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

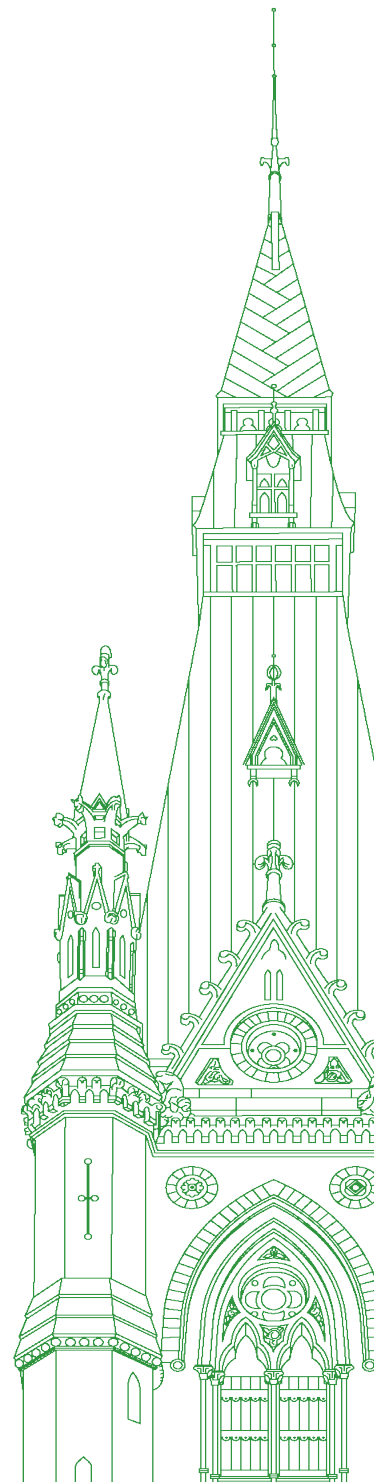
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Chair: Fayçal El-Khoury





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

Monday, May 4, 2026

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 18 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 on its study of 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 witnesses and 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 would now like to welcome our first witnesses.

[*English*]

As individuals, we have Dr. Thomas Juneau, full professor, public and international affairs, University of Ottawa; Mark Kersten, assistant professor, school of criminology and criminal justice, University of the Fraser Valley; and Professor Frederick John Packer, associate professor of law, University of Ottawa.

By video conference, from the CAUKUS Foundation, we have Dimon Liu, human rights activist; from the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, we have Luke de Pulford, executive director; and from the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, we have Brandon Silver, director of policy and projects.

I welcome you all.

I would like to give every one of our witnesses a time period of five minutes for your introduction. Please do your best to respect the time.

I would like to start with Dr. Thomas Juneau.

You have the floor for five minutes. Please go ahead.

**Thomas Juneau (Full Professor, Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa, As an Individual):** Thank you very much for the offer to speak to you today.

I am in the process of writing and researching a book on transnational repression in Canada with my co-author, Professor Amarnath Amarasingam, from Queen's University. The book will focus on how China, India and Iran target diaspora activists in Canada. We've conducted about 100 interviews so far, the vast majority with victims of transnational repression, or TNR. It will be the first comprehensive assessment of the threat and the problem in Canada. What I will discuss today are preliminary results. We expect to finish the writing of the manuscript by the end of the summer.

There are four main elements to our research: tools, impact, how victims perceive the government's response and the importance of understanding diaspora politics.

Our interviews, first, asked victims to describe the tools that state perpetrators of transnational repression use against them. The main tools are physical threats in Canada: surveillance, monitoring of protests, verbal abuse and, in extreme cases, physical violence and assassination attempts.

Much transnational repression occurs digitally—intimidation online, disinformation and defamation—with the goal of draining the activist's energy to sow doubt in others' minds about their honesty or integrity. Many of the worst instances of TNR have involved threats to and pressure on families inside the perpetrator country: interrogations, physical abuse, freezing of financial assets, firings from jobs and expulsions from university or education. We've documented multiple cases of each of these instances.

There is a heavy gendered aspect to transnational repression. Women activists are often victims of especially brutal and violent threats, notably in terms of disinformation and defamation online.

One element that matters a lot here is perception. We spoke to some activists, for example, who have not been directly targeted but who know of colleagues who were. The simple fear that there is a possibility they could be targeted in the future because of their activism is more than enough to send a chilling message. Transnational repression, in a sense, works a bit like terrorism. There is a theatrical element whereby the public display of visible instances of violence, physical or digital, serves to intimidate a given population.

Second, we try to assess the impact of transnational repression on diaspora activism itself. The impact varies a lot. We've spoken to people on whom there was no impact at all. They decided to continue their activism despite the threats or the violence. We've spoken to activists who decided to completely stop, and anybody in the middle. The most important variable in shaping the response or impact is whether the activist has family inside the perpetrator country. Those with no immediate family were typically more likely to continue.

We are also asking our interviewees—close to 100 of them—about the personal impact. Here we saw, universally, tremendous personal distress, with many activists reporting excessive emotional suffering as a result of the pressure they're under, and in most cases there's little or no support.

Third, we asked interviewees about their perceptions of the government's response to transnational repression. We systematically asked in particular whether they had contacted the RCMP, CSIS or other police of jurisdiction, and if yes, what responses they received, and if no, why not. Again, responses varied a lot at this level. In many cases, the main criticism was one of neglect—the perception that authorities have limited awareness and interest in the threat. Another frequent response was a perception that officials, in the police in particular, had very little awareness or understanding of the threat. That being said, there was also a fairly clear perception among our interviewees that the government is taking the problem increasingly seriously. I'll get back to that at the end.

Finally, our research has also shown the importance of understanding the broader context of diaspora politics, and more specifically, among other implications, how fragmented communities—this is the case in particular of the Iranian Canadian community, which I study a lot—create more opportunities for state perpetrators of transnational repression to target individuals and also make the job of the federal government to counter transnational repression more difficult—in terms of reaching out, for example.

Another element of our research has been to understand the government's response. What I would briefly say here is that the response has improved, but much remains to be done. There is better awareness in government of the threat, a better understanding of the portfolio of tools used by perpetrators of transnational repression and a better understanding of the impact not only on individuals but also on the broader fabric of Canadian society.

• (1545)

The federal government has developed new tools—for example, Canada's national counter foreign interference coordinator and some of the tools that came with Bill C-70—and it is steadily learning how to better use these tools. There's better information sharing not only within the federal government, but also between the federal government and other levels of government. There have also been efforts to be more transparent and to engage with diaspora communities.

To conclude very quickly, I will just add a point I made in an op-ed in the National Post about a month ago. We can expect transnational repression against Iranian Canadians to get significantly worse in 2026. Past patterns show that when two variables are met—enhanced diaspora mobilization and more acute perceptions of vulnerability by the regime—there's an increase in the targeting of diaspora activists. That is exactly what we're seeing in the Iranian case now. The tragic assessment is that we should expect things to get worse at that level in the coming months.

• (1550)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Juneau. You exceeded your time by one minute, by the way. Please try to respect the time.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Mark Kersten to take the floor for five minutes, please.

**Mark Kersten (Assistant Professor, Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of the Fraser Valley, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, everyone, for having me.

As transnational repression, or TNR, continues to grow, it is critical to remind ourselves that transnational repression is not waged against abstract entities or states, but against people and communities. Canada's response must therefore be grounded in human rights.

With my time, I will emphasize three points and conclude with a number of recommendations. First, TNR in Canada is inextricably linked to human rights violations committed in source countries. Second, understanding these links means tackling both, by holding perpetrators accountable. Third, the threats of TNR are growing and include states that Canada considers allies.

TNR is not separate from repression in source countries. It's an extension of it. Those who call out and push back on atrocities in Iran, Russia, China, India, etc. are targets for repression here. How Ottawa responds must appreciate that it is those who dream of human rights in their homelands who face the nightmare of transnational repression in Canada.

Given it's the springtime, consider the following analogy. If Canada continues to focus only on how repression is expressed on Canadian soil, it will be cutting the dandelion flowers while leaving the roots intact. Worse, current Canadian policies might even allow the weedy world of repression to flourish.

I have studied the presence of Iranian regime figures in Canada and what responses are available to authorities to hold them accountable. Like others, I was troubled to see some members of Parliament calling for Iranian regime figures to be deported back to Iran. Trying to tackle TNR in Canada by sending perpetrators back to a regime engaged in the oppression of civilians is potentially reckless and dangerous. Sending agents back risks strengthening the Iranian regime and its repressive capabilities.

It was thus a lost opportunity in some ways when Canada decided last week not to investigate or potentially prosecute, but to return a former IRGC commander, Mehdi Taj, back to Iran. If Canada's response to TNR is to deport perpetrators, what lesson will those engaged in repression learn? "We can send our guys in to terrorize diaspora communities. The worst that will happen is Canada will send them back to us."

Canada cannot tackle repression here by exporting its perpetrators abroad. We must instead uphold our sovereignty by reaffirming the human rights of those targeted by TNR. We can do this by holding perpetrators of repression and atrocities accountable in our own courts and under our own laws. Canada can become a world leader in this regard.

There is a framework that Canada can use to identify emerging threats of TNR. Look for states that perpetrate atrocities against their own people with impunity and that lack respect for state sovereignty. That means we must look not only at states like China, India and Iran, but also at the United States as an emerging risk of TNR.

Canadians are rightly worried that ICE, a paramilitary force engaged in rights violations in the United States, including the kidnapping and killing of migrants and citizens, might do the same in Canada. It's a reasonable fear. The U.S. may not be engaged in repression in Canada today, but it is precisely states that behave as they do that enable repression and seek to silence those who push back against their crimes.

Canada must be indiscriminate in our fight against repression and not allow the aspiration of good relations to blind us. Our commitment to accountability must not rest on double standards or partisan games.

Please allow me to conclude with three recommendations.

First, Canada should allocate new resources to the war crimes program and encourage it to open a structural investigation into transnational repression linked to the investigation and prosecution

of atrocity perpetrators residing in Canada. This could include an analysis of whether transnational repression may in some cases amount to a crime against humanity.

Second, Canada could create a non-partisan working group to study the creation of a bill of rights for victims of TNR to offer them an effective institution to seek protection and remedies, including access to compensation from the seized assets of perpetrators.

Finally, Canada should review current ICE operations in the country. Ottawa should explain to Canadians why ICE, a force of an increasingly autocratic government, should still operate through its five offices in five Canadian cities.

It's not a matter of whether Canada can do this. We have the right people, the right resources and the right institutions. It's only a matter of whether Canada has the will and the courage to do so, in line with human rights and the goal of accountability. I certainly hope that it does.

● (1555)

I thank you very much for your time.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That was perfect timing.

I would like to invite Professor Frederick John Packer to take the floor for five minutes, please.

**Frederick John Packer (Associate Professor of Law, University of Ottawa, As an Individual):** Mr. Chair, we are behind the curve and at demonstrable peril. The Parliament of Canada was awoken by foreign interference in Canadian elections, a direct attack on Canadian sovereignty—that is, interference with our political independence and a breach of the foundational principle of sovereign equality, which has been a cornerstone of international law since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

You, the Parliament of Canada, responded by having a public inquiry, the foreign interference commission, resulting in the adoption of Bill C-70, the Countering Foreign Interference Act, but that is the tip of the iceberg. The breach of Canadian sovereignty—our territorial integrity, the safety, security and freedom of the population, and the autonomy and integrity of our polity—has been and continues to be violated by an increasing number of foreign states, with the most grave and widening consequences.

The very purpose of Canadian sovereignty, and arguably the primary responsibility of Canada, according to article 55 of the UN charter, is the “creation of conditions of stability and well-being”, pursuant to the rule of law under the Constitution of Canada. We are an open society dedicated to these aims, which also create vulnerabilities that are being abused. Parliament and the Government of Canada need to act with urgency, precision and effectiveness.

Transnational repression is not new, but it is rapidly growing as technologies have expanded substantially the means and reach of interference. In 2022, the respected NGO Freedom House reported incidents from that year committed by 20 governments, as their database approached almost 1,000 cases perpetrated by 38 governments. Recently, Freedom House reported that some 54 governments have now committed verified acts of transnational repression. The reach affects over half the countries of the world—107, to be exact—as the repressive acts traverse geographic—i.e., sovereign territorial—boundaries.

This carefully compiled information is certainly just scratching the surface. For example, last autumn, on behalf of the Organization of American States, I advised on an unpublished survey of electoral management bodies throughout the hemisphere, including Canada's own Elections Canada. Of the 32 countries, over 90% reported forms of interference known to them, with many originating abroad, including direct attacks against authorities, with fully one-third having experienced deepfakes. In fact, most have no solid knowledge of the full extent and full effect of such acts, but they were unanimous that this is a real and growing problem striking at the heart of sovereignty and especially democracy. I am available to recount more examples, including my own, having been sanctioned by China for holding and sharing an expert opinion on which China simply disagrees.

The forms of transnational oppression vary in range, kind and severity—travel constraints, withholding of documents, conditioning entitlements on changes of political or other opinions, confiscations of property, denationalization, detentions, deportations, extraditions, breaches of physical integrity, inhumane conditions, torture and assassinations. Among the most insidious are acts of extortion and covert measures that often invisibly but effectively silence. Indeed, that is the clear aim: to repress and preferably eliminate the basic freedoms of thought, belief, association, assembly, movement, and social and political participation. In some cases, it is a component of genocidal policies to destroy a group in whole or in part, including to erase their history, memory and voice.

These acts are not limited by geography, diplomacy or the international rule of law. I would go further and say that they aim to counter and undermine the vigour and cohesion of democracies where such freedoms have taken root and blossomed. The perpetrator governments threaten, sow fears and doubts, and constrain critical scrutiny or even dialogue, instead promoting polarizing views. Their targets are not only activists in exile, although these are high on their list, but also allies and independent voices—like those on this panel—as well as journalists, civil servants, public authorities and, yes, parliamentarians. They affect second and third generations of extended families. Significantly, Canada has some four million dual nationals, many of whom are potentially subject to repressive acts and laws.

Canada needs to catch up. The Europeans have been considering measures that include a possible Council of Europe convention on transnational repression and an EU directive to protect human rights defenders and other activists in exile. It's not only our elections and your integrity that need protecting. The essential sovereignty of our country and the safety, security and fundamental freedoms of every Canadian and visitor to Canada need protecting.

As such, I respectfully propose that the following be undertaken. One, a full-time point person should be tasked in the Privy Council. Two, an inter-ministerial working group should be established to ensure coherence. Three, an advisory group should be formed comprising public authorities, independent experts and civil society representatives with actual experience. Four, training should be mandated for all relevant departments, including provincial and municipal authorities. Five, as an observer of the Council of Europe, Canada should engage actively in the Venice commission for democracy through law, as well as support the elaboration of a convention on transnational repression open to non-member democracies like Canada. Finally, consider a possible royal commission on the full nature and extent of transnational repression and other kinds of foreign interference in Canada.

• (1600)

To conclude, the harsh reality of “the world as it is”—to quote our Prime Minister—means Canada is now among a shrunken number of genuine democracies, and we are vulnerable and already significantly compromised. The threats are coming from both fragile states and a burgeoning group of unscrupulous antagonists or rival states that are in fact breaching Canada's sovereignty right now. Moreover, they are collaborating and learning quickly how to exploit our open societies.

We are behind the curve. With all due respect, it is your duty to act to protect Canada now.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now I would like to invite Madame Dimon Liu, a human rights activist, to take the floor.

You have five minutes. You're welcome to go ahead.

**Dimon Liu (Human Rights Activist, CAUKUS Foundation):** Ever since the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, violence and intimidation have been used by the CCP as routine means of control and dominance over the Chinese people.

During the fight over the passage of the permanent normal trading relations act in 1999, a friend found a rattlesnake in his mailbox. More recently, another friend found three sharpened knives neatly arranged on her front steps. “I can easily make you disappear” is sometimes whispered into the ears of activists, me included.

Guan Weiyan, noted physicist, former president of the University of Science and Technology—China’s MIT—and a force for reform in the CCP, was killed on the sidewalk of a Texas street when a car plowed into him in 2003. Wei Jingsheng, China’s most famous dissident, has had several assassination attempts on him, and three arranged near car accidents—one near Geneva, one near Hamburg and one in front of my house. Wei had one poisoning that landed him in the ICU for two weeks. Similar poisonings have killed dissidents in Australia, France and other countries. Wei continues to face endless lawfare cases that drain his time and finances.

Why do authorities choose to ignore the CCP’s acts of violence and intimidation? We now have a relatively new phrase, “transnational repression”, to describe these acts of violence and intimidation. With this new phrase and proposed legislation by U.S. Congressman John Moolenaar and U.S. Congressman Chris Smith, will these acts of violence and intimidation be reported more often by the mainstream media?

Authorities in western democracies have been loath to take note of massive repression against the Chinese people, both inside and outside China, because the west adopted the British Empire’s commercial approach beginning in 1793. It aimed to gain entry into the vast China market and maintain regime stability in order to continue raking in the money. Please note the difference here. Regime stability is not at all the same as stability and safety for the Chinese people. The British Empire even attempted to maintain regime stability for the Manchu Empire in 1900 by sending troops from eight western countries into China to quell rebellions for the ruling regime.

• (1605)

[Translation]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Unfortunately, there is a problem with the interpretation. We should check that with the clerk and the interpreters.

[English]

**The Chair:** We will suspend for a few seconds. We have a technical problem.

• (1605)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1605)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

[English]

Ms. Liu, we are going to try again with you, but if the problem persists, we’ll have to stop.

Continue, please.

**Dimon Liu:** Ruling regimes have come and gone in China, but China has endured because the Chinese people have endured. We are now facing another possible crumbling of yet another abusive regime. Do the democracies have a China policy that is different from the approach of the old British Empire? The answer is no. All democracies are continuing the old British commercial approach of the last 233 years in pursuing deals with the ruling regime.

What would be the price of a deal with Xi Jinping for a peaceful coexistence with ongoing commercial relations? It would likely be the triumph of tyranny and the defeat of democracy.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you. You made it. We are happy.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Luke de Pulford to take the floor for five minutes.

**Luke de Pulford (Executive Director, Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity.

I created and lead the secretariat for the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, or IPAC, which is the world’s largest parliamentary organization dedicated to China-related issues. IPAC regularly receives requests for help from suspected TNR cases, and members of the network have been engaged, all over the world, in parliamentary discussions about how best to approach the problem. However, today I’m just going to focus on one area of transnational repression.

Committee members will know that a key aspect of the discussion regarding Beijing’s transnational repression is the effort made to suppress political dissent, but little attention has been paid to the attempt to suppress and silence politicians themselves. For the purposes of this presentation, I’m going to call this “political TNR”, and I want to outline IPAC’s experience, which serves as an almost *sui generis* example of what it is and how it operates.

As a brief definition, political TNR is a calculated, cross-border strategy in which a government reaches across national borders to intimidate, silence or harm foreign lawmakers, or their staff and/or their associations. Victims are individuals the aggressor state perceives as a threat and has a political incentive to control, regardless of their nationality or regardless of their status as elected lawmakers. This is not just harassment; it’s a form of direct foreign interference.

The experience of IPAC serves as a stark case study of this evolving threat. IPAC members and its secretariat have faced a spectrum of repression. I’m going to give you, with your permission, a very truncated list.

One, there was the APT31 cyber-attack against the whole IPAC network in 2021, including 18 Canadian members of IPAC. The attack was confirmed by the United States Department of Justice in 2024 as a PRC state-sponsored attack.

Two, there was the arrest and torture of former IPAC volunteer Andy Li, and the subsequent coercion of Mr. Li to become a prosecution witness against Jimmy Lai.

Three, there was the naming of multiple IPAC politicians in Hong Kong national security law cases, and the naming of myself as one of three co-conspirators in the trial of Jimmy Lai.

Four, there was the formal sanctioning of 15 lawmaker members of and three advisors to IPAC, together with their families, in 2021. This includes one member of your committee, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Five, there was the coercion of four countries outside of the network of IPAC by the People's Republic of China, which threatened countries and parties with economic consequences unless their members quit IPAC.

Six, there were attempts to pressure politicians in 11 countries through their political parties not to attend an IPAC summit in Taiwan.

Seven, there was the impersonation of IPAC staff and targeted harassment of IPAC staff and advisors, which included the fabrication of AI-generated pornography and disinformation.

Eight, there was the threatening of IPAC staff from Hong Kong through their families or through the weaponization of bureaucracy in Hong Kong.

Nine, there were statements by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China targeting and smearing IPAC.

Finally—and I emphasize that this is not an exhaustive list—there was the paying of a municipal representative in Belgium to spy on a Belgian IPAC member, Samuel Cogolati.

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of this nascent threat is the lack of transparency from democratic security apparatuses. The FBI, for example, discovered the APT31 activity in 2022 and notified relevant host governments, including Canada. However, in almost all cases, those governments failed to notify the targeted legislators. This includes Canada. Not only that, but the intimidation of lawmakers and secretariat staff, including their spurious naming in national security law trials, has largely been met with silence.

To protect the integrity of our political processes, we must move beyond viewing these incidents as isolated harassment.

We recommend, first, attribution. Affected governments must formally attribute attacks to the responsible parties and publicly condemn them.

Second, I would recommend initiating defending democracy task forces commissioned to understand Beijing's whole-of-state approach to transnational repression and how to defend and maintain the freedom of democratic institutions.

Third, we need sanctions. We have to impose consequences on the perpetrators.

Fourth, we really need prompt notification. We should commit to notifying lawmakers if they're targeted through cyber-attacks or other means.

Finally, we need strengthened support. Cybersecurity measures need to be improved. Environmental awareness training for lawmakers and their staff is really a must.

Thank you, Chair. I yield back to you.

• (1610)

**The Chair:** Thank you. That was perfect timing.

Now I would like to invite our friend Mr. Brandon Silver, director of policy and projects, to take the floor.

Mr. Silver, it's nice to see you with us here. Thanks for participating in our subcommittee and this important study. I'm very happy to see you.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Brandon Silver (Director of Policy and Projects, Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also want to thank the members of the subcommittee.

It's a great pleasure for me to be here. Thank you for the opportunity to join you today.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Exactly seven years ago today, my friend Masih Alinejad testified before this very committee. As an Iranian journalist and one of the leaders of the women's rights movement, she warned of the dangers posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Not long after returning to her home in Brooklyn, Iran tried to kidnap her. The regime hired an operative to abduct her and return her to Iran to face likely execution. What is exceptional about Masih's story is not that Iran ordered her kidnapping; it is that she survived. Most others have not.

We live in what scholars have called the golden age of transnational repression. Since 2014, Freedom House has documented close to 1,400 incidents across 107 countries carried out by 54 governments against their citizens in exile. These numbers continue to rise every year.

Even where direct perpetrators are caught and prosecuted, as Masih's would-be kidnappers were, the statistics still do not go down, because transnational repression is by definition a leadership crime. It is not the spontaneous misconduct of rogue agents. It is the deliberate exercise of state power directed from the top against individuals whose only transgression was to exercise their right to freedom of expression or opinion from the supposed safety of exile.

The operative who attempted to kidnap Masih did not act alone. Behind him was a chain of command, a budget, an intelligence apparatus and, at the top of that chain, a senior official who gave the order. It is that person, the official who authorized the operation, who has never been held to account, and that gap is the topic of my testimony today.

The international community has studied transnational repression extensively, condemned it at the highest levels and built policy frameworks to counter it. The G7, for example, under Canada's presidency, has declared that TNR undermines national security, state sovereignty and the safety of human rights. Forty-five states signed a joint statement at the UN Human Rights Council in 2024 calling for coordinated action against it. This committee has heard powerful testimony about its human cost.

What the international community has not done is hold anyone criminally responsible for ordering it at the highest levels. The focus has been on detection, disruption and diplomatic pressure. Nobody is asking who bears criminal responsibility for directing transnational repression as a matter of state policy. The current responses, therefore, have very real limits.

Criminal prosecutions of operatives matter, but they can cover only those who carry out these crimes, not those who command them from abroad. Targeted sanctions, which have been an important tool that we've been using and should be used even further, still only levy costs without generating criminal accountability. They can be lifted under diplomatic pressure, for example. A senior foreign official who calculates that the worst-case outcome is a travel restriction has been given insufficient reason to stop.

The result is a landscape of responses that generate visibility without accountability and leave the command architecture of TNR entirely intact. The architects of these campaigns have drawn a clear conclusion: The international community will document these crimes, prosecute the low-level operatives and maybe sanction some associates, but it will do nothing to threaten their personal liberty. Until that calculation shifts, TNR will continue being ordered by the commanders and senior officials of foreign regimes.

International criminal law was built precisely to protect individuals from the criminal exercise of state power and to ensure that those at the highest levels who order these atrocities cannot hide behind their office or mandate. The dissident hunted across borders by the state she fled is exactly the kind of victim this framework

was designed to protect, because she is someone for whom no other remedy exists.

I am seeking to underscore in my testimony today that the foundation to respond exists through the International Criminal Court and has simply never been used. Under article 12(2)(a) of the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the ICC, the court has jurisdiction where an alleged crime was committed on the territory of a state party. TNR operations produce their effects where the victim is located—on the soil of the host state. If that host state is a Rome Statute party member, the ICC has jurisdiction over those crimes.

Even if the primary perpetrating states are not Rome Statute members—and most of them are not—like Iran, China and Russia, their victims are almost always located in jurisdictions that are members of the court, including Canada.

I will note that Canada led a statement of the G7 condemning Iran regime transnational repression and a further statement of 14 countries condemning the following:

...attempts of Iranian intelligence services to kill, kidnap, and harass people in Europe and North America in clear violation of our sovereignty. These Services are increasingly collaborating with international criminal organisations to target journalists, dissidents, Jewish citizens, and current and former officials in Europe and North America.

As you know, the founder of our centre, Professor Irwin Cotler, a former minister of justice and attorney general of Canada, was one of these Jewish citizens and former officials targeted for assassination.

The widespread and systematic nature of this transnational repression targeting civilians as a matter of Iran state policy meets the exact legal definition of a crime against humanity.

To conclude, I would urge the subcommittee to consider calling on the Government of Canada to refer Iran's transnational repression to the International Criminal Court. Canada can even lead our allies—the five members of the G7 that are also members of the ICC, and the other 12 signatories of the joint statement on Iranian transnational repression that are also members of the court—in jointly referring the case to the ICC and allocating resources to the court to prioritize it. This would set a major global precedent that would resonate far beyond Iranian transnational repression in order to combat global TNR.

Too many Canadians continue to adjust their routines, triple-check their locks and look over their shoulders because the foreign architects of transnational repression know they are protected by a culture of impunity. This subcommittee can help change that.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

• (1620)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Silver.

Now we will start the first round of questions and answers.

I would like to invite my friend Mr. Majumdar to take the floor for seven minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for participating in this deep dive on transnational repression we're pursuing at the subcommittee. We have too many questions, too few witnesses and not enough time.

Dimon Liu, I will start with you.

What are the reasons transnational repression is ignored by authorities in democracies?

**Dimon Liu:** The answer is very simple. We have followed the British Empire's commercial approach to a China policy, which is to maintain regime stability in order to gain access to the vast China market. Unless this commercial approach is changed, the authorities will continue to ignore repression and abuses both inside China and outside China.

**Shuvaloy Majumdar:** We have a serious issue in Canada with respect to the amount of transnational repression the PRC conducts across our country, our society and our economy. In your opinion, what would the correct China policy for the Canadian government be with regard to Beijing's transnational repression?

**Dimon Liu:** Actually, it's very simple. There is a successful model before us: President Reagan's approach to the U.S.S.R.

One, he targeted the U.S.S.R. as a main adversary, not its proxies, because after you defeat the proxies, you still have to face the main adversary.

Two, he contested the U.S.S.R. via escalated military spending, which eventually bankrupted the U.S.S.R.

Three, he pursued an effective economic containment strategy.

Four, he undermined the legitimacy of the U.S.S.R. by giving visibility and support to Eastern European dissidents.

To succeed, all four measures must be pursued simultaneously, not separately.

**Shuvaloy Majumdar:** That's a comprehensive perspective. I really appreciate you for your time and testimony.

Picking up on that, I will turn to Brandon Silver now.

You described, rightly so, how Iranian efforts, through criminal networks, have been targeting Iranian and Jewish populations

around the world. You correctly ascertained that those officials are the ones who need to be held to account, not protected by some concept we heard about earlier today.

Let's think about the impact of the Iran conflict and its pursuit of transnational repression compared with what Beijing has been conducting. How might China, specifically, adjust its strategy of transnational repression in response to the attack on its vested interests in the current war affecting Iran?

**Brandon Silver:** Thank you for the question. It's an interesting one, because we've seen that for the most part, a lot of the perpetrators of transnational repression are trading notes and collaborating.

That is the reason China, in the first place, had interests in Iran, which were affected by the war. Russia, similarly, has been using Iranian drones to attack civilians in Ukraine. We have heard of cases where targets of Iran were subjected to harassment or assassination attempts by Russia in places Iranian agents couldn't reach. There is increasing collaboration—even if it's just anecdotal—on the TNR side among these regimes.

On the side of campaigning for freedom, equality, the rule of law and the protection of our sovereignty and citizens, we need to increasingly be working together. It was encouraging to see a statement by the G7 and the 14 countries affected by Iranian transnational repression, but a more holistic approach is needed. That targeted statement against Iran—and hopefully targeted action via the ICC that could create some accountability—would have a deterrent effect if applied more globally. Have a standing forum, perhaps via the G7 or other places, to jointly address transnational repression against the range of authoritarian perpetrators. Work on a more concerted, collective and concrete response.

• (1625)

**Shuvaloy Majumdar:** Thank you for that.

I'm going to turn now to Mr. de Pulford.

In your concluding comments, you articulated some very specific things that can be focused on to confront actors who are undertaking transnational repression: attributing a tax, defending democracy task forces, sanctions on perpetrators, notifications, transparency and cybersecurity. All of these things are really practical and specific things that leaders in the west—in the world—can undertake.

Let me ask you this, Mr. de Pulford: Do you find there's any enthusiasm about taking on the issue of transnational repression, or do you find that politics in different countries fall to division too deeply and they are incapable of actually addressing these issues?

**Luke de Pulford:** Thank you for the question. I think there are a few ways of answering it.

The easiest thing is to say that this is a nascent problem. It's quite new, and governments are trying to get a grip on it. It's not the case that governments around the world are doing nothing. I think they are trying to understand it. In some places, legislation has been passed and police have been trained.

The basic difficulty is that this is unavoidably diplomatic. We see, particularly around China, a culture of pre-emptive self-censorship in diplomatic missions. They're worried that if they talk about the behaviour of Beijing in their country, they will upset them and there will be a corresponding response. This is hamstringing us from responding the way we should. We should be much freer in imposing, at the very least, targeted sanctions on perpetrators, even if the perpetrator is an arm of the government.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Majumdar.

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

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today online or in person.

I would like to start with Professor Juneau.

You outlined a number of your preliminary findings from the 100 people you interviewed who are involved in or have experienced transnational repression. One thing I picked up on was your talking about the excessive emotional suffering. How do you think governments can respond to support individuals facing the pressure you described and that you have seen in your research thus far?

**Thomas Juneau:** It's really important that you raised that aspect.

When we started this research and were asking our interviewees about the impact, we focused only on the impact on their work: "Is it causing you to curtail your activism, and if so, why?" In the first interviews, we realized that a lot of the activists we were speaking to, who are victims of transnational repression, were spontaneously bringing up the personal aspect—the emotional distress from the pressure they were under. Because of their work, their families back in Iran, India or China are being pressured, threatened and so on. That distress, in some cases, is massive. We're documenting a lot of these instances. We've decided to shift our focus a bit and systematically include this in our research.

The reality is that it's really difficult to think about practical solutions at that level. Should there be resources at the community or society level for victims of transnational repression? The obvious answer is yes. How do you do this, especially given that in many cases it wouldn't be a federal responsibility? It's not easy. There are ways for the government to support community organizations in providing either the psychological or emotional care itself, or at least in providing advice on where to get it.

**Sameer Zuberi:** That's an interesting point about supporting organizations in terms of their support for those who are at the forefront of human rights and facing oppression. We have supports for victims of crime, for example. That concept does exist, and it's debated and discussed. This would be a corollary of that, I would suggest, although it doesn't flow from the same source.

Professor Packer, you had some recommendations that you were powering through at the very end. If you want to, you can briefly expand upon them and complete them.

● (1630)

**Frederick John Packer:** I did get through them, but there are many more to say. I hope that—perhaps deductively—you grasped that my suggestion of, for example, a point person at the Privy Council or an inter-ministerial working group was actually a veiled critique of the frankly incoherent position of the Canadian government.

Right now, many victims—persons who are aware of the transnational oppression—have no idea to whom they should address themselves. I have that experience. I give my own testimony as someone sanctioned by the Chinese state. I'm basically given a telephone number for consular services while I'm travelling abroad, but if something interferes with my bank account or whatever, there's no one to call and I have no idea what to do.

I would suggest that I'm perhaps more able than many other people. I don't have family in a country of origin or in China and I'm not subject to most of these...but I can tell you that under the Chinese security law, this extends to all sorts of persons, including persons with whom I have contact, which I guess means you.

I don't know what to say, but there's nobody in the Canadian government to whom I can address myself or respond. My main plea here is that this is a very large problem. That's why I mentioned the four million Canadians with dual nationality who are all potentially subject to this.

I'll just quickly tell you that the other day I had a person from Tunisia show up at my door. He was agitated. He's a businessman. He said that he needed help. I asked what I could do, because I'm not really there to help—I'm a scholar. He said that he'd gone to the embassy to renew his passport. They took it and then, in short, said they wouldn't renew it unless he changed his statements on X, and if he didn't do that, they knew who his family was in his country of origin.

This is Tunisia, a little country. We're not talking about China and we're not talking about Russia. This is a person who is visiting our country and trying to do business with our country.

I want to underline that I didn't know who to call. I think this is a problem for our country.

**Sameer Zuberi:** Thank you.

Professor Kersten, you mentioned that not only the three countries we named but many others engage in transnational oppression. Without necessarily naming them, do you have suggestions on how we can remain mindful that it's not just India, China and Iran that are involved? How can we remain mindful and aware that, as Professor Packer just mentioned, other countries also engage in this? What suggestions do you have for us in that regard?

**Mark Kersten:** This committee is a very welcome start to that, including its emphasis on human rights.

Perhaps I'll go back to the point—and to Professor Packer's as well—about dual nationals, risks and assessing the emerging risks.

If you have a combination of states that are engaged in human rights violations against their own populations or populations living within their borders and that seem to disregard the state sovereignty of others, and there are diasporas or dual nationals abroad, in a sense, then, you could establish something like a traffic light model where green means there's no risk of transnational repression, red means clearly there is transnational repression and yellow means there's the possibility that a state would engage in transnational repression because it fits some of the criteria. Having that kind of model might also act as a warning mechanism for dual nationals, citizens and people who call Canada home.

**Sameer Zuberi:** In the remaining 45 seconds, I'll go to Monsieur de Pulford.

You described a lot of challenges that IPAC has faced while doing its work. I'm a proud Canadian co-chair of IPAC. In terms of best practices you have for those who are advocating, do you want to share with viewers what precautions they can personally take in order to protect themselves?

**Luke de Pulford:** Thank you very much, Sameer. It's a great pleasure.

It's quite difficult to answer that question, because it differs from country to country. One of the principal problems we find is that there is a wild variation among police authorities' understanding of transnational repression. For example, in the United Kingdom, many have had bad experiences when they've tried to report. I know that around the world, others have had similar experiences. It really varies hugely.

It's actually quite difficult to say to people, "Here's what you should do", but something very positive recently was that the cybersecurity institutions of our various nations got together and produced a report that at least advises potential victims of transnational repression about what they can do to tighten up their cybersecurity so that they can at least try to defend themselves. People should read that and should have access to that. It's a good document. It's a good start, but there's so much to do in terms of directing people to police authorities.

Finally, in the United Kingdom, we've had to find a way, through us, of triaging potential victims to the police we know are going to respond, or we at least send something to somebody who knows

what they're talking about. That is clearly an inadequate situation, but that's what we've been reduced to.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

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

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

Mr. Juneau, in your opening remarks, you told us that the government seemed to be more aware of the matter and that it was taking it more seriously. In any case, it seems to be making efforts that it may not have made before. However, at the same time, we are seeing a public diplomatic rapprochement with Beijing.

I don't know how, on the one hand, we can take transnational repression more seriously and, on the other, move closer to a regime that, as we know, is one of the biggest transnational oppressors on the planet.

Isn't that a contradiction or paradox?

**Thomas Juneau:** There's absolutely a contradiction, or a tension, as I would call it in this case. I think there are two possible answers to the question. There's a more general answer and a more specific one.

Generally, to a certain extent, it is normal and inevitable that the foreign policy objectives of a country like Canada involve internal tensions and contradictions. I think it's inevitable that there won't be absolute consistency. I don't think absolute consistency is a standard that should be applied to foreign policy in general. I'm not saying that to justify the choice, but I think it's an important point to mention at the outset.

More specifically, I would say that the case of China raises a useful and meaningful debate in terms of our policy choices. We can wonder what it means to move closer to a country like China, which is obviously responsible for a significant and intense amount of transnational repression, when it comes to China's transnational repression in Canada.

There's the rosy argument, which I think is naive and doesn't work. According to that argument, slightly more cordial relations with China will lead it to slow down its transnational repression activities in Canada. There isn't really any data to solidly confirm that hypothesis, but my gut tells me it's not true.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Maybe it's the other way around, right?

**Thomas Juneau:** It's going to be the other way around, yes. Even if a country like Canada moves a little closer to China, China will continue to see Canada as a country that welcomes dissidents, and it will want to target it. The dissidents will criticize Canada's approach to China, so China will target the country even more.

It may have the opposite effect.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you for that.

Mr. de Pulford, in your opening remarks, you talked about the APT31 attacks.

Can you tell us whether the Government of Canada took that seriously in its response to the attacks?

[*English*]

**Luke de Pulford:** I feel a bit bad singling out Canada, because 18 countries were attacked and very few of them notified their politicians. The Canadian government took the same stance as the United Kingdom government, which was not to tell politicians that they had been subject to a state-sponsored attack.

In fact, not only was it three years later, but it wasn't until it had been publicly announced by the United States government that this became news. We, the IPAC secretariat, had to brief politicians about what had happened to them. I would argue that this is completely inadequate. I mean, there were people who were attacked within Canada who had senior positions in committees, such as yourselves, and were potentially victims of a very serious cyber-attack. It was dismissed and swept under the carpet by the Canadian government in the same way that it was by the United Kingdom government.

This isn't a party political point. Regrettably, it's to do with the posture of countries towards Beijing. I believe that they did not want to attribute the attack for fear of the diplomatic consequences of doing so. It was the same in the United Kingdom.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Silver, in your opening remarks, you talked about international mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court. However, I get the sense, which various witnesses confirm, that what's being done here shows that the Canadian government's legislative framework for transnational repression is simply nonexistent or that there's no training.

This question may also be for you, Mr. Juneau, because you talked about it.

I won't say it's complacency, but isn't there a clear lack of apparatuses and tools for training police forces and prosecutors to help them fight transnational repression right here on Canadian soil?

**Brandon Silver:** Thank you for the question.

More resources need to be allocated to police officers and people who are engaged in the effort to combat transnational repression. We also need to expand the use of tools in Canada.

Internationally, Canada has tools available, but it is not committed as a country. Canada has a lot of allies around the world who are undergoing the same attacks from these authoritarian countries, from these dictatorships. Therefore, we can work with them to use international tools, such as the International Criminal Court, to fight these horrific international crimes.

By doing that in the case of Iran, which I alluded to in my opening remarks, we can set a precedent that can help fight all crimes of this kind, including those committed by China.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you.

Mr. Juneau, can you say a few words about training?

**Thomas Juneau:** That's an extremely important point. There can be no serious progress in countering transnational repression without a much greater effort to support the people involved. The effort must be made not only at the federal level, by training people on the front lines, meaning people from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, but also at the provincial and municipal levels, by training police officers.

In the interviews we did, my co-author and colleague and I constantly heard horror stories. Victims were telling the police terrible things, and, to be blunt, the police had no idea what was going on. There is a complete lack of knowledge about the very threat of transnational repression as well as the actions, strategies and tactics used by the states responsible for it.

I have to say that it's better today than it was five years ago, but we're still a long way from where we should be.

There is also a specific problem when it comes to police officers. The reaction of people on the front lines is often to say that what victims describe is unpleasant, but that it doesn't reach the minimum threshold of criminal activity. They then conclude that it is not a police matter.

In a very narrow sense, that's not necessarily wrong. However, the problem is that it prevents progress, it prevents a response and it ignores reality. When you assemble the pieces of the mosaic made up of all the small activities that fall below the threshold of what constitutes a criminal act, you can exceed the threshold. However, it requires a sustained effort to share information, which is complex.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** There's also the fact that the legislative framework doesn't help police officers either in terms of moving forward and laying charges, for example.

I'll come back to you later.

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

[*English*]

Ms. Vandenberg, you may take the floor for five minutes, please.

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses. There is some very rich testimony and good recommendations here.

I would like to start with Dr. Juneau.

You mentioned that one of the threats is the fragmentation of communities. There has been discussion, both at this committee in a previous Parliament and right now at the procedure and House affairs committee, about providing support to human rights defenders in exile in Canada so they can continue their work and also about perhaps creating that connective tissue where movements can have a small fund that would allow them to connect to one another.

I wonder if you think that might be one possible solution.

I'd be interested in hearing from the other members of the panel as well.

**Thomas Juneau:** Yes, absolutely.

Speaking especially on the Iranian Canadian side, which is a community that is very divided and very fragmented, there is no strong organization that represents significant components of the community, never mind the entire community. That division creates openings for the Islamic republic, which it very enthusiastically exploits. It also makes the job of the federal government much more difficult. It makes outreach, engagement and transparency with the Iranian community much more difficult. It means that providing information....

One of the other speakers spoke about spreading awareness, cyber-hygiene and measures for people to protect themselves. That is much more difficult when you need to speak to individuals almost on an individual basis as opposed to having an organization that is more representative, which can itself play the role of a conduit not only from the government to the community, but also to gather information on what the threat is, who the perpetrators are and who the proxies are on the ground who are responsible for some of these actions.

All that is to say, yes, providing more support to community organizations that could play a conduit role to facilitate a two-way dialogue would be extremely useful.

• (1645)

**Anita Vandenberg:** Professor Packer, you said that supporting human rights defenders and those in exile is a matter of national sovereignty. Would you support a measure like this?

**Frederick John Packer:** I'm frankly quite concerned about that. What we know is that one of the areas in which.... It's a Canadian tendency to reflect on and defer to diaspora communities, and we have this idea of multiculturalism, the coherence of the communities and, I would say, positive dispositions.

This is not the position of many activists in exile. They are deeply concerned not just about the fractiousness and the non-homogeneous character of the groups, but about exactly who these groups are and who is subject to which influences. It's not just human rights defenders, anti-corruption activists, democracy supporters and journalists who do not want to be dependent upon their conational community, which may have historical roots that are not contemporary and are very problematic in terms of the influences we're talking about.

I would be deeply cautious, and I would actually advise against deferring to that approach. I would seek to enhance the independent

Canadian institutions, not the diasporic ones, that are responsible for our vigorous democracy. That's protecting everyone.

**Anita Vandenberg:** Further to that, there's been talk of creating a Canadian democracy fund, which would provide funding to groups that are promoting democracy and, presumably, to human rights defenders. I know that when this committee proposed it in a previous study, one on women human rights defenders, we proposed something that would support human rights defenders when they come to Canada so they could continue their work instead of driving an Uber. Would that change your view on this?

**Frederick John Packer:** I think many people here are aware that it's been a long-time proposition of Canada to have something similar to that and that we've failed to develop or deliver it.

If we look at the direction of travel of the world, and if we look at global reports on democracy and so forth, the number of democracies is shrinking. In fact, I think Freedom House counts now a dozen full and vigorous democracies. The non-democracies are gaining in strength and in their collaboration. The threat is very real, as we're discussing here, so I think something like this is needed.

I would also argue, for example, that Canada has led with regard to the pathway for human rights defenders, but it's very small and it's too limited. That's why I'm using language like "activists in exile". There are many people, like journalists, who do not wish to identify themselves as human rights defenders; they think they're professionals doing journalism. There are many groups that don't want to be refugees as such, because it's problematical in terms of their status and the way they'd be treated. In fact, to declare refugee status is basically an allegation against your country of origin. If you're a dual national, that's a massive problem.

We need to do something like this, but it needs to be nuanced and it needs to be thoughtful. It's overdue.

**Anita Vandenberg:** That human rights defender pathway came from this committee originally.

**Frederick John Packer:** Bravo. Expand it.

**Anita Vandenberg:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Vandenberg.

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

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for your very thoughtful remarks today.

Dr. Juneau, I want to pick up on your opening remarks.

You talked about there being a heavily gendered element to transnational repression. You talked about people with family in the perpetrating country being the people most likely to be impacted and said that where there is family at risk, transnational repression can have the most impact here in Canada.

You also talked about the way that everyone is expecting there to be an uptick in transnational repression from Iran over the next little while. I cannot help but think about the very small but heavily impacted Iranian community in my riding, where almost everyone has family at home and where almost everyone is worried about them. As you know, people have lost contact with family members.

I'm wondering if you can elaborate on what the policy implications are for Canada of families that are split under these circumstances.

• (1650)

**Thomas Juneau:** I'm very happy that you brought up these aspects, including the gendered aspect and the prediction that there will be a serious uptick in Iranian transnational repression in 2026, given the current context.

Anecdotally, I've already talked to a number of activists who report recent cases of families over there, for example, being pressured to try to silence their activism here post the protests of early 2026 and post the war that is going on right now.

From a policy perspective, what does that mean for Canada? The family abroad dimension might be the most difficult policy challenge at this level. Generally speaking, transnational repression is very difficult. It's a very difficult problem to deal with on many fronts. In a narrow sense, there is not that much that Canada can do in the short term when a Canadian, an Iranian Canadian, a Chinese Canadian or others have family abroad being targeted to silence them.

In the bigger picture, I agree with what my colleague Luke de Pulford said in his testimony and answers about naming and shaming—making this public and not keeping it quiet unless there is a specific request by the victim themselves to keep it quiet, which I think we should respect in those instances. As a default position, however, the publicity aspect does matter.

Coordination with allies is something we are doing better now than five years ago, but it can still improve a lot. We are not the U.S., and we are not even the U.K. in terms of our size, our power and the assets we can bring to bear to resist at this level, but in working with other democracies where there are similar problems, the response can be improved. I think Canada work through the G7 was the first step in that direction.

**Tamara Kronis:** I want to pick up on the comment you just made about what Canada no longer is. We are not able to have the same strength of voice that we had at the table.

I was at a Battle of the Atlantic commemoration ceremony yesterday, where I was reminded that Canada gained that respect because of the incredible power we had militarily, the way we punched above our weight and the fact that we finished the Second World War as the third-largest navy in the world. I can't help but contrast that with the way our government was less than clear about

its position on Iran. Over a series of days, we struggled to figure out exactly where Canada was heading.

What do we need to do to move forward and have that credible voice again?

**Thomas Juneau:** There's no answer to that question that doesn't involve more resources. CSIS, the RCMP and our diplomatic service are completely overstretched. We're focused on transnational repression here today. We are right to do that, because it's a big problem, but it's only one threat among many others that Canada faces: economic espionage, cyber-threats and great power competition. It's a very long list, as I think everybody knows.

Given that multiplicity of threats, CSIS, the RCMP and the intelligence community in general are struggling to prioritize. It's very easy to say we should do more on transnational repression, but tomorrow morning that would mean doing less against economic espionage, which is also a major problem.

Moving forward, the simple answer is there's no way to do this without more resources.

**Tamara Kronis:** In that context, we've had pledges of major investments in this space and pledges of major investments in defence. What is stopping us from being able to make those investments and move this file forward?

**The Chair:** Give a quick answer, please. The time is up.

**Thomas Juneau:** Very quickly, I very much welcome the government's efforts to significantly increase defence spending. That is more than overdue, but I would emphasize the point that there are other aspects of national power and national security beyond defence that we have also been neglecting for a long time.

• (1655)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Mr. Kersten, you spoke specifically about Iran. In particular, you talked about two conditions. We are looking at what is currently happening in Iran. Objectively, any serious analyst could predict that hostilities will resume very shortly. In any case, there is a high risk.

What does that mean for the future? Strictly from a transnational repression perspective, a conflict like this in a country like Iran involves more than the Iranian government. The Iranians also have allies, and there are communities from those allied countries on Canadian soil.

Isn't this an example of a perfect storm? Will we see an increase in transnational repression in a country like Canada if there is a conflict as big as the one currently taking place in the gulf?

[English]

**Mark Kersten:** My former colleague at the Munk School of Global Affairs, Ron Deibert, was here, and he spoke of a tsunami of TNR. My colleague mentioned—and I think other analysts said similar things—that in 2026, we should expect an increase in transnational repression, including in Canada, as a result of the conflict with Iran and perhaps its allies.

One interesting common thread in some recent reports from various organizations is that there have to be real, concrete repercussions for those who perpetrate transnational repression in Canada. Whether they're sanctions, prosecutions or investigations, there have to be real, direct repercussions for the perpetrators. One of the previous speakers, Brandon Silver, mentioned using small-level perpetrators of TNR to figure out how to build potential cases up the chain of command to those most responsible.

Canada has done this before. Under the Harper administration, Canada prosecuted a number of perpetrators of genocide in Rwanda. These were complex cases that Canada prosecuted. It's different from TNR, but it's possible for Canada to do this again.

[Translation]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you.

Mr. de Pulford, there's an example of transnational repression that may not be mentioned very often. I'm talking about the freeze on mandatory provident funds for people who have left Hong Kong. However, these funds are managed by Canadian companies such as Sun Life and Manulife.

Whether intentionally or not, aren't these Canadian companies engaging in backdoor transnational repression when they don't allow people to get their money back from these funds because they are conforming to Hong Kong's policies and laws, given that they manage the funds?

[English]

**Luke de Pulford:** Yes, in a word. I think it is complicity with transnational repression. These companies will say they have no choice but to comply with the law in the jurisdiction where they operate, but the reality is that they are participating in the persecution of people with regard to mandatory provident funds. In Hong Kong, these are compulsory retirement savings, which are not being released to British national overseas passport holders. We're talking about billions being held that belong to these people, who are therefore leveraged in one way or another. They know they need that money, and they also know that if they speak out, they're much less likely to get it.

In your analysis as a committee, it's very important to look at the role companies play in propping up authoritarian, transnational repression.

[Translation]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you.

Mr. Packer, you told us that you didn't know who to turn to. Earlier, we talked about training police forces and prosecutors, as well as the legislative framework, which is clearly lacking when it comes to transnational repression. Furthermore, there are no government tools either.

What I understand is that, no matter who you turn to, you don't get an answer from the government's elected representatives.

Did I understand correctly?

• (1700)

[English]

**Frederick John Packer:** I think you've understood.

The government has responded with regard to electoral interferences. That form of foreign interference has touched you. That's not normally what touches ordinary Canadians, particularly non-nationals who are here—for example, students who are studying. This is a large problem for students. We need to expand our scope of understanding.

You've just raised the idea that provident funds administered and held by a foreign state are touching Canadians for a repressive purpose. If we look at what's happening across the board in Canada, with the kind of complexity that my colleagues referred to, this far exceeds the question of electoral integrity. It even exceeds the democratic institutions per se. These are ordinary Canadians being touched.

For example, for my security, who should I call? I could call the RCMP. If I'm travelling abroad, as I do frequently, they would say it's not a policing issue in Canada. I could call CSIS, and they would ask what exactly they are supposed to do. However, if I asked them about my bank account, neither of them would know what to do.

I remember a discussion I had several years ago with the director of legal affairs and the assistant deputy minister of Global Affairs Canada when I raised this question in a conference. He immediately said it had nothing to do with them; it was a policing matter. Does a breach of sovereignty between states have nothing to do with foreign affairs?

Our world has changed, if I may say, and the concepts of geography are not the same anymore. Where our relations intersect is not just between or behind three oceans. They are simultaneously happening in our real lives that exist through family, friends and business associations transnationally, and we are not up to speed on that.

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

Now I would like to invite Ms. Fancy to take the floor for five minutes, please.

**Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, everybody, for being here today.

In this third round, I'm dealing with a bit of cleanup, and I'm going to primarily talk to Mr. Juneau and Mr. Packer today.

Earlier today, you talked about how two variables connect with transnational oppression. As Canadians, we've long positioned ourselves as defenders of human rights on the global stage and have also helped to navigate complex geopolitical realities. You've argued for a more strategic interest-based approach to foreign policy here today. I'm wondering how Canada should balance values in terms of human rights with strategic interests when responding to some of these transnational regressions.

**Thomas Juneau:** That is a broad question. Specifically, I mentioned the two variables. Past patterns tell us that, one, when the Islamic Republic of Iran feels especially vulnerable because of geopolitical pressure and/or domestic political pressure and, two, when there's enhanced diaspora mobilization, it speeds up its already high baseline of transnational repression. We saw that, for example, in 2022-23, at the time of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement. We saw it after 2020 after the PS752 was shot down.

The prediction that a number of us are making now is that we are basically seeing the confluence of these two variables again, because of geopolitical pressure from the war and because of domestic political pressure from the protests of just a few months ago. Anecdotally, I am already seeing that prediction coming true, even if we don't have enough data points to really make a rigorous assessment at this point.

When I was referring to two variables, that's broadly what I meant.

**Jessica Fancy:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Packer, we've talked about sovereignty a lot today, so drawing on some of your experiences across international institutions and legal frameworks, what practical, realistic steps should Canada be taking within the next year or so to strengthen protections against transnational repression?

**Frederick John Packer:** I understand the reach of this subcommittee, but let me say that the primary responsibility of the Canadian government and our entire constitutional framework is in Canada—for the protection of Canadians and the well-being of persons within our jurisdiction, which means territory and nationality.

What I'm proposing is that we don't need to ask anyone else. We don't need to consider whether we can reach into the Islamic Republic of Iran, or deal with the Chinese state in Hong Kong over an investment fund. There is much we can and should do in Canada now. This includes both the protection services. We talked about policing—for example, not only that police at local levels be trained, but that there be coherence between the RCMP, CSIS.... I know that CSIS is not a policing agency, but I mean all of the agencies responsible for safety and security.

I work with scores of activists in exile. Most of them have problems that would traverse about seven different ministries in Canada. They have no idea how to do that.

This is the incoherence I'm talking about, and this is a domestic matter. It's not only a first priority, but also.... I have suggested, for example, creating not only a government that works better, but also

dedicated bodies and institutions. This problem is of a complex and nuanced nature, but also has a particularly insidious character, and it is undermining our sovereignty. Most of the states in the world are now considered around the fragility index—the 70% of countries that are fragile, failing and so forth—and never mind the vigorous anti-democratic states.

We are a G7 democracy. Surely we can protect our own people within our own country. If we're not doing that, it's an indictment against our own country. It's not what my parents fought the Second World War over.

• (1705)

**Jessica Fancy:** To finish up, I have about a minute or so. We looked at the international ring. We looked at sovereignty within our own country. Now let's go even closer.

My riding in Nova Scotia is quite rural. A lot of rural regions often rely heavily on community organizations, faith-based groups and local leaders, rather than larger institutions. What role do you think these localized networks can play in identifying and responding to cases of national repression?

**Frederick John Packer:** I believe they can play and do play a role.

If I understand correctly, CSIS, for many years, has had close relations. They understand the relations, the effects and what's going on from an information-gathering and intelligence perspective, and also the way in which some of these groups are instrumentalized as they are. That is something we need to pay attention to.

We should not be so naive as to think that the oceans protect us and that people are no longer connected. They are highly connected. If I want to know what's going on in Yemen right now, with all due respect, I don't call anyone in the Canadian government. I call Yemenis I know who are here in Ottawa and are directly connected in Yemen. That's the world in which live.

I'm not arguing not to have contact. I'm saying to take care. I'm not suggesting that we defer to the communities as if they will solve the problem, as we have with multicultural traditions. That is great. Like any Canadian, I'm connected with such groups myself, through marriages and so forth. Take care. This is crucially important.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Fancy.

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 try to bring this down to more of a grassroots level.

Canadians who are watching this today probably won't understand much of what is being discussed today. We know, as you've all said, that transnational repression is pervasive and comprehensive and is often, if not most of the time, invisible and can't be tracked easily.

Dr. Juneau, give me a profile of who's doing this so that Canadians can understand it—just a slight bit of a snapshot.

You talked earlier about cyber-threats, economic threats and espionage. Everybody can understand the word “espionage” if they've watched *Mission: Impossible*. I'm looking for the typical profile of somebody who is engaged in transnational repression, so that Canadians might, in some way, have some hint of recognizing it.

**Thomas Juneau:** Who's doing this? First of all, in Canada, the big three are China, India and Iran. They are the countries that are the biggest perpetrators, but as mentioned a few times, there is a long list of other countries that are doing it on a smaller scale. By “smaller scale” I mean in terms of quantity, not in terms of nastiness. It can be as violent if not more so in multiple cases. Pakistan, Rwanda, Eritrea, Algeria, Tunisia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia—it's a very long list of perpetrators.

Why do they do it? By definition, autocratic governments—non-democratic governments—feel vulnerable. They feel insecure. They do not tolerate dissent or opposition because they consider it a threat to their very survival, as opposed to more limited threats. Therefore, they will target those opponents.

• (1710)

**Fred Davies:** To some degree, it's in self-defence, they would argue.

**Thomas Juneau:** In their perception, it is, yes.

**Fred Davies:** Professor Packer, I love your first two names, by the way. I share them with you.

**Frederick John Packer:** They're great names.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Fred Davies:** I was really interested in the structure that you recommended the Canadian Government take a look at. That would be starting right at the Privy Council level.

Can you give me an idea of whether anyone doing it right? Are there any countries, in your view, that have a handle on this and have something that we could actually take a look at?

**Frederick John Packer:** In short, I don't believe so.

I just spent a few days in Europe, in Vienna, for meetings of multilateral institutions and others. A few weeks before that, I was in Brussels. This included, by the way, meeting with NATO, with the European Union and at high levels.

I would say there is a general problem right now of incoherence and a kind of risk aversion in taking the necessary steps to proactively address this threat. It's a complex threat.

As my colleague Luke de Pulford mentioned, it's not a new phenomenon, strictly speaking. Karl Marx was pursued by Prussian agents in the 1840s. When I was a student in the United Kingdom

in the 1980s, Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis, through the Ba'ath Party, instrumentalized every single student as an informant. There was a parliamentary commission at the time, which you can look at. It's not strictly new.

What has changed is the nature and character of our relations, transnational telecommunications, the reach and the nuance—the means by which this is operationalized in very terrible ways, including assassinations in our own country. Many governments are caught off guard by this. The Westphalian model doesn't quite respond to it. It's kind of like dealing with cryptocurrency—what is it?—or a pandemic.

Canada needs to lead here. We're capable. We need to be proactive and not reactive. That's why I'm suggesting that at the top, we need someone who's in charge and says this is a real problem, and then our government takes the responsibility and assigns it.

**Fred Davies:** Have you written on this at all?

**Frederick John Packer:** I have a bit, yes, specifically on the relationship with diasporas and others, because diasporas do not give us a sufficient framework. The responsibility question is a matter of international law and state responsibility—our responsibility as Canada. It's not just for Canadians but for our own territory and population. I could elaborate on it.

**Fred Davies:** I would be really interested in a literary review on how we deal with this and to look at a structure. It really is, as we've said, so pervasive, invisible, subversive, objective and subjective.

When I asked you whether anyone was doing it right, your answer was no. It's curious to me that if nobody is doing it right, how can we ever really expect to do it right? I guess I'm just looking for an opinion on that.

**Frederick John Packer:** My quick opinion is that I believe—and I spent 30 years of my professional life abroad and working for security organizations and others—we're the only country in the world where more than 50% of the population has a higher education. We have talented and capable people.

This is a question of grasping the threat as it is, dedicating some resources and being serious about it. I believe this is both a security and a democracy issue. For example, the commitment of our government to spend more money on traditional means of defence is fine, but all this soft stuff that is pervasive, very troubling and touching us directly is something we need to address and we can.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Davies.

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

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

Mr. Silver, I'd like us to discuss the case of Jimmy Lai, who is still imprisoned in Hong Kong under the notorious national security law. He's a British citizen. Therefore, there is a connection with transnational repression.

Something unusual happened here in Parliament. We had a member elected as a Conservative, Michael Ma, who crossed over to the Liberals. In fact, we all joke that this is the best thing that has happened to the Conservative caucus lately.

When he was a member of the Conservative Party, Mr. Ma was elected chair of the Canada-Hong Kong Parliamentary Friendship Group. Then, when he crossed the floor to join the Liberals, he made some very startling and unfortunate statements. He questioned whether there was forced labour in China, even though thousands of studies show that there is.

This is all related to Jimmy Lai. Why is it that, in the Parliament of Canada, the chair of the Canada—Hong Kong Parliamentary Friendship Group can question the existence of forced labour in China?

Also, how is it that this person remained silent about the tragedy affecting Mr. Lai and his family?

• (1715)

**Brandon Silver:** Thank you for the question. I will answer in English to be clearer.

[*English*]

First, I want to thank my colleague Luke de Pulford for raising how emblematic Jimmy Lai's trial is when it comes to transnational oppression. I want to expand on that.

To your question, MP Brunelle-Duceppe, about the need for Canada's Parliament and parliamentarians to be more focused and engaged on the case, it really cuts to core Canadian interests. The national security law under which he is being prosecuted is draconian and extraterritorial. What Hong Kong and its masters in Beijing feel that they can get away with in doing to Jimmy Lai, as the most prominent person being prosecuted under this law, will thereafter be applied to Canadians on Canadian soil.

When Parliament and government were not outspoken enough on Jimmy Lai's case earlier, we saw that happen. Thereafter, you had the same law being used to pursue bounties against Canadian citizens on Canadian soil.

As a middle power, engagement with the UN and multilateral institutions is a core part of our foreign policy and sovereignty. Even engaging with the United Nations can be criminalized under the national security law.

When a complaint was filed against the Chinese embassy, the UN asked, "Can anyone talking to us really be prosecuted under the NSL?" China's response is so brazen that China put it in writing.

Article 56 says, yes, it can be the case. A Canadian in Canada engaging with the UN, even on Mr. Lai's case, can end up with a bounty and face a trial. We will risk greater and greater incursions on our own sovereignty via this law if we do not speak out more concertedly and concretely on Mr. Lai's case.

I want to commend the members of this committee who have held hearings on this case, which help sustain him and his family and shine a spotlight on these issues, including the efforts you all spearheaded to grant him honorary citizenship. Again, it's a testament to our values and helps to push back against efforts of transnational oppression. I would encourage any member who has not done so or who may engage adversely, as you suggested, to reconsider what the implications of that might be for Canada's sovereignty and Canadian citizens.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Meanwhile, Mr. Ma is still the chair of the Canada—Hong Kong Parliamentary Friendship Group.

Mr. de Pulford, I think some of your employees have experienced very tangible acts of transnational repression. I'm thinking in particular of AI-generated pornography.

Could you clarify that for the committee?

[*English*]

**Luke de Pulford:** I'm very grateful for the question. I'm also grateful to Dr. Juneau for mentioning the gendered nature of a lot of the online harassment.

I'll just give you an example. I run an institution and have quite a high profile. Nobody has ever made AI pornography of me. I get a lot of harassment, but I don't get that. I have two staff members and very recently a close colleague—Laura Harth, who I know has testified in front of you as well—who suffered extremely explicit, repeated AI pornography on all of their social media feeds. This is a common occurrence, and sadly, it's very often perpetrated from a different country, which brings into play other complexities when it comes to prosecuting it.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to mention that. It's a key aspect. It's a key technique that is used particularly against women to try to silence them when they're speaking up abroad.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now I will invite Mr. Zuberi to take the floor for two minutes.

Please be strict. You have two minutes for the questions and answers.

**Sameer Zuberi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll continue with Mr. de Pulford.

We've heard a lot about the challenges and heard some of the suggestions on how there should be a greater working together by different Canadian agencies and other agencies in the world, but we didn't really talk much about legislation and suggested ideas around that, like best practices from other countries.

What have you seen in terms of best practices from other countries, from your research or from what you've heard within the space to address TNR? Do you want to share that with the committee?

• (1720)

**Luke de Pulford:** I have a couple of things to say about this. There are obviously many more incidents of transnational repression in Canada than there have been prosecutions, and that disparity ought to give the committee pause for thought. What's the gap there? Why aren't we identifying that gap and enabling prosecutions to happen?

In terms of good practice, one thing to say is that the issue of training police has been extremely high on everybody's list. I think Dr. Juneau mentioned the importance of trust. If victims of transnational repression do not trust the authorities, they will not report, and that's notwithstanding any of the difficulties, legal complexities or diplomatic obstacles in actually prosecuting.

It's extremely important that we have that training. In the United Kingdom, we have a defending democracy task force, which is attempting to come to grips with some of this and to link up various state institutions, but the legislation has to be enforced. Unless we have the desire to do that, we're not going to touch the sides of this problem.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

I now invite Mr. Majumdar to take the floor for two minutes, please.

**Shuvaloy Majumdar:** Two minutes doesn't provide enough time, so I'll ask witnesses to provide a submission in writing to respond to my comment.

The transnational repression hearing is something that I've led here for three sessions. It is a mixture of how authoritarians impose their rule across borders in repression. The word "repression" is particularly important to me because it defines in its nature the differentiation between victim and oppressor.

In the democratic world, we have a conflation of these ideas, which has created moral confusion and come at the cost of moral clarity. Tolerance as an idea and our desire to be inclusive have created a world in which everything is included, including the things that are outside of the laws of our country, our sovereignty and the freedoms our people have been promised.

In that context, in the western world at large, when one party wins an election, it's called populism. When another party wins an election, it's called democracy. We have various models of moral equivalency that make it even harder for us to identify an oppressor and an authoritarian when they are imposing their will on the lives of our people, whether they're from Niagara, Halifax, Toronto, Ottawa, Calgary or anywhere else.

It is a growing and disturbing problem that requires strength, fortitude and a total awareness of what has been promised in terms of what our liberties in this country should be. In that sense, the test of moral clarity in our country, as our democracy is as vibrant as it is, is perhaps one of the biggest ones. I think of countries and peoples on the front lines of this—which include the Taiwanese, the Baltic nations and much of the Jewish world—who have had to deal with concepts of transnational repression robustly.

In that vein, I would invite all witnesses to provide some written thoughts and submissions for the benefit of this committee and of this study, which we are just about to close, on how Canada and the western world can confront transnational repression.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

If any of the witnesses would like to give any comments, you can write either to the chair or to the clerk please.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Juneau, you produced a very important study. Therefore, you have recommendations for us.

Are any of these recommendations urgent or could any be implemented quickly?

We would be grateful if you could share them with us, in order of priority.

**Thomas Juneau:** There are several of them. Transparency is first on the list.

In short, transparency is not the only tool to better counter transnational repression, but it is an essential one. In general, it's significantly underutilized in the national security space.

We tend to think of transparency in abstract terms. It's important in a democracy, yes, but it's also a national security tool to combat economic espionage, foreign interference and transnational repression.

Transparency is a tool to communicate with victims, whether they are diaspora groups or other groups. As was mentioned, it would provide them with better information on how to defend themselves. In addition, as was mentioned too briefly, transparency is an element of trust between people and governments. When that trust is too low, threat information is not reported. However, a relationship of trust helps create essential communication channels so that information goes not only from the government to the victims, but also from the victims to the government.

More broadly, while not the only factor, greater transparency helps build a more resilient society. This is essential if we want to better counter not only transnational repression, but also, again, many of the threats that Canada faces today.

• (1725)

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you.

I want to thank all the witnesses. It was a high-flying panel. Honestly, I think that we were spoiled today. I absolutely want to thank them for participating in this extremely important study. I think our analysts have something to sink their teeth into when they draft the report.

I sincerely thank all those who have travelled here today to join us. We are very pleased to have welcomed you to the committee.

Have a good day.

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

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

[*English*]

On behalf of myself, all members of the subcommittee and all people working here—the staff and interpreters—we'd like to thank you for your presence and ideas and for your good answers to our questions. If you have anything to add, please do not hesitate to write either to me or to the clerk.

We'll suspend the meeting for five minutes.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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