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# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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Chair: Mr. Ali Ehsassi





# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

• (1635)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 114 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. Please only use an approved black earpiece. Keep your earpiece away from microphones at all times. When you are not using the 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. I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members as well. Before speaking, please do wait until I recognize you by name. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available. You have the choice of either floor English or French and if interpretation is lost, please do inform me and the clerk immediately.

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

I'd now like to welcome our two witnesses here in person. We have Dr. Farzin Nadimi, who's a senior fellow with the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Joining us virtually is Mr. Kasra Aarabi, who is the director of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps research group. Thank you both for joining us.

You will each be provided five minutes for your opening remarks, after which we will open it to questions from the members. However, I ask that you look over to the screen and the monitor every once in a while, because if I am raising this item in my hand, it means you should be wrapping up your comments or your response to questions posed by members within 10 to 15 seconds.

That having been explained, we will go to Dr. Nadimi. Dr. Nadimi, the floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi (Senior Fellow, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, As an Individual):** Thank you.

For over four decades, the Islamic regime in Iran has founded and aggressively supported terrorism and terrorist organizations in

the Middle East and defied international norms by conducting these terrorist activities, with global repercussions.

The roots of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, go back to the 1979 anti-status quo revolution in Iran, when a number of paramilitary terrorist groups merged to assume the role of enforcer of the new regime. They targeted activists, rival political factions and ethnic and religious minorities in line with the regime's monopolism and suppressive behaviour.

This role of protecting the revolution and its achievements was inked into the new Iranian constitution's article 150. In fact, according to the second charter of the IRGC, published in 1982, the revolutionary guard's main agenda is not only to safeguard the Islamic revolution and its achievements but also to continuously work toward realizing God's will and expanding the rule of God as interpreted by the supreme revolutionary leader and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

The IRGC is one of the very few military forces in the world, and perhaps the only one, that claims a direct connection with the Almighty through its chain of command. Throughout the 1980s and the Iran-Iraq War, the IRGC grew into separate forces—ground forces, navy and air forces, Basij, and the Quds Force, the expeditionary branch of the IRGC.

The Quds Force has repeatedly been targeted with sanctions for its active role in supporting and leading terrorist organizations in recent years, but the Quds Force is only one part of the whole. It is often boosted by other branches of the IRGC and answers directly to the highest levels of the chain of command in Iran.

After spending almost a decade expanding both its defensive and offensive powers, in the early 2000s, the IRGC shifted its attention to fighting the United States and the west in general, which were, by then, engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan, and also to defeating its self-declared enemy, the state of Israel. By following one of the basic principles of warfare, the economy of force, which means judicious employment and distribution of forces, Iran created and managed a network of proxy militant groups to do most of the fighting and dying for it.

Iran has also increasingly relied on criminal gangs in target countries to target Iranian dissidents and journalists. The IRGC also has a powerful intelligence arm, the intelligence organization, with extraordinary powers, undeclared prisons and a notorious reputation for locking up, torturing and raping political opponents. The IRGC's intelligence organization has a foreign operations branch, and it's especially involved in targeting foreign and Iranian citizens in countries like Turkey, and as a result was designated last year by the U.S. Treasury.

The IRGC is by design an anti-status quo, ideological international force that seeks to alter regional and also international balances of power. Its extraterritorial role makes IRGC one of the main tools of the regime's state-sponsored terrorism beside the intelligence ministry. State-sponsored or directed terrorism is generally defined as government support or control of acts of international terrorism, usually by violent non-state actors with funding, training, hosting, directing and supplying weapons to them. Those definitions rarely include a state that commits acts of terrorism all by itself in a systematic manner.

The IRGC does have such quality in the form of its Quds Force, the same extraterritorial arm. Therefore, international terrorism is not a problem isolated to non-state actors or certain regions; it is a global problem, and so is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard, the IRGC. The IRGC has also quickly gone to work to export the revolution by supporting guerrilla movements around the world.

Also, when the devastating Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988, the IRGC played a very key role in prolonging it. The IRGC expanded exponentially both as a conventional military organization but also as a force to safeguard Islam and export their revolution.

• (1640)

The U.S. Department of State has designated and sanctioned four countries—Cuba, North Korea, Iran and Syria—as ones that have repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism pursuant to three specific laws.

Under Iran, in April 2019 the State Department designated the IRGC as instrumental in founding, training and supplying Hezbollah, a group designated a foreign terrorist organization by the State Department, and also by the Canadian government, in 2002.

While the Canadian government mainly sees the threat of terrorism originating from the three main components—violent Sunni Islamist extremism, both at home and abroad; international terrorist groups; and domestic issue-based extremism—it also admits to the changing nature of the terrorist threat facing Canada. It is now time to broaden this definition and clearly include state terrorism conducted directly by its main element of power.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We now go to Mr. Aarabi.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Mr. Kasra Aarabi (Director of IRGC Research, United Against Nuclear Iran):** Thank you.

Honourable members, I testify before you today at a time when the threat from Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps jihadi terrorism has reached unprecedented levels in the west. In the past 72 hours, we at United Against Nuclear Iran have identified an individual at a rally in Toronto, dressed in IRGC attire, threatening IRGC-inspired jihadi violence on Canada's streets.

Despite the rising threat of IRGC terror, there is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of the IRGC, its violent Islamic extremist activities on western soil, and how proscribing the IRGC will practically mitigate its ability to operate abroad, including in Canada.

The IRGC is not a conventional armed force. It officially recognizes itself as an ideological organization with an “ideological mission of jihad in God's way to spread sharia law across the world”. It operates no differently from proscribed Islamic extremist terrorist organizations, from ISIS and al Qaeda to Hezbollah. It has a formal program of indoctrination to radicalize all of its members and their families in a violent Islamist extremist ideology, which, as my research has revealed, calls on its members to wage armed jihad against Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians on the basis that “they have unacceptable faith” and must either convert to Islam or be killed. It also teaches its recruits that Iranians who oppose the Islamic regime in Iran are *moharebs*, waging war against God, and must not just be killed but also be tortured prior to their death.

In a bid to make the IRGC into a more ideologically pure and extremist force, Ayatollah Khomeini has increased indoctrination in the IRGC, which now makes up more than 50% of its training. It has also restricted its conscript intake to members of the Basij paramilitary force and has doubled down on the most extremist Islamist and anti-Semitic doctrine—namely, the apocalyptic and militaristic doctrine of Mahdism, which calls for the destruction of the state of Israel and the killing of Jews worldwide to facilitate the return of the so-called messianic “Hidden Imam”.

These are not just empty actions. Look at the modus operandi of the IRGC—terrorism, hostage-taking, hijackings. In the past few years, the IRGC has increased its terrorist activities on western soil. In 2022 alone, U.K. authorities announced that they had foiled more than 16 IRGC terrorist attacks on British soil.

The IRGC is not only conducting direct acts of terror in the west; it is also seeking to nurture homegrown Islamist radicalization and terrorism using tactics identical to that of ISIS and al Qaeda. At United Against Nuclear Iran, we recently obtained and exposed videos of eight IRGC commanders being hosted online by a London-based entity called the Islamic Students Association of Britain and Europe. In their online speeches, these commanders glorified IRGC terrorism, propagated extreme anti-Semitism, and even called on British Muslim students to join their apocalyptic army that will eradicate “the lives of Jews everywhere in the world”.

This student body also has branches in Canada. Indeed, in 2023 an IRGC-affiliated propaganda anthem, *Salute Commander*, designed to radicalize children, was recorded on Canadian soil.

These methods are identical to homegrown Islamist radicalization tactics used by ISIS and al Qaeda. Unlike ISIS and al Qaeda, which are proscribed terrorist organizations, the current sanctions regime on the IRGC does not prohibit its propaganda activities, and nor does it prohibit its ability to disseminate jihadi propaganda.

Proscribing the IRGC would fundamentally change this. Proscription would give the Canadian government a clear mandate to prohibit any activity, including propaganda activity, related to the IRGC. It would also provide Canada's local communities, including teachers and local police forces, with the necessary safeguarding tools to identify and prevent against IRGC or Shia radicalization.

At present, Canada's preventive program designed to identify and prevent individuals from becoming involved with terrorism through radicalization is almost exclusively focused on Sunni Islamist extremism, meaning that IRGC and Shia Islamist extremist activities are blind spots. Proscribing the IRGC would fundamentally change this and equip Canada's communities with the ability to identify and prevent Shia and IRGC radicalization.

In other words, the claim that proscribing the IRGC is just a symbolic move is entirely false. Proscribing the IRGC will have practical and meaningful consequences on the IRGC's ability to conduct its radicalization and terrorism activities on Canadian soil. This is a step the Canadian government must immediately consider. I speak as both an expert on the subject matter and as someone whose best friend, British-Iranian journalist Pouria Zeraati, was stabbed in London only a few months ago in an IRGC terror attack.

• (1645)

The continued failure to prescribe the IRGC is putting Canadian lives at risk and poses a major national security threat to Canada.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We now open it up to questions from the members.

First up is MP Epp. You have five minutes.

• (1650)

**Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both of the witnesses for their testimony.

I'll start with you, Mr. Nadimi.

You referenced the IRGC's judicial use of force and their actions through proxies such as the Houthis, Hamas, Hezbollah, etc. Some of those groups we've already listed as terrorist entities. How much would we diminish them by simply going after IRGC? What is the level of coordination through what has been coined as the “axis of resistance”?

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** Well, on the “axis of resistance”, even if at some level there is a loose connection, with more coordination and given the existing technologies to communicate, at the same time Iran has been investing for years to arm these groups and to train them, to encourage them, and together to plan for situations exactly like the Houthis have been involved in since last November.

Even if there is not day-to-day operational planning involving both the Iranians and Houthis or Hamas fighters, this kind of planning has been done for years, and that includes the horrendous terrorist action by Hamas on October 7. Even if Iran was not directly involved in that particular day and that particular operation, for years Iran has sponsored Hamas and has helped them arm and train for this exact reason.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Thank you.

Mr. Aarabi, do you have a comment on this as well?

**Mr. Kasra Aarabi:** Yes. The IRGC has manufactured various proxy groups in the Middle East, and there is a significant level of coordination, particularly with those IRGC-manufactured groups. These are groups that the revolutionary guard has created from scratch, and they have spent a significant amount of capital, not only in training, arming and funding their fighters but also in radicalizing their recruits in the same ideology as the revolutionary guard.

In relation to the Houthis, we, United Against Nuclear Iran, identified the Behshad intelligence ship, which the IRGC owns and operates and has directly been providing intelligence to the Houthis to conduct terror attacks against commercial shipping as well as U.S. and its allies' ships in the Persian Gulf. The level of coordination is there.

Even if we monitor in the months and years leading up to the October 7 terrorist attacks, we see the changes to the IRGC's personnel and changes to the IRGC's doctrines, and the broader military security infrastructure of the regime in Iran indicated that the IRGC was preparing for a major confrontation with Israel. All the IRGC—

**Mr. Dave Epp:** I'm sorry to interrupt, but I'm just so short of time.

Now let's bring this to our shores. There are allegations of 700 militants acting in concert with the IRGC here on Canadian soil, allegations that the IRGC is working with Hells Angels here and in the U.S. Can you comment on their level of integration, their level of control, their level of activity right here on our Canadian soil?

**Mr. Kasra Aarabi:** The IRGC has three ways of operating when it comes to terrorism.

The first is direct terrorist attacks. It sends its operatives to conduct these operations. There is a strong track record for this.

As well, it uses armed gangs, which it has been using increasingly, more so than before.

As well as that, it also uses the same methods as ISIS and al Qaeda, nurturing a social constituency in Canada, in the U.S. and in the United Kingdom. It has used the same methods as ISIS and al Qaeda to radicalize people, using the networks affiliated with the regime in Iran, from religious centres to mosques to community centres to schools, as a means to radicalize local Canadian nationals and local British nationals and recruit them for operations.

Homegrown Islamist extremism is an increasing threat that the IRGC poses, and the current sanctions regime does not prohibit against that.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** If we list them, as we should, as a terrorist entity, practically, how will that diminish their activities in Canada?

**Mr. Kasra Aarabi:** Absolutely.

Practically speaking, as I explained in my testimony, the current sanctions regime does not prohibit the IRGC's ability to disseminate its propaganda or disseminate its jihadi propaganda activities. Soft power activities are not covered under the current sanctions regime.

The IRGC is unlike ISIS and al Qaeda, which are proscribed terrorist organizations. Proscribing the IRGC would give the Canadian government a full mandate to prohibit any activity, including propaganda and soft activity, related to them.

As well as this, it would equip Canadian local communities, the local police force and the local schools with the tools necessary to identify and prevent Shia and IRGC radicalization.

Again, the current preventive program in Canada, as in Britain and the European Union, is exclusively focused on Salafi-Jihadism and Sunni Islamist extremism. Proscribing the IRGC would fundamentally change that, and, as I said, would equip Canadian local communities with the ability to identify and prevent Shia and IRGC radicalization.

Previously in my testimony, I mentioned that we at United Against Nuclear Iran, in the past 72 hours, identified a Canadian individual at a rally in Toronto dressed in IRGC attire and threatening IRGC-inspired violence on Canada's streets. This is ongoing. It's a major problem, and the current sanctions regime does not prohibit it.

Thank you.

• (1655)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to MP Oliphant.

You have five minutes.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both our witnesses.

Without casting any doubts on anything you're saying, I'd like to understand how you gather both your intelligence and your evidence.

Strong statements have been made on exactly what's happening. I feel like I'm speaking to intelligence officers or people who are engaged in that activity.

From both of you, I'm just wondering how you get your information. How is it verified by double source? How do you get it?

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** I was born in Iran. I've lived in Iran and studied and worked in Iran. I did my military service in Iran until 2005, when I moved to Britain to study. I did a master's degree in war studies. I did a Ph.D. degree in Middle Eastern studies at the University of Manchester and King's College London, and then I moved to Canada for a year. I was a visiting fellow at York University.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** I'm not questioning your qualifications; I just want to understand your current research, your intelligence sources and how your intelligence is verified.

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** I do not have access to classified intelligence, but I am a senior fellow of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, where we constantly talk with people from the intelligence community, from foreign administration and other Iranians who have primary knowledge of the IRGC's operations.

From an analytical point, much of the content of these statements that I made were analytical, based on information that is readily available.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** I'll go to Mr. Aarabi now with the same question.

**Mr. Kasra Aarabi:** Like Farzin, I'm an Iranian. I've been looking at and studying the IRGC for more than a decade. Through my expertise and time working on the IRGC, I've developed a network of contacts inside of Iran and an ability to identify locations in the online space where the IRGC is active and has provided open-source information.

Through such means, through both networks on the ground and knowing where to look, I've been able to maintain a constant flow of primary information, primary data, primary Farsi material and primary IRGC material. Through these means, I have been able to assess this primary IRGC material and therefore publish on the subject.

For example, I have obtained the internal training manuals the IRGC has used to radicalize its recruits, as I referenced in my testimony.

I've always ensured that my analysis is centred on primary material—primary Farsi material—specifically related to the IRGC.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Thank you. I would like to move on a little bit.

I'm a Canadian, but I don't have access to Canadian intelligence, so I'm just trying to figure that out.

I want to follow up on Mr. Epp's very good line of questioning with respect to the so-called axis of resistance.

You didn't talk about money. Is there money that flows from the IRGC? Do you track it? Do you understand the financial or resource relationship between the IRGC and/or the Quds Force, Hezbollah and Hamas, Hamas or the Houthis, or any other groups? Is there information about how that happens?

I'll go to Mr. Nadimi first.

• (1700)

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** A lot of that information is open source.

Yes, Iran and the IRGC fund Quds Force operations, because the Quds Force is a branch of the IRGC. The Quds Force—

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** From the Quds Force to the proxies, is there...? I don't imagine they publish their financial statements.

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** Well, according to statements made by Iranian officials and many of those proxy group leaders, like Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, when they visit Iran, they usually carry suitcases full of cash. Qassem Soleimani, before he was killed by a U.S. military operation in Iraq, visited those countries. He visited Syria, mostly. They carried cash. There were regular cargo flights from Iran to those countries, and those flights also transported cash and gold.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** That's illegal activity, though, regardless of what you're talking about.

**The Chair:** I'm afraid you're out of time, MP Oliphant.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Those groups are terrorist organizations. If we have proof of that, it should be reported.

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** Yes.

**The Chair:** We'll go next to MP Bergeron.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank the witnesses for joining us today and sharing their comments, experience and the fruits of their studies to enlighten us.

So far, I would say that there is a certain consensus among witnesses that is emerging around the idea of adding the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to the Canadian list of terrorist organizations.

Last week, we were treated to somewhat iconoclastic testimony from Professor Raboudi of the University of Ottawa. He told us that now would not be the right time, although he acknowledged, on the one hand, that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is probably

engaged in terrorist activities, and on the other, that this movement would eventually have to be included on Canada's list of terrorist entities. There would be an issue of a circumstantial nature, since, in the context of the ongoing war in the Middle East, this would affect Canada's credibility for the global south.

What do you think?

I put my question to both witnesses, but perhaps I'd invite Mr. Nadimi to answer it first.

[*English*]

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** Thank you very much, sir.

I think it's the responsibility of all of the free world and lesser nations to tackle this problem, because the IRGC is a growing problem. It is an adaptive, complex system. It adapts to existing situations, and we have to design and plan for measures against them accordingly.

With any days of inaction, the IRGC grows operations and abilities in both conventional weapons and terrorist operations. I think it'll be a loss for the free world, because it will be more capable and it will expand its activities in the region and beyond.

Yesterday there was a report that the Houthis have established a working relationship with the al-Shabaab group in Somalia. Al-Shabaab is a Sunni terrorist, al-Qaeda-affiliated group. The Houthis are Zaydi Shiites affiliated with Iran, and now, mostly with the consent of the Iranian sponsors of the Houthis, they are establishing a relationship so that the Houthis can provide al-Shabaab with more sophisticated, longer-range, more lethal weapons.

In the future, if the Houthis stand down, al-Shabaab in Somalia can take over their job.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** If I understand correctly, according to you, this matter of circumstances should not come into play in Canada's decision.

Is this correct?

[*English*]

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** I think it is the right time. It's probably even late for making such decisions. I think it's about time for Canada to designate the IRGC—in line with other countries, like the United States, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the European Parliament—as a terrorist organization.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Mr. Aarabi, what do you think?

[English]

**Mr. Kasra Aarabi:** It is absolutely the right time. When we talk about proscription, first and foremost, we're talking about Canada's national security. This is an interior ministry issue. There is a serious threat of IRGC terrorism in Canada, and IRGC homegrown radicalization, homegrown extremism and homegrown terrorism.

The current sanctions regime on the IRGC does not prohibit its ability to disseminate jihadi propaganda, nor does it prohibit its ability to carry out soft power activities, which we know they are doing in Canada. We know they have cultivated a social constituency in Canada. Just in the past 72 hours, we had a Canadian individual dressed in IRGC attire making IRGC-inspired violent gestures at other Canadians in Toronto.

First and foremost, beyond the foreign policy aspect of this, proscription relates to the national security of Canada and the protection of Canadian civilians. It is absolutely fundamental that Canada proscribe the IRGC to protect against the threat of IRGC terrorism on Canadian soil. That is the most pressing issue here. When we're talking about proscription, it is primarily an interior ministry issue. It's about national security.

The current sanctions regime on the IRGC in Canada does not protect against IRGC terrorism on Canadian soil. It is absolutely essential to do this sooner rather than later.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will go to MP McPherson.

You have five minutes.

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

This is an important study. I'm very grateful to the witnesses who are here today.

Before I ask some questions, I have to do a bit of housekeeping.

I need to move a motion. It's not for voting on or dealing with right now. I just want to get it on the record. The notice of motion will be shared with the members shortly.

It says:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee conduct a study on Canada-India relations, with particular focus on human rights of minorities in India and Canada's arms sales to India; that the study consist of at least four meetings; that the Minister of Foreign Affairs be invited to appear; that the committee invite witnesses from Canadian civil society and international human rights organizations; that the committee reports its findings to the House; and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

Thank you. We'll send that out to the members in both official languages.

Thank you very much, Dr. Nadimi, for being here today and for sharing your thoughts with us.

One thing I brought this motion forward to do—and to have this study do—is to understand the implications of listing the IRGC as a terrorist organization. You've made it clear that you think it is getting late and that we should have done this much sooner.

We had testimony from somebody earlier this week who talked about the fact that Canada wasn't using the tools we already have effectively. My concern is that this is doing one more thing badly. We are already not using the sanctions regime adequately or not using the tools we have at our disposal.

What is your stance on how effective this would be, if we don't have that enforcement mechanism in place?

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** Thank you very much for inviting me to this important session.

I think robust legislation has always been very effective, even if there are existing measures. The very fact that the problem still persists means there is still room for robust legislation.

With regard to the IRGC and existing powers in Canada, yes, the RCMP probably already has special powers, but I think they can do much better with more resources. Especially with better intelligence, they can foresee the activities that these actors might have in mind against Canadians.

• (1710)

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you.

I've been concerned with the sanctions regime for a long time, because it is becoming a larger piece of our foreign policy, yet we have not invested in the enforcement of those sanctions or in making sure those sanctions are being taken seriously.

From your perspective, have the sanctions we already have in place had a demonstrable effect on Iran? Has Iran found ways to sidestep those? Has there been any impact to date?

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** The Islamic regime in Iran, in many cases, has been able to circumvent sanctions, adapt to existing sanctions and create measures to bypass some of the sanctions. However, the very existence of sanctions and sanctions regimes has a very important psychological effect.

With regard to the IRGC, I think the sanctions will also have a very positive effect on the Iranian people, who have been subjected to the IRGC's nefarious activities for decades.

With regard to Canada, I think you know it is very important that the government is also committed to any legislation that covers this issue. However, there is room for implementing and adapting. I think the Iranian-Canadian community in Ontario and Toronto, for example, knows how much this can cut into the activities and the influence that IRGC and Shiite fundamentalism has, especially on the Iranian-Canadian community.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you for that.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we go to the second round, and first off is MP Abouttaif. You have five minutes.



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

Thanks to the witnesses; welcome on board.

Mr. Aarabi, would you be able to tell us who the partners of IRGC are in Canada? If you could name organizations, that would be great.

**Mr. Kasra Aarabi:** There are several entities. One of the most concerning entities is the presence of the Islamic Students Association of Canada.

This entity, as I mentioned, is directly part of the Office of the Supreme Leader Beit-e Rahbari structure. It has had direct contact with IRGC commanders in the U.K. branch and the U.K. branch of the Islamic Students Association and has hosted eight IRGC commanders as these IRGC commanders propagated and glorified IRGC terrorism. They propagated extreme anti-Semitism and they even called on British and European Muslim students to join their apocalyptic army that will “bring an end to the life of the oppressors and occupiers, Zionists and Jews across the world”.

This association has a branch in Canada. We have also seen there are entities in Canada that have been propagating IRGC-affiliated propaganda anthems. As I said, *Salute, Commander* was a propaganda anthem that was created in Iran by the IRGC.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Beyond propaganda, Mr. Nadimi, can you name organizations that are doing money laundering, doing drugs, doing weapons and feeding or outflowing money to IRGC and to the Iranian regime? Can you name organizations, please, Mr. Nadimi?

• (1715)

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** Do you mean in Canada?

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Yes.

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** No, I cannot. However, the money exchanges in Toronto—

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** We don't have any idea how large the network is in Canada. Is that correct?

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** I cannot comment on that, but as I mentioned, the money exchanges in Toronto have means to directly exchange money with Iran, and that can easily be exploited by the IRGC and any Iranian government members.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** To combat this organization in Canada—and, it seems, across the world, but we need to worry about Canada the most—do you think we are serious about doing this, and do we understand totally how big and how serious our enemy is in order to be able to find the proper resources to fight it?

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** I cannot comment on that.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** You do understand the mindset of the IRGC, since you were born in Iran, and that's probably beginning to understand how big the challenge is.

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** Of course the IRGC, by design, is an international organization. They export their revolution, and that still persists, that ideology of exporting their revolution, expanding the rule of *velayat-e faqih* throughout the world.

The creation of this Islamic civilization, the ideal Islamic civilization, by the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, is not just a theory; the IRGC has been assigned by the supreme leader—and that's official—to implement his ideas and his doctrine.

The IRGC has been trying to establish influence in Canada is because of the large Iranian-Canadian community—

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Do you think they are deep-rooted within the community itself, the communities they can speak to, or even beyond those communities? They might have branched out with that fundamental challenge to Canada's security and economy, and to other situations.

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** First and foremost, the focus of the IRGC in Canada is on the Iranian-Canadian community, and also the dissidents—the Iranian dissidents who live in Canada—and also any organization or NGO that has any kind of focus on the plight of the Iranian people.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** But they are also a threat to the overall Canadian society, beyond the community, aren't they?

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** Yes, because the Iranian-Canadian community is an integral part of the Canadian system.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** What are the consequences of fighting them, versus just staying quiet on dealing with them?

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** As I mentioned, the IRGC is an adaptive, complex system. They adapt to new conditions and situations, and they have shown the ability to increase their role, to increase their presence. That has been the case in Canada and in many other countries that have an Iranian diaspora.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** I'm done. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I'll take the next segment. I would like to start off with Mr. Aarabi.

First of all, I should say, the interpreters are advising that your volume is very high. Could you kindly turn it down a bit before you respond to this question?

You touched on an incident in the U.K., a terrorist attack that was orchestrated by the IRGC. Given that most members here aren't familiar with it, could you give us more examples, whether in the U.K. or more broadly throughout Europe? That's the first question.

The second one is this: Could you perhaps advise us as to why the British government never chose to proscribe the IRGC?

• (1720)

**Mr. Kasra Aarabi:** The two main targets by IRGC terrorism across the world are the Iranian diaspora community and the Jewish community. The IRGC is the most anti-Semitic organization in the world. A big part of its focus is targeting the Jewish community abroad.

In the U.K., the IRGC has carried out surveillance, identifying Jewish targets. It has created a hit list for Jewish community members.

Similarly, in Germany, they have done the same. They have also targeted Jewish synagogues and Jewish kindergartens, as well as Iranian diaspora members.

They have been pushing and trying to mainstream anti-Semitism across Europe, across North America, as well as directly conducting these terror plots and terror attacks. The majority, fortunately, have been foiled by British security authorities.

They have also, as I have said, been nurturing homegrown radicalization. I think this really goes to the point. The current sanctions regime on the IRGC does not prohibit its radicalization activities. It's using the same methods as ISIS and al Qaeda, but unlike ISIS and al Qaeda, which are proscribed terrorist organizations, the current sanctions regime does not prohibit the IRGC's ability to nurture homegrown radicalization, and it is specifically targeting not the Iranian diaspora community—because the overwhelming majority of Iranians who live abroad oppose the Islamic Republic and oppose the IRGC—but the Shia community abroad. That's a sizable community.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. We're out of time.

**Mr. Kasra Aarabi:** They are targeting, for example, in Britain, the British Shia Iraqis, the British Shia Lebanese, the British Shia Afghans, and British Shia Pakistanis—

**The Chair:** I'm so sorry. I have limited time.

Could you also kindly explain to us why the British government has yet to proscribe the IRGC?

**Mr. Kasra Aarabi:** I think it's an abject failure in British policy. I think that the opposition has already pledged, as a priority, that it will proscribe the IRGC as a terrorist organization.

In Britain, there was a visible disagreement between the Home Office and the Foreign Office. The Home Office was in favour of proscribing the IRGC, and rightly so, because first and foremost, the proscription of the IRGC is an interior ministry issue. It is about British national security and the protection of British citizens. Unfortunately, the Foreign Office opposed the move and was able to block it.

However, there is hope with the opposition party, which is predicted to win the election. Of course, we can't predict elections, but the polling shows that. The opposition party has pledged that it will proscribe the IRGC as an immediate foreign policy priority and domestic security issue.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for that.

If I could go to Dr. Nadimi next, Mr. Aarabi explained some of the practical consequences that would follow if the IRGC were to be proscribed in Canada. Could you elaborate on that as well? In your opinion, what would be the consequences?

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** The IRGC has a naval branch, the IRGC Navy, which operates small missile boats, a large number of them, and has also recently commissioned missile corvettes. It has control of the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the shipping lanes to and from that strategic water lane.

One possible repercussion could be the targeting of Canadian-flag or Canadian-affiliated ships that use the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman, by measures such as seizures and

other intrusive activities. Even more serious actions could be considered.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for that.

We will now go to MP Bergeron. You have two and a half minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

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

In an article on rising tensions in the Middle East published by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, you said that it was essential to note that the Iranian regime's actions did not reflect the wishes of the Iranian population as a whole, most of whom were seeking peaceful coexistence with other countries in the region.

My question is quite simple. To what extent does the regime's propaganda towards, say, the state of Israel resonate with the Iranian population?

From the contacts you still have in the country, how has the Iranian population reacted to Iran's attack on Israel?

• (1725)

[*English*]

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** The Iranian regime does have some support base. There are differences in the percentage, with some people counting a support base of as much as 9% to 10% of the Iranian people.

In general, I can sum up the reaction of the Iranian people, especially those who oppose the regime, as indifference. However, those who do support the regime are in a very celebratory mood, because after over 40 years of self-declared war against Israel, finally the regime had a chance to launch missiles, drones and cruise missiles from Iranian territory against Israel proper. That was considered a major achievement, given that ultimately the Israeli response was very measured. Those who supported the regime were very happy about it, and obviously the majority of Iranian people who did not support the regime were indifferent—or, in many cases, they went on social media to offer support to the Israelis.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We next go to MP McPherson. You have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm interested in knowing about the impact that your research has had on both of you. Could you tell me whether researchers like you feel that you're at risk because of your work, in the same way that we have seen other critics of the IRGC put at risk?

Perhaps I would start with you, Dr. Nadimi.

**Mr. Farzin Nadimi:** Well, obviously, any analyst of Iranian heritage has been subjected to some social media activities by the supporters of the regime, and I was no exception to that. I have not been able to go to Iran since 2014, the last time I visited Iran. I have been aware of the risks, obviously.

Yes, there are risks, especially for the journalists who cover Iran, especially for the Persian language networks based in Europe and the United States. They have been subjected to harassment by the Iranian regime, but with regard to analysts, that differs.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Would you comment, Mr. Aarabi?

**Mr. Kasra Aarabi:** The short answer is yes.

Without going into too much detail due to the sensitivity, I have had, for example, in-person surveillance conducted. I am a regular recipient of death threats. I have had regular cyber and malware hacking attempts directed from the regime in Iran and the IRGC. Again, I'm one of many—certainly not the exception—and the threat is increasing against Iranian diaspora members who are outspoken against the regime and who conduct research, particularly on the security and military intelligence apparatus.

Unfortunately, Iranian diaspora members no longer feel safe in the west. That is the sad reality, and I think that reflects the abject failure in western policy to take action against the regime in Iran, choosing instead to negotiate with it, which has really set a precedent. The regime in Iran believes that it can carry out attacks, it can intimidate and it can conduct these acts of terror without facing any consequence, and that really goes to the root of the problem.

Until the regime in Iran believes that it can't get away with this, my sad prediction is that this will only increase. Given the sizable Iranian diaspora community in Canada, I believe this is a major threat, and proscription can help mitigate against it.

• (1730)

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

That concludes our questions at this point.

On behalf of all the members, I want to thank you, Dr. Nadimi and Mr. Aarabi. We are very grateful for your expertise and for your time.

I will suspend for a couple of minutes so that we can ensure that our next slate of witnesses can make it to the table.

• (1730)

(Pause)

• (1735)

**The Chair:** Welcome back, everyone. We will resume our study on the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and the current situation in Iran.

At this point, I want to acknowledge that we're very grateful to have two distinguished witnesses with us today. We have Professor Fen Osler Hampson, who is the chancellor's professor at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University. We also have Mr. Dennis Horak, who is a retired Canadian diplomat and ambassador with very deep insights on the region.

Regrettably, I should inform the members that although we were also slated to hear from Brandon Silver from the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, he had some headphone challenges.

To our witnesses, you will each be provided five minutes for your opening remarks, after which we will open the meeting to questions from the members.

Go ahead, Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** I certainly don't want to question the decision that was made regarding Mr. Silver. I understand from exchanges with the clerk that he had headphones that had been approved by the House at one point, but were no longer approved.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** As explained to me, that particular headset is not currently approved. I suspect it was approved.... It was a Senate headset. My apologies. I guess we're using different headsets.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** We've already discussed this issue, notably with Ms. Chatel. Wouldn't it have been possible to do a sound test to check these headphones with our interpreters? We could have determined whether they worked rather than simply sending him home when he had gone to the trouble of connecting.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** No, the guidelines as they currently stand, Mr. Bergeron, are that you are not permitted to use headphones that haven't been approved.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Even if the sound is perfect?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Yes. I'm sorry. Those are just the....

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Will we have the opportunity to hear Mr. Silver's testimony, eventually?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I don't believe so, but I should also underscore that the clerk had sent him and mailed him headphones, but for some reason.... I don't believe we'll have another chance to devote to this study.

He has undertaken to send us his written submission.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That having been explained, we will go to Professor Hampson.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Dr. Fen Osler Hampson (Chancellor's Professor and Professor, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, As an Individual):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I understand the committee is focusing on three issues: Whether the federal government should list the IRGC as a terrorist entity, the connection between people or assets in Canada and the IRGC, and paths forward to support Iranian human rights activists and other political refugees. Let me comment specifically on these three issues.

I won't go through the litany of all the things that the IRGC has been up to. You've heard that in the hearings, and I don't need to add to that litany. As we all know, the federal government has referred to the IRGC as a terrorist organization, called its leaders terrorists, taken measures to prevent its leadership from entering Canada and designated the Quds Force as a terrorist entity. The House of Commons has passed non-binding motions to designate the IRGC as a terrorist entity, so why not take the final step to actually list it as a terrorist entity? As I understand it, there are three, perhaps four, major concerns.

First, a terrorist designation might affect low-level individuals who are forced to serve in the IRGC as part of their mandatory military service.

Second, such a designation would be resource-intensive and place enormous demands on our security and intelligence services.

Third, under Canada's Criminal Code, a terrorist entity is defined as a person, group, trust, partnership, or fund or an unincorporated association or organization. Does the IRGC technically meet the legal test? Some would say no, because it's a state actor, not a non-state actor.

Fourth, such a designation would prevent a potential resumption of diplomatic relations with Iran. That is perhaps one of the reasons, Mr. Chair, that the United Kingdom has not designated the IRGC as a terrorist entity, a question you put to one of the previous panellists.

Let me go to the first concern.

I draw your attention to a recent publication by the Atlantic Council that points out that since 2010, 80% of the IRGC conscripts actively chose to join the IRGC. There are further reports that many of those conscripts were already members of the Basij Resistance Force, which is a volunteer paramilitary organization. Some 20% of the membership do come from unprivileged, underprivileged and poor areas, and they have probably been forcibly conscripted into the IRGC.

Concerns about sanctioning individuals who have been coerced to join the organization and have been subjected to its indoctrination programs must be weighed against the broader risk of allowing entry to Canada of members of the IRGC who may be involved in various kinds of illicit activities that support the organization and Iranian interests. Again, that litany is a long one: money laundering, illegal business activities, spying on Iranian exiles, issuing death threats and so forth.

Globally, those risks are growing. I would draw your attention to a letter sent by a group of U.S. senators to EU officials last year, wherein they pointed out that in July 2012, Bulgarian authorities arrested an IRGC operative suspected of planning an attack on a synagogue in Sofia. In 2016, German officials arrested IRGC-spon-

sored assassins. In April 2022, a detained IRGC operative was identified for conducting assassination plans in Germany and France.

The second concern has to do with resource implications, as has been pointed out by a number of the witnesses here, but should that be an excuse for inaction? Should we let the proverbial underfunded bureaucratic tail wag the policy dog here?

• (1740)

I would point out that on October 7, 2022, the Prime Minister announced that he was going to provide \$76 million to strengthen Canada's capacity to implement sanctions against Iran. That's a fair bit of change, in my estimation. I think any designation of the IRGC as a terrorist organization should be accompanied by a legislative requirement to report on how existing funds are being used, and whether additional resources are required to support our intelligence and security services.

The third concern may require a legislative fix. I think Bill C-350, a private member's bill, might provide for a series of amendments to the Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act that would go one step further than the Harper government's enactment of the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act and its amendments to the State Immunity Act in 2011.

The concerns about people and assets with close ties with the IRGC are well documented by our media. In the testimony I submitted to you, I've provided hyperlinks to numerous cases, identifying individuals who have been involved with and have ties with the IRGC. I'm not going to name them publicly here, but that evidence or information is readily available in public sources.

Designating the IRGC as a terrorist organization may make it easier to expel these individuals from Canada, because the burden of evidence is lowered to do so. It will also prevent IRGC individuals from entering Canada.

Canada can also do more to support Iranian human rights activists, artists, journalists and other political refugees. The World Refugee & Migration Council, of which I am president, recently partnered with the University of Ottawa in a highly innovative program sponsored by Open Society Foundations. It supports the work of human rights activists who have been forced to leave their country of origin for challenging injustices—many of whom are located here in Canada, including Iranians—and who seek to continue their activism here to raise the flag on what's happening in their home country. That's the kind of creative approach that merits support.

Thank you.

• (1745)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Professor Hampson.

We will now go to Mr. Horak. You have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Dennis Horak (Retired Canadian Diplomat, As an Individual):** The Islamic Republic of Iran is a malignant and destabilizing force in the Middle East and increasingly globally. Its fingerprints are all over the current crises in the region, and it has active international networks, cyber and personal, aimed at disinformation, misinformation, intimidation and violence.

The IRGC is at the centre of it all. It sits at the core of the Islamic republic. Its tentacles have broad reach, and its political influence within Iran is unmatched. It is, in some respects, a state within a state. It is a tool of internal repression, and its members, current and former, play an essential economic role both in legitimate business circles and in sanctions-busting efforts.

The IRGC Quds Force is the tip of the IRGC spear, leading Iran's pernicious efforts regionally. Its links and its support and, at times, direction of terrorist organizations across the region are well documented. The Quds Force is a terrorist organization by any definition of the word, and its listing by Canada in 2012 was appropriate.

The question of listing the IRGC itself, however, has always been more challenging. At first glance, it may seem strange to list the Quds Force but not the organization that controls it. It's a bit like listing the monkey but ignoring the organ grinder, but there is some logic to it. While the Quds Force is made up of some of the most ideologically committed and nasty individuals in Iran, the IRGC is a much more complex entity. True, it has more than its fair share of ideologues, thugs and murderers, but it also includes of a fair number of conscripts who see an IRGC connection as a way to get ahead in life. Listing won't change that reality.

The risk of listing the IRGC is that many of these conscripts, likely including some Canadian passport holders, can get caught up in a web really meant to catch the worst of the worst. Many do their service far removed from the IRGC's violent excesses. Canada does not have the capability to differentiate the real thugs from the time-servers. The IRGC is too large and its reach too expansive, and Canada is too under-resourced to be able to enforce such a listing.

The break in diplomatic relations hasn't helped. It may have freed our hand to act without fear of diplomatic repercussions, but it has also undercut our ability to know who's who both here and there. Listing the IRGC would, as a result, be a largely symbolic gesture. It wouldn't stop current or, more to the point, former IRGC members from setting up in Canada or placing assets here. It happens now, and listing would be unlikely to change that in any significant way. While listing would enable Canada to act when they are discovered—and that's something—we must be realistic about what listing would and wouldn't achieve.

There is value in symbolism. It sends a message, not least to Canadians threatened by the IRGC here and human rights activists in Iran and elsewhere whom we care about and support. That kind of messaging is important. It has long underpinned our human rights efforts in dealing with Iran.

Many different mechanisms in addressing Iran's human rights abuses have been tried over the years. These include special rapporteurs, the annual UN General Assembly resolution on human rights in Iran, controlled engagement strategies, case-by-case dialogues, sanctions, condemnations and ultimately the break in diplomatic ties. It is fair to say that none has really managed to move the needle on human rights in Iran, nor is there some magic bullet out there that we haven't tried that might do the trick. Advocacy on human rights doesn't work that way. It is slow, frustrating and often without tangible rewards. It is a process.

The Iranian diaspora and groups inside Iran are our allies in this effort, but we need to be careful about who we align with in our outreach efforts. Iranian diaspora communities and human rights groups are notoriously fractious. It is best for Canada to stay out of these disputes. We should be inclusive. It is for the Iranians to decide their future, but there is one exception.

The National Council of Resistance of Iran, or the MEK, as it is also known, is a noxious cult that, despite its odd ability to regularly attract prominent western politicians to its annual conferences, is widely despised in Iran and should be avoided.

Finally, I will end with this observation. I spent 22 years dealing with the Middle East during my 31-year diplomatic career. Nine of those were spent focused on Iran, including three as head of mission in Tehran. My conclusion is that with Iran, there are no easy solutions; there are only frustrating challenges.

Thank you.

• (1750)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we go to MP Fast. You have six minutes.

**Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair

Thank you to our witnesses. It's been good to have you back at committee.

Can you gentlemen help me with something? You've both identified the reasons that it may not be advisable to list the IRGC.

Six years ago, Parliament spoke. The House of Commons voted overwhelmingly to list the IRGC as a terrorist organization. Here we are six years later, and nothing has happened that I know of. The best we have is the Prime Minister quoted as saying that he's "continuing to look for ways to responsibly list the IRGC as a terrorist organization".

Professor Hampson, is there a way of responsibly listing the IRGC as a terrorist organization under Canadian law?

**Dr. Fen Osler Hampson:** Well, we did it with the Kurds. I would submit that the next step is to do it with the IRGC. It is not throwing a blanket across the entire Iranian government.

Second, to me, the real issue is this: What kind of message do you want to send to the bureaucracy to mobilize itself so it can better coordinate its activities?

As I pointed out in my testimony, there has been an infusion of fairly substantial funding to deal with Iranian operatives working in Canada. A special division was set up in Global Affairs Canada, but it's clearly not working. A strong political message would provide the kind of leadership that I think is necessary to galvanize the bureaucracy to start taking this threat seriously. It would also send a strong message to our security partners—the United States being the foremost one—that we are serious. The message right now is that we're not that serious.

I think something more than a resolution by the House of Commons and Government of Canada would provide a very important strategic focal point for getting serious about a threat that is clearly growing, as you've heard from numerous witnesses. To me, the puzzle is why we haven't done it up to now.

• (1755)

**Hon. Ed Fast:** I am puzzled as well.

Mr. Horak, you identified a number of the same reasons for perhaps not listing the IRGC. However, I didn't hear you say that you're fundamentally opposed to listing it.

Are you opposed to listing the IRGC?

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** No, I am not.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Okay.

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** My point was that it's fine. We can do it. I am just not sure we will be able to enforce it, and its real value would be symbolic. That's not a small thing, either. There is some value in that.

I think there are instruments now—I'm not a lawyer, so let me just preface that—to deal with some of the concerns we have, whether these are IRGC assets or not. Particularly on the assets side, as far as I understand, the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act involves confiscating, seizing and selling off Iranian government assets. The IRGC is a government entity. If they have assets here, I'm not sure why they can't be seized under the JVTA. I don't know.

To your point, no, I'm not opposed to it, but I think we have to be realistic about what it will mean. I don't think there will be much in the way of negative repercussions. We don't have diplomatic relations with them, so we don't have the concerns the British, for example, have about doing it, in terms of whether that would cause a break or downgrade in diplomatic relations. We don't have to worry about that at this point.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** The United States has listed the IRGC. Somehow they've been able to make it work.

What is it that the United States did that enabled them to use this as an effective tool to at least rid their country of some of these terrorists and cells that were presumably lodged within their country?

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** I would venture a guess that they haven't gotten rid of them. That would be my one guess.

They have used this as a tool. They have used it effectively. I think they have a whole lot more resources devoted to it than we do. I think that's part of it. We are stretched pretty thin. As we have all seen in the last little while, there are a lot of concerns in Canada about the activities of various countries, and only so many resources to go around. Certainly, devoting those to Iran is important, because they are a threat to the Canadian Iranian community and the country itself. However, there are only so many resources to go around.

**Hon. Ed Fast:** Is there a way of doing this responsibly, in the way that the Prime Minister has suggested he is seeking?

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** What do you mean by “responsibly”—

**The Chair:** Answer very briefly. We're over time now.

**Dr. Fen Osler Hampson:** As I understand it, the normal procedure for designating an entity as a terrorist threat, a terrorist organization, is a bureaucratic process. Mr. Horak should be able to explain what that process is, but it does require the collaboration of the different government departments to come to that conclusion.

I think the resourcing issue, quite frankly, is a bit of a red herring, for the reasons that I mentioned. One of the concerns—and I've certainly heard this expressed by some former officials—is that this would really prevent any effort by this government or a subsequent one to restore diplomatic relations with Iran, but I don't see that happening anytime soon.

**The Chair:** Now we go to MP Zuberi. You have six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. I appreciate your presence here and the testimony of all others. As we said earlier in our study, if any witnesses are harassed or intimidated in relation to their testimony, they should let the committee clerk know.

With respect to Mr. Horak, it's good to see you here. I know about your work in the past and that you have served as a Canadian diplomat for many years, including in Iran and other countries. You spoke about the importance of clearly checking Iran. In no way, shape, or form are we giving Iran a pass with respect to all of the crimes that have been committed by the Iran government, the many that we can enumerate and have enumerated.

As a diplomat of the past, you did touch upon the importance of relations between countries. I'd like to allow you to have more time to speak about that and to note that in September 2012, we closed our mission here, of Iran to Canada. The Iranian diplomats were not permitted to stay. Since then, Italy has served as Canada's protecting power. Do you want to speak about that in particular, please?

• (1800)

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** Do you mean how it got there?

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** It's not how it got there, but in terms of where that left us.

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** Yes. I was in Iran up until about four or five weeks before we closed our embassy there. We were doing all the preparations. I had actually recommended that we should close because of the circumstances in which we found ourselves. The Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act and the prospect of Canada seizing Iranian government properties here in Canada made the presence of a Canadian embassy in Tehran completely untenable.

I made that recommendation, though with some regret, I have to say, because I think we lost something in not being there. We lost the ability to see for ourselves what's going on, on the ground, and to make contacts there and to be able to talk with our allies—the U.S. and Israel, which aren't there—and to give them our perspectives, which we did, but also to get a sense for ourselves.

Also, that's not to forget the kind of service that we could provide to Canadians, and there are thousands of them that live in Iran. We lost all of that for the trade-off of a piece of legislation. Iranian government properties have been seized and sold off and judgments have been paid, but they've been paid, as I understand it, largely to American plaintiffs.

We have given up all of the positives of being there for a symbolic move, which has not benefited Canadians whatsoever, nor has it deterred Iran from sponsoring terrorism. We've lost that ability to see what's going on and to be able to talk to them, and these are important things.

I become frustrated when people see diplomatic relations as an instrument, as a tool, as some sort of gesture of support for a country. That's not what they are. You talk to your enemies as much as you talk to your friends, and I think we lost that, and we continue to lose that, and it's directly relevant to the issues here.

Sure, we get information from our allies—from the Brits, from the Australians, from the New Zealanders—about what's going on there. It's not the same as being there with our ability to be able to gauge what's going on with the IRGC internally, perhaps even with some of the people, some of the businesses. A lot of these guys have their hands all over business in Iran. To be able to have a sense on the ground of what they're all about and what links they may or may not have to Canada—those are intelligence assets that would greatly support this kind of legislation, this kind of listing. We don't have it.

We rely on our allies, which we always did—and we always would, in any case—but we have lost our own particular perspective, and that's challenging for us in listing the IRGC. It's challenging for us to know what's going on with Iran. It's challenging for us in being able to have a dialogue with our Five Eyes partners in par-

ticular, and also with Israel, about what's going on there and to be able to shape their perspectives. We've lost all that, and for basically a gesture.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** I remember the Ben Affleck film, when Canada was very involved in 1979 in helping our ally, America. I know it's not factually accurate, but still, for pop culture....

In terms of the successes or challenges we've had with Canada and our allies in confronting the IRGC up to date, do you want to opine a bit on that in the next 40 seconds?

• (1805)

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** I don't really have a whole lot to add. At least when I was there, we didn't really face pressure on that. We all talked about it. Everybody was agreed on the Quds Force, but in terms of the IRGC, everybody understood the challenges.

One challenge, in answer to an earlier question as well, is this differentiation. There are a lot of people who got caught up in the IRGC. Professor Hampson has mentioned it as well. They're basically doing their time. They build connections. It's a way to get ahead. It's not exactly analogous to the Baath Party in Iraq, but there is an analogy in some respects, so being able to differentiate among them....

Some of them are probably living in Canada. They did their time and they served and they had nothing to do with anything bad. Are we going to want to differentiate, or are we going to catch everybody in the same web? I don't know, but that's one of the challenges of dealing with the legislation as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now turn to MP Bergeron. You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for joining us this evening to shed light on this extremely important issue.

I'd like to ask you exactly the same question I asked our previous guests. Many witnesses have come to talk to us about the security threat posed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, not only internationally, but particularly domestically. In most cases, they urged us to see to it that this organization was placed on Canada's list of terrorist entities.

Last week, however, we heard some rather iconoclastic testimony from a professor at the University of Ottawa. He was telling us that, whatever the thing to do, now is not the time to do it since, because of the conflict in the Middle East, it would have the effect of causing Canada to lose an enormous amount of credibility in the global south in general.

What do you think of this statement?

My question is addressed first to Mr. Hampson.

[*English*]

**Dr. Fen Osler Hampson:** Thank you very much for your question.

There are two parts.

What are they up to in Canada? As I said earlier, I provided quite a few links in my testimony, which the clerk will make available to the committee members, of well-documented cases of money laundering, influence peddling and business associations—those who, if they're not IRGC members who have ties with the IRGC, have been involved in in Canada.

I would add parenthetically that this was one of the reasons we suspended diplomatic relations with Iran. It was because their embassy was not doing the things embassies normally do. There was a lot of spying and other kinds of subterfuge taking place in Canada that was certainly making Iranian students and others very uncomfortable.

In terms of timing, I would make a different argument. Iran is the major supporter of Hezbollah. It's the major supporter of Hamas. It is the major supporter of the Houthis in Yemen. It has launched major attacks directly against Israel. It's not business as usual in the Middle East and it's not business as usual in terms of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I think we all know that. We are entering a very dangerous era. One only has to go to our Global Affairs website, which is pointing out that Canadians travelling in not just the Middle East but also France, Spain and other countries of Europe have to be on the lookout for potential terrorist activities and threats that may put them at risk. Well, why is that? It's because of the conflict that has taken a terrible turn in the Middle East.

I would submit that one of the reasons Canada should designate the IRGC a terrorist actor is to close the circle. Is it a perfect fix? No. Is it a difficult call? Yes. I would agree with everything Mr. Horak said, and it's a tough call, but on balance, given the world we're in now, given the fact that this is one way to prevent those with ties to the IRGC from coming into Canada.... There may be sleeper cells here. I don't know, but when you're faced with the kinds of risks that are real, then this kind of action, yes, is symbolically important, and it also says to the government and to officials in government that we have to take this threat seriously.

• (1810)

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** In terms of the Iranian embassy not being here, yes, they were up to some pretty nefarious activities, but their having a presence here helped us be able to see, monitor and track those activities in a way that we can't now.

On the question of the reaction if we were to act now, I agree completely with what the professor said.

One thing, though—maybe this is what was meant, but I don't know—is that it would be presented and perhaps perceived in other countries in the world that we're doing this to benefit Israel. If that's the problem, too bad. I don't think international reaction should be a deterrent to our doing it. The Iranians will be ticked off, but so what?

**The Chair:** MP McPherson, you have six minutes, please.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank both of you for your testimony testimony today. It's been very interesting.

I am struggling with something, though. I'm hearing a bit of a mixed message: It is a symbolic gesture to list the IRGC and we

can't enforce it, but it is an important gesture and it will have an impact. You can see how I'm struggling a little bit with that.

Is it symbolic? If we are not able to enforce it adequately....

You spoke, Dr. Hampson, about not letting the tail wag the dog. If we don't have those resources, if there is no transparency on where the \$76 million are going and if we have no ability to measure whether there is an impact of listing the IRGC, then it does seem slightly performative. I do worry that even that symbolism is not, as you put it, in the balance going to be as effective as some of the other measures. It's that we actually have to fix some of those things before we take this step.

I understand what you're saying—that this moment in time requires this action. In my mind, I'm really struggling.

Dr. Hampson, the other thing you said is that 80% of those we would be worried about catching in this web are actually choosing to be part of the IRGC. Surely you don't mean that it's okay that we catch those 20% of people who didn't choose and that the others are collateral damage, I guess you could say.

Can you explain what you meant by that?

**Dr. Fen Osler Hampson:** In the context of whether this would just be a symbolic act, it depends on how you frame it. I would suggest that it shouldn't be. It should include reporting requirements. How is the money being used? What is the bureaucracy doing to up its game? How are they tightening the net?

Now, some of that may be difficult to do in open committee, but there are other ways of getting that information or at least introducing some accountability in terms of which additional resources have been put to deal with this issue. I think it also makes it clear that this should be a priority for our intelligence services.

Your second question was about the conscripts. The argument that some made—it was based largely on a somewhat dated CIA report—was that many, if not the majority, of the members of the IRGC were unwitting conscripts. More recent evidence suggests that is not the case. Those who join it do so.

The indoctrination element is hugely important. You may be an unwitting conscript, but once you've gone through the indoctrination program, you're a threat, particularly if you're an IRGC operative. That would be my point there.

It's not just people sitting at desks and passing religious notes across the table. This is an organization that does have operatives. Not all of them are here. A lot of what the IRGC does is maintain internal order and control in Iran.



• (1815)

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** My understanding, though, is that there are members of the IRGC who could be cooks, people who are not implicated in that.

I think, Mr. Horak, that you wanted to add something to that.

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** Yes, and that is right. As with any organization, there are pencil-pushers who are far removed from a lot of the excesses, but on this question of conscripts and whether they're involuntarily conscripted into the IRGC, as you were saying, I think the numbers are a bit off.

Being a member of the IRGC has some prestige in certain circles in Iran. It has some benefits in terms of developing networks. There are former IRGC officials and members who are, as I was saying earlier, all over the Iranian economy. When I was there, if there was a big deal, whether it involved telecommunications companies or whatever, you could bet there was an IRGC or often a former IRGC person behind it. You can think of it as being almost like an American fraternity—yes, a terrible fraternity. I don't know what Greek letter it would be, but there are networks or advantages to having been in the IRGC.

You're right that there is an indoctrination process as well, and a lot of people are ideologically committed to this, but a lot of them want to be in the IRGC for the material benefits it can provide to them if they go down that road. Now, whether we excuse them for that is a whole other question, but there are different elements within the organization. Of course, the worst of the worst go into the Quds Force.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We next go to MP Hoback. You have three minutes.

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

Just leading into that, we do have prosecutorial discretion here in Canada, so if we were to list them, there's a process they would have to go through. It's not as though they would automatically be thrown in jail. They could go through the process and have it determined at that point in time whether they were in a situation that they didn't really want to be part of, and were part of it, but did nothing wrong or did no harm. There's also a process whereby we can identify, let's say, that this guy's a bad actor and thus is treated accordingly.

Is that not fair to say?

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** Yes, but it's about some of them even getting here. There are instruments already that do these sorts of things.

If I remember correctly, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, for example, has been used against other countries. If I remember correctly, after what some people call the “coup” in Egypt that removed the Muslim Brotherhood, for a time, using the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, we weren't allowing anybody who had done any military service in Egypt to come to Canada, and the Egyptian military wasn't a designated terrorist organization. Why that can't be applied to IRGC members applying to come to Canada I don't know. As I mentioned earlier, I'm not a lawyer.

You're right that in terms of activities that are done here, yes, there's a judicial process, and that could happen with or without their being.... If we find they're up to some nefarious activities here, be it money laundering or supporting terrorist organizations or whatever it might be, there are deportation measures that could be taken against them, whether or not we have listed their organization, or if they've committed crimes or broken any laws, they could be arrested and charged.

Again, I'm not sure what this adds, but there is value in the symbolic acts.

• (1820)

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** But it does add something, because when you do list them, now anybody who is raising money for them would actually qualify or be recognized or identified under that scenario. Is that correct?

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** That's true.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** I look at the tool box and say, okay, we have added another tool to the tool box, but you made a good point, which is that we have a tool box with some tools in it that haven't been used. Can you explain to me why, in the bureaucracy, they haven't utilized all the tools they already have? If they sense that we're looking at adding more tools to the tool box, why wouldn't they be more aggressive with the tools they have to actually address the issues?

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** I wish I had an answer for you. I didn't understand it at the time when they were applying it to the Egyptian military, and I never got a straight answer from immigration Canada or whatever they were called at the time, so I honestly don't know.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Mr. Hampson, do you have any theories on that?

**Dr. Fen Osler Hampson:** We've already heard about the coordination problems among our security services, and so perhaps one way of addressing that is to say here are some threats you have to really take seriously, because Parliament has said—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** You might say it's broken then, right?

**Dr. Fen Osler Hampson:** Yes, the system is not working the way it should.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Everything is broken.

**Dr. Fen Osler Hampson:** You said it.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** He's going to call my time as soon as I mention that, so....

**Dr. Fen Osler Hampson:** We should also probably not use the “innocent cook” example, because I would like to point out that Putin's cook was somebody called Prigozhin. They can start off as a cook and have greater ambitions.

**The Chair:** We will now go to MP Alghabra. You have three minutes.

**Hon. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Horak, I want to direct my question to you. You have eloquently outlined the complexity of listing the IRGC, so maybe I will give a pragmatic question to you.

Assuming the government would do that, what is your advice on the kinds of safeguards we would need if the government is going to proceed in that direction? What measures or safeguards do we need to include as we move forward with this?

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** I think we need to take a step back and ask if we are willing to accept that we are going to catch everybody with this net, and if we're fine with that, then we're fine with that. If we're not, we have to figure out a way legally to differentiate, but I don't know how to do it. Is there a way to track if this person was active in X, X and X?

As a gentleman was saying, you could list the organization, and if somebody's fundraising for them, you could say that this is illegal. However, in terms of the individuals who are here, or the individuals who want to come to Canada, do we want to say that there's a full ban and that those with IRGC background can't come in, or do we want to differentiate?

I don't think we have the resources for that. I frankly don't even know if we have the resources to figure out whether these guys are IRGC or not. They fill out an immigration form. If they don't put down the IRGC membership or background.... They might say that they were working with the Iranian navy during their military service; I don't think we have the capability to say that they're lying.

**Hon. Omar Alghabra:** These are the challenges.

Professor Hampson, just a few days ago I was speaking with a constituent who is a Canadian citizen but is unable to travel to the U.S. because he was conscripted to the IRGC.

Is there any advice that you have for the government? If it were to proceed in that direction, what types of safeguards need to be included in this measure?

**The Chair:** You have 40 seconds.

**Dr. Fen Osler Hampson:** Well, I'm not a lawyer, and there are members of this committee who are lawyers, and some of those safeguards were alluded to earlier.

The question always is this: Do you want to err in the direction of greater security, or do you want to err in the direction of less security and, shall we say, greater respect for individual cases like the one you mentioned? There is no perfect answer to that.

As I tried to suggest earlier, we are now in an environment where we have to start taking security seriously, and this is one of those cases. Is it a perfect solution? No. Will it raise the bar? Yes, it will, for many of the reasons that I mentioned.

• (1825)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now go to MP Bergeron for a minute and a half.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Hampson, in the digital magazine Policy Options, you explained in 2012 that the Obama administration, at the time, needed to be firm with Iran and draw red lines. What's more, you were drawing a comparison with the Cuban missile crisis, which took place in 1962 and was resolved by deploying an enormous diplomatic effort. What's also notable is that the nuclear threat from Iran continues, 12 years after this article appeared, even though sanctions are being applied.

Why do you think this is the case? What should be done to try to turn things around, if it's still possible to do so?

[English]

**Dr. Fen Osler Hampson:** When the Iranian nuclear agreement was negotiated by Iran, the United States, and the other six parties, it wasn't a perfect solution, but I think there was a lot of hope that it would slow down Iran's nuclear ambitions.

I was a supporter of those agreements. Then there was a change of administration, and the United States essentially tore the whole thing up. That was probably a mistake, but we can't revisit history. Given the regional security tensions now, I don't think Iran will dial back on its nuclear ambitions. The realist in me says it's only a matter of time. In the current environment, it will probably accelerate, unless there is a change of regime in Iran, and I don't see that happening any time soon.

A lot of Iranians, as we all know, are extremely unhappy with the regime. I think it is important to support them. I think it is important to support the diaspora communities here that are strong voices for human rights. We can do that in a more systematic way. The project that I referred to—

**The Chair:** I'm so sorry, Mr. Hampson. We're a minute over.

**Dr. Fen Osler Hampson:** My apologies.

**The Chair:** For the last question, we will go to MP McPherson. You have a minute and a half.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Horak, I think with my minute and a half I'll ask you a question that I asked one of our witnesses earlier in the week with regard to the Houthis.

We know that the people of Yemen have suffered greatly over the past decade, first with the war, with the Saudi-led coalition that Canada supported politically, which of course led to a terrible humanitarian crisis, and now under the Houthis, who are brutal to civilians. There doesn't seem to be much hope of any change any time soon.

What actions can Canada take that would help the people in Yemen, who have already suffered so much?

**Mr. Dennis Horak:** We could do whatever we can to support the Saudi-Yemeni peace talks. That's the start, and to try to solidify those and offer them whatever support we can, but it's tough. The Houthis are very unpleasant. They are feeling emboldened now. Their willingness to make any sort of compromises with the Saudis will be lessened.

I think that, as we always do, it's to make ourselves available "if you need something", whether it be patrol boats or whatever it might be in the international community to support the international efforts to try to protect the shipping in the Red Sea and coming out of that. Those are the sorts of things we can do.

However, it's very tough at this moment because of the situation—because of the Houthis and how they're feeling. They're on the march, and they're not being rolled back.

• (1830)

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you very much. I think that's my minute and a half.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

That concludes our questions.

Professor Hampson and Mr. Horak, thank you very, very much for your generous commitment of time and for your expertise.

The meeting stands adjourned.

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