. Thank you.

It's 5:30. I know that a lot of people are getting out of here.

We have Monsieur Fortin and Mr. MacGregor for two minutes each.

[*Translation*]

Mr. MacGregor, you are signalling to me that you don't wish to speak.

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I have nothing to add, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: In that case, we are adjourned.

Thank you, everyone.

[*English*]

We are adjourned.

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