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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, September 9, 2014**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**



## Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, September 9, 2014

• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our briefing on the deployment of Canadian Armed Forces personnel in Iraq will begin.

I want to introduce our witnesses who are at the table.

We have with us today, Peter Boehm, who is the associate deputy minister of Foreign Affairs. Welcome, sir, we're glad to have you here.

Sitting next to him, we have Ambassador Andrew Bennett, who is the ambassador of the office for religious freedom. Welcome, sir.

We also have Minister Baird, the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

We have Minister Nicholson, the Minister of Defence.

We also have Thomas Lawson, who is the Chief of the Defence Staff.

We are going to start with the opening statements. We will start with Mr. Nicholson. Then we'll move to Mr. Baird and finish up with Mr. Bennett. Then we'll go around the room over the next two hours to ask questions to fill in some of the blanks based on the testimony.

Minister Nicholson, I'm going to turn the floor over to you now. The floor is yours, sir.

**Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, honourable members, I want to thank you for the invitation to appear before your committee today.

[English]

I also want to thank you all for taking time out of your schedules to come back from your ridings in order to be here in Ottawa to discuss this very important issue.

As everyone around the table unfortunately knows, the world has borne witness to unspeakable barbarism in northern Iraq in recent months at the hands of an Islamist terrorist entity known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, also known as the ISIL.

Stories have emerged of horrific beheadings. We have heard reports of mass graves and children being buried alive. We have also heard that Yazidi women are being kidnapped and sold into slavery by ISIL fighters. Those who refuse to convert to Islam are killed. So let us not mince words. This terrorist organization is not only

committing barbaric murders through the systemic killing of religious minorities, but represents a real and growing threat to civilization itself. This is unacceptable to Canadians and to this government.

It is incumbent upon all nations who believe in democracy, religious freedom, freedom of expression, and the rule of law to confront those who would threaten the innocent.

[Translation]

This is why our government has decided to take action. I am happy to be here to provide you with details on the role the Canadian Armed Forces will play.

[English]

Following my remarks, the Minister of Foreign Affairs will be addressing the committee on the current situation in Iraq and his first-hand experience on the ground.

As you know, last Friday in Wales, at the NATO summit, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a statement regarding the Government of Canada's response to the situation in Iraq. Prime Minister Harper announced a deployment of several dozen members of the Canadian Armed Forces to Iraq, a deployment that will begin shortly upon final discussion with the Government of Iraq. The Canadian Armed Forces members in question will provide strategic and tactical advice to Iraqi forces with the goal of increasing their effectiveness in operations against the extremist group.

Let me be clear. These forces will be present in an advisory and assistance role, not a combat role.

Mr. Chair, this deployment is in support of Iraqi security forces because any long-term solution to Iraq's stability is first and foremost an Iraqi responsibility. The initial deployment of our troops will be for a period of up to 30 days and it will be reassessed after that time. I'm happy to say that although Canada's contributions are important, we are not alone in offering assistance to the Government of Iraq. In fact, the Canadian Armed Forces will work closely with their U.S. counterparts in this mission and will be joining our allies in providing critical advice to the forces in Iraq as they continue to repel the terrorist advance.

Mr. Chair, I would also like to remind the committee that the Government of Canada has also previously taken steps to assist the people of Iraq. On August 15 the Prime Minister announced that Canada would begin delivering critical military supplies to Iraqi security forces in order to assist them in their fight against ISIL. A CC-130J Hercules transport aircraft and one CC-177 Globemaster 3 Strategic Airlifter were committed to transport military supplies donated by our allies. Based in staging locations in the Mediterranean, approximately 75 Canadian Armed Forces personnel have been deployed for this work. This includes air crew, ground crew, and logistical support personnel.

I can confirm that 11 flights by the Royal Canadian Air Force have taken place delivering almost 500,000 pounds of military supplies from our allies. These supplies are enabling Iraqi security forces to halt the advance of ISIL while preventing further attacks against defenceless populations. Recently the Minister of Foreign Affairs announced that Canada will contribute \$15 million in non-lethal security assistance to support Iraqi security forces and to limit the movement of foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria.

Mr. Chairman, the Government of Canada is taking these steps because this terrorist organization has created a grave security and humanitarian crisis in Iraq. This terrorist group is responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent men, women, and children. It is clear that the further encroachment of ISIL threatens the territorial integrity of Iraq and poses a very real threat to regional and global security. There is real concern that this radical militant group is likely to harbour terrorists that may threaten Canada and our allies. Canadians are reading reports of these atrocities and they are concerned. This is why, in coordination with our allies and the Government of Iraq, Canada has taken these deliberate steps to help bolster the Iraqi security forces as they counter ISIL's militant activities and expansionist agenda.

Mr. Chair, this deployment is a tangible example of our determination to contain this terrorist group while helping to mitigate the ongoing humanitarian crisis. This is not a combat mission. This mission is not without risk. As always, and General Lawson will attest to this, our men and women in uniform are ready to answer the call. I think I speak for all of us around this table and all Canadians in thanking them for always being prepared to defend Canadian values and interests in this increasingly dangerous world.

[Translation]

• (1105)

Again, honourable members, thank you for taking the time to convene and discuss this issue.

[English]

It's my hope that, given the direness of the situation, we can come together and support these efforts to save lives and push back this threat to global security.

Both the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Tom Lawson, and I will be available afterwards for questions.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister Nicholson.

We'll now turn the floor over to Minister Baird for his opening remarks.

**Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and colleagues.

Just a few short days ago I got back from Iraq where I was joined by two of our colleagues here today, Paul Dewar and Marc Garneau. We went to demonstrate Canada's solidarity with the people of Iraq in this incredibly challenging time, to see the situation for ourselves, to urge Iraqi leaders to come together in a united and pluralistic government, and to learn about what more needs to be done.

I have to tell you that it was an emotional trip at times. It was just absolutely horrifying to see the literally hundreds of thousands of people who have been forced to flee their homes, and to listen to the stories about what they are fleeing from.

I think I can speak not just for this government and this Parliament but for this country when I say that we are determined that Canada will do its part in dealing with this crisis, on both a security, and just as important, a humanitarian level.

I'd like to take a few minutes to reflect on the rise of ISIL, the nature of the challenge that it has created, and some of the steps that need to be taken in tackling this challenge. After that I'd of course be keen to take any questions, ideas, suggestions, or comments you may have.

When confronted by the Arab Spring—now nearly a deep winter—Bashar al-Assad, an Alawite Shia, embarked upon a bloody campaign against his own people. Regional Sunni jihadists found their clarion call. Al-Qaeda in Iraq, the forebear of ISIL, grew increasingly sophisticated as they effectively erased the border between Iraq and Syria.

At the same time, Sunni tribes and leaders in Iraq grew increasingly disenchanted by the overly sectarian government in Baghdad. ISIL and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed caliph of the so-called Islamic State, filled that void.

As we've all watched in shock at the speed of their advance and the brutality they have employed, they have captured Mosul and other cities, and have taken over key infrastructure, including dams, oil fields, and military facilities. In doing so, they have executed hundreds of Iraqi troops. They have ruthlessly targeted anyone they don't agree with, and there are growing reports of them using rape as a weapon of war, a horrible phenomenon against which Canada has been campaigning with the United Kingdom and others.

We know about some of these actions because they themselves document them to fan the flames of terror in the hearts of those they seek to rule. They don't hide their brutality; they in fact promote it. They film it; they tweet it, and they bask in the reaction that it causes. The despicable beheading of two international journalists in particular has raised the profile of the terrible threat they pose. But let's not forget the thousands who have been victims of the same treatment. Those who happen to believe in God in a different way have tragically taken the brunt of their wrath.

Our government has consistently spoken out on matters with respect to religious freedom, and I'm glad that Canada's ambassador for religious freedom, Dr. Andrew Bennett, has joined us to brief us on that aspect.

The reality is that ISIL intends to eliminate the very notion of religious freedom through bloodshed and through fear. Repugnant reports continue to stream in of Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen Shiites, and others, including women and children, being ordered to convert to ISIL's barbaric interpretation of Islam or face death.

I remember talking to a Christian family at an IDP camp last week. Their neighbours had informed on them to ISIL and within five minutes they had to escape for their lives. This is one of just so many stories of the scale of human tragedy. Really, it's hard to comprehend, just as it is frankly hard to stomach.

• (1110)

[Translation]

What we are facing here is one of the most barbaric terrorist groups the world has ever seen. This is not someone else's problem. We are talking about a group of people who want to impose their barbarism everywhere from southern Spain through to India.

Their world view is a direct challenge to the values of western civilization, and it is a threat to international security and stability. It is obviously in all of our interests not to allow them to have a foothold from which they can launch attacks abroad. This battle against terrorism is one of the great struggles of our generation.

[English]

What we are facing here is one of the most barbaric terrorist groups the world has ever seen. It is not somebody else's problem. It is not a problem that will remain between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. It's obviously in all of our interests to not allow them to have a foothold from which they can launch attacks abroad. The battle against terrorism I believe is the great struggle of our generation. We don't know how long the struggle will take or exactly how it will unfold, but there are actions that can be taken now to stem the flow of the threat, both by Iraqis, and just as importantly, by the international community.

There are three key areas for action. We need a firm and focused response from Iraqi authorities. We need to assist those who are on the front lines of this fight. We need to continue to help those who are its victims.

First is a strong and united government. Like the fingers of a hand coming together into a tight fist, the stability and security of Iraq depend on its government presenting a united front against terrorist threats. This was a key focus of our meetings with leaders in Baghdad last week, so I was very pleased to see yesterday that the Iraqi Parliament has approved a new government and cabinet under the leadership of a new prime minister.

The unified leadership must put aside ethnic and religious divides and work together to meet the needs of all Iraqis, whatever their creed or colour. As I made clear to the government last week, Canada has committed to work with them as they seek to do this. It is tremendously important that this government have not just an

inclusive cabinet, but an inclusive program that reaches out to Kurds, to Sunnis, and to other minorities.

Minister Nicholson has covered what we're doing so far on the security front. The humanitarian challenge is just as daunting.

The violence has displaced some 850,000 people over the last two months alone. That adds up to a staggering 1.4 million since the beginning of just this year. In response to this, Canada is providing additional humanitarian support that will directly help to alleviate their hardship. Practical aid is being provided: food, hygiene kits, cooking materials, blankets, tents, medicines, and other important supplies.

Much of our security and humanitarian assistance is focused on the Kurdish region, which we visited as part of our trip last week. Ambassador Saccomani has also been spending time there, and I'd like to pay special tribute to his hard work. ISIL has been testing the peshmerga while the KRG leadership also works to provide humanitarian relief. Also, our international allies have assessed that Kurdistan is where Canadian military help is needed. Canada stands with the Kurdish peshmerga soldiers who are bravely fighting these terrorists and holding back their advance in the north.

As I conclude, I ask that as we consider whether or how to act we also consider what happens if we don't act. What happens if Canada does not do everything in its power to stop this barbarism? Will we be willing to look ourselves in the mirror in 10 years and ask if we have done enough? In a situation like this, there are no easy options, quick fixes, and win-wins. It might seem easy to ignore as we go about our comfortable lives here in Canada. It might seem convenient to brush off options as leading to mission creep in the future, but the hard reality is that inaction is not an option.

• (1115)

[Translation]

The reality is that inaction is not an option. We must fight terrorism from a position of strength and unity. We also have to stand in solidarity with the Iraqi people during this incredibly difficult time.

[English]

That's all I wanted to say. I now look forward to hearing from Ambassador Bennett, who will deliver a few words.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister Baird.

We will now turn the floor over to Ambassador Bennett for his opening statement.

**Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett (Ambassador, Office of Religious Freedom, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, vice-chairs, and distinguished members of the committee.

[Translation]

I am honoured to have been invited to speak on the dire and truly grave situation faced by Iraq and its people.

I thank the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development for convening this meeting.

[English]

Since January and exponentially since June, the Iraqis have witnessed the newest and deadliest wave of hatred in the world against religious communities. By now, we are all familiar with the suffering and violence faced by millions of Iraqis at the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL.

We have witnessed thousands of families forced from their homes and into refugee camps for standing in the way of ISIL's purported Islamic caliphate. We have heard how hundreds of Yazidi women have now been abducted, converted to Islam, and married to ISIL militants against their will. We have watched the massive expulsion of nearly 200,000 Iraqi Christians from places like Mosul and the surrounding area, places in which their churches have been a continuing presence for nearly 2,000 years.

• (1120)

[Translation]

These images show us a reality we cannot ignore.

Since the creation of the Office of Religious Freedom, in February 2013, I have monitored the trend of increasing social hostilities directed towards many different religious communities in Iraq and the surrounding area.

In all my outreach to the various Iraqi and Syrian religious communities—including members of the Syriac and Chaldean Catholic Churches, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Assyrian Church of the East and the Canadian Yazidi community—every one of them shared the same anguish and the same fears about ISIL and its ideology, which drives its followers to perpetuate acts of such inhumane barbarism.

[English]

Minister Baird and I, as well as Prime Minister Harper, have vehemently spoken out against the violence perpetrated by ISIL against the Yazidis, Iraqi Christians from all the distinctive ecclesial traditions, Shiite Muslims, and others. I should also add that Sunni Muslims who do not agree with ISIL face active barbarism on a regular basis. On these occasions, Canada has repeatedly confirmed its leading role in protecting and advocating on behalf of all religious communities under threat, regardless of their faith, ethnicity, or country of origin.

[Translation]

As the Ambassador for Religious Freedom, I have also made it a priority to raise awareness among Canadians on these atrocities that target our fellow human beings based on the faith they profess. In seeking to raise awareness amongst our fellow Canadians, I have further emphasized how democracy cannot find fertile ground where freedom of religion—including the freedom to worship in peace and security—is not respected.

[English]

I will continue to advocate strongly with our allies in this cause, and with the support of my colleagues in the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, for greater championing of religious freedom in Iraq and in the region, for increased religious dialogue, which is essential for pluralism to thrive in Iraq and the broader region, and for guaranteeing the safety and dignity of religious communities in Iraq. We hope to be aided in this effort by the newly created contact group on religious freedom, an initiative spearheaded by my office to develop, among like-minded partners on the issue of religious freedom, common approaches and joint activities to promote and defend religious freedom around the world. In the past month I have performed extensive outreach with Iraqi and Syrian religious communities, including members of the Chaldeo Syriac Assyrian churches, the Yazidi community, the Jewish community including the World Jewish Congress, and Muslim communities, as well as many other churches and Christian denominations, to identify how best to help and support these gravely threatened communities. This has included a focused discussion with a number of faith-based aid organizations such as the Catholic Near East Welfare Association and Aid to the Church in Need.

Tomorrow, as part of the discussions in Toronto with the Ismaili Imamats and the Aga Khan Development Network, I will seek their perspective on how Muslims might be more directly engaged in taking action, in whatever way, to defend the religious freedom of religious minorities in the Middle East.

The office of religious freedom, through its religious freedom fund, is currently assessing a number of projects in Iraq to increase interfaith dialogue and lay the foundation for a safe and respectful environment for religious minorities in Iraq.

[Translation]

In the next two to three months, the office will continue to work closely with partner organizations to identify initiatives to improve interfaith relations and dialogue in Iraq in the medium and long term, and further contribute to the development of a country where every individual has the opportunities and resources to continue to practice their faith freely and without fear.

• (1125)

[English]

The religious freedom programming is an integral component of Canada's broader long-term strategy to address the situation in Iraq and assist the victims of ISIL. It will be designed to complement Canada's assistance effort in Iraq, including humanitarian aid, and will contribute to the development of a stable Iraq where religious freedom is fully endorsed, as only a unified, pluralistic, and representative government can overcome the current crisis.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I very much look forward to the committee's questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ambassador.

We are going to start as we normally do. It's our custom to have a first round of seven minutes for all parties. We're going to start with Mr. Harris, followed by Mr. Bezan, and then Mr. Gameau. Then we're going to move into five-minute rounds as we move forward through the rest of the questions.

I'm going to start with Mr. Harris.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your presentations this morning.

All Canadians are of course extremely concerned about the extreme violations of international humanitarian law, crimes against humanity, and war crimes that have been committed. We're also obviously very concerned about the hundreds and thousands, as Minister Baird mentioned, of displaced persons within Iraq who have left with, in many cases, nothing but the clothes on their back. My colleagues will deal with some of that, but I want to deal with the military aspect of it and the response announced by the Prime Minister. We do need some clarity here, because we've heard numbers such as a few dozen, which you mentioned here today, but we've also heard a hundred, which is a little more than that. You talked about 75 Canadian forces being involved in the airlift, but the announcement on August 15 was about 30.

We'd like to have a little bit of clarity, so I have four simple questions.

First of all, Mr. Nicholson, how many Canadian Forces troops are being deployed to Iraq? Are they special operations forces? Where specifically will they be? What language capability does the Canadian Armed Forces have to operate in the role you mentioned, the advisory role in amongst the Kurds in Iraq? I understand that is where we'll be helping.

I have those four questions first, and if you could keep the answers short, it would be great, because I have a few other questions as well.

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Again, at this point in time, several dozen will be deployed to that area, Mr. Harris. They will be special operations forces. I can indicate that to you. They will be located in northern Iraq, and it's my understanding that we will be using translation services in cooperation with our allies.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Perhaps General Lawson should answer the second question.

Do we have a status of forces agreement with the Iraqi government? I know there's a question of getting the consent of the Iraqi government. We think we should also get the consent of the Canadian Parliament, but a status of forces agreement should be very important. When will we be likely to have one of those?

Second, General Lawson, could you indicate and describe the chain of command between you and our troops on the ground that are proposed to go to Iraq?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Might I just answer that first, General? The Chief of the Defence Staff will be in charge of Canadian Forces in Iraq. We will work in cooperation and in collaboration with our allies, but the Chief of the Defence Staff will have the control and ultimate responsibility for Canadian Forces.

That being said, we have several Canadians on the ground now, and they have been welcomed by the Iraqi government. Again, we will be working with the new government for their cooperation.

Is there anything you wanted to add, General?

**Mr. Jack Harris:** I think my question was a bit more specific than that regarding a status of forces agreement. I don't think General Lawson would be on the ground there, so the chain of command is also of interest.

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Again, they come under the responsibility of the Canadian Armed Forces, and ultimately that responsibility resides with General Lawson. As we have on a number of these occasions, we'll work in collaboration with our allies, but the forces on the ground will be under Canadian direction and control.

**General Thomas Lawson (Chief of the Defence Staff, Department of National Defence):** The only thing I would add to that, Mr. Chairman, is that the articles normally covered in a SOFA, as you've mentioned, will be provided to us through a diplomatic note that our partners at Foreign Affairs are helping us with at this time.

**Hon. John Baird:** If I could briefly—

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Do you have any notion of timing, Minister Baird?

**Hon. John Baird:** I'll be very quick.

Prime Minister al-Maliki has not led an inclusive government and it has been problematic in this interim period. With the formation of the new government, which Parliament approved last night, that should follow in short order.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** When are we talking about in terms of actual deployment?

• (1130)

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Again, for national security reasons we don't pinpoint these things, but our appearance before today and the briefings that we have given you and the announcements that we have made have indicated that Canadian Forces will be deployed. We don't give the exact time and place for obvious security reasons.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Are we talking a week? Are we talking a month?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Again, we're moving as quickly as possible, and as I indicated to you, there are already members of the Canadian lead in this area on the ground.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** You still haven't answered the question of how many. Of course, that's pretty obvious. We are proposing a 30-day mission. I don't know what is expected to be accomplished within 30 days, but perhaps you could tell us that.

When the Prime Minister announced this in Wales, in his speech he said that the contribution of Canada is based on an assessment by the United States as to how Canada could best contribute. A review, or reassessment, in 30 days; will that be based on what the Americans think in 30 days? Or do we have any specific criteria by which a judgment might be made of whether Canada would continue in the role that's being proposed, or some other role, or as it's sometimes called, although I don't necessarily like the term, "mission creep", which has been a way of describing what might come next?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** As my colleague I think just said in comments yesterday, we have to deploy and assist people where we can. It's not a question of mission creep. Otherwise we wouldn't be there to help anybody, if that was always hanging over our head.

That being said, we've said that we're going to analyze this on an ongoing basis. I think it's quite reasonable to say that after we're on the ground and we are moving to assist...that to have this reviewed in 30 days I think is entirely appropriate. I'm hoping you'll agree with that and that you'd want us to have an ongoing analysis of how this is working.

**Hon. John Baird:** If I could, we have two short-term goals. One is obviously to stop the advance of ISIL so we can contain the growing humanitarian catastrophe. Two is to provide support to the KRG and Iraqi officials and forces to turn back the advance, to support, to help them help themselves. This thing is moving very quickly. The advance was very quick.

On a positive side, the airdrops to support the Yazidi and religious minorities on the mountaintop went demonstrably faster than anyone could have imagined. This thing is moving very quickly. The Prime Minister has obviously said he will review it after 30 days, which I think is intelligent.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Baird and Mr. Harris.

We'll now move to Mr. Bezan for seven minutes, please.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Minister Baird, Minister Nicholson, General Lawson, Ambassador Bennett, and Mr. Boehm for being with us today to help shed some light on exactly what's happening in Iraq with ISIL and of course what role the Canadian Armed Forces will be playing. I think all of us are very disturbed, disgusted and revolted by the violence we've witnessed. I know that we over and over again want to express our condolences to all the families who have been victimized and terrorized by ISIL.

In follow up to some of the questions Mr. Harris asked, I think it's important to say from the standpoint of this whole conversation about mission creep that we're talking about a 30-day deployment. How will we at the end of 30 days determine success, define the mission mandate? We've laid out, Minister, some of the objectives, but how do we actually measure that and know whether or not we've achieved those objectives?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** As Minister Baird just indicated in answer to the previous question, we're going to assess what's actually happening on the ground. We will do this in cooperation with our allies. We'll want to see if we're making a difference. This is a very tragic situation, and we believe we have to do our part to assist in averting any more tragedy of this type.

I think it's reasonable to analyze after a relatively short period of time exactly what's happening on the ground and what we're doing. I think that's entirely appropriate.

**Mr. James Bezan:** From the standpoint of the forces that we're putting on the ground, all in leadership positions, you talked about being there to assist and advise, not being in a combat role. Can we just tell Canadians how prepared the Canadian Armed Forces are to carry out this type of mission, what their experience, their expertise,

is, and exactly what they're doing in collaboration with Iraqi security forces?

• (1135)

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** As you know, Mr. Bezan, nobody has a better record in this world of getting the job done and stepping up to the plate when called upon than the members of our Canadian Armed Forces. As I indicated, these will be our special operation forces that we will be deploying in northern Iraq. They will come well equipped, well trained, to deal with the situation on the ground, but as you pointed out, and as we indicated in our opening comments, we are there for advising and for technical assistance. We are well placed to do that, and we'll do that in collaboration with our allies.

**Mr. James Bezan:** How do the goals and objectives that we've laid out for the Canadian Armed Forces coincide with the other coalition partners that we're working with? I know that we are in charge of our forces on the ground, but what is the overall objective of the coalition? Exactly what is the overall impact that we believe this is going to have on the current situation as well as regional security?

**Hon. John Baird:** Obviously President Obama will be speaking to this in terms of the like-minded coalition that is emerging.

Obviously the United States is providing a substantial amount of assistance. The United Kingdom is providing humanitarian aid and is transporting arms and munitions from European partners to the Kurds. They have deployed six Tornados to the theatre and four Chinooks. France is providing humanitarian assistance and is willing to join the United States in airstrikes. They are shipping weapons to KRG authorities. Germany is providing humanitarian assistance like Canada has announced, that it would send arms to assist the KRG, and is committed to provide other non-lethal military assistance. It has deployed a small number of military officials to oversee delivery. I could go on and mention Australia, the Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Albania, the EU, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Norway, Sweden, and Japan.

**Mr. James Bezan:** I know one of the concerns that we've heard from Canadians is the risk factor. The Prime Minister even alluded that no mission comes without risk. How are we going to mitigate that risk and the exposure to our forces?

If something does happen how do we deal with a medical emergency?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** You quite correctly pointed out, as has been pointed out by the Prime Minister, that there are no missions that do not come without risk. We will take very opportunity to minimize that risk at the same time getting the job done that we are deploying these members for. My understanding is this is in complete cooperation with our allies in terms of medical assistance, and anything of that particular type. That being said, these missions are carried out with considerable caution and care, and deliberate planning. They don't come without risk, but that being said, this is not a combat mission. This is for giving advice and technical assistance, and we'll proceed on that basis.



**Mr. James Bezan:** Mr. Chair, I will follow up with this question on the issue of mission creep. If things continue to escalate in Iraq with ISIL, do we foresee that there could be further military involvement?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Again, we have indicated, and the Prime Minister has indicated, that we are not putting boots on the ground. This is the role that we have designated for the Canadian Armed Forces and that's what we are going to continue, and again appropriately for caution's sake we will analyze exactly what has happened after approximately 30 days.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Since this announcement was made by Prime Minister Harper at the NATO summit in Wales, is this a NATO mission?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** It's not strictly a NATO mission. Certainly as you heard from the long list of countries that are cooperating with this, many of them are NATO partners, but some of them are not. This is an initiative by the Canadian government in cooperation with a number of allies, but it is not in and of itself a NATO mission.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Bezan and Minister Nicholson.

We will now complete the first round with the Liberal Party, Mr. Garneau, for seven minutes please.

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Thank you, gentlemen, for your remarks this morning.

At the outset I'd like to make it clear where my party stands on Iraq and ISIS. Yes, we believe definitely that we should provide more humanitarian aid for roughly the over one million Iraqis who have been displaced because of ISIS and who fled into refugee camps in northern Iraq. There's no question that northern Iraq is overwhelmed with these refugees. Having said that, if we don't want these refugee camps to become permanent fixtures on the landscape, then ISIS has to be dislodged and eventually defeated. ISIS is indeed a threat to world security and Canada can't just say it's not our problem, because it is our problem. For that reason, my party supports the limited military role recently proposed by the government of sending in a group of advisers in a non-combat advisory role for a set period of time. Having said that, we would like to have more detail and more clarity.

You have stated that Canadian soldiers will provide tactical advice to the Kurdish peshmerga. My first question is, can you confirm that no Canadian soldiers will be in the trenches on the front lines, or taking part on the ground in any offensive or defensive operations?

• (1140)

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Again, I've indicated they are not taking a combat role. Their role will be strictly advice and technical assistance. Again, I think I've been very clear on that, Mr. Garneau. Again, we're not putting boots on the ground. We're not engaging in combat activity. Again, our role is very specific and very clear.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Thank you.

Sometime close to about the 30th day after arriving, the government's going to re-evaluate the Canadian role and decide on one of the following things. Either the job is done and we're leaving,

or we're going to extend our involvement in the same role, or we're going to extend our involvement but change the role.

I'd like to ask a fairly direct question here, and I would appreciate a yes or a no. If any changes are planned to the Canadian military role being discussed today will the government undertake to bring them to Parliament?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Again, the government has reached out, as you know, to members of the opposition to keep them informed about this engagement and indeed about all our activities in that area. I believe we will continue to keep other people, including the opposition, informed as to what we're doing.

**Hon. John Baird:** I think, Mr. Garneau, we are very committed to continuing an open dialogue with parliamentarians and all parties to communicate what we're doing. We've offered briefings, and we'll continue to do that. At this time the mission is what it is. Should it evolve or be extended, obviously we'll remain in close contact. I think we've shown good faith in not just bringing the critics to Iraq and having this offering and volunteering to have this committee sit early before Parliament resumes. Parliament will be back on Monday, and there will obviously be an opportunity on a daily basis to discuss these issues. There will be other opportunities on opposition days and in take-note debates. We certainly are committed to continuing to engage with the opposition so that it's very clear what we're doing and what we're not doing.

Obviously this is explicitly not a combat mission. Undoubtedly we will continue to do more on the humanitarian front and security front, and we are certainly committed to working constructively with all members of Parliament including the opposition.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Thank you, Ministers. I'll take that as a yes.

[*Translation*]

You said that the Chief of Defence Staff will be in charge of our soldiers at all times.

Can you explain to us how our soldiers will work with the chain of command of the Iraqis, Kurds and our coalition allies, especially the U.S. troops?

[*English*]

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** General Lawson may have comments on this. Again, as I indicated in response to an earlier question, the Canadian Forces will remain under Canadian command. As we do whenever we are involved with these types of activities, we work in close collaboration with our allies. Again, we are there to assist the people who are on the ground in their efforts to fight this terrorist group. Again, we will do that on a regular basis.

I don't know if you have anything to add, Tom.

**Gen Thomas Lawson:** The only thing I would add, Mr. Chairman, is that the lead elements have been warmly received by Iraqi forces and by the Iraqi government, and we'll be working in close cooperation and collaboration with the Americans, who have quite a background of activity in Iraq.

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** This is a very complex situation. Why did you decide to go with a 30-day period? Set up and integration take time. It seems to me that an initial 30-day period is too short for an operation of such multinational scope and complexity.

[*English*]

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Things change very quickly in that part of the world as you know, Mr. Garneau. Again, this is an ongoing crisis that changes very quickly as you know. I think it's entirely appropriate that on a regular basis we analyze exactly what it is we're doing and how we're doing on the ground, so I appreciate the Prime Minister indicating that after 30 days we will assess what it is we're doing, because we know how quickly things change in that part of the world, and this is an important mission for our Canadian Armed Forces and our special operations forces. So, yes, we will watch this very carefully on a timely basis, and we will assess it after 30 days.

**Hon. John Baird:** We would certainly welcome any contributions you have to that assessment whether they be on the security side, the defence side, or the development side.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Thank you.

My final question is on what makes our troops especially well suited to this kind of operation. I'm not an army officer, but I suspect that our experience in Afghanistan with similar terrain allows us to provide that kind of expertise. Is that the assessment?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Whenever we're called upon, as I indicated earlier, we always step up to the plate and get the job done regardless of when, where, or how, but I think you raise a very good point. There is quite a bit of knowledge on technical matters and issues related to that part of the world that was gained in the conflict in Afghanistan. We believe this will be very helpful in Iraq.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Garneau.

We're now going to start our second round of five minutes back and forth. We're going to start with the Conservatives and Ms. Brown.

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

I thank each of you for being here this morning. This is a very serious discussion that Canadians need to hear.

Minister Baird, I'd like to address my questions to you regarding the humanitarian situation that you saw when you were in Iraq last week.

Each of you has referenced the enormous humanitarian crisis that is developing, and each of you talked about the victims you have seen. Canada has been engaged over the long haul on this. In fact, since the beginning of 2014, we have spent more than \$28 million on development assistance, humanitarian assistance, in Iraq. We have, since 2009, resettled more than 18,000 refugees from Iraq. We've committed to another 5,000 coming out of Turkey, most of them Iraqis. We have been engaged in this situation for a long time.

Mr. Minister, could you talk about how important it is that Canada participate? While you were there, what did you observe in regard to the humanitarian assistance we are providing?

**Hon. John Baird:** I'm sure that Mr. Garneau and Mr. Dewar will speak to this as well.

Obviously, our first priority is to stop this crisis from growing and getting worse. That means containing ISIS from expanding. We have provided very substantial support already.

The issue of supporting refugees has been important. Minister Kenny and now Minister Alexander have done a lot of work on that. We've done a lot and we'll do more.

We announced \$15 million in security assistance and \$7 million in further humanitarian aid while we were there. I look at Mr. Dewar and Mr. Garneau. That's clearly positive and will have a very positive contribution, but more will be needed. There is no doubt about that.

I think we have to do two things. One is to help ensure that we support the agencies on the ground. My views on some aspects of the United Nations not living up to their original high purpose... I have been very complimentary of the work that Valerie Amos' humanitarian group does and that the World Food Programme does with Ertharin Cousin. We saw first-hand the good work that the UN is doing on the ground. They need more help and support. That is obviously a message I'm going to be bringing back to the government.

There are many families who don't want to leave Iraq. They obviously are horrified of the prospect of returning to Mosul; I mean, if your neighbour ratted you out to an international terrorist organization for being a Christian, it's hard to perceive how you would ever feel comfortable returning to that. Some may want to come to Canada or leave Iraq; others would be very keen to be resettled within the Kurdistan Regional Government territory. That as well is something that we learned. Also, we'll look at what other measures we can do.

Notwithstanding our generosity in trying to support religious minorities fleeing persecution and death, Canada has faced some criticism about supporting the de-Christianization of the Middle East, and particularly Iraq. Obviously we want to support a pluralistic Iraq. Pluralism is one of the great things that we've established in this country. If that's not possible in all parts of Iraq in the short term, it certainly is very possible in the KRG territory. That is something we'll look at. We obviously are concerned about a number of areas. I know that Mr. Dewar and Mr. Garneau have ideas they'd like to share in regard to what they learned as well, and we're certainly prepared to listen to them.

● (1150)

**Ms. Lois Brown:** You spoke a little bit about what Canada is providing, such as medical supplies, tents, blankets, going through agencies like the International Committee of the Red Cross, Save the Children, and Mercy Corps. These are all organizations that have deep roots working in Iraq.

Were you able to speak with any of those partners while you were there?

**Hon. John Baird:** Sure. We spoke to a number of them, not just those but others. As well, there was a Canadian who was in charge of one UN operation whom we had the opportunity to spend a little bit of time with. They're doing a lot of good work but more needs to be done. I think the development side has to be part of the equation. It's not a choice between security and defence and development. We can do all three. Going forward we will need to do more, particularly as we see the winter approaching.

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

We're now going to move over to Mr. Dewar from the NDP. You have five minutes.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Thank you to our guests.

I want to start with Minister Baird. I saw what you saw and heard what you heard. I think it's very clear that the priority for our government is to help those who are suffering, those who had to flee, as you mentioned. We talked to those families and we saw on the front lines what was happening.

To that end I want to formally put forward a couple of asks that I would like to get the government to consider.

Obviously—you've already touched on it—there has to be an immediate support for the set-up of refugee camps. The refugees we didn't see were in Duhok where they do not have any shelter at all. As we noted it was 46 degrees. Winter will soon be coming, so that clearly has to be something we support. Just two days ago the UN had an appeal for \$315 million so clearly there's an ask there. There's a critical need to build those refugee camps, frankly, yesterday.

Regarding supporting the protection of minorities, if I may, this isn't the first time we've seen the assault on minorities. This is the third wave. I was there in 2007. In 2006 there had been the targeting of Christians, Yazidis, and a group that most people won't know, the Mandaeans, who are John the Baptist followers, etc. Then there was the follow-up to that just after I was there in 2009, when there was another wave. Twenty years ago there were 1.3 million Christians. There were 700,000 in 2009. I have no idea what the numbers are now. We need protection for minorities. What we heard is that many of them don't want to leave the country. In the case of Yazidis, they can't because their belief is that they have to be in this particular region. In the case of the Christians, they want to stay in the country but they can't go back to Mosul for reasons you mentioned. We need protection for minorities, be it housing or new communities being built supporting that.

Supporting the victims of sexual violence is something we have to do. I'm assuming we are going to do it, both the prosecution of the perpetrators and support for the victims. We also have to investigate and prosecute the alleged war crimes. I'm putting that on the table and being public about it.

Minister Baird, one of the questions I have relates to the defence piece. When we were on the ground—and I appreciate the invitation from the government, I really do; it was important—we had no indication that we would be asked to send troops. For the record, I want to hear from you: were you aware of that ask when we were on the ground, not after there was an announcement, but was that something you were aware of? I say that because in all of the

meetings we had with the President of Iraq and President Barzani of the Kurdish regional government, they didn't ask for boots on the ground. For the record, were you aware of the ask? Will you agree with me that we weren't asked by people on the ground in the meetings we had to send troops?

•(1155)

**Hon. John Baird:** I'll answer the second part of your question first.

Obviously, I think the people whom we met with want to win this battle themselves but they need support. They talked about the need for arms, ammunition, and the like. They're not asking for someone to come in and fight their battle for them. So the answer is yes. We provided \$50 million of assistance for non-lethal military security support.

In conversations with the American government, with President Obama, this idea had come up. Obviously, when the Prime Minister and other leaders met on the margins of NATO, further decisions to proceed were made. I knew that this was something that was in the cards; it was being considered.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** In the media we heard it was something of a discussion between the President and the Prime Minister, and that was it.

**Hon. John Baird:** Yes.

If I could, I do want to come back to your first point. You mentioned four areas, and my answer on all four is yes, yes, yes, and yes.

I think there is no doubt that the UN's appeal is an important one. There is clearly the need. I think they need 13 more camps of the size of the second camp we visited. The appeal has gone out. We received it, obviously. Notwithstanding the fact we have one department, we have a full minister of international cooperation, and I'll be speaking with him and my colleagues at our department to look at what else we can do. We should certainly be very clear that the humanitarian mission will not go on for just 30 days; it will clearly have to be something that is more long term.

The protection of minorities and resettlement is something that we learned, and we can look into what support we can do for that. I wholeheartedly agree with your comments on the victims of sexual violence. This has been something that Canada has been active on going back a number of years. Your intervention with respect to Libya was an important one. We put money into the G-8 appeal under the United Kingdom's leadership, and I led a delegation to an international conference supporting this issue earlier this summer. That is important not just with respect to rape as a weapon of war, but it also goes to the comments Mr. Garneau made about the Yazidi women and Christian women being forced to convert and into forced marriage, which is tantamount to rape in and of itself, and certainly constitutes sexual violence. I'll have my officials look at what could be done with respect to war crimes and the ICC. Those are four good points.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Dewar, and Minister.

We're now going to complete the second round and turn to Mr. Goldring for five minutes.

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for appearing here today, gentlemen, to help us understand this better. I think it's worth mentioning that Canada's contribution to this is to be greatly respected and admired. I think it's nothing new. Since Confederation Canada has fielded some two million men and women in uniform, at a cost worldwide of some 115,000 who never came home. So Canada's contribution throughout all these years has been tremendous and tremendously respected.

Ambassador Bennett, I'd like to ask you the following. It seems that we've just gone through one long series of efforts combatting terrorism and now another group seems to be coming forward that is even more barbaric than the one from the past that we've worked to fight over the past 10 years. It seems to be coming under the name of Islam. With your work with the various religions and organizations, is there any centralized area with the Islamic communities that you have had communication with? Is there a central area there? Do they roundly condemn this organization? What nations in the region are seemingly supportive of it, and which ones do we hope we can have some influence from at some time possibly in the future to counteract some of this type of outrageous barbaric behaviour in the name of their religion?

• (1200)

**Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett:** I think it's a very important issue that you raise, Mr. Goldring.

I think we need to be very clear that Islam does not condone terrorism. What we see in ISIL is a gross warping, distortion, twisting of a perceived understanding of Islam that is not Islam. I think that's been very clear and I think the majority of countries in the region have stated that.

Certainly the Saudis have condemned ISIL. The grand mufti a number of weeks back speaking from Riyadh condemned the activities of ISIL, saying that it was not Islamic. We have had tremendous support from the Jordanians who have been very active in the area of religious freedom. They categorically condemned ISIL.

I think there is a recognition that ISIL is not simply targets, although the majority of the people they are targeting are religious minorities such as Christians, Yazidis, Mandaean, and Shia Muslims. They will not stop there. They go after Sunnis that disagree with them. I think the countries in the region realize that if this is not stopped, if this violence they are perpetrating is not halted, they will not stop simply at the borders of Syria and Iraq; they will go after Sunnis that reject their distorted and warped understanding of Islam.

To the point of a central authority, I think it's important to note that with the exception of some strains of Islam, such as the Shia Ismaili Muslims, there is no central leadership. In Sunni Islam it is a fairly diffuse system of leadership through imams and senior imams, grand muftis in different states. I have not had any contact with a particular

central authority since there really is not one as we might understand it in the context of Christianity with bishops, or patriarchs, and so forth. However, I have reached out to a number of different Islamic communities represented here in Canada.

I had a wonderful meeting this past Friday with Imam Hamid Slimi, a Sunni Muslim leader in Toronto. I've engaged Shia Muslim leaders both in Toronto and Montreal, all of whom have roundly condemned ISIL's actions and have condemned not simply ISIL's approach and distortion of Islam, but they've condemned explicitly their persecution of Christians. They've condemned explicitly their persecution of the Yazidis. I have full confidence in the outreach that I've done to the Islamic community here in Canada that they are very aware of the grave threat that ISIL poses.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** What is their major—

**Hon. John Baird:** Perhaps I could add something. I had a conversation with one member of the Saudi royal family. Instead of saying they're Islamic fighters, I think ISIS is more like a cult than it is a religious group.

I was also very pleased, not just with respect to Islam, but the Arab League spoke out very strongly and unanimously in recent days. We have seen substantial humanitarian assistance from the Saudis and other support from Jordan and the United Arab Emirates which is important.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** What is their major power base—

**The Chair:** Mr. Goldring, that's all the time we have, sir. I'm sorry to cut you off.

We're going to continue on and start our next round, which is still a five-minute round, with Ms. Gallant.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for the Minister of National Defence. Why is it that Canada is one of the first countries to participate in this?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** It goes back a little bit to the record that your colleague, Mr. Goldring, said that when people find themselves oppressed, attacked, when their freedom is threatened, when people are being murdered, Canada has a record second to none to stepping up and assisting people who find themselves in that situation. If you go back over Canadian history, you'll find that we were never in the business of conquering other lands or taking lands from people, or oppressing people. We've always stepped in to assist the people whose freedom was being threatened. Our role here is perfectly consistent with that.

As you know, we had a long engagement in Afghanistan. Again that was perfectly consistent with our being there to assist the people of Afghanistan. One of the things I think all of us as Canadians take pride in is when we go on these missions, we make a difference. Where we have been, people are grateful for what we've done. When I was in the Middle East last summer, I heard this myself from different individuals in different countries. They seem to be very appreciative of the role that Canada played. I say to Canadians that when we are in Europe, the Netherlands and other places people tell us how appreciative they are of Canadians. But it's not limited to what we did in Europe. Certainly Afghanistan is a good example. Certainly this is the latest in the Canadian story of assisting people who are in a very desperate situation. It's perfectly consistent with the role that we've always played.

• (1205)

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** What are the rules of engagement for the forces on this mission?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Again, as I indicated in my opening remarks, we are there to provide advice and technical assistance. These are not boots on the ground. This is not a combat mission. We are there to give advice to the Iraqis, working in collaboration with our allies—the Americans, the British and others—consistent with what we do when we're called upon to work. In combination with others, we are there to assist and provide technical assistance only.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Could you describe the command relationship between our forces and those of the United States, as well as how operations will be approved and directed?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Well, not too surprisingly, the operational relationship between us and the United States is very good. As happens whenever we get involved, whether it's in a mission like this or indeed in a formal arrangement such as NORAD, we work in cooperation with our American allies as we do with other allies. As I made clear to some of our colleagues here, the command of the Canadian Forces will be under the Canadian Chief of the Defence Staff and those he designates. We are very clear on that.

Again, as you know, and you've had a long record in this area, Ms. Gallant, of having a look at NATO and Canada's contributions and Canada's cooperation with other nations, we'll act consistently with how we have always operated in the past, which is to make sure that what we are doing overall is having a positive effect and that it is not a one-off and we are not renegades or off on our own. We want to make sure that we compound the effectiveness of what we are doing by working with others.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Is there any anticipated role for our forces in handling detainees?

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Again, that's not part of the mission they are on. Any detainees will continue to be under the Iraqi regime in that regard.

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

We're now going to turn it over to Mr. Saganash. Go ahead for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank these gentlemen for their presentations.

Today's topic of discussion is complex. We will be involved in a critical and complicated situation for 30 days. I would like to focus on a specific aspect.

I assume some sort of a plan has been developed to take into account the situation's humanitarian aspect.

Mr. Baird, your visit last week showed us a large-scale population displacement. Your colleague referred to that population as “defenceless”. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have been internally displaced, and very concrete measures need to be implemented to address that situation.

Has a plan been developed as part of our mission to help that defenceless population? What measures have been implemented to deal with that aspect of the situation in Iraq, which is unfortunately ongoing? Do you feel that the current humanitarian aid provided is sufficient?

The cost of the military deployment referred to today has not really been discussed. Besides the amounts that have already been announced, have the additional costs in humanitarian aid required by the current situation been assessed?

• (1210)

**Hon. John Baird:** Thank you for your question.

Of course, many people are defenceless. Our first order of business is to help the Iraqi government and the Kurdish Peshmerga forces defend those minorities and stop ISIL's advance. We do not want the humanitarian issue to get worse. Atrocities and barbaric practices abound, but I hope that Canada's assistance to the KRG and Iraqi forces will lead to change.

You asked whether the current level of assistance was sufficient. It is decidedly not. We were on the ground, and we saw how much aid was provided. We have made many announcements over the past few years. This year, we have already announced \$28 million in assistance. This announcement was made by Christian Paradis, Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie. I announced \$7 million in additional aid last week.

The United Nations also requested additional assistance. We are currently looking into what could be done. I will speak with my colleague, the Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie to see how much we could add. I saw the extent of the needs during my visit. Your colleague, our colleague, requested four additional elements. We are ready to look into what we can do. It is very important for Canada to do that, but we also want to encourage other countries to join in our efforts, as we could do so much more that way.

If this is insufficient, we will continue to provide assistance on behalf of the Canadian population.

**Mr. Romeo Saganash:** Mr. Nicholson referred to this deployment as an advisory and assistance mission. Does that assistance include the immediate establishment of refugee camps in the northern part of the country? Is that the direction being taken?

**Hon. John Baird:** We will follow the United Nations' leadership when it comes to organizing refugee assistance. We can also work with other organizations and good partners, such as the Red Cross and other Islamic development organizations. I think that people who are already on the ground need our help. We will look into how we can meet the needs they made known the other day. We visited the region to determine what the needs were. We have already made numerous announcements, and we will continue to do our part.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That's all the time we have. We're going to finish off—

[Translation]

**Hon. John Baird:** Humanitarian aid is being provided, but assistance to victims of sexual violence and security issues are very important, as well, of course.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister Baird and Mr. Saganash.

We're now going to complete this round with Mr. Anderson, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Thank you, gentlemen, for being here today.

I want to come back to an issue that a couple of people have raised. Mr. Dewar mentioned the issue of religious persecution. There are numbers of reports of religious minorities being viciously persecuted, and I think on one occasion on Mount Sinjar. Could you talk a bit about some of the specifics of that event? Are there other specific events the committee should be aware of in terms of what's happening on that front?

**Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett:** Mr. Anderson, I think some of the evidence I've seen of the persecution is pretty graphic. I think many of us have seen some images not simply on the web; in meetings I've had with different Christian groups, the Yazidi community, they've provided indirect eyewitness accounts from their families who are present on the ground. Obviously the situation around Mount Sinjar was quite acute. It was very focused. The same was the case around Mosul, and in Qaraqosh, just outside of Mosul, where the Christians were driven out by ISIL. For the first time in 2,000 years there are no Christians present there.

I think the targeted persecution of both the Christians and the Yazidis and Mandaean takes on a variety of different forms. As Mr. Dewar pointed out, the Yazidis and the Mandaeans feel very anchored to a particular territory because it's incorporated in their faith. Christians feel the ability to move and to leave. I want to flag again the importance of not only helping those Christians and other religious minorities who feel they need to leave the region to do so through the resettlement program that we already have in place, but also of ensuring, and I think this is largely part of the focus of our work in the office of religious freedom, that those Christians and other communities that want to remain in the region are able to do so. Again, I think that plays to Mr. Dewar's point on the need to protect those communities.

When you speak to the religious leaders, to the various bishops and other leaders I have spoken to, they want people to stay, but they

also realize that some may need to leave. It's a very difficult situation, and you can tell that they're very anguished about it. Although there are mass atrocities happening across political and religious communities, the response of those communities varies somewhat based on their own assessment of their need to remain in place.

I think part of our work that we would like to undertake in the coming months or over the medium and long terms would be to support in particular those Christians who have fled to countries of migration, such as Jordan and Lebanon, so that they might have the requisite places they need to help them maintain their identity and hopefully remain in the region.

• (1215)

**Mr. David Anderson:** Minister, do you...? Okay. I thought someone else might want to respond to that.

I'm just wondering if DFATD provides programming funds for this at all. You mentioned some of the projects you may be looking at. I think there's some money going into supporting the High Council of Religious Leaders in Iraq. There's another one advocating for rights of religious minorities in Iran that we put money into. I'm wondering if you can talk about the work with that community. What you see as the future there?

**Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett:** I can't speak to the specific examples that you mentioned, because it wasn't funding that came through our office. It might have come through another part of the department. We can certainly get back to you on that, Mr. Anderson.

On the funding that we are envisaging, I would say there are two tracks. We recently had a call for proposals through our religious freedom fund which completed on August 4. The call was from June until August 4. That was a global call for proposals. We netted roughly 220 proposals for funding for projects around the world, but we had a specific focus on the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Africa. We have received, I believe, three specific project proposals that would help persecuted religious minorities in the region. We still have to go through our regular internal process to assess those, but those are happening in the immediate future, within the next week or so.

Then it's our intention to launch.... Under our terms and conditions for the religious freedom fund, we can launch a DFATD initiative that focuses specifically on a particular theme or a particular region. That's been sort of the ultimate goal of my consultations that I've been undertaking with CNEWA, Aid to the Church in Need, and various other groups.

**The Chair:** Thanks, David. That's all the time we have for this round.

Before we start the next round I do want to ask a question, probably a quick question that requires a longer answer.

Can we talk a bit about Iran? I know that Iran has been a hugely destabilizing force in the area, in Syria as well as Iraq. They're concerned with ISIL. From a security perspective, how do you see dealing with Iran as it relates here? It's obviously a very tricky question. They've not had a great track record at all in this area.

**Hon. John Baird:** Some would say, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend". I would not say that.

Iran is the biggest state sponsor of terrorism in the world. Just because it's not their brand of terrorism doesn't absolve them. They have had a very destabilizing influence in just about every single country in that region, from Hezbollah in south Lebanon to Hamas in the Gaza Strip to their interventions in Bahrain, to the attempt to kill the Saudi ambassador in a restaurant in Washington, to their intervention in Yemen and their growing role in parts of Iraq. We take a very negative view of that. There have been media reports of certain things. I think the Kurds would probably share, maybe not my complete view, but my apprehension.

• (1220)

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

We're going to start the next round with Mr. Dewar. Go ahead for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Regarding a question I wanted to get to before—actually it's just a statement—I hope the government reconsiders our taking in Syrian refugees. We've been asked by UNHCR to take 10,500 refugees for the next two years, because doing so would alleviate things. It wouldn't deal with the whole refugee crisis, but we know that in the north of Kurdistan and Iraq they took 300,000 Syrian refugees, so they're already dealing with that. It's something I would encourage you to talk to your colleague Mr. Alexander about, Mr. Baird.

We were there on the ground before. One of the things we know is that the peshmerga know how to fight. We don't have to teach them how to fight. They know the ground. Their motto is: the mountains are our only friends. This is not Afghanistan. This is a group of people who know how to command and control. They do need other supplies certainly.

My question for the Minister of National Defence is this: what are we going to teach the peshmerga? I've heard from you what we won't be doing. That's very clear. We won't be doing this and we won't be doing that. What will we actually be doing in light of the fact that we do have a group of people who are able to fight?

Finally, I would note, as the Prime Minister himself said in Wales, that ISIL will not be defeated just by the military. If there is something else you want to add, how else are we going to deal with them?

**Hon. John Baird:** I do agree with you that peshmerga forces are experienced. I think you correctly pointed out that the mountains are their home. I think where they lack specific skills is in a more conventional type of warfare, in which there's a clearly delineated front line. I think that will be the focus.

I do think this cannot be won militarily. It is essential that the government in Baghdad address the real problems that frankly have existed for more than a decade. The outgoing prime minister has not led an inclusive government either in terms of his cabinet or in terms of any program, and there is no doubt that fact has exacerbated a bad situation. Let's have some hope that the message that you delivered, that I delivered, that Mr. Garneau delivered, and that Canadian diplomats have delivered for some time is heard. Let's hope that the promise they're making about a government of inclusion is actually borne out, not just, frankly, in the hours and days ahead, but for weeks, months, and years. That will be key to winning this battle.

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** I think you make a good point: it's not just a military exercise. This is one component of this. You and your colleagues and the minister have been very clear that this is one component of what has to be done for there to be a success in this area. You've touched upon assistance to refugees and humanitarian assistance. Again, it has to be all a part of this to make things work. It's not just a military exercise.

**Hon. John Baird:** Promoting pluralism is a key part of it though. That's why we are supporting the Global Centre for Pluralism with the Aga Khan Foundation—

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I appreciate that.

I'm trying to get at the heart of the military piece, which we on this side have concerns about. If we have these battle-tested peshmerga and we're being told all the things we can't do, I'm still not clear exactly what we would be doing and the value of what we'd be providing when there are already people who certainly know how to fight.

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Again, as I indicated, I believe that technical assistance and advice will be invaluable. The Chief of the Defence Staff has a few comments.

**Gen Thomas Lawson:** I would just say, Mr. Dewar, that you are absolutely right in recognizing that the peshmerga have no shortage of fighting spirit or courage. What they do not have is the luxury of a significant standing army or professional standing army. Here in Canada we have the luxury of having developed that very thing. We're certainly battle-tested in ways, and Afghanistan has provided us a tremendous ability to advise and assist. It is that very thing that the peshmerga seek from western allies.

• (1225)

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** If I may say so, with respect, we're not talking about fighting a conventional war, so a standing army is one thing. The peshmerga did push back the IS, and I know there were problems at the beginning. I'm just trying to glean here what we're offering that they don't have. I'm hearing, and we have heard, that they need arms. Fair enough. Are we now going to be supplying them with the arms and training them on those? Are we just going to be training them along with our allies who are supplying the arms? I think they have the tactics down pat. I think one of the lessons the Americans learned in Iraq and in Afghanistan in some ways is that you're not fighting a conventional enemy. In fact the peshmerga know how to deal with these guys, because it's not a typical war; it's an asymmetrical war.

**Hon. John Baird:** I'm going to respectfully push back on you. I think you correctly identified that they are experienced in the mountains. That is where their home is. When they are out in open terrain with a more conventional type of battle with a front line and the type of equipment they're going to need to work with to engage with the air support that the Americans and others are providing, I think they will need support.

I can say that not only have President Obama and the United States asked for our support in this type of area but that the KRG and the Iraqi forces are welcoming that support.

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

Ms. Brown, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister Baird, I'll turn back to you if you don't mind. I know in June of this year Iraq was added to our list of development country partners. I know right now there is a \$10 million fund that our programming people are trying to decide how to move forward with, particularly to work in communities where there are internally displaced people.

I wonder if you could tell us a little bit first of all about what we're doing diplomatically in Iraq right now. Could you tell us how willing Iraq is to have our engagement on these kinds of projects?

**Hon. John Baird:** We have stepped up our engagement with Iraq in a big way over the past two years. We have a permanent presence on the ground in Baghdad with co-locating with the British, which has been helpful because we couldn't obviously afford that early on. Our new ambassador, Ambassador Saccomani, has visited the region, Baghdad, Erbil, Basra, and elsewhere on a regular basis. We've really stepped up our engagement in the last year, which is positive.

We've taken an approach not just on the foreign affairs side of the department, as you pointed out the development side being a priority, but also on the trade side. Obviously people being able to work and provide for themselves and their own families is our long-term vision. There are opportunities for Canadian companies to assist the economic growth of Iraq. That is something important. I think we've stepped up the engagement in a big way which we hadn't a number of years ago.

The capacity in some parts of the country.... Until recent months Erbil and the KRG region was a very safe and secure area. I did notice on our visit to Baghdad it was demonstrably different than it was even 18 months before; we were not required to wear flak jackets and helmets outside of the green zone which I did 18 months ago.

We obviously want to push our interests and values. I think it's in our interests to see a secure humanitarian stable Iraq where people aren't slain.

In terms of our values, it comes back to pluralism. This is a great Canadian experience that I think we can help share with the world. Going back many years, this has been a real centrepiece in Canadian foreign policy. The leadership the Prime Minister has given the Aga Khan in terms of the Centre for Pluralism is important. The Aga Khan is probably the most world-eminent leader of pluralism. The fact that he has a special connection to Canada, the fact that he is Islamic himself, I think is not unhelpful.

The work of the office of religious freedom is inherently about promoting pluralism where you have genuine freedom of religion, not just freedom to believe, but freedom to fully practise and live your religion. So many of the other freedoms take care of themselves. That's got to be the long-term vision that we have to work with our allies on in Iraq. It was horrific to hear stories how Christian families were ratted out to this barbaric terrorist

organization by their own neighbours and people in their community where they had lived for millennia. It's absolutely horrific.

We talk about religious minorities, Christians, U.S. journalists. There have been hundreds and thousands of Muslims killed in this conflict by this cult. I think in the medium and long terms, pluralism has to be a big part of the solution. The government in Baghdad has been deficient on that. The establishment of a new government last night we hope holds great promise, but our diplomatic resources will obviously be going to engage, encourage and monitor and assess that. Obviously I'll do that. Others will do that. It is tremendously important.

● (1230)

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Dr. Bennett, do you see a role for Canada going forward to speak to the situation and help the new Iraqi government with some of our experience and our advice?

**Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett:** Again, just to reinforce what the minister said, pluralism is at the heart of advancing religious freedom. We advance religious freedom overseas not simply through international covenants that speak to it as a fundamental right, but we advance it based on the Canadian experience of pluralism. Because we enjoy religious freedom here in Canada and we cherish it, it's incumbent upon us to speak to those countries where there is such a crying need for reinforcement and defence of that principle.

In all the countries we've been focusing on over the last year and a half, part of our outreach is regular engagement with government officials, different ministries of religious affairs, interior ministries, those that have a responsibility for religious matters in a given country. I certainly want to hope that not only through our programming but through our advocacy efforts we can continue to engage in Iraq, and not just Iraq, but also in other parts of the region because it's a real puzzle of different countries coming together and there are broader challenges. The situation in Iraq is most acute, but I think we need to, as our office does...we're not engaged in short-term humanitarian activities, but rather more medium and longer term activities. I think we need to continue to reach out to governments and bring that Canadian model to bear when we're engaging on religious freedom.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That completes all the rounds that we have, but I know there are still some additional questions. We'll go about four more questioners back and forth. I'm going to start with Mr. Harris and then I'm going to move to Mr. Bezan. We'll then go to Mr. Garneau and then we'll finish it up with one of the Conservatives.

We'll turn it over to Mr. Harris for five minutes.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Thank you, Chair.

So far, gentlemen, what I see is... I want to focus on the military deployment. I know the others have covered the humanitarian side. So far, what I got from today is that you won't tell us when the troops will actually be there and you won't tell us how many specifically. You keep it a vague several dozen. You are very vague on the continuation after 30 days. I think the general consensus seems to be that not a lot can be accomplished within 30 days. You will not commit to a parliamentary debate or a vote.



The news media is already reporting that President Obama will make a speech to the American nation tomorrow, I believe it is, where we he will be talking about a three-year program. I guess you have to understand why Canadians are a little concerned about what road we're going down here and where this is leading us without any significant commitment from this government as to where we could be taken.

You know and I know that when the Prime Minister was seeking to be the Prime Minister, he committed to a position that Parliament should be responsible for the commitment of Canadian Forces to foreign operations. What I want to know is how the approach that you're taking here squares with the statements that were made by the Prime Minister when he was seeking to be Prime Minister and with previous agreements between our previous leader, Jack Layton, and him to change the Standing Orders of the House of Commons to ensure that there was a vote by Parliament on these matters before they took place. How does that work?

● (1235)

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** First of all, I thought I was very specific in terms of exactly who would be going over. These are our special operations forces.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Not who, but how many.

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** I indicated that.

Again, you asked where would they be located and I indicated to you that they would be in northern Iraq. As I've indicated on a couple of occasions, they are there for technical assistance and advice.

Again, I said there would be a few dozen Canadian Armed Forces that will be on the ground. We won't give you the flight numbers or the times or exactly when and where they're going for security reasons. That being said though, as I indicated, they are going to be deployed very quickly. We believe there is an urgency to what's taking place and I think that's obvious to everyone who has viewed this area. Again, that's exactly what we'll do.

With respect to debates in the House of Commons, part of what we're doing in reaching out, calling this meeting for example, was to bring all members together so that they would have an opportunity to discuss either the deployment of the special operations forces or indeed any of the other issues as they relate to this part of the world.

That being said, we certainly welcome debate. One of the great things in our parliamentary system as you know, Mr. Harris, is that on a regular basis opposition parties can debate and call for a vote on any subject that they want. Certainly if you and your party want to have additional speeches and debates on this, you are certainly welcome to do that. I believe the Liberals are moving forward with a motion in that regard. Again, I think we are moving forward and I think this is the right thing to do.

**Hon. John Baird:** I did want to discuss this too, because I think the Prime Minister has always been clear. In the past when we had our mission in Libya, when we had extensions on the combat mission in Afghanistan, there was parliamentary debate and there were votes. This is not a combat mission. When we provided support in Mali to the French government, and now we are providing some training assistance, I think it was quite a different case. I think we've

tried to demonstrate some pretty good will. We had both opposition parties go to Iraq to be able to assess for themselves the situation. Obviously reasonable people can come to prioritize different aspects of how Canada can be involved. We had this committee called a week before Parliament returns, pulling everyone back from their constituency responsibilities. That was the government's suggestion. We weren't carried kicking and screaming here. Parliament will resume Monday and if you want to have a take-note debate next week, we'd be very keen to do that.

The opposition every year gets quite a number of opposition days. If you'd like to have a specific debate and a vote, we're all game. We're committed to continue to work off-line as well, providing briefings and listening. Your party has come forward with a number of very good ideas. I'm in agreement with all four of them in terms of what else we can do there. We want to be very constructive in our engagement with the opposition parties, with the government members, and with Parliament.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Harris and Minister Baird.

We're going to move over to you, Mr. Bezan, for five minutes, please.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think all of us understand that if we want to protect the ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq, and if we want to be able to deliver humanitarian assistance where it's needed, we have to improve the security situation. That's why it is so important that Canada play a role in improving the security situation in Iraq and defeating the ISIL terrorists. I think we're all very proud of our Canadian Armed Forces and the brave men and women who serve us in uniform and who are always willing to step in and take on these leadership roles.

Minister Nicholson, you've mentioned that there are already four members of the Canadian Armed Forces on an advance team over there, as well as 75 people who have been involved in both the CC-130J and the CC-177 aircraft delivering aid into Iraq. Would you be able to elaborate on what those four individuals are doing and what the ongoing mission is in delivering assistance in the area?

● (1240)

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** Again, I think you make a very good point. These cannot just be military operations. They have to be a complete effort. It's not enough for a country to say that there should be no military involvement but we want to be involved heavily with aid and distributing it. This is not a place where that is obviously possible.

What we have done, as I indicated to you in my opening remarks, is that we have been of assistance to others in transporting equipment to Iraq. We have done that with allies of ours. Again, this is with full cooperation of our major allies. I've indicated that we've moved approximately 500,000 pounds of equipment into Iraq. It is not Canadian equipment or Canadian supplies; these were on behalf of, in one case, Albania.

Again, this is what we are doing, because one of the things I've said is that these things have to be a coordinated effort. It's not just Canada alone; it's not the United States or Great Britain alone. It's a cooperative effort on everyone's behalf to make sure that we accomplish what we want to accomplish, which is to put an end to this terrorist group and its activities in Iraq.

It's the kind of effort you have seen in the past from Canada. We continually reach out. Again, we don't do it all by ourselves. I think you made a very good point by raising that. We have already used our equipment and the members of our armed forces to help move equipment and supplies into Iraq at this time. The lead group we have there is part of the announcement that the Prime Minister has made in this area, and that will continue, but as I've made very clear, we will watch it very, very carefully.

**Hon. John Baird:** We welcome the American leadership initially on the humanitarian side with the airdrops to assist the Yazidis on the mountaintop, and we're prepared to be supportive. Before we could even provide assistance in that regard, the job was done. It happened much quicker than anyone thought.

We welcome the American leadership to provide support to the KRG and folks in Iraq so they can win this battle themselves and protect these minorities, to stop this humanitarian crisis from growing. We welcome the American leadership to try to push this back so we could stop some of these barbaric things that are happening in Mosul, for example.

Obviously, President Obama has requested Canada's support. He and Prime Minister Harper work well together, and Canada is a reliable ally of the United States in pushing our values and our interests.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Thank you.

General Lawson, we talk about how we're going to be deploying members from the special operations forces. Can you describe for the committee exactly who special operations forces are and what their mandate is? Also, what training would they be doing right now in getting ready for deployment?

**Gen Thomas Lawson:** The special operations forces are a step up, slightly higher-trained members of the army. Some are from the other environments, but they're largely from the army. They are extremely fit and are at higher readiness levels and with capabilities that all western nations take to a slightly higher level in defence of very quick-breaking threats, such as the one they are going to advise and assist on facing as we go ahead. They're extremely well trained. They also come back from having been well involved in the mission in Afghanistan, which was, at the end, a train-and-advise mission as well.

**Mr. James Bezan:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** We're going to move over to Mr. Garneau, for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Thank you very much.

I think most Canadians who are following the committee hearings this morning are trying to get that sense of what it is that our Canadian troops are going to do over there. I'm going to have a stab at it.

Please tell me if I'm out in left field, but I'm imagining that group of Canadian special ops soldiers, whether it's 35 or 65, providing that advice in some sort of command centre or operations centre behind the lines where they are working with the Kurdish peshmerga, possibly the Americans, and possibly some other allies in this coalition. Their job is to help to provide advice, whether it is for an offensive operation that is going to be carried out by the Iraqis or the Kurds, or even for a defensive operation if ISIS decides it's going to try to create an onslaught somewhere along the line. Is that roughly what the picture is?

Also, very quickly, it is President Obama who proposed to Canada or asked Canada to play a role. He spoke to the Prime Minister. Was that role proposed? Or was it "Canada, you decide what you're going to do", and this is what we decided we were going to do?

● (1245)

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** I think that is a pretty good description of what our armed forces will be doing in terms of giving advice. I think that's well done.

With respect to President Obama and the conversation, I'll turn it over to my colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, as to what exactly it was.

**Hon. John Baird:** Obviously, they wanted political support and tangible assistance to combat this menace, this barbaric threat. On the issue with respect to training and advice and what specifics, humanitarian as well, Canada can't, on global affairs, just sit back with a chequebook and send money. They need Canada's tangible help.

They're not asking for and we are not engaging in a combat mission, but I think the expertise, skill, and leadership that the Canadian Forces have—you as a former member would know that well—can make a positive contribution to halting the advance of this humanitarian catastrophe and hopefully to ending the barbarism we're seeing from this terrorist group. I don't think this will be easy, but I think we need to help the Kurds and help the Iraqis help themselves, and that's exactly what we're proposing to do.

**Hon. Rob Nicholson:** It's never questioned on these that Canada goes in, acts on its own, and figures out on its own what it can do or should be doing. We always work in cooperation with our allies, but again, we're very clear that it's a Canadian mission under Canadian control.

We will make the decisions, but it's very clear from the outset that we are prepared to cooperate in this case with the United States and with our other allies in what's taking place on the ground.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Thank you.

I have a question for Minister Baird because it's on foreign affairs. At the moment, of course, we have one office that's in the British embassy in Baghdad, and the ambassador who is accredited to Iraq is based in Jordan.

Given the fact that we have more exposure now in Iraq with all of the things you've described, including this new involvement, is there any thought, because of the need to liaise with the government, particularly on the issue of inclusivity, to have a bigger presence in Baghdad, or is the plan still to be doing it from Jordan?

**Hon. John Baird:** That's a good question. This ambassador has probably increased his engagement tenfold over the previous one by having a chargé in Baghdad co-located with the British. Obviously that has stepped up our engagement. I certainly saw... I think we could see the need that there would be a value, for example, in expanding that, so it's certainly something that I'm prepared to consider.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Anderson.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've been surprised in the last couple of hours. Other than the one question that Mr. Allison has asked, no one has asked a question about regional impacts on neighbouring countries. I'm wondering if you can talk a bit about that, about Turkey, Syria, and Jordan, and the impact that this is having, and they have on them.

**Hon. John Baird:** With respect to Turkey, obviously the porous nature of the border there is a challenge. Obviously with respect to Syria, ISIS is a direct creation of President Assad's war against his own people. He created the fertile conditions for the establishment of this group, and he bears significant responsibility.

Jordan is always a very constructive player. It is obviously a key friend and ally of Canada. We have obviously put a significant amount, in the hundreds of millions, into humanitarian support over the years with respect to Assad's war against his own people. We put a lot of that support into Jordan to support our friends who are on the front lines of dealing with this humanitarian crisis. Obviously we will continue to do that. Minister Paradis made Jordan a country of focus with respect to development assistance.

There is no doubt, though, that Canada, the United States, and the west can play an important role, but there is a role for the Islamic

world. There is a role for the Arab world. I was impressed with what came out of the Arab League the other day. Saudi Arabia has been incredibly generous on the humanitarian side. We do need everyone to take the role they are best suited to. The promotion of pluralism again is key.

• (1250)

**Mr. David Anderson:** I have one last question.

We're going to be sending personnel into northern Iraq, and I'm just wondering if you can lay out Canada's position with regard to the KRG. Do we have any concerns regarding the peshmerga? What is Canada's position recognizing Kurdistan as an independent state?

**Hon. John Baird:** That's not something we're looking at. We obviously want to see Iraq be safe and secure, be a pluralistic society whether you are Shia, Sunni, Kurdish, or Christian. We want to see it survive. Obviously the Kurdistan Regional Government is a key partner for us, but obviously we have important responsibilities to continue to have a good and constructive working relationship with the central government in Baghdad. I think we tried to reach out and strengthen that this past week. I visited 18 months ago.

We have to have great hope that this new government can take a different course than the previous one did. Certainly it is tremendously important for all of us, whether we are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab League, or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and for the west as well to preach the value of inclusion. I thought it was particularly powerful when we met with the President of Iraq and we had members of three political parties with one message: inclusion, inclusion, inclusion. We will obviously work to monitor and encourage that in the new government.

**The Chair:** I want to thank our witnesses for making themselves available on such short notice for this very important topic.

To my colleagues around the room, thank you as well for rearranging your schedules to be here today.

The meeting is adjourned.





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