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Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

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• (1235)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): This is the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. This is our 14th meeting.

[English]

Our guest today is Patrick Clawson.

I'm sure your remarks will be very informative to the committee, Mr. Clawson. Once you've completed your remarks, we'll turn to questions.

Typically we have a round of seven-minute questions, one from each party, followed by a second five-minute round of questions, one each from the Liberals and Conservatives. That uses up our time, but all of this is very much directed by you and what you have to say in your presentation, so please feel free to go ahead.

Mr. Patrick Clawson (Deputy Director of Research, Washington Institute for Near East Policy): Thank you very much for inviting me today. As a shameless self-promoter, I've brought along some publications from our institute, which are available here for you.

[Translation]

Unfortunately, they are available in English only, but we can always hope.

[English]

If you'll permit me, I'll make my opening statement.

Iran's hardliners see their nuclear program and their repression as integrally linked. Both are ways to combat what they see as western arrogance seeking to overthrow the Islamic republic. For this reason, the west should tie its concern about Iran's nuclear standoff with the world community to an insistence that Iran respect the human rights treaties it has signed.

Why is Iran being so unwilling to compromise about its nuclear activities? To answer that question requires understanding the mind of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the main decision-maker in Iran. His main worry for more than a decade has been that the west is working to change Iran's regime. His concern is not a military invasion, but instead a western-inspired Velvet Revolution. That phrase, which he uses very often, refers to the 1989 Czechoslovak

overthrow of communist rule, in which the seemingly isolated intellectual dissident Václav Havel was quickly propelled to power.

Khamenei worries that regimes that appear to be solidly entrenched can be quickly overthrown if they have been undermined by civil society organizations and free media, a process he calls post-modern colonialism. His concern about this alleged western strategy is reinforced by his reading of the experience of Iran, where the reformers' surprise 1997 victory in presidential elections led to massive student demonstrations against the regime in 1999. Because of his concern about a Velvet Revolution, Khamenei is paranoid about non-governmental organizations of all sorts, but especially those that promote people-to-people exchanges and the free flow of information.

The objections of the Iranian hardliners are directed at the activities of not only governments but civil society groups. The intelligence ministry's counter-espionage director has said:

Any foreigner who establishes relations is not trustworthy. Through their approaches, they first establish an academic relationship but this soon changes into an intelligence relationship.

These are not empty words. As we speak, there are physicians sitting in Iranian jails who have been convicted of spying because of their contact with foreigners.

Supporting Iran's beleaguered human rights activists is not just a moral value but a vital western security interest. *The New York Times* has editorialized, "The best hope for avoiding a nuclear-armed Iran lies in encouraging political evolution there over the next decade". Although a democratic Iran would certainly also be attracted by the pursued advantages of nuclear weapons, it would also be more sensitive to the high cost of international isolation a nuclear-armed Iran would face—a price that an Iran eager to integrate with the world may well not wish to pay.

The cause of reform in the entire middle east would suffer a grave setback if the west were perceived to have abandoned Iran's beleaguered pro-democratic forces by making a deal with hard-line autocrats to secure strategic interests. Iranian reformers fear such a deal. Noted dissident Akbar Ganji warned in his "Letter to America", printed in *The Washington Post*:

We believe the government in Tehran is seeking a secret deal with the United States. It is willing to make any concession, provided that the United States promises to remain silent about the regime's repressive measures at home.

Iran's leaders appear convinced that their nuclear program will force the west to treat them with what they refer to as respect. By that, they mean that the west would back off from criticizing the Islamic republic, including criticizing its human rights record.

• (1240)

The prospects for resolving the nuclear standoff are not good, but a common front by the influential members of the international communities offers the best hope of persuading Iran's leaders to compromise. At the same time, we should not stay silent about our concerns about Iran's human rights while negotiating about the nuclear program.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you. That was very good. We're used to witnesses who run on at great length, so you are a breath of fresh air at our committee.

We'll turn, then, in our order of questioning, to the Liberal side of the table.

Would you prefer to go first, Mr. Silva?

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I want to thank the witness for being before this committee. I do apologize for being a little bit late. I was at another meeting. I hope I haven't missed some of the points you made. I will certainly look at the transcript.

We in the committee have been dealing for some time with the issue of Iran, particularly on issues of ethnic minority persecution. Not too long ago, we had a motion on the Baha'is, which was approved in Parliament, and we have also looked at some of the policies and how they impact on human rights in minority communities across Iran.

I think it's appropriate that you're here. You'll be able to speak about one of the issues that concerns us. We have been hearing that Iran is moving ahead in terms of nuclear capabilities. There has been rhetoric coming from President Ahmadinejad. Has there been any reference to using this nuclear development for means other than peaceful means?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: President Ahmadinejad often describes the nuclear program as an example of how Iran has become a powerful country. In his usual understated way, he has taken to describing Iran as the most powerful country on earth.

In his mind, the advances in the nuclear program show how Iran has the ability to do what it wishes, irrespective of complaints by outsiders, so the nuclear program has been very useful. Even when Iran does not have nuclear weapons, Iran can use this image that it's making advances on the nuclear front to argue that Iran's position should be listened to carefully, that the tide of history is with it, and that Iran has every right to voice whatever opinion it wishes in meetings such as that in Geneva the other day.

• (1245)

Mr. Mario Silva: What role do you foresee the International Atomic Energy Agency having in terms of monitoring and making sure that there is proper oversight? Has there been any movement by

the International Atomic Energy Agency in terms of sending inspectors, for example, to take a look at what's happening?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: The International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors are a wonderful example of how important it is to work through the United Nations and its agencies to get people on the ground to investigate situations, in that what they have been able to find when they were able to make inspections has been a treasure trove of information about Iran's nuclear program. It has been much the same experience with the human rights inspectors sent to Iran, by the way, who found a great deal more information than we had otherwise.

Unfortunately, Iran is cooperating less and less with the International Atomic Energy Agency. It now is probably not even fulfilling the absolute minimum requirements. There's a dispute between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency about whether or not Iran is fulfilling the absolute minimum requirements, and I do mean minimum, for these inspections.

Whereas previously Iran better understood that openness did much to dispel concerns and was leading us towards some confidence that we had a handle on or an understanding of what Iran's program is like, now there's a lot of concern that Iran may in fact be trying to hide some covert activities and develop some capabilities similar to what it did during the 18 years before 2003, when, it is now acknowledged, it was doing things covertly.

Mr. Mario Silva: The Security Council has pronounced on this issue. Have they insisted on sending inspectors?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: The Security Council has four times adopted resolutions sanctioning Iran. Indeed, Canada has been at the forefront of enforcing those, as the arrest last week of the gentleman in North York showed. Those UN sanctions have been targeted at the nuclear program and the missile program, and they have been quite effective at slowing down that program. Iran has encountered a number of bottlenecks to progress. In a number of cases, they've had to do workarounds that have slowed them down.

The Security Council sanctions have really been targeted at the nuclear and missile program. The council has not done very much about political sanctions designed to press the Iranian government to come back to the negotiating table.

Mr. Mario Silva: Given the fact that we have heard—many times—the rhetoric from the president about wiping Israel off the face of the earth, and given the fact that they are developing nuclear possibilities, which present an incredible threat not just to Israel but to countries around the region, has there been also another pronouncement by the Security Council saying that Iran is violating the peace, security, and order of its neighbours?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: To gain unanimity of the Security Council, the focus has been on the lack of confidence in the purely peaceful intentions of Iran's nuclear program. By making that issue the centrepiece, it's been possible to get four resolutions adopted without a single country voting no. That has included Libya twice voting to sanction Iran.

But this has required keeping these resolutions very narrowly focused. The constant refrain in the resolutions is that Iran needs to suspend its activities—not to stop them, but to suspend them—until Iran has re-established international confidence in the purely peaceful intentions of its program. The position of some governments, including a number of European governments, has been to announce publicly that they do not see how they can have confidence in Iran's purely peaceful intentions so long as Iran's leaders continue to threaten the existence of another United Nations member, but that has certainly not been in the Security Council's resolutions.

However, I would think it would be a very useful formulation to say that to meet this condition the Security Council has set down about establishing confidence in the purely peaceful intentions will require that Iran clarify the meaning of the statement of its president threatening another United Nations member.

• (1250)

The Chair: You still have time, Mr. Silva.

Mr. Mario Silva: It is something that we have to emphasize when you have a regime that has displayed nuclear weapons during their military parades, with signs saying “Wipe Israel Off the Map”, and when you have the rhetoric from the president at the same time that they are building nuclear weapons. That is a real threat. That Iran has nuclear weapons is scary when they are also making such overt statements against Israel, statements about wiping Israel off the map. We have to figure out how to get a Security Council resolution that is specific on that issue, because there is an imminent danger to Israel with the nuclear threat coming from Iran.

Mr. Patrick Clawson: If you will permit me, sir, I have just one comment. We don't know that Iran is building the nuclear weapons yet. We know that it's building the material that's essential for nuclear weapons, and that would put Iran in a very good position to build nuclear weapons very quickly, but the actual additional step of building nuclear weapons may be something that Iran postpones until it has accumulated more of this material. I'm sorry to be such a stickler for words on this one, but after the experience with Iraq, there are many around the world, unfortunately, who think we exaggerate, so it is very much to our advantage to understate things.

Also, if I may make another comment, I personally worry more not about the hateful statements that Iran makes about wiping Israel off the map but about the hundreds of millions of dollars that Iran is spending to arm, train, and finance those organizations that are fighting to do exactly that, such as Hamas. We've seen in these last few weeks the Egyptian government complaining loudly about Iran's role in providing arms to Hamas and in preparing to attack innocent Israeli tourists in Egypt. Iran is not just making statements. They are carrying out very specific and deadly acts.

Mr. Mario Silva: I think that's a very good point, but I'd also state that if we can't also get proper inspections.... If you remember back to when there were inspections for Iraq, for example, there was a clear pronouncement as well that they didn't think there were weapons of mass destruction. The report was actually quite accurate, as we know now. It was an administration that was making the point to the contrary.

That's why we need to have UN inspectors in there who don't belong to any particular country, UN inspectors who are acting on behalf of the UN and specifically the International Atomic Energy Agency, to make sure they are not going in that direction.

The Chair: Perhaps we can treat that as a comment rather than a question, because your time has expired, Mr. Silva.

[Translation]

Mrs. Thi Lac, it is your turn.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Good afternoon, Mr. Clawson, and welcome. My questions are along the same lines as Mr. Silva's. But I am going to ask you some others. I would like some clarifications. We have talked about the threat of nuclear attack on the people of Israel.

Do you not feel that Israel is perhaps more in danger than the neighbouring states given the possibility that Iran could have an operational nuclear weapon, if not right now, then shortly?

• (1255)

[English]

Mr. Patrick Clawson: Again, Ahmadinejad, with his charming sense of understatement, has these grandiose ambitions. When UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was giving his farewell tour around the world and stopped in Tehran, *The New York Times* reported on the meeting that he held with Ahmadinejad, in which Ahmadinejad complained that the structures of the United Nations were too much based on the results of World War II and that the world had changed. Ahmadinejad went on to add that “Britain and America may have won the last world war, but we intend to win the next world war”. Kofi Annan was rather taken aback by that comment.

More realistically, I think that Iran's nuclear program is in many ways a dire national security threat to the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, which seem convinced that Iran would like to press them to take Iran's leadership in the area. Many of the countries in the region have expressed interest in starting their own nuclear programs in response to Iran's advances, and I'm sorry to report that the countries in the region have ordered more than a hundred billion dollars' worth of arms in the last three years, in what is a very destabilizing and disturbing arms race. This is not good for all of us, given that it's an area where so much of the world's oil is found.

So Iran's threats to its neighbours are quite realistic. Iran's world ambitions are exaggerated.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: I would also like to know something else. Currently, that structure and those positions are staunchly defended by the political regime in power. What would happen if another president were to be elected in June? In terms of their nuclear program, will it be much the same or will there be major changes?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Clawson: The president in Iran has quite limited powers. The Supreme Leader is the man who really decides about questions of foreign affairs. For instance, when an agreement was reached in 2003 to suspend Iran's nuclear activities, the Iranian president at the time was not even informed about this agreement. It was signed by the representative of the Supreme Leader.

So the election of a new president is important primarily as an indication of which direction the Supreme Leader would like things to go. The Supreme Leader has much influence over how the election takes place. He has much influence over the results, the widespread allegations of considerable fraud, but even setting that aside, the Supreme Leader really dictates what kind of coverage there is in the newspapers and especially on television, and this really means that he dictates the results.

Among the three announced candidates besides the current president, I would say that at least two of those candidates have indicated that they think Ahmadinejad's stance is way too provocative and aggressive, but they have not indicated yet if they would change the objective. They would change the tone, but perhaps we should welcome the small step of changing the tone.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: We know that the United States is currently providing significant leadership in the issue of nuclear energy in Iran. Since the election of Mr. Obama, have things changed a great deal or are the positions similar to those held by the Bush administration?

[English]

Mr. Patrick Clawson: The Bush administration was not prepared to offer Iran much in the way of incentives, even if Iran cooperated with the international community. That was a problem, because we want to make the choices for Iran very stark between the incentives it would get if it cooperated and the problems it would face if it did not cooperate. The Iranians felt that Mr. Bush was too tied down in Iraq to do anything negative to Iran, and they felt that Mr. Bush would not do anything positive towards Iran, so they didn't see much reason to reach an agreement with the Bush administration.

With the Obama administration, it's much more credible for the United States to be able to say they will provide incentives to Iran if it cooperates, and that's certainly been a factor, but so far, the bigger factor of change with the Obama administration is that the Obama administration has adopted a much more respectful tone and has adopted language that goes much more out of its way to show respect for Iran and its leaders, if I may put it that way.

Many Iranian commentators had said that Bush's insulting tone was a very big problem in relations between the United States and Iran, and, in fact, a very big problem for Iran overall in dealing with the nuclear issue. If that analysis is correct, then this change in tone should help.

• (1300)

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac: I have one last question. You mentioned incentives and sanctions. I would like to know what the

best kinds of incentives for Iran could be and what would be the best kinds of sanctions that the international community could impose.

[English]

Mr. Patrick Clawson: Well, we need to have more leverage with the Iranians, and one of the best ways to get leverage, frankly, is to have political unity in the international community. When Canada makes this tremendous effort at the General Assembly at the United Nations to get the resolutions condemning Iran's human rights practices approved, that has a real impact. It is perhaps as important in influencing Iranian leaders as any of the economic sanctions that we adopt.

The economic sanctions that we can consider may have some impact on Iran, but I frankly think that a political stance of unity is likely to have more.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We've used up the time for that round.

Go ahead, Mr. Marston, please.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): I'll try to beat the fire alarm, if I can.

The Chair: Hopefully that's just a dinner bell or something.

Mr. Wayne Marston: And our debate didn't even get heated today, so I don't understand it.

I was pleased to hear a number of your comments, especially when you talked about the exaggeration of the WMD in Iraq and the understanding that the world now has of that actually taking place in the fashion it did.

You spoke of Mr. Bush's tone, and it's easy to point a finger at Mr. Bush. I wouldn't have wanted to be in his shoes following 9/11, but I also don't think we would go the same route.

I spent some time in the Middle East in 1979. Saving face is a very crucial, important thing to the culture there, and I think this move of the Obama administration is offering that to some people.

We've had testimony here before from a gentleman whose name, I think, was Mr. Gordon, who told us that they've developed to the point of having yellowcake in their weapons—well, we don't know that it's a weapons program, but certainly the fear is there.

Your comments about the nuclear program made me wonder if it's an effort, in a way, to provoke the secret deal that you were saying people feared, and also if the capacity isn't there yet to deliver nuclear weapons. It's not even clear that the capacity is there to complete the construction of nuclear weapons, but he certainly is waving that as a flag, as a continuous threat, and using his rhetoric on the world stage. I can't help but have the word "megalomania" come to mind. I never thought I'd say this, but it might be very good that there is a supreme leader behind this man, because I think the potential is there for him to be reined in at some point if a deal is made.

What do you think is the possibility of some kind of deal actually being formulated at this point?

• (1305)

Mr. Patrick Clawson: Unfortunately, so far we haven't heard any indications on the Iranian side of what it is they would want in return for a deal.

We're in fact further behind with Iran than we are with North Korea. The North Koreans at least say that if we provide them with this, this, and this, then we can have a deal. The North Korean list seems to be ever-growing, and there are lots of problems in negotiations with them, but at least the North Koreans say that if we give them enough, and make things sufficiently attractive, we can do a deal.

With Iran, we haven't heard that. And that's very discouraging. It reflects the extraordinary confidence that Iranian leaders have had in recent years that their country's geostrategic situation is so good that they don't need to think about a compromise.

The pattern of negotiating with Iran on any issue, whether it's a business deal or a political deal, has been stalemate, stalemate, stalemate—until breakthrough. In many of the negotiations, what Iran ended up agreeing to was much less attractive for Iran than what they could have gotten at an earlier stage. So they are tough, but they are not particularly effective at negotiating.

Some in Iran have suggested that this is what's going on with this nuclear issue. Iran could get a lot out of a bargain with the international community about the nuclear program—now—but if they drag on the discussions for a long time, the world may decide that Iran is such a difficult partner country, we're prepared to offer them less.

Mr. Wayne Marston: You mentioned in your comments the billions of dollars going into arms in the Middle East. How do you see that distributed across the Middle East; what countries?

There was an eight-year war between Iraq and Iran. Right now, because there are non-believers occupying Iraq, from the perspective of the Muslim world they're kind of a brotherhood for the moment. But once the Americans do leave Iraq, what's the potential for Iran to resume hostilities toward Iraq?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: The Iraqi military—and Iraqi government—is being very insistent in the negotiations with the United States that it wishes to purchase 96 F-16 fighter planes. It has already purchased 120 M1A1 tanks and been given 20 more. It wants to buy another 120. That's 240 tanks and 96 aircraft—more than you need to defeat al Qaeda in Iraq.

Some Iraqi officials are on the record as saying that the principal purpose of these armaments is to defend Iraq's borders. This is a good example, to my mind, of how Iran's nuclear program only creates suspicions in the region and leaves Iran's security worse off.

We should remind ourselves that the reason most countries don't pursue nuclear weapons is not because they're pacifist at heart but because they do not want to start arms races. Iran seems to have forgotten that lesson. Iran is starting an arms race—which, frankly, it is going to lose. It has neither the money nor the powerful friends that some of its neighbours do.

So I think we can make a good case that nuclear weapons are not in Iran's security interest. These arms purchases in the Middle East

that I spoke of are overwhelmingly for systems that seem well suited to dealing with the threat from Iran, or well suited to responding to Iranian provocation, but not well suited to other defence needs.

Mr. Wayne Marston: In terms of the F-16, though, you'll get a fair range with that particular weapon. But I think I follow you to the same conclusion, that they are focused very much on Iran at this point.

One thing we heard about the human rights violations in Iran was the fact that the governing body—the powers that be—represents about 30% of the population. How much of this is just bravado to keep their folks in line? How much of the systemic human rights violations and the international chest-pounding—as you say, they talk about being the most powerful country in the world—do you think is actually aimed at the Iranian people to keep the actual majority in place?

• (1310)

Mr. Patrick Clawson: President Ahmadinejad believes his chest-thumping. I don't think Supreme Leader Khamenei does, because Supreme Leader Khamenei's great concern about cultural invasion and a velvet revolution suggests he thinks his regime is in fact in danger and that the people don't support it. I think their Supreme Leader greatly exaggerates the extent to which the regime is in danger. But this is a man who throws reporters in jail, and in the case of Canadian Iranian reporters, he kills them. The hasn't happened to American Iranians, but there are lots of them who have been thrown in jail, because this regime is so paranoid about their activities that it thinks they could bring about an overthrow.

So it would seem to me that Khamenei's concern is how to use the nuclear program to force the west to back off and not to provide support for non-governmental organizations. And I say the “west” advisedly, because in my prepared remarks, I quoted from an Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps statement this last week that held forth about the grave dangers to Iran from the Dutch. It's the first time I've heard the Dutch described as a great world power in some centuries.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Or as a threat.

The Chair: We're out of time, unfortunately.

You're right. That seems like an appropriate comment for, say, 1650 AD or some time like that.

Mr. Sweet, are you doing the next round?

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Mr. Clawson. I did a little research on your institute. Congratulations on the good work you've been doing for 24 years and your expansion into Middle East studies. I'm glad you're here with the level of expertise you have.

I would like to pick up on some of Mr. Marston's questioning regarding the resources that Iran has right now. In your research, do you feel this regime is now beginning to hit the wall, as far as resources are concerned, because of the nature of the way they lead, the lack of economic development, and the over-stretching of their resources in the nuclear program?

Of course, Mr. Marston mentioned the protracted previous war. I don't think it's any secret their involvement in the destabilization of Iraq after the Americans entered there. In fact, I'm even curious for your thoughts on why that has diminished as well. Is that with respect to the fact that their resources are diminishing?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: The current Iranian government is racing towards the wall with its foot on the accelerator. There has been no adjustment whatsoever in government spending since the price of oil came down and the global financial crisis hit late last year. As a result, Iran is racing through its foreign exchange reserves. I don't see any change in policy happening until well after the next presidential election on June 12. And the record of what happened when Iran ran into serious economic difficulties in the early 1980s and mid-1990s is that in both cases, it was only after Iran was completely out of money that they made the slightest changes in economic policy—and then had to make dramatic changes in their policies. It looks likely that that will once again be what we see.

So in some ways we're in a race for time. If we can, through UN sanctions and other actions, slow down Iran's nuclear program, then Iran is going to run out of financial reserves and not have enough income to finance the extraordinarily inefficient government spending that is going on at the moment. That would be an excellent moment for saying to the Iranians that Iran's geostrategic situation was not so strong and that they would do well to compromise with the outside world.

•(1315)

Mr. David Sweet: So for lack of better words, you would see Iran's position right now and the chest-thumping you mentioned as similar to the position Russia was trying to put itself into before the Berlin Wall fell and we found out that in fact the chest-thumping was really very much that of a hollow regime.

Mr. Patrick Clawson: I'm not an expert on Russia of that time, but I would say that at the moment what we have in Iran is a small group, including the president, who sincerely believe that the tide of history is with them, and then there's a much larger group of people who think they're a mid-sized country with some very big problems coming up.

Every indication from the election campaign is that ordinary Iranians are already quite unhappy about the economic situation, and if we add to this dramatic cutbacks in government spending and much higher taxation, there are going to be some very unhappy people in Iran. I suspect that even more the politicians would be focusing on the domestic concerns and saying that foreign policy has to take a back seat compared to that.

That's very much the position of one of the candidates in the presidential election, a former speaker of parliament. He doesn't really care that much about foreign policy. While he may not have good foreign policy views, his concern is domestic policy, and that gives us something to work with.

Mr. David Sweet: With the hundreds who are on death row all the time and the number of human rights violations, along with the economic situation, I'm hoping it's only a matter of time before there's a significant pushback by the common citizen of Iran.

There are two things that I hope I can get in. I'll ask you the first and most important one right now.

There was a number you had mentioned on arms exports from Iran. Could you tell me the dollar figure again? Was it an import or export number around arms purchases?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: I said in the Middle East there have been purchases of \$100 billion of weapons in the last three years, which seem to be well designed for dealing with Iran.

Iran has been accused by the nine states and Israel of providing several hundred million dollars a year to Hamas and Hezbollah. We have powerful supporting evidence on this from the Egyptian government in the last two weeks, which intercepted a number of Hezbollah operatives who were bringing arms and money into Hamas, and indeed Hezbollah has confirmed that's what they were doing. Given the magnitudes involved in what the Egyptians have discovered, those Israeli and American estimates look quite credible these days.

Let me say a word about the ordinary citizens of Iran. The regime has been quite successful at applying its Chinese model, namely that it lets its citizens do what they want in the space of three metres around them in return for people doing nothing outside that three-metre space. Therefore, there's a lot more opportunity for people in Iran to party and use intoxicants of various sorts than there used to be, but there's a lot more human rights abuses and violations if anyone tries to organize even the most innocuous things such as helping prostitutes and AIDS victims.

Mr. David Sweet: On the arms purchases, are they primarily small arms?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: What Iran has been shipping abroad has been some disturbingly sophisticated weapons systems, such as longer-range and more precise rockets that it's trying to get into the Gaza Strip that could be used to hit Tel Aviv, and also anti-aircraft missiles and anti-tank missiles. There are disturbing indications that what Iran is providing is considerably more sophisticated than small arms to Hamas, and certainly Iran has for quite some time been providing much more sophisticated weaponry to Hezbollah, which has become a pretty impressive light infantry force.

•(1320)

Mr. David Sweet: You talked about this velvet revolution and Ali Khamenei's abstract fear of this. Do you feel this is the primary motivator behind their behaviour as far as the nuclear race is concerned and as far as keeping their citizens subjugated in the way they do is concerned? Do you feel it's a hatred towards Israel? Do you feel it's their need to be the most powerful nation in the world? Is there one of these items that is pre-eminent?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: I don't think we know the mix. All those are there, along with the prestige of having advanced technology. With Khamenei, the man's preoccupation seems to be regime survival, and he seems to think that the essence of regime survival is finding a way to get the west to back off on its cultural invasion.

For Ahmadinejad and for many in the revolutionary guard corps, the key issue seems to be expanding Iran's influence and Iran becoming the pre-eminent player in the gulf. There may be others for whom there's more of a defensive concern, but the two key actors seem to be Khamenei and the revolutionary guard corps. With Khamenei, it's how do you get the west to back off on the cultural invasion, and with the revolutionary guard corps, it's how do you make Iran into the principal player in the region, and indeed, throughout the Muslim world.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kennedy, it's your turn now.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Thanks.

I guess I'd like to come back to your sense of...obviously, there's an enlarged international concern around the nuclear capacity, but is there a real understanding...and I appreciate that you're framing it in careful terms, which is, I think, helpful.

Are there any indications, not just from the declarations about centrifuges but from the actual activity that's been noted? In their current nuclear capability, how far away would Iran be, in the estimates of the international agencies and security forces and so on, from converting to a nuclear weapons system? What is the timeframe, and what are the markers in terms of when it becomes a critical point?

You say and the reports say that they're amassing certain kinds of material and so forth. What does that mean in terms of the road ahead?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: Iran has enough centrifuges and enough low-enriched uranium that it could, if it threw out the UN inspectors, probably make a nuclear weapon in a matter of months. Perhaps, if things went badly, it would take a year. But that would be a pretty primitive weapon, heavy and big, hard to deliver. It certainly wouldn't fit on a warhead of a missile, and it would be only one.

It's hard to come up with a rationale for why somebody would develop just one primitive warhead, because if everybody knows that you have nasty intentions, you have only the one missile, the one warhead, and it's now exploded. So the general feeling is that Iran would do well—maybe they won't take this advice—to wait until it has more low-enriched uranium and more centrifuges.

Furthermore, it's also quite possible that what Iran might decide to do is take all this technology that it's been developing and develop a second covert system, smaller presumably, where it would develop the material for one bomb, which it could then have without the world community knowing about it. Then, once it exploded that one bomb, it would have this big pile of material we know about, this low-enriched uranium, that it could quickly convert into a number of additional bombs.

However, there are real technical barriers that Iran has yet to overcome to figure out how to get to a warhead on a missile. They seem to be working on that. The one issue on which the IAEA has had the least success in getting any Iranian responses has been about the documentation for a project that Iran was working on about how to fit a warhead into a missile. Iran claims the documents are fake, but refuses to answer a whole lot of IAEA questions about that project.

● (1325)

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: You're putting forward different possible scenarios, and I guess for an embryonic program you have to understand what they might do that's tied to whatever strategic objectives they might have. Presumably, there is some relationship—and I want to come back to the whole hegemony of nuclear power and what that does both to domestic policy and to what they want for themselves regionally. They believe that Israel has nuclear weapons. They want to be a regional counter to that. It doesn't make sense that if that was their policy, they would have to come up against a fairly sophisticated.... Going back to the old Cold War kind of thinking, if you don't have the capacity, you're not serious, and you can't be taken fully seriously. The idea of a dirty bomb or something covert is a dangerous component.

I heard you expressing before some doubt about their overall strategy and asking why they would want to be...when this isn't good for their security, and so on, but I'm just trying to see where else they might be headed. Do they have the missile systems? What other parts of development would there be for them to have a sophisticated nuclear capacity, of the kind they allege other countries have?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: They have a missile that has the diameter and weight-carrying capacity to carry a nuclear weapon to Israel. They appear to have a program to design a warhead that would fit on that missile. They have a program to produce large amounts of low-enriched uranium, which would give them the raw material to build more than dozens of bombs. I say more than dozens because conceivably it would be even in the low hundreds of bombs. It's hard to look at this without starting to worry that they're planning to in fact produce dozens and dozens of bombs with the characteristic that they could fit on those long-range missiles.

Furthermore, they are testing even longer-range missiles. These multi-stage missiles they are testing would have the range to reach into eastern Europe, but what's more disturbing is that most countries that have learned how to build multi-stage missiles have been able to expand that upwards to the point where they could build an intercontinental ballistic missile. The great technical hurdles are in going to the multi-stage, not in how you ramp up from there to an intercontinental ballistic missile. The fact that Iran is putting so much effort into a multi-stage missile suggests that its ambition may in fact be to acquire intercontinental ballistic missiles, but we have no proof of that.

● (1330)

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Right. But if I can bring you back to the idea of a time context for this, you're saying Iran as a nuclear threat of any description is fairly immediate. They have the ingredients. There's an easy strategy to understand, unless there's a covert option. Iran as a nuclear power of some kind with a real threat capacity exists. There are two parts to this question. First, how much time does that take for them? In other words, how far away is the risk for that? Second, what would you say about—and you've said a little bit about it, I know, at different points—the international community's ability now, and foreseeably, if Iran continues to be less cooperative, to know enough to anticipate where that will go?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: Iran has acquired a lot of the capabilities, including missile deliveries, that it would need in order to have an extraordinarily dangerous nuclear weapons system. We are increasingly at this stage debating what its intentions are and whether it will explode a bomb quickly or wait until it could do a more rapid breakout to a larger set of bombs.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: When you say “explode a bomb”, do you mean for the purposes of testing or for the purposes of...?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: Presumably for testing it—presumably—

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Pardon my lack of technical know-how, but presumably that needs to be done at some point if they're going to prove their capacity. Is that true or not?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: No, I don't think so. The Israelis, for instance, have never tested a weapon. Well, there's some dispute about whether they and the South Africans tested a weapon, but it doesn't appear the Israelis have tested a weapon. And the weapons design the Iranians seem to be going for is 60-year old technology. When the United States built nuclear weapons during World War II, we developed two designs. One was a design that we weren't sure would work, so we tested it at the Trinity site. But we still weren't so sure it would work well; therefore, what we dropped on Hiroshima was a bomb that had never been tested. And that is the type of bomb Iran is building, so it is a pretty straightforward technical thing. Getting it to fit on a missile is harder.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Right.

The Chair: I apologize. I let you go over five minutes, and gave you 10 minutes actually, so we'll turn now to Mr. Hiebert.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I too will seek about 10 minutes' worth of questioning.

I do have many, many questions, so I would appreciate your succinct answers.

It's hard to know where to begin. The first question that is on my mind is that western nations have known for years about Iran's intention to proceed with a nuclear program, yet the program seems to continue at the same pace as always. What more could be done to prevent them from succeeding?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: Well, Iran's program has moved at a remarkably slow pace. Let's remind ourselves that it was now 20 years ago that Iran started its clandestine nuclear activities. Twenty years is a long, long time for a program that is of such importance to Iran and from which they're running such great risks of international isolation. What that illustrates is how successful we have been, because of things like Canada's vigorous enforcements of the United Nations Security Council sanctions and the arrest of the gentleman who was shipping dual-use material last week.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: But you've also said that they're within months, if not a year, of creating a nuclear weapon. We've know for about the last three years that they were on the verge of this. Now that we're so close and the cat is almost out of the box, what do we do?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: Hopefully what we can do is to persuade the Iranians that it would be really stupid idea for them to build just one nuclear weapon, because if they were to explode just that one

nuclear weapon, they would face tremendous international isolation and what Secretary of State Hillary Clinton referred to as “crippling sanctions”—and, indeed, quite possibly more. If Iran clearly only had one nuclear weapon and exploded it, then the United States government would be seriously debating whether to take preemptive military action, and a number of governments around the world, including many Arab governments, would be urging us to do it.

Hopefully what we can continue to do through combined efforts in the international community is to persuade the Iranians to go slow on this thing, and to say to them, okay, you are piling up great quantities of low-enriched uranium, but don't even think about doing more than that. Let us remember that most of the countries who started weapons programs abandoned them. My favourite example of this is the Swiss, who twice voted in public referenda in favour of building nuclear weapons and then in favour of testing the nuclear weapon inside Switzerland. It was only because of an accident in the tunnel they were building for this that they decided to change their mind. But lots of countries that have gone down this road even farther than Iran has in the end have backed off.

• (1335)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: To what degree has the new U.S. administration changed the U.S. position toward Iran?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: Certainly there has been a strong change in tone, and so far what we have seen are pretty much the same objectives. There was a lot of press in the United States about the Obama administration being willing to participate in negotiations with Iran without pre-conditions that Iran first suspend its enrichment. Well, look, we crossed that route three years ago. For the last three years, Javier Solana of the European Commission has been holding talks with the Iranians about what it would take to get negotiations restarted, because the European governments had said they wouldn't hold negotiations until Iran suspended its program. Therefore, Solana is not allowed to hold negotiations; he's holding talks about what it would take to get negotiations restarted. Some people might think that distinction is relatively small, and what the Obama administration was saying was, look, let's stop pretending; we've in fact been negotiating with Iran for the last three years and we should acknowledge that.

But so far that's the only indication of a change in objective—and even that you could say is a change in approach rather than a change in objective by the Obama administration.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: You said in your earlier answer to a question that Iran does not have the money or the friends. I was led to believe that Russia was somewhat of a friend to Iran. Can you elaborate on the connection between Iran and Russia?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: There's certainly no love lost on either side between the people of the two countries. They don't like each other. By contrast, Iranians like Americans and Americans like Iranians.

On the government side, the Russian government has not seen the Iranian nuclear program as an urgent issue, as argued repeatedly in the meetings of the P-5 plus one. The five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany have been meeting regularly about this matter. Russia has repeatedly argued that the Iranians are further behind than other countries think, we have more time to deal with this, and at the end of the day the Iranians will come around, but we have to be patient and tolerant.

One gets the distinct impression that this issue is not high on the Russian agenda, and Russia sees no particular reason to be cooperative with Europe and the United States when they have been unhelpful, as far as Russia is concerned, on issues like Georgia. Indeed, the only way we ever got the first Security Council resolution about Iran through the Security Council was by agreeing to keep our mouths shut about some developments in Georgia at the time.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: You mentioned that Iran is having a presidential election in June, and two of the three candidates are slight moderates compared to the current president. Are there any candidates who might be willing to take the country in a more positive direction that respects human rights? What's the likelihood of that candidate, if there is such a candidate, succeeding? Will the election be free and fair in the first place?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: If a person were interested in taking an entirely different position on human rights, the guardian council that vets the candidates would never allow such a person to run. In any case, even if such a person were to run and win, the Supreme Leader has complete authority to overrule and dismiss the president. The judiciary has established itself as a very powerful organ that can broadly interpret laws, like insulting Islam, to do whatever they want, and the Revolutionary Guard Corps pays little attention to what the president does.

So the scope of reform within the framework of the existing system is depressingly small. That is one reason why a great many Iranians are interested only in the three-metre circle around them. On the other hand, we have a Supreme Leader who is terrified of the prospect of a Velvet Revolution.

In the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, Mr. Havel was a dissident with seemingly no prospects of ever having any political post on a Thursday morning, and on the Tuesday morning he was the President of Czechoslovakia. It all happened in less than a week. Indeed, one week after the start of the Velvet Revolution, Mr. Havel was in the White House. I presume the Supreme Leader knows something about his country and worries about this.

• (1340)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Do you think the elections will be fair?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: The elections will certainly not be fair. State television, which is where most people get their news, is only reporting about Ahmadinejad's activities; it's not reporting about the activities of others.

When it comes to the mechanics of voting, it is done by presentation of one's identity card. The interior minister has reported that there are 20 million extra identity cards floating around. He says that's due to people losing their identity cards and getting replacements, and I'm sure that's part of the explanation.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: What's the likelihood of a Velvet Revolution occurring? I know the Supreme Leader's obviously concerned about it. Do you see it happening, in light of the youthful demographic that seems to be emerging?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: I do not see such a Velvet Revolution happening soon. On the other hand, the track record of analysts predicting revolutions is very bad.

Mention was made earlier of the Berlin Wall. When Mr. Reagan stood before the Berlin Wall in June 1987 and said this wall must go, many people thought that was showing the early onset of Alzheimer's, yet within two and a half years, the wall was gone.

A U.S. government group looked at the track records of analysts predicting revolutions successfully and concluded that in the last 200 years, country experts had been inaccurate in every single case.

The Chair: You're over your time, Mr. Hiebert. If you have one more, I'll let you do it.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: I've been thinking about the logic that Iran must be facing. I know this is completely hypothetical, but they've made all these claims about wanting to annihilate Jerusalem or Israel.

You stated earlier that if they had demonstrated that they had a nuclear weapon, there'd be increased sanctions. There'd be support for a pre-emptive strike if they simply demonstrated that they had the weapons.

As they think about their options, certainly having nuclear weapons gives them a power position, a place to negotiate. That makes sense, but if they were actually to follow through on their threats and launch one of these missiles, would they simply be trying to precipitate World War III? Do they see the end? What's the outcome?

It would seem to me that the retaliation on Iran would be immense. They'd be bringing destruction upon themselves.

Mr. Patrick Clawson: Many countries get into wars because of miscalculations and ignorance about the other side. After the war is over, presumably at least one side regrets that the war started.

The great worry is that Iran has a record of ignorance about the outside world, and a record of miscalculation that suggests that we have to be worried that in a crisis, they would miscalculate and would think that their threats would cause the other side to back down, when in fact the other side would stand tough and we would get into a war that neither side wants.

That, I would suggest, has happened very often in history, and indeed in many ways it's what happened with the Iran-Iraq war. You might think that after having lost several hundred thousand of their citizens in a bloody eight-year war, the Iranian leaders would be much more cautious. Unfortunately, they're not, and the fact that the nuclear program is in the hands of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the exact same group that is also responsible for supporting terrorism, is not encouraging when we think about how they might be willing to gamble that a tough stance will cause the other side to back down.

•(1345)

The Chair: Maybe I'll intervene at this time. Normally I don't get the opportunity to ask questions; however, your testimony has been both very interesting and very well timed, which leaves us with a few minutes. With the indulgence of the rest of the committee, I'd like to ask a few questions myself.

A few things relating to their nuclear and missile programs strike me as being problems that ought to be of concern to the Iranian leaders themselves; certainly they would be of concern to the rest of us if they miscalculated on these things. You mentioned working on a bomb similar to the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, the Little Boy bomb. That bomb, to my understanding, was an extremely unstable bomb, and this raises the whole question of a nuclear program designed largely with considerations other than safety at the forefront, such as hiding it from public view as much as possible.

Maybe I'm worried about something that we need not be worried about, but the thought occurs to me that there may be a danger of the nuclear materials in some way being a threat to public safety within Iran. Does that danger exist?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: I'm not an expert on these matters, but there certainly are some people who are very concerned that the drive for both nuclear power and nuclear enrichment has led Iran to make some decisions that were environmentally unwise and that raise real dangers of accidents.

It is the case that Iran does not have in place a regulatory framework, a system of monitoring, and a system of responding to accidents. The kinds of steps that the IEA encourages countries embarking on nuclear power, much less nuclear enrichment, to take, Iran has not taken.

The IEA has a whole program that's designed to help a country. For instance, the United Arab Emirates is working with the IEA to develop a model program for regulating, monitoring, and responding to accidents. Iran has done extremely little in this regard.

The Chair: Right.

I have a second question. There exists already a missile system that has the capacity to carry a non-existent but potentially existent nuclear warhead to Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv is actually a relatively small target. Israel is a small target when compared to the kinds of targets the United States and the U.S.S.R. were dealing with. It's hard to miss the U.S.S.R. and land on some friendly neighbour, but it's not hard to miss Tel Aviv and land somewhere where there are people who are presumably not intended targets.

To what degree is Iran in possession of a sophisticated guidance system?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: The missiles Iran is using have guidance systems that make these missiles of very little use if the warhead is a conventional warhead, because a conventional warhead does damage that's limited to the tens of metres or perhaps, possibly, the hundreds of metres. However, when it comes to nuclear weapons, then an accuracy of a couple of kilometres is good enough. And while Tel Aviv is small, even if you miss by a few kilometres, you can still do a tremendous amount of damage.

The accuracy of the missile that Iran has been testing is such that more than half of the missiles would fall within a circle of somewhere between two and three kilometres.

•(1350)

The Chair: So we ought not to be then comparing these to the kinds of missiles that Iraq was firing at Israel in the Gulf War in 1990—the Scuds? They're superior in accuracy to that?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: In fact they're a little less accurate than the Scuds, but the Scuds were carrying a conventional warhead. And because the Scuds were carrying a conventional warhead, they didn't cause much damage outside of the immediate area where they landed.

In fact, I would be more reassured if Iran were spending its time and effort perfecting the accuracy of its warhead, because then I would think that in fact perhaps Iran intends to put a conventional explosive on this warhead and wants to be sure that it can deliver it directly on the one building that it's targeting in Tel Aviv. But instead, Iran has devoted its efforts to developing longer range for these same inaccurate missiles, missiles that really don't make much sense, unless you plan to put in them some kind of unconventional weapon.

The Chair: If I could just pursue that a tiny bit further, I'm just thinking that from the perspective of a country that has a limited number, in the foreseeable future, of actually deliverable warheads, the accuracy you're describing would leave me with some alarm if I were then considering using these missiles for a target where.... Tel Aviv is, after all, only nine kilometres from the West Bank.

Obviously, this is all outside the moral calculations. It's all repugnant. But you'd be now dealing with a severe public relations problem if you were trying to demonstrate that you're the leaders of the Muslim world and you were putting Muslim populations at risk of—I don't know what you'd call it—a kind of friendly fire. That's just a thought.

The other question I had, and this was raised a bit in one of the earlier questions, is about the fear of a Velvet Revolution. I had the thought that even paranoids have real enemies. One thought that has occurred to me as we've gone through these hearings and listened to our witnesses is that there are a large number of groups of people—most of the surrounding countries, most of the linguistic minority populations within Iran, the religious minorities, be they non-Muslim or non-Shia minorities, intellectuals, students, those who are not the beneficiaries of corruption—who have reason to want the regime to be replaced or who would legitimately expect that they would benefit if a regime other than the current one were in place.

Given that situation—again, I'm editorializing more than asking a question, but you can comment on my editorial—it strikes me that there actually is reason for someone who is in a position of power in Iran to worry not only that they might find themselves out of power, but that a Velvet Revolution would be a very desirable outcome, as compared to, say, the outcome of the Ceausescu regime in Romania, which fell equally swiftly but also met with a rather dire end.

Mr. Patrick Clawson: The Iranian regime is not in power because it enjoys popular support. It does not. It's in power because it has a dedicated minority, which is probably more than 10% of the population, who are prepared to kill the others in order to keep God's government in place. As long as that continues to be the case, as long as there continues to be a minority—a pretty sizable minority—that is prepared to kill the rest of the population in order to keep God's government in place, it's going to be hard to make a Velvet Revolution.

The Chair: Right.

We have a few more minutes. Does anybody else want to raise any further questions?

Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Just in terms of the human rights aspect, there are numerous things that are objectionable about the Iranian regime from the standpoint of a western democratic country. You just finished describing something we find hard to relate to in the sense of that abusive type of power by which they are sustaining themselves.

But the connection between the nuclear weapons... I'm just wondering if you could locate that a little more precisely. I think your broad thesis was that it acts not so much as a distraction but as an actual deterrent to their having to contend with other international norms. Is that correct, that they hope it will draw people away? Do you actually believe it has that effect of drawing people away from some of the things they might otherwise have to contend with that could lead to—whether it's a Velvet Revolution or some other kind of disturbance—that very rigid kind of control that they've elected to follow in the current regime?

For a while, I guess you could realistically have talked about some reformist trends. I don't know that you can now.

That's the main thing I'd like to ask. If we have a minute after that, I'd like to hear your response to Mr. Reid in terms of the blunt thing, whether there's any prospect of something else arising from what we know are factors in place.

I really wanted to try to get directly at your thesis of nuclear weapons and the status of human rights. In other words, if Iran were persuaded to drop the nuclear weapons program, how would that benefit all these other outstanding problems?

• (1355)

Mr. Patrick Clawson: The Iranian dissidents and human rights activists are firmly convinced that the nuclear program is an essential part of the regime's survival strategy. Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi co-authored an article entitled “Link Human Rights to Iran's Nuclear Ambitions”, and the main theme of the article was that the regime sees these nuclear ambitions as the best way to get the international community to back off on the things the regime really worries about, which is reporters, such as all of these reporters they throw in jail or, in Ms. Kazemi's case, kill, and also people-to-people exchanges.

It's very discouraging to think that this is a regime that sees the free flow of information and the exchange of people-to-people

contacts as a vital threat to it. It's so foreign to our way of looking at this matter, where we see those as things that can help build confidence and trust among people. It's not how the Supreme Leader and the Revolutionary Guard Corps view this. They're firmly convinced that there's a grand western plot to overthrow them. When an American academic, Haleh Esfandiari, was in jail, a 67-year-old grandmother, 22 governments around the world marshalled, asking the Iranians for her release, and the Iranian television put on a show in which they explained that George Soros and George Bush meet each week to coordinate their activities, promoting a Velvet Revolution inside Iran. It was on nationwide television in Iran. Most of us who are observers of the American political scene do not think that Mr. Soros or Mr. Bush actually get along that well.

The Iranian dissidents are firmly convinced that this nuclear program is designed for regime security and not for national security.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: Okay, I—

The Chair: We have enough time for only one more question before our time expires, and Mr. Sweet actually gave his time to....

Mr. Sweet, please.

Mr. David Sweet: You mentioned the Iranian model being like the Chinese model. I thought that was quite good.

One of the things I understand is that unlike China, Iran has not been able to have control over its electronic media. Am I correct, or have they actually developed a sophistication as far as monitoring their media is concerned, limiting their media more than what I'm knowledgeable of?

Mr. Patrick Clawson: The Iranian government puts some considerable effort into monitoring Internet and other media outlets. But it also long ago decided that it's advantageous to the regime to allow intellectuals to say whatever they want in journals that nobody reads. Therefore, the Iranian regime concentrates on state-run television and other mass media, while leaving alone literary journals, obscure artistic presentations, and movies and so on.

We in the west may be impressed that there are these remarkable pro-human rights, pro-democracy articles written in Iran, but that's because nobody gets to read them. What everybody sees in Iran is the very rigidly controlled state-run television and the very widely available newspapers, and those are very tightly controlled.

The government has a problem with the Internet, and they're working very hard on that. But with modern technology advances, text messaging has become a popular way to spread news in Iran, and the government now has to figure out how to do something about that. The intelligence minister announced last week that he has to have a big new program to control text messaging, but so far it hasn't really come into effect.

• (1400)

Mr. David Sweet: Thankfully.

The Chair: Our time has expired.

We're very grateful to you for your testimony. It was really very interesting and educational for all of us.

At this moment, it being 2 p.m., I will adjourn this meeting.

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