

SUMMARY OF COMMITTEE PROCEEDINGS

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Thursday, March 31, 2022

11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Report Prepared By

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Topic of Meeting

- Rise of Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism in Canada
- Consideration of Draft Report on Guns Control, Illegal Arms Trafficking and the Increase in Gun Crimes Committed by Members of Street Gangs

Members in Attendance

- **Liberal Party** – Pam Damoff, Jim Carr, Paul Chiang, Taleeb Noormohamed, Sameer Zuberi, Ron McKinnon; Rachel Bandayan
- **Conservative Party** – Tako Van Popta, Raquel Dancho, Dane Lloyd, Doug Shipley
- **Bloc Québécois** – Andréanne Larouche
- **New Democratic Party** – Alistair MacGregor

11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

As individuals

- Aurelie Campana, Full Professor
- Mubin Shaikh, Counter Extremism Specialist

Insight Threat Intelligence

- Jessica Davis, President and Principal Consultant

12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence

- Louis Audet Gosselin, Scientific and Strategic Director

The Global Disinformation Index

- Daniel J. Rogers, Executive Director

1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. (in-camera)

Topic: Gun Control, Illegal Arms Trafficking and the Increase in Gun Crimes Committed by Members of Street Gangs

Summary

This was the second meeting of the Committee on the topic of Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism. The Committee heard from academics and stakeholders who spoke to issues of online platforms being used to propagate hate and hate speech, prevention and the environment that leads to radicalization.

In the third hour of the meeting, the Committee moved in-camera to discuss the draft report on Guns Control, Illegal Arms Trafficking and the Increase in Gun Crimes Committed by Members of Street Gangs.

FIRST PANEL (11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.)

Opening Remarks

Mr. Campana gave an overview of the field work that she and her colleagues started in 2013. She shared observations on the global scope of IMVE and the role of social media. She indicated that there are two trends within the Canadian far right. 1. Groups that want fundamental reform and the others that reject democracy; and 2. The far right movement that is shifting boundaries and is made up of influencers.

Ms. Shaikh gave an overview of his background and indicated that he has viewed threats from direct participation in covert activities with CSIS and other organizations from 2006 to 2010. He explained that social media platform opportunities have increased for threat actors and went on to give example of some of the successes around infiltration of some groups. Some Canadians are active on online hate networks. He stressed that it takes a collective effort on the parts of governments, businesses and individuals to bring forward concerns and push back on IMVE.

Ms. Davis gave an overview of how groups and individuals use financial mechanisms to finance and move their activities forward. She explained that propaganda used by influencers can generate income. She indicated that there are some tools such as financial intelligence are useful in stopping financing but more is needed in the areas of legislation and regulation. With regard to payment processors, she indicated that they rarely restrict their use even for hate groups.

Questions

Demographics

Ms. Davis indicated that the role of women in extremist groups is under-represented and that their participation is around 15-30%. They tend to take on non-connected roles such as logistics and financier roles. Women are there to propagate a certain message, especially in the area of white supremacy and conspiracy theories.

Ms. Davis explained that people involved in extremist groups come from a variety of socio economic backgrounds. In the IMVE space, there is a tendency to look at men.

Mr. Shaikh explained that ideologies and grievances must be viewed equally because ideology without grievance does not make sense.

Ms. Campana explained that there is no single answer to the issues of root cause for radicalization and that there are a variety of socio economic profiles. Some draw their inspiration from idea that are rolling around echo chambers.

Mr. Shaikh explained that the government is doing a good job dealing with tackling grievances, especially through the Canada Centre. His organization went for a more collaborative approach and generated the ability for participants to begin to work together and offload some of the challenges that come to young people and even adults to deal with grievances on a one-on-one basis.

Social Media

Mr. Shaikh explained that social media has become a force multiplier for IMVE groups. He went on to explain that in the case of lone actors, they can be inspired by others or they can be driven by organizations.

Ms. Campana indicated that there should be more regulation of algorithms. This issue has led to echo chambers, target individuals and help to propagate rumours that become attractive to individuals.

Extremism and Radicalization

Mr. Shaikh explained that the main issues leading to changes in extremism in Canada have been social media, the pandemic and unforeseen circumstances. The current environment has thrown Canada into a situation where it's hard to know where the threats will come from. Some people are picking and choosing issues based on their feelings on what's happening around the world.

Ms. Davis explained that Canada faces a lack of application of laws across the IMVE space and that in terms of resolution, there is a need for more resources. Threat actors get the sense that they can get away with things without having to pay. She did note that she is starting to see some broadening out by police to address certain types of threats.

Mr. Shaikh explained that teachers are trying to prevent students from becoming radicalized but while they are not spies or police, they do have a duty to report. He stressed that there is no way to prevent all radicalization.

Mr. Shaikh explained that radicalization is not a condition that only affects brown people and that there will be radicalization if all the ingredients for it are present. He stressed that it is a human psychological process and that there needs to be equality in how we prosecute incidents of IMVE.

Extremist and Hate Groups

When asked about what groups Canadians should be worried about, Mr. Shaikh indicated that groups such as the Anti-Muslim Militia and Diagon are some that have grown increasingly radicalized. Ms. Campana responded that visible groups are not always the most dangerous. Some are present in social media and getting more organized.

Ms. Campana explained that she does not think groups will disappear once the pandemic is over but that they might change tact or merge with other groups. She indicated that at the moment there is no real unity with some groups and that it is very hard to find the underlying unifying factors within groups.

Ms. Davis indicated that she sees IMVE as a set of loose movements that tend to not have organizational structures. This makes it harder to investigate and deal with them.

Ms. Campana explained that while Canada is not as polarized as the US, dominant and alternate media is being fed by far right groups who are propagating theories.

Financing

Ms. Davis indicated that in order to move toward stopping extremism funding, there must be more public/private partnerships.

Ms. Davis explained that the pandemic has likely increased funding to influencers but in the area of actual attacks from IMVE actors, there has been no change.

Ms. Campana noted that some individuals emerge as influencers and use their influence to finance themselves and other movement.

Radicalization within the CAF and Police Forces

Mr. Shaikh explained that radicalization within the CAF and police forces is a real concern, particularly within the military. Military personnel often have combat training, intelligence information, and access to weapons. This said, he does not believe it is as pervasive a threat in the military and most are not regular forces but reservists. He indicated that more internal mechanisms are needed within the military and police services.

PANEL TWO (12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.)

Opening Remarks

Mr. Gosselin explained that over the past two years, some forms of extremism have been influenced by and crystalized around the pandemic. Some are driven by conspiracy theories and some groups and individuals have made threats and promised violence. Some ideas have circulated worldwide. For example, the so called Freedom Convoy became a breeding ground for movements around the world. Vectors such as anxiety, the pandemic, and polarizing of public discourse are fueling crowd funding and merchandise sales. The solution is to use education, mobilization, support and awareness building to reach out to groups that are susceptible to radicalization. Since the beginning of the pandemic many have remained non-violent leaving a lot of room for prevention.

Mr. Rogers spoke to the series of studies he has done around how tech and payment companies enable groups by leveraging the internet. Simple searches of internet platforms will find items for sale that support IMVE and groups. An analysis of north American groups and payment platforms found that many are used to raise money. Over half the platforms have policies against IMVE but have gone unenforced. Some groups are considered charities and have exempt tax status. Private industry must step up and do more to stop those who use their platforms to finance these activities. There is a need for industry wide standards and third party accountability.

Questions

Prevention

Mr. Gosselin indicated that most prevention cases are confidential but that success stories are not hard to pin down in that if prevention not succeeded, there would have been real problems. Prevention work is done on a case-by-case basis but a more robust national evaluation process is needed to get a better idea of which initiatives are working and which are not.

Radicalization

Mr. Gosselin explained that it is difficult to identify one root cause that leads to IMVE. In one study, they focussed on youth and how they become radicalized which includes vulnerability and the feeling that they are going to have things taken away from them.

Mr. Rogers indicated that he looks at information through an adversarial narrative that carries a risk of harm in order to determine whether it is disinformation.

Mr. Gosselin indicated that we must help people get out of extremism and work to meet their needs. More resources are need to deal with these issues.

Mr. Gosselin explained that labelling is often a factor that will accentuate the feeling of marginalization and exclusion. Dialogue is very important.

Mr. Gosselin explained that his organization tries to deal with all extremists in a fair and equitable way. When his Centre was set up, it focused on the Jihad movement. Since then, they have tried to develop a framework that works over all four forms of radicalization. They have been clear that radicalization is not only for political reasons.

Mr. Rogers explained that during the pandemic some factors of radicalization have been anxiety, social factors that have pushed people to extremism, and disinformation that further accentuates radicalization. He explained that he is seeing a convergence of a specific narrative around anti-science, anti-government, and anti-democracy.

Mr. Gosselin indicated that vaccination is a sensitive public health issue and that personal choice has a broad ramification on society at large. Some get the sense that those who choose not to be vaccinated were marginalized but that this has now changed. There has been over-polarization internationally.

Online Hate

Mr. Gosselin indicated that online hate speech is rampant and widespread. A study on online hate speech indicates that it is more dangerous than in person hate speech. It must be criminalized and made punishable. Hateful ideas can sometimes affect communities and make people feel that they no longer have a place within them.

Mr. Rogers indicated that financial considerations are only a part of the reason why platforms are not self-policing. Experience has shown that the response from private companies can depend on the

culture as some are eager to implement policies, some push back and some are in the middle. The default is that public or media interest informs what they do.

Mr. Rogers stressed that social media companies have a huge role to play in the IMVE space and that algorithms can hugely warp individuals. He went on to explain that legislators have a role to play in forcing change to social media companies.

Financing

Many companies that are selling hate material and products are American and have blanket waivers. Policies need to be enforced and created to change online purchasing and the spreading of hate.

Follow-up Items

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Next Meetings

Tuesday, April 5, 2022

Topic: Emergency Preparedness in Light of Range of Threats Posed by Russia

Committee’s Forward Business Agenda

Study	Next Meeting Dates & Steps	Deadline to Complete Study / Date à laquelle l'étude doit être terminée	Date Study Agreed To or Referred
That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study on the rise of Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism (IMVE) in Canada; that this study include an investigation into the influence of foreign and domestic actors in funding and supporting violent extremist ideologies in Canada; that the study include the use of social media to fuel the IMVE movement; that the committee explore the impact of anonymous and foreign donations funding IMVE, including through crowdfunding sites; that the committee invite representatives from GiveSendGo to appear; that the committee further look at the role of payment processors in preventing the funding of IMVE and invite representatives from Paypal and Stripe to appear; that evidence and documentation received by the committee from upcoming appearances of representatives of GoFundMe and FINTRAC be included in this study; that this study include Canada’s national security organizations and police involved in monitoring, countering and responding to IMVE threats; that the committee report its findings to the House; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response to the report.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - March 3, 2022 - March 31, 2022 - April 26, 2022 - April 28, 2022 - May 10, 2022 - May 12, 2022 	- May 12, 2022	- Feb 10, 2022
That pursuant to standing order 108(2), the committee immediately begin a study on Canada’s emergency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - April 5, 2022 - April 7, 2022 	- June 2, 2022	- Mar 3, 2022

<p>preparedness for the range of threats posed by Russia, including threats to Canada’s public safety and national security, to Canada’s critical infrastructure (both physical and cyber), <u>to the prevalence and impact of Russian misinformation and disinformation</u>, as well as the threat that Russia could resort to the use of espionage, sabotage, and weapons of mass destruction; that this study include at least eight meetings; that the committee invite the Ministers of Public Safety, Emergency Preparedness and National Defence to appear; and other witnesses as requested by the committee; and that the committee report its findings to the House; <u>and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response to the report.</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- May 3, 2022- May 5, 2022- May 17, 2022*- May 19, 2022- May 24, 2022- May 31, 2022- June 2, 2022 <p>* The study could be interrupted for the study of Main Estimates 2022-23 (TBC)</p>		
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Diagolon Participation in the Freedom Convoy 2022 and Beyond



The 2022 Freedom Convoy is part of the broader anti-public health measures movement. The convoy drew thousands of protesters to downtown Ottawa beginning at the end of January. While supporters are not homogeneous in either their grievances or organization, the majority oppose the federal

government's proof of vaccination policy for cross-border drivers as well as broader public health mandates related to COVID-19. Prior to the actions of law enforcement on February 19-20 to clear the convoy in downtown Ottawa as a result of the enactment of the *Emergencies Act*, many demonstrators had stated that they planned to continue occupying Ottawa until all COVID-19 mandates are removed.

The convoy has attracted significant media attention and support from those who share their grievances and frustrations with the federal government.

Key Assessments

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What is Diagolon?

Telegram user and online personality, Jeremy Mackenzie, created Diagolon in January 2021 as a fictitious country to inspire unity among like-minded individuals. It represents a symbol of defiance against the government's COVID-19 restrictions and mandated vaccinations. Diagolon members also voice grievances against increasing restrictions on firearms and promote a variety of conspiracy theories related to the government at large.

Throughout 2021, Diagolon has expanded from an online presence to a real-world community that conducts in-person meetings across the country. The Freedom Convoy 2022 allowed for a number of Diagolon members to congregate in Ottawa, where some members met in person for the first time.

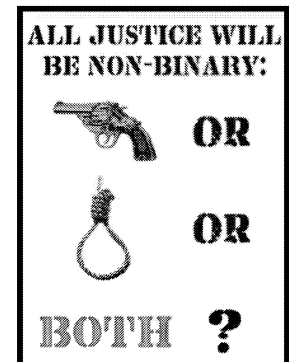
In addition to Mackenzie, Derek Harrison and Alexander Vriend are also known and vocal members of the Diagolon community.

For further information on Diagolon, consult the "Diagolon Dictionary".



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The Violent Rhetoric of Diagon



Diagon Participation in Freedom Convoy 2022

In Jeremy Mackenzie's Own Words

"This is the good guys versus the bad guys [Canadian government]. The showdown has finally fucking begun and it has begun in Canada... you could go be a part of the story now."

"This is the beach, get yourself out there."

Mackenzie discussing protests against COVID-19.

*'The Beach' is a common saying in Diagon to reference their own version of World War II D – Day.

Leaders of Diagonon did not call for violent participation in the Freedom Convoy 2022 and specifically asked that members attend to peacefully support the convoy. They believe that any attempt to label demonstrators in the Freedom Convoy 2022 as extremists would reduce the legitimacy of the demonstration and would allow for further police and government intervention against demonstrators.

During the first weekend of the demonstration key figures within Diagonon suggested that the Federal government might use this demonstration as a means to create a 'false flag' event and may even hire actors in an attempt to instigate demonstrators, thereby allowing the federal government to bring in the military or arrest participants in the convoy to discredit the entire demonstration. This paranoia within members of Diagonon resulted in Mackenzie and Harrison conducting online live streams and interviews from their hotel room in Ottawa on January 29 to prove that they were not physically present on Parliament Hill that day (in the event of an attack).

Since the initial weekend of the Freedom Convoy 2022, key figures within Diagonon have made many appeals for participation in and documentation of the demonstrations. Further, Vriend has been collecting donations to allow others to travel to participate in demonstrations in Coutts, AB, or Ottawa, ON. Prior to the actions of law enforcement on February 19-20 to clear the convoy in downtown Ottawa, Diagonon members continued to maintain a presence at the Freedom Convoy 2022 in Ottawa; Mackenzie, Vriend and Harrison were in Ottawa during the weekend of February 12-13. Mackenzie has claimed that he would not leave Ottawa until all COVID-19 mandates are removed.

Coutts, Alberta Blockade

A partial blockade at the Coutts border crossing started January 29, 2022 as part of the anti-public health measures movement. Many of the participants are driven by a similar range of narratives and grievances as seen at the Ottawa occupation, including their opposition to some- if not all- public health restrictions related to COVID-19. As of February 15, 2022, the RCMP had arrested 13 individuals in connection with the blockade and seized weapons, firearms ammunition and body armour. The RCMP notes that several participants at the blockade are members of Diagonon. See Diagonon flag on body armour.



Increased Diagonon Following

An increased Diagonon following will also increase the number of consumers of the extreme anti-government, anti-authority and anti-law enforcement messaging espoused by key figures within the community. Though there were calls for peaceful protest among Diagonon at the onset of the Freedom Convoy 2022, the tone of open messaging from key figures has become more focused on law enforcement over the past weeks. There have been more overt calls for members of Diagonon to travel to Ottawa and “hold the line”. Key figures within Diagonon are calling the government’s response to the Freedom Convoy a ‘siege’³ and have:

- claimed the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is intentionally cutting truckers off from essential supplies such as food, water and medications in both Ottawa and Coutts, Alberta;
- claimed the RCMP may attempt to disrupt cell towers to ensure that the truckers cannot communicate outside of the demonstration; and,
- shared directories, including the names of all members of the Ottawa Police Service.



Memes and photos are being shared online to show Diagonon’s support of the anti-government views being highlighted during the demonstrations.

³ A ‘siege’ is a military operation where the enemy cuts off essential supplies with the goal of making an enemy surrender. For Diagonon, this implies that both the federal government and RCMP are cutting truckers and protesters off from essential supplies to facilitate compliance.

Diagolon – Future Implications

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