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Chair

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1550)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)): Order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and a motion adopted by the committee on October 27, 2016, the committee will now resume its study on resettling Yazidi girls and women.

We have before us, by video conference from Stuttgart, Germany, Michael Blume, the head of the special quota project. I apologize for the slight delay to this portion of our hearing. Unfortunately, we had some committee business to attend to.

Mr. Blume, we will automatically go to questions. You have already presented to us previously.

We will go to Mr. Ehsassi, who is splitting his time with Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Hello, Mr. Blume, and welcome back.

Allow me to begin by thanking you for your testimony last week. Obviously, the special quota project was an incredibly heroic effort. Thank you very much for that, and thank you for kindly making yourself available once again.

We heard during the course of that testimony that the Yazidi community has been going through a traumatic experience. The way it was put was that they have gone through transgenerational trauma. They've gone through collective trauma, and often have gone through individual trauma.

That said, the one thing that did catch my eye when I was reviewing the transcript was that as far as I understand it, the German model is to focus on individuals who have suffered through terrible atrocities.

Could you explain to us the merits of focusing on individuals rather than having individuals and their immediate family come to Germany, or in this case to Canada? Could you elaborate on the decision that was made under the special quota project, and why?

Dr. Michael Blume (Head, Special Quota Project, State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg): The situation in Germany was that a lot of refugees managed to come to central Europe, but most of them, who managed to cross several countries and seas and the like, were male, or they were families who could afford to pay for traffickers. If you think about the situation for women and children, who had lost their male relatives—their fathers or husbands—and

had lost nearly everything, you can see that those emergency cases didn't have any chance to reach central Europe.

At that time, the political decision was to focus on these people who wouldn't make it on their own. We knew from people who had escaped from Daesh, and we knew even from Daesh propaganda, that Daesh killed many of the men and killed boys over the age of 13 and enslaved the women and children.

We knew there were a lot of women with small children literally left by themselves, and even if there were relatives, in some cases they had to take care of many other refugees in the family, so they were in a very desperate situation.

That was the reason we spoke to the Kurdish regional government to say we'd not take everyone but would focus on these very traumatized emergency cases who did not have any way to get psychological treatment. That was the reason we went after these emergencies.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you for that.

If I could follow up, you did, in the course of your testimony, refer to a contract that you signed with the Kurdish regional government.

Generally speaking, whether it was with the Iraqi government or the Kurdish regional government, what are the types of principles you refer to in that contract that we should be aware of?

Dr. Michael Blume: We signed a letter of intent between our state and the autonomous region in Kurdistan. The reason was that we agreed that we would take care of 1,000 cases. It would become 1,100, because two other states joined the effort.

The other thing was that we wanted to build a sustainable partnership. Even now we are active in the region. We are building infrastructure. We are building a centre for training psychologists. For both sides, it was important to say that we are now helping in this situation in these emergency cases, but that we wouldn't stop there. We want to build a partnership that goes into the future.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much. Those are my questions. I believe it's the turn of my colleague Mr. Tabbara.

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes, Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you for your testimony last week. It's really helpful in our study.

At the time of resettlement, were there any safety concerns? I know we briefly touched on that, but I wanted you to elaborate a little more. I remember your telling us that you had to go day by day to understand the situation and the security levels.

• (1555)

Dr. Michael Blume: Yes. Of course there is a war, and at the start of the mission sometimes we were five to 10 kilometres from Daesh. We had to take care that we wouldn't be attacked and that they wouldn't try to get a ransom if they got hold of some of our team.

On the other side, the Kurdish people in northern Iraq are very against Daesh. For example, in the region of Dohuk, Daesh didn't manage to strike with suicide bombers or the like because the people there don't like Daesh. It's not only about religion; it's also about Arab and Kurdish differences.

For example, in Erbil or in other regions, some attacks were done by Daesh. We had to be very careful, and we kept in close contact with our Kurdish allies. Of course, we have the German army and the American military there too.

In the end I'm glad to say that we didn't need to use any weapons, because we managed to fly under the radar and follow a certain security protocol.

In the meantime, on one side the security situation improved. Daesh is not as strong as it used to be, but then certainly I've heard about the freeing of Mosul, and one doesn't know how Daesh will react to that.

At the moment it's rather safe, but it would be good to think about security when travelling there.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Tilson, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you.

You indicated the special project has been under budget.

Dr. Michael Blume: Yes.

Mr. David Tilson: Can you tell us what percentage it has been under budget, and why?

Dr. Michael Blume: We are about 20% to 25% under budget. For example, we didn't use commercial flights; we changed to charter flights, and it ended up being far less expensive than we had thought.

Here in Germany, in Baden-Württemberg, the women and children we took in are demanding far less therapy than we expected. For many of them it's far more important to have a normal life, to cook, to go to school. Only a few of them are ready to go into therapy.

Speaking overall, we had a budget, but up to now it seems it's not as expensive as some assumed.

Mr. David Tilson: In Canada we have homes for women and children who have sustained domestic abuse, and the newspapers have said that these women and children are in safe houses similar to these women. I suppose you have the same thing in Germany—

Dr. Michael Blume: Yes.

Mr. David Tilson: Women and children who have sustained domestic abuse are put in homes. Can you tell us a little about that, and what these homes are like? Following on Mr. Tabbara's question about security, what sort of security is there with these safe houses? Are they the same as the other houses you have in Germany?

Dr. Michael Blume: Yes, exactly. We call them *Frauenhäuser* in Germany. At the start, they were like the benchmark. We tried to reach out to the women and their situation, and also because we knew some of the women might testify against Daesh, so it was important that they would not only be secure but that they could feel secure. They would know that nobody could find them or anything.

We have shelters in 21 cities. We have some very small groups with, for example, eight people, and we have bigger ones with up to 100 people. In the end, every city is providing a shelter and a concept. We are even able to compare what's working best, what's working not so positively, and we are doing network meetings so we can share the experiences.

Just to give an example, with the very small shelters at the start, it's harder for people to adapt to the new environment, but with the very big shelters, there is a danger that a perilous society is forming. That's why we are trying to learn what's working and what's not working.

• (1600)

Mr. David Tilson: Ms. Rempel has a question.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There were some media reports this week that the Kurdish government was expressing some displeasure with the Canadian government looking at this particular course of action. I know you stressed how important it was to collaborate with the Kurdish government on this issue.

I guess I have two questions. First of all, do you have any advice for our government on how to approach that relationship? Certainly it would be Canada's intent to ensure that the relationship is strong and solid.

Second, part of the resistance is through an acknowledgement that the Yazidi population, which is indigenous to the area, is so small and so greatly reduced, and there's a concern about the cultural genocide occurring in the region. Can you speak to the establishment of safe zones in the region? I know your Chancellor has called for this. Do you think it's something Canada should also be pursuing as part of its overall aid in the region?

Dr. Michael Blume: We see the Kurdistan Regional Government not only as friends, but also as allies. They are fighting on the ground against Daesh. I think it's important that we support them and that we are helpful for them.

Even as we started our program, it was important for us that they wouldn't lose face by seeming to show the world that they couldn't take care of their own people, so we said we would keep it on a very diplomatic, secure, and safe level. We are just concentrating on the emergency cases. That was really helpful because, again, they are among the good people in the region. They are trying to build a democracy. Of course, there are fundamentalists in Kurdistan, too, but most of the people want a society that is diverse, democratic, and pro-western.

I would say the right way to approach the Kurdistan Regional Government would be a supportive one where they feel they are allies and are partners and that we wouldn't leave them just for a short show and then follow another course.

Then, of course, in Kurdistan there is this debate about what will happen in the future. A lot of the Kurds want to have independence from Iraq, which could lead to a struggle, but we hope that this course might be a peaceful one.

Then there is the question about which region the disputed areas will belong to. Will they belong to Iraq? Will they belong to Kurdistan? Then there is the issue of minorities.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, please.

Dr. Michael Blume: I think it's important, again, to be supportive of all the parties involved. It would not be good to go there and say we don't like this group, and we will support only this group. This could make things worse, so I would go very diplomatically there.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan, you have seven minutes, please.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much for your testimony and for agreeing to come back to our committee.

If you don't have this date readily, can you send it to us at a later time? When did the Canadian government first contact you to seek your knowledge and advice with respect to this project?

Dr. Michael Blume: I can look, but it was some weeks ago that there were the first contacts with the German embassy.

There was a contact. There is an ongoing dialogue, actually, with colleagues from the Canadian government.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That would be great. If you can look up the date, I'd be interested in knowing it.

I think in your last meeting you mentioned that a team of three people helped to select the refugees. Can you tell us who was on that three-person team?

• (1605)

Dr. Michael Blume: There was Professor Kizilhan, one colleague on our team from the visa department, and the team leader. When I was team leader, it was me. There were the three of us.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That included, then, the local people on the ground who helped you in selecting people.

Dr. Michael Blume: No, the decision team was only German, was only from our state. That was part of the regulation. It was so that no one would be allowed to interfere in the decision process. It was not only because of the fear of corruption, but you can also imagine, for

example, that if you had taken local people into this process, someone could threaten them.

We have made it pretty clear that this three-person team that makes the decisions is only composed of members of our German team, our Baden-Württemberg team.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: In terms of location, in terms of your advice to Canada on where we should go to try to provide support to the refugees, I think in your last meeting you suggested that we maybe look at a multi-pronged approach. How would you prioritize location? Would it be Iraq, Turkey, Syria, Greece? How would you prioritize where we should go in, as our first phase, to try to provide support?

Dr. Michael Blume: I think it would depend on the diplomatic relationships.

For example, I think some states such as Jordan might be very ready to work with Canada. Other states might be more reluctant, or they might have things they expect from you in return. My idea when I started this program—and now you are planning, thankfully—was that I would go for a mixed approach. I would say, let's talk with the Kurdish regional government maybe for emergency cases and let's look at the other states such as Greece, Turkey, and Jordan for other things.

I'm not quite sure. It seems that your program is concentrated only on Yazidis. Our program was focused on vulnerable women and children. We were able to take some Christians and Muslims too. It was important for us. If you imagine talking in the region, it's maybe not helpful to say you are only helping people from one community. For us, it was good to say that we wanted to help the people who most needed the help. Of course, most of them are Yazidis, but it's not exclusive.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Is it feasible?

Dr. Michael Blume: That might be a point. For example, even some Turkish politicians would probably ask, why are you taking only Yazidi refugees?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Is it feasible for us to get into northern Iraq?

Dr. Michael Blume: Yes, absolutely. It's possible. I would encourage going into dialogue with the Kurdish regional government. It's possible to travel there. Some German politicians have been there too. As our prime minister offered, we could even go together, with a German and a Canadian team. That would be possible too.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: We've often been told that security is the reason that even officials can't get in, and even if they can get in, they can't really do any processing, and so on, and there are lots of risks.

In your experience, it is entirely possible. Can you share that information at a later time with our committee on how we might actually go about doing that?

Dr. Michael Blume: Of course, there will always be people who say that it's not possible or it's dangerous. I agree that there are risks, but the other side is that we decided to take them. All of our team volunteered, actually.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Do you have any numbers by way of Yazidis who are victims of the genocide that you can share with us in terms of refugees so that we can perhaps consider how many we should try to target?

Dr. Michael Blume: Yes, there are numbers. There are even accounts by the Kurdish regional government, because when people come from the Kurd-Dagh regions, they are questioned by the peshmerga and by Asayish. The Kurdish regional government clearly has lists and numbers of people and can even tell you when they escaped from Daesh, and—

• (1610)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I see.

Dr. Michael Blume: —we have the numbers too.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can you share that information with the committee as well?

Dr. Michael Blume: Yes, but I would advise that you maybe to talk with the Kurdish government, because if they give us information, maybe it would not be that diplomatic if we just forwarded it. Maybe it's a better way if Canada approaches them. Of course we can help.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

You mentioned the issue of corruption. Can you give us some examples? We've heard from other witnesses about concerns, for example, with the UNHCR, that even within that organization there are potential issues of corruption. Can you elaborate on that?

Dr. Michael Blume: On the one side there are cases, for example when you need permissions, that some people might want to take money for. Many Kurdish officials haven't had a salary for months, so for many of them it's difficult when suddenly people are coming from all over the world and they have money. There were a few cases—

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, please.

Dr. Michael Blume: —but we could handle them.

On the other side, of course, there are rumours, and people are jealous. Then they might say that someone got admission because they paid for it, so we were very strict on these things.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Zahid, you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Blume, for appearing again today and providing your important testimony.

You mentioned that you worked with Air Bridge Iraq and the International Organization for Migration. How did you source these groups and how did you evaluate which ones to work with?

Dr. Michael Blume: Actually, we went there and spoke with the Kurdish government, and we saw how different NGOs are working. Air Bridge Iraq-Luftbrücke Irak is a German organization built by German Kurdish groups, and they were already in the business of evacuating children. They helped medical emergency cases with children, so we knew they had experience in exactly the field we were seeking. The IOM, of course, is an international organization affiliated with the United Nations, and on the ground we had very good experiences with them. Actually, a lot of German cities and states are working with IOM, so these two were the partners we chose.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Working with these groups, was one of these groups more successful than the other one?

Dr. Michael Blume: I think it was good that we had both of them. For example, Luftbrücke Irak and Mirza Dinnayi had very good contacts through the high council of the Yazidi religion, and he knew a lot of people on the ground. On the other side, IOM was brilliant on logistics, on medical flying buses, so in a certain sense, they helped us to get what we needed. We needed both of them, but in the end, you see, we were only three partners—us, Luftbrücke Irak, and IOM—and with the three of us, it worked.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Further to what you said last time and further to Ms. Kwan's questions, you mentioned the criteria that you used to select the victims for resettlement, and also that you extracted some Christians and Muslim minorities. Did you distinguish between the Yazidis and the other minority groups?

Dr. Michael Blume: No, actually, we didn't. According to our constitution, it's even forbidden for state officials to ask for the religion, although, of course, we knew in most cases. For example, there were rumours. Some said that a family might have converted to Christianity, and we said it's okay, it's not our business.

We won't even ask the people. We are seeing whether they fulfill the criteria, and we are not into ethnic or religious discrimination. Of course, most of the victims are from the Yazidi community, but it was important, even in talking about this issue in public, that people saw that we wouldn't single out a certain minority but that we were open for people who needed help.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Even when you interviewed them, did you ask them about their ethnic affiliations or their religious practices?

Dr. Michael Blume: If they wanted to tell us about that, we were fine with it. For example, we asked them whether they would want to be blessed by the Baba Sheikh in Lalish, but if someone was hesitant, if someone wouldn't want to talk about the subject, we completely accepted that.

•(1615)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: What were their most pressing needs upon arrival in Germany, and how is it different for children and women? Were there any other issues you saw during their resettlement in Germany?

Dr. Michael Blume: We had suspected at the start that they would need therapy immediately, and there were some cases that needed to be hospitalized. Some also had very hard medical issues. However, what most of them actually needed was everyday life. The children needed to go to kindergarten, to school; the mothers needed to have secure shelters, a place to bake their own bread, and get into a normal life. That was the most pressing issue.

Then they wanted to start learning the language. There were a lot of issues about getting married, about whether they could move to another place, and these kinds of things. We saw that they began to think about the future. It happened some weeks after their arrival.

This process is still going on. Some of them are already speaking up, giving testimony in public, so they are going into a more active mode. They didn't do that at the start.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: My last question would be about process and the time it took.

How long did the process take from the beginning until the first Yazidis were brought to Germany? Could you discuss the necessity of each step, and how long each step would take?

Dr. Michael Blume: We started in January 2015 to approach the Kurdish government. Then we built up the structures and made treaties with our partners. In March 2015, we managed to bring the first group of beneficiaries to Germany. Then we adjusted our planning. It was a small group with a little more than 30 persons. Then we went, on a rotating basis, with every new mission, every two to three weeks, and in January 2016, we were done. It took three months preparation and nine months to do it.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: What were the total number of Yazidis you brought into Germany?

Dr. Michael Blume: Excuse me?

Mrs. Salma Zahid: You brought a total of about 1,100 into Germany?

Dr. Michael Blume: Exactly. There were 1,100 beneficiaries. About 950 Yazidis came into Baden-Württemberg, maybe 40 Christians and 10 Muslims, tentatively speaking, and almost all in the other states are Yazidi. It was 1,100 overall.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, Mr. Blume, I'd like to express the committee's thanks for your invaluable insights. I speak on behalf of the whole committee when I express a heartfelt sense of gratitude for everything that you personally have done, and to the people of Baden-Württemberg for opening up their hearts, and to your prime minister, to your team, for leading the way in helping these survivors of the horrors of Daesh.

With that, we will suspend and go in camera.

Thank you so much.

Dr. Michael Blume: Thank you very much.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

•(1615)

(Pause)

•(1650)

[Public proceedings resume]

The Chair: The committee will resume its hearing.

We have before us a number of departmental officials. From the Department of National Defence, we have Mr. Stephen Burt, the assistant chief of defence intelligence, Canadian Forces intelligence command. From Canada Border Services Agency, we have Mr. Denis Vinette, director general, international region. With the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, we have Ms. Catherine Parish, director general, security screening. With Global Affairs Canada, we have Mr. Reid Sirrs, director general, mission security, and Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux, director, Gulf State relations division.

Welcome to the officials.

We begin with Mr. Stephen Burt for five minutes, please.

•(1655)

Mr. Stephen Burt (Assistant Chief of Defence Intelligence, Canadian Forces Intelligence Command, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair and members of Parliament, thank you for the invitation to speak to you this afternoon. It's my distinct pleasure to speak to you about the security situation in Northern Iraq. I'm also glad to be sitting next to my esteemed colleagues, who will be able to provide different perspectives on the region.

[English]

Before I talk about the security situation in northern Iraq, I'd like to provide some background briefly on the role of the Canadian Forces Intelligence Command.

The command's role consists of supporting the Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces in making sound decisions in the exercise of their duties. Whether conducting operations in the Arctic, providing support for events such as the 2010 Olympic Games or the G8 summit, or carrying out overseas operations, the Canadian Armed Forces need the most accurate and up-to-date intelligence in order to achieve their military objectives and ensure the security and protection of their personnel.

I am assistant chief of defence intelligence, and my organization is responsible to provide timely, reliable, relevant, all-source analysis of defence intelligence issues to the department, the armed forces, and interdepartmental clients. We provide strategic warning and threat assessments to the department and to the CAF. Another important part of my mandate is to contribute to intelligence-sharing relationships with allied partners and countries.

Defence intelligence is also a key element in the ability of the government to make informed decisions on defence issues, national security, and foreign affairs. I can say with pride that our intelligence capability is world class and offers the necessary tools 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to give our leaders an information advantage in making those decisions. Intelligence is a leading factor in operational success.

I would also note that we benefit from productive relationships with our government partners, working closely with the Privy Council Office, the RCMP, CSIS, CSE, CBSA, and Global Affairs, to name a few. You and the Canadians you represent may be certain that your intelligence organizations are promoting the interests of this country in the areas of defence and security.

The Canadian Forces Intelligence Command focuses the vast majority of its energy on foreign military threats and support to Canadian Forces operations abroad.

Turning now to the subject at hand, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the volatile security situation in northern Iraq.

Northern Iraq is characterized by an intersection of conflicts among local, sub-state, and regional actors. Daesh currently provides a unifying enemy for these actors, but as Daesh weakens, we expect that they will all increasingly act in their own self-interest, often at each other's expense. Therefore, as the fight to dislodge Daesh from the city of Mosul progresses, the security situation in northern Iraq will become more fluid and unpredictable from the geopolitical standpoint.

We believe that as Daesh elements are defeated, the group will revert to acting as an insurgency and will increasingly pose an asymmetric threat rather than a conventional military one. Though Daesh is currently on the decline in Iraq, it still poses a significant threat to traditional state armed forces. As it loses territory, it will increase its use of terrorist attacks to distract the Iraqi security forces and the anti-Daesh coalition, as well as to foment sectarian tensions.

As such, we assess that even after the fall of Mosul, Daesh will retain the capability to target civilian populations and official Iraqi or Kurdish institutions throughout Iraq, including in what is considered to be cleared territory.

Regional and sub-state actors will almost certainly vie for influence in a post-Daesh northern Iraq, complicating an already difficult security situation. Sub-state actors, principally the Kurdistan Regional Government, or KRG, and Shia militias, are aggressively posturing to be the dominant actors in several localities within northern Iraq. KRG forces and Shia militias have clashed with each other on several occasions and display deep mistrust and antipathy towards each other, raising the potential for localized conflicts across northern Iraq.

Regional actors, principally Iran and Turkey, are also seeking increased influence in Syria and Iraq. Both countries have increased their military presence in northern Iraq and are actively supporting proxy forces that serve their respective national interests.

Finally, I would like to note that as the conflict in northern Iraq has evolved over the last several years, we have seen population displacement used as a tool to achieve the political and security goals

of various actors. Allegations of forced population displacement have been levelled at all sides in the Iraqi conflict—principally at Daesh, but also in some areas at Iraqi security forces, Shia militias, and Kurdish security forces.

● (1700)

While some Shias and Kurds have been affected, the majority of the displaced have been members of the Sunni community or various minority groups. The international community's resettlement efforts, while assisting the plight of refugees and other displaced persons, may also be used by various actors in northern Iraq to achieve their own political objectives.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, this concludes my presentation. Thank you for listening to me. I look forward to answering the questions of committee members.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Burt.

Now it's Mr. Vinette for five minutes, please.

Mr. Denis Vinette (Director General, International Region, Canada Border Services Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As this committee is aware, the Canada Border Services Agency has a dual mandate of facilitating movement across our borders while ensuring and protecting the safety and security of Canadians. Together with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the CBSA administers the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which governs both the admissibility of people into Canada and the identification, detention, and removal of those deemed to be inadmissible under the act.

The CBSA's role in refugee determination is to provide support to IRCC by ensuring that refugees are screened to minimize all risk to Canadians. The process is the same when there is a national effort to extend humanitarian support to a particular group of people, as we did for Syria, although as the committee can appreciate, it requires a great deal more coordination across government departments, given the scale of these undertakings.

[*Translation*]

The CBSA has a well-established and well-respected practice in the area of security screening. It works closely with the relevant departments and agencies as well as with international partners to ensure the integrity of the process.

The CBSA's role during the Syrian refugee resettlement initiative demonstrated that our security screening process is robust and proven. It's designed to be responsive to changing environments, and we are able to apply it consistently.

The process involves comprehensive interviews, the collection of information and biometrics to assist with confirming identity, and checks across a range of databases. It also involves working closely with our federal government partners to seamlessly integrate security screening at key points in the process.

[English]

We have successfully refined the process, and the CBSA is ready to work with our partners once again to meet and support the Government of Canada's commitment to bringing Yazidi refugees to Canada.

The CBSA's security screening practices ensure that every refugee coming to Canada in the wake of the humanitarian crisis will have undergone a multi-layered screening process prior to their arrival, allowing them to fly to Canada. It also ensures that refugees arriving in Canada have the proper travel documents and that they can be welcomed and processed by our border services officers for admission into Canada on their arrival.

Through thorough and efficient security screening, refugees and their families are able to arrive in our country and move on to their important work of settling into their new communities and starting a new life.

That concludes my remarks, and I would be more than happy to answer the committee's questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vinette.

Ms. Parish, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Catherine Parish (Director General, Security Screening, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I'm director general of the security screening branch in CSIS. My branch is responsible for providing advice and assessments to other government departments in support of their review of applications for status in Canada and for government security clearances.

I want to thank you for the invitation to appear in support of your study on the resettlement of the Yazidi refugees in Canada. I will keep my remarks brief. However, I would like to provide you with some insight into the service's role in supporting this effort. I will focus my remarks on the service's immigration security screening program.

Members may be most familiar with our section 12 mandate, which is to investigate and provide advice on threats to the security of Canada as defined in our act, such as terrorism, espionage, sabotage, and foreign interference.

Security screening is also one of our core mandates, and it is certainly the most relevant to the committee's study. Pursuant to section 14 of the CSIS Act, CSIS provides security advice to our immigration partners in support of the administration of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Section 15 authorizes CSIS to conduct investigations for such purposes.

It is important to note that CSIS does not have an enforcement mandate, nor do we decide who is granted entry or status in Canada. Our role is to provide advice to CBSA and IRCC, which contributes

to the bigger picture examined by our partners in making decisions regarding an individual's admissibility to Canada.

With respect to our security screening program, we have robust processes in place to manage this important function. We also work closely with our partners on a routine basis.

These processes and partnerships work on a routine basis, but also lay the foundation for efforts we may consider more exceptional—for example, the resettlement of Syrian or Yazidi refugees, which may require a more concerted effort.

With regard to this resettlement of Yazidi refugees, CSIS is committed to working with our government partners and will support the security screening process by providing security advice.

To ensure the integrity of Canada's immigration system, the same high standards will continue to apply to all individual refugee claimants. Screening individuals from complex environments does come with its own unique set of considerations; that said, CSIS is working with its partners to consider the process and requirements as a whole in light of the particular circumstances.

Though unique in its own right, it is useful to highlight the integral role CSIS played in fulfilling the Government of Canada's commitment to resettling Syrian refugees. CSIS was successful in achieving its security screening commitments and remains confident in the measures put in place. A robust and appropriate security screening was undertaken before applicants departed for Canada.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will conclude my remarks and welcome any questions.

● (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Parish.

Ms. Lamoureux, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux (Director, Gulf States Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada): Thank you.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, and honourable members of the committee.

I have been asked to speak to you today to provide some background about Canada's presence in Iraq and to briefly discuss our relationship with the governments of Iraq and of the Kurdistan region of the country. I hope this will provide some useful context for today's discussion.

I can also address the question asked by the honourable member of Parliament about the number of IDPs displaced since the beginning of the Mosul operation. The response is 70,000, according to IOM statistics.

Canada is in the process of expanding its diplomatic presence in Iraq as part of the commitments in its three-year strategy to counter Daesh and respond to the crises in Syria and Iraq. Until last spring, our presence in Iraq had consisted of a political officer in Baghdad and a small complement of local employees in Baghdad and Erbil. Canada's footprint has now expanded. In Baghdad, we've added a full-time Canadian development officer, a defence attaché and assistant, and a management and consular officer, along with several local employees. In Erbil, we have a new Canadian political officer and a military police security service position.

Despite our relatively small presence, our diplomatic staff in Baghdad has regular access to the Government of Iraq and to the UN at senior levels. We've also developed good relationships with officials in the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq and with local officials, such as governors and mayors. We expect that we will be able to deepen our existing relationships in Iraq and expand on our network of contacts as our mission continues to grow. This is particularly true in Erbil, where Canada has the smallest presence of any G7 nation, and where we have only recently created our first full-time Canadian officer positions. This new presence will be an important link to the Yazidi population for Canada, as they are mostly located in northern Iraq, and access from Baghdad requires air travel.

The Yazidis are particularly concentrated in four provinces of Iraq: the northern Nineveh province of Iraq, and the provinces of Erbil, Dohuk, and Sulaymaniyah in Iraqi Kurdistan. The two biggest communities are in Sheikhan, northeast of Mosul, and in Sinjar, which is near the Syrian border, 80 kilometres west of Mosul. Both are in Nineveh province.

Since 2014, many Yazidis have fled Sinjar, ending up in the Sheikhan area, in camps for internally displaced persons that are mainly in Dohuk province, or as refugees in other countries, such as Turkey and Greece. At present, the area around Sinjar remains off-limits to our mission staff and Government of Canada officials because of the ongoing battle against Daesh in Mosul and in the greater Nineveh province area.

While progress is being made in the campaign to retake Mosul, there are still large areas that remain under the control of Daesh, in particular to the west of the city, where Sinjar is located.

The IDP camps in Dohuk province are more accessible, and our staff can travel fairly safely when accompanied by our security services provider. Though costly, this type of travel does not present a significant threat to the safety of our mission staff, and suitable accommodation is available in Dohuk should there be a need to remain for more than a day.

• (1710)

[Translation]

We know that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, is currently working on fulfilling its commitment to resettle Yazidi victims in Canada. Our mission staff will be able to provide support for this initiative should we decide to proceed with the resettlement of refugees from Iraq.

As a result of our contact with Iraqi officials and with the Yazidi community, we know there is a certain level of support for the idea

of providing focused assistance to the most vulnerable among the victims of Daesh. We've also learned, through the media, about certain concerns. Our staff can ensure that Canada's resettlement program is subject to a proper consultation with all parties prior to implementation. It will be necessary to ensure this initiative receives the support of the broader community in Northern Iraq, especially at this important juncture in the fight against Daesh, when attention is turning towards mending sectarian divisions and allowing displaced populations to return to their homes.

One important consideration will be the duty of care for Canadian government staff, which is an overriding concern for Global Affairs Canada.

When the government decided to increase its operations in Northern Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East to address the Daesh challenge to international and regional security, one of our first objectives was to gain a better understanding of the security environment and to design a security package to protect Canadians.

In March of this year, the regional security manager for the Middle East and North Africa travelled to Erbil to review potential locations for a Canadian office and to review the security environment to determine what would be required to create a secure environment for Canadian officials to work.

Two sites were identified as credible physical security environments for Canadian staff. Both sites were hotels with excellent physical security protections. Global Affairs Canada has new physical security standards, which will be implemented for the establishment of the new mission. These include perimeter protections such as walls and setbacks, interior controls for personal and vehicular access, and screening provisions.

At this point, we won't be too specific when outlining all our security measures. In addition to the physical measures, we reviewed the operational security measures. These measures range from movement protocols, to local security capacity, to access to medical facilities and reliable evacuation options.

[English]

The Chair: *Vous disposez de 20 secondes.*

[Translation]

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Our regional security manager has already met with the security representatives of other countries present in Erbil to gain a better understanding of the best practices and of how they are addressing their security concerns. We met with private security providers and with government security officials to develop a better security plan.

Thank you again for the invitation to appear before you today. My colleague can answer the other questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Ehsassi, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Allow me to thank all the witnesses who have appeared before this committee today.

I have a lot of questions. I would like to start off with Mr. Burt, from the Department of National Defence.

Thank you for the statement you provided to us. You started off by saying that the situation in northern Iraq is very fluid and volatile, given that it is at the intersection of various conflicts.

One thing that caught my eye was a paragraph in which you said, "...the international community's resettlement efforts, while assisting the plight of refugees and other displaced persons, may also be used by various actors in northern Iraq to achieve their own political objectives."

Could you explain to us the types of concerns you are relaying to us with that statement?

• (1715)

Mr. Stephen Burt: I'd be happy to do that.

The statement, quite simply, relates to the fact that we have seen a number of groups within northern Iraq using or encouraging population displacements as a way to secure political and security influence over what has been previously disputed geography. We've seen this on all sides, principally by Daesh, in terms of clearing out the Yazidi and others. However, as the conflict has continued there and as various groups have asserted control over areas that weren't traditionally theirs, there have been incidents of people being moved off territory they had previously occupied.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

We were hearing from other witnesses earlier in the day, and there was some disagreement as to how fluid the situation is in northern Iraq. Given your expertise and your understanding of what is going on in Iraq, could you see complications delaying our efforts to bring Yazidis to Canada?

Mr. Stephen Burt: I understand that we're still fairly preliminary in terms of what specific efforts will be made and what the operational footprint might look like. There may be issues around where it's located, what security measures are taken around it, and how you move the people you are trying to help. Moving people in and out of those sites is going to be very complex, given the overall security dynamic.

What I can say specifically about the conflict under way right now in Mosul is that while progress has been good, clearing a city the size of Mosul is an extremely complex military operation. This is likely to take some months to complete. As it progresses, as I said in my statement, we will see various groups start to look at each other with perhaps a little more hostility than they did previously when they were able to focus on Daesh. The security situation in northern Iraq, even after the fall of Mosul, could be quite complex for some time to come.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you, Mr. Burt.

Mr. Vinette, obviously the Canada Border Services Agency was intimately involved in welcoming 26,000 Syrians to Canada. Given all the expertise you have already developed, does your agency also liaise with other agencies in the world, and is there co-operation between your agencies and entities on the ground in Iraq?

Mr. Denis Vinette: I'll try to hit on a few points in relation to your question.

First and foremost, we work extensively and closely with all our domestic partners. That's where it begins for us.

Once IRCC has selected some individuals as potential refugees to Canada and we receive those referrals, we then engage with all our law enforcement and security partners to make sure we do our due diligence domestically.

For sure we work with international partners. CBSA doesn't have a presence in Iraq, but liaison officers have been deployed to Amman in Jordan, and we have one in Istanbul, Turkey. They are responsible for the geographic area.

Due to the current situation in that area, we have not deployed a representative in that country, but we do work with those state entities through the missions to make sure that whatever is required in co-operation, information, and any type of facilitation is secured as part of these undertakings, as we did for Syria, to ensure that we're able to deliver on the screening mandate as well as facilitate IRCC in reaching final determinations on selection.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you for that.

Ms. Parish, as you know, the purpose of our effort to help the Yazidi community is to send a strong message to the international community that it is imperative that other countries also step forward. In your opinion, will granting asylum to Yazidis demonstrate Canadian goodwill, and will it affect public opinion in the Middle East in a positive manner?

• (1720)

Ms. Catherine Parish: I'd have to leave it to my IRCC colleagues to respond. My realm is limited to the security screening support of my colleague Denis Vinette and IRCC.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Okay. Sorry about that. It is often confusing to try to get the right official.

Is Global Affairs partnering with local organizations on the ground in Iraq, and what is the merit of that approach?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: At the moment we're not specifically partnering on this resettlement program, but we're definitely consulting not just with local government but also Yazidi leaders who are not necessarily part of the government.

The partnerships, I believe, would have to be established by our IRCC colleagues in the context of the program.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel, you have seven minutes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to start with the comment that was made in the opening remarks from Global Affairs about a decision to move forward with resettlement in Iraq. To clarify, no decision has yet been made by the government on where to focus the efforts of this particular measure. Is that correct?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: I believe my IRCC colleagues mentioned in previous hearings that a two-phase plan was under discussion, which includes a first phase outside Iraq and a second phase inside Iraq.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Is it your understanding that the government will utilize section 25 of IRCC to assist in relocating internally displaced people as part of this measure?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Section 25?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Sorry. I'll park that and ask IRCC the next time we get them in public.

Looking at the overall operation, the comment you made, Mr. Burt, was that the operation is very preliminary in its footprint. Have any of your departments been given a target number yet by the government in terms of how many people will be involved in this particular resettlement effort?

I will go down the row.

Mr. Stephen Burt: They have not, to my knowledge.

Ms. Catherine Parish: No.

Mr. Denis Vinette: Are you talking about refugees to be resettled? No.

Mr. Reid Sirrs (Director General, Mission Security, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada): No.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Ms. Lamoureux, has the government had any discussion with you whatsoever about potential numbers, in terms of how many would be coming here? We're already a month into the mandate given by Parliament. Has there been any discussion up to now of targets for the number of Yazidis to be resettled through this initiative?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: We've had internal consultations with IRCC, but I would not be able to comment on numbers. I think it's probably for IRCC to provide the numbers, but they have consulted us on these issues, yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Do you think that not understanding the target number to be resettled is a possible impediment to achieving the 120-day objective, given your operational requirements?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: I'm sorry; just to be clear, there have been specific numbers discussed with IRCC, but I would prefer them to disclose those numbers, because it is their prerogative.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: We're here to discuss the efficacy of the government's plan to achieve this goal. To clarify, numbers have been discussed, but nobody is willing to disclose them here at a parliamentary committee today. Is that correct?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: The numbers should be disclosed by IRCC. I believe there was discussion of numbers in the previous session, speaking to 50—

The Chair: Let me just interject. The previous session was in camera, and we have to be mindful of that.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Thank you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I'll just note for the record that the number 50 was put on the record here.

Regarding the comment about territory being previously occupied, this particular concern around the forced resettlement has definitely come up with some of our stakeholder groups. Certainly we've seen it from the Kurdish government. We understand that this is a complicating factor in the rollout of this particular measure.

The German government has called upon the international community to look at the establishment of safe zones, given the political fluidity in the region. Is this something that the government has expressed any interest in participating in, given that there is some pushback in terms of looking at resettlement as the only option in the context of what the UN has deemed to be cultural genocide of the Yazidis?

• (1725)

Mr. Stephen Burt: I could say from the perspective of the overall security situation in northern Iraq that I'm not aware of anything I would consider to be a safe zone in the current context, and I would have question marks about how you would secure such a zone.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Sure. Thank you.

Just in terms of operationalization of the measure that was put in front of Parliament, has any cross-departmental working group been put together or struck to put together an implementation plan to achieve the 120-day objective?

Mr. Denis Vinette: I don't know that I would categorize it as a working group, but certainly IRCC has reached out to the respective departments, which each have a piece of work, to make sure that we can deliver on this. They have been engaging us in terms of process, capacity, and ability to deliver in support of their effort. There is thus a lot of collaboration that will lead ultimately to the development of the final operational plan.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: With that in mind, what are the key pieces of information that you require from the government to operationalize this within the 120-day period?

Mr. Denis Vinette: This time it's probably a better question for IRCC. We work in support of their mandate and their effort on the resettlement piece. As they receive that clarification or they are able to provide us that clarity, then we'll be responsive to what they require to enable the delivery of it.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Can you define what you mean by "that clarity"? What pieces of information, in terms of clarification, would you be looking for from IRCC?

Mr. Denis Vinette: It's a question of when we start, when key decisions are taken in regard to beginning their component—the front-end piece—to determine and identify refugees for potential resettlement. That will kick in the same process we utilized in Syria, in which interviews begin and selection and screening begin, ultimately leading to a risk determination that allows them then to make the final determination that this particular individual and perhaps their family members have been selected for travel to Canada.

We then work downstream from that: how does transportation take place, where do the arrivals take place, how do we receive in Canada upon arrival? What are the steps to provide support beyond that?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Do you anticipate being able to mobilize or to implement that particular mandate within the roughly three months that we have left on the 120-day deadline?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Denis Vinette: I'm not the one who is in a position to be able to confirm that for you. We are positioning ourselves to be extremely responsive in recognizing that the deadline, that 120 days, has been stated as a commitment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Kwan, for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the officials.

I think I'm just going to go down the line here.

Just further on this question about the timeline to deliver on the mandate, do any of you feel that within your department's capacity you will not have the capacity to help the government deliver within that timeline?

Mr. Stephen Burt: I can only speak to the security situation in the region, but we have been consulted and are being consulted on that, and we are able to deliver.

Ms. Catherine Parish: Yes, we'll be able to deliver.

Mr. Denis Vinette: Same here. We're positioned for that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Sirrs, could I have you speak so that we can have it on the record, with the same response?

Mr. Reid Sirrs: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: With respect to the security concerns, I'm glad to hear from all the departments that you can help the government deliver on this important initiative. We heard from the German officials that security concerns can be overcome within northern Iraq, particularly for the second phase.

Just further on that question, please comment on whether your department has been in touch with the German officials around the challenges they face and how they have managed to overcome those security challenges.

Mr. Stephen Burt: My department is not in touch with the German officials with regard to issues around this situation. We are in touch with German officials on a regular basis with regard to the overall anti-Daesh campaign, but on this particular issue, we are not in touch with them at the moment.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Further on that, we've heard from the government time and time again at different sessions about the difficulties around the security issues with northern Iraq. Particularly in northern Iraq, there are refugees who are part of the Syrian refugee initiative whose applications cannot be processed by the government because there's no processing centre there, and there are issues of security.

I think I heard Ms. Lamoureux say that there is one part of Iraq that is pretty safe to enter, and that was Dohuk. Are there any other areas where it is pretty safe to get in?

• (1730)

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: At the moment, the one area we've identified that includes a significant Yazidi population and that would be safer is Dohuk.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I see.

Beyond the Yazidi population, but for other Syrian refugees within northern Iraq, are there any other locations where it is safe or safer to get in?

Mr. Stephen Burt: From the larger perspective of what we're watching here, there are areas within which as a military we are able to operate to conduct military operations. There are areas in which other government officials have been able to move people in to be able to do their business. I'm confident that IRCC will be able to speak to what their specific plans are and how they will secure what they need to do and what they intend to do, but I would caution the committee that nothing in this region is safe. There are major security risks throughout the region, and even with the best efforts to secure what is going on there, including by people who are armed and participating in the conflict, bad things happen every day. There are areas that are more secure one moment, but that can change very quickly. Even with the fall of Daesh, we will see an ongoing terrorist activity across this region.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Fair enough. I think I understand that, and I think there are always challenges within that context. What you're saying is that those security challenges can be overcome in the best capacity that you have, and that it is doable.

Mr. Stephen Burt: Those security challenges are managed and mitigated to the extent possible.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

With respect to operations, how quickly can you mobilize your team, if the government were to say tomorrow that we're going to target 1,000 Yazidis? How quickly can you mobilize your team to be able to do this? We'll go down the line.

Mr. Stephen Burt: I can't speak to that. It's not my area.

Ms. Catherine Parish: We would obviously respond with our colleagues in terms of referrals provided by IRCC. As and when they are ready to provide the applicants for screening, then we would be readily available.

Mr. Denis Vinette: There are three fronts. We're pre-positioned on all fronts, but on the first one, we already have liaison officers in theatre. We have other ready-to-deploy resources available to go and support the effort as we did for Syria, so we're ready to go on that front.

On the screening front, again, we've already pre-positioned and we've built up the capacity to receive the referrals from IRCC and conduct the security screening.

The third front is the reception piece. On their arrival in Canada, it's ensuring we're set up so we can receive them and we have the process laid out. They typically arrive in Montreal or Toronto, in larger centres.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: I have described the resources we have already on the ground. Those resources are fully mobilized, both in Erbil and in Baghdad.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

In terms of the processing, in the interviewing process, is it possible to utilize video conferencing or other technology to do this work?

Mr. Denis Vinette: It's certainly possible. IRCC begins the process. They are the primary interviewer. We're the recipient of that information. There's certainly an ability to do that.

In that particular corner of the world, that remains to be seen. I don't have the actual knowledge of that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Just so I am clear, is this possible within northern Iraq?

Mr. Denis Vinette: In that specific geographic area, I can't speak to whether there's sufficient infrastructure to allow it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: If the infrastructure is in place, then is that possible from a security standpoint?

Mr. Denis Vinette: For us, it's a question of receiving the right information and being able to have the right interview. Technology's an enabler, and certainly we look at how we can make use of it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

In terms of operations for this special initiative, are additional resources given to your department to carry out this important project, or is that coming out of your existing budget?

• (1735)

Mr. Denis Vinette: On the basis of the current outlined effort, we are pre-positioning ourselves and positioning our resources from within, so we are ready to rededicate and repurpose existing resources for the time being.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Zahid, you have seven minutes, please.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to all of you for coming tonight and providing the input to us.

My first question would be to Mr. Burt and Ms. Parish. At what point in the process will security concerns be highest for our officials, as well as the Yazidis? Will it be the travel there, or travel back, or the Yazidi settlement itself?

Mr. Stephen Burt: I think we come at this from somewhat different perspectives. I'm really only able to speak to the situation on the ground in Iraq. I think any travel is dangerous right now throughout northern Iraq. I don't think there's a particular point at which it becomes more dangerous or less dangerous. It really depends on what's happening on the ground in terms of the military operations and what groups like Daesh might find an attractive target.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: What would be your concerns about the security of the officials who will be travelling there for this resettlement process?

Mr. Stephen Burt: My concerns about the officials who will be travelling there are the same as my concerns for all of the Canadian personnel who are there already. They relate to the ongoing military conflict. I'm not sure that gets at your question, though.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: How will we ensure the officials who will be going there for the processing will be safe?

Mr. Stephen Burt: From an intelligence perspective, I can really only speak to what is happening, what we see happening. What we do is take that information and we flag it up to folks on the policy and operational side. We have to make a variety of decisions about what geographic areas they would like to pick, how they would set themselves up in those areas, and how they would mitigate the risks we've identified for them. Really, my mandate is restricted to the issue of identifying the risks with enough specificity that people can react to them.

From my perspective on the defence side, with the ongoing military campaign there, it's really focused on what is happening overseas. There are different issues with security risks with regard to people we are bringing into Canada, but that I really can't speak to.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Would you like to add something to that?

Ms. Catherine Parish: Our role is really around the security screening. While the other side of other departments or branches in our agency would look at threat assessments, that information, as indicated by my colleague here, would make its way up to the respective policy centres and lead departments in terms of their ability to assess the security on the ground.

I'm not sure if our colleagues to the left would like to speak to it.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Would you like to add to it?

Mr. Reid Sirrs: What gives us pause is when people are moving in and out of a region.

First of all, it's moving, say, from an airport in Erbil up to a processing centre in Dohuk, for example. The move on the road is, first of all, a dangerous move. People start noticing a pattern of vehicles moving back and forth at regular intervals. People staying in what we call static locations, who are in the same place for long periods of time to do processing of applications, are also of concern, because you have a lot of people arriving at a destination. They stay put. At the end of so many hours, they leave. That gets watched and monitored. That's where we actually are nervous.

As our colleagues were saying, it's all a collaborative effort of collecting the information. If they hear stuff, if they observe stuff, that will be passed on through the various chains of command to make sure their people on the ground are aware that people are watching, or to make sure they adjust their movement protocols or make adjustments to their actual security defence posture.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: What is the current operating environment in northern Iraq? Do you foresee this situation becoming more hostile towards our operation?

Mr. Stephen Burt: As I stated, the current operating environment is extremely volatile. It's very risky, depending on where you are. Right now there are ongoing operations and counter-operations in terms of the clearing of Mosul.

In addition, we're seeing Daesh continue with efforts to conduct terrorist attacks in a variety of areas, including areas where they're not currently present, areas that we consider cleared. We don't expect that will stop.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Do you foresee that it will be more hostile once we start our process of bringing the Yazidis here?

Mr. Stephen Burt: I don't think the process of bringing in the Yazidi population is going to affect it one way or the other. I think what's going to affect it are the ongoing military operations and counterattacks by Daesh. Potentially, as Daesh is diminished, there is the potential for the various other groups in northern Iraq to start taking on each other as the situation becomes more fluid.

• (1740)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: We understand the situation in northern Iraq is volatile and changing, and it's difficult to predict the level of risk. How do you assess the risk and what is an acceptable or minimum level?

Mr. Stephen Burt: We assess the risk as very high right now. The issue of what's acceptable is really an operational and policy decision in terms of the goals to be carried out and the amount of resources you're willing to apply to do it.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: We heard from the German officials about their program. They mentioned that they started the operation in January 2015 and completed it in January 2016. It took them 12 months to bring about 1,100 people.

How do you see our processing compared to theirs? How long do you think it will take for us? Do you see that it can extend up to that period, or do you think that we can do it in less time?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Again, I think it's a question for IRCC to address. They are the experts when it comes to resettlement processes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: IRCC will be looking for support from all of you to complete the process.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Yes. Absolutely, and we're there to support, but in terms of the selection processes themselves, there are various ways of going about it. I certainly cannot speak to that. I don't know if others are able to.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, please.

Mr. Denis Vinette: Perhaps I can jump in.

I don't know what the German position is or how the approach was undertaken, but I can tell you that when we undertook to bring 25,000 Syrians, we were able to mobilize and do that in far less than a year. That is the process that we're looking to replicate here in order to be responsive to the request by IRCC.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Tilson, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Burt, how many Canadian Armed Forces personnel are there here?

Mr. Stephen Burt: Where?

Mr. David Tilson: At this site that we're talking about, northern Iraq.

Mr. Stephen Burt: I can't disclose the number of Canadian Forces who are present in northern Iraq.

Mr. David Tilson: You can't tell us?

Mr. Stephen Burt: No.

Mr. David Tilson: What do they do?

Mr. Stephen Burt: The role of the Canadian Forces in advising and assisting the Kurdish peshmerga is fairly well established and a matter of public record. I can't really get into more detail than that.

Mr. David Tilson: Maybe you could give me your version.

Mr. Stephen Burt: They're working with Kurdish forces to assist them in their fight against Daesh.

Mr. David Tilson: Of course, we're talking about assisting Yazidi people and getting them out of there. I guess the question is, what else can we do?

Mr. Stephen Burt: I can't speak to that question, sir. All I'm able to speak to is—

Mr. David Tilson: Can anyone else speak to that?

Mr. Stephen Burt: —what the current situation is.

Mr. David Tilson: No one wants to speak to that. Okay.

Do we have any air power or any air force people there?

Mr. Stephen Burt: Do we have any air force people in northern Iraq?

Mr. David Tilson: Yes.

Mr. Stephen Burt: We have Canadian Forces aircraft that are involved in the campaign in Iraq.

• (1745)

Mr. David Tilson: How many do we have?

Mr. Stephen Burt: I don't know off the top of my head, but we have refuellers, and we have some other aircraft involved still in the campaign.

Mr. David Tilson: Can anyone else comment on that?

We're into this whole study to find out what Canada can do to help these people. Obviously, it's been made quite clear by all of you that security is a serious issue. We need to know that the staff are safe and that the people we're trying to help are safe, so I'd like you to comment on all that.

Mr. Burt, please comment.

Mr. Stephen Burt: Sir, I can only speak to what I've said already about the overall security situation in northern Iraq. It would really be for policy and operational people within the defence department to speak to what is being done to support IRCC. From what I understand, IRCC is still in the process of elaborating their plan, and until such time as that is put together, they will consult with our operational folks to say what they need from each of us.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Vinette, can you add to that?

Mr. Denis Vinette: No. We're not responsible for any of the on-the-ground, in-theatre security requirements. We work solely from Canada and other countries in the immediate area.

Mr. David Tilson: Ms. Lamoureux, would you comment?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: It's the same response. The measures we will put in place will depend on IRCC's plan.

Mr. David Tilson: How about you, Ms. Parish?

Ms. Catherine Parish: I concur with the comments by my colleagues.

Mr. David Tilson: Okay.

Is there a risk, within what Canada is doing to help these people or to help in the security, of creating some sort of additional crisis to what's already there?

Mr. Stephen Burt: I would have a hard time.... There's always potential for more tragedy in a situation as volatile as what's going on right now in northern Iraq. There's no doubt that we will continue to see casualties taken on all sides as that conflict continues. I'm not sure this specific initiative will have a direct effect on the security situation.

Mr. David Tilson: You've indicated that you can't tell us how many armed forces personnel there are. Is there a need to increase our armed forces numbers there to do what Canada is trying to do?

Mr. Stephen Burt: Based on the experience that we had with the Syrian refugees previously, the role of the armed forces was very much in support. It was about transportation. It was about clerical support, in some cases. There was a certain amount of advice in terms of the security situation that was going on. It really depends on the specific plan.

The circumstances in northern Iraq are much different from the circumstances of the previous refugee effort, so what resources we would apply to it will depend on the plan that is developed and a very specific sense of what that plan is.

I guess the challenge from my perspective is that not being military and not being an operator, I would be hard-pressed and probably wrong-headed to speculate.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Dzerowicz, you have five minutes.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you all for your presentations and for your patience with us and all our questions and also say that I appreciate all the expertise you're bringing to the table today.

In my past life I was an executive for a large financial institution. Whenever we had a very big project to deal, with we brought all the departments together, we gave it a fancy name such as Operation Bluebird, and then we had a sort of timeline and put some resources to it.

My question is—and I think my colleague asked a little bit of this, but I want to be very clear—has there been a meeting of not only the government department, IRCC, but also of all of you together to talk about this specific project?

Mr. Denis Vinette: There's been significant collaboration in bringing together discussion around questions such as what this means and how we enable it. We are relying quite heavily on the

experience we gained under Syria, which was managed much in the way that you're speaking to, which was an interdepartmental collaboration alignment, and then everybody's piece in that operational plan came together, was sequenced, and we had quick governance to remedy, if we hit some roadblocks.

Those conversational consultations are happening, and IRCC is leading those on behalf of the government right now.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: But I haven't heard that you guys have all met together in a room and said, "Here's the game plan; here are our timelines; here's what we're trying to do; here's how we're going to get there; here's how we're going to work together." Has that type of meeting not happened?

Mr. Denis Vinette: I don't know whether it has been in a room. There's collaboration across the departments, but I'm not in a position to confirm that for you.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Okay. Thank you.

My next question is to both Mr. Burt and Ms. Lamoureux.

The Germans mentioned to us that before they went in, as they were trying to bring over 1,100 Yazidi women and girls and family members, they decided to start off with a contract with the federal state of northern Iraqi Kurdistan. I'm wondering whether we should be doing something similar. The reason I ask is because of a comment that you've put into your note, Mr. Burt, where you say:

As such, the international community's resettlement efforts, while assisting the plight of refugees and...displaced persons, may also be used by various actors in northern Iraq to achieve their own political objectives.

I'm wondering whether that type of agreement might help us ensure that we're not inadvertently helping people we don't want to help, but actually help us achieve what we're trying to do.

If you can, answer that quickly, because I have two more questions.

• (1750)

Mr. Stephen Burt: In terms of the overall security assessment and the objectives of the various players on the ground, it is possible that you could find willing partners there, as the Germans did.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: But do you think it would be helpful if we were to form an agreement with the state, as the Germans did? They set out the parameters of how they would work together and what their mutual objectives would be.

Mr. Stephen Burt: I don't know enough about the German agreement, nor about refugee resettlement, to comment knowledgeably on that, unfortunately.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Do you have any comments, Ms. Lamoureux? If you don't have any, it's okay. I just want to see whether you have anything to add.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: A formal agreement we would have to look into, but certainly we need to be consulting with local authorities: Iraqi, KRG, governorates at all levels, and Yazidi leaders. Whether it should take the form of a specific written agreement is something that hasn't been discussed yet.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Okay. Thank you very much.

My next question is to Ms. Parish.

Ms. Parish, you have repeatedly told us today that you're very much focused on security screening. A number of countries have already been successful in achieving the same objectives we're trying to reach right now, whether it's Germany or Australia or Sweden. I wonder to what extent there is some sort of collaboration or some learning we might have from them about what they've done. Have there been any discussions with them around security screening and sharing of some best practices?

The Chair: Keep it to 20 seconds, please.

Ms. Catherine Parish: To date there have not been any discussions, at least from my branch, with other countries as this relates to the Yazidi issue, but I think my colleague would agree that we had a very successful process in place that was established through the Operation Syrian Refugee, which we plan to build on for this upcoming requirement.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Next is Mr. Saroya, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for coming and giving us your perspectives.

In the last half hour, I heard two versions here. Originally, when the members were asking questions, everybody indicated that it is possible in the next 100 days that we can bring these 1,000 Yazidi women and children, but after the last question from Ms. Zahid, I wasn't sure anymore.

Is it still possible? What is it? Can we bring them in the next 100 days, those 1,000 people?

I'd like to hear from Mr. Burt.

Mr. Stephen Burt: From our perspective, we are examining the situation all day and every day, and our role of providing advice and assessment is ongoing, which we do all the time, anyway. There are no limits from that perspective.

Mr. Bob Saroya: I'm not trying to be mean or anything, but this is what I understood in the last half hour. First, I understood it's possible to bring 1,000 people in the next 100 days, but after the last question I heard, I'm not sure anymore, so what is it?

Mr. Stephen Burt: The role of my organization is to provide intelligence assessment on international security situations. I can certainly do that.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Does anybody else want to comment?

Mr. Denis Vinette: Just to clarify, in our case, if you're using the number 1,000, we're more than capable of handling that by working with partners to render a decision within that time frame on the 1,000 referrals made by IRCC for screening. In regard to resettling and getting them to Canada, there is a lot of logistics and there are many phases to it. We had a pre-selection phase, a transport phase, and an arrivals phase when we did Syria, and throughout each of those we were able to map that process.

I think that we're all enablers in the effort. I can speak to the CBSA in partnership with my CSIS colleagues and others. Certainly, screening and receiving them in Canada is achievable, and we can make that, using the 1,000 number.

● (1755)

Mr. Bob Saroya: It will be your department's job to pick up these 1,000 people? What is their role to assist in this?

Mr. Denis Vinette: IRCC makes a selection. When deploying as the Government of Canada, we use information to determine what's safe, how we're going to operate in theatre, and what the process will look like. IRCC will make the selection with the UN or by other means. Once they've selected those people, they will refer them to the organizations that will conduct the security screening.

We do not compromise in any way, and I want to make that very clear. Once we've been able to go back and confirm that there's no concern over the inadmissibility of these individuals, then it gets into the transportation phase, and IRCC is responsible for the logistical pieces on that.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Do we have any plan drawn out for how many people we're picking up from Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, or northern Iraq? Do we have any numbers in mind when we're picking up so many from northern Iraq?

Mr. Denis Vinette: I don't have those numbers. The right people to ask on that question would be the IRCC representatives.

Mr. Bob Saroya: What was your role in bringing in the last 25,000, and what will be your role in the next 1,000 people, if any?

Mr. Reid Sirrs: From my perspective in Global Affairs, my role was specifically looking at the protection of Canadians and locally engaged staff who were supporting the initiative. We would be the ones who reach out and engage with all the various stakeholders in the country, as well as with our partners. We wanted to make sure we had all the information necessary to constantly monitor what was going on in theatre, to make sure that we had information in advance of the team's coming in place, to make sure the appropriate security protocols were in place, and to make sure that we had the appropriate interview structures, right down to the departure point at the airport.

We also wanted to make sure that we had adequate facilities in place to ensure that our Canadians and locally engaged staff were safe in doing their jobs to complete the last remit.

Mr. Bob Saroya: I'm assuming some of you may have gone to either one of these camps in northern Iraq. Anybody? No?

What is the relationship of the Kurdish soldiers or Kurdish people with the Yazidi women and children? Do they trust each other? Do they believe in each other? Is there any relationship there? Can they work together? Are they forced to work together?

Mr. Stephen Burt: I don't know if I have the level of specifics that you're interested in, given the number of internally displaced Yazidis, but the vast majority of them have found refuge within the territory held by the Kurdistan Regional Government, which has made some significant efforts to deal with both Yazidi and other IDPs, including non-Kurdish ones that have been created as a result of the previous conflict and as result of the current fight around Mosul.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Tabbara, take five minutes, please.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you. I'll be sharing my time with Julie Dzerowicz.

Thank you all for coming here today.

We talked about the peshmerga forces a little bit and our collaboration with them. Have we, with this particular initiative, consulted the Iraqi forces, and are we working with them on the ground concerning how to conduct this operation, Mr. Burt?

Mr. Stephen Burt: I can't speak to what we're doing on the operational side of it.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Have we been in contact with some Iraqi officials?

Mr. Stephen Burt: Again, the role of Intelligence Command is really to do the assessment of the security situation of these things. What we may or may not have done in terms of operationalizing this work, or the kinds of relationships we have with.... We certainly do have relationships with Kurdish officials on the operational side. Specific to this initiative, I don't know.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Okay. I'll pass it on to Julie.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you, Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Vinette, you mentioned in your report that when there's a national effort to extend humanitarian support to a particular group, it requires a great deal more coordination across government departments, given the scale of the undertaking.

Given that we have a fairly short timeline and given the fact that we have a fairly ambitious objective within that four-month timeline, what is it that we could do as a committee to facilitate this coordination? What recommendations might you have for us, or how can we help facilitate this coordination so that it's a bit faster, a lot more coordinated, more helpful to all of you? If you have any recommendations, I'd be grateful.

• (1800)

Mr. Denis Vinette: Maybe the best way to put it is that we queue up behind our colleagues at IRCC. They're in the driver's seat and they're looking to deliver on the agenda that they have been provided.

Anything that brings the required clarity to the objectives, the outcomes that are sought to be achieved, allows us to queue up and ensure that the processes, which are long-established.... We've been receiving individuals in Canada for many years. Whether it's from an earthquake in Haiti, a war in Lebanon, or other things, we've been able to be responsive to bring it together. The processes are well established, but the clarity I think becomes key for us in terms of when we launch, what we are doing, how fast we have to do it. Knowing that allows us to bring the resources together.

Again, it's a very mature process. We just have to put it on steroids in certain circumstances, this possibly being one. Certainly Syria was one. In regard to your question earlier, I think collaboration and governance are really key to making sure that it happens and that we deal with any hiccups, as I'll call them for lack of a better word, so that they are addressed really quickly and we don't unduly delay things.

That said, we continue right to this day to support the overall Syrian effort. We still have many refugees arriving through the refugee stream. It's just making sure that as we layer this effort on top of that one, we're capable of maintaining the pace on all fronts.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: That's very helpful. Thank you, Mr. Vinette.

We have a minute and a half left, and I guess maybe the parting question, really to the rest of you, is this: if you had to give one recommendation to this committee to help us move forward on achieving our objective, what would it be in your respective area?

Maybe we'll start with you, Mr. Burt, and we'll just go down the line.

Mr. Stephen Burt: I'm afraid I'm going to disappoint you. We're not really in the business of recommendations, in what I do.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Most government officials aren't, which always is a surprise, actually, but I try so hard, just in case.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Stephen Burt: What we would be able to say is that this, as I have said in my statement, a very difficult environment, and even with the best preparations, it is going to generate surprises and enormous difficulties—much more so, in my view, than what we ran into in much more controlled environments in the previous operation.

If I were stepping out of the assessment role describing what you can expect on the ground and into a sort of opinion role, it would be to say that you should expect that this is going to be very hard.

Ms. Catherine Parish: I would concur with my colleague about making recommendations, other than to say that we're fully prepared to support the initiative with our colleagues at CBSA and IRCC.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Mr. Sirrs or Ms. Lamoureux, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: I would just say the announcement of the initiative has generated some interest and questions in northern Iraq. I would say that referring any questions to the IRCC, which has the latest on these people, is probably the most useful thing to make sure the information that is circulating is correct.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: That's excellent. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan, you have five minutes, please.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think earlier there was the notion of resettling or aiming to bring a thousand Yazidis here to Canada, as a suggestion. I heard from everybody that you could mobilize fairly quickly and be able to do that. I'm wondering if there is an upper limit to the capacity that your departments could handle operationally. If so, what is that upper limit?

Mr. Vinette, would you comment?

Mr. Denis Vinette: There is a limit. I don't think that I can actually give you a number. I know that the surge of 25,000 for Syria meant that we had to put certain activities in abeyance and cease them in order to repurpose our resources. We actually needed additional funding, as you well know. For us, there is only so much capacity in the machinery, notwithstanding that we have highly dedicated people who certainly stepped up for Syria and will step up for this. It's difficult right now to state the ceiling that we're capable of handling. Certainly it's within perhaps 120 days for this particular fixed number.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: You're saying you could handle 1,000 within the 120 days.

Mr. Denis Vinette: It could be higher. I'd have to go back to my team and work out the logistics in terms of the capacity that we have in the machinery to be able to deliver right now.

• (1805)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Is there anyone else on this question?

Go ahead, Mr. Sirrs.

Mr. Reid Sirrs: I would say, just from an operational point of view, what is different from the Syrian operation is we were working with established, entrenched embassies in the other countries. When we're dealing with northern Iraq, we're dealing with a very small mission, so in order for us to advance and meet our expectations, we're not going to put a limit on how high we can go, but we have to be very realistic in our expectations in terms of what we can process safely.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can you give me an estimate of what would be realistic, or can you just simply not say?

Mr. Reid Sirrs: It's a new type of processing. It's a very precarious environment, as our colleagues from DND and CSIS are saying. It's an environment that is very fluid, so we have to be very measured in what we can do.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay.

In terms of working collaboratively with NGOs on the ground, we heard from the German officials that they've been working with a number of them and that they've been very helpful to them in carrying out their special quota project. From your perspective, can you identify NGOs that your department can work with to carry out this initiative?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Certainly the IOM, I believe, has been identified, because they handle internally displaced people, as opposed to UNHCR. They've been identified as a credible partner. If or whether a partnership should be established, it's really for IRCC to determine.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Your department has officials on the ground. Do they work with any NGOs there, in northern Iraq, aside from...?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Our presence there is very recent, as I explained, so they're in the process of developing those networks at the moment. The Canadians we have on the ground arrived just a few weeks ago.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I see. It was just a few weeks ago. That's the same with anybody else who has contacts there. That's a fairly recent undertaking.

Mr. Denis Vinette: I'll just mention that we're not on the ground. The closest we are is in Jordan and in Turkey.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I see.

With respect to intelligence, Mr. Burt, I'm wondering, with this initiative, whether there are any concerns with respect to a reaction, if you will, in northern Iraq from Daesh or any of the other folks who would want to resist operations such as ours.

Mr. Stephen Burt: There are many security concerns with regard to northern Iraq. Whether or not this operation would be targeted specifically, as opposed to other operations, would depend on a variety of factors: where it is, how big it is, how attractive it is, and how well secured it is. What the threat level will be is going to depend on what type of operation rolls out.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: You can't carry out your work until you have a target from IRCC and the minister to say how many people we want to resettle within this timeline. Until you have that information, you're on standby, right? Maybe you could just give a yes or no.

Mr. Stephen Burt: From my perspective, assessing what is happening in northern Iraq is an ongoing activity. This particular operation will not change the level of effort we put into that in a significant way one way or the other, because we are already so engaged.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we adjourn, I have one quick question, Mr. Burt.

Has there been an assessment made of the security situation inside the camps in northern Iraq, as opposed to a general assessment in the actual camps?

Mr. Stephen Burt: Are we talking about refugee camps?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Stephen Burt: I would have to go back and look. I'm not aware of any off the top of my head.

The Chair: If there is one, could you provide that information to the committee?

Go ahead, Ms. Lamoureux.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: It's the part of my statement I didn't have time to deliver. The answer is the only security assessment that has been conducted so far was in Erbil for the establishment of our diplomatic presence there. There has been no security analysis from GAC outside of that area.

• (1810)

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to thank the department officials for their appearance before the committee today.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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