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• (1600)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 124 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

All witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of our meeting.

I'd like to remind all witnesses, and all of the members here, to wait until I recognize them by name. For those members, should you have any technical challenges or questions, please raise your hand if you're joining us virtually.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, September 19, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of Canada's advancement of a two-state solution.

Before we welcome our witnesses, as you will note, our old clerk is back. It's great to have you back, Ms. Widmer. I know I speak on behalf of everyone when I say that we're very happy to see you here today.

That said, we're very grateful to have two witnesses for the first 35 minutes.

We're grateful to have Mr. Eugene Kontorovich, who is the executive director for the Center for the Middle East and International Law, as well as Mr. Eylon Levy, who is a former spokesman for the Israeli government.

We will start with Mr. Kontorovich. You will have five minutes, sir, after which we will go to Mr. Levy, and then we will open it to questions from the members.

I should warn you beforehand, since you're joining us virtually, if you do see this signal going up, it means that you should be wrapping it up within 30 seconds. We have a tight schedule here, and we want to make sure that people don't go over the allotted time.

All of that having been explained, Mr. Kontorovich, the floor is now yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Professor Eugene Kontorovich (Director, Center for the Middle East and International Law at GMU Scalia Law School, As an Individual): Chairman Ehsassi, vice-chairmen Chong and Berg-

eron and honourable members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today on this important subject.

I'm a professor of international law and have extensively written scholarship on the legal aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The focus of today's discussion is on proposals that Canada imminently recognize Palestine as a sovereign state. Such a decision would lack any basis in international law and would add Canada to the lamentable trend of nations subordinating legal norms on state recognition to political considerations.

Recognizing a Palestinian state would undermine Canada's commitment to the integrity of a rules-based international order. That is because the existence or non-existence of sovereign states is a matter governed by international law, and the suggested recognition would not comport with the relevant rules.

The legal criteria for statehood are set out in the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States. They are fourfold: The entity must exercise effective and independent governmental control. The entity must possess a defined territory over which it exercises that control. The entity must have the capacity to freely engage in foreign relations and the entity must have effective control over a permanent population.

The Palestinian entity does not meet several of these criteria. To give just a few examples—and you can refer to my written brief for more details—the Palestinian Authority, which is the government, was created by bilateral agreements with Israel and possesses only those powers specifically transferred to it. Those include control of only parts of the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority controls no part of Gaza, having been evicted by a different government, Hamas, in 2006.

In short, there currently does not exist a Palestinian state under the objective criteria of international law. Canada knows this to be true, having officially declared on September 14, 2024, that it supports the creation of a Palestinian state. This demonstrates that the Government of Canada knows that no Palestinian state existed a month ago; otherwise, it would not need to be created. Nothing since then has changed. Palestine did not qualify as a state a month ago; it does not now.

International law does not regard recognition as creating statehood; rather, statehood must already exist on the ground. That is why Canada does not recognize the statehood of numerous national independence movements, many of which have suffered massive oppression and have worthy historical claims.

Recognition is not related to the justness of Palestinian national aspirations or the extent of their suffering. Surely this committee would not be prepared to minimize or downplay the suffering of the Kurdish people, the Sikh people or the Uyghur people, but that does not mean that there exists under international law a sovereign state of Kurdistan, Khalistan or East Turkmenistan.

Some might argue that other countries have recognized a Palestinian state, claiming that it would advance the peace process, but that was just a smoke screen. Have any of these actions brought peace closer? Have they reduced Palestinian support for Hamas, which is at over 70% in the West Bank, according to Palestinian opinion polls? Has it moderated the Fatah party, whose president, Mahmoud Abbas, publicly mourned the demise of mass murderer Sinwar and has himself not held an election in 15 years? Has it ended the Palestinian Authority's "pay for slay" policy or helped free a single hostage?

If anything, Palestinian stances have hardened, because they see their international recognition strategy as an outside path to getting their demands without changing their behaviour. Can strengthening Hamas, an Iranian puppet, be consistent with Canada's goal of achieving an independent and democratic Palestinian state?

Recognition in the current climate sends a message to Hamas that all of its goals, including the eventual elimination of Israel, can be achieved through vicious attacks followed by the extensive and illegal use of its own people as human shields.

Why do the people of Taiwan and Somaliland, who have peaceful, functioning governments, fail to get recognition while the Fatah- and Hamas-ruled Palestinians achieve it?

• (1605)

What message does this send to, say, Sikh nationalists, or any other kind of ethnic separatists? Is it that their failure to achieve their diplomatic goals comes solely from a lack of violence? How can one look them in the eye after this?

Considerations of international law and the promotion of Canada's stated—

The Chair: I apologize, Mr. Kontorovich. You've hit the five-minute mark. Could you wrap up in 30 seconds, please?

Prof. Eugene Kontorovich: Absolutely.

Considerations of international law and the promotion of Canada's stated interest in democracy and peace demonstrate that the recognition of a Palestinian state would be a grave mistake for Canada. It is completely understandable that many members of this House and this committee feel that more should be done to show solidarity with the Palestinian people, but recognition is not it. It does nothing for the Palestinian people, while rewarding their most criminal leaders.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that, Mr. Kontorovich.

We will now go to Mr. Levy.

Mr. Levy, you similarly have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Eylon Levy (Former Israeli Government Spokesman, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank the standing committee for the opportunity to speak.

I was an Israeli government spokesman for the first six months of the October 7 war, and now I speak to you in a private capacity in the hope of encouraging our ally, Canada, to avoid steps that would be destructive to the cause of peace.

Most Palestinians believe that the October 7 massacre was a good idea, and they believe it was a good idea because the world has rewarded them for it. According to regular polling, a large majority of Palestinians believe that the October 7 massacre was the correct decision by the government of Gaza, Hamas, and that's because they believe it has taken their national cause forward.

They see nations like Norway, Ireland and Spain unilaterally recognizing statehood, and they conclude, entirely rationally, that terrorism works.

Now, "terrorism works" might not be the message that well-meaning lawmakers want to send to the Palestinians, but it is the message they are receiving. Palestinians see that Hamas's genocidal violence on October 7 triggered waves of protests calling for the violent destruction of Israel. They see that it leads to more money for UNRWA, a Hamas front, and they conclude rationally that barbaric atrocities are the way to mobilize international opinion to their national cause, the elimination of Israel, as protesters here in Canada are chanting "From the river to the sea".

Now, I understand that there are demands for Canada to recognize the State of Palestine outside of a peace settlement with Israel, following the barbaric atrocities of October 7. That would be a terrible mistake.

When Norway, Ireland and Spain took that step, they were effectively telling Palestinians, "Burn more Jewish families alive, and we will reward you." I'm confident that none of the honourable members of this committee would wish to encourage the Palestinians to take hostages again—like Canadian citizen Judith Weinstein, whose body is still held hostage—and they would in fact be horrified to think that this would be the consequence of such an action. However, that is exactly what unilateral recognition would do, and that incentive must be avoided at all costs.

The underlying cause of the conflict remains that Israel is surrounded by enemies who wish to destroy it. The Palestinian national movement remains committed to an ideology of a forever war against Israel, until it achieves its goal of no Jewish state anywhere between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. I would challenge the committee members to find any Palestinian speaker who would embrace a vision of two states for two peoples.

Also, the Palestinian movement is backed by an Iranian regime that has surrounded Israel with a ring of fire, arming proxy armies to wage war on seven fronts, and would seek to exploit any further vacuum to continue its attacks on Israel.

Now the challenge for policy-makers is to strengthen the voices that seek peace by accepting Israel's permanent existence and the Jewish people's right to self-determination in their ancient homeland. Currently, international practice is empowering those who are committed to waging a forever war against the Jewish state.

World leaders must aim to induce the Palestinians to abandon that forever war against Israel. That means, for example, ending the farce of UNRWA. UNRWA openly employs terrorists who took part in the October 7 massacre using Canadian taxpayer money. It indoctrinates Palestinian children to glorify martyrdom. Since UNRWA educates most of Gaza's children, it is a fact that most of the October 7 terrorists went to Canadian-funded schools. That is an appalling indictment of Canadian foreign policy.

UNRWA also tells Palestinians that they are entitled to welfare at the expense of the Canadian taxpayer until they achieve their vision of no more Israel. Canadian funding to this Hamas front therefore discourages Palestinians from reconciling with Israel's permanent existence, pushing hopes of peace further away.

I'll point out another way that Canadian foreign policy has pushed away prospects of a two-state solution. Israelis are now scarred by the failures of past withdrawals. In 2000, we left southern Lebanon, and we got Hezbollah. In 2005, we left Gaza, and we got Hamas. Israelis have every reason to think that a further withdrawal from the West Bank would lead to the creation of another Iranian puppet state committed to Israel's ultimate destruction.

Israelis have learned the hard way, while Palestinians are chanting "From the river to the sea," that we cannot afford to give them from the river to nine miles away from the sea so that they can sprint the remaining distance.

Canada's failure to fully back Israel's neutralization of the terrorist armies that filled the vacuums created by its own withdrawals has taught Israelis that if they take risks for peace, they will be on their own, and the world will expect them to tolerate these threats on their borders. Any future settlement and any future Palestinian state must therefore be predicated on full Israeli security control west of the Jordan to avoid its takeover as an Iranian client state.

In conclusion, if Canada wishes to play a constructive role toward a two-state solution, then it needs to create a pathway toward peace. That pathway runs through Palestinian deradicalization. It means conditioning any change in the international status of the Palestinian Authority on an embrace of peace, an acceptance of Israel and stopping funding for agencies that support, encourage and incentivize a forever war against Israel.

● (1610)

It means giving Israel its full backing to eliminate all and any threats from territory that it vacates under pressure. The Palestinians must not be allowed to look back on October 7 as a national holiday—

The Chair: Mr. Levy, I apologize for interrupting. Could you wrap it up in the next 20 seconds, please?

Mr. Eylon Levy: This will be my concluding sentence.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Eylon Levy: The Palestinians must not be allowed to look back on October 7 as a national holiday, and that is exactly what states pursuing unilateral recognition are encouraging them to do.

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

For the first round, each member will have three minutes. I really will cut everyone off at the three-minute mark.

Mr. Chong, you have three minutes, sir.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing.

We heard at our last committee meeting about the support—current support, historical support—for a two-state solution in the region. My view is that there can be no lasting and durable peace in the Middle East unless there is a negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians that results in that two-state solution and that also has the popular support of both Israelis and Palestinians.

I'm interested in exploring the historical levels of support in the State of Israel among the Palestinian people for a two-state solution and the present levels of support. I'm wondering if our witnesses could speak to that fact.

As I understand it, there are about 9.8 million Israeli citizens. I'm wondering what the levels of support have been historically for a two-state solution and what the levels of support are presently. Also, approximately five million residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip are Palestinian. I'm wondering how levels of support for a two-state solution have varied historically among that second population.

The Chair: That question is for...?

Hon. Michael Chong: It's for both.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Levy.

● (1615)

Mr. Eylon Levy: Thank you, sir, for your question.

Support in Israel for a two-state solution has fallen over the years, and especially since October 7. Part of the reason is that on October 7, Hamas murdered many of the supporters of a two-state solution. Many of the victims of the massacre were peace activists who would drive Palestinian children to hospitals in Israel. They were burned alive on October 7. Israelis have unfortunately come to the conclusion that any territorial withdrawal would lead to the creation of another Iranian puppet state, and that a withdrawal, far from advancing the cause of peace, would in fact serve as a possibility for the Palestinians to use a springboard towards their ultimate goal of the destruction of the State of Israel.

When you see even so-called moderate leaders on the Palestinian side saying that Hamas is an integral part of the Palestinian movement, and that if there were elections they would gladly cede control to Hamas, and you see them mourning the death of Yahya Sinwar, all of their behaviour has convinced Israelis that on the other side we do not have a partner for peace, because their ultimate goal is the destruction of the State of Israel, and that any concessions would in fact be exploited to advance that ultimate goal of the destruction of the State of Israel and would push peace further away rather than bringing it forward. I would hope that—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Levy. I'm afraid we're out of time.

Mr. Eylon Levy: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we will go to MP Alghabra for three minutes, please.

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

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us this afternoon, or whatever time zone you're in.

Maybe I'll start with you, Mr. Kontorovich. Do you believe Palestinians have an inalienable right to self-determination?

Prof. Eugene Kontorovich: Thank you for the question.

Every people has a right to self-determination—as do the Sikhs, as do the Kurds, as do the Somalilanders, as do people around the world. In international law, the right to self-determination does not amount to a right to statehood, which is why there are far fewer states than there are self-determination groups—

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I'm sorry. I appreciate that. I just have limited time.

The examples you keep using are secession examples in which there are competing claims for statehood. I'm curious; what do you feel or what do you think...? What is your legal opinion of settlements in the West Bank?

Prof. Eugene Kontorovich: My legal opinion of settlements in the West Bank is that there is no international law that forbids members of a particular ethnic group from living in a particular territory as a virtue of their ethnicity.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Thank you.

Mr. Levy, I have a couple of questions for you.

In July, the Knesset voted overwhelmingly to reject the idea of the creation of a Palestinian state. What do you think about that motion?

Mr. Eylon Levy: I think it is easy to forget that only 20 years ago, Israelis voted for a party that promised a unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank, if necessary, to define Israel's borders. The experience since then has scarred them, because it has led Israelis to the conclusion that any territorial concessions to the Palestinians would mean more rockets and more death squads of the style of October 7—

Hon. Omar Alghabra: My question for you....

I'm sorry, Mr. Levy. I have limited time. I don't mean to interrupt you. I apologize.

Mr. Eylon Levy: Sure.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Do you support a two-state solution? That resolution does not support a two-state solution.

Mr. Eylon Levy: I would say that at present, the conditions do not exist for that sort of resolution to the conflict.

If we were to ensure that a two-state solution would solve the conflict rather than aggravate it, that pathway to peace would have to run through the deradicalization of Palestinian society and its acceptance of the permanent existence of the State of Israel. However, as long as the Palestinian national movement remains committed to the ultimate demise of the State of Israel and appears likely to become an Iranian client state, a two-state solution would aggravate the conflict in the Middle East, and it would be against everyone's interests—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Levy. I'm afraid I'm going to have to turn to our next member.

Mr. Bergeron, you have three minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

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

I heard a number of comments that surprised me a bit, including that Palestine would not be entitled to international recognition since it has no control over its people. However, I have had the opportunity to visit Palestine and Israel a few times, particularly in the early 2000s, and I saw that Israel was systematically working to destroy police stations and port and airport facilities—so all the infrastructure that would allow for effective control over the territory—rather than attacking what seems to be its objective, terrorist movements.

I heard Mr. Kontorovich say that the recognition of Palestine by a number of states around the world didn't change anything. Has the occupation since 1967 resulted in peace and security in the region? The answer is obvious. It has actually only fuelled resentment and despair, as I believe the ongoing destruction operations in Gaza are doing. Even if Israel succeeds in eradicating Hamas, Israel feeds the idea of Hamas by creating resentment among the Palestinian population.

I have two questions.

There is insistence that no recognition can take place without an agreement at the end of direct negotiations. Yet, on the one hand, there are no negotiations, and on the other hand, Israel is saying that it doesn't want to negotiate at all.

However, it is claimed that recognizing the state of Palestine would encourage Hamas, which does not want a two-state solution.

How do we reconcile these contradictory statements, to say the least?

• (1620)

[English]

Prof. Eugene Kontorovich: Let me respond to that. Thank you so much for the questions.

Hamas seeks to advance political pressure on Israel. Hamas leaders were quoted in *The New York Times* after October 7, saying they believed their attack was an extraordinary success. Khalil al-Hayya, a senior Hamas official in Doha, said that as a result of October 7, “We succeeded in putting the Palestinian issue back on the table”.

That’s why it’s a success and that is why they continue to not release the hostages—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kontorovich. I’m afraid we’re out of time.

We next go to MP McPherson.

You have three minutes.

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

This morning I met with Iris Weinstein, daughter of Judih Weinstein, a Canadian who was a resident of kibbutz Nir Oz. She and her husband were murdered by Hamas on October 7, and their bodies remain in Hamas captivity.

Judih Weinstein volunteered with peace groups helping Palestinians in Gaza access health care in Israel. She worked with Jewish and Palestinian children by teaching them mindfulness, which helped build resilience when surrounded by violence. We New Democrats want all hostages returned, including the remains of Judih Weinstein, a Canadian and an Israeli, who believed in doing her part to build peace and work across borders.

Judih believed in a two-state solution. and as I think of Judih, I also think of other peace builders in Israel. I think of Standing Together, which has organized thousands of Israelis and Palestinians to march in the streets to call for a ceasefire, a hostage deal and an end to Israel’s war in Gaza. I think of Gil Murciano, CEO of Mitvim, who said, “For years, we used to talk about wars of no choice. But now, after October 7, it’s time to shift the conversation. We must talk about a peace of no choice.”

There are so many Israelis who are ready to do the work for peace and who are supported by the many members of the Jewish community in Canada, including through the New Israel Fund.

We know that Netanyahu and his extremist government and its supporters are not here for peace or for a two-state solution. We know that there are loud voices crying out for more violence, more death, more war.

We want to hear from those voices that offer hope.

When I think of Judih Weinstein, who grew mangoes and peanuts, who wrote poetry for peace, I also think of the Palestinian families in the West Bank who grow olives and who also see land as life, who for generations have gone to their olive groves to harvest the olives that symbolize their hard work, their livelihood and their love of Palestine. Palestinian olive farmers dream of harvesting their olives in peace, but extremist settlers in the West Bank, emboldened by the extremist Netanyahu government and enabled by Israeli soldiers, are attacking Palestinians on their own land, burning their olive groves and cutting down their trees.

As we sit here today listening to apologists for an extremist government that is continuing a genocide in Gaza, trying to annex Palestinian land in both Gaza and the West Bank and make a two-state solution impossible, we need to ask ourselves, not just as the foreign affairs committee but as Canadians, what we stand for.

Hamas and Sinwar did not want a two-state solution. Netanyahu and his extremists do not want a two-state solution.

Our job is to find a pathway to peace. Our job is to learn from peace builders, not warmongers, not those who defend atrocities. This must end.

It is time for Canada to do the hard work to build that peace. It should start today with the recognition of Palestine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1625)

The Chair: We next go to MP Aboultaif.

You have two minutes.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I’ll make it quick.

It seems as though on both sides no one wants a two-state solution. It’s very unfortunate.

Before October 7, was a two-state solution feasible, and what changed after October 7?

The question is for Mr. Levy and the second witness.

Mr. Eylon Levy: Thank you, sir, for your question.

I would argue that at present, there are two dynamics that mitigate the prospect of a two-state reality leading to peace.

The first is profound radicalization on the Palestinian side, the commitment to the destruction of the State of Israel from the river to the sea. Indeed, I see that when protesters on the streets of Canada are chanting “From the river to the sea,” there are no Palestinian speakers who correct them and say that this is not in fact their goal.

The second is the exploitation of any power vacuum in the Middle East by the Iranian axis in order to fill it with proxy armies with which to attack Israel.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Before the October 7—

Mr. Eylon Levy: I would say October 7 has exacerbated those two problems, because it brought to the fore the depth of the Palestinian extremism problem. Even many Israelis who had previously supported a two-state solution have been turned against it as a result of October 7, because they realized the extremism problem was worse than they had grasped.

The second is the understanding of just how high the risks are of territory being taken over by the Iranian axis. Let's remember that Israel is not as large as Canada. This would leave Israel only nine miles wide at its narrowest point.

I would say that October 7 has shone a light on the negative trends that existed before and has crystallized an understanding among many Israelis about why a two-state solution without the containment of the Iranian regime and without Palestinian deradicalization and acceptance of Israel's existence would only push peace further away rather than bring it forward, as we would all like to see happen.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Do you believe in the Oslo framework, yes or no?

The Chair: I'm afraid, Mr. Aboultaif, you're out of time.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: It was one question, please. It was a good question.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but it was for two minutes.

We next go to Dr. Fry for two minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

The objective of this study is to find out how we can get to a two-state solution, not whether we should. I want to say to the witnesses that this is not what we're here to talk about. Canada has long—for decades, actually—sought a two-state solution, as have many countries. Whether you think it's fair or not is not the issue.

How does one get there? That's the question we want to ask. Canada has always supported a two-state solution, and Canada is basically saying, "How do we do this, in keeping with international law, fairness and justice?"

It's obvious that neither of you supports a two-state solution, so I'm not going to ask you about that. It's about how we can get to that position. Generations of Palestinian and Jewish children are growing up in a place where they have no dreams and hope. Let's get to a solution and move forward. Can you tell me how we can do that?

Only stick to that, please.

I will go to Mr. Kontorovich, who has his hand up. Please remember that I don't have much time. I don't want long answers. I want simple answers.

Thank you.

Prof. Eugene Kontorovich: I have said nothing, when you review the record, against a two-state solution—

Hon. Hedy Fry: I don't want you to dwell on it. Please answer my question.

Prof. Eugene Kontorovich: Yes. The deradicalization of the Palestinians to reduce their support from Hamas from maybe over 70% to less than half, would be very helpful. That means not rewarding Hamas. That means not funding UNRWA, which teaches Palestinians to hate and despise Israel and to see no role for Israel in the world.

• (1630)

Hon. Hedy Fry: I just wanted to note that actually Hamas does not want a two-state solution either. Israel does not and Hamas does not.

Can Mr. Levy tell me how we can get it?

The Chair: Dr. Fry, I'm afraid your two minutes are up.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you.

The Chair: There are no more questions.

At this juncture, I'd like to thank our two witnesses. Thank you very much, Mr. Kontorovich and Mr. Levy. We're grateful for your perspective and for kindly appearing before our committee.

Prof. Eugene Kontorovich: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee.

Mr. Eylon Levy: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: We're going to suspend for three minutes, and then we're going to move on to the next panel.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1630)

The Chair: We will resume our hearing and go to the second panel.

We're grateful to have Professor Musu with us from the University of Ottawa's graduate school of public and international affairs.

We also have Peter Larson, who is the chair of the Ottawa Forum on Israel/Palestine.

Last, we are very grateful to have Professor Waxman, who is the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation chair in Israeli studies at UCLA.

We'll start off with Professor Musu. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

I will ask witnesses to look over here at times, because if you see this sign, it means you should be wrapping it up within 20 seconds.

Professor Musu, welcome. The floor is yours.

• (1635)

Ms. Costanza Musu (Associate Professor, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for the invitation to speak today.

I would start with a statement of a position: I believe that there is no other solution than a two-state solution.

This is an opening statement, but I would also like to try to answer a question. I've listened to the other testimonies that you received today and on Tuesday. What I would like to do in these few minutes is to actually try to answer the question of why we are talking about whether Canada should recognize Palestine or not and where this idea that the recognition of Palestine should only come as a result of negotiations comes from.

It's an important question to ask before we actually say it is time to change our position: How did we get there?

I would start from a step back. This idea of the two states is not dated 1947; it actually predates the UN declaration. It really dates from the thirties. The Peel commission in the thirties proposed two states. It was a different two states, but the original idea predates both World War II and the Holocaust.

When the State of Israel was established in 1948 after the first Arab-Israeli war, Israel did not control the West Bank and Gaza was not on the borders of resolution 181 but was rather on what we have now come to call the Green Line. Basically, from 1949 until 1967, the West Bank was controlled by Jordan and Gaza was controlled by Egypt.

Jordan annexed the West Bank; Egypt did not annex the West Bank. The annexation by Jordan was not recognized internationally, other than by the U.K., at least from an administrative point of view, and Pakistan. Egypt kept the Gaza Strip as essentially a refugee area and did not give Egyptian citizenship to the Palestinians, while Jordan did, which is why so many Palestinians still have Jordanian citizenship.

The question is that once Israel got control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, originally it did not plan to keep this control, so it is important to remember why we are in this position today. The plan and the strategic priority of the State of Israel was actually that of bilateral negotiation with other sovereign states in the region, and reciprocal recognition. We saw that in 1979 with Camp David. We saw that in 1994 with Jordan.

To wrap up, as I'm aware of the time, when the Oslo agreement took place and what we call the Israeli-Palestinian—rather than the Israeli-Arab—peace process started, there was a lot of road still to travel. I would argue that the priorities of Israel were actually not with the Palestinian issue but much more with establishing itself in the region.

The reason there was so much hesitation—by now, it had already been a couple of decades—to immediately recognize the Palestini-

an state is that this final status negotiation was so complex to address. Reciprocal trust had to be built, and instead of immediately recognizing Palestine when the parties were so far apart and when the Palestine Liberation Organization had just transitioned from essentially being an activist organization or even, as defined by some, a terrorist organization, to the official representative of the Palestinian people, it was quite understandable that this would be a precaution.

• (1640)

I would say that now the question to ask—and I believe this is the question that you're all reflecting on—is this: Are the conditions on the ground different? Is there now a reason to change that policy and think that this can be done before the rest?

The Chair: Professor Musu, could ask that you wrap it up?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: And the answer is...?

Ms. Costanza Musu: It's in the questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

We now go to Mr. Larson.

Mr. Larson, welcome. You similarly have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Larson (Chair, Ottawa Forum on Israel Palestine): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll do my best.

I thank the members of the committee for having me here today.

[*English*]

I'm honoured to share the same platform as a number of your distinguished witnesses preceding me, including people like Professor Ardi Imseis and former Canadian ambassador to Israel Jon Allen.

My organization, OFIP, endorses Ambassador Allen's view as reported in the press:

Recognizing a Palestinian state now is about sending a message of hope and commitment to Palestinians and sending a clear message to Israel and others that simply managing the conflict, Israel's policy for the last 17 years, is not an option and never was.

I would add that Canada's recognition of Palestinian statehood would enhance the ability of Palestinians to advance their rights internationally, supporting them as they seek representation and justice in international forums. It would send a message more broadly to the global south that Canada exercises its sovereignty by supporting international law without fear or favour, whether applied to friend or foe.

OFIP believes that Canada's former position of agreeing to the idea of a Palestinian state only after it has reached agreement with the State of Israel was untenable. To draw a parallel with domestic policy, it would be like supporting a woman's right to divorce as long as her husband agreed.

We are encouraged by Minister Joly's new formulation, issued a month ago, that Canada reserves the right to recognize the State of Palestine at the right time. We believe the right time is now.

Many would argue that recognition of the State of Palestine is merely a symbolic act because Palestine does not have the powers of a state. That is true. Today the government of Palestine does not control its own borders, its own water, its own airspace or its own telecommunications. It does not have an airport, and its only sea-port is under blockade. Israel exerts complete control over the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem in defiance of several UN resolutions.

However, recognizing states that are not yet in control of their territory has many precedents. During World War II, many western countries recognized governments in exile from countries under Nazi occupation.

Recognizing Palestine, however, is not only symbolic. If Canada recognizes Palestine, this must have concrete repercussions. Among these are a revision of the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement, Canadian support for full membership of Palestine at the UN and full support for Palestine's right to use international institutions, including the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice.

Canada's recognition of the State of Palestine should be without prejudice to the outcome of any future negotiations between the parties. A future solution to the Israel-Palestine issue might be a two-state solution, it could be a fusion to create a single state or it could be some kind of confederation.

Canada should prioritize urgent action in support of human rights and freedom. Canada's focus should not be on endless negotiations about a two-state solution but on the urgent need to protect Palestinian rights.

Canada should, without delay, join the over 130 countries in the world today, including several European allies, that officially recognize the State of Palestine.

Thank you very much.

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

We now turn to Professor Waxman.

Welcome, Professor Waxman. I understand that you're joining us from California. You're a few hours behind. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

• (1645)

Mr. Dov Waxman (Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Professor of Israel Studies, University of California Los Angeles, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the standing committee for the opportunity to talk with you today about Canada's advancement of a two-state solution.

Let me begin by saying that I continue to believe that a two-state solution remains the best means for bringing peace to both Israelis and Palestinians. The terrible bloodshed and tragedy over the past

year I think underscores the urgent need to bring peace to both peoples.

I think we also have to recognize that the two-state solution is more endangered today, more at risk today, than it has ever been before. The possibility of a two-state solution is diminishing day by day. I think unless significant action is taken, it will soon disappear altogether.

I believe that the most important action Canada could take to save a two-state solution would be to recognize the State of Palestine, as Spain, Norway, and Ireland, of course, already did earlier this year, and as just over 75% of the UN members have done.

Now, some argue that recognition of Palestinian statehood would be an empty gesture. On the contrary; I think if Canada were to recognize the Palestinian state, it would make Canada's recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination and Canada's support for a two-state solution not merely empty rhetoric. Recognition would be a tangible step that Canada could take to help Palestinians achieve their long-standing quest for national self-determination. Recognition of a Palestinian state at this point in time would help keep the possibility of a two-state solution alive.

I think there is a real danger that this possibility will soon disappear. If Palestinians don't achieve statehood soon, they will likely, as I think surveys show, give up on support for a Palestinian state and increasingly demand equal rights in a one-state framework, as younger Palestinians are already doing. If that becomes the Palestinian norm, then rather than the pursuit of statehood, there will be a very long—I think decades-long—struggle for equal rights within a single state.

Recognition of a Palestinian state would also boost Palestinian support for a two-state solution and save the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Authority, of course, was established under the Oslo accords as an interim step toward the establishment of the Palestinian state. It has essentially lost its legitimacy among the Palestinian public. I think it could well collapse in the next few years, forcing Israel to take over complete responsibility for the West Bank. Recognizing a Palestinian state I think would really help boost the legitimacy of a reformed Palestinian Authority—I want to emphasize that—in the eyes of the Palestinian public.

It would also, of course, increase diplomatic pressure on Israel to end its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories and its ongoing settlement activity there. The stationing of international diplomats in the West Bank could also increase scrutiny of Israel's actions in the West Bank.

I want to emphasize that recognizing a Palestinian state is not an alternative to peace talks. On the contrary; I think it's a means to help peace talks succeed. Ultimately, the only solution to the conflict lies in a negotiated solution, but in order to reach such a solution, I think we need to ensure that the prospects for a negotiation are more likely to succeed. Recognizing Palestinian statehood would help do that. It would help to put it on equal par with Israel so that it would be negotiations between two states, the state of Israel and the State of Palestine.

You've already heard earlier today the claim that recognition of Palestinian statehood would be a reward for Hamas's terrorism, but this completely ignores the fact that Hamas does not support a two-state solution. Hamas does not want a Palestinian state alongside Israel; they want a Palestinian state instead of Israel. On the contrary—to the speakers earlier today—recognizing Palestinian statehood would actually undermine and weaken support for Hamas by showing Palestinians that there is an alternative path—a non-violent path, a diplomatic path—to help them achieve their legitimate rights.

Finally, contrary to the claim that some may make that now is not the time to recognize Palestinian statehood and that we should wait, I think waiting will in fact only make the situation worse. Support for a two-state solution is declining day by day. Conditions on the ground, in particular in the West Bank, are continuing to deteriorate.

After what we witnessed over the past year, and particularly what we saw on October 7, it is very clear that managing this conflict and going along with the usual means is not working. It's not bringing safety to Israelis and it's not bringing rights or security to Palestinians.

• (1650)

I think what's urgently needed is bold action to save a two-state solution, and this is the best action Canada can take in the near term to help achieve and create the conditions for a successful two-state solution.

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Waxman.

We'll now go to the members for their questions.

Mr. Chong, start us off. You have five minutes, but I will undertake to cut everyone off at the five-minute point.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are for Professor Waxman and build off his opening statement.

What territory would this state have? Would it include all of the West Bank, as traditionally delineated by the 1968 borders, or not?

Second, who would the citizens of this state be? Would it include the some two million Israeli Arabs and other Palestinians in Jordan and elsewhere?

Third, what entity would be considered the government of that state?

The Chair: Professor Waxman, before you respond, can I ask you to move up your mic? I've heard from the technicians that we're having a bit of a hard time picking you up for translation.

Mr. Dov Waxman: Yes. I'm sorry.

The Chair: Thank you kindly.

Mr. Dov Waxman: Thank you very much for those very important questions.

First of all, on the question of borders, the recognition of a Palestinian state should be within the June 4 lines, the lines that existed before the 1967 war. In other words, it's within the Green Line. This doesn't preclude the negotiation of final borders between the State of Palestine and the State of Israel. Ultimately, the final borders of a Palestinian state and of the State of Israel have to be negotiated between the two sides. I think the recognition should be within the June 4, 1967 lines.

On the question of citizens, ultimately it is clearly up to the State of Palestine, as a sovereign state, to decide its citizenship policies. We should be very careful about assuming that somehow citizens of Israel who are Palestinian Arabs would be future citizens of such a state. Most have said, quite clearly, that they wish to remain citizens of the State of Israel and that their citizenship should remain in Israel. Of course, they may well be granted dual citizenship by the State of Palestine if they wish to claim that and if the State of Palestine were to grant it.

In terms of the government, there is already a quasi-government functioning in the West Bank. This is, of course, the Palestinian Authority, which, as I mentioned, was established under the Oslo accords. I think recognition of Palestinian statehood should be linked to reforms undertaken by the Palestinian Authority, particularly democratic reforms, such as ensuring judicial reform. We have a kind of embryonic Palestinian government already in existence; that government needs to be given greater legitimacy. Affording it statehood would give it legitimacy and enable it to govern not only the West Bank but also, ultimately, the Gaza Strip.

Hon. Michael Chong: I would like to ask a second question of Professor Musu as well as you, Professor Waxman.

You both hinted at declining support for a two-state solution on both sides of this conflict. I'd like you to describe what the levels of support are for a two-state solution among both Palestinians and Israelis.

Mr. Dov Waxman: Shall I go first?

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes.

Mr. Dov Waxman: The latest polls of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza that I've seen put support for a two-state solution at around 40%, which is actually an uptick lately. It had declined to around a third of Palestinians. Lately, it's gone up to about 40%. There's actually much higher support currently. Among Israeli Jews, it's only around 21%.

It's important to note that when we look at levels of public support for a two-state solution, a lot of that support depends upon whether they believe a two-state solution is feasible. In other words, when you ask, "Do you support a two-state solution?", in many ways what they're responding to is whether they believe such a solution is possible. The major reason that support has declined over time is not that they're opposed to such a solution in principle, on either side; rather, it's because they've come to the conclusion that the other side isn't interested in such a solution.

That's why there's—

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. Thank you.

Go ahead, Professor Musu.

Ms. Costanza Musu: I quite agree with my colleague.

The question is framed as, "It is not possible". We heard from the previous speakers as well that this kind of persuasion has built up since the withdrawal from Lebanon. Lebanon brought us Hezbollah, and then Hamas in Gaza. We shouldn't forget that after multiple Netanyahu governments in Israel, the idea that it's possible to create a peaceful state in Palestine has thinned out to nothing, so the question you're asking is not the one being asked when people are polled.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to MP Chatel.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I welcome all the witnesses.

I'll go to you, Ms. Musu, if I may.

Your research has really explored Canada's relations with the United States, as well as with its European allies, concerning this conflict.

How do you think Canada could leverage its partnerships with the United States and Europe, with which it maintains close relations, to try to support significant progress towards a two-state solution? How can Canada specifically leverage its alliances with the United States and with European countries to achieve this?

Ms. Costanza Musu: Thank you very much for the question. I will answer in English, since it will be easier for me.

[*English*]

I would premise that the role that Canada can have and has had in the peace process has been, by necessity, quite limited, in the

sense that Canada has been able to contribute at different times to the peace process as kind of a holder of the refugee working group on occasion.

You mentioned my research. I think this has not necessarily been the priority for Canada. A lot of the priority has been how to place the Middle East policy in the context of alliances. This is why I was suggesting to go back and think about why Canada agreed with this idea of waiting to recognize Palestine. Is there now something that can suggest a departure from that regional position?

It is not unknown for Canada to depart from its previous alliances. It has done so on a number of occasions. Obviously, the dominating factor here is whether the recognition of a Palestinian state could possibly—I'll be quite blunt—hurt our relations with the United States in a context in which the United States does not support that particular step.

I think we are a little bit at a crossroads in deciding what the priorities are and what kind of contribution this kind of recognition would give to the peace process. I do think that at this stage, given the situation on the ground, a recognition of a Palestinian state not coupled with any other initiative to actually further the process will mostly be symbolic and have relatively little impact on the ground. I think there should be a little bit more than just that.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you very much, Ms. Musu.

I know I don't have much time left, but I'd like to turn to you, Mr. Waxman.

You argued that recognizing a Palestinian state could strengthen the two-state solution. Can you tell us a little more specifically about the outcome we might expect if Canada were to take the step of recognizing the Palestinian state? What would be the positive impact not only on Israeli politics, but also on regional dynamics? You mentioned earlier that this could give Palestine the status it needs to undertake these important negotiations on an equal footing, but beyond that, would there be more concrete results?

• (1700)

[*English*]

Mr. Dov Waxman: Thank you for your question.

In some ways, I think the recognition of a Palestinian state at this point in time is a preventive measure. It's about providing Palestinians with another option, one that is not represented by Hamas's armies. It's about showing that they can achieve an end to their occupation and achieve their national rights through diplomacy. That, in turn, would not only boost Palestinian support for a two-state solution, thereby making a resumption of the peace process more likely in the future; it would also boost legitimacy for the Palestinian Authority.

We have to really take seriously the possibility, as many have been warning, of a collapse of the Palestinian Authority in the near future if its legitimacy is not boosted.

I would also say, though, that if and when negotiations were to take place, having negotiations between two equal parties, two states, rather than, as has been the case in the past, between a state and a people that is not a state, increases the likelihood of success. It gives the State of Palestine more leverage in peace talks, more legitimacy, and it puts more pressure on Israel to end the occupation.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Waxman.

We now go to Monsieur Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for five minutes.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us and for enlightening us with their comments.

I think some of you have responded to the argument that others are trying to make, that the lack of support for the two-state solution in both Palestine and Israel should prevent the recognition of the state of Palestine by the Government of Canada. What we understand from your testimony is that, on the contrary, Canada's recognition of Palestine could increase support for the two-state solution in both Palestine and Israel. I think that offers a great deal of hope. So this argument is in favour of such recognition.

As our colleague Ms. Fry pointed out earlier, the purpose of our study isn't so much to determine whether it's appropriate to recognize Palestine, but rather to determine when it should be recognized.

My colleague Ms. McPherson often repeats that the government could immediately recognize Palestine, so much so that some see the process we are currently engaged in as a kind of ultimate delay, a dilatory measure designed to postpone what should be done now.

My question is for all three witnesses.

The government says it is waiting for the right time, but it has never defined the right time to recognize Palestine. Do you think the time is right?

Let's start with Mr. Larson, who hasn't had a chance to answer any questions yet.

Mr. Peter Larson: Yes, the time is right.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Why is that?

Mr. Peter Larson: Why wait? What would be the logic behind that?

We really need to understand the situation we are facing right now. It's very difficult to find a Palestinian who wants a two-state solution. That said, a lot of Palestinians will accept it, although they may want something else.

I challenge you to find a Palestinian who thinks that Jaffa and Haifa are not part of Palestine. When I arrive at Ben Gurion airport, the poster in Hebrew and English welcomes me to Israel, but when

my Palestinian friends see me there, they welcome me to Palestine. So in the hearts of all Palestinians, Jaffa, Beersheba and Haifa are still part of Palestine.

We have been saying for a long time that we are going to recognize the state of Palestine. In my opinion, the longer this drags on, the more frustrating it gets.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: What do you think, Ms. Musu?

[*English*]

Ms. Costanza Musu: It is not a great moment in the sense that the timing following October 7 opens the move to a lot of questions. I think that is problematic. The idea itself of supporting the two-state solution, however, which is enshrined in the Canadian policy, remains valid.

I do think there is a problem with the timing, in the sense that it does come really on the heels of something that opens up...especially if it's done exclusively as a recognition, but with no other action.

The problem I see is that in the past several years, the Palestinian question has been completely on the back burner for everyone. One could travel, as you might have done, to Israel and not at all know that there is a Palestinian question that needs to be resolved. As someone who has observed this, you would think that this would have been maybe a better time to really try to build, and now the confidence between the two parties is at an all-time low. This is why I said that recognition alone, without any other more substantial plan, a move that is concerted, is a limited step.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'd like to hear your answer as well, Mr. Waxman.

[*English*]

Mr. Dov Waxman: Thank you.

In the century-long history—

The Chair: Mr. Waxman, you have 15 seconds and no more. Thank you.

Mr. Dov Waxman: Yes, I think now is exactly the right time, although obviously there are very difficult circumstances in Gaza, in the West Bank and politically in Israel.

I think it is really important for a significant initiative to be launched at this time. There's no prospect for a resumption of serious negotiations. In the absence of that, taking the initiative and making it clear that Palestinian hopes can be realized in the form of a two-state solution would save that and counter the radicalization processes that are happening, not only in the region but around the world, as more people start to call for a one-state solution and believe that and give up hope in a two-state solution.

I think, actually, this is—

The Chair: Professor Waxman, I'm sorry. I'm going to have to cut you off.

MP McPherson, you have five minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today and sharing their expertise with us.

I'm going to start with you, Professor Waxman.

I appreciate when you said that the most important thing Canada could do to save the two-state solution is recognition of Palestine. I think that's a vital piece of testimony.

I'm also interested in the conversation that is happening in the United States right now regarding American arms sales to Israel. We've seen many experts wondering why the Biden administration is ignoring the Leahy law, which declares that the U.S. cannot arm human rights abusers. It's similar to our Canadian legislation, which our government is also not respecting. We've called for an arms embargo while this genocide continues.

I'm wondering if you could talk about where the conversation is in the United States and why that law is not being upheld.

Mr. Dov Waxman: I think there has certainly been a growing criticism, both inside the Beltway in Washington and within the Democratic Party, over the Biden administration's apparent unwillingness to uphold U.S. law with regard to arms sales.

There does seem to be some movement recently. A few weeks ago, a letter was sent, basically telling the Israeli government that unless they allowed more humanitarian aid in, there would be a restriction on arms sales.

Clearly, things are shifting. I think the conversation is shifting toward thinking about imposing restrictions on U.S. military aid to Israel. President Biden has made it very clear that he's not willing to countenance that, but if there's a different administration—if there's a Harris administration—I think you will see more willingness to do that.

More broadly, I think there is a recognition that there needs to be some fundamental changes in the U.S. approach to this conflict. I think that even includes considering the recognition of a Palestinian state as well.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you. That comes to my next question.

I am very curious. The whole world, of course, is watching the United States next week, as you have your presidential elections. I will be in Milwaukee as part of an observation mission.

I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about the impacts of this conflict on the election. What can you tell us about what this might mean for the future of the Middle East? How could the Middle East-U.S. relationship potentially change?

We're going through something similar in Canada, and I'd like your perspective.

Mr. Dov Waxman: I think we're really at a pivot point in terms of U.S. policy. If there is a Trump administration, I think it's quite clear that a Trump administration would give Prime Minister Ne-

tanyahu and his far-right government a green light to do whatever they want. He's already talking about wrapping up the war in Gaza very quickly, but I think that might well be followed by support for Israeli annexation measures in the West Bank, as well as potentially annexing parts of the Gaza Strip.

Again, that underlines the need for making it very clear where the international community stands and making it very clear that Israeli annexation of the West Bank would be illegal and unacceptable.

Conversely, I think a Harris administration is likely to shift or depart somewhat. I don't think there's going to be a radical shift from the Biden administration's approach, but clearly there is a recognition that the approach that the Biden administration has taken, however well-meaning, has failed. For many months now, the Biden administration has put its hopes in achieving a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, followed by a resumption of negotiations and tying that to the possibility of a normalization agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia and a broader agreement between the United States and the Saudis.

Were that possible and were that in the cards, I would be less forceful in advocating a recognition of a Palestinian state. However, I don't think that's going to happen. It's very clear that this government in Israel is not interested in a Palestinian state and is certainly not interested in a resumption of peace talks.

It's really important, given the fact that the U.S. policy is currently very much in flux, not to wait for U.S. leadership and certainly not to wait for the Trump administration, because they've made it very clear that they have no regard for international law. I think they would support the kind of far-right ambitions of the Israeli government.

I think it is important to signal to the Harris administration, were that to come into office, where the international community stands and where the United States' allies stand. The Europeans are doing the same, and at the moment, I think the United States could actually take heed from its allies, particularly from Canada.

• (1710)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Do I have any more time?

The Chair: Yes, you have 10 seconds.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Tack it on to my next round.

The Chair: Okay, fair enough.

Now we go to Mr. Aboultaif.

You have three minutes, sir.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for appearing today.

The Oslo accords were probably the time when both parties negotiated for something that I believe was the most advanced as far as finding a final solution for the conflict was concerned.

Where do you see the Oslo accords now? Do you see that people are walking away from them, or could they still be the best framework to start a serious negotiation towards something feasible and something that is going to solve the issue once and for all?

Mr. Peter Larson: Thank you very much for your question.

It might surprise members of the committee to know that Avis supports a one-state solution. This is the map I got about eight years ago when I went to Israel to drive around. There's no indication of an occupied territory. It's all Israel.

Canada for years has allowed the conversation about a potential two-state negotiation to fester so that now this is normalized in Israel. Israelis believe this is all Israel; it's not a Palestinian territory. We've allowed that to develop by not insisting on a two-state solution, so I think that we are partly culpable for the situation today when the idea of Palestinian statehood is very low in Israel.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Go ahead, Dr. Waxman.

Mr. Dov Waxman: I think the most significant achievement of the Oslo accords was to underline the legitimate rights and national aspirations of both peoples for mutual recognition. The most damaging development in recent years has been the reversal of that mutual recognition.

Recently, a poll showed—a survey in Israel—that now only around 30% of Israelis recognize the Palestinian right to statehood. A lot of what was achieved at Oslo, and particularly that recognition, has been undermined and reversed over the years.

The one surviving remnant of the Oslo accords is the Palestinian Authority, and that won't last forever. In order to save the Palestinian Authority, which was meant to be the way station toward a Palestinian state, I think it's important to take action, because otherwise the Palestinian Authority has no *raison d'être*. There's no reason for the Palestinian Authority to survive in the eyes of Palestinians if it isn't on a pathway towards statehood.

In a sense, that is the last part of the Oslo accords left standing, and that's what needs to be saved.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Ms. Musu, would you comment?

Ms. Costanza Musu: I'd say that for both sides, even the word "Oslo" has kind of become anathema, in the sense that both sides have lived through a lot of disappointment from what was a really positive starting point.

One of the main issues—

• (1715)

The Chair: I'm sorry. You can respond to that in the next round.

Ms. Costanza Musu: Certainly.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Musu. I apologize for that.

Next we'll go to MP Oliphant for three minutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. Thank you, witnesses.

Just to put my bias out on the table, for me, hope is perhaps the most important factor and most powerful tool to end terrorism and to end militancy. For me, a two-state solution provides hope. For

me, it is necessary to have two states to have a two-state solution. If we want to end this conflict, to me, hope is absolutely critical.

I also wanted to say that I don't believe there are two sides, as has been said in this meeting; I think there are many sides. I want to raise that we have governments, but we also have people and civil society organizations and many people who are working for solutions that are important to get to peace.

My question is related to the fact that we are not talking about the world's recognition of the State of Palestine; we're talking about Canada's recognition. We're a country that has some influence, but not a lot. Can you tell me why you think Canada's recognition of the State of Palestine could be helpful in the pursuit of peace? I don't mean generic recognition, but Canada's.

Let's start with Professor Waxman, and then we'll go to the table.

Mr. Dov Waxman: I think it's important because as a member of the G7 in particular—as a leading western country—Canada would lead the way among western countries in affirming that recognition. It's particularly important for Palestinians to see that, but we're also at a time when, because of the destruction and devastation in the Gaza Strip over the past year, western policy and international law have really been called into question around the world.

I think it's very important, not only for Canada's reputation and to show Canada living up to its commitment to support a two-state solution and its commitment to the Palestinian right to self-determination, but also in leading the way for western countries to show that we actually care about this—

Hon. Robert Oliphant: That's perfect. Thank you.

I want to give Professor Larson a chance.

Mr. Peter Larson: I completely concur with what he just said. I don't have anything new to add to that—

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

Professor Musu, would you comment?

Ms. Costanza Musu: One of the things that could potentially be positive that comes from this is giving more support to the Palestinian Authority.

This is because, arguably, one of the problems that the Palestinian Authority has had is that the support that it has received from the west has been more of a kiss of death, because it's been seen as less than legitimate. If that recognition comes, it can potentially also produce some kind of result for the Palestinian Authority to say that yes, it is supported by the west, but that this doesn't mean that it's a puppet of the west. We are actually also advancing the cause of Palestinian independence.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you all, very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bergeron, you have a minute and a half, please, sir.

[*Translation*]

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

In 1977, there were 1,900 settlers in the occupied territories. In 1997, there were 331,000. In 2022, there were 741,000.

In your opinion, Mr. Waxman, what is the purpose of colonizing the occupied territories?

[*English*]

Mr. Dov Waxman: First and foremost, the goal is to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state. I would distinguish between the Israeli government's goals, though.

I mean, obviously they vary from time to time under different governments, but generally speaking, the goal in settling or colonizing the heart of the West Bank goal is to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state.

As for the settlers themselves, they have a variety of goals. Obviously, for the most religious Zionists among them, it is to ultimately bring about the coming of the Messiah. However, I think the more secular goal is to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and allowing the ongoing settlement is doing that, essentially. Every new settlement and every additional settler makes the establishment of a Palestinian state that much harder.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to MP McPherson.

I will remind you that you have one minute and 40 seconds.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Professor Larson, I have some questions for you with regard to the ICJ cases, both on the illegality of the occupation, for which the decision was granted on July 19, and on the South African case on the plausible genocide in Gaza. Considering those two cases, I'd like you to talk a little bit about how Canada has responded to those two cases and also what the recognition of the State of Palestine would mean going forward.

Mr. Peter Larson: Thank you very much.

I consider that a set-up question, because you know what I'm going to say.

I think Canada's abstention on the ICJ decision on the occupation was appalling. I think our reputation around the world is going....

In the global south, we're maintaining a reputation with our American and European allies, but I think the world is seeing this atrocious development, and Canada is not living up to our claim to support international human rights and international humanitarian law.

Ms. Heather McPherson: You still have about 30 seconds.

Could you tell me what this could mean? If there was recognition of a State of Palestine, what would that mean? What would the obligations of Canada be then, in that situation?

Mr. Peter Larson: For example, if Palestine were recognized at the United Nations as a member, Palestine would have standing at the ICJ and would have standing at other international organizations.

Canada's recognition will not do that. Canada will be one more pebble on the balance of what's happening. We will be—

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm talking as well about the trade agreements that we would be obligated to—

Mr. Peter Larson: Well, we would have to suspend or revisit our Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement, obviously, because we would now recognize the State of Palestine and so on.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I feel as though we should do that already because of the ICJ.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Larson.

We now go to MP Hoback for three minutes, please—or to MP Chong.

Go ahead, Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

Professor Musu, you've expressed support for a two-state solution. You've also indicated some nuance that it may not be constructive for the Government of Canada to immediately recognize the State of Palestine. Could you talk a bit more about the conditions you think should be placed on the recognition of a State of Palestine in the current context?

Ms. Costanza Musu: This is a complicated question, in the sense that attaching conditions to the recognition of a state is not unheard of. It's something that's been done multiple times.

I think the reason I was being cautious is that I believe that the two-state solution is the only possible solution. The reason I believe that is that I believe that Palestinian nationalism and Jewish nationalism are two sides of the same coin. They are both national movements that aspire to self-determination. In that sense, a two-state solution is the only answer.

I think what is unfortunate is the fact that we're having these conversations following October 7, which opens the door to all these kinds of objections on the motivation and on whether this makes recognition look like a cave-in to terrorism. Why does that matter? If we know that Canada wants to recognize Palestine, we shouldn't really care about the fact that it's—

I'm sorry.

Hon. Michael Chong: I have a second quick question.

Canada's most important multilateral membership is the G7.

Ms. Costanza Musu: Yes.

Hon. Michael Chong: I think most foreign policy experts would agree with that. What would be the impact if Canada became the first G7 country to unilaterally recognize the State of Palestine and none of our other G7 members did the same?

Ms. Costanza Musu: I think we can expect that there would be some uncomfortable conversations to be had. It still has to be balanced on whether it is a worthy discomfort if Canada follows its own policy and makes independent foreign policy decisions on a matter of importance for Canada. Discomfort is part of the G7 in general, and this would be one more.

• (1725)

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the last questions, we go to MP Zuberi.

You have three minutes, sir.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today by Zoom and in person.

This study is about Canada's advancement of the two-state solution. Our country's long-standing position is that we are here to realize the two-state solution because we support the two-state solution, and that's what this study is about.

Mr. Waxman, you stated that it's important to recognize the State of Palestine now. Do you think that this recognition is contingent on the recognition from other countries if and when Canada were to go ahead with that recognition?

Mr. Dov Waxman: No, I don't believe that Canada should wait for other countries. I think other countries, including G7 members like Britain and France, are seriously considering taking this step at this time. In that respect, Canada wouldn't be a complete outlier. Even in the Biden administration, the State Department initiated a study.

I think it would be very much in accordance with this shift, but Canada would position itself in that respect as a leader. I don't think it needs to wait until other countries are willing—

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Certainly, and you spoke previously about how Canada would be a leader.

Professor Larson, can you also answer that question? Is our recognition contingent on any other country?

Mr. Peter Larson: I think any serious political actor has to be very cautious about the reactions of our trading partners, our inter-

national partners. It would be foolish to plunge ahead without doing so. I think Canada should be trying to find like-minded countries to go ahead.

We've made certain initiatives, aligned with like-minded countries. I don't think anybody would seriously recommend an announcement tomorrow without any consultation with allies, but—

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Witnesses spoke about our relationship with the global south. Those are important allies to consider too, wouldn't you say?

Mr. Peter Larson: Absolutely, our G7 allies are important, but there is a growing movement of the global south. The BRICS is not an inconsiderable development, and we need to be careful as we move forward to maintain our reputation for human rights and international law.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

Mr. Waxman, do you think recognition of the State of Palestine would help to end the war that is currently happening and bring peace back to the region?

The Chair: Answer very briefly, Professor Waxman, in 30 seconds or less.

Mr. Dov Waxman: Sadly, I don't think it would end the war in Gaza in the near term—certainly not while the current Israeli government is in power—but I think it would be a significant contribution toward achieving peace in the region.

That's not going to happen overnight. Peace is the goal, and I think this would be a significant and important step to take that would help us move in that direction rather than further away from it, as we've seen over the past year.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: It's moving in the right direction.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: That concludes the questions.

Professor Musu, Professor Larson and Professor Waxman, thank you ever so much for your time and for your perspectives. I know I speak on behalf of all members here when I thank you for appearing before our committee.

The meeting stands adjourned.

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