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Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

[*Translation*]

Welcome to meeting number 11 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders.

Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 23, 2025, the committee is meeting to receive an update on the situation in Gaza.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses, who are available for one hour. By the way, as the amended notice of meeting indicates, this will be only a one-hour committee meeting.

From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have Alexandre Lévêque, assistant deputy minister, Europe, Middle East and Arctic branch; Rebecca Netley, legal adviser and director general, international law bureau; Tara Carney, director general, humanitarian assistance bureau; and Hong Won Yu, director, humanitarian policy division.

Welcome to you all. Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed to rounds of questions.

I now invite Monsieur Lévêque to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Merci beaucoup.

Alexandre Lévêque (Assistant Deputy Minister, Europe, Middle East and Arctic Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and honourable committee members. We appreciate your time today, all the more so knowing that you have many other preoccupations and affairs to deal with. Nonetheless, thank you for the invitation to provide an update on the situation in Gaza.

After over two years of devastating conflict, the current ceasefire and the U.S.-led comprehensive peace plan present a critical oppor-

tunity to alleviate widespread suffering, lay the foundation for recovery and secure lasting peace.

[*Translation*]

On October 10, 2025, the U.S.-negotiated ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas came into force.

The agreement was reached following the unrelenting mediation efforts by Egypt, Qatar, Turkey and the United States. The government welcomes those efforts and President Trump's comprehensive peace plan.

The first phase of the peace plan has resulted in the release of all living Israeli hostages held in Gaza and a rapid increase in humanitarian aid to Palestinian civilians.

[*English*]

The ceasefire remains fragile. It is vital that the parties fully uphold the agreement, refrain from all hostilities and engage constructively on subsequent phases. The crucial next steps are for Hamas to return the remains of all deceased hostages and to follow through on its commitment to transfer power, and for Israel to facilitate unimpeded humanitarian assistance deliveries and to remain withdrawn behind agreed-upon lines. Any escalation could jeopardize prospects for peace.

This is a unique and critical moment that must be seized to, one, rapidly scale up and sustain the delivery of life-saving assistance into Gaza; two, support efforts to bring the stability and security required to help Gazans recover and rebuild; and three, support the Palestinian Authority's reform agenda, enabling it to eventually re-assume governance responsibilities in Gaza. Canada is presently acting on each of these imperatives. We have deployed civilian and military personnel to the U.S.-led Civil-Military Coordination Center, the CMCC, to monitor the ceasefire and help implement the peace plan.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Since October 2023, Canada has scaled up its international assistance to more than \$400 million to address the needs in Palestine. That includes more than \$270 million in humanitarian aid delivered through the United Nations, or UN; the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement; and international non-governmental organizations, or NGOs.

Canada's humanitarian partners are working under extremely difficult conditions. Humanitarian and commercial trucks are starting to enter Gaza, but access issues persist. Restrictions, including complex registration requirements for international NGOs, are major barriers. Canada is on the ground to support efforts to address those issues.

[English]

Canada is also working closely with international partners on security and stabilization. This includes the establishment of a temporary UN-mandated international stabilization force and the establishment of transitional governance by a Palestinian technocratic committee. The needs will be immense. The scale of destruction in Gaza is staggering. Helping Gazans recover will require an unprecedented mobilization of resources, coordination and international solidarity.

We are actively exploring how to support these efforts in close coordination with Canadian and international partners. We look forward to engaging at the upcoming recovery conference in Egypt that is expected to take place later in November. We must have an eye to the future governance of Gaza. The government has been clear that Hamas, a listed terrorist organization in Canada, must disarm and play no role in Palestine's future governance. Canada has issued four rounds of sanctions against Hamas since its brutal attacks of October 7, 2023.

[Translation]

We are committed to strengthening the Palestinian Authority's reform and capacity-building efforts to enable it to eventually reclaim its governance responsibilities in Gaza and to ensure that Palestinians are full participants in implementing the next phases of the peace plan.

Canada has long supported the two-state solution as the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We remain deeply convinced that efforts to achieve lasting peace and security must work toward that goal.

[English]

Thank you. We will be happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Monsieur Lévêque, for your remarks.

I will now open the floor for questions, beginning with MP Kramp-Neuman.

You have six minutes.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington—Tyendinaga, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you very much to the witnesses for being here today.

In your opening remarks, you mentioned that we're in a unique and critical moment. I'd like to preface my comments by reiterating that I think we are all here furiously advocating for peace between the State of Israel and the fundamentalist Islamist terrorist organization currently wreaking havoc in Gaza, as well as peace in the broader conflict between Israel and the recently recognized Palestinian state.

We believe a two-state solution with elected democratic bodies that respect the rights and freedoms of not just their own citizens but especially each other's is absolutely paramount to achieve this. I do, however, have a couple of questions on points of clarification on the government's decision to recognize Palestinian statehood at this particular juncture and around what that looks like from a Canadian perspective.

To start, who does the Government of Canada recognize as the legitimate sovereign over the Gaza Strip, that being area A, area B, area C and East Jerusalem?

Alexandre Lévêque: Thank you for the question and for the sentiments on the prospects for peace.

I think the short answer to governance in Gaza is that it now suffers from an immense void. Hamas and its security forces, for a lack of a better term, continue to control a portion of the strip, and of course the Israel Defense Forces occupy the other half. There is very little governance, and the Government of Canada currently does not recognize Hamas as a legitimate governing authority. The work that is—

• (1110)

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: If I may, what does the Government of Canada then recognize as the capital of the Palestinian state?

Alexandre Lévêque: That is also a question of disagreement and reflection. Canada has traditionally not pronounced itself on this, and the position of the government is that this is something that should be decided on through consultations and negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis in the future.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Perfect. Thank you.

Moving on to conditions attached to the actual statehood recognition, in the statement where the Prime Minister recognized Palestinian statehood, he wrote:

The Palestinian Authority has provided direct commitments to Canada and the international community on much-needed reforms, including to fundamentally reform its governance, to hold general elections in 2026 in which Hamas can play no part, and to demilitarize the Palestinian state.

What specific direct commitments to Canada did the Palestinian Authority give?

Alexandre Lévêque: All of the above. These commitments were made in writing by the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas. There were commitments to elections, commitments to reforms on governance, commitments on education reform and a variety of legal reforms in the Palestinian Authority.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Did these fundamental reforms include guarantees for a continued suspension of the Palestinian Authority's martyr fund, including any direct or indirect alternatives or attempts to rebrand?

Alexandre Lévêque: Yes, absolutely, both explicitly and in practice, as we have seen already some progress being made in the transformation of that fund to turn it into a more universally recognized, let's just say, process of welfare support for certain families.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Okay. For clarity, can you confirm that the call by the Prime Minister for demilitarization is for the entire Palestinian state, including the Palestinian Authority and any militant groups operating in their territory?

Alexandre Lévesque: That was the predicate on which the decision was made, and that is indeed what the Prime Minister is expecting.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Are you aware of any deadlines imposed on the demilitarization of Palestine by the Palestinian [*Inaudible—Editor*] in exchange for statehood recognition?

Alexandre Lévesque: Pardon me, can you repeat the beginning of the question?

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Were there any deadlines imposed for the demilitarization?

Alexandre Lévesque: No strict deadlines were imposed.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Was any assessment done on their ability to demilitarize?

Alexandre Lévesque: I would say that this is going to be a work in progress and something that will happen over time. The assessment is that it can be done if there is a general push by the international community to keep our collective attention on the situation in Palestine. As long as the reform programs and the support for governance in Palestine are in place, then yes, the assessment is that it is possible.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Let's fast-forward to January 1, 2027. What happens if January 1, 2027 comes around and open, fair and free elections have not happened? Will Canada de-recognize Palestinian statehood if they do not hold open, fair and free elections in 2026?

Alexandre Lévesque: That's an excellent question.

My understanding of international law is that, once a state is recognized, it cannot be unrecognized. This is a decision that happens once, which means that, after that, the Government of Canada engages and interacts with the government of Palestine as it would with any other country, which means that the levers at our disposal as a country and as a diplomatic corps and foreign policy are the same as with any other country.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Did the government—

The Chair: We are out of time, Madam.

Next is Rob Oliphant for six minutes.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for coming today and for your work in this ongoing, difficult conflict and humanitarian crisis.

I want to follow up on Ms. Kramp-Neuman's question and talk about the difference between recognizing a state and recognizing a government.

It is my understanding that Canada does not recognize governments ever, but we do recognize states. I just want to make sure that I am correct in understanding that.

• (1115)

Alexandre Lévesque: That is correct.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: There's state recognition. That means we recognize the authority of that state to participate in internation-

al fora, but we may disagree with governments, as we do in many cases, like Venezuela, for instance.

Alexandre Lévesque: That is correct.

I would say that the process of recognition is a one-time thing. The process of normalization of relations that includes the full suite of tools, first of all through the mutual recognition of embassies and ambassadors, privileges and immunities, diplomatic property, etc., is along the spectrum of the normalization of relations.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: That would include diplomatic relations eventually. It would include the borders and boundaries and eventually the capital, but this would be a normal process.

Alexandre Lévesque: It is a very normal process. I would say that a number of other tools exist to continue engaging, just like with any other country, whether it's MOUs, treaties, consultations, trade agreements, etc. These are all along the lines of the spectrum, if you will, of normalization between two countries. We are still at the beginning of that process.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I have two other areas of questioning. One is that we appear to be cautiously optimistic about the ceasefire holding. Is that a good characterization and, if so, how is Canada participating in reinforcing this ceasefire and peace agreement?

Alexandre Lévesque: It is a good characterization. The ceasefire has had a few false starts already, but overall it is holding. I think it will require constant attention by global leaders in order to keep the pressure on all sides for this to continue to hold. Canada is currently, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, represented in the Civilian-Military Coordination Center, which is U.S. led, and is based in Israel just north of Gaza. It's a large building with several floors. The Israel Defense Forces are there. International partners are there. The American military is there. We are embedded through civilian and military presence in this group, in this cell, which is there to observe and document the daily occurrences of the ceasefire.

The intention is to migrate from this to an international stabilization force. As a matter of fact, just this morning we learned that the United States was going to table at the UN Security Council a resolution to establish an ISF, an international stabilization force. This is a very positive development, because this force could have been developed outside of UN confines. It could have been done as regional groupings, strictly U.S. led. The fact that it is being introduced in the context of the UN Security Council is an indication of doubling down on multinational institutions, but it also has a much higher likelihood of drawing the credibility and the legitimacy that the world is looking for. It will, therefore, also increase the likelihood of military contributions of a peacekeeping nature or at least of an observational nature to be from across the globe.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: We have ongoing conversations with the Palestinian Authority and are attempting to support it in its modernization and in its capacity to govern all of the new Palestinian state once we have a two-state solution.

Constraints have been placed on the PA through the forwarding of taxes and monies from Israel. Are we continuing to advocate for the PA to have the resources it should have to do the work that it needs to do?

Alexandre Lévesque: We are very strongly. Canada is not alone in doing this. A large number of partners, particularly European partners, continue to increase this pressure and these requests.

Ultimately, we collectively believe that it is fundamentally in Israel's interest in the longer-term security to have a stable, secure, well-managed and well-governed Palestinian state, both in the West Bank and in Gaza. The way to do this is not by suffocating the governing authorities from any revenues. These are revenues on the basis of exports and goods coming out of the West Bank. We think it is legitimate for these to be collected by the current governing authority.

• (1120)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I will just open the door on humanitarian assistance and I will follow-up with further questions on that.

Canada's role is that we are a significant contributor. My assumption is that this will continue.

Are there things you should be asking us to ask our government for?

The Chair: You have time for a 10-second response, please.

Alexandre Lévesque: We can come back to it later.

We will continue to follow the international appeals for humanitarian assistance. We have set aside a significant amount of money right now, but we know the need is going to continue to be great.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for six minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today to take part in this meeting.

When the government recognized Palestine, it cited humanitarian reasons, among other reasons. I'm going to focus on humanitarian aid.

How does that recognition by the Canadian government actually translate into international aid policy, particularly in Gaza, in a context where humanitarian aid is difficult to access, even after the ceasefire?

Alexandre Lévesque: Thank you for the question.

The fundamental principle that led the government to recognize the state of Palestine was the fear that the possibility of a two-state solution could disappear forever. That means the goal was to preserve that space where, at the international level, an Israeli state can continue to be recognized and a Palestinian state can also be recognized legally. Today, we know that there's very little trust between Israelis and Palestinians from all factions.

Humanitarian aid fits in as part of that process. I'd say that there isn't necessarily a direct link between that aid and the recognition of Palestine. However, there was clearly a deterioration in the Gaza Strip, and Israeli armed forces were preventing humanitarian aid from entering there. Those two messages arrived at the same time.

That said, I wouldn't directly link humanitarian aid and the desire to carry out our responsibility with the legal political decision that was made, namely to recognize the state of Palestine.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Canada has said that it wants to support a credible peace plan.

What are your department's criteria for defining what a credible plan is? If we want to support this plan, we would first need to know the criteria.

Alexandre Lévesque: That's a great question, and it's pretty fundamental.

The most important criterion for a peace plan to be credible is to get support from the parties to the conflict. We aren't there yet. If all Arab countries, the United States, the Europeans and the entire world commit to a peace plan as drawn up, it means that the whole world believes that it's possible to achieve that status and foster a climate with greater trust between the parties.

For the peace plan to be credible, the first elements of the plan have to be carried out. For that to happen, Hamas has to completely transfer power and be demilitarized. The civilian population also, of course, has to stop suffering.

That means it's absolutely essential for humanitarian aid, such as medicine, clean drinking water and staple foods, to be able to enter the Gaza Strip.

Once those elements are in place, there's a collective belief that mutual trust can begin to build between the various parties to the conflict.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: When was the last time Canada sanctioned entities in Israel?

Alexandre Lévesque: It was earlier this year, in the spring of 2025.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's right.

From what I understand, then, there have been no additional sanctions against Israeli ministers since Palestine was recognized.

On the one hand, the government recognizes Palestine and wants a two-state solution. Like everyone else, it wants Hamas to be disarmed and not to be part of the solution.

On the other hand, war crimes have still been committed. Humanitarian aid was purposely prevented from entering. Orders were given to ensure that this aid didn't enter as it should have done. Many around the world have called for sanctions, including against Prime Minister Netanyahu directly, but also against some of his ministers.

Isn't that a bit contradictory? Doesn't that show a lack of courage from the government to apply additional sanctions?

• (1125)

Alexandre Lévesque: I would start by saying that the sanctions regime on which Canada relies, the legislation that governs sanctions in general, makes it so that specific triggers have to take place before sanctions can be announced.

In other words, sanctions don't reflect a political or ideological act. They're measures that are taken when threats to peace and security are observed, for example.

It's in response to that trigger under Canada's economic sanctions legislation that two Israeli cabinet ministers were sanctioned.

That same trigger led to sanctions for extremist settler groups in the West Bank. It's a very dynamic situation that continues to evolve.

Right now, we see that there's a significant resumption of humanitarian aid into Gaza and a suspension of calls to annex the West Bank.

We're continuing to monitor the situation.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry, but we're out of time.

We'll start the next round of questions, beginning with MP Kronis.

You have five minutes.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here. This is an important topic of concern to my constituents, and I'm glad for the updates.

I have a couple of quick yes-or-no questions for Mr. Lévesque, and then I have some questions for Ms. Netley about international law.

Mr. Lévesque, Canada has recognized a state of Palestine in furtherance of a two-state solution. Does GAC have a map of the state of Palestine?

Alexandre Lévesque: Yes.

Tamara Kronis: Is that map publicly available?

Alexandre Lévesque: We don't produce our own maps at Global Affairs. We use publicly available maps.

Tamara Kronis: I'd really like a map of what.... I'd be grateful if you could send the committee a map of the state of Palestine.

Alexandre Lévesque: I can assure you that Global Affairs has no map that isn't publicly available.

If I understand what you're trying to get at is exactly where we would see the precise boundaries of a state of Palestine, the answer to that is not a yes or a no, but it's a short one: It will be up to Palestinians and Israelis to negotiate final status issues on the return of refugees on the status of Jerusalem—

Tamara Kronis: There is no actual map that Canada is using at this point. We're waiting to find out where it heads in negotiations.

Alexandre Lévesque: Canada is not the entity that decides on the delineation of the border between Israel and Palestine. That is correct.

Tamara Kronis: Ms. Netley, I'd like to ask you about Prime Minister Carney's statement that he would arrest Prime Minister Netanyahu under the ICC arrest warrant if he were to come to Canada.

Is it Canada's position that the ICC had jurisdiction to issue that arrest warrant?

Rebecca Netley (Legal Adviser and Director General, International Law Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): It's Canada's position that we're a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court, as you know, and the role that it plays in the fight against impunity. We consider the court to be an independent court—

Tamara Kronis: Is that a yes?

Rebecca Netley: Its judiciary is independent, and its prosecutors are independent.

Tamara Kronis: Therefore, yes, it is GAC's position that the arrest warrant is valid.

Rebecca Netley: Well, it's—

Tamara Kronis: I want to ask you about the principle of complementarity, a jurisdictional principle which dictates that the ICC can only step in to prosecute crimes and issue arrest warrants when a national legal system is either unwilling or unable to do so.

Give a yes-or-no answer to this question. Is the Israeli court system currently operating?

• (1130)

Rebecca Netley: Yes, it's currently operating.

Tamara Kronis: Does that include the IDF military tribunals?

Rebecca Netley: Yes, that would be part of what the ICC would look at in terms of evaluating the complementarity.

Tamara Kronis: Is the Supreme Court of Israel continuing to function in its capacity as both an appeals court and a judicial review body?

Rebecca Netley: Yes, of course.

Tamara Kronis: Does the Israeli government still have the capacity to hold elections?

Rebecca Netley: Of course.

Tamara Kronis: Are the basic state functions of policing, administration and taxation still operating in the State of Israel?

Rebecca Netley: Yes, they are certainly operating.

Tamara Kronis: I'm wondering, given the principle of complementarity, how GAC and Canada justify their position that the ICC has jurisdiction here under the principle of complementarity.

Rebecca Netley: Again, it's not for GAC to assess whether the arrest warrant was properly issued. We consider the International Criminal Court to be an independent and impartial tribunal. We defer to it to make those decisions with respect to its own jurisdiction.

Tamara Kronis: Do you think that the ICC's decision and conclusion that Israel is effectively a failed state for the purposes of the principle of complementarity is correct?

Rebecca Netley: I would not say that the ICC concluded that Israel was a failed state. I would say that the ICC concluded, through its lens of the way it interprets complementarity, that it did not see evidence that an investigation had been conducted. Again, we make no comment on that conclusion it made. I just wanted to clarify how one might summarize the conclusion it had to draw prior to issuing or prior to making an application to its judicial bench for the issuance of an arrest warrant.

Tamara Kronis: Do you think Israel is capable of being able to hold any of its officials to account in this context?

Rebecca Netley: Well, it's not for me to comment on that. I would say, based on the assessment of Israel as a democratic state, that yes, it is capable of doing so.

Tamara Kronis: Did GAC advise the Prime Minister on the principle of complementarity in the context of the Prime Minister's statement about the arrest warrant?

Rebecca Netley: We didn't advise the Prime Minister recently, but we have briefed officials up to the minister's office, including the Prime Minister's Office on complementarity and how that operates in the context of international criminal tribunals.

Tamara Kronis: In that context—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry, but we're out of time.

We're going next to MP Mona Fortier.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today to give us an update on Canada's efforts to address this crisis.

From the start of the crisis, Canada has been clear that the parties to the conflict have to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law. Canada is exploring ways to help scale up humanitarian aid, support stabilization efforts and help Palestinians recover from two years of devastating conflict.

Canada remains firmly committed to Israel's right to exist in peace and security, while recognizing that a lasting peace also requires a viable and stable Palestinian state that fully recognizes Israel's inalienable right to security and peace.

There was a question earlier about humanitarian aid, and there wasn't a chance to answer, so I'm going to come back to that.

Canada has pledged to donate over \$400 million in international aid.

Can you give us an update on that contribution in terms of humanitarian aid?

Alexandre Lévesque: It would be my pleasure. Thank you for the question.

As I mentioned, of the \$400 million in international aid that has been promised since the start of the profound crisis that began in October 2023, Canada has paid \$270 million.

We know that the needs are ongoing, simply because Gaza doesn't have the means to engage in economic activity right now. Very few agricultural activities are taking place. Gaza's people are completely dependent on humanitarian aid for food, care and clean drinking water.

In the medium term, the goal should be to rebuild and rehabilitate the Gaza Strip. Until then, it's important to continue feeding and caring for more than two million people in a territory that's roughly three-quarters the size of the Island of Montreal.

Our efforts are always based on international humanitarian requests and appeals made by credible international organizations.

In general, those are organizations from the UN system, and we determine our contribution based on Canada's traditional assessed contribution. We always deal with international organizations that know how to use the money we spend on humanitarian aid to maximize its effectiveness. Those organizations have the expertise needed to distribute aid to people in a safe and dignified manner.

• (1135)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Let's actually talk about distribution and the major challenge of getting humanitarian aid to where it's needed.

Can you tell us if there has been any progress on that? If so, what progress has been made in delivering humanitarian aid since the ceasefire?

What are the remaining challenges when it comes to distributing humanitarian aid?

What role does Canada play, of course, with its regional partners?

Alexandre Lévesque: Thank you. That's a great question.

There has been significant progress in terms of not only the delivery of humanitarian aid but also its distribution. We know that the most difficult moments of crisis were when there wasn't enough aid entering the Gaza Strip, as well as periods when distribution networks and distribution points were severely reduced.

Since the peace plan on October 10, there's been a very clear increase in humanitarian aid. Renowned international UN agencies have taken full control and responsibility for humanitarian aid. That means that the volume has increased, since Israel and the Israeli armed forces are letting in a lot more trucks. Distribution points have also increased tenfold.

That inevitably has an impact. The more food and medicine available, the less crime that gets injected into the system. I'm thinking of looting in this case. I'm sorry, it's the English term that comes to mind.

Hon. Mona Fortier: I appreciate that. It's looting. Thank you to the interpreters.

Alexandre Lévesque: Thank you to the interpreters.

Looting occurs when there's a lack of the minimum necessary—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Next, we'll go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Lévesque, you talked about reconstruction.

A National Defence spokesperson recently said that Canada was assessing the sectors where we could, in fact, participate in stabilization and reconstruction.

Have those sectors been targeted? Has the assessment been completed in that regard?

Alexandre Lévesque: Thank you for the question.

Obviously, that's the big question. We have to make sure that we can consolidate the small gains that have been made in the peace process so far.

Sectors are still being assessed. We haven't made up our minds yet, but we're focusing on the traditional sectors that need major investments, given the level of destruction we're seeing here. I'm thinking of basic infrastructure, drinking water and infrastructure to open up routes because, obviously, the roads are largely destroyed right now.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: The towers are as well.

Alexandre Lévesque: First and foremost, it's important to demine and to defuse the weapons that haven't yet exploded.

We know that Canada has specific expertise in that kind of project. As a result, there has already been a commitment to collecting debris and demining.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's the first area, then, that needs to be addressed as a priority so that it's possible to work on the ground. Demining has to come first.

Alexandre Lévesque: That's right.

We're also focusing on sectors related to basic health. Clinics have to be set up again, particularly to care for the most vulnerable: children, pregnant women, people with untreated injuries and so on.

We're also looking at government instruments, governance and the legal system, among other things. All of that is being evaluated at the moment.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you work more with the major UN agencies, or do you also work with local non-governmental organizations?

Approximately what is the percentage split between the large UN agencies that Canada works with and the other organizations it works with, if any?

Alexandre Lévesque: I don't have a specific percentage for you. It will all depend on the needs observed and on how the international community organizes itself.

What I can say is that all of those elements will be brought to bear. We're always looking for efficiency and the best results possible.

To ensure the delivery of basic services and the reconstruction of basic institutions, we're often speaking with the international organizations that are very well equipped and very experienced. Those could be UN agencies or major development banks, such as the World Bank.

• (1140)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have MP Ziad Aboultaif for five minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thanks, Chair, and thank you to the department.

It would be good if we could get some history about Canadian aid to the Palestinian authorities over the last decade. If you could give us a briefing or supply us with those numbers, it would be great.

Alexandre Lévesque: It is, indeed, a long association that goes back to the Oslo Accords of over 30 years ago. Maybe, if it's helpful to the committee, we could share some background on this. Ever since, Canada has been deeply involved in a number of key sectors of governance, particularly the legal system and transparency in the service that is delivered to citizens in the West Bank. There's been a little bit of infrastructure, a little bit of technical assistance, and a little bit of civic and democratic development, as well as many programs that encourage private sector development. A lot of training, technical assistance and transferring of knowledge has taken place literally over two or three decades.

Ziad Aboultaif: The Prime Minister said that Canada would redouble its efforts to support the Palestinian Authority, to support the government in Palestine, and to contribute to a peaceful and promising future for its people.

What does redoubling mean? Is it of resources, financial resources or human resources? Is it of assistance in bringing democratic reform of some kind? Has Canada been asked to participate in such efforts? I think we have a long-standing experience and history in being able to do that, and I think it would be important.

I'm not sure if you know whether Canada was asked specifically to play this role. What else does Canada's commitment look like in order to assist in the commitment made originally?

Alexandre Lévesque: The short answer is that, yes, Canada has been asked. The flip side of that answer is that this is an absolutely unique moment in time. If it is to be successful, if the ceasefire is to lead to a consolidation, a stabilization, eventually reconstruction and, most important of all, the ability for two peoples to coexist, to cohabit side by side in safety and security, it is going to require sustained dedication, sustained attention and, of course, sustained resources.

Decisions have not yet been made on the level of resources nor the type of assistance that we could provide. The latest assessments I have read on just the reconstruction needs of Gaza are in the \$65-billion range. Obviously, this is not something that governments alone... No development assistance alone is going to be able to deliver on this. It is going to require drawing in the private sector and, of course, sovereign wealth and donations, etc. Where Canada will play a role is, first of all, where the need is greatest, but in the consolidation of these essential institutions—be it particularly on transparency, rule of law and democratic governance—that starts with elections that should happen in next year and a half.

Ziad Aboultaif: The Prime Minister attended the peace summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. Can you tell us if the Prime Minister had direct negotiations or talks with the Palestinian Authority, or are the commitments he made and the plan within the international community effort? It's very important to know, in order to have Gaza ruled by the Palestinian Authority. There's complete disagreement between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority on how this is going to be navigated, how this is going to be sorted out in order to allow that to happen. Do you know if Canada had any direct contact or direct negotiations on that, or was everything through the international community?

• (1145)

The Chair: Give a very brief response. We're out of time.

Alexandre Lévesque: I can absolutely confirm that the Prime Minister has been in touch directly with the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, on several occasions, both orally and in writing. Yes, the Prime Minister was involved in those early discussions in Sharm el-Sheikh that determined the early steps of this peace plan.

I can say that we do not engage with Hamas. We have absolutely no contact. That's a strict policy because it is a terrorist organization under the Criminal Code of Canada. We do deal through some of our partners, like Egypt, Qatar and Turkey, that do communicate directly with the Palestinian factions and do try to bring about a resolution of the conflicts between the different factions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we have MP Bill Blair for five minutes.

Hon. Bill Blair (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to our witnesses for appearing before us today and for the insights that they have provided. We are grateful.

I'd like to begin with an observation and ask you to comment.

It's been very clear that Canada has never drawn any equivalency between the State of Israel and Hamas—which, as you've just said,

Mr. Lévesque, is a terrorist organization—but we do recognize and acknowledge an equivalency between the people of Israel and the people of Palestine. Both share aspirations for peace and security.

I also believe that Canada remains, as you've articulated, firmly committed to Israel's right to exist in peace and security, but we have also acknowledged and recognized that lasting peace requires a viable, stable Palestinian state that fully acknowledges Israel's inalienable right to security and peace.

You've spoken at some length on this already, Mr. Lévesque. You mentioned the UN Security Council resolution that the Americans are bringing forward and a number of significant next steps. Could you give us some insight into what Canada's role could be in supporting those multilateral efforts to stabilize the region, to prevent escalation and to help secure that stable, viable peace and security that both the Palestinian and Israeli people aspire to?

Alexandre Lévesque: Thank you for the question and the opportunity to comment.

First of all, it is a recognized fact that this is one of the most protracted conflicts in the world. Some would say it is the longest lasting conflict that has ever been.

It is important what you mentioned about there being no equivalency between the Government of Israel, which is democratically elected, and a terrorist organization like Hamas. I would never dispute that, but it is important to zoom out and look at this from a much higher level and look at what Canada has traditionally and fundamentally believed, which is that both these peoples deserve to live in peace and security.

We have seen many efforts in the past and we expend a lot of time and energy finding the voices inside Israel and inside Palestine of those who continue to seek this peaceful cohabitation. There's a lot of extremism. There's a lot of hate and a lot of mistrust right now.

It is part of what we see as our role to be the voice of reason that sees into the future and tries to bring parties to the conflict where we believe their best interests will be served in the future. Enough voices exist in both Israel and Palestine to continue these efforts.

The department is working on options to provide to the ministers and Prime Minister for where we can be most helpful. We have areas of expertise. I mentioned demining before, and I mentioned governance training and a technical transfer of knowledge and democratic development, which means, in this case, the holding of elections in Palestine in a way that will legitimize future leadership for Palestinians. These are all areas that play to Canada's strengths. It's not to say that we couldn't make a contribution elsewhere, but we each need to play to our strengths, and these are, in the first wave, the areas where we would consider making contributions, all subject, of course, to the level of ambition and decisions to be made by the Prime Minister and the minister.

• (1150)

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lévêque.

As you said, it has been a long, protracted and extremely complicated and difficult conflict for decades, but it's also occurring within a complicated environment in the neighbourhood.

Canada has some diplomatic relations with some of their neighbours, with Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. I wondered if you might speculate on how, through our diplomatic relationships, we might be able to continue to advance the co-operation of the regional partners.

Alexandre Lévêque: Absolutely.

You're correct that nothing in the Middle East can be seen in isolation. We see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the very centre, the nucleus, of what radiates throughout the region. When Palestinians suffer and are internally displaced or become refugees, they go to neighbouring countries, which decreases stability for Jordan and Lebanon, in particular, and, of course, Egypt. There's a reason why these countries are absolutely central to coming up with a plan for a lasting peace in the region, and there's a reason why they are the ones that are the most intimately involved, along with the United States, at the negotiating table.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

In the remaining time, we can have a lightning round of three minutes each for three MPs.

MP Ziad Aboultaif, you are first. You have three minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thanks again, Chair.

Prime Minister Carney was invited to Sharm el-Sheikh, and I think that's important. Canada has always been on the international stage as a peace element and endorser.

Prior to that, the relationship with the U.S. wasn't on the same alignment with regard to this conflict. Am I correct?

Alexandre Lévêque: I would say we share the same objectives, fundamentally, which is to bring peace between Israelis and Palestinians. As to how we go about it, there have been some differences of views in terms of which foreign policy tools to use, but we share fundamentally the same objectives.

Ziad Aboultaif: The United States initiated the invitation, because it was led by President Trump. Is that correct?

Alexandre Lévêque: That's correct.

Ziad Aboultaif: Did the U.S. ask Canada to play a specific role in this whole thing? Do you recall, or are you aware of, any conversation on that?

Alexandre Lévêque: As far as I'm aware, the invitation was made in recognition of Canada's long-standing and traditional role of helpful peace broker in the region, but no specific contribution was requested of the Prime Minister as part of that summit participation.

Ziad Aboultaif: After the Sharm el-Sheikh summit, has the Palestinian Authority been in contact with Canada more actively than before?

Alexandre Lévêque: I would say it hasn't necessarily been more actively. I mean, we do have a diplomatic mission that is based in Ramallah, and a Canadian representative to the Palestinian Authority. These Palestinian Authority officials are the daily contacts that our diplomatic staff based in Ramallah meet with.

There's a particular interest on the next phases of the peace plan right now. That's what a lot of the focus is on. There's a particular interest on our part in discussing the implementation of the commitments the Palestinian Authority has made to the Prime Minister. I would say we have maintained a very good working-level relationship with Palestinian Authority officials. There's been no major difference; it's been maybe just on the topics and the areas of focus in the last few weeks.

Ziad Aboultaif: How many people make up our mission in Ramallah? Do you know?

Alexandre Lévêque: To give you the specific numbers, I would need to come back to the committee, but the Canada-based staff would be in the range of 15 to 16, I would say, with a few dozen locally engaged staff.

• (1155)

Ziad Aboultaif: Is there a plan to increase or basically support the mission further because Gaza is now under the authority of the same mission?

The Chair: Please give a very brief response.

Alexandre Lévêque: The current assessment is that we are staffed adequately in our mission based in Ramallah.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Anita Vandenberg, you have three minutes.

Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your expert testimony on this.

I'm interested in what comes next in terms of governance and democracy. There are international examples of places where under UN Security Council resolutions there were international multilateral authorities that had executive and legislative power while alongside building capacity of provisional institutions of self-governance in those places. I'm thinking of East Timor and Kosovo. Canada and Canadians have been very involved in helping to build the peace and governance structures. We have a tremendous amount of expertise amongst Canada, but also of Canadians who are doing this in multilateral institutions.

I wonder if you could tell us what role you think Canadian democracy and governance practitioners might be able to play in a future building of those kinds of democratic structures in Palestine.

Alexandre Lévesque: That is indeed the billion dollar question right now. I think, given where we are starting, it's important to really look at small steps that first stabilize the ceasefire and then start building the trust in very incremental ways. Like I said, right now, the only mission that exists is one of oversight, supervision and observation of a ceasefire, not a peace plan per se.

The next really important step will be the international stabilization force. That could actually see, depending on how the UN Security Council resolution is drafted, international troops, troops provided by a number of countries, enter Gaza and serve as a security force while the transfer to a proper authority among Palestinians of the monopoly of force and policing can occur.

It means, in the meantime, we have a lot of work to do to professionalize and to increase the number Palestinian security forces that would have the ability to play that role. This is a space where Canada has actually done a lot through the office of security coordinator in Jerusalem. Operation Proteus, one of the Canadian Armed Forces operations, has had the deputy command of this operation, which is a mix of military and civilian. They have done a lot of training among both civilian and not military, but Palestinian security forces.

There's a good basis from which to start there. It would need to be brought up to scale for that ISF, the international stabilization force, to first take hold, to be able to then train Palestinian security forces and then to bring them into Gaza.

Those are the next steps before we can even talk about developing proper governance in Gaza.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for three minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're talking about an international peacekeeping force to secure the ceasefire.

Do you think Canada would be ready to participate in that?

Alexandre Lévesque: I don't think it will be a peacekeeping force per se. It's still too early for that to be the conclusion.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I see.

Alexandre Lévesque: Various models could be put forward.

That said, we will consider all proposals. No commitment has been made on either side. We'll really have to see what kind of force it is.

Canada obviously can't make a commitment until it's possible to know what it is.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I agree that this is very hypothetical, but would it be possible for Canada to participate in the mechanism that gets adopted, whatever form it takes?

Alexandre Lévesque: That will be determined based on the Prime Minister's commitments and decisions.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: At the start of the meeting, we talked about sanctions. You told us that there were no longer any calls to annex the West Bank and that food aid was entering the affected areas much more than before the ceasefire. That proves that there was actually wrongdoing.

Do you think that all the Israeli officials who committed such acts, whether calling to annex the West Bank or blocking the delivery of humanitarian aid, have been sanctioned? Are there any who haven't been addressed yet?

If those actions took place, regardless of whether they've stopped taking place now, it's still important to impose sanctions.

Isn't that right?

• (1200)

Alexandre Lévesque: The use of sanctions isn't automatic or immediate. As I explained a little earlier, specific triggers are needed.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You mentioned them earlier.

Alexandre Lévesque: I did mention some. It could be a case of, for example, imminent threats to peace and security.

We're currently in a phase where there are fewer calls to annex the West Bank and where we hope we can continue seeing less violence or a lack of violence by extremist settlers against Palestinian farmers in the West Bank, for example.

Right now, our role is more to encourage closer ties between the parties than to use coercive tools.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I understand, but my question is still quite clear. If wrongdoing has been committed, don't you think they should be sanctioned, regardless of the new situation?

Alexandre Lévesque: That isn't necessarily the case. It depends on what the goal is. It isn't up to Canada to be the police force that sanctions absolutely any action in Israel, Palestine or anywhere else.

At the moment, we think our role is to strengthen the trust levels between the various parties and to increase peace and security in the region.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Does that then send a message of impunity, if people who have committed wrongdoing aren't sanctioned?

Canada isn't an economic or military powerhouse. This is coming from a Quebec separatist. Still, there's a history of human rights, and Canada has been a leader in that regard. I'm thinking in particular of Lester B. Pearson or Brian Mulroney.

Isn't that a way for Canada to set itself apart?

[English]

The Chair: Give a very brief response, please.

[*Translation*]

Alexandre Lévesque: Yes, that has already been done.

Extraordinary measures have been taken to sanction sitting ministers. Those tools still exist, and they can be used in the future.

[*English*]

The Chair: Officials, thank you very much for your appearance and for your testimony before the committee.

Colleagues, yesterday the clerk of the committee distributed a draft budget in the amount of \$17,500 in relation to the study on the detention of Jimmy Lai. He discussed with me the fact that this is a draft budget which is taking into account possible expenditures, but

this amount may not necessarily be spent. I'm just asking whether the committee approves this budget.

Do I have approval for the budget?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That concludes the agenda for this particular meeting.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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