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Chair: Mr. Ken Hardie



Special Committee on the Canada–People’s Republic of China Relationship

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• (1920)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 39 of the House of Commons Special Committee on the Canada-People's Republic of China Relationship. Pursuant to the order of reference of May 16, 2022, the committee is meeting for its study of the Canada-People's Republic of China relations.

I would like you to pay special attention to the following.

We need to avoid audio feedback. I understand that we had another injury amongst our interpreters, so we need to be extra careful. Before we begin, I'd like to remind all members and other meeting participants in the room of the following important preventative measures.

To prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that can cause injuries, all in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpieces away from all microphones at all times. As indicated in the communiqué from the Speaker to all members on Monday, April 29—today—the following measures have been taken to prevent audio feedback incidents.

All earpieces have been replaced by a model that greatly reduces the probability of audio feedback. The new earpieces are black in colour, whereas the former earpieces were gray. Please use only the black approved earpiece. By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the start of the meeting.

When you're not using your earpiece, please place it face down on the middle of the sticker, which you'll find on the table for this purpose, as indicated. Please consult the cards on the table for guidance to prevent audio feedback incidents.

The room layout has been adjusted to increase the distance between microphones and reduce the chance of feedback from ambient earpieces.

These measures are in place so that we can conduct our business without interruption and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters.

I'd like to thank all of you for your co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking.

For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either the floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Per the motion adopted on March 26, 2024, we are hearing testimony in relation to the matters revealed in the Winnipeg lab documents.

We have some substitutions today: Mr. Naqvi is in for MP Oliphant, Mr. Angus for MP McPherson, Mr. Cooper for MP Lantsman and MP Ellis for Mr. Kurek.

Mr. Kurek will be a new permanent member of this committee, I understand.

Now I'd like to welcome our witnesses for our first panel.

Nathalie G. Drouin is the deputy clerk of the Privy Council Office and national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister, and she is accompanied by David Vigneault, director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

Ms. Drouin, you have up to five minutes to deliver your opening remarks. We thank you for your patience while we got the voting business out of the way.

[Translation]

Ms. Nathalie Drouin (Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council & National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister, Privy Council Office): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you as well to the members of the committee for the opportunity to speak to you and answer some of your questions about the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg. With me this evening is David Vigneault, who is well known to the committee. He is the director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or CSIS.

I was appointed deputy clerk of the Privy Council and national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister on January 27. In my role, I coordinate the national security and intelligence organizations that perform critical analyses.

[English]

In August 2018, CSIS provided a briefing to officials of the national lab to help them better understand potential foreign interference or espionage, including how employees could be vulnerable to outside pressure.

Soon after, PHAC identified two employees at the national lab who might be at risk and flagged their concerns to CSIS. PHAC subsequently noticed certain irregularities in the two scientists' activities, which prompted PHAC to initiate an investigation that, in turn, uncovered additional reasons for concern.

As the two scientists' conduct became clearer through the investigation, PHAC took action, including seeking assistance from CSIS and referring matters to the RCMP for criminal investigation. Both employees were placed on leave and ultimately had their security clearances revoked, and in January 2021 their employment was terminated.

Important lessons were learned from this matter and security policies were improved accordingly. However, I think it is important to remember that PHAC was successful at detecting and removing a threat following awareness and vigilance and by executing a robust, thorough process supported by security partners.

• (1925)

[Translation]

Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory is world-renowned for its research excellence and the many contributions of its public health researchers.

The lab is a prime example of a rich culture of open and collaborative scientific research that Canada can be extremely proud of. It is precisely due to this reputation that, for some time now, Canada's security agencies have been warning about threats to Canada's scientific community.

[English]

The reasons for this are easy to understand. Innovation drives economic prosperity and technological advantage. Competition among states is focusing attention on the edges of science. New discoveries can be immensely beneficial or, unfortunately, can be used to do harm.

Canada produces world-class research in critical areas such as artificial intelligence, robotics, aerospace, quantum technology and the life sciences. Our innovations make us a target. The People's Republic of China is the most significant research security threat actor in Canada, given its targeting of academia, government and private sector institutions.

Just as with PRC's political interference and transnational repression activities, China uses a wide variety of methods to pursue advanced technologies.

As this committee is aware, China is not the only country of concern. For example, we saw strong indication that Russian hackers tried to steal COVID-19 vaccine research during the pandemic.

[Translation]

As has been mentioned by other witnesses, the Public Health Agency of Canada has learned many lessons from the situation at the national lab in Winnipeg, and security at the lab has been improved. As you know, I was also tasked by the Prime Minister to make recommendations related to the situation.

I've already started my review. In particular, I visited the laboratory on April 25. While there, I took the opportunity to ask questions of the researchers on site and learn directly from them. We discussed the sensitive nature of the work done at the lab and how security measures have been improved.

[English]

My goal is to identify the ways we can continue to strengthen our research security, but I will also be mindful of the need to avoid discouraging innovation or collaboration with onerous security requirements.

One thing is certain: Engagement between research organizations and security is critical for raising awareness and building resilience. For example, the new research security centre at Public Safety Canada is providing advice to institutions across the country on how to protect their research while pursuing their work responsibly in the modern geopolitical environment.

[Translation]

Canada's national security agencies are committed to protecting Canadian research.

We would now be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Drouin. I appreciate that.

Mr. Chong, the first six minutes is yours.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Madame Drouin, for appearing in front of us today. My first questions are for you.

You mentioned that the first flag went up in August 2018. It took until January 20, 2021 to terminate Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng from the employment of the Government of Canada.

What we're trying to understand here at the committee is the process that took two and a half years to result in that termination.

My first question is, when did the Privy Council Office first learn of the concerns regarding Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I don't have specific dates to offer to you. As you know, I was not at the Privy Council, but this is not the reason. I know that my predecessor briefed the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office regarding the situation at the lab.

• (1930)

Hon. Michael Chong: You can provide that information later to the chair of the committee.

Could you provide us with roughly the month and year that this information was brought to the PCO's attention?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I would be able to provide a timing in which that...but I believe it was not in 2018.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, because that would help us in writing our report with recommendations.

My next question is for Mr. Vigneault, also regarding timing.

The first flag goes up in August 2018. The lab is not secured until 10 months later on July 5, 2019. Do you think that is an appropriate length of time to secure a government facility in the context of what happened, or do you think that in the future those timelines should be tightened?

Mr. David Vigneault (Director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Mr. Chong, if I remember, I think I testified that the initial concerns that were raised were more in the nature of administrative issues, as opposed to national security issues. I think that explains, in part, some of these delays.

One thing that's clear, however, is that since 2018, as Ms. Drouin just mentioned, the system has learned quite a bit more. We, as an intelligence service, are much more proactive. We're sharing more information in private and in public about these issues. All of us have been raising our game, so I would not expect that it would be necessarily the same timeline today. I think people's awareness of the threat to their research would be much different today than before.

Hon. Michael Chong: I worked in the private sector before I came to public office, and I had to engage in workforce reductions during my time. They weren't always easy things to do, but never did it take two and a half years to terminate somebody for cause. In this situation, from start to finish, the process took almost two and a half years.

Do you think that this is an appropriate length of time? Have things changed within the Government of Canada so that when a situation like this comes up in the future, it won't take two and a half years to terminate somebody for unreliability and for losing their security clearance status?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, I can speak to this question from a CSIS point of view in terms of our engagement.

As I mentioned in my previous testimony—a colleague of Mr. Chong was talking about the pace at which CSIS was able to produce this intelligence to the PHAC—I think this was done in a very effective manner in terms of time. In terms of the specific administrative decisions, I would refer the member to the PHAC for its own assessment of how it's been managing the issue. I think it's fair

to say with regard to the spirit of your question, Mr. Chong, that things have changed inside the government, as well as within the PHAC specifically, as our colleagues have testified. I would imagine that today things would be much faster.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I'd like to add a couple of things.

First of all, it's always easy to look at what happened in the past with a retrospective lens and then see how easy it was. That is my first caveat.

However, I agree with you that from the first signal... To the credit of CSIS and the PHAC, they were the ones who identified the first signal. However, from the first signal to the moment when the two scientists were put on leave, yes, there is a timeline that needs to be looked at. However, it's not like things were not done. A fact-finding exercise was done—

Hon. Michael Chong: We recently had a globally and systemically important bank whose number-two executive was terminated after an investigation that lasted less than four weeks. This bank is a systemically, financially important bank, and this wasn't a junior employee.

What I'm saying to you is that in my private sector experience of having to do these difficult kinds of things, it never took this length of time.

That's one of the concerns that many of us on this committee have: that it took almost two and a half years from the first flag going up to a decision to terminate. That seems to be an awfully long period of time.

• (1935)

The Chair: Mr. Chong, thank you for your time.

We'll now go to Mr. Naqvi for six minutes.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to welcome the CSIS director back to this committee. I'm not sure how many times we're going to ask him to keep coming back. I think this is at least the third time.

Thank you for your patience. I know you're a very busy person.

I also want to welcome Madame Drouin and congratulate her on her new assignment as the security adviser at the Privy Council Office.

Thank you. I've always enjoyed working with you.

Madame Drouin, I'm going to start with you and ask this question: In your experience thus far—and I know you've been with PCO for some time—what role, if any, does the Privy Council Office play in protecting Canada's research and intelligence?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: Do you mean the role I'm playing?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: I mean you and the Privy Council Office.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I think my role encompasses all national security aspects. We know now that national security also has an economic component. It can also have a health component and a climate component.

All of that is to say that our innovation and research and the safety of our researchers are under my purview, of course with the support of key departments, mainly the science departments and the national security agencies.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Research and protecting Canada's research are active parts of your portfolio from a security intelligence perspective.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I think what I'm saying is that researchers' innovation, as I said in my opening remarks, can be the targets and victims of national security threats. I need to make sure that the system we have in place, whether we're talking about the legislative framework or the procedures, is something that's being looked at by the different key departments and agencies.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Okay. That's fair.

To what extent does the Government of Canada monitor patent filings by public servants? Is this something that is typically investigated during the process of security screening?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: There are a lot of layers to that.

If I talk only about labs, for example, employees are subject to security clearance at the secret level. They also have to respect the legislation that guides laboratories. If they need a top secret...they will have to respect another layer of protection.

There are a lot of layers in terms of what they need to protect.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Okay.

In your opening remarks, you talked about how the Public Health Agency of Canada acted in a fairly expedited manner when it learned about these two scientists and it took steps in order to ensure that the national microbiology lab and the work being done there were protected.

However, you also said there were important lessons learned. Can you articulate to us, in your view, what those important lessons were and what steps, in your opinion, the Privy Council Office and other government agencies are taking or have taken to implement those important lessons that you referred to?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I can talk about that.

First of all, let me repeat that when PHAC and the lab in particular received an awareness briefing from CSIS, they themselves identified employees who were at risk. They flagged those employees and found, unfortunately, other concerns. Those are things they have done.

In terms of the lessons learned, I think it was in a couple of areas where they thought that some improvements were required. First of all was on the management of their technology and making sure that, for example, they can trace who is accessing what and when, especially on the administrative documents—not necessarily the research documents, but things like, for example, patterns and things like that. They have strengthened their technology system to be able to trace who has access to what and when.

They also have enhanced their security and facility access to make sure, for example, that visitors cannot move within the lab without surveillance and without being escorted.

They have done a lot of employee communication and engagement. This is a very important component because in order to prevent other situations like that, awareness is key. Employees can be vulnerable and sometimes they don't realize that they are entering into a co-optee relationship, so awareness is very important.

Maybe as a parenthesis regarding that, I think that what the lab went through and the exercise that you're doing right now is completely unfortunate, but at the same time, it helps other scientists to realize that these things are real and that they need to care about security.

• (1940)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Drouin.

We'll now go to Mr. Bergeron for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A number of things came to light through the work of this committee. One was that VFS Global, which is owned by a consortium that is partly controlled by Chinese interests, handled Chinese visa applications for Canada and continues to do so, as far as I understand. At the time, we were very surprised to see that no security checks had been done on the company. In fact, I'm surprised that the company is still handling the visas. In addition, of course, there were all the revelations around the microbiology lab in Winnipeg. That led us to request the documents we are discussing today.

When Mr. Vigneault appeared before the committee a few days ago, I referred to an article published in the *Journal de Montréal* in 2024. It indicated that, according to CSIS, the People's Republic of China had been conducting malicious activities in Canada since the early 2000s. When we interviewed the Minister of Health, he told us that in 2018, according to his analysis, Canada still believed that China could be a reliable, good-faith partner with whom we could co-operate on science.

CSIS told us that the People's Republic of China had been engaging in malicious activities since the early 2000s, particularly in terms of research and technology. How do you explain the discrepancy between the observations of CSIS and the rather wide-eyed attitude of the Government of Canada? Until 2018, it seems, the government considered the PRC to be a reliable and good-faith partner for scientific research.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: Like Canada, none of our partners has completely cut ties with China when it comes to research. Researchers themselves would tell you that it is not healthy for innovation in Canada to completely cut ties with China in terms of research.

That doesn't mean we have to do it blindly and with just anybody, as we would, for example, with our Five Eyes partners. However, I don't think it would be to Canada's advantage to completely cut ties with China.

• (1945)

As you put it so well, we have to do it with our eyes open, knowing what techniques China uses in its business relationships, which CSIS has been telling us about for a number of years.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: If I understand what you are telling us, in your opinion, the message sent to us by CSIS should have been grasped more quickly and control mechanisms should have been put in place.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: It's easy to say that we could have acted more quickly, but the important thing is that we are doing it now.

I would like to draw your attention to something else. I really believe in the importance of raising awareness. There can be partners or employees who started working with the Government of Canada without being recruited by China, but who were recruited later on.

I would say awareness protects these people, and helps our colleagues and partners detect the signs and symptoms of co-workers who may have been recruited.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: On that note, I imagine you're familiar with the thousand talents plan, which it seems the two scientists in question were part of. I wonder why the Wuhan lab is still not on Public Safety Canada's list of problematic research organizations that it does not recommend blindly collaborating with.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: There is, in fact, a list of organizations that Canada does not have a relationship with.

For the time being, there is no agreement between the Winnipeg lab and the institute in China. That said, as I mentioned earlier, other international partners may have business relationships with the institute of virology. I can't rule out the possibility of any future dealings, depending on the case. However, we do not currently have an open agreement with that institute.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Ms. Drouin, I would like to ask you one last question in order to better understand the situation.

All of us in Parliament were surprised at how stubbornly the government objected to the idea of releasing its documents to parliamentarians.

What are the reasons for the government's stubborn resistance?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I was at the Department of Justice at the time, so I'll speak from that perspective.

The goal was not to avoid sending the documents to parliamentarians, but rather, it was to send them to the authorities who could handle that kind of information. As we can see today, the information in the documents was extremely sensitive. Until the corrective measures were taken by the lab, it was not in the interest of Canada's security to reveal the information again publicly. The goal was not to avoid sending the documents to parliamentarians, but it was to send them to the right forum, to the people who could handle them.

I understand that those discussions took place in the political rather than the administrative arena, but that was the issue.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I would even say in the legal arena, since—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Bergeron. You are well out of time, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Okay, I'll come back to that, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Drouin.

[*English*]

The Chair: Next time.

We'll now go to Mr. Angus for six minutes.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you so much to our witnesses.

Welcome, Madame Drouin. I've only dealt with you indirectly through our shared work of trying to get justice for the survivors of St. Anne's residential school. Maybe I would say that's partial work.

I will begin with our representative from CSIS.

My hair's turned grey since I came to Parliament. I remember questions being raised about intellectual property theft by China going back to my time when I was first elected and representing mining communities.

Does CSIS have a long list of research or concerns about intellectual property theft by the People's Republic of China?

• (1950)

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

We indeed have a fairly long list of concerns regarding the PRC's attempts to steal Canada's secrets—both government secrets and, more and more, what is being developed in our cutting-edge universities and research laboratories.

As I've testified in this forum recently, we know it is a stated goal of China's government to make the People's Liberation Army the most sophisticated, capable military by 2049. One of the ways they need to do that is by stealing intellectual property from anywhere they can in the world. Canada is indeed part of that.

We saw during COVID, as well, a very sophisticated effort on the part of the PRC and other countries to try to steal, in this case, our life science research, because it was in their interest to try to understand what we were doing. If they could steal and manufacture a vaccine to gain an advantage, they would absolutely do so.

That's why we have been saying publicly at CSIS, for years now, that what makes Canada prosperous today, as well as the source of our prosperity in future years, is at risk. We need to raise our defences to protect that.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

In October 2017, the Chinese National Institutes for Food and Drug Control filed a patent for the inhibitor of the Ebola virus, which included one of the workers at the Winnipeg lab. However, they didn't mention her name and the patent went to China.

Was CSIS aware, at the time, that this had happened?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, you'll understand that I cannot reveal the specific nature of our intelligence.

I will perhaps take a step back from the specific question and answer Mr. Angus by saying that we, as an intelligence service, would not be aware of all patents filed in another country. That would require a capacity that no country in the world has to monitor all of this in real time.

I think it's fair to say that we understand this and adapt techniques in our investigations by studying the behaviour and trade-craft of our adversaries. This is one area that our investigators, working with our partners in the security intelligence community in Canada and around the world, are very much attuned to.

Mr. Charlie Angus: That's fair play.

I think the worst thing is doing an after-the-fact gotcha moment, when these things are very complex and when there are all manner of things happening at the same time. However, I remember the free trade debate when Stephen Harper and the Conservatives were pushing a full free trade agreement with China. We raised serious questions about their record and issues of intellectual property theft. That got signed in 2012. In 2014, the National Research Council was forced to shut down its servers—this is our top scientific research organization—because of hacking from China. We had to shut down Treasury Board servers at one point because of hacking from China. The Bank of Canada and even Parliament Hill were targeted by China.

I'm not going to ask you for specifics, but were red flags being raised with the government? We had just signed a trade agreement with this country, and all of our key scientific, government and financial portals were being targeted by hackers. Were there investigations, hypothetically, done? Were they state actors, hypothetically?

Can you give us a broader picture so we can know how we ended up in this situation with the Winnipeg lab?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, I think it's fair to say that there were indeed a number of flags raised.

I was personally involved in response to the 2014 cyber-hack by the PRC against the NRC, and I can tell you that all the right authorities of concern in Canada and abroad were very aware of what was going on. I think it was around that period of time when people realized things were changing in the PRC under the leadership of Xi Jinping. I think we saw the beginning of a change to their approach and in terms of the aggressiveness with which they were pursuing their interests.

Those other hacks you mentioned, Mr. Angus, against the two other organizations of the federal government indeed resulted in a number of investigations flags. There's been a tremendous amount of work done by our colleagues at the Communications Security Establishment to prevent a number of these. The statistics are mind-boggling of the number of attempts against government institutions every day. More and more, what we see is that those entities, like PRC hacking groups, are going after not just government institutions but also the private sector and academia to acquire the kind of information and data they need to pursue their objectives.

• (1955)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you for that.

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Angus.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Darn. I was just getting started.

The Chair: We'll get back to you. You had your six minutes.

Where does time go when you're having fun? I see Gene Vincent and His Blue Caps in behind you there. You'll remember this.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Gene Vincent and His Blue Caps. I see.

The Chair: As we go to our second round, I'd like to recognize Kenny Chiu in the room, who has, I'm sure, followed our proceedings with great interest, having been on the leading edge of the more public form of interference.

I recognize you, sir, and thank you for being here tonight.

Now, we'll go to our second round, and we will begin with five minutes for Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I will direct my questions to Director Vigneault.

Director Vigneault, at any point, was CSIS or law enforcement under the suspicion that Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng would flee Canada to the PRC?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, as I've mentioned numerous times at this committee, I cannot reveal the specific details of our investigation, and that would include the specific information that was known at some specific points. I think we have been through the process that was established here to provide our documents.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Let me ask you, sir....

Mr. David Vigneault: There have been a lot of very specific details provided—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Sir, my time is very limited. I appreciate your trying to answer.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that they could very well have desired to flee to the PRC, which they now have. Therefore, what steps were taken, or not taken, to prevent them from fleeing to the PRC? These are two individuals who were and are under a criminal investigation.

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, as I think members know, CSIS is an intelligence organization. It's not a law enforcement organization. We have no powers to detain, intercept or arrest anyone.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

When did Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng first come under the radar of CSIS, and when did CSIS first open an investigation into them?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, the documents that have been provided to the committee, and my testimony in previous appearances in front of your committee, indicate that we first engaged PHAC in the guise of a threat briefing in August 2018. It was at the tail end of that meeting when PHAC officials approached CSIS to raise concerns about the two scientists.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Therefore, CSIS began looking into Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng some time in the fall of 2018. Is that accurate?

Mr. David Vigneault: That is accurate.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay.

At any point, did CSIS brief the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's national security and intelligence adviser or any minister in the government about Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng? If so, when and who?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, we have provided numerous briefings to the officials the member is speaking about. I do not have the specific timelines in front of me.

• (2000)

Mr. Michael Cooper: That would have included the Prime Minister and his national security and intelligence adviser.

Mr. David Vigneault: That is accurate.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Would you undertake to provide the timelines to this committee of when those briefings took place?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, we'll definitely undertake to try to collect that information to the best of our ability. Yes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Was an issues management note, or IMU, ever produced on the security breach at the Winnipeg lab?

Mr. David Vigneault: The IMU notes are now very famous. I will have to go back and verify whether one was written.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you. If you could undertake that, it would be appreciated.

Did CSIS produce any intelligence reports or intelligence assessments of Dr. Qiu or Dr. Cheng that are not part the Winnipeg lab documents that were tabled in the House of Commons?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, through you, do you mean other than the ones that were produced?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Yes, other than the ones that were produced.

Mr. David Vigneault: We have, Mr. Chair, produced a number of assessments that I have been speaking to in terms of scientific research in Canada being targeted by foreign actors. I will have to double-check to see whether there was anything over and above what was produced in committee. I just don't know that.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for undertaking to get back to us on that.

Paragraph 54, for example, of the CSIS security assessment of Dr. Qiu states that she gave access to “two employees of a PRC institution whose work is not aligned with Canadian interests”.

What PRC institution is being referenced in paragraph 54 of that report?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, as you know, these documents were produced to the committee through a very elaborate review process with three distinguished judges. The information that is produced to the community at this point is what is available, what we can release in the public domain. I will not be able to go further than that at this point, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cooper.

We'll now go to Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to both of you for being here tonight.

Ms. Drouin, I'd like to ask you about conversations you would have had with counterparts, whether it's in the Five Eyes or G7 for example. I think about the future, I think about preventing things like this from happening again. Do you have, or have you had, discussions with counterparts—every country is a different system, of course—or colleagues who share a position like yours to compare and contrast approaches on ensuring something like this won't take place again?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: As you know, I started that job in January of this year. I did have some bilaterals with some colleagues where we talked about different risks, whether it's the risk relative to artificial intelligence, securing our space or economic security. We also talked about different risks, but not specific to managing labs, for example.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: That's fine insofar as the question of security is concerned because we can focus on labs, as we naturally are here. You mention AI. This is an emerging area, and one that there are so many questions about.

Do you have any thoughts on that specific issue?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: On AI?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: My question is on the security perspective and what that means for Canadian security as it relates to China specifically.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: As you know, there is tremendous potential when it comes to AI, but also different risks relative to that—individual risk in terms of how you use AI, and organizational risk in terms of the potential of hacking systems in cyberspace. There's also a systemic risk or ultimate risk when we stop controlling the machine and the machine is controlling you. Those are the big types of risks that international safeguards.... We'd like Canada to be a lead player in determining what those safeguards should be regarding AI for the future.

• (2005)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

Mr. Vigneault, I didn't expect to be talking about AI tonight, but you've raised it, and I think it's a relevant point.

When we think about prevention, what role does AI play? I know it's very difficult to speculate about the future, but this is an emerging area. What role could AI play in this regard in securing...? I'm not thinking in specifics here. I'm not talking about labs per se, but about overall security, whether in relation to labs or critical infrastructure. Does AI have a role to play? Is this something that security officials like you and counterparts are talking about and looking to? There's the negative side of AI that's widely discussed, but we should make it work for us wherever we can, I think.

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

Absolutely, we're trying to look at AI from two sides of the coin. We need to look at how we can harness artificial intelligence in our own practices. At CSIS we are using AI for different processes already. We're working with partners in Canada and around the world to try to harness artificial intelligence from a national security point of view and how it could be of benefit. We do that because we also understand, or try to understand to the best of our ability, the threat that comes from nefarious actors using AI.

We've talked about how artificial intelligence can easily be used right now by fairly unsophisticated actors to create deep fakes that are credible enough to lead someone to believe that indeed an action was done or words were said by someone.

It is not just a problem for the future; it's a problem for today. The more we can work together on understanding and harnessing the power of AI while protecting ourselves would be great.

As was mentioned in Ms. Drouin's opening remarks, Canada is one of the most dynamic areas of the world for artificial intelligence. We have some of the best scientists and some of the most cutting edge research. We know that this is a target for a number of people, so we're working with the appropriate partners to try to secure that research and innovation.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

We'll now go to Mr. Bergeron for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

Ms. Drouin, at the end of our discussion, you were talking about the administrative and political arenas. You said that it was more of a political issue, which was subsequently resolved in a political manner. However, to illustrate what I called the government's stubbornness in not wanting to disclose the documents, I will point to something you will certainly recall from your time at the Department of Justice, the fact that the government even went so far as to sue the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Doesn't that illustrate the stubbornness that I inferred from the government's attitude?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: No, not at all.

As I said earlier, it was not a refusal to disclose the documents. It was a refusal to do so in the forum that was presented. Unfortunately,

for what I would call political reasons, the situation became very black and white: do it or don't do it. That is in addition to the fact that we were torn between having to respect your privilege as parliamentarians and having to obey the laws that you pass and that we are required to obey. It was extremely difficult for some public servants, including the former president of the Public Health Agency of Canada. It was like squaring a circle for us. Since no political solution was proposed at the time, meaning a solution that you found together as parliamentarians, our only choice was to turn to the courts to help us resolve the conflict between respecting parliamentary privilege and obeying the law.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: However, I don't need to tell you that parliamentary privilege has constitutional status.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: Yes, and we also have to obey the laws that you pass.

This is an absolutely fascinating legal debate for a lawyer, but unfortunately, it has not yet been resolved.

• (2010)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Indeed.

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, I'm sorry, but you are well out of time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I would like to ask one last question very quickly.

Everyone agrees that we need to reform the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act.

When will that happen?

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I can't say. You have heard Minister LeBlanc and others say on a few occasions that they would like CSIS, for example, to have the necessary powers to share information with other levels of government.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Ms. Drouin.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

We'll now go to Mr. Angus for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Angus, it's your turn.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Vigneault, we were talking in my first round about the cyber-attacks that were launched against the National Research Council, the Treasury Board, the Bank of Canada and various parliamentary institutions in 2014, which were tied back to China. Those began to raise red flags. This year, we had FINTRAC pulling its corporate systems off-line due to cyber-attacks.

Were those cyber-attacks tied to sources in China, or was that another kind of gang activity?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, I'm not at liberty to discuss the specific details of that cyber-attack. The origin of that attack has not been attributed publicly by FINTRAC.

I can say that we and our other partners in the national security and cyber community in the Government of Canada are working directly with FINTRAC to support them, but the attribution has not yet been made regarding this event.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Okay. Thank you very much for that.

I guess my question is this: Are we seeing an increase in cyber-attacks by the People's Republic of China? What is the government doing? What has CSIS been doing to address that over the last 10 years?

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, to the question by Mr. Angus, I would say that we are seeing and detecting more cyber-attacks from the PRC, and also from many other countries and states, but from criminal organizations as well. We see the rise of ransomware that is sometimes purely criminal in nature. It's to be able to accumulate dollars fraudulently. Sometimes we see those ransomware groups working at the behest of states. We also see state-sponsored cyber-attacks against government entities for spying purposes.

Also, in a very worrying trend, we see that some countries are engaging in cyber-attacks against our critical infrastructure. They are directing those attacks often to pre-position themselves to not necessarily stop or undertake any action but to be there, and when they decide to act on Canada or other countries, to force Canada to take a specific policy position. This is an area of concern. The PRC has been publicly called out for that in the recent past.

I would say that CSIS plays an important and unique role in what I call the "cyber-ecosystem". We're working very closely with our partners at the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security and CSE and with our partners at the RCMP, Public Safety Canada and Treasury Board.

What essentially you see, Mr. Angus, is that we need to bring this ecosystem of all the different players who have the tools and authorities to do something to really play well, because our security depends on it. The actors who are attacking Canada for criminal or national security purposes are getting better at it. We need to increase our own vigilance.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vigneault.

We'll do one more round of five minutes each. First it will be Dr. Ellis and then it will be Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Dr. Ellis, you have five minutes.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here, and to Mr. Vigneault for being here again.

I have a bit of a dilemma in my mind. You know, we've talked at this committee about how things were different before the incident at the national microbiology lab. We've also said that things have changed at the national microbiology lab. I guess my contention is that when I look at a report....

Mr. Vigneault, I'm sure you're familiar with the report called "China and the Age of Strategic Rivalry". It was produced by CSIS in May 2018. It goes on to talk about a report by CSIS that concluded that China was engaging in "Targeted efforts to co-opt the New Zealand business, political and intellectual elite".

My contention, then, is that things were really not different when this incident started, at least in August 2018, so why do we say that they weren't? Things were not great then. We knew that the PRC was out there looking for secrets from other countries like New Zealand. Why would we think Canada was any different?

• (2015)

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, I'll go back down memory lane here. I believe the report that Mr. Ellis is referring to is a document that was sponsored by CSIS but was produced by academics under Chatham House Rule. The conclusions about New Zealand were conclusions that were made public by CSIS through this academic report.

I remember those details, because, as you can imagine, New Zealand reacted to this report. However, I think it's fair to say that even back then, the academic community and the national security community in Canada and across a number of countries were indeed very worried about the PRC's activity. I believe I mentioned in this committee that one of the most significant moments of that change was when the PRC proactively, not even waiting for the final report of the international court on the jurisdiction of the sovereignty of the South China Sea, pre-emptively said that they would not respect the ruling. I think there were some moments, some of them public and some of them known through intelligence, when we started to see a shift. That shift is important, I think, to put it into perspective.

Madame Drouin said something that I think is very important. It is sometimes in our own national interest to collaborate with Chinese entities, but we need to do it with our eyes wide open and make sure that we protect our own base. I think this is why it's important; if it's good for Canada to collaborate because we can get something good out of it, we must do it, but we must do it while protecting the base.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thanks.

I'll interrupt you there, Mr. Vigneault.

You know that things were not in great shape. Then we had information from the PHAC to CSIS to say that there might be threatening actors at the national microbiology lab, and it still took more than 10 months to secure the lab—more than two and a half years. Your contention, sir, has always been that they were Canadian citizens and that we had to give them the benefit of the doubt. However, as my colleague easily pointed out, we can get rid of a senior bank person here in Canada much more quickly. This is national security.

I guess the other question, then, is this: If things were great, then, with regard to security at the national microbiology lab, why have they had to change so radically now? Clearly, they were not. Clearly, the situation was not as rosy as you have tried to paint to the committee, sir.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: Mr. Chair, if I may, I'll respond to that.

[*English*]

I have a couple of things here.

The nature of research and scientists, their DNA, is that you need to share the result, that you need to work with others. This is how they work. When I say that a shift happened, it's that now they understand that the desire to put their results out there, to share their outcomes with others, comes with an important security component.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Ma'am, with all due respect, what we're talking about here is the security. I'm not talking about scientists. I understand that the scientists want to share their work, but the security was lax at the lab, and now it is different. That falls squarely on the Prime Minister's shoulders—on your office, ma'am.

I guess the other thing is.... It took so long to secure the lab that my only conclusion is that there was political interference to slow down the investigation.

Ma'am, you can roll your eyes at that all you want, but what other conclusion can we possibly have when we can get rid of a senior bank executive more quickly than we can get rid of potential espionage-creating scientists at a national lab with secret facilities?

● (2020)

The Chair: Give a very quick response, Ms. Drouin.

Ms. Nathalie Drouin: I have, maybe, one thing. As I said, yes, in retrospect, we can always say that things could have been faster. However, at the beginning, it was not even clear that it was a national security issue. It was more a case of lax administrative procedures. It took some time—after the fact-finding, after the reference to CSIS—to identify that we were in front of national security.

I think that now those reflexes would be much faster. Yes, we can say that it should have been faster at the time, but going forward, the reflexes will be faster in terms of making the links between those deficiencies and conducts and national security.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Erskine-Smith for the final five minutes of this panel.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To you both, thanks for attending today.

Mr. Vigneault, you've attended a couple of times.

I think I've canvassed all of the questions that I'm interested in canvassing with respect to Ms. Drouin specifically, but I am interested.... Paragraph 21 of the June 2020 security assessment stood out only because we've just lived through a pandemic. It says, "QIU...and other [Wuhan Institute of Virology] employees were approved by a Chinese evaluation committee to conduct a 'CAS High-end User Nurturing Project'". That was "from June 2019 to May 2021"—ostensibly, the time period for that project. The project "planned to use reverse genetics in order to create synthetic virus strains. This was to assess cross-species infection and pathogenic risks of bat filoviruses for future vaccine development purposes, which suggests that gain-of-function (GOF) studies were possibly to take place."

I don't want to go down a conspiracy rabbit hole here, but American agencies have said that a lab leak is low...limited evidence, all things considered, but that is the most plausible reality here. What should I make of this? When I read this, paragraph 21 certainly stands out in the context of having just lived through a pandemic. What should I make of it? What should parliamentarians make of it?

Mr. David Vigneault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

For the record, I will say that I did not write this paragraph. That's why we employ people at CSIS who are much more intelligent than I am to make sense of this information.

Seriously, Mr. Chair, what I think is important here is understanding that the cutting-edge research being done at the national microbiology lab, as mentioned by my colleague, is absolutely essential for Canada. The fact that we have scientists working on these issues is in our own national interest. The problem—and the committee has been very clear on this issue—is that there were two individuals who lied to their employer and engaged in activities that were against Canada's national interest.

I think this is where principles of the complexity of the world's national security and international collaboration in science will sometimes clash with each other. It is only by having a very sophisticated approach—and, I think, a better understanding of how these different relationships interact, depending on the issue—that these can be assessed and more weight be put on national security versus international scientific collaboration.

Perhaps the last thing I will say to Mr. Erskine-Smith, through you, Mr. Chair, is that Canada and CSIS have not concluded that the virus jumped out of a lab, as others have said. I think our intelligence community friends in the U.S. have a different perspective on this issue.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I have a last question, but I only have about a minute and a half left.

You mentioned other security agencies in other parts of the world. Did you read this morning's explosive Washington Post story covering the global efforts by the security agency out of India?

Mr. David Vigneault: Yes, Mr. Chair, I have.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: For all of the time we spend examining the events that took place at the national microbiology lab in Winnipeg—and it's valuable time—don't you think we should spend, as parliamentarians, at least as much time on an international effort? I'm reading here that the operation was approved by India's security agency's chief at the time. Modi's national security adviser was probably aware of it. It was related to an assassination attempt in the U.S. and a successful assassination here in Canada, on Canadian soil.

Should we not spend at least as much time on an issue like that?

• (2025)

Mr. David Vigneault: Mr. Chair, I will not be so presumptuous as to tell parliamentarians what they should do, but I can tell you, as the director of CSIS, that we and our colleagues in the national security and intelligence community are just as concerned about many files.

The threat environment evolving in Canada right now is probably the worst we've ever seen. I think it is important that all venues we can find in which to discuss threats to Canada and what we can do about them.... It is probably time well spent.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Maybe—just maybe—Conservatives tripped over themselves a little too quickly in accusing the Prime Minister of misstating the facts, when the facts are obviously clear as we sit here today.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Drouin and Monsieur Vigneault, thank you for your time today.

We will now pause briefly, then begin our next panel in a few moments.

• (2025)

(Pause)

• (2030)

The Chair: We resume.

I'd like to welcome our witness for the second panel: Dr. Matthew Gilmour, research scientist.

Dr. Gilmour, you have up to five minutes for an opening statement.

Mr. Matthew Gilmour (Research Scientist, As an Individual): Good evening.

Mr. Chair, I really appreciate the invitation to meet with the committee this evening. I'm quite hopeful to share our perspective and to help the committee in their goal to advance the management of this interface between national security and scientific research.

I'm now based in the U.K., and even just as early as last week, the same issue was in the news. It's a discussion over this elevating expectation on national security, and how that sits alongside the challenges that a lot of scientific institutions face to put that into place based upon their own expertise and the processes that they would feel more comfortable with.

That particular example is with MI5 working across the board with all U.K. universities, trying to find that balance point between the values and practices that would be in place in universities and those expectations on national security. There's a lot of discussion on the balance and how you still pursue things like the values of research integrity, open science, fair access to education and, in the case of universities, income generation in the form of tuition that has been collected from international students.

For me, I think to achieve both, to have this interface between security and scientific innovation, it's essential that there be coordination between these authorities in working together. The scientists have the tools to recognize and then act when these threats are present while still working to keep world-class research occurring within their facilities.

Another U.K. example from 2021 is with the funders of the institute that I'm now at, UK Research and Innovation. They produce guidance called the "trusted research and innovation principles". That team holds an office and actively counsels U.K. research institutes on matters such as data security, protection of intellectual property and consideration of the different values of the nations that they might be working with.

Going back in time, I had the extreme honour from 2015 to 2020 of serving as the scientific director general of Canada's microbiology lab. That team is an exceptional team, one that has, in collaboration with their partners across this country and across the world, faced and tackled a lot of very challenging and complex public health issues. To have these roles, to work at this interface of public health challenges at the global level, the team at the NML has to demonstrate their expertise and allow different scientific disciplines such as infectious disease, but they also have to have a commitment to actively want to lead these particular responses.

It's not just the scientists at the NML; it's a very large team of hundreds of individuals. They're blessed with an engineering team that helps maintain the containment fields and makes sure, when they have mobile labs that go out into the field, that those are well-equipped teams. It's the engineers and it's administrative team as well. Again, I make sure that the resources and materials are available to those teams.

We had activities like working in the Ebola outbreak in west Africa, working on aspects like the chikungunya virus that appeared shortly after the end of the Ebola outbreak and then the COVID-19 response, where the NML worked hand in hand with the Canadian provincial public health laboratories, including Ontario's, to diagnose the first case within Canada. It takes a large degree of coordination amongst all those different disciplines within the building. This is a team that's very expert in consolidating around a particular position.

I know one thing that's really dear to the team at the NML is their placement as a category 4 lab within a downtown urban setting within Winnipeg. They've spent a lot of time to earn the respect and the pride of the city of Winnipeg, because that's part of the community they operate in. I know that, for the team, biosafety is one of their top values, and they have a profound understanding of the risks for both themselves as scientists who are working on these viruses and the risks for the community they're in.

Going towards 2018, to its credit, CSIS was increasing the awareness of these foreign interference risks. They've been working with frontline actors like us at the national microbiology lab to make sure that we had awareness of these different risks, because, certainly for us, the focus that we would have would be effective public health responses. It would have been things like biosafety and, much less so at that time, it would have been awareness of foreign interference risks. We were getting help from CSIS, and I can comfortably say that scientists probably still need help to manage those risks, so I'm appreciative of the committee's work in that regard.

• (2035)

Going back to the U.K., there's a lot of active work between law-makers and policy-makers to find that balance of that coordination and collaboration between national security and scientific interests. It takes expertise and the practices from both of those fields—security and science—to find that balance and harmony, whereby you still have productive and inspired, yet safe, science.

I'm pleased to be here tonight. How can I help?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Gilmour.

We'll now go to Mr. Chong for six minutes or less.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Dr. Gilmour, for appearing here.

In the documents that we received from the government, you expressed concerns in some of them about the transfer of the Ebola virus and henipavirus to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Those viruses were actually shipped out in late March 2019.

Why were you concerned about the shipments to the Wuhan Institute of Virology?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: The basis of my concern wasn't the scientist within the NML. The basis of my concern was actually the recipient laboratory.

I had the privilege over the course of my five-year term at the NML to co-chair the global health security action group laboratory network. That was a G7-plus-Mexico network. All the directors of

the different high-containment laboratories came together for it. For the most part, it was a network of trust and awareness that you needed to have people whom you could work with when issues and crises arose. It was so that you had someone at the other end of the phone whom you could talk to.

We met at least twice per year at these different institutes around the world. That was a major component of my own awareness of how other laboratories operated.

Obviously, this particular laboratory was not within that network, so I had very little awareness of the activities in that particular lab. That's why I put the question back to my team to make sure that they went through all of the processes and all of their due diligence to ensure a safe transfer.

Hon. Michael Chong: In this network of labs in the G7-plus-one—as you call it, the G7-plus-Mexico—I take it that they are all level 4 labs.

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: They are, for the most part. Not all of them have active, functional level 4 labs.

Hon. Michael Chong: I would assume it's a network of at least a dozen or so labs, because I assume there are at least two or three level 4 labs in the United States. Collectively, we're talking about a dozen or so level 4 labs whose heads would come together to collaborate and work on—

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: These were the public health laboratories. There's a similar network for the animal health category 4 laboratories.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. I understand.

Also, the Wuhan Institute of Virology was not part of this G7-plus-one network.

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Yes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay.

I have a second set of questions. You raised the first red flag in August 2018, which culminated in an investigation and the walking out of the two scientists from the lab 10 months later, on July 5, 2019. Subsequent to that, there were two CSIS security assessments that were conducted and reports that were produced. There was one in April 2020 and another in June 2020, which was about 12 months later.

First, why did it take so long for the lab to be secured, with the two scientists being walked out of the lab, on July 5, 2019?

Second, why did it take an additional 12 months for these two CSIS and security assessments to be concluded? It seems like it takes an awful lot of time to get things done.

• (2040)

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: I absolutely agree that the timing is key here. This is what's important to me in the messaging here today. The coordination between science and security is going to be effective in rapidly detecting and acting upon these particular threats when they appear.

In the context of what we're discussing here now, I certainly wouldn't characterize that the lab was insecure. We didn't have any suggestion or any direction that these individuals needed to be removed immediately. There wasn't any suggestion or direction to not have them retained in the lab and still doing some of the work until that moment in July.

As for myself, I only read the two CSIS letters that you're speaking of within the last week as it related to the release of documents.

Hon. Michael Chong: Do you agree, though, that it took too long for this process to unfold and that in the future this should happen in a much shorter time frame?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: In the future, it absolutely should happen in a shorter time frame.

When you apply hindsight in this particular scenario and look at the circumstances going on, this is an area where parties are all gaining awareness. This is a public service department that, at the outset, is applying public service principles to the investigation.

Hon. Michael Chong: I have another question for you.

You've now spent four years in the United Kingdom working in their scientific community at a lab. Prior to that, you spent years working for the Government of Canada in a scientific environment.

Can you compare and contrast how the British treat national security and scientific research with how we treat them here?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: In the U.K., again, there are a variety of examples I could provide to the committee in terms of actual policies, guidelines and, in some cases, even laws in place to scrutineer.

Hon. Michael Chong: Is it more effective? If so, how?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: I don't know if it's more effective, because, again, this is something that is still at the discussion point in the U.K. Certainly, the amount of guidance available is elevated. That's just a trend within the U.K. They don't leave anything unwritten. If anything is important, there will be corollary policy guidelines if not laws related to it. I think, in this scenario, you can put in multiple examples.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

We will now go to Mr. Naqvi for six minutes.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Dr. Gilmour. Thank you for presenting yourself at this committee.

Let me go to a very direct question.

Some members have been suggesting that there was a connection between the dismissal of the two scientists who are part of this inquiry at the national microbiology lab and you leaving for the U.K. when you joined the Quadram lab.

I'm going to ask you this directly: Did you resign from PHAC to take on your role at Quadram Institute in 2020?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, that's a fair question. Yes, I did resign, but the reasons for my resignation were different. I had one of those rare moments in life where there is a perfect opportu-

nity professionally and personally. The roles I have in the U.K. exactly meet my interests and skill sets. I've flourished there in that particular role. My young family who moved there with me flourished, as well.

At the end of the day, it was ultimately a personal decision and one we've had zero regrets about.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Thank you, Dr. Gilmour.

I'm very sorry that I'm asking personal questions, but I want to make sure there's transparency and clarity in this committee.

Just to clarify, the dismissal of the two scientists had nothing to do with your resignation.

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: No. Nor were they dismissed at the moment of my resignation. I think I found out about it, probably, when most people did—multiple years after.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: You made a personal decision in terms of your career and family. An opportunity came up in the U.K. that you felt was the right one for you.

● (2045)

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, I would agree with that.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: Great. Thank you very much.

Let me go to a second set of questions. These are in regard to international collaboration in scientific research. This is something we've been discussing a lot. Of course, it's very much a part of it. I think you have some unique experience and expertise you can offer us.

Let me start by asking you this question: Is it common for international laboratories to collaborate on research?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] between institutes. It's not just the materials that would be transferred back and forth. It's the expertise. It's the lived experience. It's epidemiologic information and metadata. There are a variety of requirements you need for successful science. That would have been one of the other bases for the laboratory networks we had, both internationally and within Canada.

Certainly, for a group like the national microbiology lab, there's no way to act in isolation. That's why their principal mandate is working with the other 10 provincial public health laboratories across the country. Again, success is entirely dependent upon the free flow of information around a particular issue.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: What's the importance here in terms of science on an international scale? I'm thinking of the extensive collaboration that you're speaking to.

What's the opportunity for countries and for scientists from different places and different backgrounds to collaborate on scientific research?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, there are a variety of options and a multitude of ways that people can collaborate.

I know from the U.K. that, especially under the lens of national security, they calculated that probably at least about half of all scientific collaboration in the country is founded in some degree on international collaboration.

Again, you cannot rely strictly upon your own expertise and your own materials. There has to be benefit-sharing between different institutes.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: In terms of Canada, how do you think Canada is doing on international collaboration in public health? Are we an important player?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, that's another complex question.

I know Canada is well respected in terms of its microbiology expertise, its virology expertise and its role in the study of the transmission of antimicrobial resistance. In the fields that I work in, yes, it is absolutely respected.

Mr. Yasir Naqvi: My last set of questions—obviously I am time-dependent—is around what you started talking about when Mr. Chong was asking you about the coordination between science and security. I'd love to hear you elaborate on your understanding of this enhanced nature of coordination between science and security.

I think you also alluded to...that we are, of course, learning over time. Hindsight is a great way of learning in terms of what we knew before and during the pandemic. Now even the U.K. is working through that process.

Can you elaborate, in your view as a scientist on an international scale, what that coordination looks like between science and security?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, a really good example, again coming from the U.K., is where security authorities have co-developed, with scientific institutes, guidelines and practices.

An example comes from the National Protective Security Authority where they have co-developed pieces with science. This tries to marry the aspects in the U.K. where academic research is enshrined into law, yet recognizing that yes, the majority of collaborations are international and there is this elevated expectation of security. There is active co-development of it in the U.K.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Gilmour.

We'll now go to Mr. Bergeron for six minutes.

• (2050)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Gilmour, thank you very much for being with us this evening.

On April 8, when he appeared before the committee, the Minister of Health said, "In 2018, we were working collaboratively with China on developing therapies and interventions with respect to Ebola."

Why was it essential for Canada to work with the People's Republic of China to combat the Ebola virus? Why wasn't that work happening with labs in G7 countries, as you mentioned a few mo-

ments ago? Why was it specifically with the People's Republic of China?

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, I don't recall the specific work that might have happened with China over the course of the Ebola virus work.

Certainly in general, internationally, there would be coordination and collaboration on this because, of course, for most countries this is, fortunately, not a virus that is native to their country, so it's something you have to work with other countries to obtain and work on.

I'm sorry. I'm not familiar with the specific project being discussed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I would have thought you would know about that collaboration, because we sent Ebola specimens to the People's Republic of China. I guess the reason we had to send Ebola to China was that they didn't have any samples. I will ask my question again.

Why was it necessary to work with the People's Republic of China to combat a virus like Ebola?

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, again, the rationale for working with them is just part of that international expectation of benefit sharing. Again, for those who don't have access to these viruses, you're in a position to share. That would have been the ethos at the time.

Again, within the laboratory, in terms of due diligence on the process, it would have been almost entirely a biosafety consideration. Within the documentation that was released with the package of documents, the final 100 pages were all about the documentation the NML produced regarding, again, their own due diligence in fulfilling their own processes and checks and balances.

The Chair: Dr. Gilmour, I'm pausing for a second. You tend to drift off microphone a little bit. If you could just aim right down in there, that would be great, or just shift it over depending on which side of the table you're speaking with, okay?

Mr. Bergeron, you can continue now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Did it ever occur to you that China might want to have viruses to use as biological weapons one day?

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: No, I didn't have that specific concern, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Also on April 8, when he appeared before this committee, the Minister of Health confirmed that the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg does not collaborate in any way with entities or individuals in the People's Republic of China.

When he appeared before our committee on April 19, Dr. Guillaume Poliquin, who now holds the position you used to hold at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, said that “international collaboration in this space is essential for the advancement of the work.”

To reconcile the minister's statement that there is no longer any collaboration with the People's Republic of China and Dr. Poliquin's statement that this collaboration is essential to the advancement of the work, would you say that no longer collaborating with the People's Republic of China is hindering the advancement of Canadian scientists' work?

[English]

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, I would reiterate that it was part of the overall ethos and the culture, scientifically, for that benefit-sharing where possible, but with the checks and balances that I mentioned.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I would like to take a few moments to give notice of a motion that we will discuss later out of respect for our witness. It reads:

That, pursuant to the order of reference of Monday, May 16, 2022, the committee, in light of the government's expressed intention to normalize relations with the People's Republic of China, invite in person and before June 21, 2024, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change; Mr. David Morrison, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Canadian Ambassador to China, as well as the President of the Canada-China Legislative Association.

• (2055)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, we'll take that as a notice of motion—

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Yes.

[English]

The Chair: —but we will need it in both official languages, too.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Absolutely.

[English]

The Chair: That's good. You can continue with your questions. You have one minute.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'm done for now.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Barron, you won't be splitting time with the cat, I trust.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: And we will not talk about fish.

Ms. Barron and I serve on the fisheries and oceans committee together.

You have six minutes or less.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: That's right.

Yes, my apologies, as my cat wanted to join the meeting.

Thank you to our witness for being here today.

I'm happy to be here to ask a few questions on behalf of my colleague who's unable to be here today.

I apologize that I came in a little late. If you're repeating this, perhaps you can expand on it a little bit. What are your thoughts on the ways we could avoid the same problems from occurring again? What are some of the learnings that we could take from this that you might be able to share with us?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, that's a good question.

One of the examples that I haven't yet mentioned—again, drawing upon some of the practices within the U.K.—is that there's a program there called the academic technology approval scheme. This is integrated right at the national level. It's integrated with the visa scheme. As people apply for visas from non-exempt countries—Canada would be an exempt country—for certain categories of work.... The security agencies have identified particular categories of work that are of concern to them in terms of, with regard to the previous member's question, things related to bioterror. That's built right into the visa application scheme—some of that vetting. It's not happening closer to the front line within the actual departments or within universities; it's happening at the outset as people are coming into the country.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: That's interesting. Thank you.

I was learning that the PRC's thousand talents plan is one of an estimated 200 talent recruitment programs that are using incentives such as salaries, research funding and lab space to encourage Chinese researchers abroad to transmit knowledge to the PRC, as you know.

Could you share to what extent the PRC's talent recruitment programs are a threat to Canada's national security, or are they?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, my own specific awareness of these programs is quite low. They're not something I have to deal with in my day-to-day job anymore.

Certainly, going back in time to my time at the national microbiology lab, I had periodic engagements with an individual CSIS agent from the Winnipeg office where we were mutually developing a little bit of awareness. He would show me things that would come across the wire that were of interest or concern to them and then would ask for my reflections in terms of what they might mean. It often meant actually talking about and educating a little bit on the science of what they were looking at. I should clarify that in those meetings we weren't talking about anything specific at the NML. It was just their own process of, again, generating awareness in myself and some of the security pieces.

To my recollection, things like education on the talent management programs didn't actually occur until that August 2018 meeting, so I've had limited exposure in terms of analysis of those. I apologize to the member.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: No. Thank you so much for clarifying, Mr. Gilmour.

Mr. Gilmour, under what circumstances and conditions would you consider that the national microbiology laboratory in Winnipeg should be resuming collaborations with entities and individuals in the PRC?

• (2100)

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, I'm not sure I'm in a position to speak to that because I don't have a role within the Government of Canada anymore. I certainly do hope.... Again, judging by the conversations with the witnesses who preceded me, it sounds like the level of interaction and engagement between the leadership team at the NML and the security authorities is greatly heightened. I'm very pleased to hear that.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, perhaps you could clarify how much time I have left before I continue.

The Chair: You have one minute and a half.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the last of my time, perhaps I'm going to go a little high level just because I'm not a regular member here.

What are some takeaways that you can share with us as a committee, in your role, Mr. Gilmour, that are essential that we take with us in our continued work?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, my takeaway is that the conversations between security and the specialized scientific institutes need to be very active and profound. This can't be something that's just left as a background conversation. Again, it's one of the reasons I was pleased to hear that it sounds like this is happening now between the security agencies and the management team at the Public Health Agency of Canada and the NML.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you very much, Mr. Gilmour.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron.

We have Mr. Cooper now for five minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Dr. Gilmour.

Dr. Gilmour, knowing what you know now, do you think it was a good idea for the Winnipeg lab to transfer Ebola and henipavirus to the Wuhan Institute of Virology?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, I can absolutely see how, in the light of 2024, there would be concerns over the transfer. Certainly at the time, though, we were acting upon the information we had and acting under a different operational tempo where the concern, as I stated before, was assurance on things like biosafety.

Mr. Michael Cooper: It was a highly unusual transfer. Is that correct?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, it would be difficult for me to say whether it was highly unusual. Certainly the transfer of materials between different laboratories would happen on a regular basis.

Mr. Michael Cooper: But this type of transfer didn't typically occur with PRC laboratories, did it?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, I think that's best coming from the current employees of the NML. I don't specifically recall. It would have been a very low incidence, if at all.

Mr. Michael Cooper: A low incidence of that type of transfer of materials to PRC institutions, correct?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Yes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Okay.

On March 27, 2019, days before the transfer, you sent an email to Steve Guercio, the executive director of the Winnipeg lab, in which you stated, "I'd like you to be comfortable with this before it goes [out]", that being the transfer of the Ebola virus and henipavirus.

Why did you send that email to Mr. Guercio? Did it have anything to do with the fact that, four days earlier, PHAC obtained a fact-finding report that raised serious concerns about the activities of Dr. Qiu, who was directing this transfer?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, it's a very good and very valid question. I remember the nature of my concern. That email was a follow-up to my original email that had been sent to the team, where I explicitly said that I had a concern, and I outlined the nature of my concern.

All the concerns were about the validity of the recipient. It wasn't about who within the team was initiating the transfer. That email to the executive director was a reiteration to make sure that we as a team had done all of our process to make sure that we had gone through the due diligence.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Did the fact-finding report of March 23 not raise additional red flags with you or anyone at the lab? I understand that we learned a lot more, but at the time, PHAC knew that she had.... It was registered on a PRC patent. There were multiple policy breaches. There was the unauthorized transfer of materials to the PRC. There was evidence of collaboration with the PRC.

Again, this is Canada's highest security lab. Surely there must have been additional red flags.

• (2105)

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: It's very conceivable that this would have been a red flag. I certainly remember at the time that the nature of the concerns over the individuals, as you stated, evolved to something completely different. At the time, the level of concern was much lower—potentially even things that we could manage within the lab.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Respectfully, I find it concerning that it took three and a half months before she and Dr. Cheng were finally marched out of the lab.

You met with Dr. Qiu on June 19. What happened between the receipt of that fact-finding report, your meeting on June 19 and then July 5, when they were finally escorted out?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, in my memory it was a discussion with the senior executives within the Public Health Agency of Canada on how to initiate what was ultimately the administrative investigation. It was the orchestration of how to actually introduce this to the employees' supervisors and then to the employees themselves on the 5th of July.

Mr. Michael Cooper: But were additional facts gathered between that time about the activities of Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng? There's just a big gap, in the documents we have, between this fact-finding report and then July 5.

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: It's a challenge for me to fill that gap for you. In my own review of the documentation, I didn't see anything missing in terms of additional investigations. Again, these were investigations that were done by other authorities.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I think that would underscore, I would submit, why action should have been taken on or around March 23, 2019, and not July 5.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, I'm sorry. Your time has run out.

We'll go to Ms. Yip now for five minutes.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you very much for staying so late.

Are similar research organizations in the U.K. working in collaboration with the PRC?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. Just to clarify, are "similar organizations" the other public health laboratories?

Ms. Jean Yip: Yes.

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: I'm not an employee of those organizations, so I couldn't speak to them.

Ms. Jean Yip: What about your own organization that you've now joined?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: It's not something I've done a review of.

Ms. Jean Yip: In your opening statement, you spoke about the balance point of scientific innovation and national security. Knowing what has transpired, is there anything in hindsight that you might have noticed that would have tipped the balance point?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, can I hear the question again, please?

Ms. Jean Yip: In your opening statement, you mentioned the balance point of scientific innovation and national security. Was there a time when you worked with the lab that this was tipped?

Could you see warning signs or red flags?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, the red flags would have been the ones that amounted to the discussion with CSIS in August 2018. Some of those warning signs were the affiliation with Chinese institutes. There was frequent travel to China. There were the issues that were uncovered relating to visiting scientists who were not always supervised.

Those were issues very near the same time, which we were discussing within the management team, so when they were presented

by CSIS in August 2018, I reciprocated that they were of growing concern to us.

Ms. Jean Yip: Would you have done anything differently, knowing what you know now?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, that's another good question. This has been part of my own reflection—even this last week, after reading all of the documents.

I'm not sure if I mentioned it before, but to my knowledge, the April 2020 and June 2020 CSIS reports are not things I had seen before. That I hadn't seen them before can be explained by how I had already resigned from the position by that point, so I wouldn't have expected the employer to show them to me.

The one regret I might have is.... Would I have had a role in following up with CSIS more actively myself? That's a question I ask myself.

• (2110)

Ms. Jean Yip: I guess you don't have any answers to your question.

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: No.

Ms. Jean Yip: You testified at the health committee during your previous role at PHAC on the important work that NML does, including diagnostic support and research studies into therapeutics, antiviral transmission modelling and more.

Can you speak about the role of the NML in the context of new and emerging viruses and the pathogens of concern?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, it's one of the rationales for the existence of laboratories that you have a safe place to bring in any clinical material when a new disease is emerging. When the safety profile at the early outset is unknown, you can put it into a category 4 or category 3 lab as you see fit, and do the work to characterize it and understand the nature of that emerging organism.

It is one of the key rationales for having a laboratory like the NML in Canada.

Ms. Jean Yip: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 40 seconds. What can you do in 40 seconds?

Ms. Jean Yip: What are your thoughts on AI and the role it plays in national security?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, very quickly, my own thoughts on AI are that it's a very powerful tool, at least for information gathering. You can scan public data sources and other literature, and with natural language models, you can very accurately recover the information you're seeking. Whether you're a scientist or a security firm—whatever your interests are—you can use these tools, at least at the outset, to very robustly get the information you need.

At this time, it probably very much still needs a human interface to synthesize all that into a compelling narrative, but at least it's a very powerful tool for information gathering.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Yip.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I have no questions, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: All right. We will then go to Ms. Barron for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Of course, I will gladly call our witness by the proper name of Dr. Gilmour.

My apologies, Dr. Gilmour, for not saying "doctor" in my first round of questions.

Dr. Gilmour, I'm not sure, honestly, if my colleague had a chance to ask you this or not, but I do want to know why you left your role as the scientific director general at the Winnipeg lab. What was the reasoning behind that?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, one, I have no concerns at all about the salutation. It's even later than you can imagine for me with a little bit of jet lag. I did not notice what you called me, but the question was asked and answered in terms of my departure.

The short answer, just for your own benefit, is that an absolutely dream opportunity came available to me with colleagues whom I already knew and respected. It was the right fit for me personally and professionally.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you; that helps me.

I'm wondering if, in your time in your position, you felt that you had the proper tools to be able to prevent foreign interference. I know you spoke a little bit in previous rounds of questions about whether there were any regrets, and I'm wondering if you felt that you were equipped with the proper tools to be able to identify concerns and to be able to respond accordingly.

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, that is probably the most powerful question I've heard tonight.

I want to go back to Ms. Yip's question on whether I had any regrets. I think I answered maybe we needed more conversation with CSIS.

In terms of whether I was equipped or not, that's a challenge to answer, but certainly, going back in time, yes, there absolutely should have been more briefing, more planning and more conversation among me, CSIS and the departmental security officer, yes.

• (2115)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Barron. That's pretty much your time there.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go now to Dr. Ellis followed by Mr. Fragiskatos, and that will wrap up this panel.

Go ahead, Dr. Ellis.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Dr. Gilmour, for being here.

My colleague started talking a little bit about the time frame between the end of March 2019, when the infamous shipment happened, and then the administrative action that happened to doctors Qui and Cheng in July 2019. That's three months or so. As you said, there didn't appear, in your mind at least, that there was more information available, but you were having conversations about what to do with these individuals. Whom were the conversations with?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, those were conversations with the senior executive of the agency. In my case, I can recall conversations with the vice-presidents of the infectious disease prevention and control branch and conversations with probably at least one other VP within corporate services. I don't recall if there were conversations with the president. That's just my own fallible memory.

This, again, is an agency that found itself in a relatively unfamiliar and probably remarkable territory in terms of what they had experienced in the past. On the one hand, there's a lot of credit to the agency for earnestly putting forward due diligence in actioning those fact-finding reports and then moving towards what was ultimately the administrative investigation. I firmly recall, again from a public service perspective, that this was not your normal HR process. That would have been a struggle for the executive.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thank you very much.

Through you, Chair, was the Minister of Health made aware of that during that time, to the best of your knowledge?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, I'm not aware of that happening. Those were not conversations I was privy to.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: You were the scientific director general. In your mind, do you think that the Minister of Health should have been made aware at that point in time?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, that's a good opinion question and one I honestly haven't reflected on until now, as you're asking it.

Yes.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thank you for that.

I'll go back to your original contact with CSIS in August 2018. For all intents and purposes, that's what started the ball rolling, if I might use that term here.

Can you please elaborate for the committee what concerns you related to CSIS at that time?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. I remember that the session on it was starkly different, because I transitioned from just having one-on-one briefings with an individual agent sporadically, over time. If I recall correctly, I think this was the first group session where there were multiple CSIS agents presenting a prepared presentation and describing some of the tactics and approaches used in the PRC—things like talent management programs and the undue consideration of intellectual property protection.

I recall, at the time, that some of the tactics they were describing were familiar. They were some of the same concerns we had, I think, very recently started to talk about within the NML management team, including affiliations with Chinese institutes, frequent travel to China and the number of visiting scientists and students who were coming from that particular country. That was a concern we were discussing within the management team, and there it was in front of me in a CSIS briefing.

There was no compunction to withhold that from them, so we had a conversation about it.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: That's fair enough.

Through you, Mr. Chair, Dr. Gilmour talked about having those discussions among the management team at the NML. Who else would that have included, at the time?

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, I'd be challenged to remember the specifics, but I have to imagine it was at least the executive director.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Just the two of you would have had those conversations about Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng.

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, I couldn't say if it was just the two of us.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: I have one final question for you, Dr. Gilmour.

Obviously, you had concerns about the shipment going to the Wuhan lab, which was a new actor in the laboratory scene. A level 4 lab didn't exist in China before Dr. Qiu helped it come into being.

Why didn't you stop the shipment?

• (2120)

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: Mr. Chair, I think, as other members have questioned, I did express concern and I expressed concern at multiple points.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: However, you could have stopped—

Mr. Matthew Gilmour: I didn't stop the shipment, though, because, for me, that would have meant overriding my team—their expertise and processes. That's the process we had at the time, so I didn't override it.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Ellis.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, in fact, I don't have questions.

However, I suppose this is a question for you. I think we've run the course here with respect to the topic. I would put this to you:

When can we talk about drafting instructions and what the plan will be for that, exactly?

The Chair: We have received further witness requests from Mr. Chong. I believe it's one more witness.

Hon. Michael Chong: No, it's three more witnesses in one meeting, then—

The Chair: As I understand it, Richard Fadden is scheduled to appear in the session scheduled for Friday. We have been attempting to line up Ms. Siddika Mithani, but we have not received a response. Then you came up with two more.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes. We could get that all done on Friday.

The Chair: If we do that on Friday, could we carve out some time for drafting instructions?

Hon. Michael Chong: Sure.

The Chair: Will that work, Mr. Fragiskatos?

I'm sorry.

Hon. Michael Chong: Would you mind carving out drafting instructions next week, after we have had time to absorb today's testimony and Friday's testimony? I don't think we need more than 30 minutes for drafting instructions.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: With great respect to my colleague, of course, I wonder what the rationale is for having another meeting. We've had, by my count, seven hours and 13 witnesses already by tonight, and not just on the government side. We even had an opposition member say they ran out of questions.

I'm not looking at you, Michael. You are an opposition member who never tires of asking questions, and you always ask very good ones.

I'll make the point, again, that I think we've run the course on the issue. I don't know if Mr. Bergeron or my colleague in the NDP has views on whether or not we need another meeting, but those are many hours and many witnesses. I'm not sure what would be gained, frankly, and most importantly, by having another meeting on Monday.

The Chair: We did originally schedule two meetings. I think we've been quite generous with our committee time.

Mr. Chong, please go ahead.

Hon. Michael Chong: Look, I'm asking for one more meeting. Dick Fadden is the former director of CSIS. I think he could add valuable insight into the time frames that we have been investigating here—whether they were appropriate, whether they took too long, and what should be different.

He's coming willingly, as I understand it, as a witness to our committee. I think that is valuable testimony.

The other two or three or witnesses we've invited were actually involved in the transfer of the viruses and the applications for the transfers, and also the policies regarding restricted visitors to the lab.

It would be the final meeting. I waited three long years to get to this point. Just one more meeting, Mr. Chair, would be entirely appropriate, and then we could easily set some time aside—I don't think we need more than half an hour for drafting instructions—and then the study would be largely done.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I do not want to put them on the spot, but I'd like to hear from my opposition colleagues because, yes, while Mr. Fadden is a respected former director of CSIS, we've heard from the current director no less than three times. With great respect to my colleague, I don't know what we would gain by having Mr. Fadden come when we've already had the current director give lengthy testimony, including his thoughts on recommendations on all of this.

However, like I said, I'm not going to belabour the point here.

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, do you have any reflections you would care to offer?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I would simply say that the fact that we have not submitted any other witness lists indicates that we believe we have covered the issue.

That said, I understand that our Conservative colleagues would like one last meeting, which I am not particularly keen on. However, if they feel that it would add to the information we already have, how could we, short of muzzling them, prevent this other meeting from taking place?

• (2125)

[*English*]

The Chair: Why don't we proceed with Friday, then? We know Mr. Fadden does intend to appear. If the others can be coaxed into appearing, we have a deal. If not, we will wrap it on Friday.

Okay?

Hon. Michael Chong: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: All right.

Ms. Yip, did you have something to say?

Ms. Jean Yip: In the spirit of being fair, you asked Mr. Bergeron, but we didn't hear from, is it Ms. Barron for the NDP?

The Chair: I think that would put Ms. Barron on the spot given that she's had about an hour of experience.

Ms. Jean Yip: Oh, I see. That's true.

The Chair: Ms. Barron, have you heard from your whip? She has actually, to this point, been a regular member of this committee.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Thank you, Chair.

The only information I can contribute is that my colleagues are okay with going ahead with witnesses on Friday. Anything further I'll leave to my colleague to be able to answer those questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Erskine-Smith, please go ahead.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: I apologize to the interpreters because I told them I wasn't going to talk.

Just so that I'm clear, we would meet this Friday as a final meeting, and that's the meeting Michael is requesting. Then, Chair, you can obviously take matters into your own hands, but my understanding is that from there we would revert back the following week to a three-hour meeting every Monday, and we would not have two meetings a week. Is that correct?

The Chair: That's correct.

All right?

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Thank you.

The Chair: So, that's the deal. We will meet on Friday. We'll get as many remaining witnesses as we can. We will carve off a little time next Monday for drafting instructions on this. I'm sure we'll have a very fulsome report to present to Parliament.

Dr. Gilmour, thank you for your time and making the effort to be here in person. I know it was a bit of a stretch to your schedule. We appreciate it very much.

I will thank the interpreters, our staff and everybody who has made tonight possible.

With that, we will adjourn.

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