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• (1700)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 113 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 the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents. Use only the black earpieces. Keep your earpieces away from all microphones at all times. When you are not using your earpiece, please place it face down on the sticker placed on the table for this purpose.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of our distinguished witnesses, as well as the members.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available.

In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I've been assured by the clerk that she has very kindly made sure that the tests with all witnesses who are joining us virtually have been completed.

I should start off by apologizing to the witnesses. We had a number of votes. That has changed the schedule somewhat today, but we're very grateful that you can join us.

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. Of course, as everyone is aware, to the extent possible, today we're going to keep the focus on the IRGC and what it does beyond the borders of Iran.

That all having been explained, it's a great pleasure to welcome today Dr. Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, who is a professor and the head of the Iran Human Rights centre.

We're also grateful to have with us here in person Professor Thomas Juneau, a professor with the public and international affairs department at the University of Ottawa, who is familiar to all of you.

Also, joining us virtually, we have Witness 1.

Each of you will be provided five minutes for your opening remarks, after which we will open it to questions by the members.

We will start off with Professor Amiry-Moghaddam.

You have five minutes, and the floor is yours, sir.

• (1705)

Mr. Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam (Professor, Iran Human Rights, As an Individual): Thank you so much.

Thank you for inviting me, ladies and gentlemen.

As was said, I'm the director of the organization Iran Human Rights.

Iran Human Rights has been monitoring and reporting human rights violations in Iran for the last 17 years, with a particular emphasis on the death penalty. The imposition of the death penalty serves as a critical indicator of the human rights situation and remains the primary tool employed by the Islamic Republic of Iran to sow fear within society. Following the nationwide Woman, Life, Freedom protests, the regime has been executing an alarming average of two to three individuals every single day.

Iran Human Rights documented a staggering 834 executions in Iran last year alone, with eight of those individuals being protesters. The execution of protesters sparked an international outcry and escalated the political cost of imposing death sentences on protesters in the Islamic republic. However, the majority of executions are for drug-related offences. There were at least 471 executions for drugs in 2023.

Regrettably, the global community has largely turned a blind eye to drug executions, failing to condemn these grave violations of human rights. Even more concerning is the complicity of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNODC, which not only remained silent in the face of this surge in executions but also proceeded to sign a new co-operation agreement with the Iranian authorities. These executions are not aimed at combatting drug trafficking; rather, they serve as a ruthless tactic to instill fear and deter future protests.

Individuals sentenced to death for drug offences are deprived of legal representation and a fair judicial process by the revolutionary courts, particularly impacting marginalized and impoverished segments of Iranian society. Ethnic minorities, notably the Baluchi minority, are disproportionately represented among those executed, serving as the low-cost victims of the Islamic republic's killing machine.

Compounding these injustices is the compelling evidence that implicates Iranian authorities and the IRGC in collusion with international drug cartels. Notably, a renowned terrorism expert has highlighted drug trafficking as one of the main sources of income for the IRGC, underscoring the illicit nature of its operations.

In 2012, the U.S. Department of the Treasury designated IRGC Quds Force General Gholamreza Baghbani as a specially designated narcotics trafficker under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act, shedding light on the deep-rooted ties between the IRGC and the drug trafficking networks.

The collaboration between the IRGC and the international criminal cartels extends beyond drug trafficking and money laundering to include the reprehensible practice of abducting opposition members.

This partnership was exemplified in the case of Habib Chaab, a Swedish citizen and member of an Iranian Arab opposition group. In October 2020, Chaab was abducted by the IRGC, in collusion with international criminal networks, while visiting Turkey. Subsequently, he was transferred to Iran, subjected to a sham trial by the revolutionary court and, ultimately, executed in May 2023.

Similarly, Ruhollah Zam, a prominent Iranian journalist and political activist, fell victim to the IRGC's campaign of terror when he was abducted in 2019 during a visit to Iraq and subsequently hanged a year later.

Jamshid Sharmahd, a German citizen with U.S. residency, faced a similar fate after being abducted while in the United Arab Emirates in 2020, forcibly transferred to Iran and handed a death sentence. He remains under the imminent threat of execution.

The IRGC and the Islamic republic have not only rendered neighbouring countries insecure but also orchestrated a series of terrorist attacks targeting Iranian dissidents on foreign soil, notably in Europe.

• (1710)

One notable incident occurred in 2018 during an Iranian opposition gathering outside Paris, where a foiled terrorist plot implicated an Islamic Republic diplomat with ties to the IRGC. Subsequently, a Belgian court sentenced the diplomat to 20 years in prison on terrorism charges, underscoring the extent of the Islamic Republic's global reach and its willingness to resort to terrorism to suppress dissent.

These acts of terrorism perpetrated by the Islamic Republic and its ideological arm, the IRGC, are not confined to Iranian dissidents but extend to non-Iranian individuals worldwide, posing a grave threat to global security and stability.

It is crucial to underscore that the Iranian people have been the main victims of the Islamic Republic and the IRGC's oppressive regime over the past four and a half decades. From the brutal mass killings of dissidents—

The Chair: Mr. Amiry-Moghaddam, you are a minute over. Are you going to be concluding in the next 20 or 30 seconds?

Mr. Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam: I will be 20 seconds.

Just as the world now condemns the atrocities committed by the SS under the Nazi regime, future generations will look back on the IRGC with the same contempt and horror. The Iranian people are crying for justice, freedom and solidarity. They need the international community to stand with them in their struggle against oppression.

By designating the IRGC as a terrorist organization, Canada can send a clear and powerful message of support to Iranians.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Amiry-Moghaddam.

We now turn to Professor Juneau.

Welcome. You have five minutes. The floor is yours.

Dr. Thomas Juneau (Professor, Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I'm pleased to be here today.

[*English*]

My starting point is that Canada does not do enough to counter IRGC activities inside the country here. Committee members, I think, are well aware of the nature of IRGC activities, especially in terms of transnational repression, the presence of senior regime members or their families, the parking of financial assets and so on.

To better counter IRGC activities in Canada, a combination of targeted measures should be the way forward. I understand the symbolic politics of listing the IRGC as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code. I am especially sensitive to pleas from victims of IRGC repression or brutality, and from family members of victims, but the most ethical response to the IRGC's activities here is an effective one, a response that targets those doing the most harm and that best protects the victims.

To situate my thinking, I would emphasize that I don't view this issue through an Iran lens specifically, but through the broader prism of Canada's overall security priorities and policies. This broader perspective emphasises two factors.

One is that Canada faces a deteriorating security environment today, with multiple and intensifying threats. IRGC activities represent one of these threats, but they're not the only one, and I would say it's not the top one. The other is that our security and intelligence agencies today are already vastly overstretched and under-resourced. That's the broader context.

Listing the IRGC as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code would be very labour-intensive. There are hundreds of thousands of current and former members. Enforcing this would be very demanding for law enforcement and national security agencies. It also raises the risk that innocents can be caught in the sweeping net of broad sanctions. This has become a serious problem in the U.S.

To counter this problem, several people will suggest exemptions whereby only those, for example, with blood on their hands or above a certain rank would be sanctioned. This is appealing in theory, but in practice it further increases the workload of already overstretched agencies.

This is a serious problem, even if it's one that is easy to dismiss. Canada already cannot fulfill our existing commitments to monitor and enforce current sanctions, let alone new ones. It is important to emphasize how much this irritates our allies. It is an increasingly serious problem that we underestimate, and it is one that goes beyond only sanctions to national security and defence in general. It also sends a message to adversaries that we are not serious about penalizing them and that we care only about the domestic politics of it, not about actually enforcing concrete measures.

In the reality we live in of scarce resources, proponents of listing the IRGC should explain which threats our national security agencies should stop focusing on as they redirect energies toward managing the listing of the IRGC and how this would make Canada more secure overall.

Proponents often answer by suggesting that the government should simply increase the resources of national security and law enforcement agencies. This is valid in general terms, but does not support the argument in practice. IRGC activities are only one of the many threats that our national security agencies struggle to counter. It is not clear why eventual additional resources should be targeted at the IRGC as opposed to what I think are the bigger threats coming in particular from China and several others.

I would also add that my colleagues who are lawyers question the lawfulness of listing the IRGC, which is the armed forces of a state, on a list that is meant for non-state actors. Not being a lawyer myself, I'm not in a position to expand on this point, but I would encourage the committee to look further into it.

My suggestion to the committee, as we try to find the most effective way to better counter IRGC activities in Canada, is to focus on targeted measures, and more specifically on five initiatives.

The first is to fully implement and enforce measures that we have already adopted, notably under the Special Economic Measures Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which, as I said, we are not fully enforcing as it is.

The second is to consider adding more individuals and entities under SEMA and IRPA, and making greater use of other tools, such as corruption investigations. We could also better target Hezbollah financial networks here in Canada. The reality is that we are not fully exploiting the more surgical tools at our disposal.

To do that, the third initiative is that we need is to provide our national security intelligence and law enforcement agencies and departments with more resources to enforce and monitor sanctions. I

cannot emphasize enough how badly overstretched they currently are.

The fourth is that we could also improve coordination and information sharing among the many departments and agencies involved in the development and enforcement of sanctions.

The fifth, and I will finish on this, is that we could also enhance transparency on sanctions and their enforcement. This would allow for more accountability and better scrutiny by civil society, by Parliament and by the media, including scrutiny of the fact that we are a poor performer on the sanctions enforcement front.

• (1715)

We also need to be more transparent about what we aim to achieve with sanctions, and whether we are achieving it or not.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Juneau.

We now turn to Witness 1. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Witness 1 (As an Individual): Good evening everyone.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on such an important issue.

I'll start where my colleague Mr. Juneau left off.

The concept of terrorism may not necessarily apply to the IRGC. It's a vague concept on which there is no consensus. I won't teach you anything by telling you that there is no commonly agreed definition within the United Nations. It's more of a political concept than a scientific one.

Nevertheless, there is an intuitive understanding of what a terrorist organization is. It's an organization that uses violence and fear to achieve political objectives, usually by illicit or illegal means. Now, if we stick to that definition, imperfect as it may be, the IRGC meets a number of those criteria, which would lead me directly to the belief that it is a terrorist organization, even if it isn't a non-state organization.

First, it's a violent organization that employs illegal means. Its involvement in Iran's ballistic and nuclear programs, which are subject to international sanctions, already makes it an illegal organization. The IRGC controls vast segments of the Iranian economy, and uses that power to finance illegal activities. From that point of view, one criterion has already been met.

Second, it's a brutal and arbitrary organization that uses indiscriminate violence. It has been accused of numerous human rights violations on many occasions over many years. Professor Amiry-Moghaddam reminded us of that.

The IRGC doesn't shy away from acts of torture, systematically raping women when they're arrested and sent to prison. Surveillance, intimidation, physical violence and detention all suggest that this organization's weapon of choice is terror and psychological pressure.

On the other hand, it is a subversive organization that uses ideological means to achieve political goals. When it operates outside Iran's borders, it works to overthrow power or promote a number of non-state actors seeking to seize power, from the Houthis in Yemen to Hamas in Palestine. It acts by supporting internal repression, or by contributing, through the Quds Force, to clandestine operations and targeted assassinations. It is increasingly involved in insurgency and regional destabilization in the Middle East and elsewhere. It therefore challenges the status quo.

Furthermore, in a much more concrete and precise way, it's an organization that has long been involved in terrorist activities in Latin America. As my colleague reminded us, it has recently been involved in terrorist activities in Europe. It has carried out targeted attacks and assassinations on European soil, and supports terrorist groups. For example, of Hamas's \$500 million annual budget, \$100 million came from the coffers of the Iranian regime and the IRGC's budget.

Together, all these factors suggest that we are indeed dealing with a terrorist organization, even if it is not a non-state organization.

In conclusion, I'd like to reiterate a number of points raised by my colleagues. Listing the IRGC as a terrorist entity does not rule out other means or approaches. Indeed, it's not one or the other.

• (1720)

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, is not our greatest threat. However, as members of that group increasingly work with China, Russia and other countries in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, those countries represent significant threats to us and fall into the same category.

I'd like to pick up on what Mr. Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam said, namely that comparing the IRGC to the Nazis and the SS is no exaggeration. It's an apt parallel.

Moreover, the considerations and arguments put forward by Canada for not listing this group as a terrorist organization seem to me to be specious and complacent. The idea that this could seriously damage our diplomatic relations with Iran does not hold water. Nor does the idea that it could have consequences for the Canadian community of Iranian origin.

Many of our fellow Canadians are being intimidated by IRGC members here and on Iranian soil, and that's unacceptable. It's insulting to think that it could affect Canadian businesses, and that it could pose a—

[English]

The Chair: Witness 1, we're considerably over time. Could you wrap up your comments in the next 15 to 20 seconds?

Witness 1: Sure, definitely.

[Translation]

The argument that it could pose administrative or legal challenges because we don't have the means to do that is appalling, I'm sorry.

I'll conclude my remarks there.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Witness 1.

Now we turn to the members for questions. We will only have one round for each party, and each round will consist of six minutes.

The first member is MP Lantsman. You have six minutes.

• (1725)

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): I'll split my time with my colleague.

I want to start with Witness 1.

I want to know what your thoughts are, given the response in another testimony, about whether you think Canada is naive in our delay in not listing, or refusing to list, the IRGC, which you clearly agree with.

The Chair: That question is for Witness 1.

[Translation]

Witness 1: I agree with that comment. Canada is seen in the international community, among western countries, as naive and complacent towards the Iranian regime, particularly in the south.

I think the idea that we aren't affected by what's happening in Iran is false and a moral outrage.

[English]

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: I'll follow up quickly with two questions.

First, what do you believe it will do for the diaspora community here in calling a terrorist a terrorist? Would it maybe help?

Second, what do you think it will do to our international standing with some of those who have been putting pressure on us to act more vigorously when it comes to calling a terrorist a terrorist?

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: I'd say that kind of decision would be well received by a vast majority—

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Excuse me, Chair.

I think some of us are not getting translation. Can we check, please?

The Chair: Dr. Fry, we'll look right into it.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I can hear you.

The Chair: She can hear the interpreter now.

Hon. Hedy Fry: There was a first question that was only answered in French. There was no interpretation.

Maybe it will work now.

Thanks.

The Chair: Okay.

I'm sorry about that, Witness 1. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: I would say that, if Canada were to decide to put the IRGC on the list of terrorist entities, it would obviously be very well received by most of our fellow Canadians of Iranian origin. It would also certainly contribute to Canada's credibility. Our American allies have already put this group on the list. I think we'd certainly look a lot more serious if we decided to do that.

[*English*]

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you.

Dr. Juneau, you said that Canada doesn't do enough to combat the IRGC.

It's no secret that there are all these money-laundering operations in Canada with the IRGC, Hezbollah and the Hells Angels. There are car dealerships in Ontario that are owned by these groups. There are car thefts in Canada, and the cars are exported overseas. Acts of money laundering are happening every day in real estate, retail and money exchange. All of these operations are obvious, and we're still not doing anything about it.

It's hurting the Canadian economy and the Canadian people more than anything. Safety, security and inflation—it's hurting everywhere.

In your opinion, why are we not doing anything about that? Why?

Dr. Thomas Juneau: Why? It's hard for me to say.

I would say that in general Canada does not do enough on the national security front. I think that's true in general on multiple threats that we face today. It's definitely true on the issue of Iran and the IRGC, as I think I emphatically said in my presentation.

To me, my whole point is that the best and most effective way to counter IRGC activities here, including the ones you described, as well as multiple others—I would really emphasize the transnational repression aspect against dissidents and human rights activists here—is through targeted measures and using some of the tools at our disposal. It's very easy to dismiss concerns about scarce resources as despairing, but in the real world, resource constraints are real. They prevent us from doing things that we should be doing. These resource constraints are absolutely severe. Therefore, I think targeted measures would be much more effective.

It's the same thing on the issue of reputation. What hurts our reputation the most is not our failure to list the IRGC; what hurts our reputation the most is the fact that we announce measures and don't actually enforce them. That would be the case with listing the IRGC, realistically.

• (1730)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Then the answer is that listing the IRGC as a terrorist organization in Canada is the only way, and the most effective way, to combat this. Otherwise, we can continue to watch the same organization hurt and attack the lives of Canadians and the security and safety of Canadians every day. Is that correct?

Dr. Thomas Juneau: That is not my position. My argument is that the most effective way is to use more targeted and surgical tools that we have at our disposal. That would be more effective and more resource-effective.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Are you suggesting another infrastructure?

Dr. Thomas Juneau: Nope.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

The Chair: You still have 35 seconds.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Okay.

To go back to the infrastructure, how severe is the infrastructure of the IRGC in Canada, in your opinion?

Dr. Thomas Juneau: It's severe. As I emphasized in my presentation, the IRGC threat to Iranian Canadians and to other aspects of Canadian society and life is a severe threat, absolutely.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: On the amount of money laundering that you think they're involved in, do you have any idea of an estimation out there?

Dr. Thomas Juneau: I have never seen a number in the public domain. I think there's a big problem, notably with the parking of financial assets, but I don't have a number.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: If you were to estimate the number of members involved here, would it be in the hundreds or in the thousands?

Dr. Thomas Juneau: Do you mean members of the IRGC?

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Yes.

Dr. Thomas Juneau: Again, in the public domain, I have not seen numbers at that level. I'm not in a position to answer that specifically, beyond saying that it's a serious problem.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

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

Dr. Fry, you have six minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you, Chair. I will share my time with Sameer.

I think you make a lot of sense, but it's not only that we do not have the resources to deal with sanctions against Russia and to deal with all of the other issues we have to deal with in terms of security. Security has become globally rampant, or the lack of security. We see that we're having problems, including with Iran, when they are also the ones who are helping Russia, and therefore any sanctions we have applied against Russia are not working very well. We see that.

How do we deal with the IRGC and its activities in Canada, given that they're not going to say that they belong to this group when they apply to come to Canada? They'll come in under some kind of other heading. How do we know? How do we flush them out? That's the first thing. If we're going to apply sanctions against them in Canada to protect our own Canadian Iranians, how do we do that? It's like trying to tie down a slippery fish. How do you do it?

Second, how many of the other countries, like Hezbollah, etc., are helping them? How do we deal with their influence out there as well?

Those are my two questions. Sameer will probably ask others.

Could I get answers to those two questions? It's one thing to say let's apply sanctions, but it's another thing to say how, because so many rogue nations are helping to block sanctions.

Somebody start.

Dr. Thomas Juneau: Is that a question to me?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Yes. Go ahead.

Dr. Thomas Juneau: How should we act on the ground? I think it's hard to say that in one minute, but I think that if we use our two main tools better, they can be quite effective.

The Special Economic Measures Act allows us to list individuals and entities and impose a number of sanctions on them, including financial sanctions and so on. That can be quite effective if properly enforced, which is not the case at this point.

The other tool that the current government brought in about a year and a half ago, if I'm not mistaken, is the use of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which allows us to bar from entry and impose a number of additional sanctions on a number of officials within the regime—i.e., not only the IRGC.

I think it's difficult to assess properly what the success of that has been so far, because there's very little publicly available data, but it is, in my mind, a tool that we can also use.

The other aspect of your question, which is around partners of Iran, I think is important. Hezbollah in particular has a number of

financial networks that are involved not only here in Canada but also throughout the world, in parts of West Africa and South America. They are very extensive networks, and I do think that Canada can do more to counter these financial networks here.

Beyond the issue of these financial networks, one thing that Iran has done a lot in recent years, notably with the Houthis in Yemen, is to build an extensive global network of smuggling to send weapons parts—parts of missiles, parts of drones—to Yemen in particular, but also to Hezbollah, to Hamas. The U.S. is leading efforts to counter these networks, and I think that Canada could play a stronger role in the Red Sea, for example, to participate in multi-lateral efforts to counter these smuggling networks.

• (1735)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Witness 1, your hand was up.

Witness 1: Yes.

Thank you, Dr. Fry, for this question.

[Translation]

What characterizes the threat posed by the IRGC is that it is multi-faceted, constantly evolving and everywhere. Its members are involved in cyberspace, in the ballistics program, in the nuclear program, in spare parts trafficking. They're in Sudan. They're in Latin America. They work in Central Asia. They work in the Caucasus. They have their hands in a host of different files.

As a result, the right approach to tackling this protean and multi-faceted phenomenon called IRGC is not to act on just one front, but rather to do as it does, i.e., to use a multifaceted approach.

I agree with Mr. Juneau that we need a targeted approach, but that doesn't prevent us from supplementing that targeted approach with other means. The IRGC is an ideological army, a political army. Listing it as a terrorist entity means responding to the nature of the phenomenon, i.e., building on that targeted approach with other means and tackling the phenomenon systematically.

[English]

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you.

Sameer, the floor is yours.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you.

Dr. Juneau, can you briefly elaborate upon the dynamics between the GCC and the IRGC in 30 seconds or so?

Dr. Thomas Juneau: In 30 seconds, my fairly cynical view is that it's an inherently conflictive relationship. Notwithstanding a more positive tone in relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the last two years—roughly since a rapprochement that was sort of brokered by China—they remain adversaries. Tension remains beneath the surface, and any talk of further reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran in particular is very unlikely to me.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Juneau.

We now go to MP Bergeron. You have six minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

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

My questions are for Witness 1.

First, I really like your assertion that we can chew gum and walk at the same time, meaning that we can use all of the tools at our disposal to crack down on the IRGC and, if we need more resources, add that organization to the list of terrorist entities, which is what you believe it is.

In Professor Juneau's own opinion, we also need to devote more resources to enforcing the Special Economic Measures (Iran) Regulations, since very few funds have been frozen to date, at nearly \$79,000.

You said something that really struck me. According to you, the south believes Canada to be rather complacent towards the Iranian regime and, consequently, towards the IRGC, and that this should lead us to put the latter on the list of terrorist entities. Last week, we heard from Professor Raboudi from the University of Ottawa, who also told us that the IRGC met the definition of a terrorist entity, but that it was not appropriate to add it to the list, as that would discredit us in the eyes of the international community and the global south in particular, and that we had to take into account the current conflict in the Middle East. In fact, I'm interpreting what he said; I don't want to put words in his mouth.

What do you think of that analysis, which runs counter to yours?

• (1740)

Witness 1: Thank you for your question.

I think I understand the reasoning behind his assertion, which is highly conjectural. He believes that, today, in the context of the war in Gaza and the situation there, including the IRGC on that list would de facto place us in the camp of pro-Israeli countries, which could damage our credibility in the eyes of a certain segment of international public opinion. I imagine that that is what led him to make that assertion.

My answer is that there's no good time to put an organization, which is indeed comparable to a fascist organization, on such a list. It's true that there might be a price to pay in diplomatic terms and in terms of our international image.

However, it's time for Canada to stop playing it safe, being risk avoidant and cautious. There comes a time when courageous action is needed.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: We were rather surprised in recent months to see the Houthis attack nearby vessels in the Red Sea.

In your opinion, what was Iran's objective behind those attacks, given that the Houthis are being attacked by an international coalition? Was it to broaden the international coalition against them, or simply to destabilize international trade?

Witness 1: This is really Professor Juneau's area of expertise. I'll let him complete what I'm about to say, and I'll speak subject to his authority.

You're quite right. The Iranian regime's activities, in general, respond to a clear principle: to create disorder and instability. This includes the activities of its cyber-army, its propaganda activities and what it's doing in Lebanon and Yemen. As you know, the IRGC Quds Force is active in Sudan, where it supplies Shahed-136 drones to the army of the general whose name escapes me, but whose aim is precisely to gain a foothold on both sides of the Bab el-Mandab Strait and the Red Sea and destabilize, if not disrupt, world trade and shipping.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Professor Juneau, do you have anything to add quickly?

Dr. Thomas Juneau: I think you said it well. The threat posed by the Houthis in the Red Sea is very serious and will remain there for the long term. That threat is the direct result of Iran's support of the Houthis. The various capabilities that the Houthis use in the Red Sea, such as drones, underwater drones, ground-to-sea missiles, amphibious assault teams, naval mines, come overwhelmingly from Iran. Without Iranian support, the Houthis would not have these capabilities.

The Houthis' goal is to emerge as the internationally recognized government of Yemen, which is not the case at present, since there is another government that is internationally recognized. The problem is that this government is weak, corrupt and fragmented. De facto, the Houthis have won Yemen's civil war. That's bad news, but it's the reality. Today, the United States, despite its efforts to counter Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, has an extremely limited number of options to stop them.

Therefore, it's a threat in the Red Sea that we'll have to deal with in the long term.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We next go to MP McPherson. You have six minutes.

• (1745)

Witness 1: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today and sharing this with us.

Professor Juneau, you just spoke about the Houthis and how the U.S. has very little control in the region. I'm concerned, as a parliamentarian for Canada, about what Canada should be doing to counter Iran's influence in the area, given the horrifying humanitarian situation and the suffering of Yemenis under the Houthis as well as in the Saudi war, which was of course, as we know, supported politically by Canada. There is a desperate need for real peace and a real diplomatic solution.

What can we do, in this case, that would benefit the people of Yemen, who we know have suffered so greatly at the hands of both warring parties?

Dr. Thomas Juneau: Thank you.

To build on what I said in answer to the previous question, the reality right now is that the Houthis have won the civil war in Yemen. They do not control the entire territory of the country, but they control about 60% to 70% of the population. Politically and militarily, they are by far the strongest actor in the country.

That is very bad news for the people of Yemen, because the Houthis have shown themselves to be absolutely brutal in terms of their administration. It's bad news for the region, because now they are exporting that brutality outside the borders of Yemen. We suspected that for years, but now we actually see it in terms of what they're doing in the Red Sea area. The problem is that it is not going to stop. A ceasefire in Gaza, for example, is a separate discussion, and it is not going to stop the Houthi threat to the Red Sea. It is independent of that.

From a Canadian perspective, I think we need to support U.S. efforts to counter the Houthis, because that is good for regional security and ultimately for the Yemeni people. How do we do that? It's by participating in the maritime mission in the Red Sea. Even if it's a symbolic participation, as it is now, it's better than nothing. If we ever have a ship to spare—which is not obvious—I think that would be a good idea.

Beyond that, there's not much of a political process in Yemen right now, because the Houthis are not interested in it.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Yes. Also, I suppose having a feminist foreign policy—or being purported to have a feminist foreign policy—means we should be looking at ways we can end the impact on women and children, who we know are the ones feeling the brunt of this conflict.

Speaking of our foreign policy, one thing you talked about was the fact that Canada is at reputational risk because we are not following through on what we promise. We say one thing, but we don't follow through on it. That's been the problem with using sanctions as a cornerstone or large piece of our foreign policy: We have no ability to enforce them. We're known for being quite good at putting people or entities on the list, but the follow-through and enforcement of those sanctions are very weak.

You mentioned there is potential significant harm to Canada's reputation because of this. Can you describe that a bit more for me?

Dr. Thomas Juneau: That's an extremely important point.

In general, in Canadian civil society, media and politics, we really underestimate the damage to our reputation by being easy riders

on defence and national security issues and by underinvesting in these issues. It's true for sanctions, as I said, but it's absolutely true beyond sanctions.

To be perfectly blunt, I'm not especially bothered by reputational risk in the global south, but there is a significant reputational risk among our allies in NATO and especially in the U.S. That's what should really bother us, especially because, as the 2020s and 2030s go by, more and more in multilateralism—on which we are so dependent—it's about what you bring to the table. It's not about your reputation as a do-gooder or anything like that, and what we bring to the table is limited. More and more, we are not going to be invited to ad hoc multilateral arrangements. Think about the AUKUS working groups and multiple other examples.

Whether it's sanctions or something else, we need to be much more coherent and consistent at this level.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Well, one would think too of the fact that our reputation is weak with regard to sanctions and other areas within the multilateral fora. There is also the idea that we are piggybacking on a reputation we had some time ago. We are losing that reputation of being, as you put it, do-gooders in the global community.

You know, we've seen that we have not been very coherent with regard to support for international law. We have not been very coherent with regard to support for trade and the impacts of Canadian companies working abroad. A number of times our foreign policy has not aligned with our actions on the world stage. We will see the impacts of that as we go forward.

One of the things you talked about was dedicating enough resources to things like sanction enforcement and how we have not added those resources. Can you talk a little bit more about what that could look like and what other countries are doing with regard to ensuring that these things are adequately resourced and are given the tools necessary to do the job?

● (1750)

Dr. Thomas Juneau: Well, the first thing I would note is the last point I mentioned in my presentation, which is the need for more transparency at this level. Generally speaking, we are not very good at transparency on the national security foreign policy front, and the same goes for the sanctions side.

I am not in a position to give any numbers to quantify my answer. This is based on research, conversations, interviews and informal parts of my work on a regular basis. I'm also saying this as a former government person.

In a nutshell, whether it's CSIS, the RCMP, CBSA or Global Affairs—which plays a major role now in terms of coordinating these issues on the international trade side of foreign affairs—there is very simply a need for more resources, more human bodies and more money. If you look at OFAC, the Office of Foreign Assets Control, which is the U.S. office that manages sanctions in the U.S., it is gigantic. We are not the U.S. and we never will be, but proportionally we are nowhere close.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

That's good for me. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, MP McPherson.

Given that we have a few minutes left, I'm going to ask two questions.

First of all, Professor Juneau, I completely understand the arguments you've been making regarding resource management, and that's fair enough.

What concerns me is that I have not seen us do anything concrete to deal with all of the activities the members were asking you about, whether it's money laundering or transnational repression. There's been very little concrete action. What is the risk from that? Does that not embolden the Islamic Republic and the IRGC as well?

Dr. Thomas Juneau: Well, the simple answer to that is yes. I and a number of my colleagues have been saying for years now that we have been neglecting national security issues. The IRGC is on the list of threats we have been neglecting, but it is far from the only one.

Look at the whole debate on foreign interference that is going on right now. I would bring to your attention the report that a number of my colleagues and I did at the University of Ottawa two years ago. There was a task force that had a number of former directors of CSIS, former national security advisers and former deputy ministers of defence and of foreign affairs. The bulk of that report was a call to action on the cost of neglecting all of these threats, which included the IRGC. That was only one of the many threats we highlighted, which also included cyber, economic, espionage, money laundering, terrorism, extremism, China, Russia, India and so on.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

My last question is for Witness 1.

As you know, our authorities work hand in glove with our American counterparts, especially when it comes to law enforcement. Have you had an opportunity to discuss the concerns that you expressed with U.S. authorities? What are their perspectives, given the reality that they have already listed the IRGC?

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: Thank you for the question.

Unfortunately, I didn't have the opportunity to talk about that with the American government. On the other hand, I have often had the opportunity to talk, candidly and informally, with representatives of the U.S. armed forces. Each time, they are astonished by the lack of a clear strategic line in Canada's foreign policy. Yet that

is a sine qua non for a coherent policy, particularly with regard to the IRGC.

I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about our reputation and the use of our resources. Earlier, I used the example of the IRGC's activities in Sudan, where a civil war is currently raging—there are 8 million displaced people and tens of millions dead. We don't even have an embassy there, not even a special envoy. What's more, we still have no African policy. The IRGC is building a base in Port Sudan, which puts them close to Yemen. It is also negotiating the construction of a naval base in Djibouti.

As I said, some players are lucid. Others are naive, and I'm afraid we're one of the latter.

• (1755)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Witness 1.

Thank concludes questions by the members.

At this point I'd like to thank Professor Amiry-Moghaddam, Witness 1 and, of course, Professor Juneau. We are very grateful for your time and your expertise.

Before the members leave, I want to talk about the budget that was sent around to you. It's the budget for the study of the appointment of Dr. Bennett as Canada's ambassador to Denmark. The amount was \$1,000, and this budget amount was circulated to you.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt that budget?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's excellent.

Then there is the SDIR budget, a budget for the study of the current situation in Ethiopia, in the amount of \$6,800 for the subcommittee on international human rights.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt that budget?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Finally, we have a budget for the study of the current situation in Sudan in the amount of \$6,750 for the subcommittee.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt that budget as well?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's excellent.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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