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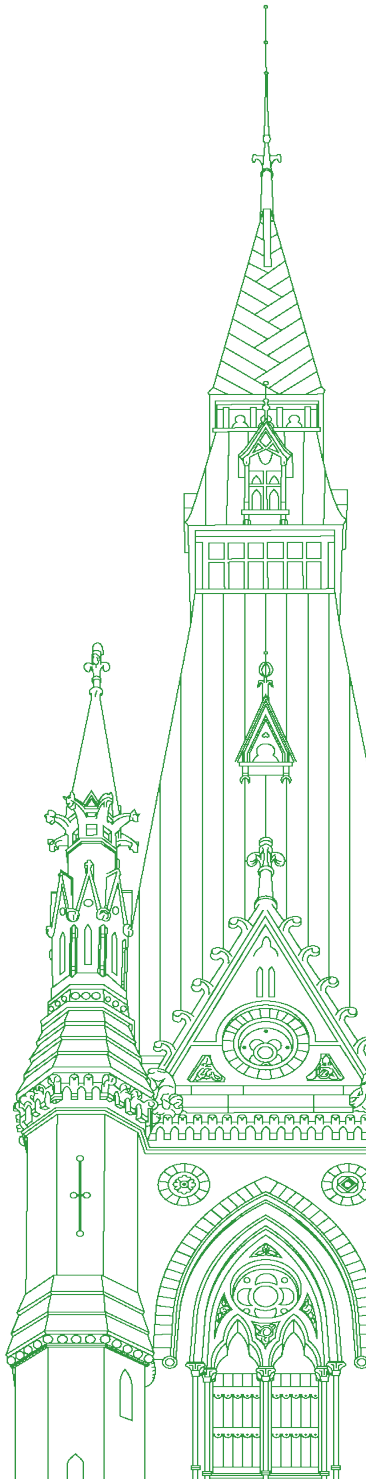
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Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 46 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, October 21, 2026, the committee is meeting regarding its study on the effectiveness of international institutions.

The meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person and remotely using the Zoom application.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour. We have, as an individual, Professor Adam Chapnick, professor of defence studies at the Royal Military College, who is appearing by video conference; Dr. Sarah-Myriam Martin-Brûlé, full professor, Bishop's University, who is appearing in person; and Dr. Jennifer M. Welsh, director of the Max Bell School of Public Policy and a distinguished James McGill professor, McGill University, who is joining us today by video conference.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with the rounds of questions from members.

I now invite Dr. Martin-Brûlé to deliver her remarks for no more than five minutes.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Sarah-Myriam Martin-Brûlé (Full Professor, Bishop's University, As an Individual): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for this invitation to contribute to your work on the effectiveness of international institutions and on Canada's role in strengthening them.

My more than 20 years of research on the peace operations carried out by the United Nations, or UN, especially on the African continent, including in Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and South Sudan, to name but a few places, has allowed me to see the gaps that can exist between the decisions made in New York and their effects on the ground.

To strengthen the effectiveness of international institutions, Canada must use its strengths, namely the quality and expertise of its professionals and, above all, its ability to influence decisions where international standards are set.

Canada has considerable assets.

First, there is the professionalism of its diplomats, military personnel, police officers and experts, as well as its strengths in gender equality, civilian protection, diversity and climate security.

Then, in Africa, where most UN peace operations take place, Canada enjoys a historical positioning distinct from that of other European powers. This particularity, combined with a sensitivity to historical legacies and local realities, can facilitate communication, foster relationships of trust and pave the way for lasting partnerships.

Finally, a strategic advantage that is too often underestimated, which I recently highlighted in an op-ed published in La Presse, is our French and English bilingualism, which is both a cultural asset and an operational and diplomatic capability. It connects military and diplomatic communities, facilitates the flow of information and, above all, builds relationships of trust. This is why small deployments can have an influence that far exceeds their size. A few Canadian officers integrated into a mission can play a liaison role, contribute to decisions and maintain valuable institutional networks. This is therefore a form of soft power in uniform.

The withdrawal from several international missions announced by the Canadian government in July raises a fundamental question: Beyond the savings, are we sufficiently weighing the value of the relationships, knowledge and institutional influence that Canada risks losing?

In terms of normative influence, I would like to highlight the impact of initiatives like the Elsie initiative, which exemplify how Canada can help change international institutions. The Elsie initiative was launched in 2017. Its aim is to increase the significant participation of women soldiers and police officers in peace operations through three levers—which I may come back to later—including the creation of a fund and the implementation of institutional analysis methods. At the UN level, implementing the Elsie initiative resulted in the proportion of women staff officers and military observers rising from 11% in 2018 to 23% in 2025. This progress is collective. It cannot be solely attributed to Elsie, but it is a crucial lesson: Thanks to Elsie, Canada didn't just fund the change, it helped change the rules that make it possible.

This is my main recommendation: Canada should have an international normative influence strategy that is well developed, planned and coordinated across the government.

Beyond participating in international institutions, we must deliberately identify the bodies where rules are established, bring our expertise to bear in a concerted way and ensure that our efforts are sustained over the long term. Influence must be prepared, built, assessed and maintained. Several bodies that develop these normative rules come to mind, including the C34 committee, the Contingent-Owned Equipment Working Group, the special services of the Department of Peace Operations and the Fifth Committee. In short, these bodies illustrate different aspects of international influence and can help Canada define the rules, put them into practice, fund their application and guide these policies.

To this end, Canada has a huge territory and a relatively small population, but I think that making Canadian expertise an intentional lever of international influence should be a priority. Our international influence cannot rest on the number of people deployed. It must be grounded in the quality of our professionals, their skills and our ability to send them to strategic locations.

Several of our partners have interesting approaches. They include Germany, which has the Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze, or ZIF—which I could come back to later if there is a question period—Sweden, which relies on the Folke Bernadotte Academy and Switzerland, which also has a specialized pool of civilian experts that can be mobilized to international organizations. Canada could draw inspiration from these approaches by making greater use of its expertise, particularly its bilingualism, to help strengthen the capacities of other contributing countries.

● (1105)

We already have comparable mechanisms, notably programs for young professionals and Canadem, but we need to coordinate them better, build up the next generation and support international careers over the long term.

This also means acting more strategically ahead of international recruitment, determining the priority functions, identifying secondment opportunities and competitions, informing Canadian candidates, preparing them for the selection processes and offering them professional and language support.

I will conclude my remarks with six main recommendations.

First, we should define our priorities. Influence must be intentional, not the mere result of our presence.

Second, we should coordinate our expertise by forming interdepartmental teams consisting of diplomats, military personnel, police officers, technical experts and researchers to prepare our proposals, build coalitions and have more influence on international negotiations.

Third, we should develop our next generation of international talent by strengthening programs for young professionals, secondments and supporting Canadian candidates for key positions in international organizations.

Fourth, we should make language skills a strategic investment by developing the bilingualism and intercultural skills of our professionals by recognizing them as essential capacities for co-operation, trust and international influence.

Fifth, we should recognize the strategic value of our small deployments. Before reducing or withdrawing Canada's presence, we should assess the cost and the presence's operational, diplomatic and institutional contribution, as well as the possible consequences of withdrawing.

Sixth, we should measure our influence rather than just our presence by presenting an annual report to Parliament that addresses three questions: What standards has Canada helped to shape; what practices have changed; and what concrete results have these changes achieved?

For a medium power like Canada, relationships of trust, language skills, the expertise of its professionals and its institutional presence are strategic capabilities. The Elsie initiative shows that by combining research, expertise, diplomacy and targeted funding, Canada can help change practices and the rules that govern them.

Our influence doesn't just depend on how many people we deploy or how much money we invest; it depends on our ability to send our assets to the right place, at the right time, and over time. Canada doesn't need to be present everywhere to exert significant influence, but it needs to be where it counts—

[*English*]

The Chair: Pardon me. We are way over time.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I now invite Dr. Chapnick to deliver his remarks of no more than five minutes.

Professor Adam Chapnick (Professor, Defence Studies, Canadian Forces College, As an Individual): Thank you for the opportunity to speak with this committee. It is an honour to contribute to this critical element of our liberal democracy. My comments will begin with historical context and conclude with a policy recommendation.

The end of the Second World War launched a series of international organizations—

The Chair: Professor, just a moment, please. Some members cannot hear you. We're going to resolve this technical issue.

● (1110)

Prof. Adam Chapnick: Okay. No problem.

Can you hear me now?

The Chair: Yes, absolutely. Please proceed.

Prof. Adam Chapnick: I will start over.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak with the committee. It is an honour to contribute to this critical element of our liberal democracy. My comments will begin with the historical context and conclude with a policy recommendation.

The end of the Second World War launched a series of international organizations and institutions that have persisted to this day. The intent at the time was twofold. The international security institutions, headlined by the United Nations Security Council, were meant to prevent a third world war. The international economic institutions—the International Monetary Fund or IMF, the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, or GATT, which later became the World Trade Organization—were all designed to encourage liberalized trade within a rules-based system, supervised for all intents and purposes by leading western liberal democracies.

This system of global governance was utterly consistent with Canadian national interests. Not only did we help design these institutions; three of our closest allies had vetoes on the Security Council. Canada and other wealthy countries had disproportionate voting power at the IMF and World Bank. The GATT promoted free trade within a rules-based liberal order, two ideas of critical importance to a trade-dependent middle-sized power like Canada.

To summarize the history, the system of global governance that emerged after the Second World War was built deliberately and intentionally by Canada and its western allies for their mutual benefit. The post-Second World War system never functioned exactly as envisioned. Its effectiveness waxed and mostly waned, based largely on the interests of the great powers—notably, the United States, Russia and China—in making them work.

Today, as the United States turns inward, Russia inexcusably violates the sovereignty of Ukraine on a daily basis, and China regularly exercises economic coercion to get its way in the world, much of that system of global governance is in disarray. The United Nations has been marginalized by the great power veto. The World Trade Organization's appellate body cannot function, because Democratic and Republican administrations have prevented the appointment of a quorum of judges.

In this context, Canada is left with three options. What Prime Minister Mark Carney calls “variable geometry” is an approach that suggests that since the system is broken, Canada should work around it. Ottawa should pursue “different coalitions for different issues, based on common values and interests”. It should develop a web of limited economic and security alliances and institutions to make up for the failures of the universal ones.

It's a practical, pragmatic approach, but in withdrawing its attention from the United Nations system, Ottawa makes it easier for Beijing to increase its influence and ultimately rebuild that system, stripped of its liberal democratic inclinations.

An alternative is for Ottawa to take a leadership role in advancing institutional reform. Since Canada benefits disproportionately from a universal system that privileges liberal democratic ideals, an aggressive commitment to reform would be understandable, but Ottawa is not nearly powerful enough to overcome the current institutional dysfunction alone, and any resources it dedicates to reform cannot be invested in building national resilience.

There is, I think, a middle way. Canada must build new relationships and alliances to make up for the failure of the old ones. It cannot count on the United Nations to maintain its security or the World Trade Organization to protect its economic interests, but it must also remain engaged in the traditional international system, no matter how flawed or dysfunctional. History suggests that the chaos of today will eventually at least somewhat subside. When it does, we must ensure that the system of global governance to which we return has not been infiltrated and compromised by the Chinese.

In sum, international institutions today are not at their best. Canada has no choice but to seek alternatives, but it must also defend the broken institutions from a hostile takeover.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your statement.

I now invite Dr. Welsh to deliver her remarks.

Dr. Jennifer Welsh (Director of the Max Bell School of Public Policy and Distinguished James McGill Professor, McGill University, As an Individual): Hello. Good morning.

It's an honour to be with you and the committee this morning to contribute to your deliberations, which, as I understand it, are about the effectiveness of international institutions.

I want to start by reminding us all of what international institutions are. They are most simply arrangements that structure co-operation among sovereign states by establishing rules, procedures and expectations for how states interact. These arrangements vary in the degree of formality, ranging from informal understandings and norms, such as the institution of diplomatic immunity, to the formal international organizations, such as the UN, with established rules, administrative bodies and decision-making.

International institutions do not necessarily replace state sovereignty or operate independently of state interests. They create structured settings within which states pursue their goals and manage their interactions, even across time when governments change.

Why do these institutions matter for Canada? Professor Chapnick referred to this argument. Because our prosperity and security depend fundamentally on the broader global and institutional context, we've had a particular interest in building and sustaining an institutional architecture globally that will secure both our security and our economic objectives. The consequence of those realities is that we have relied upon international co-operation.

I want to stress to the committee that this has not been a naive or starry-eyed pursuit. It's been crucial to our success as a country. Given that Canada is not a major power, it has a continued interest in ensuring that any rules guiding these forms of international co-operation reflect the concerns of the many rather than the powerful few, minimize the capacity of the strong to coerce the weak, and have fair, transparent, rules-based mechanisms for resolving disputes.

Today, we face a fracturing multilateral system due to major powers' conflicting interests, lack of leadership from key players both regionally and globally, particular weaknesses in institutional enforcement and design, and continued under-representation of key states and non-state actors.

The past decade has brought to the surface the uncomfortable truth that core elements of the world's multilateral system are creaking and, in some cases, at risk of becoming obsolete. Added to this sentiment are questions about the legitimacy of a post-1945 architecture that does not adequately reflect the growing power and influence of non-western states, as well as simmering resentment about the alleged selectivity with which western states apply the core norms associated with that architecture.

One possible response to the fracturing multilateral system is for Canada to adopt a more transaction-based approach to international relations. We see some signs of this with the current government's approach to international trade in particular. As I suggested earlier, two Canadian realities—our relative power position and our globally facing economy and society—require ongoing commitment to multilateralism.

Then the key strategic question for Canada is whether it wishes to be a system maintainer or a system innovator. The latter calls for more proactive efforts to ensure that multilateralism better reflects changing power dynamics and emerging global challenges, including through the creation of new structures and processes, if necessary outside of well-established institutional frameworks. In short, it's still “a” rules-based order, not necessarily “the” rules-based order that we have all gotten used to.

However, there are two cautions.

First, variable geometry must be more than a slogan. It needs to be based on careful consideration of where and how coalitions can come together effectively in ways that complement and improve rather than undermine what I would call our legacy architecture.

Secondly, we need to be careful about how and with what criteria we evaluate the effectiveness of international institutions. The scapegoating of international institutions has become a well-trodden path for populist politicians around the world who want to deflect responsibility. Let's blame the WHO for all the problems of COVID. Let's blame the WTO for the loss of jobs in the heartland in the United States. Remember that international institutions are created by states. They do not sit above them or outside them and therefore reflect state interests and political dynamics. International institutions cannot eliminate those dynamics.

● (1115)

In my submission to you, I've left you some thoughts on questions to ask about the effectiveness of international institutions as you go through your deliberations. I will not summarize those now—I'd go over my five minutes—but I would say, most simply, ask whether a given institution makes a meaningful difference to international co-operation and helps address the problems it was created to solve. Simply establishing an institution, adopting rules or obtaining state compliance doesn't necessarily mean it's effective. We need to examine both institutional performance and an institution's actual contribution to important outcomes today.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your questions.

● (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your statement.

I will now open the floor for questions by members, beginning with MP Philip Lawrence.

You have six minutes.

Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Clarke, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

My questions will be for you, Dr. Chapnick.

In your opening remarks, you mentioned a middle way, differing from the PM's approach of variable geometry. Could you outline what different choices you would make if you were the prime minister?

Prof. Adam Chapnick: The only different choice I would make is that I would not decrease investment and confidence in Global Affairs Canada. I think there is still a role for our diplomats in these international institutions and preserving their future viability.

My sense is that Global Affairs has not been treated as part of the international and national security structures that are being promoted by this government. It was cut, when other parts were not cut as deeply or were augmented.

Philip Lawrence: To clarify, your concern is the cuts that have been performed to GAC, as well as its removal from some of the other broader discussions?

Prof. Adam Chapnick: My concern, if you put those two together, is the decreased institutional capacity of GAC to do the grunt work necessary to keep some of these institutional organizations from falling into the hands of folks who would like to influence them differently, not through western liberal democratic ideals and norms.

Philip Lawrence: Could you continue about what some of the consequences of the defanging of GAC would be?

Prof. Adam Chapnick: The assumption seems to be that if international organizations aren't working, we don't have to put any energy into them, because they aren't working and they will shrivel up and disappear.

I don't think some of our adversaries think the same way. I think they see opportunities. If the west decides not to pay attention to international institutions, they can replace western representatives with adversarial representatives who can then reshape those institutions for their means. The only way you can resist that is through a foreign service that has the people and the capabilities necessary to stand their ground. With our allies in the United States moving out, the last thing we should do is move out as well.

Philip Lawrence: Would I be going too far to suggest that this government, by undermining the work of GAC, is in some ways allowing our enemies to gain a foothold in some of the international institutions, which will—maybe not immediately, but in the medium or perhaps long term—make the world a more dangerous place?

Prof. Adam Chapnick: To me, you are going slightly too far. I think the moves risk this happening. I think GAC could reorganize and put its emphasis in certain places, but it would certainly be easier if GAC was considered a full-fledged member of the revitalized international and national security apparatus this government is making.

I'm very comfortable with an increased emphasis on defence. I'm less comfortable that it comes at the expense of our diplomatic capacity.

Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much. I think you've been very clear on that score about the potential risks of undermining GAC and the important work it does.

I want to change subjects. In previous writings, you were critical of past governments pursuing a seat on the Security Council. I'm wondering what your thoughts would be on the government's current pursuit of a seat on the human rights committee at the United Nations.

Prof. Adam Chapnick: My concerns with the Security Council are that, in the past, we have pursued a seat in a contested election, which means that we had to sell favours to our adversaries in order to win over our allies. I don't think we should ever do that. I think we should be constantly pursuing a seat on the Security Council in uncontested elections, so when there's only one other candidate from the western European and other group. That way, we are automatically elected and represent our allies without having to sell favours to adversaries.

It follows that I want us to be represented in every UN institution whenever we can. I just don't like competing against our friends to do so.

● (1125)

Philip Lawrence: I share your concern, and I would call upon the government....

I'm wondering whether you would support being more transparent if, in fact, those favours are being traded back and forth. It seems like this is done in the shadows.

Could I have your comments on that, sir?

Prof. Adam Chapnick: I recognize the need for transparency in government, and governments have to be accountable. The messiness and sausage-making of diplomacy mean that some of these things have to be kept quiet in order to preserve the integrity and the word of a delegation. If part of the deal is not explaining the deal and we explain the deal, the deal is off.

I recognize the need for transparency, but in the case of side deals for elections, I don't think they can always be expressed to the Canadian public right away.

Philip Lawrence: Thank you very much, Dr. Chapnick. I really enjoy your writings, and you're a real benefit to Canada.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go next to MP Zuberi. You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you to all the witnesses for being here this morning.

[*English*]

I appreciate the time, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to start off with our professor from McGill, Dr. Welsh. I really appreciate your testimony and how you opened.

I picked up on one concept that you raised, which was that after World War II, a lot of countries were left out of the highest echelons of the decision-making order. Do you have any suggestions for how we can repair that and adjust to the current moment we're in today?

Dr. Jennifer Welsh: I think it's really important that at this moment, when our institutions are being discussed as objects of reform, we do not pursue that reform with clubs that we are used to collaborating with only.

I see our first tier of variable geometry in this new government as being inclusive of Europe, Japan, South Korea and now, increasingly, India, but forgetting that our universal multilateral system has a much wider membership, and that part of the problem with our institutions today is not just their alleged ineffectiveness but also their alleged illegitimacy in terms of their representation and the way they have operated.

Sameer Zuberi: Certainly. Even the outgoing Secretary-General has spoken about this, hasn't he?

Dr. Jennifer Welsh: Yes, exactly.

Professor Chapnick mentioned the approach of China and some of our adversaries to these institutions. I think it's really important that committee members understand that those countries have a very deliberate strategy of engaging countries from the global south in their vision of how international institutions should operate.

That's why we should sit up and take note that the various votes in the General Assembly with respect to Ukraine were perhaps not as overwhelmingly condemning of Russia as we might have expected, because of some of these dynamics over time.

Sameer Zuberi: Certainly. I appreciate what you referred to.

Dr. Chapnick, I'll ask you further questions on this particular point.

You talked about the influence of China and how there's been a withdrawal of the major western powers. You are cautioning us to be aware and to not cede space to China so it can then enter and influence the international institutions, such as the UN and others.

Would you like to elaborate further on that?

Prof. Adam Chapnick: My basic argument is that one of our greatest allies got very frustrated with the World Health Organization and has all but abandoned it. That space will be filled. The World Health Organization will not shrivel up and die. The space will be filled, and it will be filled by a country with similar power.

As a result, from a Canadian point of view, the last thing we should do is leave as well. We need to try, with our allies, to fill in as much of that space as possible and leave it available for other allies if and when they want to come back. That's the same for every organization out there.

Sameer Zuberi: With the withdrawal of the United States, which we would expect to continue until January 2029, how do we, as you're saying, fill in that space? Do you have any concrete suggestions?

● (1130)

Prof. Adam Chapnick: My concrete suggestion is that, number one, we do not make it worse and we do not also cut back our commitment based on the argument that if our allies aren't involved anyway, the organization is not worth our time. That would be step one.

Step two would be encouraging our allies to do the same and similarly not back off. I don't think Canada is large enough to solve the problem, but we can stop it from becoming worse, and we can leverage our partners and allies to preserve as much as we can for as long as we can.

Sameer Zuberi: How do you see the posture of us and our like-minded partners on that particular point? What's our current posture?

Prof. Adam Chapnick: Our current posture is consistent with the idea that multilateral organizations and institutions matter, but if we are reducing our diplomatic capacity, it's much harder to put that posture into action.

Sameer Zuberi: Do you have any suggestions for reforms of the Security Council or other instances of the like as they relate to the post-World War II era and where we are today?

Prof. Adam Chapnick: Here's where I might differ from some members. I don't think reforming the United Nations Security Council is worth Canada's time. I don't think the reform will work. We already have limited resources, and in the grand scheme, if three of the five veto powers are our allies, I don't imagine that any institution that comes to replace the UN Security Council would give us a better deal than that.

That is not where I would put my time.

Sameer Zuberi: I appreciate that.

In terms of the recent increase in contributions to NATO, we have done that because of the realities within Ukraine and the region. Do you see a need for us to also be mindful of other international organizations' priorities as we have prioritized the military?

This is my last 20 seconds.

Prof. Adam Chapnick: I think we've increased to NATO, in part for military reasons, but it was really for diplomatic reasons. We made a promise to our allies, and we didn't meet it for years. In fact, we almost bragged about not meeting it at times.

If we want credibility with our partners, we have to keep our word.

Sameer Zuberi: I appreciate that. That's certainly not the case today, but thank you for your testimony.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will go next to MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for six minutes.

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

I'm going to have a lengthy preamble because I want to talk about credibility. If we want Canada to contribute to the effectiveness of major international institutions, we must first know whether Canada is credible in its bilateral relations.

Here's a little reading for you today. On October 26, 2025, “the violence in and around El Fasher reached a devastating peak following months of siege and escalating attacks” by the Rapid Support Forces, or RSF, at war with the Sudanese army. That statement was signed by Germany, Denmark, Ireland, France, Norway, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sierra Leone, Sweden, the European Union and Canada. That's the same date as today.

Experts from the United Nations, or UN, considered that this offensive by the FSR to take the last major city in Darfur still under the army's control had the characteristics of a genocide.

We know that the United Arab Emirates is considered the main supporter of the FSR and by supplies them with vehicles, fuel, weapons and military equipment. However, today and tomorrow, Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, or MBZ, and his entourage will be welcomed with great pomp by the Prime Minister.

We want Canada to take part in strengthening major international institutions. However, when somewhat Orwellian situations occur, as we are experiencing today, on the one hand we denounce, and on the other, we welcome the main ally of a force that is currently accused of committing genocidal acts. I ask myself this: What does this say about Canada's credibility and what does it mean when Canada says that it would like to strengthen….

Ms. Martin-Brûlé, can you answer this big question? There will be easier ones afterward.

Sarah-Myriam Martin-Brûlé: I think it's possible to distinguish between the Canadian government's tentative political aspirations and having partnerships or partners that can be a little uncomfortable. You talked about the United Arab Emirates or Saudi Arabia. There is also a new agreement with Türkiye.

We cannot afford to be friends only with the democracies that suit us. That has been said by many experts besides myself. We are in a system with a plurality of interests and priorities. It would be difficult for us—and it would be a very lonely mission—to only align with certain types of democracies. I am thinking, politically, of democracies with other priorities.

Turning back to Canada's credibility in international institutions, I think we need to look at it from another angle, and that's where Canada can play a role. Someone mentioned that major powers such as China are investing over the long term, for example, in several key UN committees that are less visible, but very significant in terms of scope.

I think that we shouldn't focus on the visibility of the investment, be that the number of troops deployed or even the magnitude of the financial resources used. China has positioned itself in several committees that set the UN's rules; that is something we could learn from. Canada can go where it can play a role, in places that are less influential, but that have an impact on the decision-making process and on the rules that are established.

● (1135)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I understand, but what you're saying is that we can't be friends solely with like-minded democracies. However, there is still a certain boundary that must not be crossed. When we see a joint statement issued by Mr. Carney and Mr. Erdoğan, stating that Canada and Türkiye share values like respect for the rule of law, respect for human rights and freedom of expression, there is still a line that has been crossed when we know what sort of person Mr. Erdoğan is. Incidentally, I invite everyone who can to listen to the podcast on OHdio about Mr. Erdoğan. Isn't there something a little Orwellian there, as I was saying? Maybe we're rewriting something.

We can trade, I understand that. However, when we go so far as to receive Mohamed bin Zayed with great fanfare, isn't there a sense of unease about the Carney government's new foreign policy at the moment?

Sarah-Myriam Martin-Brûlé: Certainly. You alluded to unease, but I think it's important to keep the lines of communication open. For example, the last thing we should do is close embassies or to turn a blind eye or deaf ear to regimes that make us uncomfortable in our democracy. I don't think the two can coexist in an ideal manner. That's not possible. However, it seems to me that it is vital to maintain channels of communication.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I agree, as long as we don't go too far. That's my opinion, but I think a lot of people share it.

You talked about the possibility of drawing inspiration from what others are doing better. You mentioned Germany and Switzerland.

Sarah-Myriam Martin-Brûlé: There's also Japan. There are several other examples, such as Sweden.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's right. Could you tell the committee about what others are doing better?

Sarah-Myriam Martin-Brûlé: Germany has the ZIF, which recruits, trains and deploys civilian experts and runs structured programs to support international careers. I was saying that it was a deliberate way of placing German nationals in international institutions, and this is an example of that. For its part, Sweden relies on the Folke Bernadotte Academy. And so does Switzerland. Japan takes a complementary approach through the UN Triangular Partnership Programme. It helps to train military contingents from other countries, notably in Africa, but in more technical fields, such as military engineering, for example. These are examples, more broadly, of countries choosing to guide and train experts, mobilize those who are already there and train the next generation, to help these experts access international careers.

A distinction needs to be made. Our diplomats represent and defend Canada's position, that's one thing. Canadians recruited as international civil servants serve their organization while being independent, but I think they can reflect Canadian values. We could be much more intentional and create a group of experts so that we can better distribute, support and listen within our Canadian government and our talent pool.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go next to MP Jacob Mantle.

You have five minutes.

Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for appearing and providing their valuable testimony.

Professor Welsh, the last time you were at this committee, you provided some testimony about foreign policy review. You were lamenting the fact that the last foreign policy review took place in 2005. We are now in the longest gap between policy reviews since the Second World War: 11 years of the current government and 18 months of the current Prime Minister. Where is the foreign policy review?

Dr. Jennifer Welsh: It's an excellent question. I'm asking the same question.

My understanding is that the government is preparing a series of reviews for this autumn, including a national security policy and strategy, and also a foreign policy strategy. I would agree with the assumption in your question that it's extremely important for us at this moment, with the global changes we are seeing, to articulate for Canadians any new directions in our foreign policy.

From what I understand about those documents, there is a strong focus on ensuring that Canada has strategic autonomy in an era of geopolitical rivalry and a changing relationship with the United States, but I think what this committee is looking at with respect to international institutions is an important piece of the puzzle. I would say that while I have heard a great deal from this government about trade and defence, and I agree that our trade and defence relationships need to be improved upon and expanded, we have not heard as much about our political diplomacy or something that none of us have yet really drilled down on in this conversation: global development.

We have talked about the UN system in this conversation, but Canada holds very important positions in bodies like the World Bank, where its executive director seat represents not just Canada but also others. We can, as part of a new foreign policy strategy, also discuss the ways in which we are going to innovate international institutions and global development. I hope very much to see that in any new strategy that comes out this fall.

● (1140)

Jacob Mantle: Thank you very much for that, Professor Welsh.

Professor Chapnick, you spoke about the government's approach to international institutions, foreign policy and foreign trade. I want to describe for you one of the problems I see with the current approach and get your thoughts on it.

On the one hand, the Prime Minister speaks about a rules-based system, whether that's for trade or foreign policy. On the other hand, I see Canada breaking those rules on a regular basis. For example, we have imposed trade restrictions on our free trade partners when it comes to steel goods, and we have imposed even harsher restrictions on countries with which we do not have free trade agreements on steel goods, none of which was done in conformity with our WTO or free trade obligations.

The Prime Minister talks about an uncertain world and the need for liberal democracies to co-operate, but then he signs agreements and stands on a podium with authoritarians and dictators. We saw that just last week in Turkey. We've heard discussion about the U.A.E., Saudi Arabia and, of course, China. When I look at variable geometry, it seems to me to simply be a justification for hypocrisy.

What are your thoughts?

Prof. Adam Chapnick: First and foremost, I think diplomacy is ugly and will always be ugly, because we share some interests with countries and don't share them others. It's rare that we're fully aligned. Seeing elements of what you're calling hypocrisy is a given in diplomacy, in general.

I prefer, personally, that we simply not have as much rhetoric. I'm comfortable with actions that you would call hypocritical, because we may not have security interests with some countries. As John Diefenbaker said in the 1950s or early 1960s when dealing with China, they may be communists, but they can't kill us with a loaf of bread. Therefore, we can sell them bread. They can't do anything to us with that loaf of bread.

That's partly how diplomacy works.

Jacob Mantle: Thank you for that.

One of the themes I was picking up from your comments and those of others is that we should stay in these organizations, not walk away from them.

The trouble I have with that—I'm running out of time—is this: Why should we stay in organizations that have proven themselves to be incapable of reform? You talked about the WTO, but you didn't mention the fact that the WTO has an appellate body that is creating new obligations, or that you have countries self-selecting as developing countries. Korea is not a developing country anymore, yet it benefits from that.

Why should we stay in organizations that can't reform themselves?

Prof. Adam Chapnick: That's a very fair question.

The WTO—

The Chair: Unfortunately, that answer will have to wait for the next round or the next opportunity.

I go next to MP Abdelhaq Sari.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Many thanks to the witnesses for the testimonies we are hearing today, and especially for the way in which we are receiving the relevance of their answers. They are giving us a rather interesting angle to the understanding of the subject of the day.

Ms. Martin-Brûlé, in your opening remarks, you spoke about several things. I want to talk about your work on gender guidelines in relation to the UN, or the United Nations.

I would like to give you a little more time to talk about this and to talk about your work on intelligence in peacekeeping, which you also wrote about in 2022, and your work on the Canadian Armed Forces, in 2023. You did two jobs, as I understand it. I would like to know how Canada is leveraging this expertise as part of the reform we are talking about today. Can you tell us a little more about this?

● (1145)

Sarah-Myriam Martin-Brûlé: Yes, I worked with the UN as a consultant to develop the first guidelines on peacekeeping-intelligence and gender issues. The question was whether gender was a cross-cutting issue in how women and men operate on peace missions, to better understand their actions.

The UN developed this new intelligence policy on Canadian missions. It was a word that was very taboo at the UN until 2017. It was renegotiated in 2019. There is also a hyphen in the English name peacekeeping-intelligence to show that it is not national intelligence, but information sharing between allied countries within a peace mission.

I was tasked with seeing how women and men could intervene differently in war zones. I then did the same for the Canadian government to see how to take gender into account in the Canadian context.

Your question is about mobilizing Canadian expertise. In my opinion, there has been no such mobilization. This is a bit what I want to put forward as well. I happen to be Canadian, but Norway and Sweden asked me to teach in their countries.

I haven't given any classes here. I also haven't trained our armed forces on gender and intelligence. In my opinion, too often we have extraordinary experts in Canada who are underutilized by Canada. We are called upon by Ireland, Norway and Sweden. It is very difficult to demonstrate the value of our expertise within the Canadian government. That has been the case for me, in my career, but it is true for many other experts. We have, I would say, very experienced people who have had extraordinary experiences. Moreover, we have Jennifer Welsh by video conference, who has extraordinary experience at the UN. We are a small ecosystem, but in the case of several other experts, I don't know if we are called on enough.

Abdelhaq Sari: I would like to come back to another subject that preoccupies me as well. That is the matter of governance in general and the lack of agility of several international bodies or organizations. People say they have become very bureaucratic and slow.

The question is for you, but also for Ms. Jennifer Welsh. To have some agility or to review the situation, what specific and priority reforms should really be prioritized now to solve this problem or remedy it a little?

Sarah-Myriam Martin-Brûlé: We must distinguish between visible and invisible processes and, in fact, all informal relationships at the UN, which Jennifer Welsh also mentioned. Canada should prioritize being at the table and being present. Even our Prime Minister, Mark Carney, said it: If we're not at the table, we're on the menu. This is too often the case in several UN committees.

Before thinking about reforms, we should begin to understand the mechanisms and the influence we can have. The influence can be twofold. It can be the influence of the official mission of the UN committee or the deployed agency. We could also consider the influence of peace operations on the ground. However, there are also very significant benefits to be gained from our allies: Being there and being present allows us to learn more about them and about other ways of doing things. That's not taken into account enough.

There is also the fact that, on the ground, there are several ways to see the legitimacy of an action. It's about seeing that the UN is a tool and better understanding how the tool works both formally and informally. It's also important to be part of the processes.

Abdelhaq Sari: Ms. Welsh, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Dr. Jennifer Welsh: Thank you for the question. Let me make two comments.

I think it's critical at the moment that Canada look at the entire UN80 reform agenda, which can look very large and overwhelming, identify with precision the two or three areas of UN reform that it thinks are critical to its own interests and values, and lead with ideas in a coalition to reform those parts of the UN that we believe are going to survive and be even more important.

Member states are going to need a World Food Programme, no matter what happens in the competition between China and the United States. Member states are going to need a functioning global migration organization like UNHCR. How do we, as Canada, in collaboration with countries from the global north and global south, pragmatically put forward a reform agenda for two or three parts of the UN system that we think are critical to maintain and keep alive? That is what I would be doing in GAC right now.

● (1150)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next is MP Brunelle-Duceppe, for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Martin-Brûlé, in your opening remarks, you talked about the Elsie initiative. You said that there were three levers that appeared to be the foundation of the program. Can you share your expertise with the committee?

Sarah-Myriam Martin-Brûlé: Thank you for this question on the Elsie initiative.

First, one has to understand the obstacles. Canada supported the development of a methodology called measuring opportunities for women in peace operations, or MOWIP, which was developed with DCAF, or the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, and Cornell University. The method examines 10 barriers to women's participation, including selection criteria and family responsibilities, and combines anonymous surveys, interviews and political and institutional analyses. What is known as MOWIP has made it possible to replace assumptions with scientific data and to target necessary reforms as well.

Next, the focus turned to funding the solutions. The Elsie initiative fund was created in 2019 to support the targeted changes, i.e., adapted infrastructure, equipment, training, selection procedures and deployment incentives.

The results were tangible. By the end of 2025, more than $21 million U.S. had been approved for 28 projects. In addition, seven infrastructure projects had been completed, 445 trained women were registered on the deployment lists and 7 units promoting high female participation had been deployed. This is another example where Canada helped develop a methodology and had a concrete influence through standards as well.

In 2023, Canada contributed to the adoption of nine documents amending the standards for equipment, lodging and medical support for UN contingents. In January 2026, with Australia and Bangladesh, it also contributed to the recognition and reimbursement of certain feminine hygiene products. As such, with the Elsie Initiative, Canada didn't just fund the change, it helped change the rules that make it possible.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chapnick, earlier, you said that when it comes to bilateral relations, it's hypocritical to do business with certain regimes that are dubious, so to speak. However, when a head of state who is considered the main ally of a genocidal force in Africa is received with great fanfare, isn't there a limit?

[*English*]

The Chair: Just a second. There's no translation.

Okay. I'm assured by the technical folks that it is working now. You may restart your question.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Isn't there still a red line that shouldn't be crossed? Yes, we can have diplomatic relations, but it's the manner in which these bilateral relations are expressed that sometimes crosses over the line a little. Don't you find it a little indecent to receive with great pomp, on the very date when genocidal acts were denounced, the person who is considered the greatest ally of the forces committing these acts? Isn't there something incoherent in that?

Prof. Adam Chapnick: I'm sorry to have to answer you in English. My French isn't good enough.

[*English*]

I think there are lines. I think, typically, though, those lines should be drawn based on concrete actions rather than words. If we're going to be hypocritical through words, the public can see sometimes that the words are necessary to appease in order to pursue other interests that are deemed critical, and that if we're going to draw lines, they should come much more in terms of actions.

We are going to do work with unsavoury regimes in the current climate. We have no choice. If the hypocrisy comes from saying a nice thing, and that's the only hypocrisy, I'm comfortable with that in the current environment, where we don't have the luxury of being all that picky about who we do business with.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go next to MP Ziad Aboultaif for five minutes.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for appearing.

I heard the term “variable geometry” twice, I believe, from you, Dr. Welsh, and from Professor Chapnick. Within the context of this, you mentioned that Canada should be looking for new partners and looking into these institutions and how effective the system can be. There's no doubt that we have a lack of transparency in this case and a lack of clarity on the strategy of the government. We don't know where the government is going with this.

I have a question for both of you, starting with Dr. Welsh. Where are these partners? Who are they? Is Canada really looking for these partners to be able to continue on that mission?

Thank you.

● (1155)

Dr. Jennifer Welsh: In what I've been able to learn, I think there are a few examples of where we can see variable geometry at work. One that the government has talked about a lot is the coalition of the willing on Ukraine, which is broader than the formal alliance of NATO. It is a coalition of countries coming together to coordinate their policy. Another example is the expansion of the trans-Pacific trade partnership towards the U.K. and Europe, which is something outside of the WTO but is a new kind of trading relationship.

I think the direction of your question is correct. When we pull these coalitions together, we need to clearly understand their purpose and their parameters but also how they relate to the existing architecture we have. I personally would like to see variable geometry extended to issues around, for example, global health security, and to cross the north-south divide. I also think, for example, there could be variable geometry among countries with critical mineral resources. South Africa and Canada right now lead a mining organization and could work together to set standards-based critical minerals agreements that would bring about transparency and better governance.

I'd like to see us expand what that means but also clarify how it relates to the existing institutions we have, so that we're not left with the impression as Canadians that everything is broken, because not everything is broken. We have to reform and improve what we have but creatively create new arrangements where they're needed.

Ziad Aboultaif: Dr. Chapnick, go ahead, please.

Prof. Adam Chapnick: I agree with just about everything Dr. Welsh said. I would add an example of variable geometry in the north. We are co-operating with the Nordic countries in order to better position and defend our Arctic. We are buying equipment from Australia that will support us in terms of radar in the Arctic as well.

In a number of different places, we are working with others outside of some of the traditional partnerships and coalitions.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

Does that mean leaving the current world we are in and heading toward a completely new strategy because the international institutions are not working as we speak?

Dr. Jennifer Welsh: I don't know if that's directed to me, but I would refer your committee to the G7 and the G20. In the case of the G7, that was an example of institutional innovation that arose because of the failure of international financial institutions to coordinate policy sufficiently. It's a nimble kind of innovation that we have seen, and it didn't mean leaving the World Bank, the IMF or the UN.

I think there could be other Gs that we might see. We have the Quad defence relationship, which actually doesn't include Canada. Some would say that it should. I don't think it's an either-or. I would refer you to the kind of innovation we've seen historically to give us good examples of where we need to go.

Ziad Aboultaif: Dr. Chapnick, answer quickly, please.

Prof. Adam Chapnick: If we gave up some of the basics of the international institutions created after the Second World War, we would rebuild them anyway, because we'd need them, and when we rebuilt them, they wouldn't look as good to us as they do now. You can work beyond, but you keep what you have as well.

Ziad Aboultaif: I have 30 seconds.

These types of initiatives need deep pockets. Do you think we have a deep enough pocket to be able to carry on this mission?

Dr. Jennifer Welsh: I think we do if we're strategic. We have cut our international assistance budget, but we still have $6 billion. If we are strategic about how we spend it and on what kinds of initiatives, we can make a difference. I personally regret that it was cut to the degree that it was. However, we have significant heft to bring, particularly if we work with others.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go next to MP Mona Fortier.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Fortier, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

First, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today. This conversation is really important as we try to see if international institutions are effective, and how they can be more effective. We have covered different topics today.

Ms. Martin-Brûlé, can you talk a little more about the language skills you mentioned earlier? I wonder just how we leverage language skills. We have two official languages in Canada. How do you think we should use this criterion or strength in our efforts?

● (1200)

Sarah-Myriam Martin-Brûlé: I think it's important to keep the policies bilingual. This summer, we saw withdrawals from certain bases, where the military would perhaps no longer be obligated to speak French and might only speak in English. I think that going in this direction is a mistake, because it is one of our assets, but, again, it is a strategic asset. Bilingualism should therefore not be abandoned. We must continue to insist on the importance of having bilingual international civil servants and military personnel, especially high-ranking officers.

In the longer term, we must also invest in the language training of our diplomats. I think Ulric Shannon, who is a diplomat, mentioned this a few years ago in a report: the ability to speak in French, English and other languages creates much stronger relationships and relationships of trust with our partners. It's a long-term investment, but I think that this type of investment has a lot of benefits.

The fact that Canada is bilingual in French and English gives us an extraordinary advantage on the ground, since many member states speak either French or English, but few speak both. We can therefore bridge the gap between several allies, better understand situations, speak the local language and understand the challenges and our influence.

More concretely, we must continue bilingual training and have the long-term will to invest in language training that allows us to better understand the situations we encounter.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you very much.

It is said that Canada is paying extra attention to economic security, supply chains and resilience in the face of economic coercion. You mentioned that a couple of times. Are the existing international institutions well equipped to meet these challenges, or in the current context, as I believe Ms. Walsh said earlier, should we expect to see new multilateral mechanisms emerge?

Ms. Walsh, please go first.

After that, I will go to Ms. Martin-Brûlé and then Mr. Chapnick if we have enough time.

[*English*]

Dr. Jennifer Welsh: Excuse me. Can you repeat the question about supply chains in particular? I didn't—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Based on what is happening now, is it time to create new multilateral mechanisms? You said we should learn from some of the events that are currently unfolding. I would like you to expand on new multilateral mechanisms.

[*English*]

Dr. Jennifer Welsh: Yes. Thank you. I was slightly thrown off by the words “supply chain”, and I wanted to make sure that I was answering you correctly.

Yes, I do believe that we have the possibility at this moment. I would say that even in the sphere of security we should be thinking that way, because as much as I believe our involvement in the NATO alliance is hugely important, it's also clear that European security and transatlantic security may require some further forms of institutionalization, including bringing potentially Ukraine, Turkey and others into a security orbit. I don't think we should be restricting where we believe these new kinds of mechanisms might be useful.

I mentioned around trade that I certainly believe we may need beyond what we have globally for global migration. Global migration is one of the most difficult transnational problems we face. Do we need a ginger group of states to look beyond what we have in the particular confines of the refugee convention and perhaps to arrangements that can address some of the acute migration needs?

I certainly believe that we will need more coalitions and variable geometry around global health security, and pandemics in particular, because what we designed through the pandemic treaty—a slow, universal multilateral process—did not really address all of the issues we saw with COVID-19.

● (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their appearance before the committee.

We will now briefly suspend the meeting in order to prepare for the next hour of testimony.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

● (1205)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1210)

[*English*]

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Before welcoming our witnesses to the second panel....

The clerk distributed, on October 23, two draft budgets for the following studies. For the study regarding the effectiveness of international institutions, we have a draft budget of $9,600. For the study regarding opportunities presented to Canada through a strengthened relationship with the European Union, we also have a draft budget of $9,600.

Is it the will of the committee to adopt these two budgets?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I would now like to welcome our witnesses joining us for the second hour.

Appearing by video conference, we have François Audet, professor, Observatoire canadien sur les crises et l'action humanitaires, Université du Québec à Montréal.

[*English*]

We also have Vincent Pouliot, professor, Université de Montréal and Robert Wolfe, professor emeritus, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, by video conference.

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

I now invite Professor Vincent Pouliot to deliver an opening statement of no more than five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Vincent Pouliot (Professor, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): Thank you for your welcome.

As the topic of the meeting this morning is fairly broad, I would like to start by putting things into context and sharing a few remarks and thoughts based on my 25 years of work on international institutions. I will try to close with a few specific recommendations.

The first observation on context is that international institutions are facing growing challenges and politicization, not because they have become less effective, but because their mandate continues to expand. That is one contextual element that has to be kept in mind.

International institutions are taking on an expanded role. They are being called upon to expand their area of jurisdiction and scope of action. Our expectations have increased. We now expect them to be democratic, inclusive and transparent. Obviously, I support these values, but it's important to understand that this also increases the policy workload. International organizations were not designed for that. As such, a certain amount of adaptation work is necessary, and Canada should contribute to that work. However, that work cannot be done overnight. In a sense, that is an appeal to find space between cynical and idealized views of international institutions. I think the truth lives in the balance between the two.

My second introductory remark is that contrary to what we often hear in the media or even in some political speeches, in my opinion, the most pressing issue facing international organizations is not inefficiency or bureaucracy.

Obviously, the UN machinery, for example, could benefit from some improvements. This is probably the organization I know best. I don't want to say that some things cannot be improved. However, should Canada make reform of international institutions a priority now? I don't think so.

Instead, I think we need to look at member states and Canada's partners, who have a love-hate relationship with all international institutions. That is part and parcel of the international system. States created international institutions in order to use them and rely on them, and they have done that. That is to be expected. That's the name of the game, but quite often, states try to hinder the work of international organizations. As such, I think we need to use the right lens to examine this issue. In my opinion, we are better off thinking about the relationship between states when it comes to making international institutions more effective.

The third point I want to make is that, in my opinion, Canada's strongest asset in the incredibly turbulent world of today is constancy, consistency, predictability and reliability. I believe most of our partners are looking for a reliable partner.

The good news is that that does not cost much. A consistent and predictable partner is not something that requires billions of dollars in investment, far from it. Instead, it involves day-to-day action. I'm a big advocate for international law not being like an à la carte restaurant menu where people pick and choose what suits them. I believe that if the International Court of Justice renders a decision, regardless of whether Canada is comfortable or uncomfortable with that decision, supporting the court will serve our long-term interests. The same goes with the International Criminal Court. I'm just taking examples of international law.

I believe that Canada plays its role better when it agrees in principle with international institutions and not when it agrees "à la carte". I know that à la carte or variable geometry multilateralism is quite popular these days. I understand its appeal, because it gives us an opportunity to directly approach the partners we already get along with. Yes, there's a certain appeal to that. However, I believe we have to look at the bigger picture. From Canada's perspective, the value of multilateralism lies in maintaining the stability of the system, rather than in the next decision that will be taken tomorrow. The system is more stable because it doesn't have many competing or fragmented institutions.

Take the example of artificial intelligence. China is trying to set up its own regional organization. The European Union has its own approach. The United States has its own approach. It would be a bad idea were Canada to decide to adopt an "à la carte" approach and choose the organization that best meets its needs. It's much better for Canada to prioritize a broader, inclusive process. This will take more time and will be more complicated. However, it will establish guidelines that are truly global in scope.

In closing, I will make two minor concrete points. We can discuss them during the question period if need be.

First, generally speaking, if we want to reform and make international institutions more effective, our top focus should be to improve the way existing institutions work rather than try to create new ones. That doesn't mean that we can't think outside the box every now and then. It's clear that this is feasible and that there are good reasons in its favour. However, the house is already standing. If we use the UN as a reference, most international organizations are around 80 years old. The house is showing its age. It needs maintenance and renovation. That is normal. However, in my opinion, that demands that Canada take action that may not be super visible to or applauded by everyone, but the action would nevertheless be substantive.

● (1215)

I will cite two of the ones that are of particular concern to me and which touch on issues where Canada can play a truly central role. The first is funding. We need to understand that the UN budget is shrinking. That's something our levels of government have not experienced, despite current austerity measures. The UN budget has been shrinking over the past few years, with less funding available every year. I'm not even talking about a reduction in real terms relative to inflation. I'm talking about a reduction in absolute terms. The regular UN budget is $3.2 billion. That's the combined budget of the three largest European soccer clubs. That will give members a rough idea. Obviously, there are also voluntary contributions, but the regular UN budget is already tight and further cuts will inevitably create problems.

In my opinion, Canada does indeed have a role to play here. Incidentally, this role perfectly resonates with the concerns of countries in the global south, which I think Canada should draw closer to. That is a major concern for countries in the global south. As such, long-term funding should be maintained by ensuring that, for instance, states stop withholding their mandatory contributions, or paying the contributions as late as possible or using the contributions for political leverage. Other modes of funding are needed. I think that is where we are in 2026. These issues need to be considered. It's not just a matter of increasing the budget. It's also a matter of making the budget more stable and sustainable to ensure the organization can take action on its own without relying on voluntary contributions from one year to another.

I have a second point, but I'll stop here, Mr. Chair, because my time is up.

The Chair: Thank you for your remarks.

I now call on Professor Audet to take the floor.

François Audet (Professor, Canadian Observatory on Crises and Humanitarian Action, Université du Québec à Montréal, As an Individual): Good afternoon, members of the committee. Thank you for your invitation.

Greetings to my colleagues in the room.

My comments will be based on some 30 years of experience. I spent the first part of my career working for several international organizations, and now I study the governance of international organizations.

My argument is simple and echoes that of my colleague. To be effective, international organizations need trust, trust from governments like Canada's that fund them, trust from the partners that implement their programs and trust from the populations they serve. This trust is obviously based on results, and it is always by these results that effectiveness is measured. However, as Professor Pouliot said, it depends mainly on the decisions made by the member states. When states and populations trust international organizations, co-operation becomes easier. This has been well demonstrated. This co-operation enables international organizations to achieve better results, which in turn strengthens the trust they inspire.

As I often tell my students, to a large extent, we get the international organizations we deserve. Countries like Canada define their mandates, powers and budgets, but if their mandates are vague or contradictory, if their powers are discredited, or if their budgets are cut, it should come as no surprise that the results are different or even very negative.

However, as we know, organizations must answer to multiple governments. Consequently, priorities can often conflict. So, as Professor Pouliot said, any assessment of the situation must distinguish between management issues and the political or budgetary obstacles that may be imposed by certain members. The United States' disengagement in recent years from certain international organizations illustrates this distinction precisely. When a country as significant as the United States reduces its support and calls certain institutions into question, it undermines both their capacity to act and their credibility. Not all of the resulting difficulties can be attributed to administration or bureaucracy.

In my view, five priorities emerge from this context. The first is that Canada continues to demonstrate the usefulness of international organizations. Trust in them requires citizens to understand what international co-operation is going to bring to them. The Government of Canada must explain why it supports an organization and what results it expects from that support. It must demonstrate how international organizations contribute, for example, to detecting epidemics, as we are currently seeing with Ebola in Africa, preventing conflict or coordinating disaster responses. Their effectiveness directly contributes to the collective security of Canadians. This is often very poorly understood.

The second priority is to continue funding what we're asking for. It sounds simple, but it doesn't happen often. When resources dwindle, programs are scaled back, and expertise is lost. It's the same for any federal government department. This decline in capacity can then be presented as evidence of inefficiency, justifying further cuts. It's a kind of vicious cycle. Canada must break this vicious cycle and ensure that the mandates it supports are aligned with the resources it is prepared to provide or mobilize from other partners in the international community to meet those needs.

The third priority is to deliver on our commitments and ensure continuity during a crisis. I think it's fair to say that we're in a crisis right now. We need predictable funding. This must allow for the maintenance of teams, information networks and staff safety features. Effectiveness depends on that continuity. Organizations, whether federal or international, must be able to plan their responses, retain staff and work sustainably with partners.

The fourth priority is to apply the same rules to everyone and protect safety through law. Trust also depends on a sense of fairness. Conversely, trust is weakened when the rules seem to vary depending on alliances or the short-term interests of powerful states, as was mentioned earlier. Canada must therefore support the consistent application of international law, even if that sometimes means criticizing one or more partners.

The fifth priority is to co-operate where we can actually act. In Davos, the Prime Minister called on middle powers to work together on specific issues. That's exactly what an international organization is all about. Canada could give concrete expression to this call by, for example, bringing together partners to maintain essential services that are at risk of being eliminated because of budget cuts.

● (1220)

For example, in my field of humanitarian studies, I think that humanitarian monitoring and early warnings for epidemics, as we're seeing in Africa, are a good example of what Canada could do. When we lose our ability to document needs and identify worsening conditions, we intervene too late, and the human and financial consequences are much greater.

I'll end there. The five priorities I just mentioned were also included in a somewhat more comprehensive brief containing recommendations. They are based on shared responsibility. International organizations must improve their practices, but countries like Canada must give them realistic mandates. We must honour our own commitment. For Canada, this means supporting their effectiveness so that they can fully exercise their role as members, donors and partners. Trust is built through this commitment and the resources we provide them.

Thank you very much.

● (1225)

The Chair: Thank you for your opening remarks.

I now invite Professor Wolfe to take the floor.

[*English*]

Professor Robert Wolfe (Professor Emeritus, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, As an Individual): Thank you very much for this invitation.

My focus is going to be narrower than that of all the speakers you've heard so far. I'm going to talk about the World Trade Organization and why strengthening it contributes to Canada's foreign policy priority of building a stable and prosperous world order.

We all know President Trump loves tariffs and does not love trade agreements. Last year, two European leaders called the WTO defunct and said it “hasn't worked for years”. In that famous Davos speech, Mark Carney said that the WTO was “greatly diminished”.

These perceptions are misleading. The WTO is the foundation of the trading system. Its fate matters enormously, not least for a small country like Canada. Countries do not automatically comply with any international obligation, and yet most WTO members do so much of the time. Observers have a natural tendency to look at breaches of the rules and ignore underlying compliance. The WTO secretariat estimates that 72% of all merchandise trade still takes place under the basic principle of countries treating their trading partners equally. This is known as the most favoured nation, or MFN, principle.

The purpose of the WTO is to reduce uncertainty and trade costs for importers and exporters. The WTO is not to blame for massive uncertainty in world trade. That's due to the geopolitical situation.

Reforms the WTO might need depend on its effectiveness in fulfilling three core functions.

First, it monitors the implementation of commitments and improves transparency on national trade policies. All of that is working well. WTO agreements are like the operating system for world trade. Its committees provide a forum for discussion of all the agreements, and those discussions are often based on notifications of new or changed trade measures. Thousands are submitted and published every year.

Second, it has a forum for settling legal disputes when they arise. This part of the system does need reform, but it's far from moribund. When countries cannot resolve conflict over the interpretation of the rules, they launch disputes. Rumours to the contrary notwithstanding, first-stage dispute panels still work. The problem is with appeals. The appellate body exists but is effectively defunct because of U.S. concerns. Some members appeal results anyway, which means rulings do not have to be implemented. Others use the interim mechanism of appealing by arbitration, which Canada helped create.

The third function is negotiating new agreements. WTO rules have not kept up with technological change and the evolution of complex global value chains. Observers will say that the WTO is ineffective because new negotiations involving the whole membership now seem impossible. Some say that 166 members cannot make decisions by consensus, but there will never be consensus to relax consensus. That's why members have tried to advance negotiations among smaller groups of countries in so-called plurilaterals. The results of some of these negotiations need consensus to be brought under the WTO umbrella. India, in particular, has created roadblocks to that consensus.

These institutional impediments to reform obscure the bigger problem. Capitals are distracted by events elsewhere. Bilateral negotiations and new strategic partnerships proliferate, but there's no alternative to the foundational role of the WTO in the trading system. If the WTO is allowed to fade away and world trade fragments into multiple small agreements, uncertainty and costs will rise for everyone. It won't be as instantaneous as closing the Strait of Hormuz, but it may be worse.

At the UN, in September, Canada co-sponsored the new Partners for Multilateralism coalition. This affirmed the need to uphold and enforce the rules essential to international order while renewing the multilateral system. One place to start is the WTO. We and other middle powers depend on the stability and predictability of the rules it provides. Dozens of reform proposals are on the table, but they are wish lists. Delegates are keeping the discussion alive, or treading water, until the politics allow genuine movement. Canada can help to ensure that the WTO does not sink while waiting.

Canada will likely make its own proposals. Officials in Geneva participate in country groups that meet informally on areas of possible agreement on institutional reform. Canada also supports informal dialogues on things like industrial policy and the environment. The Prime Minister and ministers are actively talking to their counterparts about trade. They should bring up the WTO. Canada can encourage other capitals to engage. For example, leaders could encourage India to be more accommodating of bringing plurilaterals under the WTO umbrella.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you for your opening remarks, Mr. Wolfe.

We will now move on to the question period.

[*English*]

I'll begin with MP Philip Lawrence.

You have six minutes.

Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions will primarily be for you, Mr. Audet.

You went through five priorities that you have for Canada in terms of building trust in the international organizations. While you were going through them, I don't think you said this directly, so I'd like to give you the opportunity to comment. It's that many of them appear at odds with the current fanciful term “variable geometry”.

I'm wondering if you could comment on that. Are suggestions for consistency of funding, consistency of support, at odds with variable geometry?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: That's obviously an excellent question, and, as they say, the devil is in the details.

I believe that the situation we find ourselves in, as my two colleagues mentioned, is one of crisis. Personally, I'm not afraid to say that humanity is facing an extremely serious existential crisis. We are facing existential threats unlike any we've ever seen before, whether related to climate change or other issues. For example, we need only think of artificial intelligence as well.

I think all of this underscores the importance of international co-operation and our government's ability to influence it. To influence international co-operation, we must absolutely build or rebuild our influence, the trust we have in international organizations and the trust they have in Canada.

In the past, as Professor Pouliot mentioned, things were sometimes done in a piecemeal way. We said yes to some things and no to others. We voted yes at the United Nations General Assembly, and sometimes we voted differently. We did everything we could to please one side a little and the other side a little. In the end, we didn't do ourselves any favours.

The ability to build this trust contributes to a consistent image of how other countries perceive us, and that will fully reassure us and ensure our greater security. That's because all of this is linked to security. We're living in an era of insecurity. International co-operation will do us a tremendous service by ensuring the safety of Canadians. Addressing this issue is somewhat in line with the Prime Minister's remarks in Davos.

[*English*]

Philip Lawrence: Another one of your criticisms.... Actually, “challenges” might be a better way of saying it. You said one of the challenges for Canadians to trust some of these international organizations was a failure to communicate them.

I have two questions. My first is this: Do you think the government is doing an adequate job of communicating the roles, responsibilities and contributions of international organizations?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: To put it very simply, I would say no. It will never be perfect.

I don't want to sound nostalgic, but when I started my career as a co-operant some 30 years ago, the Canadian government had resources—limited, but still—to promote international co-operation, including Canada's role in the world. It asked Canadian organizations, NGOs, to share their experiences, advocate and conduct outreach in schools so that Canadians would understand what we were doing, how it benefited us and why these investments were being made abroad. Today, those funds no longer exist, and those projects no longer exist, for one thing.

On the other hand, I think Canada unfortunately finds itself with a population that is very misinformed and very vulnerable. That's my second point. It is very vulnerable to the fact that the international narrative is very un-Canadian. Our media, which are very often in English, come from the United States or Europe. Generally speaking, young people in universities won't get their news from traditional media. Instead, they'll use social media, so it will be extremely difficult to convey information about what's happening in the world, what Canada is doing and what we should be doing.

● (1235)

[*English*]

Philip Lawrence: Thank you.

I have one last question for you, and it's sort of putting the shoe on the other foot. You have written critically about humanitarian organizations not always doing the best they could to promote their own causes. Are there reforms within the sector that you would recommend so that Canadians would have greater confidence in these international organizations?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: That's a good question. I'll answer quickly.

Canadian—or more generally international—humanitarian organizations that are in networks will also be extremely limited by the resources they are given. I think we need to continue supporting them. In particular, Canadian organizations must be supported.

Today, we find ourselves with a model of international co-operation that I would describe as localized or decentralized. In other words, humanitarian organizations will be much more effective if they work in partnership with local organizations. The Canadian government, through Canadian organizations, must continue to maintain this co-operation. However, humanitarian first responders, meaning those who arrive on the ground after a crisis, are the local and national experts in the crisis-affected area. As a result, this transfer of capacity, this strengthening of local capacity, is a very good solution to the criticisms we currently have of the traditional humanitarian aid model.

Philip Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Audet.

[*English*]

Thank you, Chair.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

We will go next to MP Vandenbeld.

You have six minutes.

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

My first question is for Professor Audet.

We've been talking a lot about the UN, but when we talk about the UN, we mostly talk about the General Assembly or the Security Council. In fact, a lot of the work of the UN is done through agencies, funds and programs. I'm thinking of the UNDP, the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization and a number of others. That's where a lot of the work on the ground of the United Nations gets done.

I wonder if you could tell us a bit about how Canada could engage more strategically with these UN agencies.

[*Translation*]

François Audet: I think Professor Pouliot and I agree on that. A more effective strategic commitment will be based on consistency and sustainability, as well as on engaging with UN agencies that align with Canada's priorities.

You talked about the World Food Programme, the United Nations Refugee Agency and UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. Canada is a very good partner for these agencies, but it can't fund everything on its own. Therefore, it is essential to engage additional international partners, particularly the European Union. The United States has let the United Nations down in recent years, particularly these major humanitarian agencies.

I've just returned from the field. I was in Central America last week. UN humanitarian organizations no longer have the resources to monitor the migration situation. Right now, we have no idea what's happening in Central America because UN agencies no longer have the capacity to document the situation, and they can't even meet the needs. I'm simply talking about documenting the situation.

Therefore, Canada must continue to invest. This requires resources. It requires diplomacy, particularly at the headquarters in New York, but we must also ensure that other partners, such as the European Union in particular, continue to invest in international co-operation.

[*English*]

Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much.

Professor Pouliot, you talked about working within the institutions that exist. I'm wondering if, first of all, you could answer the previous question about UN agencies.

Also, Canada is in a unique position. We are a member of many international organizations. We're a member of the Commonwealth, the Francophonie, NATO and, when we talk about European integration, OSCE.

As the committee is looking at how to define our study, I wonder if you could speak to whether there are particular international organizations we should perhaps focus on, and then how we would engage with them and the UN agencies.

● (1240)

Vincent Pouliot: I'm going to follow up on what my colleague François Audet just said.

Every crisis is a political opportunity. I'm not going to say anything new to you here. I think that the current de-financing of the UN system, tragic as it is, is in a way something that Canada can tap into to improve its role.

I'm going to use the example of the UNHCR, the High Commissioner for Refugees, which has slashed its budget by, I think, over 15%. Its workforce has also been slashed by, I think, over 15%, yet the number of refugees keeps increasing. Those are the hard realities out there in the world, and obviously that creates a crisis that means that the UN is unable to fulfill its mandate, because its resources have been cut.

I don't think the solution is that Canada will just sign checks and that will be it. The notion that leadership is also about gathering others around a cause is certainly something that is more within the reach of a country like Canada, with its limited means. That's what I would suggest we look at.

What are the places in the system right now that have been particularly hard hit in the past few years? Refugees, for me, are an obvious case. It's not the only one. Development aid and humanitarian crises are certainly two other fields of priority. To get through the storm and be the rock in the storm, that's really what I would look at, rather than trying to build a new ship.

Quickly, on the other organizations, that's a great question. You're right that Canada distinguishes itself on the international stage by being a part of so many organizations, and that's an edge. That's something that we've built. It's a kind of political capital that we've built over decades.

The problem, though, is that a lot of the most urgent and pressing issues right now are not regional issues. I'm thinking about AI and climate change. Unfortunately, perhaps even with the edge that we have in regional issues, those are not issues that are best approached regionally. For that reason, I think we have to keep looking globally, despite the fact that it's a little more complicated.

Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much.

Professor Audet, do you want to weigh in on the international organizations?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: No. I quite agree with my colleague's comments.

I don't know to what extent this is the focus or objective of your committee. As we mentioned at the beginning, it's quite broad.

Our current assessment is as follows: The world is facing a series of overlapping existential crises. By existential crises, I mean existential threats not only to the security of Canada and Canadians, but also to the rest of the world. The solutions will not come from one country or even three. They will come through international co-operation and through agencies that we trust. Canadians need to fully understand this. At the moment, I think they understand very little about it. The Government of Canada can play a simple and relatively inexpensive role: It can ensure that Canadians understand the purpose of international co-operation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Next, we go to MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for six minutes.

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

Mr. Audet, this motion is indeed very broad. We would have liked it to be more specific, but unfortunately, one party holds the majority on the committee now, so that results in a study like the one we have today.

Mr. Pouliot, you didn't have time to finish your opening remarks. I think there is a second point you wanted to share with us. I'll give you a chance to do so, then.

Vincent Pouliot: I was going to talk about what could truly be a fundamental undertaking for a country like Canada. In my opinion—and this is based on my research and work—what is most lacking in international institutions today is a distinct, autonomous and independent political voice. I'll give you an example to make this as concrete as possible. Leaders of international institutions, such as the Secretary General of the United Nations, or UN, who is, let's say, the highest-ranking official in the international community, should have the ability to adopt positions that may be controversial or at odds with the major powers. I'm talking about the UN Secretary-General, but it's not just him; there are many other examples.

Let's look at what has happened in recent years. First there was Ukraine, then Gaza, followed by a series of conflicts and tragedies. We can see that, within the international system, there is no political voice capable of rising above the fray to propose solutions that aren't completely entangled in intergovernmental or geopolitical rivalries. That's what's happening, and it is very real.

There are some very concrete things that Canada can do. I'll give you a very quick example, because I know time is precious. A process is under way to appoint the next UN Secretary-General. It's a convoluted process that you may or may not have been following. What you need to know is that, even though the current operation has changed somewhat, the decision will be made by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Ultimately, they will choose the lowest common denominator, meaning the person who hasn't alarmed any of the five major powers.

That's like putting someone in that position, while telling them that they're already handcuffed and asking them to keep a low profile during their term. That, to me, is problematic. Instead, we need a secretary-general who can take a stand and rattle the cage a bit, in a diplomatic way, of course, since this is a diplomacy. That means that this person has to be appointed and given political capital, a much broader legitimacy than that of the five permanent members of the UN.

I'll leave it there.

● (1245)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

Mr. Audet, you referred to the Davos speech a few times. You also spoke to us at length about consistency. I'm looking for consistency. Two days before the World Economic Forum in Davos, Prime Minister Carney was in Beijing, shaking hands with Xi Jinping. So when we talk about the hegemony of the major powers, there is, in my view, a paradox—in short, an inconsistency.

Recently, it's been nothing short of spectacular. Today, a joint official statement, signed by Canada and several other countries—including the European Union—condemned abuses in Sudan by the Rapid Support Forces, or RSF. Yet the RSF's biggest backer is Khaled bin Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi. That very same day, he was received with great fanfare in Ottawa. Last week, Mr. Carney was in Istanbul to sign a completely unrealistic and Orwellian joint statement declaring that Canada and Turkey shared the values of democracy, human rights and respect for the rule of law.

You talked about consistency. We talked about consistency and predictability. What does that look like when we take the international stage to reform or improve big international institutions? We're engaging in a whole lot of doublespeak. When I tell you it's Orwellian, that's exactly what it is, in my view.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

François Audet: There's a very political dimension to this, and I'd prefer not to get involved in that, if you don't mind. I'll stick to my area of expertise.

Consistency is the ability of a country like Canada to successfully bring together—under one umbrella—everything that the Prime Minister is trying to achieve—amid very significant tariff threats from the United States—while ensuring support for international co-operation through the United Nations.

You're right to say that when we drift toward agreements with countries or leaders who are deeply involved in genocide or acts of terror against populations—and who don't truly share Canadian values—it seems inconsistent, and it probably is. I believe the Prime Minister needs to be able to better justify this kind of agreement. I can tell you, in any case, that it is indeed highly questionable to drift toward partnerships or collaborations like this, whether they are political or could lead to concrete agreements. That's as far as I'll go.

We're talking about consistency and sustainability. Yet everything we're doing now could come back to haunt us in six months, three years, or five years. The kind of international co-operation and international institutions that Canada wants to uphold are based on the values of the rule of law and respect. These values must be reflected in the agreements we sign. When we sign agreements or shake hands with people who don't honour their agreements, who don't respect the rule of law and who don't respect international co-operation, consistency is obviously an issue.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Pouliot, you talked about alternative funding. I'm curious to know what that would mean for international institutions.

Vincent Pouliot: I think national organizations need funding that isn't earmarked. They need funding that remains open-ended. Some funds already exist—for example, generic funds—that allow Canada to participate while letting the multilateral process itself make the decision.

The idea is that, instead of funding our bilateral projects through national organizations, we provide funding together with our multilateral partners so that the international organization’s action plan can then take over.

● (1250)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I now invite MP Roman Baber to pose his questions.

You have five minutes.

Roman Baber (North York, CPC): François Audet of the Université du Québec, are you prepared to accuse Israel of genocide here before the foreign affairs committee, as you do on Twitter?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: Listen, I'm quite prepared to say that—

[*English*]

Roman Baber: Yes or no.

[*Translation*]

François Audet: You're not going to play that game with me.

I'm perfectly comfortable saying that Israel is engaging in genocidal behaviour and that there's reason to believe that, following an investigation, it would be entirely reasonable to conclude that Israel may have engaged in genocidal behaviour.

Today, under international law and according to the International Criminal Court, it hasn't been proven yet, but Israel is engaging in genocidal behaviour.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: There has been no evidence provided, yet you've already made the accusation.

Would you dispute that, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the population of Gaza in October 2023 was—

The Chair: I don't see how this is.... Is this relevant to the study?

Roman Baber: Absolutely. We're talking about the International Court of Justice here. We're talking about Canadian—

The Chair: Okay, but we're not litigating something before the ICC or the ICJ—

Roman Baber: One minute.

The Chair: I'm happy to.... We'll pause.

Again, I want to try to indulge you, but please—

Roman Baber: You haven't given me 30 seconds, Chair.

The Chair: Please stick to the topic.

Roman Baber: No, what we have—

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: The population of Gaza.... I'm not sure how that—

Roman Baber: There's an allegation of genocide—

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Point of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: On a point of order.

Mr. Chair, the motion addresses Canada's effectiveness and how to improve international institutions. The motion does not address a witness's past statements regarding a current situation or crisis. It makes no sense to go down that path, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: Guys, can you help me out here?

Jacob Mantle: On the same point of order, Mr. Chair, the motion, as we have discussed, is broad in nature and didn't specifically mention any international organizations. The ICC, to which Canada is a signatory, is an international organization.

I think it's well within the ambit of this committee to ask witnesses about those institutions, and about statements that those witnesses have made about those institutions, to assess what evidence this committee can gather about the effectiveness of those organizations and whether Canada should be involved with them. That is directly within the scope of this study.

The Chair: MP Sari, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

I'll go back to you, MP Baber. I ask that you try, as much as you can, to stick to the—

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: As always, it's your call, Mr. Chair. It's up to you to determine whether the question is truly out of order in the context of today's discussion.

Beyond the committee's work—in relation to which we must stay on topic—it behooves us to respect both the expertise and the people who testify before us and, regardless, give them the opportunity to fully address the issue they've come to discuss. Furthermore, we must treat those who testify here appropriately.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: One second. We're still on the point of order.

The witness makes an allegation—

A voice: Can you make sure the right mic is being.... It's not the right mic.

Roman Baber: Yes, and my mic wasn't on during my initial submissions. Is that correct?

A voice: It was on.

Roman Baber: No, it was not.

I'm going to ask for my time back after we're done with this.

I'm surprised the chair would not indulge me for more than 30 to 35 seconds before cutting me off. This is a witness who calls for the arrest of the head of another state through an international—

The Chair: I did not cut you off. I had—

Roman Baber: You just cut me off again.

The Chair: I had a discussion with you regarding sticking with the topic. Please be accurate.

Roman Baber: We're going to talk about what this witness likes to talk about most on Twitter and how that affects Canada's participation and Canada's view with respect to various international institutions that may have a stake here, whether it's the United Nations or the International Criminal Court.

The Liberal government, the members opposite, referred to the International Criminal Court and discussed an arrest warrant against the head of another state. I think it's entirely within my purview to discuss this allegation.

As a guest at this committee, I'd like you to afford me some latitude. This is a serious issue that is of public interest to many of my constituents and, I'm sure, the constituents of many members here.

The Chair: MP Vandenbeld, go ahead.

Anita Vandenbeld: On the same point of order, I would note that the witness is not on trial here, and he did not mention anything about this in his opening remarks.

The Chair: I will restart the clock and turn it back to you.

● (1255)

Roman Baber: Do you have reason to dispute that, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the population of Gaza, in October 2023, was approximately 2.2 million people, yes or no?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: Listen, if you give me the chance to quickly respond to the questions you're asking me to answer with just a yes or a no—I'd tell you that the situation in Gaza involves 70,000 deaths, including thousands of children, and humanitarian workers and journalists being systematically killed. This is a military strategy designed to displace and kill a population. That's the simplest definition of genocide.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: Okay, but my question was about.... I'd like to probe—

[*Translation*]

François Audet: Let me finish.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: If I may, please—

[*Translation*]

François Audet: Yes, but it's important.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: My time is very limited.

It was 2.2 million in October 2023.

[*Translation*]

François Audet: Mine is too. If you point the finger at me while misinterpreting highly sensitive information, I find you particularly….

Be careful what you say, because, as you said yourself, you also have a responsibility to your fellow citizens.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: I'm prepared to discharge my responsibility.

[*Translation*]

François Audet: I'm here voluntarily giving my time to the government. I didn't come here to be treated like this by anyone.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: I should be able to respond to you.

The population today is 2.1 million.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: On a point of order, Mr. Chair. Once again, when I'm in a committee—

[*English*]

Roman Baber: How interesting—I feel like I'm the one on trial here.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: On a point of order. There's work we need to do here. The image we project is a reflection of our committee. When someone fails to respect the witnesses testifying here to help us draft our reports, it's appalling, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Please proceed, MP Baber.

Jacob Mantle: Was that a point of order, Mr. Chair?

Roman Baber: It's not a point of order, nor disrespect.

The population today is listed as 100,000 less, at 2.1 million. Israel agreed to the figure that you just cited, which is 70,000 people who were killed during the war. However, Hamas has said that more than 40,000 combatants were lost. That means that the ratio, in a densely populated area, of civilians to combatants is 2:1 in favour of combatants. Isn't it odd, when a state engages in genocide, that there are more dead combatants than dead civilians?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: Listen, I fully understand your intentions and your comments. I'm here to talk to you about the effectiveness of international organizations. If you'd like to hold a committee meeting on Gaza, I'd be happy to come and testify. Are there any questions about the effectiveness of international organizations?

[*English*]

Roman Baber: Thank you.

I'd like to follow up.

Are you familiar with the process by which the Israeli Air Force drops a sound bomb—a dummy bomb—on a roof so that a building is vacated before it is bombed?

Why would a state want to do that if it engages in genocide?

The Chair: One second....

Go ahead, MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: On a point of order, Mr. Chair.

This question is completely out of order. I haven't heard a single word about international institutions. In the last question put to the witness, there was absolutely nothing that pertained to the motion we're supposed to be discussing.

Listen to the last question. It refers to—

[*English*]

The Chair: I would encourage members to go through the chair.

Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.... Okay.

You have the floor. Go ahead, Mr. Baber.

Roman Baber: Why would the State of Israel engage in dropping leaflets and making phone calls, as they did in Hormuz and Srifa, if they intend to engage in genocide?

The Chair: There's a point of order. I'm sorry.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Chair, on a point of order.

Our witness is here to discuss a study on the effectiveness of international organizations. It's potentially a broad topic, but it's nevertheless specified that it pertains to international organizations. We would therefore like to discuss that at this time.

[*English*]

The Chair: I would—

Roman Baber: The International Criminal Court offered an arrest warrant for a sitting head of state. Many folks in this town have called for the arrest of that person.

It's completely okay for me. I'm still on the point of order. This should not go into my time.

The Chair: It hasn't gone into your time. Don't worry.

Roman Baber: I am allowed to question the efficacy of this international organization or Canada's participation therein.

May I continue, please?

The Chair: Before you continue, I would also urge you to understand that the witness does not have to answer the question. You can pose questions; the witness doesn't have to answer.

Please, keep to the topic at hand.

Roman Baber: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have two minutes and 36 seconds.

Roman Baber: Why would they drop leaflets or dummy bombs on rooftops if they wanted to engage in genocide, Professor?

● (1300)

[*Translation*]

François Audet: I won't respond to that, because it's not relevant to the committee.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: Are you familiar with the fact that Israel actually engaged in ground invasion, walked in with many troops and went house to house?

If Israel has clear air superiority and intends to commit genocide, why would it risk its troops and engage in a massive ground invasion?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: You need to ask the Israeli army that question. I won't respond because it's not relevant to the committee.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: Are you familiar with the ethnic cleansing of Christians going on in Nigeria right now?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: Yes, as—

The Chair: One moment, please.

[*English*]

If I don't hear anything related to international organizations in your next sentence, I will move to the next questioner.

Roman Baber: Sure.

Well, the UN Security Council continues to condemn Israel more times than all other countries combined, so maybe we should move to the UN. Are you familiar with the genocide of Muslims by other Muslims in Sudan right now?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: It's not relevant to the committee, sir.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: Are you familiar with the allegation that close to 400,000 people have been killed in the military conflict between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: It's not relevant to the committee, sir.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: Okay, sir, but I do see that you talk and tweet and lecture about Israeli genocide, or alleged genocide, whereas you have no interest in discussing any other atrocities or actual genocides going on around the world right now. Why do you select the State of Israel as a target of your genocidal allegations?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: It seems obvious that you're completely unfamiliar with my work.

I was in Central America as recently as last week, which is when the earthquake struck, by the way. I've actually been working on the migrant crisis there for years. I'm interested in humanitarian crises around the world, and I'm particularly interested in the crisis in Gaza, because it's one of the most serious humanitarian crises of our time.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: More than five times as many people died in the war between the Houthis and Saudi Arabia that is still ongoing, but you don't mention that once. Is it because an allegation against a Jewish state may have the effect of undermining the Holocaust?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: I won't respond to that question.

[*English*]

Roman Baber: Do you understand that blood libel demonizes Canadian Jews and puts them at risk?

The Chair: Just a second. There's a point of order request from MP Lawrence.

Go ahead.

Philip Lawrence: I would just like to thank the chair for hearing this testimony.

I will tell you that the actions of Israel, whether you support or don't support them, are very much undermining Canadians' confidence from both sides with respect to international institutions. I just wanted to state on the record, and to the professor as well, that this is very much fair game.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: You have six seconds left.

Roman Baber: Is that a picture of you and Mélanie Joly behind you on the shelf?

The Chair: What does that have to do with international organizations?

Roman Baber: I'm just making conversation.

The Chair: We are out of time.

I will go next to MP Clark and then to Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

Braedon Clark (Sackville—Bedford—Preston, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for being here this afternoon.

In particular, Professor Audet, if I could, I'd like to apologize to you, sir, on behalf of the committee for what just took place. I think all the witnesses here are professionals doing work, doing research, and came here prepared to discuss international institutions. That's what I certainly intend to do.

I'm sorry, Professor Wolfe. I appreciate your patience. To give you a chance to get in here, I'll ask you this question first.

[*Translation*]

Next, I will speak to Professor Audet and Professor Pouliot.

[*English*]

Canada is in an interesting but difficult position, always, as a middle power, where we perhaps have too much influence and authority to take things as they are but not enough power to change the rules on our own. That's a difficult spot to be in, of course.

Professor Wolfe, I know that you touched on the WTO as your particular area of interest. How can Canada, as kind of the quintessential middle power, navigate the WTO to make sure it works better?

Then I'll go to Professor Audet and Professor Pouliot on that question.

Thank you.

Prof. Robert Wolfe: I think it's the case always that Canada has to work with other countries to do anything in the WTO. You're quite right that nobody's going to stand up and salute when Canada makes a proposal. We don't have the weight. Interestingly enough, the Americans don't have that weight anymore either. It is a much broader membership, and it's harder to make things happen.

I think Canada has to do what in fact it's been doing: Try to assemble groups of like-minded countries who'd like to make progress on a particular issue, hold the conversations, do the research and see if things can be moved forward. We certainly don't have the power to simply command that something happen; that's quite right.

● (1305)

Braedon Clark: Professor Audet, you're next.

[*Translation*]

François Audet: I must admit that I didn't hear the question clearly. I apologize.

[*English*]

Braedon Clark: That's okay. Essentially, the question was, how do we, as the quintessential middle power in the world, navigate some of these international institutions to make sure, as we say...? Professor Pouliot made a great analogy about an older home. You don't just walk away from your house. It's true. You try to renovate it and make sure...and the bones are still strong in a lot of cases.

How does Canada navigate that in this kind of middle power spot?

[*Translation*]

François Audet: That's a good question.

I largely agree with Professor Pouliot that, in the recent history of humanity, the creation of new organizations is extremely complex. I believe that, as a middle power, we must focus on building on our strengths and challenging certain things that aren't working within these organizations. Earlier, Professor Pouliot mentioned the election of the Secretary General, which will be decided by only five member states. This isn't at all representative.

Obviously, Canada has limited influence in this kind of process, but it is clear that a coalition with other middle powers around the world will be necessary to ensure the rule of law is upheld and remains relatively stable globally. Indeed, at present, the rule of law is under attack. This is the greatest challenge for a country like Canada.

[*English*]

Vincent Pouliot: Thank you. It's a great question.

I think the premise is absolutely correct: Canada doesn't have the power or the influence to change rules on its own. I think those were your words. That's a very important starting assumption, I think.

The best thing we can do, or where we're most useful, is assisting in enforcing the rules, which is slightly different but just as useful. As for what I mean by this, I'll give the example, for instance, of funding. I apologize, because I know that funding is also, from a political perspective, sometimes a bit of an issue as well. That's one example.

I also think that another point made earlier and that needs to be enforced is the need for a positive discourse in leadership in international institutions. That's sorely lacking right now. The United States has pulled out and is tremendously critical, and no one has really stepped in to say, “Well, no, the system isn't completely broken.” There are fixes to be made here and there, but there are also moving parts that work. Again, that's not expensive. It's just for Canada to be part of the countries that are actually in support and that help legitimize the action, especially where it's warranted from our point of view.

Those are the under the radar types of actions that I think belong best to Canada.

Braedon Clark: I would like to make one quick point.

Professor Audet made a great point about publicity and communications.

I don't know why that triggered this in my brain, but it's Halloween on Saturday. My kids are nine and six. They're excited. When I was a kid their age—30 years ago—I had a little orange UNICEF box. You'd get coins: a quarter or a loonie. That made a big difference to me as a kid. I felt like I was helping in that way.

A voice: They're bringing it back.

Braedon Clark: Are they? Okay. There you go. There are no more pennies, but....

The Chair: Thank you, MP Clark.

Colleagues, our next meeting will be on Wednesday, October 28.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: It's so adjourned.

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