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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, February 8, 2012**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**



## Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Wednesday, February 8, 2012

• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** I call the meeting to order.

I would like to welcome everybody to meeting number 19 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), as we look at our briefing on the situation in Syria.

With us, we have two directors general from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Barbara Martin and Robin Dubeau. Thank you both for being here today.

I understand you have some opening remarks, Barbara.

**Ms. Barbara Martin (Director General, Middle East and Maghreb Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade):** I do indeed.

**The Chair:** We'll see how far we go. We understand that we may have bells at some point, but I'm optimistic that we can get most of your testimony in today.

Thank you both once again for taking the time to be here today to explain as best you can what is happening on the ground in Syria. We're looking forward to hearing from you. I'll just turn it over to you. We'll hear your opening statement and then we'll go around the room and ask some questions. We'll see how we make out.

Ms. Martin, thank you very much for being here. I turn the floor over to you.

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and honourable members.

We are indeed very pleased to be here to offer you some perspectives on the situation in Syria.

Security conditions in that country have deteriorated in recent months, and we are monitoring the situation hour by hour. We will continue to work with like-minded partners in the region and beyond, in pursuit of a peaceful resolution of the crisis.

If the Tunisian revolution was sparked by the self-immolation of a fruit vendor from Sidi Bouzid, you might say that the Syrian uprising erupted from a paint can in the border town of Daraa. There, 15 children were detained and cruelly tortured for painting anti-regime graffiti on March 6 of last year. The aftermath is a story of spiralling violence. The boys' families marched to the governor's house to demand their release, but they were met with live fire.

Protests ensued, and the Assad regime attempted to quell these by force, but the demonstrations only grew and spread to other cities. Calls for calm that fell upon deaf ears returned as demands for freedom, democracy, and eventually the departure of the Assad regime. Assad has attempted to placate the growing opposition movement with a gradual and belated series of concessions. However, the implementation of these measures has been limited, and Syria's security forces have maintained a crackdown that undermines promises of reform.

Last month, the United Nations pegged the death toll at more than 5,400. While the majority of the opposition remain peaceful, this relentless and brutal repression by the regime is provoking an armed insurrection.

Let me be clear that it is not yet, in our view, a civil war. Indeed, the attacks are mainly guerilla-style hit-and-run attacks, in some cases carried out by civilians who have taken up arms in response to the brutality of the regime rather than by the Free Syrian Army's corps of army defectors.

At times the armed opposition has shown itself capable of holding territory, but only temporarily. Defections are on the increase, although they include primarily low-ranking soldiers, as are attacks on regime-controlled targets. Weapons continue to flow into Syria. Violence has spread to more and more cities, including at times the normally calm Syrian capital of Damascus.

Descent into sectarian civil war is not inevitable, but there is a genuine risk if the violence continues to escalate. Given Syria's fragile sectarian balance, its geopolitical position, the regime's support for terrorist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah, and its reported stockpiles of chemical weapons, this would have significant implications for the stability of both Syria and the broader region.

Some analysts suggest that Syria might attempt to ease regional and domestic pressure by using its influence with Hezbollah to provoke a confrontation with Israel. However, both Hezbollah and Israel have repeatedly affirmed that they have no intention of initiating a confrontation. Instability in Syria could have significant implications for other neighbouring countries like Lebanon, where sectarian divisions are considered to be even greater than in Syria.

The gravity of the crisis is keenly felt by Syria's neighbours, who, along with the Syrian people themselves remain central to any solution. Turkey initially attempted to use its influence as an ally and economic partner to engage Syria diplomatically and to encourage reform. However, Turkey has since become frustrated with the intransigence of the regime. Turkey imposed sanctions on Syria on November 30.

The Arab League is currently at the forefront of efforts to resolve the crisis. Minister Baird has applauded its involvement and views it as a key player in any solution.

The Arab League has charted new ground as both an observer and as a peace broker. Its road map for democratic transition in Syria called on the regime to engage in dialogue with the opposition, leading to the formation of a national unity government under the vice-president. Under the Arab League plan, free and fair elections would be held and a new constitution would be submitted to popular referendum.

The strong stance of the Arab League underlines the unprecedented isolation of a country once described by Egyptian President Nasser as the “beating heart of Arabism”. It has also increased Syria's dependence on Iran, which is currently supplying the regime with arms and security personnel as well as oil and economic assistance. Syria has also become increasingly dependent on Russia, which remains a key supplier of arms to the Assad regime and last weekend obstructed efforts at the Security Council to effectively address this crisis.

As Minister Baird has said, Canada was deeply disappointed by the Security Council's paralysis. “History”, he said, “will judge those whose obstruction serves only to prolong this senseless violence.”

However, it is important to stress that no members of the international community are calling for international military intervention at this time.

• (1540)

[Translation]

Throughout the crisis, Canada has been clear: Assad must go. To this end, we have been working in concert with like-minded partners to further isolate his regime, and to increase the pressure on him to step aside and make way for a democratic transition.

On January 25, Canada imposed its fifth round of sanctions on Syria under the Special Economic Measures Act (SEMA). Measures imposed by Canada to date include: a prohibition on dealings with senior members and supporters of the Assad regime; sanctions on the Syrian petroleum sector; a prohibition on imports from Syria; a prohibition on new investment in Syria; and a prohibition on the export to Syria of software and equipment for telecommunications surveillance.

These sanctions are targeted in nature and are not aimed at the people of Syria. Our sanctions and those of our international partners are already starting to bite. They, along with years of economic mismanagement and, now, almost a full year of popular unrest, are edging Syria closer to an economic crisis, which could erode support for the regime among Syria's influential business community.

In addition to our SEMA sanctions, Canada has banned the export to Syria of all goods and technology subject to export controls. This includes arms and munitions, as well as military, nuclear and strategic items intended for use by the Syrian military, police or other state institutions. Any bilateral cooperation agreements and initiatives have been suspended.

The Canadian government has also been engaging the Syrian opposition. Minister Baird has personally met with representatives of

the Syrian National Council, one coalition of opposition groups, on multiple occasions, including a high-level delegation last December.

While we are currently extremely limited in our ability to meet opposition members inside Syria without jeopardizing their safety, Canadian officials maintain contacts with opposition members in exile. We have been encouraging the Syrian opposition to refrain from violence, to overcome internal differences and to develop a concrete plan for a post-Assad Syria that respects the rights of all its citizens, including minorities, and that lives in peace with its neighbours.

[English]

The government has also taken unprecedented steps to encourage Canadians in Syria to leave the country while commercial means are still available. That continues to be our advice. From December 15 to January 14 Canada undertook a voluntary evacuation, expediting the processing of travel documents for Canadian citizens and of visas for non-citizen dependent spouses and children. More than 470 requests for expedited services were received. During this period, Canadian officials also placed more than 3,400 calls to Canadians in Syria and their families in Canada and responded to more than 1,580 calls from Canadians.

Although Canadian citizens are under no obligation to inform the government of their movements, more than 300 of the Canadians in contact with DFAIT indicated that they had left Syria. There are 1,550 Canadians in Syria registered with ROCA, the registration of Canadians abroad service, though we believe that the actual number of Canadians in Syria is currently fewer than 5,000. Again, we continue to urge all Canadians in Syria to leave immediately while commercial means remain available.

The safety of Canadian embassy personnel continues to be a top priority. The embassy has reduced its staff since the end of the voluntary evacuation and is now operating at core staff levels. The visa and immigration service, previously the regional hub for citizenship and immigration, has been closed, and its services have been transferred to visa offices in neighbouring countries.

Like-minded embassies are also reducing their staff in response to a deteriorating security situation. Some countries have recalled their heads of mission for consultations, but their embassies remain open.

Even with reduced staff, the Canadian embassy also continues to play a valuable role in monitoring local political, economic, and security conditions. There have been suggestions that Canada should withdraw its ambassador from Damascus in light of the failure of the UN Security Council resolution; at this time we do not believe that a recall would add to the strong statements the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs have made about the situation. We are continuing to monitor the changing situation to ensure that our staff are safe.

Let me not understate it: the situation in Syria is grim, and we are profoundly concerned. The repression of the opposition by the Assad regime is relentless and merciless, and the opposition is increasingly taking up arms in response. In our view, the Arab League transition plan is the best hope for a peaceful solution to the crisis. It deserves our support. It would be an understatement to say that the failure of the Security Council last Saturday in this regard is a disappointment.

We have no illusions. The path ahead for Syrians and Syria's neighbours and the international community will be fraught with challenges; however, we remain committed to maintaining the pressure on the Assad regime and to working with the international community to bring an end to the current crisis.

We would be very happy to answer any questions you may have.

• (1545)

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

We'll start right away.

I believe we're going to have bells around 4:10, so I think we'll have time for one round anyway.

Let's get started right away.

Go ahead, Madam Laverdière.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for joining us today, Ms. Martin and Mr. Dubeau. This is a very important topic. Without wanting to play politics, I think that all of us here are also very concerned about the situation. I have a whole bunch of questions for you. I will start with the more important ones.

You are talking about working with the Arab League. What can Canada do to support and co-operate with the Arab League in its efforts?

[*English*]

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** Thank you very much.

If I may, I'll respond in English.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Yes, of course.

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** Canada has very vocally supported the Arab League efforts.

This is a very historic moment, a turning point in the nature of the activity and engagement of the Arab League. It is valuable that a regional organization is taking the lead in trying to find a solution to the current crisis. It has considerable credibility and clout in that respect. The observer mission that the league pulled together was composed of representatives of Arab League member countries, which was also a valuable statement. The United Nations had provided some direct support in, I believe, training some of the observers who were a part of that mission.

At this stage, our support is primarily with respect to encouraging the league in its efforts and offering our vocal support for its plan. Should the league request any particular engagement, certainly we would consider it very seriously.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you. I'm being very brief in my questions because time is so short.

I understand that there are about 12 Canada-based staff left in the embassy and that the embassy is in a relatively secure location in Damascus. I presume we have the specialists in consular affairs and emergency issues...?

• (1550)

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** We do. The ambassador is particularly attuned to the consular needs and to the safety of the Canadian staff. Mitigation measures have been put in place, but clearly I can't speak about those publicly. We are continually monitoring the situation closely. There's extensive dialogue between headquarters and the mission at this time.

Robin, I don't know if you wish to add to that.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robin Dubeau (Director General, Emergency Management Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade):** I will answer in French.

Our ambassador there is very proactive about monitoring various sources of information to have a better idea of what is happening on the ground. He has also put in place risk mitigation measures so that the staff is not exposed to violence. He is constantly updating emergency response plans. Our ambassador has shown great leadership in developing plans that have been simulated on a number of occasions, allowing the embassy to respond to any emergencies that could arise.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you very much.

Yes, I have no doubt that the ambassador is doing an outstanding job. From experience, I know experts who are not ambassadors and who usually go from one hot spot in the world to another. Their expertise in managing those types of situations is quite extraordinary. I obviously have every confidence in what the department can do.

To conclude,

[*English*]

perhaps the \$100 million dollar question is, what next? Where do we go from there? Do we go back to the UN and try again at the UN?

I know you can't give any details, but without mentioning countries and to the extent you can talk about it, who are our main partners? I'm thinking of the U.S., the U.K., France, and so on. What are they thinking of or seeing as potential next steps?

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** That is the \$100 million dollar question, and it's a very difficult one to answer without breaking confidences.

There is a considerable amount of activity behind the scenes, with talk between those who supported the Arab League plan and were disappointed by the outcome of the UN Security Council resolution, and there is an effort under way to try to find ways to support the Arab League concretely, but those are, at this stage, very preliminary discussions.

If I might add this in response to your previous question, when I said there was dialogue back and forth between the embassy and headquarters, Minister Baird himself spoke with the ambassador just yesterday to review the security situation and the safety of the Canadians in Damascus at this time. He also thanked them for the extraordinary work they've have been doing under extremely difficult conditions.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** I have one last point. How much are we monitoring and what do we know about arms transfers from Russia to Syria?

I'm sorry again for my very brief question. Please don't think this is rude. It's because I want to hear you as much as possible.

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** We are aware that there are arms transfers. Exactly how much is again is difficult to say in a public forum. I regret that.

We are concerned sufficiently to have raised our concerns about Syria with the Russians through a *démarche* by our embassy in Moscow. I think many others in the international community are equally concerned about that particular situation.

Syria itself indeed is becoming increasingly isolated from its neighbours and from the international community. Its friends are narrowing considerably. Our hope is that people will be persuaded that the extent of the repression and the violence in Syria is insupportable and that it is time to stop these arms transfers.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to move over to Mr. Dechert. Sir, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Martin, for your report here today.

Do you know if the Prime Minister has had an opportunity to raise the issue of Syria with the Chinese government in Beijing during his visit there?

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** I don't know.

• (1555)

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** My understanding is that he has, and that he has made clear Canada's position on China's vote at the UN Security Council.

We are also aware of the recent decision the U.S. made to suspend operations at their embassy in Syria and to bring their ambassador back for consultations. I'm wondering if you could provide the committee with some context as to what led specifically to that decision by the United States, and in diplomatic terms, whether this means that the U.S. has suspended all diplomatic relations with Syria?

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** I'll answer the easy part of the question first: no, the U.S. has not suspended its diplomatic relations. It has simply closed its embassy at this time.

It has been reported in the media that the reasons for closing the embassy were related to the security situation in Damascus, which was particular to the U.S. embassy and to certain threats they felt they were exposed to; the media also reported that the Syrian regime

could not give assurances that it would be able to provide sufficient security for the embassy, so the closure of the American embassy was based on a rationale that applies to the particular U.S. situation in Damascus.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Thank you.

In your remarks, you referenced Syria's dependence on Iran, which of course is supplying arms and security personnel to the Assad regime. The Prime Minister has been unequivocal in his position that Iran poses the greatest threat to global peace and security.

How concerning is this, and how has the government concurrently been applying pressure on the Iranian regime?

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** Iran is a concern to Canada for three reasons. One is the serious human rights violations and the repression of any kind of political dissent within the regime. The second is the impact that Iran is having regionally through its support of Hamas and Hezbollah, which is destabilizing in Syria itself and also in Lebanon. It poses a threat to Israel as a consequence. Only just this week, President Ahmadinejad said that Israel is a cancer that must be cut out.

However, the primary concern is about Iran's nuclear activities and its unwillingness to be transparent with the international community about what it is actually doing. It claims those activities are for peaceful purposes, but the IAEA report in November detailed evidence that there were linkages between its nuclear activities and its military activities, which then raised very serious doubts.

It is actively enriching uranium to the level of 20%, which is not sufficient to build a nuclear bomb—you need 90% enriched uranium to do that—but the process to take it to 90% once it has reached 20% is quite quick. They have sufficient uranium for approximately four bombs. This is extremely concerning.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to share the rest of my time with Ms. Brown.

**Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Martin, you've touched on something I'm very interested in, which is the threat to Israel.

Given the instability in Syria and their dependence on Iran for their arms—and oil too, I think—I wonder if you could comment on the oil coming in. What is their level of dependence on oil from Iran, and can you expand any more on the threat to Israel and what that looks like in the geopolitical sense?

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** I can't give a great deal of detail about the actual dependence of Syria on Iranian oil. However, the situation in Syria vis-à-vis its economic environment as a consequence of sanctions is becoming extremely difficult. The currency is falling, and there is inflation. There are breadlines forming. There are electricity blackouts because of the lack of access to fuel to run their generators. The dependence on the oil is keeping that economy limping forward.

As for the threat to Israel, certainly Israel perceives the threat from Iran as an existential threat, a threat to its very existence. This is because of the pronouncements of the regime with respect to Israel's existence. The support it has provided to Hamas and Hezbollah has equally been a threat. Both Hamas and Hezbollah are showing themselves to be increasingly reluctant to be allied with the Syrian regime right now, and the Hamas leader has been rumoured to be trying to persuade Assad to accept the Arab League plan. Hezbollah has also said that it will not seek to engage in a confrontation with Israel at this time.

The threat is very real, but the players right now are taking some fairly cautious stands, which I think is indicative of the extent to which people are worried about the overall consequences of the instability that would emanate from Syria.

• (1600)

**Ms. Lois Brown:** With regard to the proximity of Syria to Israel, we know that Iran has said it has missiles that would reach Israel at this point. I suppose that what they're putting up in the air can go across land too. Do you see them keeping this relationship with Syria open in order to use it as a strategic point if they ever decide to attack Israel?

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** That is potentially quite a good analysis. I can't say with any certainty either yes or no, but I think it reveals your understanding of the complexity of the situation.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Eyking, sir, you have seven minutes.

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming in on short notice. We just brought this up last week.

I've spent some time in Damascus. I was there on trade issues eight years ago with our government. It's quite an eye-opener to see the large youth population of Damascus. There's a lot of unemployment, and you can almost sense the frustration among the populace, so I'm not totally surprised by what's happening.

The Russians have been visiting there in just the last couple of days, and apparently they've been quite well received. According to reports, over a million people showed up at the rally when the Russians landed there. Many people know that most of the support Assad has is from minorities; he has a big following with them. Gadhafi and Mubarak seemed to have mostly military support, but as these things unfold, it gets more complicated if there's a large population supporting a dictator or whatever it maybe.

What I'm concerned about.... We hope that down the road there is going to be a good outcome from this turmoil, but I'm concerned about these minorities and the role they're playing right now. How they might be treated in the aftermath, when this is all said and done?

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** I think that's a legitimate concern.

The Assad regime is from the Alawite minority, which actually represents only 12% of the population. Christians represent 10% and the Jewish group makes up 3%.

The Alawites, the Christians, and the Sunni elites support the Assad regime. The majority Sunni are in opposition to the regime; this is why there is tremendous concern about the evolution of a sectarian war within Syria, and about the considerable vulnerability that the Alawite minority or even the Christian minority might feel if a Sunni majority is able to take over power in the country. There is unease about what this would mean for the future in terms of minority rights within Syria.

**Hon. Mark Eyking:** Yes, because there are many examples in history. We saw what happened in Rwanda. When somebody gets power all of a sudden, it can be a scary thing.

Also, it's my understanding that the opposition council is stationed in Turkey. Does our embassy in Turkey have a lot of dialogue with them? I don't know how much influence there is, but I'm hoping. Is that dialogue perhaps helping to prepare them for this? It could be inevitable that they are going to be ruling. It's similar to how we had to deal with Libya. Can you tell me more about what's happening there?

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** There is a great deal of engagement, not just through our embassy in Ankara, but with a number of embassies around the world. The Syrian National Council is primarily made up of expatriate Syrians, and one of the challenges it faces is developing its base of support inside.

The conversations with them are similar to the conversations that we've had in headquarters as well, urging them towards a peaceful solution but also trying to find unity within the opposition itself, trying to map out a strategic plan for how they would handle it, and of course continually urging the fundamentals of democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights, including women and minorities. It's a mantra for our officials in the field.

• (1605)

**Hon. Mark Eyking:** When I was doing the trade talks there, we found that it's a hard place to do business. We weren't successful. We were trying to help companies with their natural gas; Syria has a great wealth of natural gas.

In part of your presentation, you talked about sanctions in the petroleum sector and the changes you're going to make. What do we do very much of there? Do we have much of an economic stick in what we are trying to do or are doing?

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** We've been among the earliest among our allies to impose sanctions on the Syrian regime, including the sanctions on the petroleum sector. Those sanctions, because they are done by a group of significant traders with Syria, are starting to have bite. Syria relies heavily on oil revenue to support government revenue.

**Hon. Mark Eyking:** I'm also worried about our companies. That's what I was leading to; how could our companies be affected by these sanctions?

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** Our current commercial exposure in Syria is quite low. The largest commercial engagement pulled out of Syria a number of months ago. Actually, they operated through European offices, and it was largely as a consequence of the sanctions the European Union imposed that they were compelled to pull out; our trade relations with Syria, which were small, will now be diminished even further.

**Hon. Mark Eyking:** You're saying the impact will not be huge on our companies because we're not that big in there.

That's it, Mr. Chair. I don't have any more questions.

**The Chair:** We'll move back over to the Conservative side.

Do you have any questions? I know we're waiting for bells, but we can keep going until then.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Ms. Martin, can you tell us about the government's call for remaining Canadians to leave Syria?

I understand that in December the government announced a voluntary evacuation for Canadians in Syria. Can you explain what the "open express lane" entailed and how this program worked? How was the Syrian community in Canada engaged in that process?

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** I'll defer to my colleague, Mr. Dubeau.

**Mr. Robin Dubeau:** The voluntary evacuation was launched for a period of one month, from mid-December to mid-January. It was an attempt to document people as quickly as possible so that they could benefit from existing commercial options to leave the country.

We put in place different measures during that time, from small-scale measures to larger ones. The first one was to extend the opening hours of the embassy to receive as many Canadians as possible. The fast lane that you were referring to was to expedite the production of travel documents and immigration documents. For instance, a passport application would normally take 15 working days; we were able to produce passports in five working days. That would enable people to take advantage of commercial options that were available for them to leave. We would point them to those commercial options through travel agencies and we would also point them to airline companies and ground transportation companies.

Another measure we put in place was to increase the capacity of our 24/7 call centre so that when we received calls from the Canadian community here in Canada or from people on the ground in Syria, we could direct their questions and get answers as fast as possible. As my colleague said in her opening remarks, we received close to 1,600 calls. We also placed 3,400 calls in an attempt to give people registered with us the latest information.

One of the last measures we put in place was really to communicate as much as possible through all available means—mass email, mass SMS messaging, texting, calling people, and calling the families here as well—to convince their loved ones to leave the country. We believe it's been effective, given that about 300 of them who were in contact with us during that period said they had left.

Those basically, in a nutshell, are the measures we put in place for that period.

• (1610)

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** It sounds as though you made some very significant efforts to assist Canadians in Syria.

Do you have any idea how many Canadian citizens remain in Syria today?

**Mr. Robin Dubeau:** Well, as my colleague said, close to 1,600 Canadians are still registered with us in the database, but there's no obligation for anyone to register. The assessment that the mission

made through different calculations—it's more of an estimate than any scientific number—is that there are fewer than 5,000.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Do you have an estimate for us on the size of the Syrian Canadian diaspora community in Canada?

**Mr. Robin Dubeau:** In Canada? I couldn't answer this question.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Have you been working with any of the Syrian Canadian organizations on the evacuation and the other issues surrounding the current crisis in Syria?

**Mr. Robin Dubeau:** Yes. Before Christmas, we organized several—two, if my memory serves me well—teleconferences with Syrian Canadian associations and Arab League associations in an attempt to explain the nature of those measures and to encourage them to reach their loved ones back in Syria and convince them to take advantage of those measures to leave the country.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** I can tell you that I have met with Syrian Canadians in my city of Mississauga, where there's a large community of Syrian Canadians. I met with them recently, during the parliamentary break. They are generally quite pleased with the service they've been getting from our embassy in Syria and the Department of Foreign Affairs and with the position that Canada has taken thus far on the crisis in Syria. We're going to continue to engage with them and certainly will let you know what we hear directly from them.

**Mr. Robin Dubeau:** I'm very happy to hear that. Thank you.

**Mr. Bob Dechert:** Do you have another question?

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Do I have time?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** I'll put the question on the floor, and if there's any opportunity to address it... I'm just wondering what our engagement has been with the Arab League, what kinds of communications we have had with them, if any, and how they are going.

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** I can give a very quick response to that. Our ambassador in Cairo, where the Arab League has its headquarters, has met with the head of the Arab League. We continue our conversations at various levels, but dialogue has occurred right at the top.

**The Chair:** Okay. I think Madam Laverdière has a quick question, just to wrap up.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** There may be two very quick questions.

First, on ROCA, do dual citizens generally register on ROCA, and are the Canadians registered on ROCA mainly expats or dual citizens?

**Mr. Robin Dubeau:** They're mainly dual citizens. We have very few Canadians who don't have dual citizenship registered with us in the database.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Okay. Thank you.

I have one other question, and it's a big question. In a few words, could you give us your assessment of the current state of the Syrian army? There have been reports that the army was starting to lose ground and has fewer resources and is getting weaker.



**Ms. Barbara Martin:** The Syrian army is large and extremely well equipped. It is also, in general, very loyal. It is a formidable force.

**The Chair:** Mr. Eyking, you can have one last question, and then we're going to wrap up.

**Hon. Mark Eyking:** I have a question about Lebanon. Lebanon was once part of Syria, way back, and there's a close connection. When you talk to the Lebanese community in Canada, you hear that they're very worried because they have relatives in Syria, and vice versa. There are people working back and forth.

Are there any concerns we should worry about on the Lebanese border or on refugees coming in? What could be the repercussions for Lebanon of everything that's happening?

**Ms. Barbara Martin:** You've highlighted exactly the concern. If there is sectarian tension in Syria, it will likely spill over the border into Lebanon, where the same sectarian groups are represented, so there is a risk. There's also a risk of refugee flows, of people who are afraid of the mounting violence fleeing over the border towards Lebanon.

**The Chair:** Ms. Martin and Mr. Dubeau, thank you very much for being here.

We're going to adjourn the meeting now. We won't be coming back in the second hour only because there's not going to be enough time.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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