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Chair: Fayçal El-Khoury

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1535)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 14 of the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the subcommittee on Monday, January 26, 2026, the subcommittee is meeting to study the global impact of transnational repression.

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

[*English*]

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and the members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

[*Translation*]

I'd now like to welcome our first witnesses.

[*English*]

As individuals, we have Dr. Michael Doran, senior fellow and director of the Center for Peace and Security in the Middle East at the Hudson Institute, who is joining us by video conference, and Ronald J. Deibert, professor of political science and director of the Citizen Lab at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Toronto.

From the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, we have Tzvi Kahn, research fellow and senior editor. From Hong Kong Watch, we have Landson Chan, advocacy officer. From Resilient Societies, we have Maiwand Rahyab, founder and chief executive officer.

From the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project, we have Mehmet Tohti, executive director.

I welcome you all.

Each of you will have five minutes to give an introduction. Please try to respect the time.

I would like to start with Dr. Michael Doran.

Dr. Michael Doran (Senior Fellow and Director, Center for Peace and Security in the Middle East at Hudson Institute, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee. It's a wonderful opportunity to testify.

The Islamic Republic is conducting a sustained campaign on western soil to shape our policy choices through intimidation and coercion. The Islamic Republic today is a military dictatorship run by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, IRGC. The IRGC is a terrorist jihadi organization dedicated to advancing a revolution based on an extreme interpretation of Islam, destroying Israel, expelling the United States from the Middle East and aligning with Russia and China against the established global order.

The regime is economically incompetent. It has no credible answer to inflation, unemployment, water scarcity or the collapse of public services. A large majority of Iranians reject the regime and its jihadi ideology. The jihadi ideology no longer commands a belief even among many who once professed it. The Islamic Republic, therefore, resembles the Soviet Union in its final years. It is a society held together not by conviction, but by patronage and fear.

Despite this malaise, the IRGC continues to conceive of itself as a revolutionary vanguard. Its ranks are filled with true believers. To square the circle between its revolutionary aspirations and its limited resources, it resorts to violent suppression of domestic opposition and to the application of divide-and-rule tactics. The IRGC applies this same method to the Iranian diaspora, co-opting some members of the diaspora, killing and coercing others and sowing division among the rest.

In 2018, Iranian diplomat Assadollah Assadi used a diplomatic pouch to smuggle explosives into Europe and directed a plot to bomb an anti-regime rally in France attended by Rudy Giuliani. He was convicted in Belgium and sentenced to 20 years.

The regime has also relied heavily on criminal proxies for deniability.

In 2024, as I'm sure you're all aware, U.S. prosecutors indicted Hells Angels members in a Canadian-linked murder-for-hire plot targeting an Iranian defector.

In March 2025, the U.S. Treasury sanctioned a criminal gang and its leader, Rawa Majid, for orchestrating an attack on the Israeli embassy in Stockholm. This gang recruited and manipulated teenagers as young as 13 and 14 through encrypted apps. The Swedish prime minister publicly accused Iran of directing this plot.

Very few states on earth, perhaps none, weaponize diplomatic immunity, diplomatic pouches and foreign ministry institutions to conduct terrorism. No other state outsources coercive operations to criminal networks for deniability. The Islamic Republic attacks Iranian opposition targets, carries out revenge plots against the U.S. and against Israeli officials and engages in religious persecution of Jewish communities that have no connection to Israel.

Hostage-taking sits at the centre of Iran's coercive system. In the current crisis, Iran's prosecutor general publicly warned on March 9 that diaspora Iranians who sympathize, support or co-operate with the United States and Israel would face confiscation of their property in Iran. Diaspora figures who speak out against the regime routinely discover that their relatives in Iran have been summoned, interrogated and often detained by the regime.

In June 2025, regime agents took hostage family members of an Iran international presenter in Tehran, and they conditioned the release of those family members on her resignation. UN experts later revealed threats to 45 journalists and 315 family members across seven countries, including Canada.

Calls for appeasement of the Islamic Republic by members of the diaspora assure that their family members in Iran will remain unmolested. Advocacy for pressure on the Islamic Republic by the United States and Canada carries severe consequences.

The result is a structural bias in our discourse. Because the Iranian diaspora plays an outsized role in explaining Iran to the world, the IRGC's intimidation tactics shape what democratic governments hear, with whom they consult and what options they consider. Again—

• (1540)

The Chair: Is it possible to wrap it up, please? Thank you.

Dr. Michael Doran: I'm finished now. I just wanted to say that no other state on earth behaves in this way, and we have to be clear about that fact.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to invite Mr. Ronald Deibert to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert (Professor of Political Science and Director of the Citizen Lab, Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. My name is Ron Deibert. I'm the director of the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto. I'm pleased to provide testimony today about transnational

repression, which I believe is growing in scope and scale and sophistication worldwide, including here in Canada.

For over 15 years, our investigations at the Citizen Lab have shown how governments take advantage of a poorly regulated and extremely sophisticated mercenary surveillance marketplace to hack, track and neutralize political opposition and civil society across borders.

As part of this research, we have spoken to hundreds of victims and these interviews surfaced common experiences. Victims who had suffered torture and other types of repression and who had fled from one country to another, like Canada, for their safety soon realized that they were not truly safe at all. Their sense of sanctuary was shattered when the governments they had fled from reached across borders to harass, surveil and track them.

Victims described not knowing where to turn or receiving little help when they reported their experiences to authorities. Formal complaints submitted to law enforcement typically went nowhere, with local officials either unable to determine who was responsible or, when it was clear, unable to hold foreign governments accountable.

Chilling effects are common, with people retreating from public life.

Despite some progress, which I'm happy to talk about in the Q and A, I believe transnational repression will expand dramatically in the coming months due to three factors, the first being the authoritarian turn in the United States. We have all witnessed the spectacle unfolding south of the border and as Canadians, we hear clearly the threats to our sovereignty.

Among the many things that can be said about that sad situation is its impact on the topic of this hearing. The U.S. has pivoted from combatting transnational repression to becoming a major enabler of it instead. The Trump administration has allocated \$85 billion to ICE, transforming it into a secret paramilitary force equipped with the latest mercenary spyware and facial recognition tools. Its agents roam the streets without identification, outfitted in battlefield fatigues, heavily armed, routinely kidnapping people or breaking into their homes without warrants or probable cause. Trump associates and family members act as policy advisers while enriching themselves with Gulf sheikdoms that are the world's worst perpetrators of transnational repression.

This shift will normalize state repression and embolden dictators.

The second is artificial intelligence. AI will increase the scale and precision of transnational repression. It can now be used to rapidly de-anonymize social media users and generate hyper-realistic disinformation campaigns, and will be used in every aspect of the dictator's tool kit for repression.

It is concerning that the Canadian government appears broadly enthusiastic about AI while failing to deal with its harms. Our government has signed an agreement to collaborate on AI with the U.A.E., a regime with a long track record of supporting unethical surveillance. This is not an administration prepared for the coming flood of AI-enabled repression.

The third is variable geometry. Prime Minister Carney has recently outlined a foreign policy of variable geometry or values-based realism. In practice this has meant entering into partnerships with major perpetrators of transnational repression like China and Russia. The protection of citizens rests on international human rights law. This foreign policy shift signals a softening of that stance.

Here are my recommendations in light of the coming tsunami of transnational repression.

The first is to engage the grassroots. The government must engage deeply with affected diaspora communities. Victims need an easy-to-use hotline with immediate responses. We must reverse the financial cuts to immigration and refugee support systems at the very time they are needed most.

The second is to turn pledges into action. Canada has not yet put in place export controls or other restrictions against mercenary surveillance vendors. We must also hold individuals accountable with visa restrictions and sanctions.

The third is to regulate AI. The government should cease any cooperation on AI with governments known to be perpetrators of transnational repression. We must mandate independent due diligence audits of tech platforms.

• (1545)

Finally, the fourth is to review the safe third country agreement with the United States. The determination that the U.S. meets a "high standard" for human rights is now out of date. We must rethink this agreement alongside the risks of transnational repression emanating from south of the border.

Canada has always prided itself—

The Chair: Please wrap it up. We've exceeded the time.

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: We must contrast our approach more forcefully, not only with words but with deeds to match.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to invite Mr. Tzvi Kahn to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Tzvi Kahn (Research Fellow and Senior Editor, Foundation for Defense of Democracies): Mr. Chair and honourable members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am pleased to offer insights about the Islamic Republic of Iran's

transnational repression on behalf of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a non-partisan research institute in Washington, D.C., where I serve as a research fellow and senior editor.

Iran and the Islamic Republic of Iran are not the same entities. Iran, not the Islamic Republic, denotes the historic, millennia-old civilization of Persia, rooted and manifested in a nation with borders. The Islamic Republic, however, is rooted in a religious ideology whose aspirations are unconstrained by geography. In fact, the Islamic Republic's radical, revolutionary Shiite creed has broader ambitions that transcend lines on a map.

In this sense, when I speak of the clerics who lead the Islamic Republic, I choose my words carefully. I describe them as the regime in Iran, not the Iranian regime. It's a crucial distinction, for there is nothing Iranian about the regime in Iran today. In fact, I would argue, to use a more apt description, that the Islamic Republic is a foreign entity occupying the nation of Iran. It is using that occupation as a launching pad to launch a campaign of transnational repression targeting dissidents outside its borders.

As the Islamic Republic's constitution states, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, which leads this campaign, seeks to fulfill "the ideological mission of jihad in God's way; that is, extending the sovereignty of God's law throughout the world". Thus, since 1979 the Islamic Republic has assassinated or plotted to harm hundreds of critics across the globe, including in Iraq, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland. That's just a partial list.

In my home country of the United States, the Islamic Republic has attempted to kill Iranian American human rights activist Masih Alinejad. It has also plotted to assassinate President Trump. The regime has even sanctioned my organization, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, and threatened violence against us. In Canada some 700 IRGC agents reportedly take residence. CSIS recently said that it thwarted numerous lethal threats against Canada originating in the Islamic Republic. Just last week, the U.S. Department of Justice unveiled court documents reportedly indicating that the regime offered a \$250,000 bounty to a drug cartel to kill former Ontario politician Goldie Ghamari.

Because the Islamic Republic's ideology animates its transnational repression, and because this ideology inspires its supporters around the globe, the regime's threat to Canada extends beyond Tehran's direct agents. In recent years, and particularly since the atrocities of October 7, 2023, committed by Hamas, which is a proxy of the regime in Iran, attacks against Jews and Iranians by a range of perpetrators have significantly increased in Canada. But the views of the Islamic Republic, which helped orchestrate the October 7 atrocities, constitute an ideological heart of global Islamist sentiment, ultimately making the regime complicit in these attacks in Canada.

As such, Ottawa should recognize that because the Islamic Republic's creed constitutes its very reason for being, it will not end its transnational repression so long as the regime remains in power. Without its creed, the Islamic Republic simply would not be the Islamic Republic. That means diplomacy alone will not end the threat. For this reason, I believe Ottawa should make clear, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that it supports the U.S. and Israeli military campaign against the Islamic Republic as well as the rise of a new, democratic government in Iran. Recent calls in Ottawa for de-escalation are counterproductive, as ending the military campaign prematurely would ultimately ensure the regime's survival. In this vein, I also recommend that Ottawa take immediate action to expel all IRGC agents from Canada.

Mr. Chair, I come before this subcommittee as an American who believes in the historic special relationship between the United States and Canada. In this context, I am mindful of the tensions between Ottawa and Washington over the past year, but I believe America and Canada have a shared interest in a free Iran. The Islamic Republic threatens us both. By uniting in common cause, we advance our mutual security and shared values.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you. We have a shared interest, of course, in respecting our sovereignty on both sides.

I would like to invite Mr. Landson Chan to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Landson Chan (Advocacy Officer, Hong Kong Watch): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Landson Chan, and I'm the advocacy officer at Hong Kong Watch.

Hong Kong Watch has documented cases showing how transnational repression is affecting the Hong Kong diaspora in Canada, including harassment, intimidation and surveillance. In one case, a Hong Kong diaspora advocate received anonymous threatening messages linked to her pro-democracy advocacy. The messages included violent videos and references to her boyfriend, to her employer and to her workplace address. In another case, a co-founder of a Hong Kong diaspora community group that has assisted more than 30 Hong Kong asylum seekers received anonymous Telegram messages showing images of his home, threatening him that he would be beaten in Chinatown. We have also documented cases in which family members are targeted. One Hong Kong activist re-

ceived anonymous messages referencing a private family trip, warning that her young daughter could be harmed.

Importantly, these incidents do not only affect activists. In Toronto, a community worker with no advocacy involvement received threatening emails at his workplace after attending a Hong Kong community event, forcing him to eventually leave his job. These cases show a clear and intensifying pattern of transnational repression targeting the Hong Kong diaspora.

At the same time, Hong Kong authorities have issued public bounties on 34 overseas activists, including Joe Tay, a Canadian citizen and federal electoral candidate. During the 2025 election campaign, "wanted" styled posters targeting Joe Tay were circulated across multiple social media platforms. He was informed by the RCMP that they had received credible intelligence indicating that he could be harmed. He also reported an unfamiliar vehicle outside of his home and his volunteers being followed. Additionally, in 2025, an MP publicly suggested bringing Joe Tay to the Chinese consulate to claim a bounty of approximately \$170,000, and later apologized. These incidents occurred within weeks of his nomination in late March 2025, during the election period. Following the election, his relatives in Hong Kong were taken in for questioning by the Hong Kong police.

More recently, the father of Anna Kwok, another "wanted" Hong Kong democracy activist, was convicted and sentenced in Hong Kong. His case reflects how legal consequences can extend beyond individual activists to family members. These developments reflect the extraterritorial enforcement claims embedded within the national security law of the People's Republic of China.

In January 2026, the Canada-China joint leaders' statements referenced law enforcement co-operation, raising concerns about safeguards and information-sharing risks, especially given past concerns about alleged Chinese "police service stations" in Canada. The outcomes of investigations remain unclear. While Canada enacted foreign influence transparency legislation in 2024, the registry remains non-operational as of March 2026, and no prosecutions have been publicly advanced under this framework.

This issue is not solely a Hong Kong diaspora issue. It concerns Canada's sovereignty, security and democratic integrity. Transnational repression silences voices within diaspora communities and discourages civic participation.

In response, we recommend that the Government of Canada adopt a prevention, protection and punishment approach. Firstly, Canada should expedite the full implementation of the foreign influence transparency registry and establish a formal reporting mechanism for individuals experiencing transnational repression. Secondly, law enforcement and intelligence agencies should provide appropriate protection to victims and high-risk individuals facing threats linked to foreign-state actors. Lastly, Canada should pursue diplomatic measures and targeted sanctions when foreign actors are responsible for acts of transnational repression.

Canada must remain a place where individuals can speak freely without fear of intimidation by foreign governments. Thank you.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you. You respected the time well.

I would like to invite Mr. Maiwand Rahyab to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Maiwand Rahyab (Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Resilient Societies): Thank you very much, honourable Chair and members of the subcommittee, for the opportunity to testify before you.

My name is Maiwand Rahyab. I'm the founder and CEO of Resilient Societies, a Canadian institution supporting civil society actors and human rights defenders working under authoritarian pressure and in exile.

I came to Canada three years ago after being forced into exile following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Over the past years, my organization has conducted research on the experiences of exiled activists and human rights defenders, including in Canada.

Our findings are clear. For many, crossing a border does not mean reaching safety. Repression follows them. Exiled individuals in Canada continue to face online harassment, surveillance, coercion through family members abroad and pressure through transnational networks. Over time, this shapes behaviours, narrows participation and leads to self-censorship, even within a democratic society. This is not only a matter of individual safety, it affects the integrity of Canada's civic space.

What we are seeing in Canada reflects a broader global pattern. Transnational oppression is expanding. It's becoming more networked, more adaptive and increasingly normalized. Public attention often focuses on high-profile cases—assassinations, abductions or major cyber-attacks.

The more common and often more effective forms are the quieter ones. It's the messages that go unanswered, the family members who are pressured and the warnings that cause someone to step back. That is everyday oppression. It is subtle, deniable and scalable. It silences people before they become visible enough to be protected.

At its core, transnational oppression is not only about intimidation, but it's also about erasing agency. Authoritarian regimes are not only simply trying to make exiles feel unsafe; they are trying to ensure they cannot organize, speak or influence. However, exiled activists and human rights defenders are not passive victims. They

are credible voices for democracy, with networks, knowledge and lived experiences, but only if they are able to remain active.

This is a global challenge. No country can address it alone. It crosses borders, exploits legal gaps and thrives where responses are fragmented. At the same time, national leadership matters.

Canada is both a destination for those seeking refuge and a space where foreign regimes attempt to exert control. This places Canada at the front line, but also positions it to lead. In 2025, under Canada's G7 presidency, leaders recognized transnational repression as a growing threat, and committed to addressing it collectively. The question now is this: How will Canada build on that commitment?

My recommendation is that Canada adapt a “civic refuge” approach, a concept advanced by Resilient Societies in 2025. A civic refuge is not simply a country that offers safety; it's a country that protects and enables. It protects individuals from transnational oppression through stronger reporting mechanisms, coordinated responses, updated legal tools and real consequences for perpetrators. It also creates the conditions for exiled civic actors to remain active through access to networks, mentorship, mental health and digital security support, and pathways to participate in public life and policy spaces. It recognizes exiled activists not as beneficiaries of protection, but as contributors to Canadian society and global democratic resilience.

If we respond only through a security lens, we will fall short. The objective of the repression is not only to harm; it's also to silence. The most effective response is not only protection but the restoration of agency. Restoring agency is a strategic investment in democratic resilience at home and globally. Canada has the opportunity to ensure that those who defend rights and freedoms are not only safe, but they are also able to contribute and continue their work.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you. You respected the time limit.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Mehmet Tohti to take the floor for five minutes.

Mehmet Tohti (Executive Director, Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project): Thank you, Mr. Chair and all honourable members, for the opportunity to testify today.

Today we are addressing the issue of transnational repression and its impact on individuals and communities. To begin my testimony, I would like to draw attention to the case of Huseyin Celil, which reflects the growing concerns of victims in Canada.

In three days, it will be exactly 20 years since Mr. Celil, a Canadian citizen, father and UNHCR-recognized refugee, was abducted in Tashkent, Uzbekistan while visiting his wife's family. He was handed over to Chinese authorities, subjected to a closed trial and sentenced to life imprisonment. For two decades, no Canadian official, nor even his own family, has been allowed to see or speak with him once.

Mr. Celil's ordeal is not an isolated injustice. It is the blueprint for transnational repression. His disappearance has become a warning to every Uyghur Canadian that abduction, surveillance and fear can go beyond the Chinese border. This is also a direct assault on Canadian sovereignty. When Mr. Celil was taken, his citizenship was not simply ignored; it was erased. For 20 years, China has refused to recognize him as a Canadian. This is not a bureaucratic mix-up. It is a deliberate act of defiance and a denial of our sovereignty.

There has been zero consular access in those 20 years. Despite repeated efforts by previous Canadian governments, our officials have been denied the right to confirm his health, his living conditions or even his existence. The denial of Canadian citizenship and consular access has allowed China to assert that it is entitled to Canadian recognition. Additionally, China does not recognize dual citizenship, which means that if Huseyin Celil is a Canadian citizen, as was granted him, he is not a Chinese citizen. His Canadian family has lived in limbo for 20 years. His wife has been separated from her husband, and his four children have grown up without their father. The youngest has never even met him. There have also been no phone calls, no letters and no visits. That silence is not a by-product; it is part of the punishment. Transnational oppression operates by undermining national sovereignty while instilling fear, isolating victims and deterring others from speaking out.

Mr. Celil's case represents a pattern we have since seen repeated with hostage diplomacy, intimidation of diaspora communities and surveillance of Canadian residents on Canadian soil. Transnational repression is the export of authoritarian control into democratic societies. It turns Canadian cities like Vancouver into extensions of foreign interference. It leaves citizens wondering whether their government can, in practice, protect them when it matters most.

This committee has a proud history of confronting such abuses. This committee recognized early and courageously the genocide against Uyghurs and other Turkic people on October 22, 2020. This committee urged Canada to uphold human rights even when it is diplomatically inconvenient. Today, as we mark 20 years of this injustice, this committee has another opportunity to lead.

We cannot allow this anniversary to pass with a ritual expression of concern. After 20 years, concern is not enough. The asks before the government are clear and are long overdue. However, I have prepared five direct urgent needs for action.

First is immediate and unconditional consular access.

Second is direct and high-level diplomatic intervention to confirm proof of life and permit communication.

Third is, at a minimum, one phone call between Mr. Huseyin Celil and his wife and children.

Fourth is a renewed, determined effort to secure his release and reunite his family.

Fifth is stronger protection for Uyghur Canadians facing harassment and intimidation here at home.

For 20 years, Canada has failed to change the outcome. The least we can do now is achieve the most basic act of humanity—to hear his voice again and bring him home. Huseyin Celil has been silenced for two decades. It is now our responsibility, as legislators and as Canadians, to be his voice.

At 11:00 a.m. on March 26, which is the 20th anniversary of his imprisonment, we will hold a press conference in the press gallery of this chamber. I would like to invite each member to stay for that press conference to support a call for action on behalf of Huseyin Celil.

• (1605)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I would like to start the first round of questions and answers, starting with Mr. Majumdar.

You have the floor for seven minutes, please.

Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all who have provided powerful testimony about how transnational repression is launched by authoritarian regimes against the west and democracies around the world. Many of you have personal experiences in this, and we thank you for your courage and perseverance through it all.

Dr. Doran, maybe I'll begin with you, if that's okay. Your testimony was interesting on so many levels. I would like to pick up on the thread about how authoritarians, over the last half-century, have focused on expanding and extending their transnational repression in the west. Over the last 50 years, we've seen the rise and, perhaps even today, the fall of the Islamic Republic—at least the beginning of the end—and Beijing replace the Kremlin as the west's principal rival.

What's the common approach of these authoritarians in how they divide the west against itself?

Dr. Michael Doran: We're seeing, especially after October 7, a convergence in the propaganda of the Chinese, the Russians and the Iranians with respect to the American alliance system. I focus mainly on the Middle East, but I think you'll find that the use of anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli themes is enormously productive for the Chinese, Russians and the Iranians in several ways.

First of all, they depict the American alliance system as a colonialist and genocidal system. If Israel is conducting genocide in Gaza, if it's an apartheid state, well, then the United States, which is Israel's biggest supporter, is the leader of a system that is imposing apartheid. It drives a wedge between the United States and Israel, and as we see, the current administration in Washington has expanded military co-operation with Israel beyond anything that we've known in the past and regards Israel as absolutely vital to American security in the Middle East. The administration, and not just this administration, but I think the United States government in general, wants to do less militarily in the Middle East and focus the resources of the United States on East Asia. It is leaning more on allies in the region, and Israel first and foremost.

Any ideology that can drive a wedge between the United States and Israel weakens the United States, but then it also weakens us with respect to our other allies. There are protests on the streets in Europe against Israel. That weakens the cohesion of the U.S.-European alliance. The same is true even on our own campuses here in the United States. Our domestic cohesion is affected by the strength of these ideologies. What you find is that the Chinese, Russians and the Iranians are engaging in their own messaging campaigns, but they're also using web-based propaganda tools to boost the signal of homegrown anti-Semites in the United States and elsewhere.

● (1610)

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you very much for that, Dr. Doran.

Tzvi, I only have a couple of minutes left, so let me ask you this question fairly quickly. You described, in your testimony, how the Department of Justice recently revealed four websites that were behind a \$250,000 bounty, one on California thought leader Elica Le Bon and another on a former Ontario legislator, Goldie Ghamari. To what extent do you see the regime in Iran propagating these types of violent threats against dissidents among Iranian communities in the west?

Tzvi Kahn: We see this throughout the world, actually, particularly in Europe and the United States. When we look at the situation you just described with the U.S. Department of Justice announcement, what we see actually is an effort by the regime to target the United States and Canada at the same time. We saw two dissidents—an American and a Canadian—targeted simultaneously. It shows that the United States and Canada are a united target of this effort by the regime to target our dissidents, to target our citizens and upend our way of life.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: I appreciate that.

When you're discovering that these types of attacks are happening to dissidents who are quite powerful voices, both inside Iran and around the world, what's your counsel to governments like the one here in Ottawa and elsewhere to work together to confront how this regime is using technology and terrorism on our streets to go after people?

Tzvi Kahn: First and foremost, we need to recognize that when Canada speaks, the world listens. Canada has been a long-standing leader on human rights and transnational repression. We need to speak with one voice about anti-Semitism and about dissidents who have been targeted. There are numerous ways we can do that.

Canada has already done a great deal by sanctioning the IRGC, as has the United States. In this respect, we have a common bond.

I would urge Canada to continue these kinds of efforts for targeted dissidents, to sanction those who would engage in this kind of behaviour and to co-operate on law enforcement activities so that we can find these people together. That would be my initial counsel for Canada to address this problem.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you both.

I'll yield my time to the floor.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Majumdar.

I would like to invite Mr. Zuberi to take the floor for seven minutes, please.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here, especially those who have gone through personal ordeals and are standing strong despite the repression of states against you and those around you. Thank you for standing strong.

I'd like to start with Mr. Tohti.

You highlighted today the case of Huseyin Celil, a Canadian citizen who has gone through this horrible ordeal with his family of 20 years of separation and incarceration. Can you talk about how this case exemplifies transnational repression? What should be our take-aways as a country from this case?

● (1615)

Mehmet Tohti: It has been a horrible 20 years for his family and his children and, at the same time, for the entire Uyghur community in diaspora. It was intended by the Chinese government just to hit one bird hard and scare the rest. That was the tactic. I know Huseyin Celil personally, and we lived together. He's very peaceful and is a family man.

The most stunning thing was that despite all previous Canadian governments' sincere efforts to get word from Huseyin Celil personally, the Chinese government completely ignored his citizenship. That also placed some sort of question mark on Canadian citizenship and to what extent Canada can offer protection. This was a kind of shock wave.

It is for that reason I featured Huseyin Celil in my opening statement entirely, because this was the beginning of transnational repression. There was no transnational repression that we were talking about 20 years ago. Huseyin Celil's case is the face and the name of transnational repression. He's a Canadian citizen abducted in a foreign country and sentenced to life without being granted a single consular access in 20 years. Just imagine: We don't know if he's alive or dead.

For that reason, it is a really important case and I hope all parliamentarians across the parties pick up this case and ask the government to take serious steps toward action.

Sameer Zuberi: Thank you. There has been a lot of cross-party parliamentary action on this and the cause you're advocating for.

With respect to safe third countries, we know Canada has offered refuge to Uyghur people through a resettlement program. There are other safe third countries; I would argue G7 countries are safe third countries for Uyghur people and others, like Hong Kongers and Tibetans, who are going through transnational repression.

When we zoom in on the Uyghur people, there are a lot of Uyghurs in third countries that are not in the G7. Are those third countries safe for those Uyghurs outside of China?

We know of the Wilson report from 2022 that said that 1,574 documented cases of deportation at the "behest of China" did occur. What's the situation today?

Mehmet Tohti: The situation is the same as the Wilson report highlighted a number of years ago. Maybe it is getting worse because of the Chinese increasing influence over those countries, and those countries' dependency diplomatically and economically on China. Also, it may be those countries' tendency to see and accept China as a leverage against Western powers. For that reason, those countries are more dependent on China than ever before. Victim communities of Uyghurs and vulnerable people are paying a heavy price.

As you will remember, last year Thailand deported 40 Uyghurs back to China. Just last month, the UN issued a report, and they couldn't find the whereabouts of those deported Uyghurs. We don't know if they are in prison, safe or with their families. The Chinese government refused to give any account of them.

Central Asian states such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, even Turkey as well as the Middle East, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates countries, are not safe.

Sameer Zuberi: In general, they are not safe.

Thank you. I appreciate that for the record.

I'd like to go to Dr. Deibert.

I know at Citizen Lab that you have done a lot of work in terms of monitoring and transnational repression. I'd like to open up the floor for you to speak to your research.

How do states do this when it comes to your electronic research, and which states are involved in this?

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: That's a good question.

We focus on the digital component of transnational repression. Typically, this involves governments using a variety of surveillance and hacking tools, many of which are commercially available now, to repress people abroad. In fact, this is why we have been seeing an explosion in cases globally over the last 15 years.

The digital ecosystem is poorly secured, and social media is a perfect vector through which to harass and intimidate people. Of course, there is now a largely unregulated mercenary surveillance

marketplace of companies that provide governments, under the auspices of fighting crime and terrorism, with tools that enable them to track and get inside the devices of political activists and dissidents abroad.

We are seeing an explosion of this marketplace right now. There are very few regulations around it. This is a very opaque space, and a variety of governments are using those tools to target people abroad.

• (1620)

Sameer Zuberi: Are there any particular companies, groups or governments, that stand out in these sorts of activities?

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: Yes, 100%. There have been companies that have featured prominently in our research such as the NSO Group, the manufacturer of Pegasus spyware. Many people in this room may have heard about it because of the press reporting and the Citizen Lab's forensic research.

There are dozens of cases over the last 10 years of governments using that either for domestic espionage or spying on people abroad. The NSO Group, which, by the way, has been sanctioned by the United States, is only one company in a growing marketplace. There are American companies, Italian companies, Gulf-based companies and Spanish companies. The reality is that it's a very lucrative marketplace.

There's a big appetite for this technology, and it boils down to the fact that every one of us carries around a phone, takes it home with us and puts it at our bedside table. One minute it's safe, and the next it's funnelling data to a bunker somewhere on the far side of the world.

In our research, through careful forensic analysis, we meet with victims and analyze their phones, and in many cases we see that they've been spied on unwittingly. Someone from abroad can turn on a camera or turn on a microphone and look at all of your social networks today and in the past and, most powerfully, track your location in order to facilitate either kidnappings, beatings or, in the worst case, assassinations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

I'd like to invite Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe to take the floor.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for seven minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being with us for this important study.

Mr. Tohti, if you like, I'll accompany you next Thursday to the press conference marking 20 years since Mr. Celil's imprisonment.

I think one way to counter transnational repression is to be consistent with the political positions or decisions we make.

I want to talk to you about motion No. 62, which recognized the genocide of Uyghurs and proposed, among other things, “to expedite the entry of 10,000 Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in need of protection, over two years starting in 2024 into Canada”.

In your opinion, has the Canadian government kept its promise? Have the objectives of motion No. 62 been achieved?

[English]

Mehmet Tohti: The program in M-62 was voted on by the whole House. The government accepted the program and promised Parliament it would implement it.

The program was kick-started on January 1, 2024. It has now been almost two and a half years, and the program is ongoing. The only concern is that we have not brought in 10,000 people yet. We have not even brought in 1,000 people yet. We've probably brought in fewer than 500 in two years. If it continues at this speed, it may take 20 or 40 years to bring all 10,000 people here.

For that reason, I urge the Government of Canada to uphold that parliamentary promise and parliamentary will, and urge the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to review this program one more time and expedite it.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I think we've spent enough time together for me to safely say that I have a lot of friends in the Uyghur community. We regularly hear testimony from members of the Uyghur diaspora in Quebec or Canada. They say they're being pressured, surveilled and receiving threats targeting their loved ones back in China. That's often what transnational repression looks like: members of a diaspora living in a given region are used to threaten their loved ones or families in China.

Given what you've seen from the new Canadian government in recent months or the past year, do you think Canada is taking the threats being made to the Uyghur diaspora here seriously?

• (1625)

[English]

Mehmet Tohti: That is the concern for many Canadians, because transnational oppression, Uyghur genocide, forced labour, surveillance technology and the many Chinese high-tech companies that are operating in Canada have been part of the public discussion for a number of years. We have even had a public inquiry about transnational oppression, and there are recommendations from independent commissions.

If we look all of that, bring all the pieces together and look at the implementation side, there are a lot of issues in implementing those previously discussed policy matters and recommendations offered by the commissioner. For example, legislation on Uyghur forced labour was promised by the government three times—in budget 2023, in budget 2024 and in the 2024 fall economic statement—but we haven't see any bills tabled by the government on it.

Now that CUSMA is starting to be reviewed, this issue is coming up. For that reason, we need to strengthen Canada's hand and leverage by passing that legislation. It is important. Domestic law is required to take action.

We also need protection for the victim communities against transnational oppression from China, Iran or other countries. It is important to pass the legislation proposed by the commissioner, as well as amend the laws as recommended. We should implement them as soon as possible.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you for your answer.

Mr. Chan, I have the honour of being one of Hong Kong Watch's sponsors. Over the years, a certain friendship has developed between us.

I'd like to talk about the mandatory provident fund. Isn't that an example of involuntary transnational repression? Canadian insurance companies abide by Hong Kong laws. Hong Kong authorities, through these same laws, are engaging in transnational repression by ensuring that opponents of the regime or Hong Kong refugees in Canada cannot access their pensions.

I'm not casting stones at these companies, but aren't they unwittingly participating in transnational repression by preventing people who are here in Canada from accessing these funds?

[English]

Landson Chan: Yes, absolutely. It is absolutely a form of transnational repression. We have actually been advocating for the MPF...for a very long time, because what's happening here is this is money they earned in Hong Kong—it's basically a pension fund—but because of Hong Kong law...

Sometimes, if they are dealing with refugees' funds, it will be even more serious. They can apply the national security law in Hong Kong right now and transform it into a way of preventing access to those funds. They will lose those funds, potentially permanently, and some of them.... Even if it's temporary, it doesn't make sense.

We have to do something to ensure that they get their money back, instead of letting the Chinese government get in their way.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

[English]

The Chair: You have 15 minutes. No, it's 15 seconds.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do I have 15 minutes? That's no problem.

[Translation]

Since I have only 15 seconds left, I'll resume my questions during the next round.

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

[English]

I invite Ms. Yip to take the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Yip, the floor is yours.

Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you to all the witnesses for coming today and for sharing their expertise.

My question is directed to Mr. Chan.

How has transnational repression impacted the wider Hong Kong community in Canada, aside from your very detailed comments about activists?

• (1630)

Landson Chan: Aside from the casework I mentioned, the wider community is generally scared to speak up. Even when we organize events, I think they hesitate to participate because they can see the influence of the Chinese government in Canada. Yes, it has created a chilling effect for everyone in the wider community, especially when they saw what happened to Joe Tay. His campaign was severely disrupted. It's not a fair election for him if he is scared and gets all that harassment.

Most of the Hong Kong communities are aware of this. I would say that there is a chilling effect and that they are very scared of speaking up.

Jean Yip: Have there been more police stations reported?

Landson Chan: In my research, I saw that two were discovered in Montreal and three were discovered in Toronto, to the best of my knowledge. I believe the two in Montreal have already closed, but without the RCMP laying charges.

Jean Yip: What are your recommendations to reassure the Hong Kong community and Canadians at large about disinformation?

Landson Chan: The most pressing thing we can do right now is implement the legislation for the foreign registry passed in 2024. The framework is already there, but we are slow to implement it and provide more protection, especially to high-risk individuals. It's a clear mechanism for those who are experiencing transnational repression to report it and eventually—potentially—transform that into a prosecution.

Jean Yip: How does transnational repression among Hong Kong communities in Canada compare with that in other countries?

Landson Chan: Compared with other countries, I would say that it is just as bad here. Look at the United Kingdom right now. We are seeing a trial going on for the HKETO spies.

It seems like it's quieter in Canada at this time, but if we look back to the election campaign in 2025.... I spoke to Joe Tay personally, and we discovered that there were a lot of activities during the election period. For example, I didn't mention that he was accused of tax evasion in Hong Kong during the election period. The charges they pressed were dropped right after the election period.

Jean Yip: Thank you.

Dr. Deibert, you talked about digital repression. How is AI used in digital repression?

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: AI is exploding very quickly. It has come upon us all of a sudden, and it's penetrating everything. It's no different in the world of transnational repression.

From our vantage point, what are we looking at when we do evidence-based research on the threat actors engaged in transnational

oppression.... AI is used across the spectrum. It can be used, for example, in the creation of deepfake videos to try to cast false aspersions on somebody or put out false news about somebody. It's also used in targeting—trying to better understand how to get access to a person and what they're doing, in terms of data available to a state. AI can be used to analyze all of that at scale. It can be used to undertake reconnaissance on a person's device.

There's a whole spectrum of harms associated with AI, which is why I recommended that the government take these harms seriously and start putting forward regulation that can at least help us address these harms in a more comprehensive fashion.

• (1635)

Jean Yip: Aside from regulations, is there something the government can do with the AI capabilities of disinformation? It can really grow, because it recalibrates and learns and so forth.

The Chair: May we have a rapid answer, please, because time is up.

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: I actually think that overall a lot of the solutions to these problems have to come at local levels and at a grassroots level rather than the government doing something centrally. I'd be happy to expand on that.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Yip.

I would like to invite Madam Kronis to take the floor for five minutes, please.

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

I'm going to address my questions to Professor Deibert.

If we think of the world as a big house that we all live in, the global digital ecosystem is arguably the plumbing, and you have an incredible view into that. I remember in the late 1990s, when I was one of your students, that the Citizen Lab was an idea you had. It was this incredible thing you wanted to start. Now, 25 years later, it is really in a position to be able to investigate novel threats to democracy, human rights and global security from a digital perspective that gets at some of that, that melds together that international finance, the defence, and all of the pieces.

In your opening remarks you talked a little about how people flee oppressive regimes and they come to Canada only to find that they actually haven't gotten nearly as far away as they thought. What we've heard from a number of the witnesses today is of their own personal experiences or the experiences that people they know have had with transnational repression.

What insights do you have for us, sitting and listening and taking all of this in?

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: As part of the research, which tends to be technical in nature because we're doing forensic analysis and network scanning and all of this detective work, we also, with a very focused lens, talk to people and understand their lived experiences. What I'm hearing across the table is very consistent with what we hear from victims, especially around the chilling effects that have been described. I have talked to people who had their phones hacked by one or another government that they fled from and the mere presence of a phone makes them anxious. They have a feeling of helplessness around technology, around the Internet, that makes them feel like they don't want to engage anymore, which is really quite interesting if you look back to 25 years ago. Most people assumed that all of this technology would enable liberalization and democratization. We're seeing the exact opposite. People are retreating into isolation, not connecting to their diaspora networks, not picking up their phone and not going on social media because that's where the harms originate.

Tamara Kronis: We heard from the Auditor General this morning that the CBSA is not only behind in hiring the 1,000 agents we've heard about over and over again, but in fact, it has actually lost 3,400 full-time employees.

Are Canadian law enforcement agencies adequately equipped and trained to identify and respond to these threats? If they aren't, are there structural barriers that are eliminating the effectiveness? Is it lack of will? What kinds of insights do you have into that?

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: Yes, that's a good question. Thank you for that.

All I can tell you is what victims report to us. Again, consistently we hear victims saying that when they report a case like we've been hearing about to local law enforcement, there are usually big question marks and they don't know what to do. That's understandable because in a lot of cases we're talking about a foreign government on the other side of the world—if you can even figure out who's doing this. There is not much that they can do.

There are some exceptions. For example, I've learned about the York Regional Police, which has done a very impressive job building up their internal repertoire for how to deal with these cases, so I would point you to them as a model example.

Generally speaking, though, I think there must be much better training, much better education at a local level across the country for frontline entities and agencies to understand what it is they're dealing with. There is still a lack of understanding of what the experiences are here.

• (1640)

Tamara Kronis: The other thing I find fascinating about your work is that you're embedded in a university. You're embedded in a downtown core. There are protests, incidents and events going on all around you.

What have you observed in terms of the role that transnational repression is playing in connection with university campuses and the ways in which those campuses are being harnessed in some ways to facilitate it?

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: As a university professor, I'm seeing a lot of pressure on universities coming from all sorts of places right now, not just the topic of this hearing. Academic freedom is at risk at the university right now. That's daunting for somebody like me who does work at the cutting edge.

When it comes to transnational repression, of course, students are not immune to it. I will say one thing about it, in general. My impression, and this is based on our visibility into what we're talking about here, is that most governments that undertake acts of transnational repression don't really think about the state within which the victim resides; it's a secondary consideration.

They just want to get at an individual who is from their country and who represents some kind of problem for them. They want to neutralize that problem. The country where a person lives, their location and whether they are a student or a business owner, matter less. That may factor into some risk calculation, which is important for us to understand, so that we can create effective deterrence in this country.

It's not that they're going after Canada or Canadians. They're going after Uyghurs, Iranians, Hong Kongers or whatever. They're largely agnostic on the state in which they live.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to invite Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe to take the floor for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Deibert, the fact that you raised the issue of electronic devices is of particular interest to me. I myself have had to get a new phone a few times, because I knew it had been compromised. Let me be clear: I was never concerned for my safety. However, this is the phone I use to communicate with activists or opponents of certain regimes, through encrypted apps. I was told that the officials had nothing against me, but that they were looking to identify people I was talking to via my phone, among other things. So that's a pretty interesting problem to have.

You said there should be a lot of local initiatives. I'd like to get your general reading of things. When it comes to international repression, we're really talking about four countries: Iran, Russia, but also India and China. Recently, we've sensed that the Canadian government is getting closer to India and China, or is experiencing diplomatic and trade thaw with those countries.

Do you not see that as a challenge? In your opinion, should we be more careful about this kind of thaw, whether diplomatic or trade, since these forces are clearly still actively carrying out transnational repression on Canadian soil?

[*English*]

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: I'll respond in English if that's okay.

Those are two separate questions.

Regarding the first one, you're essentially talking about hacking technology and spyware, which is available commercially to governments today. Not all governments have access to the same tools. Not all governments undertake cyber-espionage in the same way. Russia, China and other countries are all slightly different.

There is also a commercial market for some of the most advanced and sophisticated surveillance technology that's available to dozens of other governments. In your question, you limited it to these four. Those four, of course, are major actors of transnational repression, but dozens of other governments also routinely undertake transnational repression thanks to this commercial marketplace.

What could be done to solve that? That is an extremely difficult problem to solve, because we're talking about cyber-espionage. It's very difficult to regulate. Canada has signed a pledge, along with 26 other countries, to better regulate the commercial market for spyware. We have made that pledge, but as far as I can tell, we have done almost nothing to live up to those words right now.

That's where I think we need to do better. We need to work with other countries to better regulate the industry that's putting tools in the hands of these governments to undertake transnational repression.

I'm sorry, but what was the second question?

• (1645)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you think we should be more careful when we talk about a diplomatic and trade thaw with people we know are responsible for transnational repression?

You talked a lot about local initiatives, but I think we also have to do something at the global level—that is, at the federal level—in terms of international relations.

Does that worry you? Do you think we should be more careful about these new actions?

[*English*]

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: Thank you for that.

Yes, I definitely think this is a problem. When you start putting aside the fact that these governments are major actors that have engaged in transnational repression against Canadian citizens, immigrants and refugees in this country, you sweep all of that aside and you say, okay, now we're into a new territory. I think that's a problem because it sends a signal to those governments that we're no longer serious about combatting that problem.

I've seen it in the past. Back in 2018, we discovered that a Canadian permanent resident, Omar Abdulaziz, a Saudi by birth, had his phone hacked with Pegasus spyware by Saudi Arabia while he was in Sherbrooke, Quebec, as a student. The government said very little, if anything at all, about that. I think when you don't speak up, when you don't take a stand, then you open up, you invite that sort of repression to happen.

I think this, frankly, often gets cast as something idealistic, but in fact this is a national security issue for us to the extent that we are a

relatively small country. Our national security depends on international law and international human rights. If we are not vocal about that, if we don't take a serious stand about that, we act at our own peril.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. Time is up.

I would like to ask Madam Dhillon to take the floor for five minutes.

Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start my questions with Mr. Deibert.

You spoke a little bit about regulations surrounding AI. What kinds of regulations would you recommend?

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: I think first and foremost, before we even get into regulation, we need to set the appropriate sober tone about this technology. It's all very impressive, as I'm sure all of you have seen, but it's also impressive in terms of the incredible harms that it facilitates across a wide spectrum.

The signals I've seen from this government, and from our Minister of AI, seem to me to be mostly cheerleading and thinking about how we can capitalize from a business perspective on AI. That's not enough. I think especially from a minister of AI, there needs to be a message sent to people, "Look, we understand that this has benefits, but it's also harmful and we need to take steps to address that."

Regulation, I think first and foremost, has to come in terms of more transparency imposed on the platforms. When you ask ChatGPT, Anthropic or something like that a question, it goes into a big black box. We don't know what's happening within that company, what they are doing with that data, with whom it is being shared. You could be certain that some of those companies are sharing that data with law enforcement and intelligence agencies in foreign countries, and that data may then be used as a weapon in transnational repression.

I think first and foremost, we need to open up the black box of these platforms and subject them to outside, independent scrutiny.

Anju Dhillon: You mentioned there are several different types of transnational repression and predominantly now it seems to be AI and online. If we could backtrack a little bit in time, what were the forms before this?

• (1650)

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: I think looking at this historically is very illuminating. If you think about it from the perspective of a bad actor on the other side of the planet, and they want to take care of a dissident based in Canada, 25 or 50 years ago, it would have been very difficult. You'd have to send an agent across borders. You'd have to get the agent into the country. They'd have to physically follow somebody. Maybe they'd have to try to plant some device in their room to eavesdrop on what the dissident is doing.

Now, with a click of a button, thanks to this type of surveillance technology I've been describing, you can get inside a person's entire life. You can see everything they're doing, who they're speaking with. You can activate the camera and eavesdrop on a conversation like this. You can go back in time, look at all of the emails that they've sent.

This is a quantum leap not only in surveillance potential, but in the potential for transnational repression. That's why I think we're at a crisis moment when it comes to the tools that are available to actors. I know there's a lot of attention in this hearing to Iran because it's in the news right now, but again, I need to emphasize there are dozens of countries in many parts of the world that are targeting Canadians from many different backgrounds. The experiences that you hear from Hong Kongers and Uyghurs are consistent with what I'm hearing across the board.

Anju Dhillon: Could you name some of these countries?

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: Rwanda is a major perpetrator of transnational repression. Rwanda very rarely gets mentioned because it's often seen as a success story. There's a complicated history with Rwanda. The president is very popular. There's a lot of investment in the region. If you talk to any Rwandan dissident, they will tell you horror stories of not only targeted surveillance, but also targeted kidnappings and assassinations as well.

There are many other countries. Every region in the world has countries that engage in transnational repression.

Anju Dhillon: I was also going to ask you this question, but it seems to have been answered somewhat.

Does it seem like there's an increase in transnational repression now more than ever? Is this thanks to technology, or is there another reason?

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: Yes, I think it's thanks to technology. We are certainly inundated. We're a small research group, yet we're flooded with inquiries from people who feel that they can't receive help. They are lost. They are coming to an academic research group to try to help them. In a lot of cases, it's not appropriate. We're not set up for that type of assistance. That is why I've been advocating for more support for refugees and immigrants at a grassroots level. They need people within their communities to help them navigate this. It is definitely exploding, though.

Anju Dhillon: From all of the testimony we've heard in this committee, the way transnational repression is done today is more psychological. If you silence people, then there's no controversy. Would you say it's more like psychological warfare?

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: It's more psychological.

Empirically, there is a major gendered component to transnational repression. We're seeing women, especially from conservative societies, targeted differentially from men. That often involves the use of deepfake videos meant to incriminate somebody, to put them in embarrassing positions that will make them afraid to speak out because something like that could ruin relationships or family relations.

I would like to get back to your question about the explosion that's happening here. I really want to emphasize the situation in the United States. I know that some colleagues here at the table were talking about us acting in unison. I fundamentally disagree. A major risk to transnational repression is on the horizon, and it's coming from south of the border. You only need to open a newspaper and read about ICE agents kidnapping people off the streets and murdering citizens without any repercussions.

I predict that it will eventually spill into our country. We need to reckon with the fact that the country south of the border, which used to be our ally, routinely threatens our sovereignty, and is now rounding up people and deporting them. That's a major risk for transnational repression moving forward.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Davies to take the floor for five minutes please.

Fred Davies (Niagara South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to follow that with two different subjects.

Let me start with Mr. Tohti.

A constituent of mine is fairly well known internationally. He lives in the Niagara region. Jimmy Lai is a major investor in the Niagara area. He has invested probably billions of dollars in the real estate sector and has created thousands of jobs. He's very well known and respected in Niagara. He was arrested in Hong Kong and has an ever-changing sentence.

Can you draw some parallels with your original discussion on Huseyin? What is your impression of the Jimmy Lai case, and where do you think it's going?

Mehmet Tohti: This is an important question.

Huseyin Celil was the first reported victim of transnational repression by a hostile foreign country, despite his Canadian citizenship. Jimmy Lai is the same example. Both Jimmy Lai and Huseyin Celil are the front faces of transnational repression. We can see them. We can visualize them, and we can relate.

As you said, their relatives may be Canadian citizens. I don't know for sure. Maybe Jimmy Lai's family and friends live in Canada and have investments. At the same time, Huseyin Celil and his wife have four children. Some were born in Canada and are Canadian citizens. It is also the destruction of family. This has a profound impact on the freedom of individuals and other members of the community as well. That instills fear and is a threat to the freedom of individuals.

Fred Davies: The difference in this case is that there have been communications with Jimmy Lai.

The two cases are distinct but similar. Why do you think the Chinese government is acting in this way and do you have any predictions on how this might end up?

Mehmet Tohti: The basic intent of the Chinese government is to silence the critics of the Chinese government in third countries, in free countries like Canada.

The Chinese government has been using these sorts of silencing tactics not only for Uyghurs, Tibetans and Hong Kongers, but for some Chinese citizens as well. It is interference in the freedom of free people in free countries: forcing them to work, to be an informant or to be silent on any activities or initiatives that go against the Chinese government.

It is important to raise this case all the time.

Fred Davies: Thank you. I appreciate your comments.

Professor Deibert, you made reference to the spyware agreements that have been signed by multiple countries. It seems to me that just as we sign agreements, somebody goes out and builds a better mousetrap. This technology is changing substantially.

Mr. Kahn, thank you for making the trip here. What do you see on the horizon? What is the landscape you see in the United States as we look at transnational issues? Where are we headed?

Tzvi Kahn: It's a complicated question.

With respect to Iran, I believe it's going to remain a continued threat, and we have to keep our eyes on it. The Islamic Republic has long plotted to act within the United States, as well as Canada, of course. This is going to continue so long as the regime remains in power.

Ultimately, from a U.S. perspective and from the perspective of the west, it's in our interest that this regime fall. I think that should be the ultimate goal of western policy, of the United States and our allies.

I think that as long as that is the case, we are going to continue to see transnational repression as a major problem in the United States.

• (1700)

Fred Davies: Thank you for that.

For Professor Deibert, I have the same sort of question on the technology side of things. As we looked at AI a couple of years ago, it was outside our realm of understanding. Now, it's part of everything we do.

As those mousetraps get better, where do you think the future lies and what can we do to help mitigate the future damage? It seems that every time we turn around, the threat gets bigger and the knowledge of how to fix that gets smaller.

The Chair: You have a few seconds. We've already passed one minute.

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: I would say that it can feel daunting. The range of topics we're describing covers a huge spectrum.

I think the only way to grapple with it is one by one: by picking apart and focusing in on one particular issue that we can better regulate, as opposed to thinking about how we change the entire universe of problems related to digital technology.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, the floor is yours for five minutes.

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

Mr. Tohti, you talked a lot about Mr. Celil, someone the government has neglected. I think that should concern all my colleagues around the table.

Can you tell us if, in the past 20 years, the Canadian government has made any attempt to secure Mr. Celil's release?

[*English*]

Mehmet Tohti: From time to time, there was a question in Parliament and at various committees posed to government officials about Huseyin Celil. So far, we haven't heard anything. The only answer is that the Chinese government did not recognize citizenship and refused to provide consular services. Except for communications held from time to time between the two governments, I don't know what concrete steps the Government of Canada has taken so far.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We have heard nothing about behind-the-scenes discussions between the Canadian government and the Chinese Communist Party regime. I, for one, haven't heard anything. Anyway, thank you for your answer.

Earlier, with Mr. Deibert, we talked about the recent diplomatic and trade thaw with Beijing.

Are you concerned about the agreement reached regarding the 49,000 Chinese vehicles that will be allowed into Canada at a significantly lower tariff rate? Originally, the tariff rate was 100%, but it has been reduced to 6.1%, if I recall correctly.

Do you not see this as a risk for national and public security, in that these vehicles can be used to send information to certain servers on Chinese territory? Isn't there also a concern with regard to forced labour, since, according to some studies, forced labour and child labour are used in certain supply chains and in the manufacturing of certain components of those vehicles?

[*English*]

Mehmet Tohti: I would just like to say one thing before answering your question.

I believe that the Prime Minister of Canada should call the family and friends of Jimmy Lai, and the wife and four children of Huseyin Celil. The latter family had a photograph taken and shared on social media. At least that photograph travels at light speed and will go somewhere in China and people will share it. Maybe there will even be a rare opportunity for Huseyin Celil to see his children in it.

In many countries, when a Canadian citizen is taken by a hostile state, high-level Canadian officials immediately visit the victim's families or call them to the office, and the government officials stand with them.

In the case of Huseyin Celil, so far for 20 years, no prime minister or minister has called them or just asked them a direct question, "What is your situation?" This is something that the Government of Canada should do for the family members of both Huseyin Celil and Jimmy Lai.

As to your questions about electric vehicles, this is a huge concern for all Canadians, because electric vehicles have computers. They can directly communicate with the Chinese information hub and send and transmit personal information. For that reason, they are a national security issue.

Secondly, they are a forced labour issue. The aluminum production, extraction and all other relevant car parts are done with the use of Uyghur forced labour, which has been well documented and reported in Professor Laura Murphy's comprehensive report. For that reason, the Government of Canada should study this. Instead of importing these electric vehicles, we should ban them until we clarify the components.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Could you send that report to the committee, through the analysts?

Mr. Deibert, you mentioned the treaty Canada signed regarding spyware, which 26 countries worked on. On one end of the spectrum, there are countries that are helping one another to perpetuate a certain form of transnational repression. On the other end of the spectrum, there are countries that will work together to develop new technologies or, at the very least, share those technologies.

You talked about Rwanda earlier. I'd like to ask you a question that's a little out of left field, as we say back home. You may not

have the answer, but I'm still going to ask. Are you able to tell the committee whether the Rwandan intelligence services were trained by another country or by the intelligence services of another country? Do you know the answer, or am I asking about something that falls outside of your expertise?

[*English*]

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: Could you clarify the question: the secret services were notified by whom, about what?

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Can you tell the committee who trained the Rwandan secret services?

[*English*]

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: You're informed by?

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: No, I said "trained".

[*English*]

Dr. Ronald J. Deibert: Okay, "trained by". Thank you, I now understand your question.

I don't know who trained them, but the Rwandans were able to procure Pegasus spyware from the NSO Group, which is an Israeli-based company, to answer your question.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for their testimony on the global impacts of transnational repression.

[*English*]

I would like to thank all of the witnesses. On behalf of the subcommittee members and myself, thank you for being with us and taking the time to illustrate...and to enlighten this subcommittee with your interventions and by answering questions. It is highly appreciated by us all.

If you would like to add something and have some other ideas you would like to share with us, feel free to write either to the chair or to the clerk here. We appreciate your presence.

We'll suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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