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Chair

The Honourable Geoff Regan

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• (1735)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.)): Colleagues, this meeting of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations will come to order.

Mr. Harris, I understand you have a point of order.

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

At a meeting on January 30, we asked the government to produce a list of the 14 countries it had indicated were in support of our position on, and concern about, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. Fourteen countries have publicly endorsed Canada's position, as well as an unnamed number that have not offered their names publicly. The committee was offered a list of these and I'm wondering if that has been produced yet. I believe it was Mr. Thoppil who offered to do that. Has it been made available to the committee yet?

The Chair: Let me check with the clerk.

We received several documents at 4 p.m. today that will be distributed tomorrow morning. I'm not sure whether that is one of them. The clerk will check on that. Hopefully, we can have an answer to that question before the end of the meeting, or perhaps at the end of the meeting.

Colleagues, before us today we have His Excellency Ambassador Dominic Barton, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Canada to the People's Republic of China. With him, from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, is Mr. Shawn Steil, executive director, Greater China.

Ambassador, you'll have 20 minutes for your opening statement, followed of course by questions.

Mr. Dominic Barton (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Canada to the People's Republic of China): Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I know that you're taking on very important work, and I'm very honoured to be able to come and talk to you today.

I want to spend just two minutes on the coronavirus. I know that the minister has already talked a lot about it. We have 373 Canadians seeking assistance to leave Hubei province. The 211 on the flight manifest should be leaving tomorrow at about noon, with the weather and all that stuff being in our favour. Then we're looking at other options, whether relating to other countries' planes or to having our own plane coming in. We have eight consular people on the

ground, because there are a lot of complications in moving people. We've also set up a call centre in the Beijing embassy in case people have a lot of questions about getting water, food and so forth in that environment. I'd be happy to talk to more about that.

The other comment I would make is that the Government of Canada, working through the Canadian Red Cross, has also provided protective medical equipment to China. That was sent yesterday. They're en route and will be heading right to Hubei. I would just echo what's being said at the World Health Organization. I commend what China is doing in trying to contain this and the effort that's under way on that front.

In September of last year, Prime Minister Trudeau appointed me as ambassador. I've basically been in the role for about four and a half months. I was in Beijing at the end of September on the same day that the new Chinese ambassador came here. As I think you well know, my career has been in the private sector all the way through. I'm honoured to be given the opportunity to serve my country, and that's to promote and defend Canada's interests and values. I hope it's to also help China better understand Canada, and Canadians to better understand China. I want to say also that the utmost priority of my goal and objectives is to work for the release of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, and to seek clemency for Robert Schellenberg. That's right in the headlights, and I think about that every day.

In December 2018, Canada's relations with China fundamentally changed, and that was following the arrest of Madam Meng. We can talk about all the consequent acts, but there was a massive change. Things had been actually moving quite well. The chill is real. I'm committed to working hard to resolve the challenges we face in that bilateral relationship, to try to restore our relationship, but critical to that will be the release of the two Michaels and clemency for Robert Schellenberg. The Chinese side is also very angry about where they are, so we have lots to work through. Resuming regular high-level dialogue between our governments and strengthening our channels of communication, which, again, had been broken, are key early aspects of what I've been trying to do in China. Although we've had some success in this regard, many of our regular dialogues, especially the ministerial ones, have not resumed since December 2018.

I want to say a little bit about my background. I lived in China for six years. I was based in Shanghai, working around the country. I've been in Asia for about 12 years. I've had consistent engagement with China. It's actually been mainly with the university sector and some cities. That's been my primary area of interest. I definitely do not pretend to have the answers to all of the issues and on the complex, diverse relationship, but I will try to do my best to give you my lens as to how I see it and what we're up to.

More specifically, there are four things I want to cover quickly: one, a bit of the context on what's happening in China; two, the nature of our relationship today; three, our current presence and what that looks like; and four, probably most importantly, my mandate and the priorities that the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs are asking me to pursue.

First, on the context, I know that you don't need lots of stories about how big China is, how important it is, and so forth, because I think you well know that. All I would say is that I think we've seen over the last 15 years, and it's accelerating, an economic power shift towards Asia and a geopolitical shift towards Asia, with China very much at the centre. In terms of global GDP growth, 28% to 30% is coming from China. While that's going to be affected by the coronavirus, it's going to be back.

- (1740)

It's the second-largest consumer market in the world and the largest protein market in the world for meats, but also for vegetable-based protein, so it's a very important market for us. As we look at it, it's the largest energy market in the world, particularly as it relates to renewables. On that side, I could go on.

We are not very relevant in that market. China imports about \$2.1 trillion; that was the 2018 number. We have about 1.3% of that. Over the last 25 years, we've lost share in that. We've been growing, which is great, but we've been losing share as we go through it.

I look at China as 22 clusters of cities. It's just too big to look at as one country. Canada is probably relevant in three of those 22 clusters in where we are. There's a lot of potential—a lot of opportunity—for us as we look ahead. I believe this growth will continue with the urbanization and the push to the service sector as we go through it.

Understanding the history and culture I think is critically important. I'm not about to try to talk in detail about that. I just want to register it. In the 3,000-plus years of history, you can learn a lot about how China thinks about priorities, how they make decisions and their values as they go through it.

For example, on the values side, I think it's important to understand—and it's not to say that we agree with it, because we have a different point of view—where they're coming from. They place an importance on the values of collectivism and harmony, owing to a Confucian heritage. Understanding the extent to which China values unity and the needs of society at large, rather than freedom of individual choice...we just have to understand that. That's where they're coming from. It can help us understand the trade-offs they make. It does not mean that we agree with what they do and where they are at; it's about understanding. You can see that in the history.

While I talked about all of the growth and the opportunities and so forth in China, they face very significant challenges. They have a huge issue on poverty going on. There is a very poor part of China. It's a rich and poor country. That's a very big focus of the government—eradicating poverty. They have millions who are still below the international poverty line.

The environment is a big push for them. China has the world's second-highest number of pollution-related deaths, after India. There's been a lot of improvement, but a lot of work needs to be done there.

In terms of demographics, it is a very rapidly aging society, like Canada's, but obviously on a different scale. There are about 260 million people over the age of 60; I don't think it's that old, but it is getting older. That's going to go up to 483 million. That has a huge impact on productivity and on health care costs and lifestyle. Canada has a lot of capability on that side, on the research and in many other dimensions.

Their investment efficiency is dropping. It takes double the amount of investment to get a single unit of output, which has put challenges on their growth model and on their financial system, which is now, by any respect, the second-largest in the world. They now have to worry more about stability, and I think Canada can provide a lot.

They have lots of big issues that they have to work on, besides obviously pandemics and so forth that come up, so it's just to understand the challenges....

On our relationship, the history of our relationship is actually quite unique. They remind me of that almost every time I see someone senior. They're serious about it. They actually go back to missionaries who were in China in the 1870s and 1890s in places such as Chengdu and Chongqing and who established schools and established hospitals. They're revered to this day. Actually, they used to not talk about missionaries. You can now talk about missionaries, and it's due in large part to what Canadian missionaries have done.

There's Norman Bethune. Everyone probably knows about Norman Bethune and the role he played as a doctor in helping Chinese soldiers in World War II. He is completely an icon to the younger generation today.

There is our support for Hong Kong during World War II, when 554 Canadians died trying to defend Hong Kong and 500 Canadians were wounded. That is remembered every year as a joint effort in trying to fight fascism.

There are our wheat sales in 1958 all the way into the 1960s. Against a view in the world where people wanted to isolate Communist China, we provided wheat.

Then there is our diplomatic recognition in 1970, almost a decade before the United States'. They remember that.

● (1745)

All of that said, it's nice to have a history, but there are limits to what that gets us in terms of influence. I'm going to come back to this, because I believe we need to have influence, but having influence means that you have to have some relevance in the system. There is only so far that those historical links can get us there.

Regarding our presence in China, I'm not going to go into the details; these are just facts. We have roughly 650 people in greater China, 150 of those are Canadian-engaged staff and about 500 are locally engaged staff who we shouldn't forget. We obviously have the embassy in Beijing, but also consulates general in Chongqing, Guangzhou, Shanghai and Hong Kong. Then we have a secondary network of trade missions in 10 cities, spread across the country. Then there is the provincial-level involvement that goes on from provinces, which is very important, and some municipal linkages. Those ties are very important, especially when we have challenges such as this. Having wires that are not just at a national level help allow dialogue in what we're doing.

Getting to my mandate and priorities in discussions with the Prime Minister and then with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the overall objective is to restore the relationship, but with three priorities, and I would argue, one very important caveat that's in that.

First and foremost is to secure the release of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, and get clemency for Robert Schellenberg. That is core; that's a priority.

Second is to promote and protect human rights. That is a *sine qua non*. It has to be everywhere. It's not something you put to the side while you do it. I want it in the headlights of what you do.

Third is to look at how we can deepen and broaden the relationship. That's the people-to-people ties, not just the government ties. It's the arts, it's the sports, it's the universities. There are lots of other wires and linkages in there. Then it's the economic ties, because there are significant opportunities in many sectors, but particularly in five or six.

Those are the keys to resolving this bilateral tension and restoring trust. I think Canadians want to engage, but on the basis of doing it with international rules and principles that provide predictability and security.

That's what I'm trying to do.

What I will say about the dark periods when it's a very tough discussion is that when I was presenting my letters of credence to President Xi, I told him what my priorities were. He said that in restoring a relationship like this, it takes two sides, that there are

things we need to do and there are things they need to do. There is clearly a lot of work there.

On the bilateral tensions and the first priority around the safe and timely return to Canada of Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig and securing clemency for Robert Schellenberg—as it is in all the death penalty cases in other countries—I am limited by privacy in what I can say. I've seen each of them a number of times as I've gone through it.

The comment I would just want to make—and I'm not used to doing this type of thing—is that I am unbelievably inspired by their resilience. Each of these three people is incredible, as a human and as an individual. I want to say that. That's how I mark my time in China, by my visits that I do to see them. It's not usual for ambassadors. They typically will do one. Every single time I am allowed to visit, I'm going to go.

I, and we, consistently and constructively engage with the Chinese government on their cases and I hope our efforts are soon going to bear fruit. We have to try all different means. We are working closely with other governments, particularly the United States, but also like-minded partners, to try to unlock this, but also to maintain awareness of the issues as this also impacts other countries.

I know this continues to be top of mind for the Prime Minister and is the reason he has repeatedly said that Canada will only respond to this situation in a manner that upholds our values and respect for the rule of law.

My discussions with fellow ambassadors in Beijing have given me insights into what other countries have gone through, because others have gone through this and experienced significant strains in their relationship, and I'm happy to talk more on that.

● (1750)

Again, resolving this issue is critical for us to be able to move to a restored relationship with China.

Promoting and protecting human rights is extremely important and is emphasized to me all the time by the Prime Minister, that it be reinforced no matter what position we are in.

As I mentioned when it comes to values, we have different views on these. That said, we believe that human rights are universal and inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. This is why we believe it's important to hold the Chinese government accountable, as we do with all governments, to these principles in its own international and domestic commitments. For example, our government has expressed deep concern over time with China's human rights record, particularly recently in the province of Xinjiang, but also in other parts of the country.

Journalists, diplomats and Chinese civil society representatives I have spoken to agree that 2019 witnessed an increased crackdown on dissent and on expressions of disagreement about China's human rights record, within and outside the country. The Government of Canada is concerned that China's crackdown on dissent is increasingly extending beyond China's own borders. Whether it's in international forums, such as the UN, or domestically Canada continues to emphasize the value of universal human rights as defined by the United Nations.

As I mentioned, our government is concerned by the credible reports of the mass detention, repressive surveillance and family separation affecting Uighurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, under the pretext of countering extremism, terrorism and separatism. As ambassador, I will continue to raise these issues with Chinese authorities, which I have done, to release Uighurs and other Muslims who have been detained arbitrarily.

Canadians are also becoming more worried about how all of this touches them, as I see in the opinion polls. Charting a way forward in our relations with China has to ensure that we're following the rules and norms of engagement that we all respect.

On deepening and broadening the relationship, we do have frank, difficult discussions with the Chinese government. They do that with us because they're also very concerned with us.

China is more than about government. Many other different relationships are going on in the country, and so it's very important that we deepen and broaden them. They help with resilience and they also help strengthen the relationship.

We've been looking at three areas in particular. One is the fabric, the people-to-people ties, linking everything from art to education, business and communities. One example is that when I've had conversations with party secretaries in cities and they have been very icy at the beginning and then we have one glass of baijiu with them and find out that the party secretary's son or daughter has gone to Western or McGill, and they're very proud of that linkage. There's a linkage in the system with Canada that people know. Our alumni in China who have gone to Canadian universities are, I think, an underutilized asset.

I would love to talk more about promoting trade and investment. I probably should shut up and move on, but I'm very excited by the opportunity we have on many fronts.

I also think we need to build our China competencies more, given the significance of China over the next 100 years. Whether you like China or don't, it is going to play a very important role and we need to build our capabilities, not just on the government side but

also in our communities and with our children to understand how this system works.

In conclusion, obviously none of this is easy or straightforward. There's a new adventure almost every week in this.

As a country we need to digest this complexity and the significance of China and how it impacts our interests. In the short term, this means defining our Canadian interests very clearly and identifying where these interests are shared by China so that we can work together on common objectives, and there is a large common objective agenda that we can work on together.

It also means identifying our red lines, where compromise is not possible. Friends disagree with each other; friends get mad at each other, so we need to define where those are and make sure people understand them.

We need to manage both these opportunities and challenges in concert. It's a notion of walking and chewing gum at the same time. We can engage and grow, and we can also be tough at the same time.

• (1755)

Again, to be able to do this, at the beginning we need to resolve the current bilateral challenges in securing the release of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor and gaining clemency for Robert Schellenberg. I don't think we're alone in this challenge. Many countries are facing this. I just hope we take a long-term approach in how we do it and don't bounce around over time. We need a long-term approach.

Thank you for listening to me.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ambassador.

Our first questioner today is Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

I do want to say at the outset, with greatest respect, that I felt at the time of your appointment and still feel that you are a completely inappropriate choice as ambassador. That's not because of your personal qualifications. It's because, as you said today, we expect our diplomatic corps to defend our interests and our values. I look at the track record with McKinsey and some of the things it was involved in, and those raise big red flags for me in terms of your position now as the representative of Canada defending our interests and our values.

At the time you were in charge of McKinsey, from 2009 to it's my understanding that you advised almost two dozen Chinese state-owned companies. According to The New York Times, one of those companies was the China Communications Construction Company. Could you confirm for me, first of all, that McKinsey did work for the China Communications Construction Company while you were there?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I'd have to check that out. I'm happy to agree to that if you read it in The New York Times.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Would you prepared to submit to this committee a list of all of the Chinese state-owned companies that you did work for at McKinsey?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, what I would need to do is.... McKinsey's pretty careful about client confidentialities. I'd be happy if there were some mechanism so that it isn't in the public domain but that some people could look at it. I'm open to that.

What I would remark, though, is that, first of all, I'm very proud of my career and time in the private sector and with McKinsey and the work that we did. That firm has worked with many companies around the world. We're known for telling truth to power and calling it out as it is.

• (1800)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. You're proud of that, and we know that, and I think it's important that it's on the record.

When you signed the China Communications Construction Company as a client in 2015, they were still under World Bank sanctions because of the corruption and bid-rigging they engaged in in the Philippines. Would you have been aware that they were under sanctions when you signed them on as a client?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, what I would say is that McKinsey has over 3,000 clients that we work with. I'm not familiar with that at all. I wasn't involved. I wasn't doing any client work. I was based in London at the time. I'm not looking at that, so I'm just not familiar with the details of that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

You were in charge of McKinsey, though, and you were setting, I assume, broad policy direction. For example, McKinsey was advising a company that was carrying out the Chinese government's policy of building militarized islands in the South China Sea. Was it your position that those islands are a violation of international law?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, what I would say is that I am not familiar at all with our being involved in designing the islands in the South China Sea. If you want to talk to someone at McKinsey to find out more information, I'm sure we'd be happy to get someone to talk to you about it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, let me just back up a second, then. In terms of your position now, do you agree with the Permanent Court of Arbitration's ruling that China's program of construction of militarized islands in the South China Sea violates international law? Do you agree with that?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I would follow the policy of what the government does. I think the Canadian government respects international opinions, but we don't have a view on maritime issues. I'd have to look at what our policy is on that. I don't—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, but you're Canada's ambassador to China, so you're a spokesman for our policy on China. It's your job to communicate that policy to Canadians and to the Chinese government. If you were asked in a meeting with a Chinese official whether our view is consistent with the Hague tribunal's view, would you agree, yes, that the tribunal is right, that these islands violate international law?

Mr. Dominic Barton: First of all, what I would do on that is that I wouldn't make up an answer. I would actually go and look to see what we do.

I would probably ask to get back to them on it because I am not familiar with all of the pieces. Canada opposes unilateral actions that escalate tensions and undermine stability in the international order, so....

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's a simple policy question. It's interesting that you're not briefed on the answer to what is.... I think everybody around this table knows what's happening in the South China Sea, that it's a violation of international law.

You may not remember, but your company was involved in advising the China Communications Construction Company at a time when they were working on this very project in violation of international law.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, could I just interject for a second?

I said that there is a very different point you make that the company was involved while this was happening. It doesn't mean that McKinsey was advising on that, so you need to find out more—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: But you were in charge of the company, sir. It's like when the Prime Minister says, "Oh, I didn't do it. It was a functionary in the bureaucracy." The buck has to stop somewhere and you were running the company, so you were setting the policy direction.

It wasn't just in China. It wasn't just state-owned companies. You know of the case in Saudi Arabia where a report that was prepared identifying critics of the Saudi government led to their being punished in the crackdown. There were so many different cases, when you were in the leadership of McKinsey, of just gross problems in terms of co-operation with gross abusers of human rights. Your response to these questions is to say that you don't know, you don't remember and you weren't responsible, when you were the guy running the show. It doesn't give me a lot of confidence that you, running the show as ambassador—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry, but you've exceeded your time.

Ambassador, I'm afraid you'll have to wait for an opportunity if you wish to respond to that.

We're on to Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ambassador, for being here.

In 2015 you co-authored a piece for the Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development and there was a quote in it that stood out to me. In fact, it mirrors what we heard in your comments in many ways, but I'll read it to you. It says: "The world is re-balancing towards Asia, and China in particular; Canada must re-balance with it."

Can you highlight for us the importance of this relationship?

I know you've taken time to do that in your opening statement, but this is a fundamental relationship for Canada—now and in the future. At least that's my view and I think the view of most people in this country.

Could you expand on that?

• (1805)

Mr. Dominic Barton: Sure.

I think that Canada is a small trading nation. We're a G7 country, but we depend on trade and we depend on trading with large markets, and one of the absolutely largest markets in the world is China and it's going to become the largest market. For Canada's future prosperity, I think it's very important that we be there.

The thing I find most exciting about it is that there is a neat overlap in what we have, and not just in terms of natural resources, which is obviously an important area and where we could do more, but also in terms of our brain power, our regulatory approaches and our financial services, and I could go on. There is a neat overlap.

This will create many jobs. It will allow Canadians with ideas and innovative thoughts to be able to expand them into bigger markets, and it's something the whole country can participate in. Again, China needs a lot of things that we have and I think we could play an even more influential role in how that economy and society evolves.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I acknowledge everything you've said, but I think the word you used in your statement was "chill". We are in a very difficult moment in the relationship.

Do you have any thoughts on what's worked and what hasn't when other states have had challenges with China? Are there any lessons learned that can be applied, particularly the experience of liberal democracies, that stand out and would be quite appropriate? Is there anything we can learn as a lesson from that and apply it to the current situation?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Yes, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, I've spent a lot of time with ambassadors from other countries who have gone through this. You think about Norway, Japan, Singapore, and I can go on.

I think there are a couple of lessons learned. I think one is not to be bullied. It is to stand up for what we believe in and what we're going to do.

Number two is to maintain a long-term perspective, to think about the broader relationship, to continue to engage. There are a number of cases where the engagement stopped and it took a long

time to get back. The lesson learned from talking with that ambassador and with the government there is that they would have continued to engage.

I think it's being clear about what you want to do. It's continuing to engage and build and look for relationships to engage others to help you in that process.

Those would be a couple of things I would suggest.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: On that point about engagement, if you read the Globe and Mail, for example, there have been a number of op-eds calling—and it's not just politicians—for a much more confrontational approach.

However, you've pointed to the need to continue to engage Beijing, and the fact—as you've highlighted here today—that positives can come out of engagement. Can you talk about how that could help to overcome the current impasse we're in?

Mr. Dominic Barton: It is important to engage. I remember clearly, from talking to Singaporeans, that you need to have some relevance to be able to get things done. It's not just the economic relevance; it's the trust and linkages that people have built in what they're doing.

I think it's important to do that.

I know there are different views. I know there are views about, "Let's go hard line, and let's cut everything off." The question there is to be prepared for what you ask for in that type of an approach. I don't think we have to go that way. There are a lot of reasonable people we can interact with.

Again, what I've learned and heard from other countries that are going through similar processes is that engagement is important.

• (1810)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: That is not to the exclusion of human rights then.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Absolutely not. As I said, you can be very strict and strong in how you feel and say it.

Some might say, "We're in the freezer box in terms of our linkage, so why would you even say anything?" I think that's exactly the time to say it. We're not going to stop. It's there.

That's important, because when we re-engage, we want to make sure we're re-engaging in the right way, for the long term. That's something that the Prime Minister feels very strongly about.

The Chair: You have five seconds.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: In five seconds, you talked about common objectives where we can work together. I quoted directly from your opening statement. If there is another round, I'd like to ask you more about that. I think that's really important to emphasize.

That's not to minimize at all the current challenges we're facing. Of course, Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor are facing real difficulties, and their families are concerned, as are Canadians. However, we have to keep in mind the importance of the relationship as well.

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Fragiskatos.

Monsieur Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Your Excellency, thank you for joining us today.

You said at the start that you take every opportunity to meet with Canadian citizens who are currently detained. Please convey our thoughts to them. All the members of this committee are deeply concerned about their situation. I would greatly appreciate it if you could express to them our solidarity regarding their situation at this time.

Mr. Chair, I won't hide my unease with the way that the work of this committee is proceeding. Quite honestly, it seems that the worst thing to do, under the current circumstances, is to undermine the credibility of the person representing Canada before the Chinese authorities.

On the contrary, Your Excellency, I believe that your experience and your work to date amply qualify you for your sensitive mission. We need only look at the fact that, as soon as you were appointed, the downward spiral in relations between Canada and China came to a halt. Fairly quickly, we were able to restore pork exports to China.

Some may say that the Chinese had no other choice because domestic production, given the swine flu, wasn't enough to meet the demand. However, the fact remains that there was a change in attitude. I know that your visits with detained Canadians are having a very positive impact. I want to thank you for this.

This brings me to my question. Your presence in China, in addition to your calibre as a person, your experience and your knowledge of Chinese cultural dynamics, has had all the effects that I just described. Isn't this the most tangible proof that the Government of Canada should have acted much faster to appoint an ambassador to Beijing, rather than waiting eight months during this long crisis before filling the position?

[*English*]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, thanks for the comments and the questions. It is much appreciated, and I will definitely pass on the remarks to Michael Spavor, Michael Kovrig, and also Robert Schellenberg. It means a lot to hear that this committee is hearing how people feel about that.

With regard to the question of appointing an ambassador, I wasn't part of the process. What I would say is that the fact that both ambassadors were appointed at the same time is a small step, but it was a signal that we wanted to be able to move forward.

What I would say is that this chill in the relationship.... We're angry. We're very angry because of our people have been taken. China is very angry as well—furious. We're both furious. I'll just say that the first conversation I had there was probably one of the most unpleasant conversations I've ever had. I mean, the shaking and anger from there, and we were also.... So it wasn't a conversation; it was a two-way reading of things.

The dynamic was such that the government was trying to reach out. There wasn't any response in terms of where things were. There wasn't even a basis to have a discussion. It was really in Osaka that the Prime Minister, because of alphabetical order, was sitting beside the president and could say, "We have to get through this".

I hope now that we do actually have some channels and can now have real conversations where we can interrupt each other, where we cannot just be angry, but can actually try to be constructive.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

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

We may have the opportunity to look back at the sequence of events that led to the arrest of Meng Wanzhou and at the ripple effect on Canadian citizens. We'll certainly look at that again.

I have two very simple questions.

First, to your knowledge, before making the decision to authorize the incarceration of Meng Wanzhou, did the Canadian government seek advice from the embassy?

Second, given the similar case of the Garratt couple in 2014, shouldn't we have been warned of what might happen?

[*English*]

The Chair: Please be very brief, Ambassador.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, on that one, I'm not aware of the actual conversations. I think the justice department came to sort of explain the process yesterday—before and how the process worked—but I wasn't part of those discussions on where it was, so I wouldn't be able to answer that.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Yes, but from what you know—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, your time is up. You may be able to continue later. Thank you.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Okay.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Harris.

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

Thank you, Ambassador Barton, for your opening remarks.

I want to echo Mr. Bergeron's comments and acknowledge your extraordinary efforts on a personal level in personally visiting Mr. Kovrig, Mr. Spavor and Mr. Schellenberg and offering them your support. It is very meaningful, and I've heard words to that effect, so thank you for doing that.

You were appointed, of course. I want to go into the effectiveness of some of the efforts internationally.

We may have a second round, Mr. Chair, and I hope we will in order to do some of that.

You were appointed only recently, in the middle of an election. You haven't appeared before a committee before, and this is the first opportunity for us to listen to you and to raise some things that have been raised in the public domain, of which I'm sure you're aware. As late as today, we had a release from Democracy Watch that suggests that your holdings, your history, your current holdings, those of your wife and her involvement in investments in the Asia-Pacific region give rise to a conflict of interest.

I don't want to get into blind trusts and any of those things because they are detailed and, potentially, would lead to a big discussion. I do just want to ask you this question because Canadians deserve an answer. What do you say to Canadians as to whether they should feel comfortable with you in this role, given the fact that it's been suggested that these involvements would lead you to be open to influence, given the suggestion that perhaps, consciously or unconsciously, your own approach and attitude in dealing with the Chinese on the issues may be influenced by your personal interests?

What do you say to Canadians about that criticism and that allegation? I want to give you an opportunity to respond to that.

Mr. Dominic Barton: The first thing I would say is that my integrity matters a lot to me. It matters a huge amount to me. What people say, or say I'm doing, matters. I've lived my life with the highest integrity. So at a personal level, I would just say that. There's a track record of people I've interacted with and worked with on that.

The second is that I've been extraordinarily diligent with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. From the very beginning, before this even happened, I said that I am proud that my wife works and this is a situation you need to be aware of. I was very transparent about any of the issues that I have, and so forth. I've tried to be up front about that and transparent on everything I've been involved in on it.

The third thing I would say is that from a financial point of view, I think it was John Manley who said, and I agree, that this is the stupidest economic decision I could have made in my life. I didn't do it for an economic reason. I did it for public service. I want to help. I feel I can help the country. I have no interest in making money from it. Any ideas about how I'm going to somehow.... It's foreign to me.

I am following every single rule. I want to be way far from the chalk line, if you will. Again, you can see it with the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. It's how I've lived my life. My objective here is that I want to restore the relationship. I want to get the two Michaels out and the Schellenberg situation sorted. That's what I want to try to achieve.

• (1820)

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

There are a number of other issues dealing with your involvement in China with the McKinsey group, and some of your statements about being bullish on China, on the belt and road project, which some have suggested is contrary to Canada's interests in the Asia-Pacific region, and the notable comment about drinking the Kool-Aid about China and President Xi. Do you have any thoughts

on that now that are different from what you expressed so effusively to the Council on Foreign Relations and others?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Yes. I would say a couple of things. One is that I'm very bullish on the growth of China. I think it's going to continue to move the urbanization, as I went through it.

Many of the comments I made were pre-2016, and I think things have changed. The world changes in where it is. If you asked me what I felt about China in 2003, or about what I wrote about or said in 2009, or what I thought about Poland and different.... Do you know what I mean? I do have views that I express. I don't hold them to the end of time. As I said in my opening remarks, again, I am amazed by the growth of where China is. I'm very concerned right now with the crackdown on dissent and where things are. I've been quite direct with government about saying that and how I feel.

I don't want to give you the sense that there's an inherent bias that everything's rosy and great, because that's not how—

Mr. Jack Harris: Tell me, Ambassador—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Jack.

Mr. Jack Harris: Okay.

You mentioned human rights. I want to raise another issue, which is about McKinsey having a seminar very close to the internment camp for Uighurs. Were you sensitive about human rights in that situation, or were you aware of it?

Mr. Dominic Barton: On that situation, I think Kevin Sneader, the managing partner, has come out to apologize on that side. They had no awareness at all on the McKinsey side that there was anything going on with the detention camps. If they had, they wouldn't have done it. So there's an apology for that having happened, and it wouldn't happen again. I would say that. That's how I view it.

It doesn't take me away from my role as ambassador for Canada to raise direct concerns on that issue with the Chinese government.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Ambassador.

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

We'll now go to the second round. Members have five minutes each.

Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Barton, to pick up on what you just said to Mr. Harris, you suggested that McKinsey wasn't aware of the detention camps at the time when the corporate retreat in Kashgar happened. Is that what you said?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I did.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. I ask because these mass detention camps were denounced by a UN committee a week before the retreat happened. Did McKinsey just miss the news item, or...?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, if you'd like to talk about my background with McKinsey, I'm very happy to keep going. I'm not sure if that's what we want to do in the committee, but I'm very happy to go—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I control the five minutes. I think this is very important for the public interest, sir, because you're telling me you're not aware of a lot of things—or weren't aware of a lot of things—that are pretty fundamental. You said that McKinsey had this corporate retreat completely unaware that there were concentration camps four miles away.

• (1825)

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, what I'm saying is that I'm not trying to absolve myself or anything. I'm happy to...I'm saying that McKinsey apologized for that having been done; it is my understanding that they were not aware that was the case. That's what I'm saying.

Again, back to some of the earlier comments you made about the situations like the company in the South China Sea, you were saying that McKinsey is working with them and then implying that McKinsey is working on building things, and it's just completely false. All I was saying—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sir, with respect, what I said—

The Chair: Order. I just ask members to show respect and make sure that we have a chance to hear from each person, because we have interpreters, of course, and they need to have time to interpret.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I think the process is that I control the time, but I'll ask a question and, Mr. Barton, I'd like to hear your response to it.

You have said there was not an awareness of what was happening in these camps by McKinsey, yet there were news items. There were UN reports beforehand. You've said that you're not aware of Canada's policy in the South China Sea. My charge was never that McKinsey was physically building these installations in the South China Sea; it's that McKinsey was advising the companies and working with companies under World Bank sanctions that were in fact doing this. You've said that you're not responsible because it's a big company and so forth, but you set the policy direction.

Are you comfortable that all these things were happening under policy direction you set? Are these the things you consider consistent with your personal values?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, there's a lot to unpack in that. I'll try to answer it.

One, as I said, on the situation with the retreat and the Uighur detentions, I'm saying that McKinsey has said they were not aware of the case.

As it relates to the South China Sea, as I said, I'm going to follow what the government policy is. We basically believe that we should follow what arbitration says in what they want to do. For any more detail on that, I'm going to have to get advice for what it is, but we believe in what international arbitration says.

I'm not trying to skirt the issues. I'm just trying to say that on McKinsey's side, I'm happy to go into that as much as you want. I just would be careful about conflating what McKinsey was doing versus what was actually happening.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sir, I really look forward to seeing that complete list of companies—state-owned companies—that you advised. I hope you'll be able to submit those to the committee.

You said at the beginning of your testimony that you commend what China is doing to try to contain the coronavirus. Part of what China is doing to contain the coronavirus is that when somebody dies of this virus their body is taken away from the families and they're not allowed burial. They're banning Christian funerals.

Are you aware of the human rights abuses that are happening in the context of this so-called effort to contain the coronavirus? Do you want to qualify your initial remarks at all that you commend what China is doing in this respect?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Dominic Barton: What's going on in China right now with this coronavirus is unbelievable, and I don't think we should underestimate the scale of what's happening and how the infections occur. I've not heard anything that would suggest to me that they're doing this for religious purposes. They're terrified of the spread of where this is, and I think the scale of what's going on is like Berlin in 1948 with the airlifts and getting food in there and so forth. It's an unbelievably high-scale operation. That's what I'm commending them for.

To lock down a city of 11 million people to try to protect all of us from not getting infected, I think, is a very worthy thing, and I commend them for that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Ms. Yip.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, Ambassador Barton, for coming such a long way to join us today.

Part of our mandate in this committee is to review consular relations. Can you provide an update on evacuation efforts happening in Wuhan and what other countries are doing to evacuate their citizens?

Mr. Dominic Barton: As I mentioned, we have 373 Canadians who have said they want help. We have 211 on the flight manifest for this plane, which hopefully will leave tomorrow around noon. That leaves a gap. What we're looking at to help in closing that gap from 373 to 211 is talking with the British and the Americans, because they have room on planes and they're right there. I think the minister talked about that this afternoon. That would be the fastest way, but there are all sorts of logistical challenges, so we're looking at that carefully.

At the same time, we're looking at the second plane coming in. We have the plane; it's ready. We just don't want to send an A380 to pick up five people. That's how we're working it.

One of the things that has been quite important in this is the registering of Canadians. I think there were only 91 people who were registered as Canadians on January 10 in Hubei province. As the crisis has emerged, we're now up at 500. We're also asking, what are the other areas in China where we have Canadians who are registering and where is the infection moving? To use that tired expression about where the puck is going, we're trying to figure out where that is ahead of time so that we know what's happening.

Those are some of the things, but the challenge, too, is the logistics on the ground. I spoke to someone this morning, a family that had travelled 250 kilometres to get to the airport, and when they got into the airport there was no more water in the vending machines, and it was cold. We can't get our people into the airport because of the security. Therefore, it's working out those details, and we need to be as responsive as we can.

I don't know if that gives you enough.

• (1830)

Ms. Jean Yip: Are you in discussions with the Chinese government to allow you more access for the consular officials on the ground, in the example you just mentioned about the water and trying to get in, and so forth?

Mr. Dominic Barton: They're being very helpful. When we raise the issue, they'll say, "Okay, where are they?" They're trying to help themselves as they go through it. We've really beefed up the team that's on the ground, because they're very nervous about the number of people coming in. We've added a second team to go in.

They're being very open on it, but they have very strict controls. It's 10 to 20 stops that people have to go through to get to the airport. We have to help get these people through, so we have very direct communication with them and we've found them to be quite helpful.

Ms. Jean Yip: There is enough staff on the ground in Wuhan, but what about if there should be other affected areas?

Mr. Dominic Barton: That's why, again, we actually haven't reduced our embassy staff as much as other countries have, such as Australia or the U.K., because we basically want to have the resources to be able to deal with that. As long as people are not afraid—and they're not—we would like to have those resources.

We're also reallocating people. We've moved people from immigration, where there's not a lot of activity. There are not a lot of tourists flying. We've moved them—

Ms. Jean Yip: I'm sorry, but I'm going to cut you off so I can ask my next question.

China does not recognize dual citizenship. We know there are Canadians who enter China with a Chinese passport, and now they are not allowed to leave Wuhan. What is being done to help these Canadian citizens? Also, what is being done to help Canadian permanent residents?

The Chair: Before you go on, Ambassador, I want to ask all members to try to make sure that when a question is asked, the witness has an opportunity to answer. Of course, I think there was, but I just want to point that out.

Ambassador.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Sure. I'll reply quickly.

China has quite strict rules about consular services and how those work with permanent residents, and so forth. They do that with all countries. What we don't want to do, and they've agreed with this, is break up families. They're being helpful on that. I've had a number of conversation.

I'm a pipsqueak in it, because the team is doing it, but just to check in, where you have a husband who is a Canadian citizen, you have a permanent resident, and then you have a one-year-old who is being breast-fed. They're all going. They normally wouldn't, but they want to keep the families together. However, they have a policy that we have to deal with. We're trying to push it in other cases.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Yip.

Now we have Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Thank you, Ambassador. I appreciate your service. Obviously, with service comes scrutiny by the public, including their officials, so I appreciate your being here.

Have you ever met with Huawei officials in your capacity as Canada's ambassador to China?

• (1835)

Mr. Dominic Barton: I have.

Mr. Dan Albas: Would you mind putting on the record whom you met with from Huawei and where you met them and roughly when?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I'm not sure what the privacy rules are, but I have had outreach from some of the senior vice-presidents to talk about information that relates to the consular cases.

Mr. Dan Albas: The Privacy Act pertains to Canadian citizens.

Mr. Dominic Barton: That's right.

Mr. Dan Albas: So did you meet with these officials in China?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Yes, I did.

Mr. Dan Albas: Okay, and were they Chinese officials from Huawei or were they Canadian ones?

Mr. Dominic Barton: One was Canadian and one was Chinese.

Mr. Dan Albas: What was the nature of your conversations?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Again, I'm a rookie at what's private or not in this sort of thing, but they were conversations about the relationship between Canada and China, what was happening with the Meng situation and so forth. They were giving their views about the situation and what was happening. I'm open to hearing ideas and views from many different people in the system. It wasn't a negotiation or anything like that. It was just, 'Here's our view of what's happening.'

Mr. Dan Albas: Did you raise the illegal detention of Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Absolutely. I always do that when I have the chance, and I did.

Mr. Dan Albas: In this case, did any commitments by those officials come from that?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Again, it's unclear to me what influence the company has in China, and it's not for me to figure out the detail of that. What I expressed to them was that while they might be very upset and concerned because Madam Meng had been arrested, we are very upset and concerned because Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig have been arrested, and we've had the death sentence put on Robert Schellenberg.

That was the nature of the discussion.

Mr. Dan Albas: Did the Huawei officials ever suggest a so-called prisoner exchange, as had been suggested by Eddie Goldenberg and plied by other senior officials such as John Manley and Jean Chrétien?

Mr. Dominic Barton: They did not to me.

Mr. Dan Albas: Again, I think it's important for us to be asking, because, as you said, the relationship is broken, and you talked about wires and linkages, and I think that obviously includes talking to the business community among others.

Sir, you mentioned earlier your lack of knowledge of the position on the South China Sea. Obviously, that's a very important geopolitical issue. It's important to trade. It's important to Canada. I'm from British Columbia, so I know that having some certainty in those areas is very important.

On July 12, 2016, at the time the Minister of Global Affairs, Stéphane Dion, said he welcomed the tribunal ruling on the Convention of the Law of the Sea by a UN body, and in it he said, "Canada therefore stands ready to contribute to initiatives that build confidence and help restore trust in the region."

Ambassador, how can you stand ready for initiatives that build confidence and help restore trust if you don't know the government's position on the South China Sea?

Mr. Dominic Barton: As I mentioned on the South China Sea, just to clarify, we respect and would respect international arbitration rulings on what has happened in that case, and the international ruling is that there is a concern. ASEAN has also raised issues, and we've supported that. I do have a view on that.

In general, the Canadian government respects international arbitration and policies, but we're careful about what we talk about on the maritime side. On the South China Sea, I very much worry about trade being able to flow through places. We care a lot about that. I know we do a lot in the Taiwan Strait, for example. The navy goes through there as a matter of course, so open sea routes are important.

• (1840)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Albas.

Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Ambassador Barton, for being with us.

I think it's important to note that our committee is doing some important work. Our work is meant to look at this complex, important relationship we have with China.

You've been invited here to help us. I think that some members who are subbing on the committee seem to think this is an American-style confirmation hearing. This is not. I want to make sure that people watching this recognize that your appointment has followed due process. Everything about this appointment has been for the best interests of Canada. I personally want to thank you for your public service and doing this.

This is not about you—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: On a point of order, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I think you'd find that it's out of order for the member to imply that in a free society tough questions to public officials are out of order. It is important that, in Canada, we are able to ask challenging questions to government appointees.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, this is a matter of debate.

Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

I didn't name any names. I am saying this is not about you; this is about Canada's relationship with China.

I'm no expert on China. On my trips to China, however, if I had a dime for every time Norman Bethune's name was mentioned, I would be wealthy. It is a constant thing.

On my most recent trip to China, I thought that it would help the Chinese understand the importance of the relationship. What I heard was a different thing from Chinese officials, which was that they expected we would then understand them better. That becomes a complex thing. We were talking like this: they saw an extradition process as being one thing; we saw arbitrary detention as something else. We weren't speaking the same language.

Can you tell us how you're trying to pull those two vectors together to get us on a common language?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Sure, because I do think there are, as I said, from the history and the culture, different perspectives and views on the world. I think that what we first tried to do was move away from what I'd call the "speech-reading" on both sides, which literally was, first, "You are lapdogs of the U.S. You've done this and that and the other", and why they were so upset with that. We were saying, "We're following the rule of law in what we did. We have an extradition treaty, and this is how it works." You did see that, but part of it was because there was no discussion. It was just talking at each other and there was no time for discussion.

What I find to be helpful—again, we have to get results, otherwise this is activity with no impact—is to unpack it a bit and say, "Do you know what? We actually have this long-standing relationship. Our people like each other." Do you know what I mean? There's, "Let's go back to what we like about each other. Let's not forget that. Let's talk a bit about why that is the case. What are some of the things we did for each other in the past?" Just build trust and open the ears on both sides on where it is.

There are going to be differences. We're never going to be singing from the same hymn book on this, but we can start to find some common areas that we can work on. We have a lot of things to work on and a common agenda out there.

When we think about this challenge we have, let's not lose the forest for the trees. I don't know if I'm answering your question properly, but that's....

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Are you hopeful?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I am hopeful.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: What would give you hope?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I'm hopeful because, just by definition I'm an optimistic person, so you have to take that, but I actually believe there are small steps.

We did not have any formal communications. A lot of it was informal. We now have very good formal relations. We have real discussions where we can argue and debate, and say, "Let's try to figure this out and understand where things are." There's a momentum. I think they want to have this sorted and we want to have this sorted. I feel like there's a broader discussion. There are small steps.

Again, I'd go back to the meat and the pork. I had nothing to do with that. The Prime Minister was very nice to say it, but part of it is that we couldn't even get to resolve the issue because we couldn't communicate or talk. Now that we can communicate we could actually resolve the issue.

These things start to open up other opportunities, and those are signals or green shoots. Sorry, I see lots of green shoots.

• (1845)

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

I'm now going to give two and a half minutes to Monsieur Bergeron and then to Mr. Harris. After that, if members agree, we'll take a five-minute health break, if that's all right. Members can let me know their views on that.

Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I have two and a half minutes. Is that right, Mr. Chair? I can see that I do.

I hate to go back to questions that I've already asked, primarily because I'm wasting precious minutes, and also because I feel as though I'm putting you on the hot seat, which isn't my intention at all.

I know that you were appointed after Meng Wanzhou's arrest. That's obvious to everyone. To your knowledge, was the embassy contacted? Was the advice of specialists in relations with China sought when the International Assistance Group had to make a decision regarding Meng Wanzhou's pre-trial custody?

[*English*]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, again, I wasn't there, so I don't know, but my sense from the way it works with Justice is that they just decide. They make their decision; it's a case that comes through. My sense of it was that there was not any sort of broader discussion of it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You're therefore unable to assess the extent to which the precedent of the Garratt couple in 2014 could have been taken into account as a warning of what was to come.

[*English*]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Again, my sense is that Justice has quite a strict process—that they deal with all of these. I don't know how they looked at it. I don't think that it was more broadly discussed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs have repeatedly told us that they're seeking the support of a number of countries to lobby on behalf of detained Canadians.

I have two questions about this.

First, is this really an effective way to put pressure on the Chinese authorities or, on the contrary, will this make the Chinese authorities more firm in their position?

Second, doesn't the new Chinese silk road initiative undermine, so to speak, Canada's efforts on the international stage?

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, your two and a half minutes are up. However, I'll let Mr. Barton briefly respond.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You're too kind, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Dominic Barton: I didn't take good enough notes on your first question. I'm sorry about this. I'm happy to go over if you want.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Doesn't the strategy of seeking international support run the risk of making the Chinese more firm in their position?

[*English*]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Quickly, I think it's a good thing to do, but it's not sufficient. It's sort of like necessary but not sufficient. I don't think it's going to unlock it, but it's a good thing to do.

On the silk road or the belt and road initiative, as I think we say from a government point of view, there are many good aspects of it in the sense of the trade opening, but there are many concerning aspects about the transparency and the debt that's in the system. It's not black or white in where it is, and that's I think the view we have on it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you. I'll ask a quick question that's similar to Monsieur Bergeron's.

You were very bullish, of course, as you say, on China, but also on the one belt, one road blueprint. We've gone into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, or the CPTPP, with other countries specifically to attempt to strengthen economic ties and not to be dominated by China. Do you think your work and enthusiasm for the Chinese project runs counter to that strategy and does that cause problems for you?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Again, I am the ambassador for Canada, so I'm going to be pursuing what the government is saying. My understanding of what the government is saying is that we want to be very careful about certain aspects of the belt and road initiative, again, on its transparency and debt and whether or not it beholds some of the people involved in it. On the other hand, there are aspects of it that are positive in opening up trade, which benefits Canadian companies that are actually on that.

• (1850)

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you. Fair enough.

I have one last question. It has to do with the question at the beginning—the point of order—with regard to the 14 countries that support Canada and the others who say they do but won't say it loudly enough for others to hear.

Is there any comprehensive strategic plan for working with them? We've heard nothing about a task force with other countries—as we have seen in the Iranian situation—and special efforts in the PMO, for example, to work with all of these people in a systematic way.

Is something like that going on, and would it help?

Mr. Dominic Barton: There is. With the 14 countries, there are conversations.

One of the first things I did when I got to Beijing was to thank the ambassadors of those countries for doing that and continuing it. That continues in where it is, but as I mentioned to the chair in response to a previous question, it's a good thing to do but it's not going to unlock.... We have to do other things in addition.

Yes, it continues, but we also have to look at other means.

Mr. Jack Harris: It doesn't really help is what you're saying.

Mr. Dominic Barton: It does. It definitely does. What we don't want to do is to have this happen again or to happen to another country, so it's in other countries' interests to say they don't.... It may be Canada now, but who's next? There is an interest. The minister has even talked about the notion of a protocol that would be put in place that countries would agree to.

It definitely is something that we are continuing to move on, but we have to think about other things in addition.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Ambassador.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Colleagues, we're going to add the five minutes onto the end of the meeting, but we'll suspend for now.

Ambassador, I understand that when we come back you'd like to correct something from earlier on, and I'll give you an opportunity to do that.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Sure.

The Chair: We'll add that as well, if you don't mind, to the time for the meeting.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1850) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1900)

The Chair: I'm calling the meeting back to order.

I understand you don't have a statement, Mr. Ambassador.

We're still on five minutes.

Ms. Alleslev.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you very much for being here, Ambassador.

It's very important that we understand more about where we need to be going. Many of the things you said are about deepening and broadening the relationship with China, yet at the same time promoting and defending Canada's interests. I wonder if you could speak to that in terms of the vulnerability that we face by doing more business with China.

Can you tell us what you're doing to protect us from that vulnerability?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Again, I very much believe in this notion that we engage, but that we also defend our interests and where we need to do both.

I think we've been working with industry on that side. If you think about canola, it would be the classic vulnerability. With such a significant portion of our canola exports going there, when that is hit it is a big vulnerability. I think we're saying, let's make sure we have diversification and that we're not putting too many eggs in one basket, and also just working with the industry to make sure we think about how that works.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: But there is the rule of law. It feels to Canadians that China is not respecting the rule of law, and that it shouldn't be able to put this punishing prohibition on our exports. Diversifying will just mean China can hold us hostage on more fronts at the same time rather than just one, but it still has a material impact, particularly if we broaden...

Mr. Dominic Barton: What I meant was that it's not broadening within China; it's broadening in Asia. We aren't just putting all our eggs in one basket, first of all, in China. It's an important market. There's a very big market in Asia too, so let's make sure we do that.

Second, I think we have to use the rule of law. On canola, where I've been quite involved with industry and the government has been involved, we went to the WTO. That has now led to discussions. So there was a hard...and then there was a discussion.

The important thing I think is that we do it with industry, that we're working together on that.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: How would you characterize the progress?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think the progress is quite good, but let's see the result. We're in discussions. We were not having any discussions before and we are now. This has involved not only the federal government, but provincial government people as well, again with the industry. So, there's a dialogue. There was a refusal to have a discussion before, so we're getting into that.

China also needs some of these products we're talking about, so it's moving in the right direction, but we have to get the result.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Now, clearly, we're seeing that there isn't necessarily the same kind of separation between corporations and government in the People's Republic of China as we would have in North America. With mandated laws in China that say that corporations have to provide governments with that information, how do we mitigate that and protect and defend Canadian interests when doing business with these countries?

• (1905)

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think that when Canadian companies are doing business with Chinese companies, the trade commissioner's officers are very good at explaining the requirements, what type of joint venture agreement you should have and being very open about how that works. I also think we need to differentiate between state-owned companies and the private sector. There's a lot of noise about what's happening where. We need to spend time focused on each company and understand the governance of that company.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: But are there not a number of increasingly private corporations that have party officials on their boards? That's an increasing trend in China?

Mr. Dominic Barton: There are reports of that happening. That's why I think it is most important to look at each company individually, just as we would do in other places. You can understand very clearly what's happening. It's not intransparent.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: It feels to Canadians as if it's not very transparent. Could you advise us on why we should believe it is transparent?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think this is the difference between being in the country and being outside the country. I think it's important to understand who the individuals are and what their relationships are. You can get a lot of information that way, and you can find out from other Chinese business leaders as well how they think about it. Look at the results of joint ventures. A lot of other businesses around the world are interacting with companies and some don't interact with others; that's very clear when you're there.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Alleslev.

[*Translation*]

I'll now give the floor to Mr. Dubourg, who will share his time with Ms. Yip.

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

Your Excellency, I want to thank you for joining us.

First, I want to join my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois and the NDP in saying that your work on the ground under the current circumstances is important to us. We must give our regards to the three Canadians detained over there. I know that we've been told that there may be 123 Canadians detained in Hong Kong or China, but these three cases are a little more problematic.

I want to ask you a few questions. I looked through your CV and I can see that your background is exemplary. I want to congratulate you on that. I can also see that you're very familiar with the situation on the ground over there.

When you were contacted following Mr. McCallum's departure, what was your reaction? Can you clearly show us that, based on your experience and expertise, you're the right person for this role, even though we said earlier that, since your arrival, we've really seen the tension drop? Tell us about the experience that you have to help Canada in this difficult situation.

[*English*]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thanks, again, for the messages to our detainees. That will be very well received by them next week.

I hope I'm understanding correctly. I was asked to take this role before, and I didn't want to do it. I didn't feel it fitted my timing. After I was asked again, I felt there was a very significant need. I think what I've tried to bring to it is my experience, as I have relationships from having lived in that country that have been built over time with people. They know that I know what they're like. They know I will tell truth to power. I don't back off on that. They know my track record. And it's broad. It's not just business. It's in government, the social sector and universities. Probably my closest linkages are through the university system. What I've tried to do is to bring those relationships to bear, to the extent I can. There are other Canadians who also have very good relationships in China that we need to harness. That's from the academic side, the NGO side and from the business side. Our pension funds, for example, are very influential in where it is.

So, it was to try to assemble a team, if you will, and then have a plan. I think it's the total commitment. My objective is to restore the relationship, but within those three parameters. I have been very clear all the way through, and I'm focused. I talked with anyone I possibly could, mainly informally at first because it was difficult to have formal conversations. I would meet people and say, "Oh, I happened to see you in the restaurant". That's interesting, that type of discussion, in then getting to a formal basis. Again, the team we have in Beijing is very good. They have those relationships, too.

That's what we've tried to do to build the channels to have the discussions.

• (1910)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Okay. Thank you.

In your introduction, you said that you were asked to restore that relationship and to bring the two Michaels back to Canada. You also talked about human rights. However, you did say that Canada must understand China and China must understand Canada.

Granted, it's not in your mandate, but what role are you going to play in that area? What common ground will you build on to make this mutual understanding real?

[English]

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think on the Chinese side there's a broad understanding that we're a resource-based country, a country that's been very helpful. But it's about making sure they understand the depth and breadth of who we are and our capabilities, I think, are areas where that's the case. And why do we believe in human rights the way we do? It's one thing to say it, but why is that the case? What's our history on that front? It's more the whys of how this works.

There are some Canadian study centres in a number of the universities. I think, by the way, we need to fund them more because we need to have more Chinese academics writing about Canada, not Canadians writing about Canada in China, and there's an appetite for it. But we support it. So those are the stories we need to get across.

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Dubourg.

Over to Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you.

Ambassador, earlier in my intervention I asked you about your meetings with Huawei officials, including the dates, locations, and the identity of the people you met with. I'd like you to submit that to the committee. Perhaps you could do it by February 14. That would be an acceptable time. It's important for Parliament to receive this information. I'd appreciate your co-operation.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, I'm happy to be helpful on that one. I want to be prudent in terms of the specific discussions I had, so I'm going to get some advice, if I can, from GAC. I'm personally comfortable—

Mr. Dan Albas: I certainly appreciate that. Parliamentary committees do have extensive powers, but I do appreciate your being co-operative in the matter. Thank you.

I'll pass it to Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Thank you, Ambassador, for being here.

I do want to drill down a little bit in terms of lessons learned. You did say that when being advised by other countries, partners and allies, one of the important lessons to be learned is not to be bullied. Frankly, Canadians feel like we're being bullied right now. We have the arbitrary detention of Canadian citizens. We have what seems to be arbitrary and nonsensical cutting out of our agricultural exports.

You mentioned pork. It's interesting that you believe that their allowing Canadian pork back into China was a good sign. Why did you say that?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, as I said, I did hear from many different embassies and countries, first of all, on the notion of not being bullied, and I think that's about standing up. That's why the Prime Minister is not interested in doing prisoner swaps on that. It's about being clear; we have a system, and people say, "Stay, and you do do that". And you move through it.

On agriculture, to your question—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I wasn't clear on my question, I don't think. You said that it was a good sign. Most Canadians believe that it was an arbitrary decision for the Chinese simply to shut it out. It was for ulterior reasons that they were shutting out Canadian pork. The Chinese made the case that they believe that it was because of a document issue.

Do you believe that it was done, that the ban was lifted because of reconciliation of the documents, or do you believe it was done because they decided to show some indication of good will?

• (1915)

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, this is an area that I've delved into quite deeply with the industry, the Canadian Meat Council.

The view is that a mistake was made. It was not seen as an arbitrary shift.

If I might just finish, the issue was then being able to try to get that so that it stopped. Because there were no discussions, we then couldn't figure out how to resolve it. As the discussions moved on, we were able to resolve it, and it's in China's interest, but it was stuck. It was a mistake. It was stuck, and now I think, through very good efforts from the meat council and others in the industry, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and everyone, they were able to get it sorted.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: We have a major issue, and it's an ongoing crisis with the canola exports. Where are we with that?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Pardon me. Again, the vast majority of Canadians, especially Canadian farmers, believe this is arbitrary and has nothing to do with the canola, but is simply retaliation for a relationship gone sideways.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, the first thing I'd say is that anyone who knows me knows how passionate I am about the ag food industry, so I have a very strong personal interest in that. There's a very significant opportunity.

I do think it was a punishment, if you will. They stopped it. As I said, we've gone to the WTO. That has led to what I think are some constructive discussions, technical discussions that we're having, so it's moving forward. At the end of the day, the results matter, but there's momentum.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Oh, yes, results do matter.

In terms of lessons learned, you said that we shouldn't be bullied. Now you've admitted that this is definitely one example of being bullied.

Obviously, you've talked about WTO challenges. Those are very lengthy and very costly, and we don't have time on our side when it comes to the exports in this industry. What other types of leverage do you believe that Canada has to try to break free from this punishing ban?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think, Mr. Chair, that the WTO is the vehicle that we have for going through it. What we have to say is that food security matters a lot to China, and if you think about the protein demands on the meat and the vegetable side, we are going to be a critical source of where that is. If Canadian farmers are nervous—and they are, even on the meat side—about committing, just in case something goes on, that supply is not going to come in.

What we're doing is saying is.... First of all, we didn't do something else to try to get the canola. We've gone to use the mechanisms that we have. Then we're saying, "You need to be careful," on the Chinese side, "because we are a high-quality, safe food supplier." What this does is make people very nervous about piling in behind it, and we're explaining that to them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Warkentin.

Ms. Zann.

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

Thank you so much for being here. It's been extremely interesting listening to you and hearing your own perspective of what's going on in China. I'm very glad to hear that you are a big believer in the culture as well.

As somebody who has been involved with culture here in Canada, I really believe in cross-laterally talking with people, bringing in plays, ballets and things like this, so thank you for your efforts.

I do want to talk about a December 2019 editorial by the current and former presidents of the International Crisis Group. They said the following about their colleague, Mr. Kovrig:

Although China has never spelled out the reasons for Michael's imprisonment, it is clear that he is merely a pawn in a larger geopolitical game.

At the same time, they cautioned against the adoption of "a far more aggressive approach toward China" and noted:

...Beijing has a critical role to play not only in its own Asian neighborhood but elsewhere as well, including in preventing, mitigating and resolving deadly conflict—across the globe from Central Asia to the Korean Peninsula, from Afghanistan to Venezuela, from Sudan to Zimbabwe.

As ambassador, can you please explain to us why engagement is the best approach to managing bilateral and multilateral relations with China?

Mr. Dominic Barton: A few quick things....

I'm glad on the cultural side. I think we always underestimate that, and I can't tell you the number of people in the film industry, arts and music who are doing things. Those are, again, important for the relationship.

I think, again, precisely because China is playing a bigger role in the world, we need to engage with them in areas. If you think about Africa, if you think about peacekeeping, or if you think about disaster relief, there is a lot of interest that the Red Cross Society of China has with the Canadian Red Cross because of our capabilities. They're impressed with how we do disaster relief.

As we have, unfortunately, more disasters in the world, when looking at how countries co-operate—they have a lot of resources; we have a lot of capabilities—there are many areas where we can do things together.

Even with this coronavirus and pandemics, we, as a country, have a real depth in understanding how those work, and I think there are opportunities to collaborate. That is what I think I would say.

● (1920)

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you.

I notice that the Chinese officials thanked Canada for the way we have reacted to the coronavirus, in that we have not reacted in the same way as the United States, for instance, or Australia. I believe that, again, shows this spirit of co-operation that is so important in this global world.

In a 2017 speech to Universities Canada, you described three global shifts that are under way right now: an economic power shift from the west to primarily Asia, but also to Africa, primarily Nigeria; the technical revolution, for instance computing power, connectedness, big data and artificial intelligence; and the need for a new societal deal that would address such economic forces as automation, which we all know is going to be a big thing in the future.

Would you say still that the economic power is continuing to shift from western countries to those in Asia? What key forces are driving China's economic rise, and are those forces sustainable?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I very much believe in that economic power shift. As I said, we're 15 years in, and we have a long period to go. It's driven by a combination of population, the young population of a huge middle class, of well over 1.5 billion new middle class coming into the system. In a sense, it's a re-rise of this part of the world, and it's driven by urbanization—China has a long way to go on urbanization—and a shift in the economy to the service sector.

That's happening in other parts. It's happening in Vietnam, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and as I mentioned, Nigeria and East Africa. These represent opportunities for Canada, and we have a good reputation because of our standards and how we do human rights, how we follow the law. We're highly respected. We just need to get out there.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds for a final comment.

Ms. Lenore Zann: There is one thing I just want to note. You did note the aging population, and that is becoming a problem in China, just as it is in Japan and in Nova Scotia.

How does that play into this economic thrust?

The Chair: In three or four words, please, Ambassador.

Mr. Dominic Barton: The world is aging. We're all going to have to deal with this. We can learn from each other.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you.

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

[Translation]

Before we continue, I want to say that we started the meeting at 5:35 p.m., and that we took a 10-minute break. We'll keep going until 7:45 p.m.

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

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You're too generous, Mr. Chair.

When the Prime Minister publicly insisted that he expected the United States to intervene to secure the release of Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig, a Chinese foreign affairs official immediately stepped in and said not to try to put pressure on China through a third party. However, the Department of Foreign Affairs maintains, as you did a few moments ago, that it's a good strategy to seek support in other countries.

As long as we know that China is taking offence at this type of tactic, how can we be sure that it's a good strategy to change the situation for the better?

• (1925)

[English]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, this is a very interesting question.

I think we do have a triangle here with China, Canada and the United States. We know there are lots of trade tensions going on between China and the U.S. There are lots of different views within the U.S. administration as to whether or not it is a trade deal, or... There are a lot of issues going on, and we're caught up in it because we're an ally of the United States and we also want to trade and do things with China.

My view is that we have to recognize a reality that there are those dimensions happening together that we have to factor in. I think we will talk to the United States about this and we have to be clear about it. What China reacts to most negatively is if it's a finger-wagging with nothing else, which is not that helpful, right? That's their sense of it, right?

I think what we have to say again as we're thinking about this whole situation is that there are three parties involved. The Prime Minister is being quite vocal with the President in saying, "We've followed the rule of law on this extradition, so what are you doing on this side?" It's not saying, "Do X, Y, Z". It's saying, "What are you doing about it?" I think that's a healthy thing.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: As I was saying, we'll have a chance to take another look at—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Bergeron, but your time is up.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I relied on you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry. It's my fault.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You should acknowledge that a mistake occurred and let me continue.

The Chair: Ha, ha! Nice try, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Harris, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

These times are not long enough to have a full discussion. Hopefully, we can get you to come back.

We're obviously interested here in making sure that everything is being done that can be done with respect to the detainees. Also, we're concerned about the overall relationship and the levers that we aren't using that could be used. Have you discovered any new ones since you've become ambassador?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, I'm interested in ideas from the committee, by the way, because I think we have to be creative while recognizing that we have a rule of law and not being bullied. I think there's room for creativity.

As I said, international pressure is a good part of it, and we need to keep that up for the long term. In terms of discussions with China, I think we need to look at it and say that there's so much more we can do together, so why is this getting in our way? We need to frame that up. It's one thing to say it, but what does that look like? It's working with the United States.

I think there are areas, but we're going to have to have some creativity within the system that we are in. That's where, when you start discussing things with people, I think ideas can come up.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

I want to go back to the question of bullying as a tactic, or as a fact of life, perhaps, in some international relationships. We've seen it with the American administration in some cases. I won't go into detail.

What disturbs me is that we're told there are 14 countries that are on our side and are willing to say so, but there is an unknown number of countries, perhaps a large number, that aren't. They're not willing to say so, obviously out of some sort of fear of repercussions, retaliation or some sort of bullying. I find that worrisome, as a citizen of the world. There are a lot of countries in the world; I'd like to see the list to see how many are there but not really there.

What do we do about that? Is there something that tells us what we need to do?

Mr. Dominic Barton: It's a very good point. One thing I was surprised about is that, well, this is an important area in which to do things, but I also feel a bit like we're alone in the world.

The good news is that there are 14 countries that have come out. There are other countries that, not for bullying reasons, but it's just their culture and approach, don't say anything about anyone. We can push them and drive them, but this isn't to do with China. They don't talk about the United States. It's just the way they are.

All I'm saying is, as someone coming into this thought, this would be an obvious area. It was surprising to me, too.

I do think there are things we can do on that, because in a world that's changing so quickly, we have to think about working together. The whole of foundations are changing, the multilateral foundation, so I think we should invest in that because there are areas for co-operation. However, I too have been surprised at a number of places that are not interested in it, and interestingly, not because of bullying but it's just not what they want to do.

• (1930)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Colleagues, as I indicated, we can go until 7:45. I understand that Mr. Manly would like to ask for agreement that he be permitted to ask a question.

Mr. Manly, do you want to make your request?

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Yes. If the committee agrees, I would like to take a short opportunity to say something and ask a question.

The Chair: Is it agreed?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I have no objection, but I have a question.

I think the ambassador did say that he had some flexibility with the time. In light of Mr. Manly's desire and that of some others, could we possibly extend until 8 o'clock?

The Chair: Apparently there isn't agreement to do that—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay. Either way, it's fine.

The Chair: —but I guess there was agreement to let Mr. Manly ask a question, and then we will come back to the list. Is that all right?

Mr. Manly, I will let you go ahead.

Mr. Paul Manly: Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to speak.

I want to echo some of the things I've heard from other members here. I'm not going to belabour these points, but in regard to your relationship to McKinsey and 22 of the 100 top state-owned corporations, your relationship to Teck Resources and the Chinese Investment Corporation and these conflicts of interest, I just want to put those concerns on the record.

However, my question is related to this position we're in between the United States and China with Huawei and 5G and how you see this unfolding, how we're going to manoeuvre through this situation with the Five Eyes and the demands by the Americans that we not take on Huawei Technologies to implement 5G.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Right. The 5G question is clearly a critical one. There are a lot of security issues that are going to be dealt with in that. I'm not part of that conversation.

We have people in the government who are looking at that file and moving it through. I think it's an important decision that's going to be made. Again, I'm not party to those discussions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Manly.

Mr. Genuis, please. You have five minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your Excellency, could you share a little about your engagement on the Celil case?

Mr. Dominic Barton: On the what?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The Celil case. That's the name of a Canadian detained in China.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Oh, sorry, yes. He has been in detention for about 15 years.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes.

Mr. Dominic Barton: I've looked into that case. I call him Huseyin. Basically, because Huseyin is not a Canadian citizenship holder, we aren't able to get access to him on a consular services side. We've tried, because he's someone I would like to see. I know it has been a long-standing file, but—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Celil actually is a Canadian citizen.

My next question is, does the Government of Canada support calls for universal suffrage in Hong Kong?

Mr. Dominic Barton: There are two things I would say on that.

Again, on the case of Huseyin, we have tried everything we can and we do not have access on the consular services side. We've tried. If you have ideas of how to do it, I'm open to them.

On Hong Kong, we support the one country, two systems model. We believe people should have the right to be able to express their views. We're hopeful for a peaceful resolution of that, but we believe very much in the one country, two systems approach.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Do you support calls for universal suffrage in Hong Kong?

Mr. Dominic Barton: We support the one country, two systems model. There are very clear rules about what can be done and not done, and that's the approach we take.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, sir. I think your answer is clear.

You used the word "friends". You said that friends disagree with respect to the Chinese government. I'm curious. Principally, do you regard the Chinese government as a strategic friend, as a strategic competitor or foe or as something else?

Mr. Dominic Barton: As I mentioned, China is a very complex place. I think that to try to paint it as black or white is not appropriate. There are parts of what China does where we have a very strong common interest in what we want to do in advancing an agenda and there are parts of what China does that we fundamentally disagree with, but it's not black or white.

• (1935)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you for providing your views on that.

During the introduction you spoke about cultural and philosophical differences. You talked about how we have to understand history and culture and that China's political differences, in your view, may be rooted in Confucian values of collectivism, unity and harmony.

My reading of the founding texts of Confucianism is they're very much at odds with the typical practices of the current Chinese government, and I would make this argument: It was the politics of the Marxist powers in China to try to destroy China's Confucian history. In places like Hong Kong and Taiwan that history was not destroyed.

Today Taiwan is a well functioning democracy, rooted very much in China's history and values, and Hong Kong is a place where there are strong calls for universal suffrage and democracy, which I would hope Canadians would support.

It seems to me that the political structures of China are not rooted predominantly in long-standing Confucian values, but in the political philosophy of Marxism and totalitarian control. I'd love to hear you defend your view on that. Are we maybe agreeing somewhat? What do you think about that thesis?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I don't think we're agreeing.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Mr. Dominic Barton: My understanding of Chinese history—and as I said we all should spend time really understanding what's happening there—is that Confucianism is very much a part of the

system and how it's working today. There are different manifestations of that in mainland China, not just in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and that's rooted, as I said, in the notion of harmony and the collective good as opposed to the individual. It's a view in that system. Many other dimensions, too, are worth looking at on that front. It doesn't mean that we have to agree, we just need to recognize—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I have a quick follow-up question before time runs out.

Would you agree those values are completely compatible with freedom and democracy and with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as we've seen in places like Taiwan?

Mr. Dominic Barton: You packed a lot into that question. I'll try to answer it.

Some elements of collectivism and harmony are at odds with individual rights. They're different.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Barton, we've met now tonight for two hours plus. You've answered a number of questions on a number of different topics. I see we're approaching the end of this meeting. Is there a key message you would like to communicate, not just to us tonight but to those Canadians who are following the issue of the Canada-Chinese relationship very closely and are concerned about it? Is there something you would like to put forward as your main message to them?

Mr. Dominic Barton: My main message is that China is a complex country and a society that represents very significant opportunities for us. A lot of our prosperity can benefit from being part of it, but there are also some things we don't agree with and don't like. Whatever your view is, we're going to have to engage with China. I'm of the view that we can make that work. But we are going to have to raise our game as a society and over time. I hope it's more of a long-term approach. Again, when I see how other countries are dealing with this, when they're struggling with a shift with China and the United States and so forth, we're seeing a more long-term consistent approach, which can again be by use of the accelerator and brake at the same time. I would hope we're not seeing this as a black and white model.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, I am going to be splitting my time with Ms. Yip.

As a last question, when you come to the conclusion of your appointment, whenever that might be, what will success look like, in your view?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Success, in my view, will be defined as the following. I want Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig released and back in Canada, and I want the death sentence taken away from Robert Schellenberg. That is the fundamental point of what I would see.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Ambassador.

I'll share my time, as I said, with Ms. Yip.

Ms. Jean Yip: There are 300,000 Canadians in Hong Kong. What are your thoughts on the Hong Kong protests and their impact on Canada?

• (1940)

Mr. Dominic Barton: Well, Mr. Chair, to your exact point, there are 300,000 Canadians there and we have to care about what happens to them. It's a high area of focus for us. I hope that people are listening to some of the messages that are being given by the protestors, and there's a broad range of messages. They relate also to income inequality and lack of opportunity and so forth.

I hope there can be a peaceful way for addressing those issues being raised. I think the elections that occurred recently were a manifestation of that. It was a process where messages were delivered. The Chinese government has not intervened or pushed through. I don't think that's what they wanted or expected, but they recognize that's where the people are. It's a delicate balance of hoping that ideas and people's expression can be put through, and that they can get to a peaceful place in it. I say so because the current course is harmful for everyone.

Ms. Jean Yip: Do you feel that the coronavirus has muted some of these issues at all in Hong Kong?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think the coronavirus has changed the focus on a lot of things for the short term. The coronavirus is probably going to be here longer than we think, and I just don't believe the idea that we're going to be done with it in March. I'm not a virologist, so you should be careful whom you're listening to on that. I just think this is going to take longer.

That said, these issues are not going to go away in the world, and that's why I think we have to keep moving. Obviously, this is a big issue now, but we have to keep moving on all the other agenda items, too.

Ms. Jean Yip: Some constituents have told me that they are scared and worried about loved ones in China, and also about the coronavirus spreading to Canada. What assurances can you give Canadians? Is there anything in your discussions with the Chinese government that could ease their minds or give them some peace of mind?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Well, first, if there's any country that I'd want to have to deal with a big crisis like that, it's them, in the sense of the scale. They don't want it to move out of the system at all. They're willing. When you see the lockdown that's going on in Hubei province and Wuhan, it's simply extraordinary. Even in other cities that are not affected.... In Beijing you could land a 747 on the Third Ring Road right now. It's just that people are focused and moving it. The effort China's making to contain this is extraordinary, and the World Health Organization has said so. You see it.

On the Canadian side, I'd also feel good. There was a lot of learning from the SARS issue in terms of how communications occurred, what we know among the provinces and the federal government. This whole field is an area of incredible strength for Canada. It's why China is actually asking for our help. It's not just the masks and the garments; they want virologists. They want access to our medical capability and advice on how this goes.

I think government is being very transparent and open. The discussions about where things are going are very intense. We have, I think, five cases. Again, we also are going to extraordinary lengths, and we're being very evidence-based on this. It's very scientific and evidence-based, and that's key.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you.

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

Now we'll go to Mr. Albas for three minutes, which will take us to the end of our time.

Mr. Albas.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Ambassador.

Just quickly on Huawei, public safety minister Bill Blair has suggested that security concerns will no longer be the only thing the government considers. To me, that means they will be considering things other than security, so that could be political. Would you be involved in any decision regarding that? Would you be advising Bill Blair or the government, in your capacity, as to what the political issues would be of denying Huawei access to our 5G?

Mr. Dominic Barton: As I mentioned before, I am not involved. As I mentioned, on the technical side, I'm the wrong person. You need to have people who really understand the technology. It's not my area.

On the political—

• (1945)

Mr. Dan Albas: [*Inaudible—Editor*] officials.

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think the Canadian government has the right people looking at 5G and the security issues who can actually address that.

On the political side, this is a decision that will have to be made. Whichever way it goes, there will be consequences, and I'll have to live with whatever the consequences are. I'm not involved in the—

Mr. Dan Albas: I think all of us will be living with the consequences, Ambassador.

You mentioned to the committee earlier that Canadian values are very important to you and that you would defend universal and inalienable human rights. Yet when MP Genuis asked you about universal suffrage in Hong Kong, you replied that the government believes in one country, two systems in response. How are the two consistent?

Mr. Dominic Barton: On this I would say that we have relationships with different countries in what we do. We as a government subscribe to the model of one country, two systems, so—

Mr. Dan Albas: [*Inaudible—Editor*] protest and the response by the authorities in Hong Kong to take democratic protesters expressing their will, or their wanting to maintain their system of two systems, and to be treated like that, you must admit there is a concern regarding human rights and violation of their rights.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Again, we follow the one country, two systems model. We are concerned. We want to enable people to be able to protest and to be able to share their views, and where they have...and I think we've been very open about that. We hope they come to some peaceful resolution on it, but it's one country, two systems. We want people to express their views and not have that stopped. We've said that.

Mr. Dan Albas: You mentioned that coronavirus may be around longer than we think. You also mentioned that we have 650 people in greater China, which I would assume would also include Taiwan. Should Taiwan be included in international fora like the World Health Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization? Do you believe that would be helpful?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Again, we follow the one China policy. I think on issues like health and pandemics and so forth that are affecting other people, we encourage the participation of all people who would be affected in it.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you.

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

Thank you very much, Ambassador and Mr. Steil, for appearing today. Thank you for your work. I think we would all agree that we

would like you to take our best wishes to Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor, whom we hope to see home soon, and also take our best wishes to Mr. Schellenberg.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: And Mr. Celil.

The Chair: And Mr. Celil, Mr. Genuis adds. Indeed.

Thank you so much.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Thank you.

The Chair: Colleagues, Global Affairs has informed me that Mr. Harris's issue is addressed in the information package that the clerk received earlier today. That will be distributed in the morning, so we can look forward to seeing that.

I would remind colleagues that there is a subcommittee meeting tomorrow morning from 11 to 12, room 225A in West Block.

We've had I think four responses to a survey that was sent to members. I'd encourage members, if you have a moment tonight, to respond to the survey sent to you by the clerk.

Thank you, colleagues.

This meeting is adjourned.

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