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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, February 5, 2015**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**



# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Thursday, February 5, 2015

• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** Good morning.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) our study of Canada's response to the violence, religious persecution, and dislocation caused by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant will continue.

I want to welcome all our witnesses and guests from Washington today. Thank you for taking the time to present to us.

I want to introduce to you Ellen Laipson, who is the president and chief executive officer of the Stimson Center. With her is Geneive Abdo, who is a fellow with the Stimson Center as well.

We have Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, a senior fellow with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Welcome to all.

We'll start with Ms. Laipson. We'll work our way around the room for our opening statements. Once we've had your opening statements, we'll go back and forth around our room to ask you questions over the next hour and a half or so.

Ms. Laipson, I'm going to turn it over to you for your opening statement.

**Ms. Ellen Laipson (President and Chief Executive Officer, Stimson Center, As an Individual):** Thank you so much.

[Translation]

We are very honoured to join you.

[English]

even over this long distance to discuss what is clearly a very compelling and anguishing issue.

The events of the last 24 hours only stand to strengthen our concern about the rise of ISIL and the shocking and abhorrent violence that we're seeing in at least pockets of the Arab world.

I very much appreciate Canada's concerns about this. I think those concerns are very much shared by the U.S. and other western governments. It's a dramatic moment at which to be thinking about these issues and about whether the west can do anything, or what it can do to diminish the threat not only directly to ourselves but also to good citizens in the Muslim world.

I do hope we can all keep the human dimension in mind, that not all Arabs are falling to the siren's call of ISIL. They are struggling

very much to keep some normal conventions of social and political behaviour in check even while this radical and extremist threat increases.

We used to think this was a problem just for Syria and Iraq, and now clearly we understand that Jordan is threatened. It could spread to Saudi Arabia. It has certainly already affected Lebanon, and there are other countries as well that will be struggling with this for some time.

In terms of the western response, I was in government for 25 years working on the Middle East. At this particular juncture, I think we all have to be somewhat humble about, first of all, whether it is a problem that we can solve, and we have to accept the limits and the challenges of the role of outsiders. We have to consider whether some of our responses to deal with the horrific violence and the threat to journalists and more generally to innocent citizens actually end up compounding the problem. I just want us to be attentive to that, because I do think there are policy responses that feel right in the short run, but that in the long run actually compound the problem.

I think it would be most useful to try to give a little bit of historical and political context. How did this happen? My colleague Geneive will look much more deeply at how these extremists talk to each other and what they talk about, and a little bit at how we understand what motivates them.

There are a number of different historical reference points that I think are all relevant when we are trying to put in context the rise of ISIL: the Iranian revolution in 1979, and the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981, which demonstrated that what were then considered peaceful Islamists, under the guise of the Muslim Brothers, were being challenged and superseded by a much more violent and extremist form of political Islam in Egypt, which was, after all, the heartland of Arab and Islamic thought.

For those of us of a certain age, these events are all from our fairly recent memory, but more cumulatively, there has been a failure of the west to transfer its model to the Arab world. From the end of the colonial era through the end of the 20th century, there has been a realization that the western project for the Arab world wasn't really working. Certainly the American intervention in Iraq in 2003, with all the good intentions and all the efforts to try to work with like-minded Iraqis to build modern institutions, fell short because there were some other countervailing forces in Iraq and in the region.

So it is both the failure of the western project to build an Arab world that had western-style institutions and a failure of the Arab world to develop an ideology that was modernist and positive and constructive for their own citizens.

We think of the sequence of Arab ideologies that have tried and failed, from pan-Arab nationalism to nationalism within individual Arab countries to various kinds of political Islam.

When the Arab Spring began in late 2010 and 2011, there was a flurry of hope and belief that at least some in the Arab world were now ready to try again to modernize and liberalize and open up Arab politics.

•(1105)

What is striking to me from recent travels in the region is how quickly the disappointment has set in. Even for people who supported the change in Tunisia, for example, with a moderate Islamist party coming to power for a brief time, or the one-year reign of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the disappointment in that experiment has led to very quick radicalization by some young Arabs. The notion that people who are being recruited successfully into ISIL had a very different political agenda only a few years ago is a very disturbing thought. We really will have a very difficult time understanding who are the vulnerable populations that can be recruited by this radical movement.

My next large point is that really we have to see this as a struggle both within Sunni Islam and between Sunni and Shia Islam. I hope Genevieve will explain this in much greater depth. What we are seeing in ISIL now is a willingness to kill other Muslims. This is not Islam versus the west in the first order; in the first order, it is a struggle within the world of Islam, of Sunni Muslims profoundly disagreeing about what kind of governance they want. I still believe that ISIL represents a very small minority of Arab populations, but because of their aggressiveness, they are able to coerce much larger segments of Sunni communities. They are using intimidation, and obviously, extreme violence to keep people in fear of them.

But between the world of Sunni and Shia Islam, that's another cross-cutting theme that has started to replace identity that earlier might have been focused more on "in which Arab country do I live?" Now, the source of identity may be more determined by that sectarian affiliation.

The last point I want to make when I know that all of you are thinking about possible policy responses is that I think we in multicultural societies have to stick with the core themes that we value, which are religious tolerance and commitment to a modern education, so that people have greater understanding of other communities and not just the community in which they themselves live. I would like us to think about the policy responses as having a very wide spectrum of activities, not defaulting only to a military or a counterterrorism response. It is my view, and it is one of the things that I think we have learned of the political dynamics within Iraq after 2003, that if we come on too strong, we are actually contributing to the radicalization problem. There's no way around it.

Then we can motivate people who might not otherwise have turned to a more radical course. I would argue for a very careful integration of different tools of policy response, with the under-

standing that we are not likely to be the primary agent of change, that these are long struggles within societies and communities, and that outside actors can play—I hope on the margins—a helpful role to somewhat reduce the violence and to give people who are more moderate in their world view some solace.

But I don't think that we alone will be able to turn the tide in what could be a generational struggle within the world of Arab Islam. This is not yet infecting Islam in Asia, but that should be something that we have on our screens as well.

Thank you very much for your attention.

•(1110)

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

We're going to move to you, Mr. Gartenstein-Ross.

**Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross (Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies, As an Individual):** Thank you. It's an honour to be here.

What I want to talk about is what ISIL's strengths are and what their weaknesses are. Right now, we as western politics and those involved in counterterrorism efforts combatting militancy are very much focused on ISIL, as we should be. It's unprecedented in terms of its brutality, unprecedented in terms of the amount of contiguous territory that it holds. At the same time, it's also incredibly vulnerable, much more so than public discourse tends to suggest. I think that the vulnerabilities of ISIL need to be understood. Let me caption this within the statement that right now jihadism is in a period of growth and I think that it's going to be, as Ms. Laipson said, a generational challenge to address. That being said, ISIL in particular has some very clear weaknesses that it has been able to disguise, but which at some point are going to come to the forefront.

Let's start with what they're good at. I'd say that, in addition to their obvious military successes, ISIL is extraordinarily good at messaging in a way that is unprecedented. If you look at their videos, the production quality is extraordinary. They have something close to professional quality editing for their videos. They really understand the social media game. They're able to game Twitter and they're able to connect with young people in a way that al Qaeda was never really able to do. They take full advantage of the range of social media and this is an extraordinary advantage. You can see that just in the lone wolf terrorist attacks that occurred last year. Obviously, Canada, quite sadly, was victimized twice on consecutive days. But in general, over the course of the past decade, across 15 western states you had an average of 7.3 lone wolf terrorist attacks per year for all kinds of terrorism, not just jihadist terrorism, but far right, far left, eco-terrorism, and the like.

In contrast, for lone wolf terrorism, that is, one individual acting alone, you had more than that last year in western states that were inspired by ISIL. I think the reason why is it deals with social media. Terrorism tends to be a group phenomenon and the reason is that in general, to get someone to undertake an extreme act, like an act of terrorism that will ruin their lives, it takes someone reinforcing their proclivities towards extremism. In the case of social media, social media is increasingly serving as the stand-in for what in the past was a group activity. In other words, social media can be the terrorist group. It's changing radicalization patterns; it's speeding them up. People are radicalized, I would say, (a) more quickly and (b) there are more of them doing so. I would say, however, in ISIL's case, this is unlikely to be sustainable.

I want to look at the flip side of their messaging. One thing, obviously, that Canada is concerned about now, which is reflected in Bill C-51, is trying to figure out a way to disrupt ISIL's messaging. I think that this is an area where western states have an enormous opportunity to disrupt ISIL and it's one that is not being taken advantage of. In particular, ISIL is dependent upon momentum. This is something that was clearly articulated in their magazine *Dabiq*. They have this propagandist who has been basically conscripted, John Cantlie, who is, quite gruesomely, a journalist who was kidnapped and now is being forced to go through a series of propaganda pieces for ISIL. In one of these propaganda pieces, one that bears his byline in *Dabiq*, he talks about momentum, which is a key concept for ISIL. He says that other people will glom on to their successes and basically it will keep on building and building and building. That's how ISIL sees themselves and they're desperately trying to show that they have momentum. In fact, in many cases, we have allowed them to make themselves seem far, far bigger than they are, and I'll get to that in one second.

The fact is that ISIL has lost momentum. They have gained no new major territory since October, and in particular, they're in trouble because of the aerial campaign. It has really degraded their heavy weaponry, which they don't have an industrial base to replenish, so they're forced to undertake raids against air bases and the like to capture the tanks, the Humvees, and other equipment that they have come to rely upon in their warfare against the coalition, against Assad's forces, and against Iraqi and Kurdish forces.

•(1115)

As a result of not experiencing battlefield successes, and in fact having some significant battlefield losses, they had to pull out of Sinjar. And Kobani, which just four months ago was a symbol of an unstoppable ISIL, has become instead a fierce symbol of Kurdish resistance and ISIL's inability to capture even a small town in northern Syria.

They've lost momentum within the region. As a result, they've tried to show that they have momentum in other areas. This is an area where I think we need a more effective counter-messaging campaign. There are a number of examples of where they've blown themselves up to be bigger players than they in fact are.

I think the best example of this is in northern Libya, where ISIL was able to convince the western media that they had captured the city of Derna. This was reported even by the BBC. In fact you have a political article that came out just a few days ago that talks about

how ISIL has captured Derna. It's not true. It's definitively untrue because when Derna put together a mujahedeen shura council, the person who was in charge of it was a member of the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade, which is the group that ISIL has been fighting against in Derna. Quite obviously, if they controlled the whole city, their enemy would not be in charge of the overall shura council, one that ISIL was locally part of and subordinate to.

We need to show their losses much better. It's not something that would be done by politicians getting up there on the stump and talking about how ISIL's weaker than people think. Instead, there's a credible media out there, one that is both credible and also sometimes credulous. Giving them accurate information about ISIL's losses can disrupt ISIL's momentum.

Another thing I'll say just briefly as I don't want to cut into Ms. Abdo's time is that it's also a group that has committed severe transgressions of Islamic law even by a Salafi jihadist perspective. I think it's important to understand the perspective they're coming from. Taking a moderate perspective and saying that they transgress this is not particularly helpful, but there are areas where they're extraordinarily weak to a messaging campaign, and in at least two different ways.

First, when they declared the caliphate, they made their own legitimacy hinge on the caliphate's continued viability. Al Qaeda controlled territory in the past. They never declared a caliphate. Part of the reason was that they understood that it would be fleeting thing. They would be seen as being overeager to declare it. Particularly as ISIL faces the loss of Mosul, most likely before the end of 2015, being able to publicize how they do not actually fulfill the requirements of a caliphate is important.

Another way they're extraordinarily vulnerable, which I will mention briefly, is that one of the requirements of a legitimate caliphate is having a caliph who fulfills the relevant Islamic requirements. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi does not. I don't want to get into detail here, but liaising with your U.S. intelligence counterparts will make it very clear that there are serious problems with Baghdadi from a sharia perspective.

The second thing is the atrocities they've committed. In their indiscriminate killing of Muslim civilians, in cancelling the *jizya* in Mosul, and in killing civilians who were protected by Islamic treaty, people such as Alan Henning or Abdul-Rahman Kassig, they have violated the Salafi jihadi interpretation of Islamic law such that even al Qaeda scholars are criticizing them. This is another weakness. The U.S., Canada, and other western countries don't have real credibility weighing in on how Islamic law should be interpreted, but getting this information to relevant people who can publicize their transgressions can help to disrupt their messaging campaign. Because messaging is what they're so good at, they're particularly vulnerable to disruption in this regard. Quite fortunately, they are also an opponent who've made themselves far more vulnerable than they realize.

Thank you.

•(1120)

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

I'd like to welcome you, Ms. Abdo. I will now turn the floor over to you for your opening remarks.

**Ms. Geneive Abdo (Fellow, Stimson Center, As an Individual):**  
Thank you very much.

Good morning to everyone. It's an honour to speak before you this morning.

I'm going to focus on the role of religion in ISIS activities. The reason I think this is so important is that there is some reluctance, particularly among western governments, academics, and the media, to take religion seriously as being part of ISIS's appeal, part of its recruitment strategies. I think that's a mistake.

There's also, I think, a tendency among Muslim leaders in the Middle East to say that this isn't about Islam, that this isn't the real Islam. Unfortunately, here we are, 30 years after we saw the emergence of key Islamic groups, namely al Qaeda, which actually began in Egypt, and we have to tell ourselves that it is about Islam, because this is what they believe. It does have something to do with Islam.

I think the more relevant question is, what is this something in Islam that is so powerful that we are seeing people from 80 countries joining ISIS? One answer that demonstrates the great role of religion in ISIS' power and its appeal is that the speeches of al-Baghdadi and some of the other ISIS leaders are filled with references to the Koran. This is how they condone their military actions. This is how they condone most of what they do. This is how they seek legitimacy for their interpretations. They refer to the Koran in almost all of their speeches.

They have also recruited clerics from Saudi Arabia, from Morocco, from Yemen to endorse their ideas to give them more legitimacy. On this particular point, we have seen a lot of discussion since the killing of the Japanese journalist just 48 hours ago, or at least with the publication of the video—we assume he was killed in early January—about the competition between al Qaeda and ISIS. This competition isn't just about power, as was alluded to earlier. It's also about Islamic interpretation. For example, al Qaeda doesn't really condone killing other Muslims. When al-Baghdadi founded ISIS there was a huge quarrel between the leadership of ISIS and the leadership of al Qaeda, because there are profound differences. But the fight is not just about territory. It's not just about how many people they are able to recruit. It's about Islamic interpretation.

I think another great difference is how it reflects on the ground in how religious minorities are treated. I know that the committee is particularly concerned with religious persecution, and I'll get to that a bit later. ISIS' position obviously is not only that their campaign is directed against Christians, who have left in great numbers from many Arab countries, but it's also, as Ms. Laipson pointed out, an internal Muslim debate, because people in ISIS don't even believe that Shias are real Muslims. So it's a debate about Islamic interpretation, and it's a way to marginalize other Muslims who are not with ISIS, not only to marginalize them, but to kill them.

To give you a brief background of where ISIS has developed some of its ideas, there was a book written by al Qaeda leadership in Iraq called *The Management Of Savagery*. ISIS has taken some of the ideals and principles in this book to a greater level. One of the

principles in the book is that as states wither away, this gives jihadists more opportunities. It's a great time for jihadism. Of course, we've seen this. I think this is one of the reasons that ISIS took this opportunity. We are seeing failed states in Iraq and Syria. We are seeing failed states all over the Arab world. They consider this an opportunity.

They also consider this an opportunity because not only has the nation-state collapsed, but there is no longer any sense of citizenship among the majority of people in some Arab countries. In the case of Iraq, it's very apparent. We all understand that the Sunnis were marginalized by now two successive Shia governments, and that has been a great source of popularity for ISIS. ISIS has capitalized on this.

• (1125)

It's also, as was alluded to earlier, that there's a sense in the Arab world and in Arab societies that they are no longer Iraqis or Egyptians or Lebanese, but they are Shia or Sunni Muslims. Another appeal of ISIS, even though many Muslims might not necessarily agree with this idea, is the establishment of the caliphate. This is something that has evolved and it has been debated in Arab societies for a long time. There's a sense of defeat, of loss, because many Muslims compare their standing in the world to what it was centuries ago and they feel that they have been defeated, not by the west but by their own leaders. I think that's a very important part of the establishment of the caliphate and of why ISIS has been able to bring people and to lure people into this Islamic state.

As part of this, I think that as westerners we have to stop ourselves from believing that the majority of Muslims can actually challenge ISIS. We had this discussion after 9/11. Even in this country, in the Muslim community now many years later, the leadership has not really been able to effectively articulate why extremism exists. Again, as I said in the beginning, the most cliché expression is that this isn't about Islam. If you look, for example, at what happened in France, I think it's a very good example of how western governments and western societies need to come to grips with the fact that there are certain principles in Islam that are different. Freedom of expression is one of them. This again is part of the appeal of ISIS, that they are taking some Islamic principles and interpreting them in a sense that is not only anti-western but that is agreeable to a lot of Muslims.

I'll share a very brief story with you. When I was a correspondent in Iran for the *Guardian* many years ago, it was the 10th anniversary of the fatwa on Salman Rushdie. I went and interviewed many clerics in the city of Qom, where they have their seminaries, and I asked them if they thought this fatwa should still be in effect today. They all said yes, even the moderate ones, because, as they explained, they don't consider the principle of freedom of expression the same way the west does. They don't interpret it in the Islamic tradition in the same way. They believe there need to be limits on freedom of expression.

I offer you this anecdote to show that I think we have to resist our tendency to believe that somehow we can convince Islamic societies to think as we do and to appreciate our principles and morals and moral values.

What is the appeal of ISIS? It is interpretations of the Koran that are agreed upon by at least some Muslims. It is also not just the messaging but the fact that a lot of Muslims really don't understand their own religion. They have this powerful movement that is talking about how Islam was interpreted hundreds of years ago, and in this internal Muslim debate, that's again what distinguishes ISIS from a lot of groups. They believe that the real Islamic practice should stem from the time of the prophet. Other Islamic scholars say, "No, we need to take the traditions of the prophet, but we need to apply them to the modern world."

I was reading an interview in Vice News with a Canadian citizen by the name of Abu Usamah. He's also known as Farah Mohamed. He said no one recruited him and actually no one spoke a single word to him. All he did was open the newspaper and read that ISIS was following the Koran, so he went and read the Koran and decided that they were right, and that's why he joined ISIS.

I'll just make a few other brief points.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Be very quick so we can get to questions.

**Ms. Geneive Abdo:** The last point I'd like to make is really about dislocation, which is one of the topics I know you're interested in. I'm just going to throw out a few figures for you. In Iraq the pre-2003 Christian population was as high as 1.5 million or 5% of the Iraqi population, and now it's fallen to 400,000 Christians. Of course this is due not only to ISIS but also to everything that's happened in Iraq since the invasion. But ISIS definitely and the Shia-Sunni conflict definitely do target Christians, and this is one of the many reasons that there is now persecution against Christians in the Arab world.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you to all three of you for the excellent testimony.

We're going to start the first round with seven minutes for questions and answers.

I'm going to start on my left with Mr. Dewar. The floor is yours, sir.

**Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Thank you to our witnesses for their superb overviews. Each of you kind of complemented one another, as if you had coordinated this. The component parts that you are each looking at, be it understanding the history, understanding what the appeal is, and understanding what the messaging is and how ISIL or Daesh has manipulated all of that, is incredibly important to the work we're doing. Just to let you know, as a committee we're looking at making recommendations to government to better understand what we can best offer to the coalition of around 60 countries dealing with this.

I want to thank particularly the Stimson Center for the work you have been doing. I was involved tangentially with the work you did in 2009, when you had identified the issues that we're all waking up to now. As we heard from our last witness, the emptying out of minority groups has been ongoing and continues.

I want to start with either of our guests from the Stimson Center.

Just around policy options, I really appreciate and we've heard from other witnesses that we can't impose a solution, be it in northern Iraq or Iraq, but we obviously need to do what we can to help. We've had a lot of experiences as a country on governance issues; the whole framework and flexibility frankly of federalism is something that's interesting for me, at least to see how that can be an offer or something we can help with.

Also, I think the point made on education is extremely important. As we've heard, when you get a siloed view of the world through education it really foments and allows for the kinds of recruitment that we've seen.

I'd just like to hear from our friends at the Stimson Center, what are some of the policy prescriptions you can see coming from a Canadian perspective that you think would be important, both in the short and medium terms and in the long term, in dealing with that ongoing issue in Iraq? To focus on Iraq, when it comes to governance, we've seen the new government in, and hopefully this will hold the revenue-sharing agreement in Kirkuk on oil with the Kurds and Baghdad that was announced recently.

What are some of the things you think we can concretely help with and support? That would be most helpful for us.

**Ms. Ellen Laipson:** Thank you so much.

I'm so delighted to see you. I recall with great pleasure that you hosted us. The Stimson Center and CIGI, the Canadian think tank, organized meetings with Iraqis in Ottawa. We used the conference rooms of your Parliament to talk in some detail about federalism.

Let me just say a few words about what may evolve when cooler heads can prevail in the Arab world, about whether several of these artificially constructed countries will need to devolve power to regions—those regions may be somewhat more ethnically homogeneous—and whether we are looking at a gradual evolution to some decentralization of power and authority if, in the end, a country called Syria and a country called Iraq still exist. I presume, odds are that they will still exist 50 years from now, but maybe they will be governed quite differently. I do think the Canadian model of federalism is sometimes a way of managing, and I know that Canada has offered this advice to other multicultural countries.

The Iraq story is a very complicated mix of success and failure. The autonomy of the Kurdish region in a way is still a positive story, on balance, both for Iraq and for the Kurds. They have managed to demonstrate that they're self-governing and yet they are still part of an Iraqi state where there is an exchange of revenue.

Certainly, the Kurds behaved very honourably in trying to push back ISIL and were successful. They did need help. They needed help from... Well, as they would say, apparently there's a story out that Barzani said, "I called the Americans; they couldn't get there fast enough. I called the Turks; they said no. I called the Iranians and they were there in eight hours." So there is still some question about who is their best partner.

I still think the United States plays a special role in the relationship with the KRG, but I cite this as an example that we have a slightly simplistic view that the government in Baghdad today is almost as bad as it was under Maliki. I would argue that it's a bit better than being under Maliki and that there is at least some recognition of needing to take a more inclusive approach. Nonetheless, whether we need Baghdad, for the future stability of Iraq, some decentralization of power and some recognition that perhaps federalism is part of the solution....

Just on education, again, it's not up to us to tell them how to run their ministry of education. What I think Canada, the United States, the Brits, and others can do is offer scholarships and at least save a few promising young people. Let them come out to be educated and exposed to more tolerant multicultural societies. Even though the numbers in scholarship programs are usually so small that you might ask how this can possibly affect the whole country because the numbers are too small, the impact on individual lives is sometimes huge in regard to what happens when those people go home and learn to be better citizens than they would be had they been educated at home.

• (1135)

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** Thank you. That's my time.

**The Chair:** Yes. Thank you.

We're going to move over to you, Mr. Anderson, for seven minutes.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** I want to thank our witnesses for being with us this morning. I think it's been very helpful for us.

I'd like to address a couple of things. Unfortunately, we don't have a lot of time on each of these rounds.

All of you have...and we heard from other witnesses earlier who basically have said that this is a problem which as outsiders we can't solve. We heard that this morning, that we're not likely to be the primary agents of change. We had witnesses here the other day who said that, really, we shouldn't be expecting that democracy can work in the Arab world as it stands today.

I wonder if we can get a response to that statement. Is it possible to have democratic structures functioning well in the Arab world in the times we live in?

I think Ms. Abdo talked about how there are some principles that are very different from what we have in North America. I'm interested in how you see those coming into play in terms of governance structures.

**Ms. Geneive Abdo:** Thank you for your question. It's a very important one.

If you look at polling data, I think the most reliable polling that's done in the United States is being conducted by the Pew Forum. They've done very interesting polling data on how Muslims in the Arab world feel about apostasy, for example, or how they feel about cutting hands, or about some of these kinds of punishments and penalties that we consider barbaric. What's very interesting to me is the large percentage of people who were surveyed, the respondents, who favour these policies.

To answer your question, I don't know what the solution is and how we get there but I think that we have to understand, as you point out, that we need to help Arab societies develop a different form of governance that is somewhere between Islamic extremism and dictatorship, because these are the two sort of polar opposites that have been competing for power for 30 years now. As we've seen, during different times one form of these governances triumphs over the other.

In Egypt now, there's a very repressive government that is far more repressive than anything that happened under the Muslim Brotherhood or even former President Mubarak. Conversely we have a situation in both Syria and Iraq where you have extremist Islamic groups at least governing some parts of these countries.

I think that one way the west can be instructive is to try to help—and I hate to use this word—moderate Muslim leaders, people, and civil society think about other forms of governance that would work in those societies. It's not democracy as we know it and it's not the caliphate for most people. Part of that is education.

I want to briefly comment about education in answer to the previous question. It's just a thought. There's been a big movement in Europe now to educate religious scholars who are born in Britain or France. There has been a very effective program here in the United States which started 10 years ago that is now affiliated with the University of California, Berkeley, where there's a seminary now to train religious scholars who are Americans. I think this is very important when we get to the issue of foreign fighters, because it's important—

• (1140)

**Mr. David Anderson:** I would just like to comment on that point.

**Ms. Geneive Abdo:** —for Muslims living in the west to be educated—if we're going to talk about education—by scholars who are Canadians or Americans, not people who come from Pakistan, Iraq, or Syria.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I think I'm running out of time here, but I would like to follow up on the domestic side of that.

Maybe Mr. Gartenstein-Ross can answer this.

Why has there been such silence, in our perspective, from the Muslim community? They seem to have an inability to articulate their larger response to these issues in North American society. Is it that they are unwilling to, they're afraid to, or is it that these principles actually are different even in the Muslim community in North America and they're unsure about what that response should look like even in our society? Could you give us some perspective on that?

We've talked about trying to deal with the ideology. How do we deal with that here? I'm interested in your perspective on this.

**Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross:** I think that's an excellent question.

Ms. Abdo, in her opening statement, talked about how the American Muslim community hasn't been able to articulate that stake-in-the-heart view, that stake-in-the-heart response to extremism. I thought Ms. Abdo's presentation was excellent, and her argument to take religion seriously is, I think, very important.



We largely live in a post-Christian west in that Christianity was at one point front and centre to the way we thought about governance. It no longer is. We have this way of thinking about religion that is very different from how anyone would have thought about religions at the time of their founding. There's a very good book by Scott Appleby called *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*. In it he argues that we have basically two views of religion among political scientists, one of which is that everything that religion brings is bad; the other one is that everything religion brings is good. I'd say that the latter one is more the way we think about it in the west. We tend to think that of course jihadists are wrong, because what they stand for is bad. But that's not necessarily true.

That's why in my presentation I emphasized that there are mistakes ISIL is making, clear digressions they're making, even from the Salafi jihadist perspective. You're not going to have a moderate scholar who will necessarily be able to just defend the extremist argument, because this is essentially an originalist argument, an originalist interpretation of religion arguing that you should discard the centuries of jurisprudence and the kind of scholarship that has changed Islam and made it more consonant with modern society. That's what jurisprudence has done. The Salafi argument is that all of that is a deviation from the religion; all of that is *bidah*, or innovation, and they need to go back to how it was originally practised. There's a powerful argument there.

I think one of our frustrations is that we see religion through that very narrow lens, a very western lens, which just isn't at all consonant with the way it's viewed in the Muslim world, or even by many Muslims in the west. As a result there's this frustration. We think that religion should turn out and be good. It should be consonant with democratic principles. But religion is a much more complex thing. Within the history of Christianity, obviously, you have much more complexity as well than in how it's understood today.

• (1145)

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

To round out the first round, we're going to have Mr. Garneau, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Thank you all for being with us.

My first question is for Mr. Gartenstein-Ross.

I agree with you that ISIS is exceptionally good at social media and putting out that kind of messaging and propaganda. It sets up a paradox in my head when I see them put out a 20-minute video on a Jordanian pilot being burned alive. Part of me reacts by saying that I'm sure this is going to make everybody in the world really want to destroy this group. At the same time, they obviously have a different notion of the result they're going to get from showing this video.

Please explain to me what, in your view, they are aiming for when they put out these horrific videos.

**Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross:** They're aiming for a few things. They're taking people who once were in some position of power, whether they're journalists, whether they're fighter pilots, and their subjecting them to maximum humiliation and defeat, and ultimately some of the most disgusting deaths possible.

In particular, the case of Lieutenant al-Kasasbeh, the Jordanian fighter pilot, he represented....They're basically taking out their frustrations with the air campaign, which has been quite effective against ISIS. Not only was he burned to death, but before that he was castrated. He was raped. The way he was treated was extraordinarily brutal, even for ISIL.

Now to get to the broader question, I think they're making a mistake. I mentioned that at the outset. They're making a mistake in several ways and this is why ISIL is actually much more vulnerable than al Qaeda, in the longer term.

This kind of debate happened before, and Ms. Abdo referred to it, a debate between al Qaeda and al Qaeda in Iraq, under Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. It was a debate, and in part she alluded to religion, but it was also a debate about strategy. What al Qaeda saw was that this extraordinarily brutal approach under Zarqawi ended up producing localized resistance in the form of the *sahwa*, or the awakening movements, which ended up pushing back against al Qaeda and really destroying them. There is a combination of factors.

The fact is that their extraordinarily brutal approach caused people not only to chafe at their rule but also to extract revenge that was every bit as grisly as what al Qaeda did. It's not very well publicized but there were a lot of revenge killings and a lot of humiliation has been put to the al Qaeda guys after the '07 to '08 period, and their defeat.

ISIL is very dependent upon social media and the youth demographic. But one thing we understand is that what's popular today won't be popular in two years. That's why your fellow Canadian, Justin Bieber, is not necessarily going to continue gaining popularity. Most people feel that he has a ceiling and that at some point he'll be considered uncool. We may have already reached that point.

That's kind of a humorous example, but the point is that the extreme brutality is at some point going to be diffused. I mentioned some ways that this could be done. But let me tell you something that I guarantee will happen at some point because I have watched the cycles of revenge in Iraq during the last period.

At some point, you will have a video released by somebody, maybe it will be rogue peshmerga forces; they probably won't reveal their identities, but they'll take an ISIL guy, and rather than his being strong and beheading people, he's going to be crying and humiliated, and he'll be subjected to a death every bit as brutal.

Something like that will have an enormous effect. I'm not condoning it. I don't condone brutal killings in general, but at some point that will happen. You'll get the tools that they have used, used against them. At some point, there will be a kind of reckoning where the al Qaeda strategy will eclipse the ISIL strategy, because ISIL has overplayed its hands.

You're not supposed to fight a two front war. They're fighting a war on about six different fronts right now, with lots and lots of people who want to kill them and kill them in the most disgusting ways possible. In a matter of military strategy, that's not the place they want to be.

•(1150)

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** We tend to focus on the military defeat of ISIL. You've pointed out that one of the things we should be able to do better is to try to exploit their loss of momentum and to more effectively show how they're being stopped and in some cases reversed.

This question is for all three of you, whoever wants to weigh in.

ISIL needs not only this momentum that you speak of, but it also needs money. It needs recruits. It needs weapons. Quite apart from the challenges of governance that come after all of this is hopefully concluded, how effectively is the west or the coalition dealing with trying to strangle them from the funding, from the recruiting, and from the weapons point of view? It's a very broad question.

**Ms. Ellen Laipson:** I don't have any confidence that we would know all the details of what's being monitored by intelligence services, but my sense is that we should not be confident that we can block them through banking sanctions, for example. They have been able to rob banks, literally, and they've been able to collect sufficient funding in very small ways through coercion and intimidation.

Some people have interpreted their demand for \$200 million for the Japanese hostages as a sign that they had at least temporarily run out of money. They have big swings in whether they're feeling financially secure or not. But I think they're operating in an environment in which they are more mobile than we can stop them from accessing whatever resources are available locally. Unlike Iranian sanctions or Russian sanctions, our capacity to intervene from afar and stop the flow of finances is not likely to be completely successful.

**Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross:** On the weapons front, I think they have a clear vulnerability in that they're fighting like a conventional military. They're not fighting like an insurgent force. They're using tanks; they're using Humvees; they're using heavy armour, and they don't have an industrial base to replenish that. That's one reason that air strikes have been fairly effective.

I'd say that one thing that can be done to further speed up their decline in that regard is to change the targeting of air strikes. Right now, air strikes are focused one, on senior leadership, and two, on kinetic operations by ISIL. If we were to target tactical leadership as well, that would help to accelerate their decline in that regard.

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

We're going to start our second round, which will be for five minutes.

I'm going to start with Mr. Hawn, sir.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you all for joining us.

The testimony has been very interesting, if somewhat discouraging, Ms. Abdo's particularly. What concerns me, as you pointed out, is the impotence of the majority in the Muslim world to do anything about the violent minority. As we have said, we can't impose solutions on them; they have to come up with them themselves.

Part of this is understanding Islam and understanding governance, as you have said. In the Christian world, we have separated church

and state, but it seems to me that in the Muslim world, the church is the state; Islam is governance. Everything they do is based on the Koran, is based on centuries of jurisprudence. How do we ever fight that?

A point I made on Tuesday to some folks we had here is that Christianity grew up over a period of time. To me, Islam needs to grow up. Are we ever going to see that? We can't wait 800 years for them to grow up as it took Christianity. How do we do that? How do we get into the schools where we're concerned about what's being taught, and in some mosques, and by some people in Canada, in the U.S., in Britain, wherever? How do we get into those places and work with these folks to give some power to the majority, to actually make the change, and to start separating church and state in the Muslim world? Is that ever going to happen?

Ms. Abdo.

**Ms. Genevieve Abdo:** I'm sorry to be the messenger of bad news, but I think that maybe we need to be asking a slightly different question, which is not how can we force them to separate church from state.

Before I answer the question, I just want to note that, in a sense, with regard to a lot of what we're seeing, these kinds of extremist ideas, this isn't the first time in the Islamic tradition that some of these ideas have been advanced. There's a whole history of Islamic scholarship. There's a scholar by the name of Ibn Taymiyyah, and there's another ideologue by the name of Hassan al-Banna. There have always been these cycles of radical thought having some resonance in Islamic societies, of course not as violent as what we're seeing today, but perhaps that's just a result of the modern world. We have better technology now. We have better weaponry. The extremists now operate in a different way than they did in the 1990s. In the 1990s, in Egypt, they were attacking cabinet ministers with fairly primitive military operations. I think we have to separate what is technology and the instruments of the modern world from Islamic theology, or what is theological and has been part of the Islamic tradition.

I'll give you an example. The anti-Shia attitudes have existed for hundreds of years among the Sunni; it's just that now there's a different instrument for expressing that intolerance and that hatred: there's social media.

I think those are some of the challenges, but I believe the upside is that, as part of the modern history of these Islamic movements, at some point, public opinion does turn against them. The specific example that has been referred to since the unfortunate death of the Japanese journalist was in 1997 in Luxor, Egypt, when the al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, the most militant group that had existed in Egypt for a while, killed a lot of tourists and Muslims in the town of Luxor. That was virtually the end of the movement. I think the question now is, how many more of these really gruesome incidents can ISIS survive without public opinion turning against them in a way that matters?

I think what the west can do is try to help some of the religious leadership. I think there were 180 religious scholars who recently signed a petition against ISIS. How can the west help these people develop bigger platforms so that the extremists' voices aren't the only voices that people hear? As I mentioned earlier, I don't think that, either in the west or in the Arab world, religious scholars who are against ISIS, who are against this interpretation of Islam are effective in their own messaging. I think that is one way that the west can weigh in.

• (1155)

**The Chair:** That's all the time we have, so we'll have to maybe pick it up later.

Madam Laverdière, I'm going to turn it over to you for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Thank you for three very interesting presentations.

Of course, our aim is to look at the future for some recommendations, but maybe we need to look at the past a bit to better understand how we can do better in the future.

You mentioned a few failures of the past. One you mentioned, and maybe you didn't call it a failure, was the Arab Spring. In particular, you said that young people who are in ISIL had a different agenda a couple of years ago because they were involved in the Arab Spring.

What could we have done better, if anything, to sustain the Arab Spring, to help make it work and avoid those people who would rather turn to radicalization later on?

**Ms. Ellen Laipson:** Thank you very much. I should clarify it. I don't want to oversimplify or overgeneralize. There is some anecdotal evidence that young Tunisians are disproportionately represented in ISIL. It's startling for a country as small and as homogeneous as Tunisia that over 3,000 young Tunisians have made their way to ISIL. We have some anecdotal evidence that at least some of them were Nahdha supporters; they were supporters of Rashid al-Ghannushi, who is as close as you can come to a moderate reformist Islamist thinker, and they were disillusioned that there wasn't more immediate change in their feeling about their relationship to the state.

I think the west tried very hard to be helpful in the first year of the Arab Spring. There was a big infusion, the Deauville partnership, and all these ideas of what we could do. Reality is that the flow of aid, job creation, support for the private sector, etc., couldn't come fast enough or on a large enough scale. In the particular case of Tunisia, we're just about to release a report, like the ideas of the Marshall Plan, on what we could have done in the Arab Spring. The reality is that Tunisia is the closest to a success story and it's still on track, more than any other Arab country, but its own new parliamentarians didn't know how to change the legislative environment for economic action. They failed to open up the banking system, to create an enabling environment for new economic initiative, that a statist mindset was still in place.

I think there's still work to be done, but the sad truth is that, because of this media information age we live in, people very quickly decided that it wasn't working. That's what happened in Egypt. They didn't have the patience to let some of these transformative activities play out. I don't blame the west for failing. In addition, I would say the west was very clear that we wanted to respond to Arab requests. We didn't want to decide for them what their policy should be. In the case of Libya, we waited way too long because we were waiting for a Libyan government that wasn't competent to ask for help, but we said that we were not going to decide what they needed until they asked. They couldn't ask; they didn't know how to ask. There were some missteps there on both their part and our part early on.

We should not give up on the Arab Spring. I still think that the Arab Spring will, historically, be a turning point in the willingness of Arab societies to stand up and say that they want a greater voice. It doesn't mean we're on an easy path to democracy, but I do think state-society relations in the Arab world are changing. We're just at the beginning of that process.

• (1200)

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** If you have time, perhaps you could expand a bit on the situation in Jordan. How do you see it? You've mentioned that it's starting to be touched by the events we've seen recently by ISIL and the population's reaction to the current events.

**The Chair:** I'd like a very quick response. The member is out of time.

**Ms. Ellen Laipson:** I was in Jordan in October and I thought Jordanians were very much in denial that ISIL was a domestic problem for them. I think, in the short run, the Jordanians are hugely galvanized in a unified spirit, but they want to fight now. The king wants to get behind the cockpit in a fighter plane. If I were his security detail, I would say, "You've got to be kidding." What a tragedy it would be if the king were to be caught in a battle with ISIL. I think that Jordan has always been a vulnerable country, but Jordan is also a country that has such a close partnership with the west. It will mean that a security culture will dominate, so we will see a strengthening of a security environment in Jordan, but I do think they will survive.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that quick response.

We're going to move back over here to complete the second round. Mr. Goldring, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC):** Thank you, witnesses, for your testimony today.

Ms. Abdo, it has been mentioned that Christianity has grown up, but I think we've seen over the last couple of years, even in Ireland where there was some terrorism, and we see even today on Ukraine's eastern border where Moscow itself has what it calls an Orthodox army, which in effect is persecuting other Orthodox Christians in Ukraine as we speak....

There is the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, with parliamentarians from 25 different countries. It's not necessarily Orthodox countries per se, but Orthodox members of parliament.

Would you consider that would be helpful, maybe, or is there such an organization for Arab parliamentarians, not just from Arab countries but from the United States, Canada, and other countries to get together?

A lot of this seems to be the result of really serious misunderstandings. When we think of our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and freedom of speech, it just seems to run counter to what other societies and cultures believe in themselves. I think a lot could be meted out by discussions in these forums, to perhaps take back to our own countries, to help improve our own Charter of Rights.

Could you comment on that, please?

• (1205)

**Ms. Geneive Abdo:** Thank you for your question.

Because, of course, we have to consider that post-Arab uprisings elected leaders in most countries—maybe Jordan and Tunisia now being the exceptions—who have less credibility than they had before, rather than parliamentarians, we're seeing the emergence of non-state actors. As I described, they're the ones who are in conflict. They're the ones who are making these kinds of calls.

What I think might be important if you take a country like Egypt, one thing that could be helpful, if you're talking about the idea of delegations, there is an institution called Al-Azhar, for example. The head of this institution is appointed by the Egyptian state, and that's always been true, but it's a religious institution. As I mentioned earlier, an institution like this—even though its legitimacy and how much respect it has in the Sunni world is debatable—as a state institution, is an institution that the west could maybe deal with in the kind of forum and format you're talking about. Their credibility has been hurt over time. There's a big debate in this institution among the religious scholars about the role of the state in religion, about Islamic interpretation. Perhaps it could be a player in the kind of thing you're talking about.

These institutions exist everywhere. They exist in Lebanon. There are Shia institutions, Sunni institutions. They've all weighed in on these issues, but there is no centralized way for them to exchange their ideas.

Now that these non-state actors are transnational, what happens in Lebanon doesn't stay in Lebanon. What happens in Syria doesn't stay in Syria. There's even more of a need for these kinds of, not parliamentary, but religious institutions to come together to try to sort out some of these issues.

I'll just give you a small example. Two weeks ago here in Washington a delegation of tribal leaders from Anbar province came to lobby the United States government to ask for more help in fighting ISIS. Some of these kinds of organizations are not part of the state necessarily, but they have a lot of power within Arab societies. I think that governments need to deal more with these kinds of nebulous organizations.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** You mentioned the issue in France. It was hotly debated here in Canada too. Our own CBC refused to carry the picture. It was criticized by some for not carrying it because it was not being open enough. Obviously it's an issue. We must explore

how to be more culturally sensitive so we don't unnecessarily trigger backlashes in some of these other countries and cultures.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Goldring. That's all the time.

We're now going to start our third round. I'll have Mr. Anderson start, for five minutes.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I'd like to follow up with Ms. Laipson.

You made some comment earlier about education and scholarships. I think we're all supportive of these, but I have in mind the Jesuit statement that if you give me a child for seven years, I'll deliver you the man. I just wonder how we can be effective.

Islam is very cognizant of the idea that they need to educate their young people. How effective is it going to be for us to try to come to someone who is at the university level and say, "We'll give you a scholarship, and you can come over to North America"? To whom do those scholarships need to be geared in order to be effective? How do we deal with that issue? Are we going to change somebody's fundamental values when we bring them over here as a 20-year-old?

**Ms. Ellen Laipson:** I look at this issue with great humility. I'm sure there are people who can parse the issue much more carefully than I can.

I admit that in providing university-level scholarships, essentially what we're trying to do is perpetuate an elite, trying to ensure the sustainability of a western-oriented elite. We are not talking about transforming societies in which the demographic base everywhere—in Morocco, Egypt, Yemen, the population-dense countries—has a part of their demographic pyramid that is never going to be exposed to advanced education, or certainly to western-style education. In a country such as Pakistan, a few western scholarships are not going to replace the madrasa system.

I am not suggesting that this solution would be sufficient, but I think it's a useful input, because we want at least part of the elites of these countries to still retain some cosmopolitan values. I think there is a fair amount of evidence, looking over the decades, of how an intervention with an 18-year-old who comes to get an undergraduate degree or comes for graduate school sometimes is so inspiring that those people go on to become leaders in their own countries. I think we can be reasonably confident that they are contributors to a more positive relationship with the west.

It's not sufficient. I'm not suggesting that we could ever provide enough schooling or access to scholarships to transform these societies at the base. That has to be done at the primary education level within those countries themselves.

• (1210)

**Mr. David Anderson:** Good.

I'd like to follow up on one other comment that you made earlier. You said that this theology or ideology has not yet spread to Asia. But there are various Islamic insurgencies throughout Asia in various countries, in areas in which they're calling for sharia law to be implemented and are implementing it, separatist movements and those kinds of things.

Could you explain a little more what you meant by that? It seems that it is more international than that comment suggests, and it has an impact and an influence right around the world. I'm interested in whether you want to clarify that statement, or maybe you want to defend it; I'm not sure.

**Ms. Ellen Laipson:** For sure, some of these political Islam debates exist in the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, countries in which there are Muslim minority populations or Muslim majority populations. We've been looking pretty carefully at whether the idea of the caliphate resonates in Pakistan, for example. We are really trying to watch for whether there is a contagion effect yet. It may happen, and I'm sure there are individual or pockets of ISIL sympathizers in Asian countries, but right now it seems to be more an Arab-world phenomenon than an entire Muslim-world phenomenon.

Again, I think it deserves to be monitored.

**Mr. David Anderson:** The theory, then, is typically based around the caliphate, and the notion of establishing it is what you were talking about.

**Ms. Ellen Laipson:** Yes.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Okay, thank you.

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

We're going to move over to Mr. Dewar for five minutes.

**Mr. Paul Dewar:** I have a question for Mr. Gartenstein-Ross. I found your comments around propaganda use and messaging to be very interesting. Actually, a couple of witnesses touched on this subject.

Based on your assessment, what is an effective way of disrupting this? Obviously, as a responsible actor, we have a responsibility to do what we can here under the United Nations Security Council resolution, but also in the region. Do you have ideas around that?

I was very interested in your assessment that while the public seems to think that Daesh or ISIL is gaining momentum and is on a roll, you're suggesting that they're very vulnerable. I appreciate your assessment, but what are some of the things we can do to effectively disrupt and hamper their actions, particularly in, as you quite rightly put it, their messaging, the way they use propaganda?

**Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross:** I'll start with the most immediate and least effective, which is obviously pulling Twitter feeds, pulling videos, things like that, including getting various services, like Twitter or Facebook, to do so can have a disruptive effect. But I think in terms of a messaging campaign, obviously we're looking for something much more sophisticated than that.

As I said, I don't think a messaging campaign can be driven by, say, a politician on the stump saying ISIS is actually weak. Instead, the U.S., Canada, other countries that are active in Iraq, have a lot of information related to ISIS. I think making sure that the information gets to the right people, that is credible news sources, both from the western world and from the Arab world, is extraordinarily important and can have a disruptive effect.

Number one would be showing their losses, and I think even putting together information packets for reporters that vividly document this group's losses. You have, for example, this new

study that came out saying that ISIS has doubled its territory in Syria. It's not accurate. I've been following this in very granular detail. It has not doubled its territory in Syria. If you look at the most gains being made by jihadist groups...look, jihadist groups are gaining, but it's mainly the al-Nusra Front, which is ISIS' primary competitor, which has been on a rampage over the past few months. Likewise in Iraq, the fact they've lost Sinjar, the fact that their logistics are increasingly challenged, and the fact that Mosul is being increasingly encircled, these are the kinds of things that can vividly show the disruption of their momentum, and right now that's not getting out.

Another thing that could be shown is where they are exaggerating their reach. They've consistently exaggerated, and they've gotten it out into the media. I mentioned Derna before, where they were able to convince several western media outlets that they controlled Derna when they didn't. They have been in this campaign to make it seem as though various jihadist organizations have joined ISIS when they haven't. Ansar al-Sharia, in Tunisia, is an example. The Uqbah Ibn Nafi Brigade, also based in Tunisia, is another one where they got some of their supporters in Uqbah Ibn Nafi to release a statement favourable to them and for a while people thought that Uqbah bin Nafi had become part of ISIS. These are ways they're trying to generate false momentum.

Another great thing is that on November 10 they got a number of organizations at the same time to pledge their *bay'ah* to ISIS, with the exception of one, that being Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, in Egypt. All those organizations have not only pledged to ISIS before, but they have pledged multiple times. That's interesting, right? It's actually something that demonstrates their desperation. But we didn't have a messaging where we could get that out to reporters and say that there was this announcement and all these groups had pledged before. They're trying to blow it up into something bigger than it is.

The final thing is ISIS' atrocities. I interact a lot on Twitter with ISIS supporters, who are an annoying lot to interact with, but one interesting thing about them is a lot of them don't believe ISIS' atrocities even when ISIS itself claims those atrocities. What that shows me is that within ISIS' supporters in the west, and even some of those in the theatre, some of them just don't believe what ISIS is actually doing. As one of them said to me in a conversation, it's photos or it didn't happen.

I think it involves getting out what they're doing, and being able to more effectively show it. Look, in their own magazine, in *Dabiq*, they had an entire article dedicated to the reinstatement of sexual slavery. They are in fact doing that. They are enslaving women. It's a disgusting practice. You've had some stories come out about it, but the atrocities they're committing are important from both the perspective of their violating their own extremist interpretation of sharia law, but also they get to the fact that, regardless of whether someone can craft a sharia justification, a lot of their supporters are deeply uncomfortable with what they're doing and so they've created this kind of perspective where they're just not going to believe it. Part of that is our fault, in that we're not getting that information which we have out to publications, which can really vividly demonstrate what ISIS has been doing.

• (1215)

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

Back over to Mr. Hawn, for five minutes.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** To follow up on that “it didn't happen” point, even in Ottawa when we had things happen on October 22, almost immediately something came out on Facebook with someone saying that no, it didn't happen, that somebody in Canada had made it all up. Well, I can guarantee that everybody in this room was there and of course it did happen.

That's the counter-messaging part that I think is really important. We have who knows how many homegrown jihadis in Canada. CSIS says they're tracking about 140, but you can guarantee there are many more than that. I think it is pretty effective, but is there anything we can do? Maybe it's a naive question, but the two guys who acted in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and in Ottawa in October weren't members of ISIS, I'm sure. ISIS didn't know who they were, but they lay out this propaganda and they know they have live hand grenades sprinkled across the rest of the world that are going to go off at random. Of course, that fits their plan quite well.

Of the countermeasures you talked about, how aggressive can we get in this era of political correctness? We have communities in Canada, as you do in the U.S., that are particularly vulnerable. In my city of Edmonton, the Somali community is particularly vulnerable. There are three members of the Edmonton Somali community who were recently killed over there and that caused some alarm. How do we get into those communities that we know are vulnerable without being accused of being politically incorrect with the pre-emptive counter-messaging?

•(1220)

**Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross:** I think there are multiple ways. The Somali community is actually a very good example. In the United States, the Somali community in Minneapolis–St. Paul went from being one of those horror stories to a success story. It's now a little more ambiguous at this point.

In the community initially, you had a number of foreign fighters, long before ISIS. You had a number of Americans who had gone over to Somalia to fight with the extremist group al Shabaab. Canadians did as well. While there was initially a lot of enthusiasm in the community for Shabaab's predecessor, the Islamic Courts Union, in part because the arch-enemies of the Somalis, the Ethiopians, had gone in and invaded.... The two countries have a very long history.

Despite that early nationalistic fervour, when members of the communities saw their sons fighting, dying, and often being killed by their own supposed allies in arms, and saw the first American suicide bomber, Shirwa Ahmed, a graduate of Roosevelt High School, this ended up changing the community's view from seeing local law enforcement as something that was their enemy to an understanding that it was a bulwark for protecting people from going over. That's one aspect of counter-messaging. I think community partnerships are important.

I was in Ottawa a few years ago taking part in a conference on Somali youth radicalization, so I understand what a hard nut it is to crack within Canada, but there is a success story in the U.S. For that particular community, I think there's a lot that can be learned from the Minneapolis–St. Paul example.

The second thing is on a broader scale. I think they have a messaging campaign that is very effective right now. In the longer term, as I made clear before, I think they're in a lot of trouble. The way we can hasten that is by really making sure that credible media outlets get examples, as I said before, of their losses and of their atrocities. That will hasten the toxicity which is due to them. There's a reason why, even though youth throughout the Islamic world were extraordinarily inspired by al-Zarqawi back in 2005-07 and even after his death, by 2008-09 nobody was being inspired by al-Zarqawi.

They have a messaging that is going to explode on them. The faster we can make that happen, the better.

Let me say one final thing, which is that ISIL's decline does not mean the decline of jihadism. I think this is really a generational challenge, but the sooner ISIL really is disrupted, the better. There's a variety of reasons for that, one of which is that it actually makes al Qaeda look more moderate.

Ms. Laipson mentioned the situation in Jordan. One thing that is happening is that the Jordanian regime has flirted with the idea that al Qaeda can serve as the bulwark against ISIS. That's one reason why you have some extremist clerics like Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi let out of prison. Maqdisi was actually a mentor to Zarqawi and was true-blue al Qaeda. He served as one of the Jordanian negotiators trying to get Lieutenant al-Kasasbeh freed.

That's an example of how disruptive it is to us to have this extraordinarily extreme organization that goes beyond anything we've seen before. It has created a situation where al Qaeda can seem moderate, and that in itself is an enormous problem.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That's all the time we have.

We're going to turn it back over to the NDP.

Mr. Toone.

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** I want to thank the witnesses for their presentations. They've been very, very informative.

I'm especially interested in the general concept that we're looking at a generational problem, so there's no quick and easy solution. We really do need to be looking at the long term here.

If I could bring it back to some immediate concrete measures that we might be able to take, one of the measures that was discussed was financial. You mentioned that ISIL may have betrayed a certain financial requirement through recent ransom demands for \$200 million. I'm interested in seeing what we have done to try to stem financial flows to ISIL. There was mention at one point that they were robbing banks. I'm assuming they're robbing banks within their own territory and not outside the territory. What are we doing to stop financial flows into that territory? Is there anything more we can do?

•(1225)

**Ms. Ellen Laipson:** The U.S. treasury department does have the authority to work with central banks and commercial banks in many countries as part of pre-existing counterterrorism authorities. There's a lot of global cooperation on trying to block terrorist financing.

As you interpreted from our own earlier remarks, some of their financial schemes are very local. We're not on the ground in Syria. We're not physically present in Mosul and some of the towns that they're controlling in western Iraq. I think that we—if you mean we as North Americans—are not directly involved in trying to block their finances. I think we're trying to help the Iraqis and Syrian opposition to do the best they can.

But I don't believe, to the best of my knowledge, that ISIL is depending on funds that are transiting internationally. They are getting their resources locally or through donations that come through informal networks and channels.

**Mr. Philip Toone:** So the measures that could be taken are fairly limited on that front.

Regarding displaced people, we're looking at phenomenal numbers of displaced people in that area. The UN's talking about somewhere around five million people needing some form of humanitarian aid. How are we doing with regard to helping in that humanitarian crisis?

If I could perhaps bring it down to just a few particular points and perhaps branch it out later, you mentioned, for instance, sexual enslavement of women. Are we able to bring any assistance on that level? Are NGOs involved in this? Is there anything more we can do on that front?

**Ms. Ellen Laipson:** At least on the U.S. side, we have a pretty large operation. We're the number one aid donor to Syrians in distress. That means both Syrians on Syrian territory—and there are some very delicate channels that have been developed to try to get some assistance to people who are still living on Syrian soil—and those who are outside the country.

I think the UN is quite distraught that some of the appeals for emergency aid for Syrian refugees are unfulfilled. I think it has raised less than half of the money it thinks was the target in the last calendar year. I don't know what its goals are for 2015.

The Turks have given a huge amount of in-kind assistance to the Syrian refugees and have been a little ambivalent regarding how much they want the international community to be their partner. They want to do some of it themselves.

My guess is that we are able to address only a small percentage of the actual need. There are Syrian families and children and so on in enormous distress who the international community has not been able to reach.

**Ms. Geneive Abdo:** I'll just add something briefly about Lebanon.

The official statistic now is that a fourth of the population in Lebanon is Syrian refugees, and that's considered a modest number. I think that Lebanon is a very good example of a country that could be significantly affected by the Syrian refugees, because it's on the brink now, and it has been on the brink for a long time, since the Syrian war began. Will Lebanon be drawn into this?

I think it's absolutely incumbent upon western governments to deal with the refugee crisis in Lebanon, because we don't want Lebanon to become another falling state.

The UN is completely overloaded in Lebanon. There are children all over the streets of Beirut—Syrian refugees—who basically beg and steal, not for their families in most cases, but to send money back to organizations in Syria. There are smugglers and this sort of thing.

It's a serious problem on many different levels, because it's affecting the Lebanese economy. It's affecting political stability in Lebanon. It's really draining the country and it is a cause of further instability.

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

Thank you, Mr. Toone.

We're in our fourth round and I think we'll go to Mr. Goldring, Mr. Garneau, and then we'll finish up with Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Goldring, for five minutes.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** Mr. Gartenstein-Ross, you mentioned the vulnerability of ISIL and touched a bit on their access to heavy equipment, tanks, artillery, and paraphernalia like that to conduct their warfare. What kind of an effect have the friendly troops, the allied people, been having on it? Is there a continuing supply to them and where would that continuing supply have been coming from? You said they were stealing or robbing them from neighbouring nations, but is that the extent of it? Obviously, they would need to have long-distance artillery and tanks to be able to conduct what they're doing. Where would that type of equipment be coming from?

• (1230)

**Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross:** Originally, the equipment came from overrunning Syrian bases and then capturing all the heavy armour, artillery, etc. on the Syrian bases. There are a number of instances in which they've overrun those bases. When they advanced into Iraq in June, they captured a great deal of territory, including overrunning a number of Iraqi bases. That helped them to get a lot more in the way of heavy armour during that period and they've overrun some bases since then.

But this is an area where they're in trouble because they've failed to overrun any bases for the past few months. They've made some serious attempts, including one back in December to overrun Assad's air bases, but ended up getting rebuffed.

One thing which I think is incredibly important to watch is when they make advances against bases, because the reason they're doing so is to try to get the equipment that's stashed on the base. That's the only way right now that they're able to get that specific weaponry. Now, there are other weapons they can get from other places, things like surface-to-air missiles. Unfortunately, there's a much bigger market for those, but tanks and Humvees are pretty hard to come by, and there are only a limited number of places where they can get them.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** Certainly, there would be breakdowns in the field and there would be the losses by the air strikes as well. With that and their lack of access to new supply, is that not putting them in a very vulnerable position? They can't carry on what they're doing strictly with troops on the ground and rifles.

**Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross:** Yes, it absolutely does.

In terms of breakdowns my assessment is that they have shown pretty good capability in repairing their vehicles. They don't necessarily lose vehicles due to an inability to maintain them. But, yes, they're vulnerable in this regard.

I would provide a caveat, though, a bit of caution. If they can't fight like a conventional military anymore, they might revert to fighting like an insurgent force. They were actually very successful in Anbar province in late 2014 in an offensive led by Omar al-Shishani, who's a Chechen field commander, who basically, in rampaging through Anbar, captured the city of Hit during that advance. They fought very much like an insurgent force, going in and capturing territory; that is, they had light forces and good speed of movement. They didn't have these big columns, the kind of things that ISIS in many places is characterized by. If they resort to insurgency warfare, that does create its own sets of vulnerability, but the bottom line is it makes it more difficult for them to maintain their territorial holdings.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** If they go back to insurgency warfare, what's the status of the troops that we'll be able to be put forward now, to be able to take care of the insurgency, if boots on the ground are needed at that time? The heavy equipment will eventually either break down or will be lost by air strikes.

**Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross:** This gets into the broader picture of Iraq, where I think the decline of ISIS is not the decline of Iraqi jihadism. Even if ISIS were to cease to exist as an organization, it would be replaced by another organization that I think would be less brutal, but you would still have problems.

The forces that would be there to deal with insurgencies would obviously be the peshmerga in the Kurdish north, the Iraqi security forces, and you still have Iranian-backed militias which would be a part of the response. Iran has a large number of commanders on the ground, including those in Quds Force. A number of Quds Force commanders have been killed in Iraq. So you have a number of different forces on the ground. Obviously, there are also American and Canadian and British forces.

I was in Ottawa when news first broke that Canadians had actually been in engagement against ISIS and not just playing a supporting role. I know what big news that was. So you have this array of forces that would deal with it. But if they are forced to resort to just being an insurgency overall, then as I said, that means they have more difficulty holding territory, which in itself is a sign of ISIS' decline. Now, this is probably going to happen in Iraq, but not in Syria, because there's not really a strategy to displace them from their holdings in eastern Syria, which means they'll be a regional problem for some time to come.

• (1235)

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

We're going to move to Mr. Garneau.

**Mr. Marc Garneau:** In talking about governance, let's assume that ISIS miraculously disappears from Iraq. Iraq, as you pointed out, is an artificially created country after Sykes-Picot. I had the opportunity to go there in September and to meet with government officials. We talked about a number of things. The deputy minister of foreign affairs was particularly interested and I had a long

conversation with him about federalism and it's already come up in today's context.

Canada is a federal system and it works, perhaps miraculously, remarkably well. It's not to say that Canadians in British Columbia and in Newfoundland are a homogeneous lot; we are quite different in many ways. Here it seems to me that challenges in Iraq are much greater and the biggest challenge, of course, is that there are Shias and Sunnis. It makes me wonder sometimes whether, no matter what kind of governance system you have, you can't somehow paint over the fact that there are Shias and there are Sunnis and that they don't seem to be able to find a way to get along. Is there a system of governance, other than dictatorships or oppressive regimes, that can make a country such as Iraq work such as it is, given the challenge they have?

**Ms. Ellen Laipson:** I think Iraq has a new constitution that many Iraqi citizens still believe is better than the alternatives and is better than what preceded it, where citizens do have rights. I think the process of reconciliation in Iraq hasn't been a high enough priority for the Iraqi government. I think that both civil society leaders and Iraqi politicians should be spending more time visiting areas outside their own ethnic or sectarian identity. This was an idea that was starting to happen, where Kurdish politicians would visit Basra, exchange visits, to promote more of a sense of national interest and national identity. I think it can be done. I think Baghdad is still potentially a more diverse and successful melting pot of—not always melting, but co-existing—Iraqi diversity.

I think we should also remember that citizens want services from their government. Sometimes the sectarianism could be muted a bit, or mitigated, if whatever the unit of governance is, whether it's a governorate or a national level government, as long as the services are being provided. Are there utilities, public schools, roads? I think that would do a lot to mitigate some of this resorting to subnational identity, because people are looking for basic essential services and if they're not getting them, they become disaffected from their government.

Again, I think that in places like Iraq some decentralization is desirable. That proves you are living in a post-authoritarian era, but whatever the unit of government, you have to focus first and foremost on providing essential services.

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

**The Chair:** We're going to finish with Mr. Anderson, for five minutes.

**Mr. David Anderson:** We've heard this afternoon about the importance of messaging. Dr. Gartenstein-Ross has mentioned this a number of times. Mr. Dewar brought it up. One of you mentioned trying to develop bigger platforms for moderates.

I want to try to ask a specific question and hopefully I can be clear on this.



In the west, we have a foundation or a culture that revolves around some things such as, right now, democratic values: freedoms, especially of expression, human rights, principles of equality, some expectation of honesty, those kinds of things. It seems that in the east people use some different cultural foundations in their communication. I think you touched on it when you talked about the Jordanian incident where honour and dishonour are driving factors; pride and shame play a huge part and when you're dealing with enemies, you want to create this sense of humiliation and defeat.

I'm wondering if there is any place we can change our language to try to approach this situation a little more effectively. We have divisions within Islam on the interpretation of the law. Can we use language more effectively to isolate some of these folks? In particular, can we use that language paradigm of honour, dishonour, shame, and pride more effectively, even in western culture? We're dealing with communities who don't support the messaging and the activities of ISIL. Is there a way we can more effectively communicate with them? That's for a couple of you. Ms. Abdo has been in the Middle East for a long time, and Dr. Gartenstein-Ross, I'd be interested in your perspectives on that as well. Is there anything to this?

• (1240)

**Ms. Geneive Abdo:** Sorry, I missed the last—

**Mr. David Anderson:** Is language important?

**Ms. Geneive Abdo:** Yes, language is very important. Again, I don't mean to deliver bad news, but language is really important and I think perceptions are really important, but in a sense, I think it's a little too late now.

I think the language is important if we're going to try to cultivate, as we say for lack of better terminology, moderates. That's for two reasons basically. It's not only to gain their interest, but also not to discredit them. This was true with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, for example. During the year that they were in power, they faced a dilemma: do they try to look to the United States for assistance, whether it's economic or any sort of political assistance, because doing so discredits them within their own population.

In that sense, language is important. If western governments are going to become involved in some way, whether it's on a diplomatic level, whether it's about public diplomacy, about counter-messaging, the language is important. It's also important in the sense that you want to be able to empower, not undermine the people you're working with. In that sense, I think language is very important.

I hope that answers your question.

**Dr. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross:** What I would add, as well, is that we're in an age in which governments have so many more platforms than they did before.

There is one interesting U.S. government initiative from the State Department, which is controversial in terms of how effective it is. The State Department has a program called Think Again Turn Away, where they get on Twitter and they debate with jihadists. They

produce things like.... For example, there was a tribute to bin Laden that jihadists had put together. They put together something that looked exactly the same, but it said in Arabic kind of the opposite of what the tribute had said. The tribute was something like "a lion in life, victorious in death", and they said something like "disgusting in life, humiliated in death".

It's interesting because it's a different kind of messaging. I don't think they have it 100% right, by any means, but I think it gets one thing very right, which is that you now have many other platforms than just the bully pulpit in which you can engage in this counter-messaging campaign. I think the State Department's program does take into account the values of honour and shame, and that's where some of its own kind of counter-propaganda is coming from.

One thing I would say is that it's important to pick out what platform we're using to determine what kind of language is appropriate for that platform. I think there are some platforms in which a different kind of language is appropriate than would be from a prime minister or a member of Parliament.

• (1245)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

To our witnesses today, thank you very much. I think we all agree that you provided some outstanding testimony, and we certainly appreciate that.

We're going to disconnect. I know Mr. Dewar has an announcement for the whole group, but as far as our witnesses go, thank you very much for your time with us today.

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

Thank you again to our guests.

For the committee, there's something I want to bring to your attention. You might have received notice of an event today.

I'm putting on my hat as the chair for the All-Party Group for the Prevention of Genocide and Other Crimes Against Humanity. From four o'clock until 5:30, at 238-S, Centre Block, we're going to be having an event. It's with a member of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, as well as a representative from Amnesty International, to give us updates on Ukraine, Iraq, and Syria, particularly about minority groups and how they are doing, and the challenges they are facing in conflict.

It's open to you as members of Parliament, and to your staff. If you want to attend, it is open.

I have invitations for those who want one.

I just wanted to highlight that, Chair.

**The Chair:** Perfect.

Thanks everybody.

The meeting is adjourned.





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