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Chair: The Honourable Geoff Regan



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• (1835)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number seven of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations. Pursuant to the motion adopted on Wednesday, September 23, 2020, the committee is meeting on its study of Canada-China relations.

[*Translation*]

Today's meeting is in a hybrid format. The meeting is also televised and will be available on the House of Commons website.

[*English*]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are participating by video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself.

[*Translation*]

Let me remind you that all comments from members of the committee and from witnesses must be addressed through the chair.

I would ask you to speak slowly and clearly.

[*English*]

When you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I'd now like to welcome the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, along with Marta Morgan, deputy minister; and Weldon Epp, director general, north Asia and Oceania bureau.

Thank you all.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for joining us.

I now invite the minister to make his opening statement.

Mr. Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Honourable members and colleagues, it is a great pleasure for me to join you this evening. Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today.

The work that you are doing here is important, because the relationship between Canada and China is important for Canadians.

[*English*]

I would first like to thank the officials who are with me today. Thank you for your time and thank you, also, for serving Canada. I also want to take a moment to thank Ambassador Barton and our team in the different missions in China and our diplomats in China who did extraordinary work, as I recall, in the first phase of their repatriation from Wuhan.

Mr. Chair and honourable members, thank you for the invitation to appear in front of you today. The work you do, as I was saying, is crucial because the relationship between Canada and China is important to all Canadians. The countries that make up the Indo-Pacific region are drivers of economic prosperity for Canada and for the world.

By some estimates, just 10 years from now, Asia will account for roughly 60% of the world's economic growth. The bilateral and multilateral relationships we foster and the region's stability create jobs, open up markets, connect communities and support Canadian families here at home. As the world's second-largest economy and home to 1.4 billion people, China is a key actor in the region and beyond.

[*Translation*]

This year marks 50 years of diplomatic relations between Canada and China. Fifty years later, I don't think anyone would say this is an easy relationship. Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor have now been arbitrarily detained for almost two years.

Our relationship with China is a complex and difficult one, not just for Canada, but for democracies around the world. China is changing rapidly before our eyes.

[English]

We recognize China's growing influence on the world stage as a global hub for manufacturing, trade and lending, and the single-largest trading nation in the world. It is the first trading partner for an astonishing 124 countries. It is the first trading partner in Africa, second in Latin America, and it is also an important trading partner for Canada, for both exports and imports. Bilateral trade in goods and services between Canada and China has increased eightfold over the last 20 years.

In addition, China can be a key player on the world stage in the fight against climate change, COVID-19, or to ensure the stability of financial markets and global economic development.

With significant assistance funding in Africa and Latin America, it gives China growing clout in the developing world. As an example, as part of its belt and road initiative, China has signed co-operation agreements with 138 countries to build infrastructure that will connect it to developing countries. China's banks have already provided loans worth over \$461 billion, raising many concerns over debt sustainability, transparency and international standards on labour and the environment.

China's ambition even reaches the Arctic region, where it aims to develop shipping lanes, calling it the polar silk road. This is a new reality that we need to take into account and thus engage with China with eyes wide open, as I have said on a number of occasions.

The China of 2020 is not the China of 2015, or even the China of 2018.

Its rise has brought with it troubling threats to human rights, to long-standing agreements of autonomy [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] and to the international institutions that underpin the rules-based order of which Canada is a steadfast promoter. We see a country and a leadership increasingly prepared to throw its weight around to advance its interest.

[Translation]

This includes the use of coercive diplomacy, like the arbitrary detention of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. This, however, is not a sentiment unique to me or to Canada. Democracies around the world are rethinking their own relationship with China.

[English]

Multilateralism will be key to ensuring global stability and security in a world in which China is a powerful actor. That's why we are working with like-minded countries to defend the rules-based international order and ensure that China abides by its obligations under international human rights law. When dealing with China, we will be firmly guided by Canadian interests, our fundamental values and principles, including human rights, as well as by global rules and strategic partnerships.

Let me be clear. The safety and security of Canadians at home and abroad will always be at the heart of our approach.

Tactics such as coercive diplomacy, including arbitrary detention, are unacceptable in the conduct of state-to-state relations. This is

something I have raised not just with our allies, but directly with my Chinese counterpart.

We do, and we will continue to, challenge China when human rights are violated, and we will always protect Canadians when it comes to our national security, compete with our innovative businesses and the abundant resources that allow us to do so, and cooperate on global challenges such as climate change, because there is no easy path forward without China.

More than 700 days have passed since then, and we remain deeply concerned by the arbitrary arrest and detention of Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor, as well as the arbitrary sentencing of Mr. Schellenberg. We continue to call for the immediate release of Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor and for clemency for Mr. Schellenberg, as we do for all Canadians facing the death penalty.

I know that all members of this committee, indeed all Canadians, are angered by the detention of Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor and concerned for their well-being. I would also like to acknowledge the resilience demonstrated by their families and their support at every step of the way.

Finally, after many months, we recently secured on-site virtual consular access to Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor. This is something I personally raised in a meeting with my counterpart, State Councilor Wang Yi, in Rome in August this year, and on which we worked tirelessly.

Since October, Ambassador Barton has on two occasions travelled to the prisons in which they are being held to lead virtual on-site visits to personally confirm the health and well-being of these two Canadians while they remain unjustly detained. This is a very important development and we continue to work very hard to secure their release.

Turning to Hong Kong, the imposition of the new national security law in Hong Kong has raised significant concerns about the future of Hong Kong's independent judiciary, the future of human rights and freedoms in the special administrative region, the integrity of the "one country, two systems" framework, and Hong Kong's role as a global hub.

On November 11, we condemned China's removal of four democratically elected lawmakers from office in Hong Kong. It is an assault on Hong Kong's freedoms under the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

Alongside our partners, we continue to call on Chinese authorities to uphold international human rights obligations. We have been at the forefront of the international response to the national security law, issuing—often at our urging—statements alongside Australia, the U.K., the United States, the G7 and the Five Eyes, at the Human Rights Council and, most recently, at the UN General Assembly's third committee.

We were also the first to suspend our extradition treaty with Hong Kong, and we have announced a series of other measures, including export control measures and an update on travel advice for the region.

• (1840)

Last week, you heard from my colleague Minister Mendicino on the immigration measures we have put in place. Our response to both Hong Kong and China is one that crosses many departments and requires significant coordination.

[Translation]

As all of you, I am sure, I have been alarmed by the reports of gross human rights violations in Xinjiang. The violations target Uighurs and other Muslim minorities on the basis of their religion and ethnicity.

• (1845)

[English]

Publicly and privately, in multilateral and bilateral dialogues, we have called on the Chinese government to end the repression in Xinjiang. I have raised this directly with my Chinese counterpart, most recently in Rome this summer at a meeting called at my request. In September at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, we raised concerns about the human rights situation in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. In October, we were one of 39 countries signing the third committee's declaration at the UN General Assembly in New York, which referenced Xinjiang. [Technical difficulty—Editor] for human rights.

The Chair: You appear to have a technical problem.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: In conclusion, our relationship with China is a complex one indeed. It is absolutely imperative that advanced democracies like Canada and our like-minded partners work together to protect the international rules that have ensured stability and prosperity for decades. It is a challenge we all share. No country will succeed alone. Our principal strategic approach to China goes beyond our bilateral relationship. It is, in fact, a global challenge. This is why we have been working with partners, especially when it comes to areas of fundamental disagreements with China.

I know, Mr. Chair, that some like to talk tough on China. To those who are seduced by this one-dimensional view, I say that while it is easy to be tough, let's continue to be smart. Let's not fall into the temptation of tough and irresponsible rhetoric that will generate no tangible results for Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, our farmers and entrepreneurs, and human rights victims and advocates. I think Canadians know this. They know we must be smart in our approach. We must be nimble. That is what is at stake here, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you for your time and for the role you as a committee are playing in shaping the Canada-China relationship and informing Canadians about China. As we discuss this tonight, I invite you to take a broader and longer view on the Canada-China relationship. I am here to hear your ideas and engage in a constructive dialogue with you about one of the most important geostrategic issues of our time. It is a feature of an open and successful country that we can have these discussions.

[Translation]

I am happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

[English]

We'll now start our first round of questions with Mr. Chong for six minutes.

Mr. Chong, go ahead, please.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Chair, thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have the floor, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, we missed some of the minister's remarks. Without wishing to make him start his comments again, could we at least be assured that we will have a copy of those comments in French and English so that we can be fully aware of them, albeit unfortunately after the fact.

The Chair: Is that possible, Mr. Minister?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I would like to do so, but I use a lot of personal notes. You know me, I rarely just read a speech. We will certainly find a way to add my comments into the file. If not, I can start my presentation again, if my colleague Mr. Bergeron so wishes.

I will defer to your decision, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I don't think that the members would want me to let you start again, certainly not Mr. Harris, who is in Newfoundland and Labrador. The session would finish very late if we went on too long.

If it is possible for you to add those notes to the file, we would appreciate it.

[English]

In that case, we will go to Mr. Chong for six minutes.

• (1850)

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

Thank you, Minister, for appearing and for your opening remarks.

Minister, the government has indicated for some time that a new framework on China is coming this fall, which ends on December 21. Can you tell us exactly when the new framework will be released?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: What I said is that the situation in China is evolving—China of 2020 is not China of 2016—and that our foreign policy needs to evolve with an evolving China.

What I said is that our policy will be based on three key principles. It will be based on Canadian interests; it will be based on values and principles that include human rights; and it will be based on rules and partnerships. That's what we have been putting already in motion, Mr. Chair, because the situation—

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Minister, for that, but do you have any time frame for us in the next four weeks?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, we will be coming and, as I am doing tonight, I will be explaining to Canadians all along our policy, which is evolving as the situation in China is evolving.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

I don't have a lot of time, and I have a number of questions.

Minister, as you know, the House adopted a motion calling on the government to make a decision on Huawei and to develop a robust plan to counter China's influence operations here in Canada by December 18. While the motion is not binding in a statutory sense of the word, it is binding if Canada is to uphold democratic norms. Our democratic norms say that the government must respect the will of the House of Commons, and we can all see what happens when these democratic norms aren't respected, such as what is going on south of the border.

In that context, what assurances can you give this committee that the government will deliver both a decision on Huawei and a robust plan to counter China's influence operations by Friday, December 18?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, as my honourable colleague will remember, we even proposed an amendment during the debate because we agree with the principle, but there was an issue about delay. I think Canadians who are watching tonight will understand that we cannot have the opposition fix an arbitrary delay. National security should guide our decision when it comes to 5G.

What I said when it comes to foreign interference is that we take that very, very seriously, that I'm working with the Minister of Public Safety and that we have measures in place, and we're always looking at enhancing the measures that we have. Any Canadians who would be subject to any form of interference should immediately report them to the local police force so that they can be properly investigated and we can act upon them.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you for that, Minister.

Minister, your mandate letter of a year ago mandated you to introduce enhanced Magnitsky sanctions legislation that would include the seizure of assets to be used to help victims. Do you still plan on introducing that legislation in this Parliament?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'd like to quote the member, Mr. Chair, because as my honourable colleague once said, the way that I see the Magnitsky sanction needs to be imposed, or for that matter any sanctions that need to be imposed, is to work with a core group of countries to have maximum impact. I think that's something that I've even read the member said, that the smart way to do that is to go along with a core group of countries to have maximum effect, and that's certainly what I believe.

Hon. Michael Chong: My question was this. Your mandate letter asked you to introduce enhanced legislation in the House of Commons to strengthen the legislative framework. Do you still plan on doing that? Do you plan on introducing new legislation on enhanced Magnitsky sanctions?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I missed part of the question, but I think I understand enough to be able to provide elements of response to my honourable colleague.

As I said, Mr. Chair, we have on the books a number of tools in our tool box to impose sanctions. I'm always looking at ways that these sanctions could be deployed, but my firm belief is that the smart way to impose sanctions is with a core group of countries to have maximum impact, as we've done, for example, in the case of Belarus.

Hon. Michael Chong: Minister, Michael Wernick, former Clerk of the Privy Council, suggested last week that the Canadian government consider organizing a boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. As the government comes forward with its new framework on China, will the consideration of a boycott be part of the government's new framework?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think when it comes to sports and politics, Mr. Chair, one has to be careful. That's a decision for the Canadian Olympic Committee to make. Certainly, we will look to see what their decision is when it comes to the Olympics in Beijing.

Hon. Michael Chong: Minister, Ambassador Rae, last week at the United Nations, said that the United Nations Human Rights Council should investigate China for gross human rights violations and possible genocide of the Uighur people. Has your government taken any specific action to initiate this investigation at the United Nations?

• (1855)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: We have taken a number of measures. As the honourable member will recall, before that even, I engaged with the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the United Nations, Michelle Bachelet, when we met in Europe. We had a discussion about the actions that the international community can be taking to have free and unfettered access to Xinjiang to be able to investigate and report back to the international community.

We are extremely concerned by the reports we have seen. I have raised this issue both publicly and privately and we have been taking action, Mr. Chair. I have done so directly with Madame Bachelet. We'll continue to engage with the international community when it comes to making sure that China upholds its international human rights commitments.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chong.

Now we will go on to Ms. Yip for six minutes, please.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Good evening, Minister Champagne. It's been quite a year for you and your team at GAC, and then you add the pandemic. I want to commend you and the staff at the department and ministry level for their repatriation efforts in bringing Canadians home. That was quite the task. Thank you for taking the time to answer our questions tonight.

Could you give me the status of how Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor are doing?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: First of all, thank you for acknowledging the immense work that was done by our team of diplomats, our officials and the ambassador. As you know, the virus started in Wuhan and that was the first place where we had to evacuate. That was a massive operation. Thanks to the men and women of our diplomatic corps, we learned a lot about how to do it. Unfortunately, as the virus spread, we had to apply the best practices we learned in China. For those who are watching tonight, I just want to say a big thank you, not only on my behalf, but I think I'm speaking on behalf of all committee members.

When it comes to Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor, I would say that, following the discussion I had with my counterpart in Rome, we have been working tirelessly to restore consular access. As you probably noted, we were able to get consular access to both Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor in October and November. There's the Privacy Act, but let me just say.... I'll report generally on their well-being. The most important thing that Canadians need to hear tonight is that we will be pushing at every step of the way, first, for their release, but also to get consular access on a monthly basis as the agreement between Canada and China stipulates. One of my objectives is always to call and demand that China respect its international obligations, and that's one of them.

We have been pushing with Ambassador Barton, with our officials and with the Prime Minister, everyone has been pushing all along to make sure that, first, we get both Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor released and then, in the meantime, that we get proper consular access.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you.

The Chinese ambassador in Canada warned that granting asylum to Hong Kong protesters could put Canadians in danger. This can be understood to be a threat. Do you see that statement as a threat?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I thought it was totally inappropriate and unacceptable. I've said that in no uncertain terms and I've even asked our officials to call the ambassador for consultation, which we did, to convey that message. The key message here, what we're saying, is that this type of coercive diplomacy is not just unacceptable, but it's not conducive for China to achieve its own objectives. There are norms in international diplomatic relations and we will always stand up and speak up to make sure that we protect and defend the interest of Canadians. In this case, I spoke publicly—the same day I think, the same evening—to say that this was unacceptable and we conveyed that message to the ambassador.

Ms. Jean Yip: Can you expand on how Canada can uphold its values and interests in the face of coercive diplomacy?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think that's a very good question. Thank you.

I think one of the best ways, and I said it a bit in my opening remarks, is that liberal democracies in the world need to stand up and speak up together. As many have said, Canada has been issuing a number of statements. Sometimes we did it with our partners in the United Kingdom and sometimes with the United States. Sometimes we did it with the Five Eyes. On other occasions, we did it with the G7.

I think there is a need for countries to engage with each other, these liberal democracies, those who believe in the values and principles of democracy—free speech, freedom of religion, human rights—and to speak up as one, and that's what Canada has been fostering. On many occasions, Canada was there to help make sure that we would speak with one voice, and we will continue, because we all know that human rights are one of the core principles of our foreign policy.

• (1900)

Ms. Jean Yip: As the situation in Hong Kong continues to deteriorate, many Canadians here in Canada are rightfully concerned for the safety of their friends and family. Given the long reach of the national security law, should the Chinese community in Canada feel unsafe?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Well, I think what we have heard over the last few weeks [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Ms. Jean Yip: I'm sorry. I can't hear you. There seems to be a—

The Chair: I'll pause the time for the moment. Hopefully, we'll get the minister back momentarily here.

There he is.

I'm sorry, Minister, but you were frozen for a moment. Please go ahead.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Can you hear me now?

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: What I was saying, I think, was that any Canadians who are watching tonight who feel any form of either intimidation or threat should really report these incidents to their local police force, because we want to investigate, and we will prosecute to make sure that anyone who's engaging in that is facing the law in Canada.

Now, when it comes to Hong Kong, obviously we have an interest in the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. We have more than 300,000 Canadians living in Hong Kong. As you know, they have a constitutional right to come back to Canada, but we announced additional measures through Minister Mendicino, the Minister of Immigration, of enhancements to our immigration measures to welcome very talented young people who may want to come to Canada and to also make sure that there would be a pathway to permanent residency in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Yip.

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Minister, thank you for joining us this evening.

I was drinking in your words and I didn't want to miss anything in your presentation. That is why I asked you to send us your text. As has just happened with your discussion with Ms. Yip, we missed a part of your presentation, which, I am sure, was absolutely fascinating and most interesting. That's why we want to be able to be apprised of its entire content.

You did not answer the question by our colleague Mr. Chong about the Government of Canada's new policy on relations with China. We are in the process of working on that issue ourselves and it is our intention to make recommendations to you in due course.

What added value do you see in the work of this committee, given that you are preparing this new policy independently of our work?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: In my opinion, the work of the committee adds a great deal of value.

In foreign policy, there is no partisanship. The idea is to inform Canadians and to work together to define the best approach possible. I greatly appreciate the work of the committee in this regard.

Foreign policy is always a work in progress. China is evolving and our policy must keep pace. The major principles are based on Canadian interests and values, on the principles of human rights, and on a good number of rules that we must make sure are followed.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: We really look forward to finding out about the new policy. I hope that we will be able to contribute to it in some way through our recommendations.

Ms. Yip alluded to the statement made on October 15 by China's ambassador, which was at the very least surprising, if not offensive.

Do you not believe that it would have been appropriate to summon the ambassador to the Department of Foreign Affairs in regard to such an inappropriate statement?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for the question, Mr. Bergeron.

That is exactly what we did.

That same evening, I said that his remarks were totally unacceptable and I asked official representatives to meet with the ambassador to inform him of Canada's exact position, and that was done.

● (1905)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Apparently, that did not cool his jets, so to speak, because he repeated exactly the same thing to us when he appeared before the committee. In any event, the message does not seem to have been understood.

I would now like to ask you a question about the fact that, today, the major Canadian telecommunications companies have announced that they really don't need Huawei to set up a 5G network on Canadian territory.

Does that statement make your life easier, given that, in the next 30 days, you have to make a decision about Huawei and about establishing a 5G network in Canada?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: No.

As you can imagine, national security is front and centre in our analysis and it will always be front and centre when we make decisions as important as those protecting communication systems throughout Canada. There have been a lot of consultations, but I am really relying on all the Canadian agencies that have provided the government with all the expertise we need. We will make a decision when the time is right.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Minister, on the precise issue of national security, the Canadian agencies are actually of the opinion that there is a danger, just like the four members of the Five Eyes group that have already made their decision.

What is the explanation for the Canadian government being so late in making its decision, compared to our allies?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Those listening to us will understand that, when it comes to making such an important decision about national security, it is important to have first done all the proper work, so that we can be assured that we have properly consulted our allies and properly assembled all the information we have obtained.

We know that the 5G network will make great things happen. The Government of Canada has a very important decision to make and people at home will understand that we have studied all the considerations that we had to study, that national security is of prime importance, and that we will make a decision when the time is right.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Actually, the time is right now, because Canadian agencies have formed their opinion on the issue and have already expressed it. The four other members of the Five Eyes group have also made their position clear. So we still are not able to understand why the Canadian government is so slow to act.

Be that as it may, let me continue on the issue of national security. You told us earlier about the new polar silk road. We have noticed the interest that a Chinese company, Shandong Gold Mining Corporation Ltd., is showing in the Hope Bay gold mine in western Nunavut.

Do you consider that this interest shown by the company in question and by Chinese authorities themselves is geostrategic or economic in nature?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left, Mr. Bergeron.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I did not understand the beginning of the question. I don't know whether the problem is at our end or at Mr. Bergeron's end. But I only heard the last five or 10 seconds of his question.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, with your permission, in light of that technical problem, I will repeat my question.

Mr. Minister, we were talking about national security. I was just saying that, earlier, you told us about the new polar silk road. We have noticed that a Chinese company, Shandong Gold Mining Corporation Ltd., is showing a lot of interest in the Hope Bay gold mine in western Nunavut.

As we know, and as we stated in last week's debate, Chinese companies are required to communicate information to the government of the People's Republic of China.

Do you see this Chinese company's interest in that mine in Canada's north as a commercial or a geostrategic interest?

The Chair: Please answer in 15 seconds, Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Okay, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the question, Mr. Bergeron.

We will have the opportunity to analyze that question. In terms of foreign investments, you know that, under the Investment Canada Act, there is a whole process to make sure that all aspects of national security are considered.

If there is an investment, we will be able to analyze the issue, together with all the agencies in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

Now we'll go to Mr. Harris for six minutes, please.

• (1910)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us tonight, and for your opening remarks, in which you said that the safety and security of Canadians at home and abroad was our highest priority. I have to agree with that.

I want to ask you about Canada's response to foreign interference in Canada by China. This happens to be the day on which the chair of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians appeared before the public safety committee.

Mr. McGuinty presented a report that essentially confirmed what we had heard at this committee from Canadians talking about intimidation, harassment and threats coming from Chinese government agents in Canada. They said they were getting nowhere, a runaround from pillar to post, going to the RCMP, going to local police, being sent to CSIS. CSIS sends them to the RCMP. You don't hear back from them. The report talks about a lack of coordination, about the RCMP resources being focused elsewhere. It talks about the need for reviewing and upgrading legislation to fill in the gaps. It talks about a failure to have proper resources directed to this effort.

This report was filed with the government on August 30, 2019, so the government had time to do something about it. From our debate last week in the House of Commons and the motion, does the government have a plan to actually fix those problems, focus on the proper response to foreign interference in Canada, particularly with respect to Chinese Canadians or other foreign nationals in Canada?

Is that something that's going to happen very soon, and will we be hearing about it?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As we would all agree, there's no higher duty than the safety and security of Canadians. We take any allegations of foreign interference in Canada by state and non-state actors very seriously. This is something you heard from the Minister of Public Safety. We already have measures in place, but that's also a dynamic situation that we're always looking at.

I'm happy the member mentioned a number of recommendations formulated by the committee. I will certainly be looking into that. This is an evolving situation. It's an evolving threat, and we need to provide an appropriate response to protect Canadians. Any Canadians who feel any threat, any form of intimidation, should make sure they file a report and contact their local police force to make sure this is properly recorded and investigated. Those who commit—

Mr. Jack Harris: If I may interrupt, Minister, the report states that it has only been recently identified by Public Safety Canada, and there has been a dedication of resources to the issue of foreign interference. We're late in the game. There seems to be a lack of commitment, and this has been known by the government for some time. It was a year or 15 months ago, so "we're working on it" is not good enough if people are being intimidated, pressured, and don't have anywhere to go. They are now complaining to our committee.

Is there a specific program you can announce within the 30-day limit? Obviously, you must have been working on it. Your government must have been working on it for the last 15 months.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I was very clear on that. This is an evolving situation. We have a number of measures in place. As you said, the agencies of Canada are all seized with it, whether it's CSIS or CSE. Everyone is very seized with this matter.

This is not unique to Canada, for Canadians watching at home. This is something we've seen with other Five Eyes partners. We're making sure we coordinate and co-operate, and certainly, the message that needs to be brought to Canadians is that we'll take all the appropriate measures. We are seized with this matter.

We will consider, obviously, the recommendations in the report, and we will make sure we put all the resources in place to protect the security and safety of Canadians.

Mr. Jack Harris: Minister, a lot of people have been concerned in recent months about the actions of the United States, and in particular the sense that the American government was about to engage in some sort of long-term cold war with China, with a significant confrontational approach including a long range of policy areas, trade sanctions, technology security and other sanctions as well. The language and approach were rather aggressive, and potentially could lead to a long-term standoff between China and the United States. There was concern that Canada would fall in line behind that.

What do you think of the situation unfolding in the U.S. now, with the change in administration? Do you think there will be a change in that approach, and have you had any discussions? I'm assuming your government will soon be discussing what the approach will be with the new administration.

● (1915)

The Chair: You have eight seconds, Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I'd like to be as good as you suggest, but I did not hear the question. I don't know if it was only my computer, but the computers in this room were frozen, so I only—

The Chair: I'm going to ask Mr. Harris to summarize the question, if he doesn't mind.

Mr. Jack Harris: Yes, thank you, Chair.

The question is this. The American approach, under the Trump administration, has been rather aggressive towards China, with the concerns about a new cold war, with uncertain consequences. Do you think that the new administration in the United States would have a different approach, and what do you think is going to happen as a result?

The Chair: Please give a very brief answer.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think the world has seen that there is a certain economic decoupling in technology between the United States and China. What I will say, Mr. Chair, is that we will continue to coordinate with our Five Eyes partners. We have done so since the beginning. As I said, China is one of the—

The Chair: Thank you. I think we'd better stop. We're well over Mr. Harris's time. I'm sorry, Mr. Harris.

Now we'll go on to the second round.

Mr. Chong, you have five minutes, please.

Hon. Michael Chong: Minister, in your opening statement, you mentioned that China's bank loans raise concerns about debt sustainability. Others have used the term “debt diplomacy”. Part of the debt instruments that China is using to project its power strategically through the Asia-Indo-Pacific is the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. It's an instrumental part of their strategy in the region. It's something that the Government of Canada has joined and contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to.

Will the government withdraw from this strategic initiative in light of the government's reset on China relations?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I think you'd have to go to the purpose of the bank. Canada is part of a number of multilateral financial institutions. The work of the institution that the member referred to is to help some of the poorest countries in the Asia-Pacific to build economic development and ensure that they will have the capabilities to overcome some of the challenges they have. It's both social and economic development. It's really about the work being done that is making a difference on the ground.

I'm sure the member will be with me to say that Canada should be part of alleviating some of these challenges that are faced by some of the poorest countries, because that's where the projects have been realized.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, just a week ago, China signed a blockbuster trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, with 14 other countries. This is a strategic challenge to the trans-Pacific partnership to which Canada is a party. Seeing that the government is coming forward with a new framework on China, and seeing that there are significant Canadian resources in trade offices and trade commissioners in China, will the Canadian government shift its resources away from our missions in China to other Canadian missions in countries like Japan, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand—all members of the trans-Pacific partnership—in order to broaden and deepen trade ties with those countries, as opposed to China?

● (1920)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: That's a very good point. I'd like to thank you, Mr. Chong, for that.

I think that Canada's signing of the CPTPP will go down in history as one of the most strategic moves that Canada has made, because we're the second-largest economy now in that bloc of countries that wants to trade on the basis of values and principles and strengthen the international base order.

To your question, I think what we need to do now is to complement our missions, because we want to take advantage.... We know that the economic growth is in the east. I think the CPTPP gives us an opportunity to do that. I think we need to diversify also within China, and outside China continue the trade that is going on. I think the CPTPP is providing an instrument that is proving very useful for Canadian small and medium-sized businesses across the country.

Hon. Michael Chong: Minister, Germany recently labelled China as a strategic rival. Will your new framework do the same?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think we have to distinguish a number of things. There will be areas where we'll need to challenge China, and I think you would agree with that, for example, when it comes to human rights. There will be areas where we will compete, based on values and principles and the model of governance we see. As well, there will probably be areas where we'll need to co-operate if we want to accelerate, for example, the fight against climate change.

It's more a framework in which we'll have to distinguish in our bilateral relationship the types of tools we'll need to use in order to advance Canadian interests, values and principles.

Hon. Michael Chong: Minister, what do you think of establishing a foreign agent registry that would require former politicians and former bureaucrats to register if they're working for a designated foreign state or an entity controlled by a designated foreign state?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, that would be something that the committee can study. I would welcome the input of the committee if you want to do a study on that.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

Minister, as a final quick question for my round here, do you believe China's rise is inevitable? The reason I ask is that there was a sense of inevitability in your opening remarks about the rise of China.

Could I have a very brief answer, please?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think we need to look at China with eyes wide open. What I stated in my opening statement is just facts, the numbers, the population and the economic numbers that come with China.

That's just a statement of facts. What we need to see is what liberal democracies are going to do now in the face of one of the biggest geopolitical issues of our time.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Ms. Zann for five minutes, please.

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Minister, it's a pleasure to see you.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Likewise.

Ms. Lenore Zann: You're doing a great job. Thank you so much.

On a personal level, thank you for helping get my constituents back home, including my 80-year-old parents from Spain. We really appreciated all the work your staff and your team did on that.

Thank you.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I will pass that compliment on to Deputy Minister Morgan. She has been instrumental with all our consular officials. I was just there to help, but I think all of us should be really proud. This was the largest repatriation in peacetime in Canada, but they did it. They did an amazing job.

Ms. Lenore Zann: It was amazing. Mr. Oliphant was very helpful and I want to thank him as well.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Definitely. He probably got even more calls.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Minister, getting to the topic at hand, this year, 2020, marks 50 years since Canada and the People's Republic of China established official diplomatic relations.

How has Canada's relationship with China evolved since 1970, and what is your vision for a future bilateral relationship based on trust, mutual respect and a plan to work together with better cultural and diplomatic ties and exchanges and a clear plan to fight our mutual enemy, climate change, and create world peace? How do you propose we can get there?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I would have a lot to say, Mr. Chair. I don't know how much time I have.

Certainly, I don't think you need to go back to the 1970s. As I was saying, and I think all members would recognize, the China of 2016 is not the China of 2020. The China of 2018 is not the China of 2020, because in between we have had, obviously, the arbitrary

detention of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor and the arbitrary sentencing of Mr. Schellenberg. We have had the case of the Uighurs, which came to the forefront of the international community. We have also had, obviously, the imposition of the national security law in Hong Kong, which puts in question the "one country, two systems" policy and the freedom and liberties that have been enjoyed. There's been a lot happening.

I think the role of this committee, and certainly my role, is to also look at China in the short, medium and long term. I think when you're talking about international relations, you have to think certainly about the long term. This year marks 50 years, as you mentioned. It's a sober moment, because when you have two Canadians who have been arbitrarily detained for close to two years, the hearts and minds of Canadians are with them and their families, who have been struggling all that time.

At the same time, we need to think as well about how we're going to engage with a country like China. What I was trying to say at the beginning was that this challenge, to go back to Mr. Chong's question, is not unique to Canada. I must say that the question of how we're going to do that is a topic we discuss at every meeting we have with those who are like-minded.

You mentioned climate change. We mentioned a number of areas in which we're going to either challenge, coexist or co-operate, and that is really the work that we need to do now. Many have said that the best way to address this geopolitical issue of our time is to work with those who are like-minded. That's what you've seen Canada doing. You've seen that many of our statements have been with our allies in Europe, the United States, the U.K., Australia, or New Zealand, because one thing that Canadians at home need to really get is that this is not unique to Canada.

I've often said that Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor are not only two Canadians; they're two citizens of a liberal democracy. That's why this is not a bilateral issue but a multilateral issue. Are we going to stand up for freedom and liberty and defend human rights together? That's really what we're talking about, and that's why I quoted some numbers. Obviously these numbers tell a story, but we need to act together to see how we're going to be able, as liberal democracies, to face some of these issues together.

• (1925)

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you, Minister.

I know that when we look at most goods these days, for the last 10 years or more, we've seen that pretty much everything is made in China. I have seen interviews with Chinese diplomats in which they have said to their American counterparts who are angry about this, "Listen, you taught us how to do it. You taught us how to take capitalism and spin it on its head and use it to our own benefit."

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zann. I'm sorry.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Can I just say a word, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: We're going to have to get you to hold that.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Say a word, please.

The Chair: I'm sure there will be an opportunity. I think we can get this on track again here and keep within the times that are allocated.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Minister, in your opening statement, you mentioned the government's announcement of new provisions aimed at simplifying the lives of those defending freedom in Hong Kong who may want to enter Canada. We had the opportunity to discuss the matter with the Minister of Immigration last week. I think we will probably have to go further than what has been announced at the moment, but it is already a positive step forward.

If a person takes part in a pro-democracy demonstration and is then, under the National Security Law, is accused of any kind of crime—sedition, for example—that should not be held against them even though there is an equivalent provision in Canadian criminal law. It should not be used as an argument to deny that person entry to Canada.

Did I understand correctly?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: That is my understanding too, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Let me take the issue further.

On the one hand, if a pro-democracy demonstrator is accused of sedition for participating in such an event, we cannot hold that charge against them to prevent them from entering Canada.

On the other hand, a democratically elected president whose only crime is to have organized a consultation on democracy in his country is accused of sedition and is refused entry to Canada.

Why do we hold that same charge against him?

How are we supposed to understand this double standard that we have adopted towards pro-democracy demonstrators in Hong Kong and the former Catalan president, Mr. Puigdemont?

• (1930)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I am sorry, Mr. Chair, but I did not understand the question. We only heard the first five seconds of Mr. Bergeron's comment.

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, I will let you have some more time, so that you can start again. I hope things will work.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I will try to be brief, because I am being asked to be.

Why is there a double standard with the pro-democracy demonstrators in Hong Kong and President Puigdemont of Catalunya, although his only crime was to organize a consultation on democracy, for which he was accused of sedition?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: You'll understand that it is not appropriate for me, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, to comment on individual cases when I am appearing before this committee.

In the case of Hong Kong, Mr. Bergeron, your understanding is correct. I feel that it also corresponds to our values and to the system we have established for welcoming refugees. The additional measures we have announced are welcome.

With Hong Kong, the situation is very clear. Canada certainly wants to be welcoming to young immigrants who want to come here. We took those measures in consultation with our partners in the Five Eyes group, and they correspond to those in the refugee system. As you already know, Mr. Bergeron, Canada's system of welcoming refugees to our territory is to be envied.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: No, none at all.

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

Then we'll go on to the second hour, if that's all right, because we'll be at the one-hour point.

Now we'll go to Mr. Harris for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you mention that you're working with allies and partners, and I agree with that approach. Obviously, we can't do it alone because we're not influential or big enough to do that without repercussions.

I want to know this. We always hear the same names, you know: New Zealand, Australia, the Five Eyes. We had 11 countries that spoke out publicly about Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig. Where is the progress that we hope to see, and how are we going to be successful in convincing China that it's in its best interests to change its ways on human rights, on Hong Kong and on other issues that are extremely important to Canada and to our future?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you. That's a very important question, Mr. Chair.

I was really encouraged last October when 38 countries came together at the UN third committee to call out for the respect of human rights. This was a joint statement that was with respect to Hong Kong and Xinjiang, and I think that's the type of example of the international community coming together.

I share your sense, Mr. Harris, with respect to.... I have been trying since the first day in office to broaden the coalition, to work not only with the United Kingdom and the Five Eyes. We've tried, and we have succeeded on a number of occasions.

I think the number of G7 statements you've seen on human rights is probably a record during the time we've been there, but I'm always trying to see how we can have a broader coalition. Other countries.... I'm talking to the EU countries. I'm talking to some other countries in Asia-Pacific that can add their voices to the work that we're doing to defend human rights, and also speak up on the issues about Hong Kong, Xinjiang or Tibet, for example.

Mr. Jack Harris: Speaking up, though.... I think everyone understands the expressions of concern that are being made throughout various forums, but how do we get past that to seeing actual change?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think with actions. Statements are good, but actions are even better.

• (1935)

Mr. Jack Harris: Yes, that's exactly my point.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: That's why, when I met with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, we talked about some measures that she could be taking. For example, when you talk about the alarming reports coming out of Xinjiang and that we called for an end to repression, the action that needs to be taken is, obviously, to go there and be able to assess it. That's what we're calling for. This is action.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Harris.

We're now about an hour and three minutes into the meeting, so I think we should go to the second-hour list.

I just want to check with Mr. Chong. I have Mr. Williamson leading off the second hour, but he....

Are you going to lead off, Mr. Chong?

Hon. Michael Chong: Sure.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chong, you have six minutes.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I will reset the time here.

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

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I'm wondering. We're halfway through the meeting. I don't want to miss anything, as I'm sure no one else does. I have to go to the bathroom and wouldn't mind if we could suspend for two or three minutes, not longer. I may not be the only older gentleman.

The Chair: How about if we add five minutes to the end of the meeting and plan to end at around 8:40?

We can take that three- or four-minute break and people can use the washroom. Is that all right?

Mr. Robert Oliphant: All right. Very good.

The Chair: Let's do that. Thank you.

The meeting is suspended briefly.

• (1935)

(Pause)

• (1940)

The Chair: This meeting will come back to order.

I should say that I hope Mr. Harris doesn't have my head for delaying our finish beyond 10 o'clock. I know that he's a good Newfoundlander and very hearty and can handle it.

I think we're going to Mr. Chong now, for six minutes.

Mr. Chong, go ahead, please.

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

Minister, the government has implicitly acknowledged that its China policy isn't working. I think there is an implicit acknowledgement in that the government changed its rhetoric on China beginning in October of this autumn, and it has acknowledged it in its decision to come forward with a new framework on China. In that context, will there be a formal release of this new framework before December 21?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I would disagree with the premise. I mean, every country...or let me say that our like-minded countries all have foreign policies that are evolving. The reason is that China is evolving. You just need to go a couple of months back, or a couple of years, and as I said, the China of 2020 is not the China of 2018. So the like-minded colleagues around the world, Mr. Chong, all think that you need an evolving policy when it comes to China, and you need to work with the international community.

That's exactly what we've been doing, and that's what we're going to continue to do.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. Will this new framework be formally released?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Well, I have already explained on many occasions and I will continue to explain to Canadians at every opportunity the principles. I've outlined a number of them tonight, and I will continue to do so.

Hon. Michael Chong: Are you indicating, Minister, that the framework has been completed and what you're telling us tonight is part of the new framework?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: That's your inference. What I'm saying is that the policy when it comes.... But, Mr. Chong, what I'm saying is not unique to Canada. Just look at our European partners.

Hon. Michael Chong: No, no, I understand that.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Everyone is evolving alike. For example, the national security law in Hong Kong is something that happened, so Canada, like-minded, we're all evolving in light of that. We want to work together. We want to coordinate together. I think that's in the interests of Canada.

Hon. Michael Chong: I understand that, Minister. Many of us are waiting with bated breath for this new framework, so we're wondering whether or not it's going to be formally released, but if you're not prepared to answer that, I respect that.

Minister, as you know, China imposed a draconian new national security law in Hong Kong in violation of an international treaty, the 1984 joint declaration, and it recently turfed four duly elected legislators from the legislative council of Hong Kong. As a result, the United States has imposed Magnitsky-type sanctions on the officials responsible, and the United Kingdom has announced it's considering the imposition of those sanctions.

On July 8, you indicated in the House of Commons that Magnitsky sanctions against Chinese officials responsible for this draconian new national security law were on the table for consideration. The next day, a government source—we don't know who, but a government source—told Reuters that was off the table. Which of the two positions is it? Are Magnitsky sanctions still under consideration or not?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I would say to Mr. Chong that we are always considering various issues with our allies.

I think, as you said, Mr. Chong, the smart way to impose sanctions is to go with a core group of countries to have impact. Therefore, that's the principle that I'm applying.

What I said, and what I think you're referring to, is that obviously when we're working with colleagues, allies and the Five Eyes, we're looking at a number of measures. You've seen, for example, on immigration, that our immigration measures are complementary with the United Kingdom. That's the smart way to approach when it comes to issues like, for example, the national security law in Hong Kong—

Hon. Michael Chong: I appreciate that.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: —so we will continue to consult, and we will obviously, to go back to your earlier point—

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

I take from that that sanctions are still possibly on the table.

The last question I'd like to ask you tonight goes back to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. There's something somewhat contradictory, at least to me, in your opening remarks on the government's continued participation.

In your opening remarks, you said, “China has signed...agreements with 138 countries to build infrastructure that will connect it to developing countries. China's banks have already provided loans worth over \$461 billion, raising many concerns over debt sustainability, transparency and international standards on labour and the environment.”

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is an integral part of the belt and road initiative, and so it seems to me contradictory, on the one hand, to be calling out China for its debt diplomacy and, on the other hand, to be continuing Canada's participation in that development bank. Could you maybe tell us how that's consistent?

• (1945)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Just for the record, I missed part of your question, Mr. Chong, and I do apologize. I just got the end, but I won't ask you to repeat because I know time is precious.

What I was stating before in my opening remarks were facts. What I referred to—the number of countries that you mentioned on infrastructure—was in the context of the belt and road initiative.

When it comes to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, what I was saying is that the purpose of that bank is to help the poorest countries in Asia-Pacific and for Canada to be part of that to alleviate social and economic hardship that people are living through. That's why Canada is part of that.

I think those are two distinct topics, I would say, and certainly I think Canadians would understand that Canada has a role to play when it comes to helping the poorest countries in Asia-Pacific.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chong.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have six minutes, please.

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

Minister, thank you for being here tonight.

If I understand you correctly, you sketched out a foreign policy approach to China, and you called it a smart policy approach. That would involve Canada coalescing or continuing to coalesce with like-minded allies on the basis of shared values. It would also involve, if I understood you correctly, Canada accepting China as it is, not as we wish it to be. If that's a fair interpretation, please let me know. If it's not, also please let me know.

My question to you is this: To what extent is Canada involved in leading that effort among like-minded countries to bring countries together?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Fragiskatos, I think your comment is fair in the sense that what I was trying to do at the beginning of my remarks, and I think Mr. Chong alluded to that, was just to state facts. Those are facts that people can find in the public domain. They are facts with respect to China.

When it comes to how you respond to some of these challenges that I've outlined when it comes to the defence of human rights.... I think a number of colleagues have talked about a number of other issues with respect to debt and with respect to the belt and road initiative and other initiatives.

What I've been saying all along, and for Canadians who are watching, the takeaway is that what we need to do is for liberal democracies and a group of countries to organize together to be able to face some of these challenges together, because we understand that these challenges are bigger and they cannot be dealt with on a bilateral basis. They have to be dealt with on a multilateral level.

I think Mr. Chong was mentioning Hong Kong. You've seen Canada was the first country in the world—not in the Five Eyes, but in the world—to suspend the extradition treaty. I wish colleagues had the same opportunities to talk to my counterparts in the world. Many calls I received said, “That's a very good idea; we're going to do it as well.”

This is what allies do together. We work together, and we coordinate together. We did that on the immigration measure. We're doing that when it comes to the human rights issue that I'm sure is at the forefront of people's minds when it comes to the Uighurs and Hong Kong.

I think the policy response is to work together, and Canada has been at the centre of these discussions to make sure that we can face some of these challenges together.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

For the 300,000 Canadians in Hong Kong, do you have a message for those folks? Does Canada have an evacuation plan?

We've been told there's a committee and that one has been worked on, but I wanted to ask you specifically as minister what the status of that plan might be, seeing as Hong Kong remains tremendously unstable and could require evacuation.

● (1950)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Obviously, they're welcome to come back home if they want. We're talking about Canadian citizens who have a constitutional right to come back to Canada. Therefore, I think it is appropriate and prudent for our mission to prepare a number of contingency plans. That's why we have been at the forefront of the response with the United Kingdom and other allies. We have a vested interest in the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. We all know that Hong Kong has become a global trading centre and a global financial centre. This was underpinned because people enjoy great freedom and liberties.

What we're saying to China—not only Canada, but also a number of other countries—is that we're concerned. We're concerned that the imposition of national security and the way it was done is now eroding the very fundamental principles that have made Hong Kong what it is today. We will continue to play an active role when it comes to Hong Kong.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

I have one last question.

Some have suggested—and I think that there's a great deal of fairness to this suggestion—that Canada has been caught between a Trump administration that has a particular approach to China and a Chinese regime that has a particular approach to the United States. With the incoming Biden administration, do you see the potential opening of a new path, in terms of U.S.-China relations, that could ease pressures on the Canada-China relationship, certainly from the Canadian perspective?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Obviously, my job is to defend Canadian interests and to defend our interests at every opportunity.

Certainly, we will be engaging as we've done with the current administration. Let's be clear: We've been engaging with them through the Five Eyes partnership on a number of initiatives, and I'm sure we will continue to do so.

As Mr. Harris said before, what we need to do is to broaden the core group of countries that are going to speak up on issues. Certainly, Canada will continue to engage when it comes to issues regarding China.

As I said, in some places we'll challenge, and in other places I think it would be in our best interest to co-operate. I can think of climate change, where the easier path is, obviously, to engage China. Certainly, we will be discussing this with our partners and colleagues. I think that's the smart way to do foreign policy when it comes to facing some of these challenges with China.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Minister, thank you once again for your generosity, for the time you are giving us and for the fact that you are staying with us until the end of our meeting today. We are very grateful to you.

As you know, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development agreed, after an in-depth study, that the treatment of the Uighurs, specifically, is, in practice, a genocide. Similarly, in the United States, elected officials in both parties have come to basically the same conclusion about the Uighurs, the Kazakhs, the Kyrgyz, and other Muslim minorities, to say nothing of the Falun Gong practitioners.

The American president-elect, Joe Biden, recently said this:

The most effective way to meet that challenge is to build a united front of U.S. allies and partners to confront China's abusive behaviours and human rights violations.

Earlier, you spoke about the necessity for Canada and the Western democracies—as we can call them—to present a common front so as not to be isolated from each other.

In that context, where are we in building that common front of Western democracies to face up to the People's Republic of China?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for asking that timely question, Mr. Bergeron.

This is a subject that always comes up whenever I am talking with my colleagues in the liberal democracies around the world, particularly those in Europe. We wonder how we can best organize ourselves and work together to address those challenges. A number of countries, including Canada, share the same values and the same principles and they are concerned by the same questions that you raised. We are certainly examining what we can do in the light of the new American administration.

To deal with those violations of human rights, whether it's about the Uighurs, about Tibet or about Hong Kong, the smart response is to work together, meaning that the liberal democracies must organize themselves to form a common front against those abuses. The issues are not bilateral, they are multilateral.

For example, when I am asked whether I have done anything regarding the Uighurs, my answer is yes. I have spoken to the representative of the United Nations Human Rights Committee, who can ask to have access to the territory to report to the international community what she has observed. The statement signed by 38 countries at the third meeting of the United Nations committee in New York is also encouraging. In a common statement, representatives from 38 countries expressed their concern, in quite strong terms, about the situation in Hong Kong and about the Uighurs.

That shows exactly what you have just said, Mr. Bergeron, that the international community or, at any rate, the community of liberal democracies, shares the same values and principles as Canada and they want to stand together to tackle those issues.

● (1955)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: It would be interesting to see if the United Nations Human Rights Committee representative will be authorized to go to China, to Xinjiang for example, to see what's going on there. All the more so since a number of countries are on the committee, and some are not particularly exemplary in that respect.

During your conversation with Mr. Harris, you mentioned that a number of countries have come out in favour of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. Has Canada done the same for other countries that have found themselves in a similar situation to date?

I'm thinking of Sweden, for instance, which saw one of its nationals arbitrarily detained by the Chinese authorities. Did Canada speak out in that particular case?

If we are to expect others to speak out when our fellow citizens are being arbitrarily detained, I imagine we must do the same in cases involving our allies.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: You are absolutely right, Mr. Bergeron. However, I'm not at liberty to talk about that particular case.

Canada plays a leading role in the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. We will have more to say about the working group in the near future. In my view, it's certainly a key issue.

As you say, here too, the general desire to do better is there. We need to better structure and organize ourselves. You will be pleased to know that Canada is considering an initiative to do just that.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Minister, once again, you're making our mouths water when you say "in the near future". Are you able to give us more details this time?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: We're working on it, because Canada is not the only one concerned about the arbitrary detention issue. That's why we made Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor's case a multilateral issue, although some might have preferred that it be bilateral. That's how we were able to bring their case to the fore.

The joint statement of the 21st EU-China Summit even mentions the two Canadians' case, and for good reason. It goes to show the extent to which Canada succeeded in showing that their case goes beyond Canada's borders and must be of interest to the entire world.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Time flies when you're in good company.

[English]

The Chair: Now we go to Mr. Harris for six minutes, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, you alluded to the human rights situations involving other countries. We do know that China is very active at the United Nations in undermining—with countries that are members of the United Nations—our notion and our understanding of the rule of law and our understanding of human rights in that context, making it very difficult for us to work at gaining other partners.

I want to know what steps or measures Canada is taking to do something about that. Is there a coordinated response being planned or under active consideration at the United Nations to deal with that issue, country by country if necessary, and to change that view? We know that they have a lot of influence there in the United Nations. Washington, of late, has been very reluctant to even support such an institution.

● (2000)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think we should all be proud, as parliamentarians, that Ambassador Rae has been doing that. I think some of you would have seen his comments defending our values and our governance model, because we've seen during the pandemic in many instances, not just with respect to that country, some other authoritarian regimes that have tried to undermine the democratic system.

Therefore, when I said that we will compete, I think this is a place where.... And I want to salute and to thank Ambassador Rae for the work he is doing on behalf of all Canadians. We have seen him standing up, explaining that the governance model that we defend and the values [Technical difficulty—Editor].

The Chair: We heard him say “the governance model that we defend and the values”. That’s where it stopped.

When we get the minister back here, when he is unfrozen, we’ll tell him that.

Minister, we heard you say “the governance model that we defend and the values” and then you froze. Could you go on from there, if you don’t mind?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Okay. I’ll try to be as eloquent as I was trying to be in the first place.

I was just saying that we have seen Ambassador Rae defending, at the United Nations in New York, the governance and the values and principles that are dear to Canadians and to Canada, and human rights, which are a core principle.

When I say that we will be competing, I think that’s a good example, and I think we should all be thankful to Ambassador Rae, who is someone who is standing up and speaking up in defence of our governance model at the United Nations.

Mr. Jack Harris: Minister, recently the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman stressed that the Sino-British declaration was really a dead letter, that it ceased after the handover and that they have no role to play in the future of Hong Kong. That seems to be their view, and we are at an impasse with respect to that and with the national security law and the standoff that’s occurring there.

Is it the case that the “one country, two systems” is also a dead letter, and is there any hope for that to be maintained or changed? What measures must be taken by countries such as Canada and our friends to ensure that this could happen?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: First, with respect to the Sino-British declaration, I think this is part of an international agreement that has been registered with the United Nations. When we’re calling—and you’ve seen the G7 in our statement—we refer to the Sino-British declaration in saying that’s part of the international legal obligations that China needs to abide by.

I think you’ve seen me, Mr. Harris, on a number of occasions expressing concerns when it comes to Hong Kong. First of all, we have a vested interest. We have 300,000 Canadians who are still living in Hong Kong.

Also, what I was saying and what we have been saying with the Five Eyes, with the United Kingdom, is that we are concerned that the imposition of a national security law is undermining one of the pillars that have made Hong Kong what it is today, a vibrant city, a global hub for finance and trade. Once you start eroding freedom and liberties, you’re eroding one of the key pillars.

Yes, I am concerned about the future of the concept of “one country, two systems” because we’ve seen a number of erosions of that principle. That’s what the international community has been saying to our Chinese counterpart.

Mr. Jack Harris: How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have one minute and 30 seconds.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

The issue, then, becomes, what do we do next? You say you’re building relationships with other countries and that they are interested in this. We have talk of Magnitsky sanctions; we have recommendations from our subcommittee on human rights, and our committee is going to make some recommendations, which we don’t know yet.

The next step has to be some sort of action that is meaningful to China. I am wondering when your work with other countries is going to come to that, or are we just going to be expressing concern and doing things like that? Will that have any impact on China if we’re not going to take action?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think we have taken action, Mr. Harris. The first is that we suspended the extradition treaty. We suspended the export of sensitive equipment. We updated our travel advisory. We issued a number of immigration measures, just like the United Kingdom and Australia, and the United States has been taking other measures.

I think you’ve seen, as the international community and as the Five Eyes in particular, that we have taken a number of actions. We will continue to consult, because—again, to your question, Mr. Chong—China is evolving, so our foreign policy needs to evolve in light of the circumstances that we are presented with.

I think the answer, and the key takeaway for Canadians watching at home tonight, is that the smart way to deal with these issues is to work alongside the international community.

• (2005)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris, and thank you, Minister.

Now we’ll go on to the second round.

I have Mr. Williamson. Is that correct?

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, it’s good to see you this evening. Thank you for joining us.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you, sir.

Mr. John Williamson: Are you worried that China doesn’t take your government seriously? It’s been two years now that the two Michaels have been imprisoned. Last October, the Canada China Business Council celebrated the 50th anniversary of relations between our two countries by calling on the government not to release the Canadians who were detained, but to release Meng Wanzhou.

What keeps you up at night, or why are you convinced that your approach to China is correct?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: First of all, to speak your question, yes, I do think that the Chinese authorities take us seriously, Mr. Williamson. I have had a number of meetings with my Chinese counterpart. If you looked at the length of time I’ve been minister and the number of times I’ve had interactions with my Chinese counterpart, you would draw the conclusion that we are taken seriously. My last meeting with my Chinese counterpart was two hours, in Rome. By international standards, that’s a long meeting.

I can assure you, we had a number of topics to discuss about human rights, but obviously my top priority is to bring Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor home, to seek clemency for Mr. Schellenberg, to stand up for Canadian interests and values, to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Mr. John Williamson: Why are you reluctant, then...?

Oh, I think we're frozen here, Chairman. Can you just pause the clock until we get the minister back?

The Chair: Minister, we were frozen there for a moment.

Mr. Williamson was about to ask another question, so I'll let him continue.

Mr. John Williamson: Why are you reluctant even on half-measures? You dismissed outright or you fobbed off Mr. Chong's question about a foreign agent registry act. Why the reluctance to bring in an act of that type or, for example, a law disallowing Canadian companies' sourcing of products in Xinjiang? Even these measures, which I think would have broad support, you seem to resist.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I don't think Canadians watching, Mr. Williamson, would at all see me resisting much tonight. What I'm saying is that I'm willing to work with this committee. I've said that all along. I think you do important work. If Mr. Chong and the committee want to do a study on the registry, we will certainly be taking a look at that.

We have taken decisive measures. When I suspended the extradition treaty between Canada and Hong Kong—the first country in the world to do so—I think by international standards people would say that's pretty decisive.

Mr. John Williamson: It has not produced results, though. It's a lot of meetings, a lot of talk.

Let me ask you about your colleague John McKay, who in the House of Commons the other day pointed out that there are 163 accredited diplomats in Canada from the People's Republic of China. The United States, by contrast, has 146, and the United Kingdom has 22.

Given China's course of diplomacy—what even some Chinese embassy officials call “wolf warrior diplomacy”—does this high number of Chinese diplomatic officials in Canada and the work they are doing on behalf of their country concern you?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: What I'm concerned about—and I think I'm not alone, Mr. Williamson; I think you and members of this committee are too—is foreign interference by state and non-state actors. That's why I've said that we are taking a number of measures and are always looking at measures. We are consulting with the Five Eyes. We're well aware of this.

I trust our intelligence agencies in Canada to make sure they take all the necessary steps to protect the safety and security of Canadians. I've also invited Canadians to report to their local police authorities any acts of intimidation so they can be properly investigated and prosecuted.

Mr. John Williamson: Except that the problem we learned about from immigration officials last week is that, short of a criminal conviction, individuals who hold visas can't actually be removed.... I'll come back to that later.

As you know, Minister, Canadians expect their members of Parliament and ministers of the Crown to uphold the highest standards of ethics and accountability while in office. It is in that context that I ask these questions.

It has come to my attention that you own shares—pardon me, you owned shares—of Immervision, which were held in a blind trust. Immervision produces and licenses technology used in cameras produced by Hikvision, which reports have said is supplying surveillance equipment used by China's state authorities in monitoring Uighurs in detention camps in Xinjiang, and in other gross human rights violations.

It has also come to our attention that these shares were sold. Did you direct anyone or participate in any discussion concerning the sale of these shares?

• (2010)

The Chair: Let's have a brief answer, please.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I do not own shares in that company.

Mr. John Williamson: But you did.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I said I do not own shares and the public record will state it. The record is clear, Mr. Chair. I'm surprised at this allegation coming from a member like you, Mr. Williamson. The record speaks for itself. I do not own shares, and I am not aware of the allegations that you are making.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Mr. Dubourg for five minutes.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, Mr. Minister.

Hello to everyone accompanying you as well.

First of all, I would like to join my colleagues in extending many thanks to you. Since the beginning of 2020, when first we had the situation in Iran due to the plane crash, which was immediately followed by the COVID-19 crisis and you had to take all the steps needed to bring people back from abroad and get the people on cruise ships home, it's safe to say you have been very busy. I'd like to sincerely thank you and your entire team.

Here is the question I'd like to ask you: you have worked with the Minister of Immigration, Mr. Mendicino. He appeared before us. He presented a certain number of measures, with respect to Hong Kong's workers and graduates, for instance, and we'd like to encourage them to immigrate so that they can help support our economy. He talked about prioritizing certain immigration pathways for families, and also about a number of measures to improve protections in our refugee claim system. We have a strong immigration system.

Do you know how China reacted to Mr. Mendicino's announcement?

Does China consider these measures to be sanctions on our part?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: First of all, thank you for your kind words about our public servants, who did all the work. I am thinking of all those who spent long hours bringing home Canadians in distress. I believe this will go down in the history of the Department of Foreign Affairs as a great moment when we all came together to assist Canadians in distress.

To answer your question, I can only speak from Canada's perspective. We're taking the necessary steps to handle the situations we're facing. I feel the immigration measures we announced are complementary to other measures announced by the United Kingdom and Australia. It was the right thing to do.

We have also introduced very specific measures for students. You saw that we have several measures to attract human capital that can come and contribute to the prosperity of Canadian society.

As you said, our refugee protection system is very strong. We have many measures in place to manage the situation, and we will continue to make decisions in the best interests of Canadians.

As I said, in the case of Hong Kong, with an estimated 300,000 Canadians currently living there, we obviously have a vested interest in taking appropriate measures to ensure their stability and prosperity. We also want to provide a gateway for those who would like to come here, and that's what Minister Mendicino announced last week.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you.

I have another question. You talked about the bilateral situation with China, which is complex, and I know there are several issues. You talked earlier about the two Michaels and said that bringing them home was a priority for you.

We're talking about trade interests, the safety of diplomats and staff who are there, the COVID-19 situation, the 300,000 Canadians who are there, and also the trade or climate issue.

Of all those issues, what's really keeping you up at night, Mr. Minister?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I only heard the end of the question. I will try to answer as best I can from what I could understand.

First, Mr. Dubourg, I'd like to say that I'm deeply concerned about bringing Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor home. That is the top priority. It's not just mine and the Government of Canada's

priority, it's the priority of all parliamentarians, because this arbitrary detention is shocking to all Canadians.

I want to make sure that Canada is there on the world stage to stand up for Canadian values and principles, such as the human rights we have heard so much about tonight. I'm also concerned that we need to take appropriate action on all national security matters.

We have a lot of work to do, and we see that what's happening in Canada is what we are observing in many liberal democracies. The geostrategic issue, how to deal with China on certain issues, has become a global geostrategic issue. That's why we need to work with other countries. On climate change, for instance.

● (2015)

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

Thank you, Mr. Minister and Mr. Dubourg.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Minister, the well-deserved praise you are receiving from your supporters must be a comfort to you in terms of what has been done in recent months with respect to the repatriation of Canadian citizens stranded abroad because of the pandemic.

That said, we were talking earlier about bilateral versus multilateral relationships. Until now, the People's Republic of China has been directly going after states. It does so state by state, isolating them from each other. This allows it to have a considerable effect on each of these states in isolation.

At the same time, the People's Republic of China is weaving a web around the world and increasing its influence in international organizations, presumably to be able to counter the multilateral effect. We will have to think about what needs to be done to enable us to play a useful role or even to counter the influence of the People's Republic of China.

The Tibetan Administration representative, a position equivalent to that of the president, told us that the failure of the 17-Point Agreement foreshadowed the failure of the notion of "one country, two systems" which itself foreshadows what is likely to happen in Taiwan.

What lesson do you draw from the logic that the Tibetan Administration representative presented to us?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: First, let me pass the kind words addressed to me in terms of repatriation on to those who did the work, the consular officials, who really deserve this praise.

I was not present during the testimony in question, so I am going to answer your question in a more general way. We need to engage and face China with our eyes wide open, and I think that is sort of in line with your comment.

In other words, we are asking China to live up to its international commitments. That is what we have done in consular matters and that is what we are doing, for example, in the case of the Uighurs and Tibet. I am pleased to tell you that our Ambassador Dominic Barton was able to visit Tibet from October 26 to 30. We will certainly continue to work with the international community on Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong.

Mr. Bergeron, you said and you fully understand that this is not a bilateral issue, it is a multilateral issue. For instance, you mentioned China's presence in a number of international organizations. We are discussing it with some of our colleagues from around the world. We are trying to find ways to promote certain candidates for key positions in international organizations.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, you've talked several times about the very talented young people for whom the immigration changes have been made available to come to Canada to go to university, to study here, and perhaps have a path to citizenship.

This has been criticized as being inadequate and perhaps elitist, to allow only post-secondary students who have the money to come and be a part of this, while people are calling for a lifeboat for individuals in Hong Kong who may be subject to persecution by the new security laws.

What measures are available there for them? The government has the means to arrange for people to leave China if they wish to pursue that. What is going to be done to help them as well?

• (2020)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Harris, to those who say that, I would say that our measures are complementary to other measures that were adopted. When we came up with our body of measures on immigration, as you know, the Five Eyes had a number of measures put in place. I would say they are complementary. Among the Five Eyes, we said we needed to be complementary because, again, the response with respect to Hong Kong was that we already have a very robust asylum regime in Canada, one that makes—

Mr. Jack Harris: But you have to get here to participate in that. I understand that. If you're here, you can make your application, but getting here is the issue. That was done before with China, and it could be done now, with ways of getting special visas so people can actually leave the country.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As you know, people who have a Hong Kong passport can travel to Canada. They have to file the eTA to come to Canada.

The measures that we announced last week were in addition to the body of measures that we already have to welcome people to our shore. As I said, Mr. Harris, they work complementary to other measures. I think they were pretty smart. We talked with our allies around the world and we said we should make sure we have a set of measures collectively that would deal with the issue that we're facing.

That's the co-operation and collaboration that I think many members are suggesting when it comes to dealing internationally. It's to work with our closest allies. That's what we did.

Mr. Jack Harris: Where's the other half of that complement for the young people I'm talking about?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Harris.

We'll now go on to Mr. Paul-Hus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul-Hus, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, Mr. Minister.

I agree with most of the remarks you made in your opening statement that the China of 2020 is not the China of 2015 or 2018 and that we have to keep our eyes open.

However, Mr. Minister, I must tell you that I am disappointed in your approach to the position of the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, Erin O'Toole, on China. I just want to point out that, for millions of Canadians, the position of the Liberal leader, the current Prime Minister is very distasteful.

I want to talk about the Chinese company Nuctech. As you know full well, the company is largely owned by the Communist Party of China, with whom the Government of Canada has an agreement. Contracts were awarded by the Canada Border Services Agency not even a year ago. Your department was also involved in developing an agreement with Nuctech, which was a standing offer.

Could you tell me how we were able to get to that point?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for the question, Mr. Paul-Hus.

You know that I have a lot of respect for you and all the work you do.

People watching us at home need to know that one offer was all we had from Nuctech. No purchase was made by Global Affairs Canada.

By the time I became aware of this matter, you will recall that I requested a review. We conducted that review with the auditing firm Deloitte, who made suggestions to improve our procurement process in terms of security to ensure that security is given even greater importance when we award contracts.

And I think you will agree that it is a good idea to remind people that Global Affairs Canada made no purchases. It was an offer, not a contract.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: As we talk to the Canadians listening to us, we can mention that if the opposition had not done its job, we would probably have Nuctech equipment in all our embassies today. I wanted to raise this important fact.

But mostly I want to understand. Last week I was at the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, and officials from your department and from Public Services and Supply Canada were passing the buck. Everybody was saying that it wasn't their fault, it was the other person's fault, that we didn't know why the situation got that way, and so on and so forth.

Could you tell me why, in 2020, the Government of Canada is still doing business with China for all of its security equipment when it could have an impact in terms of computers or the use of cameras, for example? This could directly affect national security and you do it knowing full well that we can't trust China in this regard.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I share your concern about national security.

The study done by Deloitte will enable us to improve our acquisition processes. I've also talked to the minister responsible for utilities and procurement, because what you've mentioned is important to me. We need to make sure that the issue of national security is central to all government processes, some of which you've mentioned.

For the benefit of the people listening, I'd say it's great if, thanks to the study we did with Deloitte, we can have stronger processes to ensure that security is at the heart of decisions about suppliers. We will also be developing a list of pre-approved security vendors.

• (2025)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

That's where we need to go, and it's urgent to do it.

Today we talked about Huawei and the 5G network. In a way, we understand that the government waited for the private company to decide to withdraw from the negotiations. It was difficult for you to answer this question.

We also talked about the Silk Road, protection of the North and Arctic sovereignty. I know that right now, with the government's permission, Huawei is setting up a standard communication line, which is not 5G. Huawei's desire was to help indigenous communities in northern Canada.

Are you aware of this file? Do you understand that there could be a security risk, again?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for mentioning this today. We will certainly look at all the security issues relat-

ed to what you said earlier, but also related to China's evolution. That's the important thing to remember tonight: our policy is adapting to these elements, as is the policy of other countries.

There is no doubt that, in such a situation, security issues must be monitored first and foremost.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I would like to mention that one company—FiberHome—was banned by the Americans because it did not respect human rights. It is now an official business partner of the Government of Canada.

I want to bring that to your attention.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you. The point of this committee is to work together. We will follow up on what you told me, Mr. Paul-Hus. I can assure those listening that security issues are at the forefront of my mind.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Champagne.

Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

[English]

We'll go to Mr. Oliphant, for five minutes.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister. It's unusual to have a minister for two full hours at a committee meeting, so it's very much appreciated.

I want to begin where Ms. Zann left off but take it in a different way. She was talking about looking at commercial goods and seeing so many manufactured in China. What China doesn't have—and if she had time, she might have gone there—is Nova Scotia lobster. What China doesn't have is B.C. cherries. What China doesn't have is western Canadian canola, or pork from a variety of places in Canada.

They're usually not a friend of the Liberals, but the Canada West Foundation recently talked about that agricultural importance. While the Conservatives have abandoned western Canadian farmers in this discussion, I want to put that in, because you talked about the economic importance of China, but also the very difficult way they're not playing by the rules. They are bullying. They are abandoning the rules-based order. They are using hostage diplomacy. You have a job of trying to help Canadian farmers and businesses and standing up for Canadian values and human rights.

Mr. Dubourg asked what kept you up at night. I'm sure that's part of it, as well as the two Michaels. Could you reflect on your job as a minister in doing that important work?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I missed part of your question, but I'm sure it was a good question. As parliamentary secretary, you're doing outstanding work, and all the compliments with respect to repatriation, a good share of them, should come back to you, because you've been doing extraordinary work on behalf of Canadians.

You're quite right. Part of my role is to restore market access, whether it's seafood, canola or pork. That's something that has not been mentioned tonight, but we saw exports going up about 4.2% compared to 2019, if I recall correctly.

In fact, one of our jobs, not just my job, but the job of this committee.... If you're going to look at the Canada-China relationship, you also have to look—as you said quite rightly, Mr. Oliphant—at defending the interests of our fishers on the east coast, our farmers in the west, whether you're a pork producer, a seafood reseller, or a canola producer. Part of our job as parliamentarians on this committee is to look at how we can restore market access, how we can diversify access within China, work with our trade commissioner, work with our mission, and how we can diversify outside of China, as well.

Mr. Chong mentioned the CPTPP. You're quite right that our role, when you talk about defending interests, is to defend the interests of our exporters, entrepreneurs, farmers and fishers. Obviously, that's part of my work.

• (2030)

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I'm happy to go to Ms. Zann, if she wants to finish my time.

Maybe I'll continue. We'll probably get another round. I have about a minute left.

The second part of that issue was obviously our markets, but also the rules-based international order, flaunting the rules, engaging with the WTO and engaging with other like-minded countries. You mentioned a number of times the importance.... Could you talk a bit more about Canada's role in re-establishing a rules-based order, so that we all play on a level playing field?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think one of the best examples and a lasting contribution of this government—and I will acknowledge in front of the committee that this was started before us—is the CPTPP. This is a prime example of Canada and the Asia-Pacific establishing a rules-based order when it comes to trade, trade with principle. In my view, that is very important and it is opening opportunities.

Let's remind Canadians who are watching that now, because of the CPTPP, the renewed NAFTA and CETA, Canada is the only country in the G7 that has a free trade agreement with all other G7 countries in the world. That gives preferential market access to about 1.2 billion consumers in the world.

I think the CPTPP is key in that rules-based international order when it comes to trade, and as Canadians, we should be very proud that we're the second-largest economy in that grouping of nations in the CPTPP.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Oliphant.

Thank you, Minister.

Now we'll go to Mr. Williamson, for five minutes.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you. I didn't think I was going to get another opportunity.

Minister, I'm going to go back and ask you about your interest in Immervision. You had listed in the public declaration an interest in this company, and then, in October, that interest was updated to reflect the fact that something happened. There was a sale, or you dissolved it.

Could you tell me about that, please, whether you were involved in those discussions and what your interest was?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: The record speaks for itself. I'm not a shareholder of that company.

Mr. John Williamson: That's not what I'm asking. Your own public declaration reports that you had an interest in this company, and then in October, it reported that you no longer had it.

I'm not asking you about currently. I can see that. I can read the public declaration. However, you clearly had an interest.

What was that interest, and what happened that you no longer have an interest in this company that is linked to a Chinese business that surveys Uighur detention camps?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Williamson, with respect, your question is very misleading to Canadians who are watching, because you're talking about a Montreal-based company. If you have something to say about a Montreal-based company, say it, but what I've said is that I'm not a shareholder in that company and the record speaks for itself.

I had a *de minimis* equity interest that was divested, and this was part of a number of things. As you see, the record speaks for itself, where I listed all my assets and liabilities, as every member of Parliament is obliged to.

The record speaks for itself. You have the public record and you can—

Mr. John Williamson: You just said you divested your interest in that company.

Did you participate in those discussions, or did you direct someone to dissolve your interest in that company?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Williamson, I have no interest in that company. I'm not a shareholder in that company, and the record speaks for itself.

You can ask me the question as many times as you want. You will get the same answer.

Mr. John Williamson: Okay, then I'll ask you a different question. Were you once a shareholder in that company?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: The record speaks for itself.

Mr. John Williamson: So you were.

What happened between when you were and when you weren't? The records are mute on that, but you clearly had an interest and now you don't. I just wonder whether you participated in that change.

• (2035)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, the record speaks for itself. I and every member of Parliament have to disclose our assets and liabilities. That's what I did, and we expect every other member to do so.

Mr. John Williamson: That's true, but you don't think the fact that you're the foreign affairs minister, that you've already had an issue with a loan from a Chinese bank on a property overseas...and now this is another case where you've had a relationship with a company that had some type of involvement with a Chinese-backed firm—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Williamson, I think what you're saying is completely misleading. The record speaks for itself.

Just for the record, the loan you referred to was contracted 10 years ago with a bank in London, England. If you're going to be misleading, you should at least allow Canadians to have the facts, and then they can make their own—

Mr. John Williamson: Sir, I'm trying to ask you about this one. I'm just showing you that there's a pattern here. This is not the first time we've seen this from your reporting, so I'd like to talk about this particular case.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I can see a pattern in your questioning as well, and I'm not sure that this is appropriate in front of a committee where we should be talking about—

Mr. John Williamson: I'll move on.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair: You have one minute and 10 seconds.

Mr. John Williamson: Minister, the New York Times has reported that World Health Organization officials concealed concessions made to the People's Republic of China concerning their investigation of the coronavirus outbreak earlier this year.

What is your position on the need for an independent review of both the outbreak of the coronavirus in China and the Chinese government's response to that outbreak?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Well, I thank you for your question. You will know from the record, Mr. Williamson, that Canada was one of the countries that had asked for an investigation like that, to make sure that we would review the World Health Organization, the leadership, the financing and the early systems to detect any future pandemic. Canada is part of these countries that have been asking to make sure that we better understand so that we can protect the health and safety of people around the world.

Mr. John Williamson: I understand that you've joined Australia—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

We have about three minutes left to go.

Ms. Zann, it's over to you.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you very much.

Again, it's great to have the minister right here and ask him questions about the China-Canada relations.

Minister, on February 5 of this year, Canada's ambassador to China, Dominic Barton, told this special committee that Canada's relationship with China has fundamentally changed since 2018, saying, "The chill is real."

Also, in a written submission provided to this committee in March 2020, the Honourable Mr. McCallum conveyed that the Canadian government's agenda is "both to remain true to our values and to do more...with China."

In a world where so many products these days are made in China—I know it drives people crazy in some ways, but it also means that Western nations have been provided, and some would say "flooded", with much cheaper products—how do you propose that Canada balance the commercial, technical, academic, cultural and people-to-people ties with the People's Republic while at the same time effectively addressing our serious concerns about China's human rights record, particularly when it comes to the very disturbing reports about the Uighurs and Tibetan people, and the eroding rights of Hong Kong citizens?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Well, thank you for that question. I don't know how much time I have, Mr. Chair, to answer that question, but certainly human rights are a core principle of the foreign policy of Canada. Therefore, we will always put our defence of human rights and human rights advocates around the world on top when it comes to engaging. At the same time, I think what you highlighted—and I think there was a question before about that—is the economic interest that exists for exporters in Canada, such as in your part of Canada, where you have fishers and people exporting seafood.

Two things come to mind. We need to be ready to stand up for our values and principles, and that's what we've been doing, making sure that we have been calling it what it is. We've been calling for the release of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor in a way that says that arbitrary detention is unacceptable, and we will continue to do so.

At the same time, I think we need to be able—as you've suggested and as other questioners have been suggesting—to find a way within the framework.... As I said, there will be issues on which we are going to be challenging China—when it comes to human rights, for sure, and human rights violations—and asking China to abide by its international agreements. There will be times when we will compete, and there was some question of whether it's about our governance model and our values. There will also be times when we might need to co-operate—on climate change, for example, and in some places such as with respect to the export of products, and also helping our fishers and farmers across Canada to be able to diversify within China and outside China. I think the CPTPP provides a great opportunity for that.

• (2040)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Zann.

[*English*]

Thank you all, colleagues. You have all received the subcommittee report, the draft of the report of the subcommittee. If there are no objections to it, then I propose it be adopted. If there are objections, we can discuss them in the last half-hour after our hour-and-a-half meeting tomorrow.

Are there any objections to the subcommittee report? Seeing none, I will consider it adopted, then.

Okay, thank you very much, colleagues.

[*Translation*]

Thank you again, Mr. Minister.

[*English*]

I should say that I was once a minister, as you may recall, a long time ago, and I always looked forward to appearances at commit-

tee, but I didn't mind the fact that mine were only an hour each time, so thank you so much.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Sorry, Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. I was just trying to get this thing unstuck here.

With respect to the subcommittee report, I wanted to propose a slight adjustment to it, and that is that we allow the ambassador to speak on it, to give a broader update than just on the situation in Tibet. We want to hear his update. I know you proceeded to declare it adopted, but I was trying to get in.

The Chair: In that case, we can take up that discussion tomorrow. Is that okay?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It sounds great. I just wanted to reserve the opportunity to have that discussion. Thank you.

The Chair: I appreciate that.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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