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• (1720)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 112 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Before we begin, I'd like to ask all members and other in-person participants to consult the cards on their table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents. Use only the black approved earpiece. Keep your earpiece away from the microphones at all times. When you are not using your earpiece, place it face down on the sticker placed on the table for this purpose.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I'd like to inform all the members that thanks to the clerk, all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, January 29, 2024, the committee will commence its study of the appointment of Carolyn Bennett as Canada's ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark.

Dr. Bennett, Your Excellency, welcome. It's great to have you back here. Thank you for having made it possible. I understand that you have another commitment. You were very firm on trying to get out of here by 5:45, but you have graciously agreed to stay until 5:55. Am I correct?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Ambassador of Canada to the Kingdom of Denmark, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Yes. It's Denmark's Constitution Day, and I am supposed to be at the farewell party for the Danish ambassador. We're trying to get there before the remarks, because Minister Joly will be speaking.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much, Ambassador.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: We're trying to get a cab, for anybody who wants to come with us.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you for that.

You will be provided five minutes for your opening remarks.

If it's okay with everyone, given the time constraints, maybe we should do one round per party.

Is that agreeable to everyone?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Excellent.

Madam Ambassador, welcome. The floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee here on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin people, especially today, on the celebration of Constitution Day in Denmark.

I'm pleased to be here to answer any of your questions.

I'm joined by Robert Sinclair, the director general for Europe, Eurasia and the Arctic and the senior Arctic official for Canada.

I have to say that I was truly honoured when Prime Minister Trudeau appointed me ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark in January, but especially humbled as I presented my credentials to His Majesty King Frederik X in Copenhagen on May 24.

Representing Canada at this time in history is especially crucial, and I will do everything I can to advance Canada's foreign policy priorities with the Kingdom of Denmark and our focus on Arctic issues.

Canada highly values its long-standing friendship and effective co-operation with the Kingdom of Denmark, which, as you know, comprises Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. More than 196,000 people in Canada claim Danish origins, and the Inuit in Canada and Greenland also have a shared history, culture and similar language, including family ties going back generations.

We have closely collaborated with Denmark and other like-minded nations in support of Ukraine's defence, recovery and reconstruction, and Denmark has joined the international coalition for the return of Ukrainian children, the global carbon pricing challenge and the NATO climate change and security centre of excellence.

It has been two years since Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark signed the boundary agreement resolving the 50-year-old dispute over Lincoln Sea and Hans Island—Tartupaluk—establishing a boundary on the continental shelf in the Labrador Sea. I know that important work is being done to realize the promised achievement of this agreement, including the issue of Inuit mobility. The manner in which we resolved that dispute speaks to our shared commitment to the rule of law and the rules-based international order, as well as meaningful engagement with the Inuit.

The Arctic represents a strategic and particularly compelling area of collaboration between Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark. In October of last year, a letter of intent for co-operation on Pikialorsuaq was signed by Canada and Greenland on the margins of the Arctic Circle Assembly in Iceland. This is an important step toward ensuring responsible management of one of the most biologically productive regions north of the Arctic Circle.

Like Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark is firmly committed to the enduring value of the Arctic Council, particularly as the Kingdom of Denmark is preparing to take over the chairship of the council in 2025.

In February, Greenland released its foreign affairs, defence and security policy, “nothing about us without us”, with chapter 6 focused squarely on Canada, its closest neighbour.

[Translation]

Canada and Denmark are strong NATO allies and active participants in alliance operations. The Canadian Armed Forces' joint task force north works closely in the Arctic with the joint command of the Danish armed forces in Greenland.

Denmark is a prosperous trading nation and a strong supporter of the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, which was ratified in June 2017. Bilateral trade has increased by over 30% since its entry into force. Canadian North and Air Greenland have teamed up to provide a new seasonal service between Iqaluit and Nuuk starting in June 2024. Denmark has set some of the world's most ambitious climate change targets, creating trade opportunities for Canadian companies when it comes to multilateral co-operation.

• (1725)

[English]

Canada has much to gain from an enhanced relationship with the Kingdom of Denmark. It is my role to ensure that those gains are realized. I will continue doing that job to the best of my abilities.

Merci. Thank you. Tak. Qujanak.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Ambassador.

We will now open it up to questions from the members. Each member will have six minutes.

I must forewarn you all that when we hit the six minutes, I will have to cut it off, given the time constraints.

We will start off with MP Hoback for six minutes.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Ambassador, first of all, I want to congratulate you and wish you all the best in your new role. I want to thank you for your service as a minister and a member of Parliament. I had the pleasure of being in your riding door knocking for the Conservative member—future Conservative member—a couple of weeks ago. We'll see what happens there.

As you settle into this new role, what skill sets from your previous job will you be bringing into this new job? Where do you see that benefiting Canada, at the end of the day?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you for the question, Randy.

I joined the Arctic caucus in 1998, when Nancy Karetak and I were elected at the same time. I've been part of that, travelling north every summer since then. I became the indigenous and northern affairs minister in 2015. That continued my interest in the north and also in the relationships with northern countries and Nordic countries from Barrow, Alaska, to the Arctic Circle meetings in Iceland.

I also think the relationship—the recognition of rights, the respect, and the co-operative partnership—with first nations, Inuit and Métis has been very much part of my wanting to be able to make sure that people have been heard and that this is how you get things done.

Mr. Randy Hoback: I'm running out of time here, so I'll be very quick.

With regard to advancing the relationship of Canada and Denmark, what would be the one thing you'd like to say you'd done by the time your role as ambassador ends? What would you like to see get across the finish line before you leave?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think it would be formalizing the relationship with Greenland, in that with the new flights, with the ability, with their new policies, I think we know that we have.... They do see us as their closest neighbour. From telehealth to critical minerals to all of the things that we can benefit from as a country by working closely with Greenland and within the Kingdom of Denmark, who are very, very supportive of this, particularly as Denmark comes to chair the Arctic Council, the role of Greenland and their voice will become increasingly important.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Just quickly, when it comes to NATO and the role Denmark has in NATO and Canada and NATO in the Arctic, where do you see Canada and Denmark? Do you see more joint operations in the Arctic? Do you see some things like that, possibly?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Absolutely. When we were in Nuuk two weeks ago, we met with the Joint Arctic Command and Major-General Søren Andersen. It was very important to see the joint exercises that are taking place but also a real understanding of security and, again, how the people who live in the north need a say in what happens in the north. I think NORAD's been very, very important, and our partnership with Denmark there.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay.

Chair, I'll turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Genuis.

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

Thank you, Ambassador. I do have a few questions about your new role, just based on your track record and how that history could impact your work.

According to an Order Paper question, when you were mental health and addictions minister you personally met four times in two years with a company called Fair Price Pharma. Fair Price Pharma is run by Dr. Perry Kendall, until very briefly a B.C. public health officer, and their business is heroin. It seems very unusual that a sitting minister would meet four times with a company selling heroin, and I do wonder how this could impact your new role. I have a couple of questions for you along those lines.

Did you have any interactions with Fair Price Pharma since you became ambassador?

• (1730)

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Oliphant.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I really draw the chair's attention to the concept of relevance. This meeting is very specifically with respect to the work of the ambassador and with respect to representing Canada in Greenland.

One can try to draw some relationship between a previous life and that work—they have done this before—but I would say that this is not relevant to the questions we need to be asking the ambassador with respect to her work.

I would ask you to ask the member to move on.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Just on that point, I didn't even have a chance to ask the question. It's about credibility in the current role, so....

The Chair: Okay, but if you could establish some relevance, that would be great, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes.

Just for the record, do I have two minutes and eight seconds left?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair. I'll restart the clock.

Have you had any interactions with Fair Price Pharma since becoming ambassador?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: No.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Have you been in any meetings, on any calls, cc'd on any correspondence with Fair Price Pharma since you left your position as minister?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Not that I'm aware of. I know that Dr. Kendall and I go back a long time, from the time that I was the minister of public health. He has been a leader in setting up the public health network, and I very much respect the work that he's done. I think Dr. Fry really knows a lot, probably more than I do, about the work they have been doing, but I don't think it's relevant to my job now.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Well, I appreciate that you have high regard for him. He is someone who has transitioned from the public health world fairly quickly into a company that sells heroin.

Why did you meet four times in two years with him, as minister?

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, if you could establish—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I think it speaks to credibility.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes, I think that's already—

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): I have a point of order, Chair.

What is the relevance, please?

The Chair: Yes, Dr. Fry.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On that point, I think it does speak to credibility. I think these are questions that the ambassador may be asked, and she may be asked internationally. She's had those four meetings. I would just, out of respect for the ambassador, give her the balance of my time to answer the question.

That's my last question. Why did she meet four times with them in two years?

If the committee will allow, I'll give her the balance of my time to simply explain what was discussed in those four meetings that she attended in person with this company. I hope members will provide the ambassador with that courtesy.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, it wasn't established how this is rationally connected to the study.

The Chair: We'll allow the ambassador to respond.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: You have 35 seconds.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I actually don't think it's relevant to my job now, although, I think the drug monitoring part of...coming out of Lisbon, in terms of the future of whether it's fentanyl precursors, there are many things that international countries are looking to help with, but I really don't think meeting with that company has—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Why did you take those four meetings?

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, she's still responding.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, the member said he'd give the balance of time—

The Chair: I know.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm just repeating the question because maybe it wasn't heard or understood.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, perhaps you could allow her to respond, as you initially indicated.

There are another 10 seconds, Madam Ambassador.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I actually don't think the question's relevant to my job.

The Chair: I completely understand.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You had a chance to answer, and you didn't.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

We will go to Dr. Fry.

Dr. Fry, you have six minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, Your Excellency.

I think that we share a lot with Denmark, so it's interesting to see you taking this position. Denmark, as you well know, is a co-founder of NATO, with Canada. Also, Denmark is in the OSCE, and Denmark is as committed as Canada is to Ukraine and committed to helping Ukraine win that war against Russia. That's the first part of my statement, and it's leading to the question I'm going to ask you.

The second part is that Denmark has managed to be able to look, with Canada, towards the security of the Arctic. With Russia amassing massive military ships in the Arctic, I think we all need to be concerned about security in the Arctic. Have you been discussing this with Denmark? Is there a way in which Canada and Denmark can work more closely together with regard to Ukraine and with regard to Arctic security?

● (1735)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Absolutely. I think we learned a lot in the meeting when we were in Nuuk with Major-General Søren Andersen about the kinds of exercises that we're taking together and about that plan, as the Arctic and northern policy framework really articulated.

I think you're quite right, Hedy. Since the illegal invasion by Russia into Ukraine, all of the Nordics are very much focused on what we can do together on security particularly in the Arctic. I think, even being in the Faroe Islands last week, knowing really how the Americans want to help, everybody is worried.

Placing those wreaths on the anniversary of the liberation of Denmark, Canada was very much part of that, and the U.S., the U.K. and Poland. This is a country that has been occupied, and they're focused on Ukraine, focused on helping Ukraine and focused on being able to give everything they can to really support Ukraine with its reconstruction.

It was also interesting—Hedy, you would be interested—that when I was at the WHO Europe, which again, are the multilaterals that are in our area in Copenhagen, it is actually dealing with the Canadian funding for the mental health support in Ukraine. There are lots of connections there.

Hon. Hedy Fry: There are lots of things you could do. I noticed that Denmark just raised its carbon pricing. It has one of the highest carbon prices in the world, in Europe. It is actually looking very clearly at the melting of ice in the Arctic, looking at what's going to happen to the Arctic, looking at how it's going to affect their infrastructure, their agriculture and everything they do because of the melting of ice in the Arctic.

Have there been discussions on how we can co-operate environmentally?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes, I think there are many Canadian municipalities that go to Copenhagen to actually learn how you can mitigate climate change and how citizens and municipalities can be part of the tools that need to be there to combat climate change and mitigate it.

It's interesting that even Copenhagen is planning to build an island that will protect the harbour and all of the canals, just knowing and preparing for what we all hope won't happen, in terms of the rising sea levels.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Yes. Do you mean an artificial island?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Really? That's an interesting engineering feat.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Do you think we can work together and learn something from Denmark? They've been leaders in dealing with environmental problems and issues.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: It is part of their identity now, particularly when it comes to whether nine out of 10 people have a bicycle, whether they're to get people out of their cars or whether they're able to use some of the things like wind power as opposed to diesel.

It was interesting that the port on the most western part of Denmark was a fishing community, then an oil drilling community, and now it's doing windmills. In terms of just transition, we have a lot to learn from Denmark. There's a lot to learn as well, frankly, about child care, about free post-secondary education, about a very generous welfare system that has the crime rate down. Of course, they have the approach of *hygge*, of people just wanting to live a good life and everybody being of equal stature. It's a really interesting culture.

Hon. Hedy Fry: How am I doing for time, Chair?

The Chair: You have 24 seconds.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I have 24 seconds.

Is there anything you want to say to this committee about how we can look at and enhance our foreign affairs relationships with Denmark?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: As we look to their chairmanship of the Arctic Council, we want to be able to support them. We want them to also understand that in that kingdom, Greenland and the Faroe Islands as well as Denmark are separate countries, and that they are in the kingdom and in the realm. I think we will see a need to support them. As they come to the chairmanship of the Arctic Council, with the leadership of Greenland speaking for Greenlanders and the people living in the north, we have an opportunity, as Canada, to say that Arctic policy needs to still have the leadership of Arctic states.

We, as an Arctic country, need to support them in that vision, as opposed to the people who seem to think the Arctic is a public good. This is not Antarctica. This is a north where people live, and they need to have a say.

• (1740)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you to Lloyd Axworthy for starting the Arctic Council.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to MP Bergeron.

MP Bergeron, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I hope that my speaking time will be as generous as Ms. Fry's time.

Your Excellency, thank you for joining us and for giving us more than the hour that you originally agreed to. We really appreciate it.

You no doubt know that the foreign affairs and international development committee held hearings on Canadian diplomacy over a number of weeks. Witnesses repeatedly pointed out the need to limit political appointments to a certain extent.

At one time, prime ministers rewarded loyal service by appointing people to the Senate. The current Prime Minister has chosen to put an end to this. However, the Prime Minister has developed a

new tendency to appoint former members of Parliament or ministers to diplomatic positions. Examples include Bob Rae, who was appointed ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations in New York, and Stéphane Dion, who is now Canada's ambassador to France. Marc Garneau was offered the position of ambassador to France. David Lametti was offered the position of ambassador to Spain. You were offered the position of ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark.

You're taking over from Denis Robert, a career diplomat who served from 2020 to 2024. He joined the Department of External Affairs in 1989. He was also Canada's ambassador to Belgium from 2012 to 2016.

You aren't a career diplomat. I had the opportunity to sit with you for a long time, both in my first life as a parliamentarian and in my second life as a parliamentarian. I hold in high esteem what you achieved during your long and prolific career, both as a family doctor and as a parliamentarian.

In addition to having held positions that put you in contact with the first nations, what specifically prepared you for the position of Canada's ambassador to the Kingdom of Denmark?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You're asking almost the same question as Mr. Hoback.

I think that it's about wisdom and an understanding of Arctic issues and the collaboration between the two countries. The Prime Minister must also appoint people such as Tom Clark or John Horgan. Members of Parliament aren't necessarily the only ones appointed.

[*English*]

Robert Sinclair has a view of how the diversity of the public service and the foreign service has been very helpful, I think, over the years in just bringing different perspectives into what is an ascension through the ranks, and—maybe I shouldn't say it—a refreshing breeze. I am trying to do my best to bring what I have learned, particularly on the panel in Greenland. There it was about engagement with citizens. They asked me to present on what meaningful engagement with indigenous people means, and as you've heard me say before, Stéphane, it shouldn't be scary. I think Canada has a role to play in really moving forward on the issues of reconciliation or, as Willie Littlechild said, “reconciliation”. I really look forward to that and also, of course, to the relationship between the Inuit and the Inuit Circumpolar Council.

I'm very much enjoying this role and the fact that I am surrounded by career public servants who really are fantastic. I think over my time even as a doctor, I would say that you know what you know; you know what you don't know, and you know who to go to for help and when to do that. That's, I think, the approach I'm taking to this new job.

• (1745)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Some witnesses argued for a limit on the number of political appointments. They said that these appointments could be disheartening for people who spend their entire careers in the public service and see ambassador positions slip through their fingers.

Do you have any comments on this perspective shared with us?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: These feelings haven't been conveyed to me.

[English]

Maybe we should let the public servant say what it feels like.

Mr. Robert Sinclair (Senior Arctic Official and Director General, Arctic, Eurasian and European Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I hope my mic works.

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron, each person who becomes a head of a mission comes with their own stories and experiences, for example.

We're motivated by heads with leadership who, as I just said—

[English]

The Chair: I do apologize for interrupting. Please wrap it up in 10 seconds.

Mr. Robert Sinclair: I am very happy and eager to work with Ambassador Bennett.

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

We next go to MP Zarrillo.

MP Zarrillo, you have six minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to say congratulations to Ambassador Bennett.

Many years ago, when I was at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, they said that only 19% of diplomats across the world were women. I think that's been raised to about 20.5% right now. We know that Canada is at a much higher percentage, at 35% or more, so I want to congratulate you for that. Especially at this time, when we see so much unrest across the globe, we know that we need more women at the peacekeeping table. I just wanted to say congratulations on behalf of the NDP.

You made some comments about reconciliation. What role does the Canadian embassy in Denmark play in respecting and advancing reconciliation in Nunavut, Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador? How do you see that?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thanks for that. We're at 50% women ambassadors, actually, or heads of missions, so we're pretty excited by that.

In terms of what we've been trying to do in Denmark, we have set up four meetings on Arctic perspectives. We were pleased at the one we held last month. Natan Obed was one of the panellists, as was Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, who chairs the National Centre

for Truth and Reconciliation as the chair in reconciliation at Lakehead University. They were very, very well received.

I think this becomes very important, as Canada is able to set an example and particularly focus on the relationship with Inuit, and on Inuit mobility. Hopefully, with the new flight that will go from Nuuk to Iqaluit and then down, and then hopefully over to northern Quebec in Kuujuaq, there's a real example of “nothing about us without us”, and being able to show that we know that it's a journey, not a destination, and it's not scary. These relationships are ones in which we learn a great deal.

I know that with the Arctic parliamentary meeting recently in the Nordics, your colleague Lori Idlout was a bit worried about the way things were being framed in terms of indigenous rights. I think as parliamentarians we all need to come together and work with that kind of reconciliation across the world, and also know that those indigenous peoples that you've identified in Canada, and their working nation to nation, will be hugely important as we put forward their voices.

• (1750)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Ambassador.

That goes to my next question. How are Canada and the Kingdom of Denmark working together alongside indigenous people in regard to economic bilateral co-operation and respecting indigenous rights and their way of life?

I'll add to that, because you just mentioned the flights. You might know that my colleague Lori Idlout was up today talking about the exorbitant price of flights and how it really is restrictive. It's not economic equality. It really isn't allowing for the free movement of people—not goods, but definitely not people—at that price.

Maybe you could share some thoughts on that.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: I think we all have a concern about the flights where, at the moment, because of the costs, certain people would find it easier to go back to Copenhagen and come back than actually deal with these new routes. We have to deal with that.

I think we can deal with it also in terms of ways to support, whether it be sports teams or music groups, youth exchanges—there is actually an agreement between Denmark and Canada—and youth mobility. How do we buttress the success of these flights, and then how do we work together to get those prices down?

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: I would just ask you to stay close to MP Ildout and have some conversations with her on that as soon as possible, if you can. It's so important that we have free movement of people and goods and that indigenous people have their rights respected and their economic independence.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Yes. That was one of the first calls I made. Before I presented my credentials, I spoke to some of the northern senators, obviously premiers, and the heads of national indigenous organizations, such as Natan. We want to know what their view is on Inuit mobility, which is a really important thing. Lori talked to me about her constituents in Pond Inlet, who have relatives across in Greenland. How do we get them to move back and forth, even before their travel documents or...? I think what Natan had said was how do we just have a place-keeper to make sure we honour this commitment that we've made on Inuit mobility? We can't prescribe what Greenland does about their definition of the people who would qualify as opposed to us here in Canada, who have those kinds of formal registries.

It's a challenge. We know that we can do it by listening to the people affected by the policies. That's the only way you get good policy.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Great. I hope you raise the voice of MP Ildout and her constituents about having the ability to get passports quickly. If you can assist with that, even, in regard to Greenland, that's very important to her residents and an issue that she has brought to the House.

The Chair: Thank you. We're now 30 seconds over.

Allow me to conclude the questions by thanking you, Madam Ambassador, for your lengthy years of public service. I know that I speak on behalf of all the members here when I wish you continued success in the years ahead representing our country.

Thank you for that.

• (1755)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Come and visit.

The Chair: Absolutely.

Given the time constraints, we will suspend for literally two to three minutes, no more.

• (1755)

(Pause)

• (1755)

The Chair: Welcome back, everyone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 16, 2023, the committee will resume its study of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the current situation in Iran.

I would now like to welcome our three distinguished witnesses. We have here, in person, Professor Noomane Raboudi from the University of Ottawa. We also have, here in person, Mr. Shahram Kholdi from Kiaxar Inc., who is a Middle East specialist. Virtually, we have joining us, from the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Mr. Behnam Taleblu, who is a senior fellow.

After we've heard from all three of the witnesses, again because of time constraints, there will be five-minute rounds of questioning—five minutes only—so we can get out of here by approximately 6:35.

We will start with Professor Raboudi.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes.

• (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Noomane Raboudi (Assistant Professor, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your invitation.

I'll start with a brief introduction. When I speak about the Middle East, it's often—as you know—about controversial topics. This can convey an image that isn't mine. I want to make it clear from the start that I have absolutely no sympathy for the Iranian regime, let alone for the violent Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC. However, I'm also fully aware that I'll likely say some things that go against the grain. Of course, I won't do so for ideological reasons, but for the benefit of Canada and—since I've been invited as a professor—of the people here who want to make the most of my expertise.

I want to say that five minutes isn't enough time to talk about everything. I'll simply talk about the issue of placing the IRGC on the list of terrorist entities. Let me be clear about this. Under the current circumstances, this isn't a good idea. I'll tell you why.

First, this discussion must take place in a non-ideological context. The international news over the past 30 years has provided clear evidence of the devastating impact of building international and foreign policy choices on predetermined ideologies that lack any connection with the reality of the international situation. This is particularly true for the Middle East, which has both contradicted these ideologies and challenged them. The Islamic State terrorist group was the direct result of this logic, which must be avoided at all costs.

We need to learn from history and avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. The IRGC is certainly one destabilizing force in the Middle East. However, it's only one of many and no less dangerous. This type of selective decision will certainly undermine the relatively neutral and moderate position that Canada seeks and, in my opinion, should maintain in the Middle East. It could certainly prevent Canada from playing a mediating role in the endless conflicts taking place in this region, particularly given the total failure of American policies. In the opinion of most experts in this region, including American experts, these policies have been thoroughly discredited.

You need an idea of the risk. You need to determine the potential danger of manipulating such a dangerous topic for political gain. We're fully aware that ideological tendencies in our political life seek to align Canadian foreign policies in the Middle East with the American policies. It seems that this choice is purely ideological and devoid of any strategic vision. Moreover, it poses a real danger to our interests in the world and to our national security.

In doing so, we'll be taking sides in deeply rooted identity conflicts. These conflicts are compounded by historical, colonial, political, religious, denominational and territorial disputes that remain virtually unresolvable. The extreme complexity of these conflicts makes it difficult to take a fair and balanced stance, at an equal distance from all the antagonists involved.

In addition to pointlessly intervening in these conflicts, we're also likely to invite them here. This type of invitation could significantly affect our social peace and internal security. The terrible tragedy currently unfolding in Gaza confirms that Canadian society is deeply and uniquely divided on the issues in the Middle East. Governments often adopt definitions of terrorism that enable them to serve their interests; enforce their vision; take unpopular or even freedom-destroying measures at times; delegitimize the actions of their enemies; and impose measures that depend on the circumstances faced.

• (1805)

For example, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service defines terrorism as the threat or perpetration of serious acts of violence to compel the Canadian government to act in a certain way—

[*English*]

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting, Professor Raboudi. We've now hit the five-minute mark. Could I ask you to conclude your remarks in the next 20 seconds or so?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Noomane Raboudi: I just wanted to say that the IRGC is certainly the repressive arm of the Iranian government, obviously one of the most detestable and abhorrent dictatorships in the world. However, given the borderline inflammatory climate in the Middle East and the level of hatred that unfortunately prevails in the Muslim world, it doesn't seem like a good idea to make this type of decision under the current circumstances.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor.

We'll now turn to Professor Kholdi. You also have five minutes for your opening remarks.

The floor is yours.

Dr. Shahram Kholdi (Middle East Specialist, Kiaxar Inc.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Honourable members of the committee, I would like to thank the committee for this opportunity and for your hard work on this critical matter over the past two years.

For your purview, I've enclosed in my submission notes several of my written analytical pieces on Iran International in English that

discuss the activities of the IRGC. My submission today is divided into historical background, recent developments and summation.

From the 1960s onwards, Shia fanatical Iranian urban guerrillas plotted and staged several successful terror attacks against the Iranian imperial state officials. These guerrillas received training in urban warfare and assassination from armed Palestinian organizations, with the financial backing of Nasser's Egypt, the Baathist regimes of Iraq and Syria, and Gaddafi of Libya. They also worked with security services of several Soviet bloc states, including communist East Germany and Maoist China.

Most importantly, this network trafficked arms and hard currency and collaborated with armed insurgents from Southeast Asia to the Irish Republican Army in that period. After the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979, the very members of these guerrillas founded the IRGC, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

In the interest of time, I will be skipping some paragraphs of my brief.

I studied law in Iran. I would be grateful to bring it to your attention that per article 150 of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution, the IRGC is officially enshrined. It is not accountable before anyone but the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic. It is unimpeachable by the ostensibly elected parliament of the Islamic Republic.

In the 1980s, the IRGC was integral in the brutal suppression of Iranian political dissidents. It actually staged several coup attempts against Persian Gulf monarchies in that region. The opportunity for it to create the first Iranian armed proxy, and perhaps the foremost one, was the Hezbollah of Lebanon in the aftermath of the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in the same period.

Per recent developments, since the 1990s, the IRGC has been a major force in Iran's postwar economy. It has evolved into a large construction racket, whose Khatam al-Anbiya headquarters and its consulting engineering companies were assigned multi-billion dollar dam, petrochemical and transportation projects. IRGC's special Quds Force has been instrumental in the military-calibre brutal suppression of the Iranian people's recurring uprisings over the past 15 years, chiefly the suppression of the autumn 2022 Women, Life, Freedom uprising.

Since 2015 the IRGC has built up a criminal network in collaboration with Mexican and South American drug cartels, and has been very active in the dark web, cryptocurrency transactions and other international money-laundering operations that use various front enterprises from the gulf region and Southeast Asia to Latin America, the U.S. and here, Canada.

Since 2022 IRGC's military industrial complex has supplied the Russian war machine with tens of thousands of technologically sophisticated, and some not-so-sophisticated, projectiles of various types.

I will again skip some paragraphs.

The IRGC has been instrumental in creating the present state of instability in the Middle East by creating the Houthis of Yemen à la Hezbollah framework. I cannot adequately underscore the involvement of the IRGC in international criminal activity and the threat it poses to all Canadians, especially Iranian Canadians.

I also cannot sufficiently emphasize the involvement of the IRGC, directly or indirectly, in recruiting the Hezbollah of Lebanon, Canadian Hells Angels and other transnational gangster networks to plot attacks against Jewish religious and cultural centres as well as Iranian dissidents across the world.

I must add here, as a note, that the IRGC is also implicated in crimes against humanity against half a million civilian Syrians, basically massacring them, and the displacement of about two million Syrians in conjunction and confederation with the Hezbollah during the civil war in defence of the Baathist regime of Bashar al-Assad.

• (1810)

It has been claimed that listing the IRGC as a terrorist entity is fraught with various legal and political problems. Even Josep Borrell, the outgoing EU foreign policy chief, has stated as much: that without judicially valid evidence, one cannot risk listing IRGC as a terrorist organization. I beg to differ. Historical evidence, contemporary occurrences as well as several occurrences of terrorist activities dating back over the past 30 years, as established by European courts, confirm that IRGC is a sponsor of terrorism in the west, and it's a threat toward peace and Canada's security as well as to our transatlantic alliance.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

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

We next go to Mr. Taleblu, who's joining us virtually.

Welcome, Mr. Taleblu. The floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Behnam Taleblu (Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies): Chairman, vice-chairmen and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify virtually before you today and to share my analysis.

My comments today begin broad and then zoom in and come at a particularly turbulent time in Iran that may be hard to understand for external observers and non-Iran watchers.

Recently the country's president, Ebrahim Raisi, died in a helicopter crash in northwestern Iran. Despite Iranian drones now being found in conflict zones in at least four continents, it was reportedly a Turkish drone that found the crash site first. Elsewhere, in normal countries, an accident of this scale would elicit national mourning and popular sorrow. Yet in Iran and across Persian-language social media, news of the president's passing was treated with felicitation, jubilation and even jokes by large swaths of society.

Indeed, there is nothing normal about the massive chasm that exists today between state and society in Iran. That's because the Islamic Republic of Iran is an Islamist and authoritarian regime that sits atop and represses a secular nationalist and democracy-seeking people.

While snap "elections" or more aptly put, "selections" are scheduled for later this June, those are expected to be boycotted en masse, just as parliamentary elections were a few months ago. Since the outbreak of nationwide anti-regime protests beginning in 2017, rising protests have meant record-setting low turnouts, even when we look at official regime statistics.

Indeed for a regime with as little social legitimacy as the Islamic Republic, exogenous shocks like snap elections or accidents involving major political figures can be ill afforded given that the Iranian population has used nearly every opportunity, including crises, whether they are social, economic, environmental or even related to foreign policy, as opportunities to protest and to make their case that the state does not represent the street and that they are done with incremental reform and are seeking wholesale political change.

This desire for wholesale political change caught the eyes and ears of members of this distinguished body from 2022-23 during the height of the "Woman, Life, Freedom." or "Zan. Zendegi. Azadi." movement, at the peak of which anti-regime protests rocked over 150 different cities, towns and villages across all of Iran's 30 provinces.

One of the elements in the cocktail of security forces instrumental in repressing those protests was the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The IRGC is a parallel ideological military created in the early days of the Islamic Revolution as a check against the national military. Tasked with defending the integrity of the "revolution," this force and its veterans, affiliates and supporters now constitute the single most important institution in contemporary Iran. It is the tip of the spear of the world's foremost state sponsor of terrorism today and the hub and its spoke of transnational terrorism and repression.

For almost two decades now, the dominant trend in the discourse among regime elites in Iran who support the IRGC has been to frame its network abroad as an anti-status quo "axis of resistance", constituting proxies and partners around the Middle East who were either created, like the Badr in Iraq or Hezbollah in Lebanon, or co-opted, like the Houthis in Yemen or Hamas in Gaza.

Nonetheless, the IRGC trains, equips, supports and underwrites these terror militias in its axis with state-level capabilities, as has been the case with the Houthis in Yemen since 2015.

This group, which is the latest to join the axis of resistance, is now in possession of medium-range ballistic missiles and anti-ship ballistic missiles. To date, it is the only proxy of Iran to have paraded and used these capabilities. Elsewhere it helps to work with those proxies to indigenously produce weapons, as has been the case with Iran and Hamas since 2014.

Since the Iran-backed terrorist attack against Israel by Hamas on October 7, the IRGC has been bringing more of its terrorist apparatus online, employing a “ring of fire” strategy so as to escalate the Gaza war into a regional conflict and prevent a member of its axis from being militarily taken off the chessboard.

While these proxies in the region have traditionally been used by the IRGC to mask its hand in foreign conflicts, today they are calling cards or tells of the regime’s regional enmeshment and growing capabilities and risk tolerance.

While the IRGC has helped Tehran engage in internal suppression and external aggression, its increasing role offers the distinguished members of this body, North American policy-makers and, in reality, all Five Eyes nations, the opportunity to course-correct their Iran policies.

In my view, every single Five Eyes country ought to, under their own national counterterrorist authorities, be designating the IRGC a terrorist organization in its entirety. I’d be happy to explain why, along with the benefits of this approach, in the Q and A.

Every single Five Eyes country also ought to be using this time to push for anti-corruption or Magnitsky-style penalties against the supreme leader of Iran and his inner circle and taking the opportunity to align other sovereign sanctions regimes, whether they be nuclear, missile, drone, Russia, or human rights related.

• (1815)

After all, the IRGC is proliferating drones to Russia for use in Ukraine, escalating Iran’s nuclear program, engaging in more overt ballistic missile activity to include strikes and attacks in four nations during the first four months of 2024 alone, and stepping up its internal crackdown against dissidents inside the country. The predicate for more multilateral action today exists.

The Chair: Mr. Taleblu, could I ask you to wrap it up in the next 10 to 15 seconds, please?

Mr. Behnam Taleblu: Sure.

The main question is this: Does the west have the commensurate resolve to act to contest these threats and better marry its head and its heart on Iran policy?

Thank you for the time and the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

Looking at the clock and at the commitments the members have, each round will be four minutes.

We will start off with MP Aboultaif.

You have four minutes, sir.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses and welcome to the committee.

I’ll start with Professor Kholdi.

We know that the network of the IRGC in Canada is quite big. It’s branched in different shapes, from money laundering to smuggling to weapons to drugs to everything. We know that’s to feed back illegal cash to the regime. This illegal operation has been going for years in Canada.

Is calling for or recognizing the IRGC as a terrorist organization the first serious step to start fighting their existence in Canada—yes or no?

Dr. Shahram Kholdi: Yes. Absolutely.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Do you have any idea of the size of the money laundering and the network or how many people they could have on Canadian soil? We know that in the Middle East they’ve done it with Yemen, with Lebanon, with Syria, with Iraq. They’re everywhere. I’m afraid they have the same model in Canada and maybe of course in other nations. How much information do we have on this organization and their activities in Canada?

• (1820)

Dr. Shahram Kholdi: In the interest of time, sir, I should say that whatever information we have is never enough. They have shown from the time that everything was analog in the sixties and seventies, to the eighties and nineties, when everybody was using facsimiles, to the present date, that they’ve been adapting themselves. What we need is a sustainable effort in tracking these adaptation measures.

We should not forget that these Revolutionary Guard commanders, especially the ones who started from Lebanon, have second and third wives there. They have families there. You cannot sometimes tell who is really Lebanese and who is really Iranian. They have done the same thing in Syria as well.

What is imperative is that the respective commission in British Columbia, that was assigned by the Government of British Columbia, reported that the Hezbollah of Lebanon has been working with the El Chapo cartel to launder money in British Columbia. Hezbollah doesn’t do anything without coordination, prior coordination, with the Revolutionary Guards. If they are here, not only are they active through the diaspora community and some of the relatives they have here; they are also doing business through the Latin American cartel as well.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Dr. Taleblu, or Mr. Taleblu, the time for diplomacy is over. We need to get serious about fighting. The IRGC are ideological. They’re not going to stop at any point. They will continue to do what they do. They have a lot of patience and they have a lot of power. Isn’t it time to start fighting that seriously in Canada?

Mr. Behnam Taleblu: Yes, sir. I wholeheartedly agree with that statement.

Thank you for the honorary promotion to doctor, but alas, I don’t have a Ph.D.

In essence, yes, if Canada is not going to use legal authorities like a proscription, and political authorities like a proscription, to begin to contest the illicit presence of this global terrorist organization on its own soil, then it really leaves a huge capabilities gap and renders one, pushes one, into a worse footing to deal with transnational repression, terrorism, drug smuggling, arms proliferation and everything else that Canadian officials have been concerned about.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Okay.

Finally, Mr. Taleblu, do you believe we have enough information in Canada about this organization and about the depth of its network in Canada?

Mr. Behnam Taleblu: We certainly have enough information to make a public call for the proscription. I say that as an American who also has an interest in having a more unified North American policy towards this group. But we need more information on the breadth and the depth of its other illicit activities that haven't made themselves known in the good news and articles that, for instance, Shahram Kholdi's reporting has revealed.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will go to MP Oliphant for four minutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you, Chair.

I think I'll begin by paraphrasing Professor Raboudi's opening comments that there is no tolerance and there is in fact disgust for the actions of the regime as well as the IRGC. I think we are united on that. We may be looking at differences in the way we approach that, but I think we are united in the condemnation of the regime.

Mr. Noomane Raboudi: There is no doubt about that.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Professor Kholdi, I'm wondering if you could describe either the organizational or the political differences that could exist between the regime and IRGC. Is there any daylight between the two?

Dr. Shahram Kholdi: Absolutely not, sir.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Okay.

At the end of your testimony, you said that the IRGC was indeed a state supporter of terrorism.

Dr. Shahram Kholdi: They themselves brag about it in their public interviews, as the commanders. I can bring for you a litany of evidence that is available in the official agencies of the IRGC.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: There is no daylight between the IRGC and the regime.

Canada in 2012, under the previous regime, listed the Iranian Republic as a state supporter of terrorism. That's been reaffirmed at the biannual review every year. We have, in fact, decreed that it is a state sponsor. We have decreed that the Quds group is a terrorist organization. We have put in sanctions limiting and immigration measures limiting.

Professor Raboudi, while you have expressed your disdain and condemnation of the IRGC, you were talking about the timing or the appropriateness of listing them as a terrorist organization. How

many countries in the world among our allies—NATO allies, European allies—have listed the IRGC as a terrorist organization?

• (1825)

Mr. Noomane Raboudi: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] countries, especially in the Middle East, there is hesitation. In the Middle East, as you know, even in the Sunni space there is division. The regime is saying something and the population is saying another thing.

As I told you and as I want you to understand, it's not the fact that I'm denying what all my colleagues have said. Everything that was said is true. The problem is the timing and what is happening around the Middle East and the way in which the Muslim world is now perceiving Canada. When I said what I said, I was talking about the political incidents that such a decision, taken now, could have in the Muslim world. It will associate us, as a country, with what is happening there. It will facilitate the propaganda of the regime. They are very gifted, very gifted, in propaganda.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Our Parliament has been clear that we view the IRGC as a terrorist organization. The European Parliament has said the same.

Mr. Noomane Raboudi: Yes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: However, the move to list them as a terrorist organization has other complications, I understand. I've looked at them domestically and the impact on some Iranian Canadians' lives. You're also bringing up the geopolitical impact of doing that.

Would it be best to do that in concert with allies, or how would we do that? This is not a new problem. This has gone on for 30 years. We've had previous governments that have had to deal with this sensitively to try to figure out the best way to protect Canadians of Iranian background, to send a message to Iran and to defeat their external activities and Hezbollah—

The Chair: Mr. Oliphant, you're over the four-minute mark.

Mr. Noomane Raboudi: Sorry. I will just—

Hon. Robert Oliphant: If you could respond in writing to us at some point, I think it would be very helpful.

In fact, if any of the witnesses could respond in writing to that particular question of the sensitivities that we have as MPs who want to state a strong position on the IRGC by looking at the possible problems of doing that, and when the best time is to do it, that might be helpful for us.

Mr. Noomane Raboudi: I think we have to wait—

The Chair: Thank you.

We would be grateful if you actually did send us your comments and your response to MP Oliphant's question, because we have very limited time.

Mr. Bergeron, we will turn to you, sir, for four minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I also want to thank the witnesses.

I'll now turn to you, Mr. Raboudi. My question is quite simple. Do you think that the list of terrorist entities has any relevance?

Mr. Noomane Raboudi: Politically, yes, for sure. However, even though it's legitimate and justifiable, I don't think that it's a good idea right now to include the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, on the list of terrorist entities.

Will this stop the IRGC from doing what it's doing? I don't know. I don't have the legal expertise to comment on this. However, we can always initiate all possible procedures and take all possible steps, without necessarily making a political decision that will have an ideological, geostrategic and geopolitical impact in the Middle East. This impact could tarnish Canada's image and continue to create this void. At this time, no one can act as an intermediary in all this anarchy affecting the Middle East.

Canada has a certain reputation over there. This country is known for its neutrality and for not being too Islamophobic, in comparison with other countries such as France or the United States. If Canada decides to designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization now, under the current circumstances, it will first and foremost simply destroy this image.

Second, in both Shiite and Sunni circles throughout the Muslim world, Canada will unfortunately be associated with the mass slaughter now taking place in Gaza. My point is that the drawbacks of this decision far outweigh the benefits. Moreover, as I said, the IRGC members aren't choirboys. They're killers. That much is certain. However, this is the wrong time to make this type of decision.

• (1830)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Okay.

I'm trying to understand your reasoning. In paragraph (c) on page 2 of your brief, you acknowledge that the IRGC has committed morally and politically reprehensible acts and could justifiably be included on the list of terrorist entities. However, for political reasons, regardless of whether the move is justified, you recommend that we don't do so. I'm trying to understand how condemning or pointing the finger—not at an ethnic or religious group, but at a terrorist group—could discredit us in the Arab-Muslim world.

Mr. Noomane Raboudi: The selective aspect will be immediately obvious from a public opinion perspective in the Muslim world, because—

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Tell me clearly what you have in mind. Would you like us, for example—and I'll go there—to also declare Israel a terrorist state in a similar vein to the International Criminal Court, or ICC?

Mr. Noomane Raboudi: Unfortunately, if you want us to use this logic, we'll end up in this situation.

As you know, there are many conflicts in the Middle East. As I said in the 11 pages that I sent you, it's extremely difficult to fully exonerate one side and completely blame another. In all these conflicts—mainly identity-based, but combined with a multitude of other disputes—we can see that many actors also engage in terrorism. Non-state actors engage in terrorism as we understand it. States also engage in state terrorism, and other states are also involved.

We talked about Iran's involvement in Syria, for example. Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar are also involved in Syria. All these countries would need to be declared terrorist entities. Israel, whether we like it or not, has also used state terrorism tactics. So you see, the key issue—

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Raboudi, you're over the four minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Noomane Raboudi: —in Muslim public opinion will be “selectivism”. Canada will undoubtedly be branded an Islamophobic country.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

For the last question, we go to MP Zarrillo.

You have four minutes.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank my colleague, Heather McPherson. The NDP was the first.... Heather herself, MP McPherson, proposed this study over a year ago. I'm really pleased. We're glad to see it coming to the table now. Unfortunately, it should have been done more than a year ago, but here we are.

I want to bring it back to British Columbia and my riding of Port Moody—Coquitlam.

I'm going to ask Mr. Kholdi a question.

Thousands of Iranian Canadians live in my riding. Many are afraid to see the news when they wake up in the morning around what's happening with “Women, Life, Freedom”. The fact is they do not feel like they're living free in Canada. They are under surveillance here, and they are afraid, sometimes, to go home or they can't go home. They lose family members in Iran. They can't go home. They're living in fear. They're seeing senior members of the regime in and around Vancouver.

I want to talk about how listing the IRGC as a terrorist organization could help Iranian Canadians live freely in this country.

Dr. Shahram Kholdi: I thank the honourable member for the question.

Whenever anyone invokes selectivism, my question is. If the Italian police over the past 60 years were not able to fight the Mafia, did it stop the prosecutors of Milan who were assassinated by the Mafia from fighting the Mafia? If there are certain countries that are not respecting...and they are our allies, and we cannot stand up to them—like Turkey—does it justify our not acting against other countries and then it would be a free-for-all? This is fascinating, this kind of relativism. It is, in fact, a fallacy, and I absolutely dispute and contest such a fallacy, not just as a matter of moral principle but as a matter of practicality.

Are we waiting for someone in Port Coquitlam—or me—to be assassinated by the agents of the IRGC? Every now and then I receive all sorts of threats from the goons of the Islamic Republic not only in this country, but also when I was teaching at the University of Manchester, where I did my Ph.D. Are we waiting until then?

Madam, I believe it is time to act and to act with all the resources that we have. At least we could say that we tried to act and failed, and not that we did not try to act and we failed.

• (1835)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Thank you, Mr. Kholdi.

In my last minute or two, I'm going to ask Mr. Raboudi a question.

Mr. Raboudi, you are also a professor. I know there are a number of professors who worked in universities in Iran who were not conscripted but still had their card from the Sepah so that they could have passports. I know that this causes an issue for them, and I know that many of them have come together in Canada to talk about their situation.

I wonder if you could share some insight about how listing the IRGC could help Canadians live free here in Canada, as well as protect those professional university professors who didn't serve.

Mr. Noomane Raboudi: It's a very good question, but it is also very difficult to give an answer to such a question.

Another time when I am back... I'm absolutely not discussing all the facts my colleague has explained, but I don't think, for the moment, that declaring them as a terrorist organization, if they are... There is no doubt they are practising terrorism—there is no doubt—but it will change absolutely nothing for those who are inside Iran. The regime is probably going to use that to justify what it's doing. It's going to legitimize what it's doing.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: However, Mr. Raboudi, will it change anything for Canadians? I'm sorry to cut you off—

The Chair: I'm afraid we're terribly over time.

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: —but will it change anything for Iranian Canadians?

The Chair: We're 50 seconds over time. I'm sorry, but we're going to have to conclude this session.

At this point, allow me to thank Professor Raboudi, Mr. Taleblu and Dr. Kholdi.

Thank you very much.

Given the limited time that was available for questioning, if there's anything that any of you would like to follow up or elaborate on, please don't hesitate to send us submissions. The clerk will very graciously receive them for the benefit of the members.

Thank you very much.

This meeting stands adjourned.

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