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• (1610)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)): I'd like to call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 94 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room, as well as remotely using the Zoom application.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of members and our distinguished witness.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Although this room is equipped with a powerful audio system, feedback events can occur. The most common cause of sound feedback is an ear-piece worn too close to a microphone.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk has very kindly and graciously done her best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, November 8, 2023, the committee will resume its study of Canada's diplomatic capacity.

Today, I have the great pleasure of welcoming Senator Boehm, someone who obviously requires no introduction to any of the members. It would be fair to say that the breadth of experience he has is really unsurpassed.

We're very grateful, Senator, that you made yourself available.

I should also acknowledge that your committee did a very comprehensive review of how to reform our foreign service. We're very grateful that you agreed to be here.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks, after which we will proceed to questions from members.

Thank you, Senator.

[*Translation*]

Senator Peter M. Boehm (Senator, Ontario, ISG): Good morning, everyone.

Mr. Chair, thank you for your warm introduction. I'd also like to thank the committee for inviting me to appear before you today.

I'm here as chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade. I'm going to talk about our committee's report, "More than a Vocation: Canada's need for a 21st Century Foreign Service," that was tabled in the Senate on December 6, 2023.

Prior to our committee's study, the last in-depth review of our foreign service was done in 1981. It resulted in the release of a report by the Royal Commission on Conditions of Foreign Service, headed by Commissioner Pamela A. McDougall, a former Canadian diplomat.

[*English*]

The key question guiding the Senate committee's study was: Are Global Affairs Canada and the Canadian foreign service fit for purpose?

Our answer is yes, but with several caveats. Over 16 meetings between April 2022 and June 2023, we were guided by 22 hours of testimony from expert witnesses ranging from current and former ministers, including one former prime minister, to retired practitioners, academics, younger serving officers and members of employee-led networks within the department.

The Senate committee also undertook productive fact-finding missions to Washington in December 2022 and to London, Oslo and Berlin in September 2023. That's because several of our major allies, including Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States, have also undertaken or are in the process of undertaking reviews of their own foreign services.

We made 29 recommendations designed to strengthen the already considerable abilities of Canada's foreign service. The results of our survey, launched in the Senate before the announcement of the department's own "Future of Diplomacy" review, is an excellent and comprehensive report, but, of course, I'm biased.

The Senate committee's recommendations span areas including organizational structure and coherence, recruitment, career management and conditions of foreign service. Among our concerns is staffing. The foreign service is still feeling the effects of a suspension in recruitment between 2009 and 2019.

Recent events have also underscored the importance of a foreign service that can respond with agility to emergencies, including evacuating Canadians from conflict zones such as Lebanon, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Sudan and Gaza; however, we heard that the department's search capacity should be increased. That's why the Senate committee strongly recommends that Global Affairs Canada run an annual entry-level foreign service officer recruitment campaign to fill vacancies and create that needed surge capacity.

It should also recruit more mid-career professionals from other government departments and from outside government altogether. Our study revealed that generalist knowledge is prioritized over specific thematic expertise, due in part to some of the staffing challenges.

Russia and China will continue to hold the world's attention for years. That means that Russia and China specialists, people with understanding of the languages, cultures and goals of these countries and governments, are invaluable.

This is why the Senate committee urges Global Affairs Canada to increase investment in foreign language training and to provide opportunities for Canada-based staff trained in a foreign language to maintain their foreign language skills throughout their careers.

This also speaks to our recommendation on the equal use of French and English within the department and to ensure that, *ab initio*, official language training is maintained for new hires.

The conditions of the foreign service could also be improved. The foreign service directives provide for allowances and benefits for staff serving abroad. Because they have not been reviewed since 1981, the Senate committee strongly urges a complete modernization of the foreign service directives to ensure that they are adapted to the current and evolving realities faced by Canada's public servants.

What happens around the world impacts us here at home, from economic security to physical security, and Canada's foreign service, through a broad range of duties, is at the forefront of mitigating negative impacts and taking advantage of opportunities.

This goes to the heart of the committee's first recommendation, that Global Affairs Canada must do a far better job of communicating to Canadians what it and the foreign service specifically do.

There is hard work ahead, and what the Senate committee recommended is not the end of it. We did not even get into costing issues. We need to ensure that our talented people have the tools, skill sets, funding and consistent, non-partisan political support to do their jobs.

Again, thank you for the invitation to be here today. I'll be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Senator.

It was just brought to my attention that your mic is having some technical problems, so if you would be gracious enough to use mic number 16, we'd be—

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Do you mean no one heard what I said?

The Chair: No, we heard it all.

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Okay. Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you kindly, Senator.

First up, we'll go to MP Abouttaif.

You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ziad Abouttaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to our committee, Senator Boehm.

[*English*]

Thank you for the report, and as you mentioned, there are certain areas that haven't been tackled, or weren't tackled, in Europe. One of them is justice. As justice is not referenced in Canada's "Future of Diplomacy" discussion paper, what efforts should the government adopt to make sure we uphold international justice and accountability efforts?

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Could I just ask you to be a little more precise? By "justice", do you mean legal services within the department, or do you mean public international law?

Mr. Ziad Abouttaif: I mean public international law.

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: You'll see that there is a recommendation there that the legal services provided in the department be retained. There have, over the years, been various ideas floated to have the Department of Justice handle these particular issues more directly—for example, extradition and issues like that.

However, as recent activity has shown, particularly with issues involving the International Court of Justice in The Hague or the International Criminal Court, it's a great value to have a functioning legal bureau or, in fact, perhaps even more than one, because there are also trade lawyers in the department—it is a combined department, as you know—who handle legal questions that could come up in the context of negotiating free trade agreements.

Those services are there, and there is also, of course, a component that is consular in providing assistance.

Mr. Ziad Abouttaif: You've also mentioned the surge capacity and the need for extra tools or support. Does the department have enough of those tools that could be useful in supporting further international justice and accountability?

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: I think the tools are there. I think they need to be refined, and I think there also has to be a way to ensure that when there is a crisis—if Canadians needed to be evacuated out of Sudan or out of Gaza or Israel right after October 7—that surge capacity is there.

I'll go back a bit to my own experience, if you'll indulge me, Mr. Chair. In 2006 I chaired a task force on the evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon. We learned a lot through that, because we could not, like the United States, send in the navy to pick up our citizens. We had to get very creative, and we developed some best practices at that time that have been refined, including during the pandemic.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: I'm going to kind of move in a different direction.

A recent article talked about direct foreign investment being in decline in Canada in the context of how much we're losing versus how much we're gaining. We are in a net loss as far as that balance between what we invest outside and what gets invested in Canada. How do you see the future diplomacy role in making sure, first of all, that we uphold that balance or a surplus?

The second is to examine.... It's a concern, to be honest with you, if international investments are not coming our way in the way they should be. I believe that diplomacy has a role in this case.

Do you mind commenting on that?

• (1620)

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: You're absolutely right. Diplomacy does have a role there. In fact, the Canadian trade commissioner service predates the creation of the old Department of External Affairs—it goes back to the 1880s—so, at most of our missions abroad and certainly at headquarters, there is a component that looks at trade promotion but also at investment. Under the previous government, that was changed to make it two-way investment, so there is a dedicated core that works on that.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: I have a final question.

One of the recommendations from the witnesses on the report called for establishing an ambassador for international justice. What do you think of that suggestion? Do you support it, yes or no, and why?

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: As you know, I'm not with the government. At some point, the government will have to respond to our report, and that is not one of our recommendations. There's a reason that it's not one of our recommendations. I think you can have designated ambassadors for different functions. Climate change is a good example. In the past, there has been an ambassador for religious freedom and the like. However, for justice, if you have, in my view, a functioning cadre of lawyers who are well versed in public international law, treaty law and international humanitarian law, I don't see why you would need to have one person covering all of this. It would be, I think, too much.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

The Chair: Next, we'll go to MP Oliphant. You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll begin by recognizing the students from Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec, who are attending our meeting today. We're very pleased to have them with us.

[*English*]

We'll be on our best behaviour when we have young guests with us.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): What are you talking about?

Hon. Robert Oliphant: We will be on our best behaviour.

Thank you, Senator, for being with us today. I've read your report. It's very helpful. It's a portion of our study on the future of diplomacy, because the human resources capacity is one portion.

I want to ask about recommendation number 26, which is about rotational and non-rotational staff. This also gets us a bit into generalists and specialists and that balance between those people normally housed here in Ottawa, who become content experts or sometimes functional experts, versus those who are trained to go to the field and become experts at amassing information and doing the two-way bilateral relationship.

I want to give you a bit of time to delve into that with me and say what your learnings were around the advantages and disadvantages of having increasing staff here in Ottawa and decreasing staff in the missions. Where should we be focusing, and how could we do that?

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

As you noticed, we didn't make a specific recommendation on resource allocation. It is really up to the government, the minister and the department how you want to do that.

I referred in my remarks to the 10-year dearth of new hires. As a result, you have the average age of a foreign service officer at 47—in my previous life, I started in my 20s—so it's very difficult to build a career or to focus on a generalist or specialist thing. Moreover, because there were no new hires, there were a lot of hires who were brought in as temporary or in different occupational groups other than foreign service officers, who were basically doing foreign service officer work at headquarters. However, when it came time for an assignment overseas, they were overlooked, because the first priority was always for foreign service officers.

What has been created and what we heard from witnesses is a type of caste system within the department. It's complicated as well, in that there are three occupational groups, so there are three unions representing people working in the department at the professional officer-type level. That is a difficult thing.

On generalists versus specialists, you have niche expertise such as trade negotiators, for example. You have the development specialists, who would have been separate in—

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The wrong mike is on for the senator, so the interpreters can't hear him.

Sorry, Senator.

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: I thought these problems only existed in the Senate.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: It seems that we also have them in the House. Sorry.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm so sorry. We'll just suspend for a couple of minutes.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1625)

The Chair: We're back.

I will forewarn you, Senator, that the chances are it's going to cut out again. We have a technician who will be showing up. Let's give it another try. Hopefully there won't be any problems.

Go ahead, Senator.

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Okay. We were into the generalist versus specialist discussion.

In our travels and fact-finding studies in other countries, we discovered that Canada is by no means alone in this. You can have a specialist, for example, on arms control or on nuclear safety, which can get very specific, and on development, human rights—you name it. Then you have linguistic expertise, too, in foreign languages. If a person wants to build a career with various assignments to China, for example, then obviously, you have to invest in keeping that foreign language capacity current. That means after assignment, training to keep it up. There are a lot of factors in there.

The advantage on a generalist.... When I was in the foreign service, I was a generalist, but I had a Latin American phase and a European phase, and I did other things. The advantage is that generally a generalist will be more nimble and can adapt more quickly. You will want some people who have a specialization, who do not necessarily want to be managers, who do not necessarily want to be ambassadors. There was an attempt a few years ago to create another foreign service category, the FS-04, where the salary range then went into the EX-01 category but with the understanding that these were seasoned professional experts. Over time, that too has eroded. I would recommend in the internal review, which, of course, you're part of, Mr. Oliphant, to really have a look at that and see what makes the most sense.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Could I just ask about formation and education? I come at this as a United Church minister, and we had six seminaries across the country, training people for the ministry in the United Church. The church and the academy worked hand in hand, differently but hand in hand, so the church had expectations given to the seminaries and the seminaries had to respond.

What do you see as a perceived good relationship between our academic institutions in Canada and the preparation for and recruitment of foreign service officers and others at GAC?

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: I often get asked that by the academic institutions. Once we launched the report, I went to the Norman Paterson School here and then to the Munk School in Toronto as well, and there are many young people who are eager to get in.

With the foreign service exam in the past, all you needed to do was to pass the exam and have Canadian citizenship, but the exam that was being offered was very much like a SAT, if you know what this is, or an LSAT. It's very specific and would not take into consideration foreign language capability, niche expertise if you're an economist or a lawyer, and that sort of thing. That's why we recommended looking at that differently and also looking at mid-career exchange in and out.

The department had a very successful academic exchange program for a while, whereby experts would come in and then leave—Jennifer Welsh is an example—but that goes back to the 1990s. That sort of enrichment would be great, getting people in sort of mid-career and rotating them out, and the same thing with other government departments and agencies or even the provinces. Every province has an international affairs component to its work. Every department has an international affairs directorate of some kind. Have more fluidity in terms of moving people in and out, and then you can select your assistant deputy ministers or deputy ministers of the future on that basis. That's why we have a direct recommendation to the Clerk of the Privy Council in this.

• (1630)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We next go to MP Bergeron.

You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's my turn to greet the Saint-Hyacinthe air cadets who are with us today. I'd like to welcome them to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. I'm very happy to see them, having been a sea cadet instructor myself for a number of years.

Senator Boehm, it's great to see you again. I would like to join my colleagues in recognizing the excellence and eminence of your professional career, both as a Canadian diplomat and as senator and chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Senator, according to one of the recommendations in your report, “Global Affairs Canada should promote the equal use of French and English within the department, ensure that *ab initio* official language training is maintained, and expand official language training opportunities to all other employees, including both Canada-based and locally engaged staff.”

I would like to ask you two questions about that.

On the one hand, have you heard that some senior public servants who should normally have a qualification in French have a special privilege that allows them not to have this qualification?

On the other hand, most of the time, the Prime Minister, the ministers and senior public servants speak mainly in English, if not exclusively in English.

What message does this send to the rest of the bureaucracy at Global Affairs Canada and, more importantly, what message does it send to our international partners?

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Mr. Bergeron, thank you for your questions and your kind words.

This is really a problem in the department. When we talk about recruitment, we should receive, *ab initio*, training in an official language, either English or French. That practice has been discontinued over the years.

As for the francophones who work in the department, they normally use English in policy documents, for arguments and for briefing notes sent to ministers. We see that as a problem.

We can certainly speak of a lack of knowledge of French among the department's senior officials, and that's the case. For example, deputy ministers don't have to take a language test every year or two. We need to work on this, which is why we made that recommendation in our report.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Are you satisfied with the government's response?

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: The report has to be approved by the Senate. After that, we're waiting—

• (1635)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Fantastic.

Another recommendation says, “The Government of Canada should ensure that Global Affairs Canada's senior officials, including deputy ministers, have in-depth knowledge of and experience in international affairs.” It's a bit terrifying to read that recommendation.

Are we to understand that the deputy ministers of Global Affairs Canada don't have in-depth knowledge of international affairs?

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: It's hard to navigate all of that.

The four current deputy ministers have a great deal of experience in international affairs. I'm talking about the deputy minister of Foreign Affairs and the deputy minister of International Trade. In fact, he worked at the Department of Finance. He has worked on issues related to the G7 and all the major financial issues. That said, in the past, some deputy ministers didn't have their experience.

It is important to have the knowledge required when working with other diplomats. A diplomatic career is very interesting, because normally you make friends in other countries. When you have more experience and seniority, you maintain ties with people in other departments. In my case, for example, I'm still in contact with my former colleagues.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Recommendation 22 says, “Global Affairs Canada should recognize the value and contributions of locally engaged staff to the work of the department by providing them with greater training, interchange and leadership opportunities as well as ways of contributing to the work of the wider department.”

We were very surprised a few days ago to learn that, after the expulsion of 41 Canadian diplomats from India, no attempt had been made to compensate for these positions by hiring more local employees.

Do you think it's appropriate for Canada not to have increased the number of local employees after the expulsion of 41 diplomats?

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: I can offer an opinion on that as an individual.

I think locally engaged staff are very important to our government operations outside of Canada. However, each case is different, because they are normally citizens of other countries. There are also a lot of Canadians who have a second citizenship, as you know, from other countries such as France or the United States.

Locally engaged staff are loyal to Canada, even if they live in another country, which has different laws. We need to look at that. We need to give these employees opportunities to improve their careers and further their education, among other things. Maybe we should give them a gateway to the department through another job.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Senator.

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Madam McPherson, you have six minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Senator Boehm. It's been very interesting to have you here. Thank you very much for being here.

Thank you for that report. I think it was very useful. In fact, I think you did a lot of work that we may be repeating in this study. Thank you for doing that. Certainly, I read it with great interest.

I also want to welcome our friends here into the chamber with us.

One question I wanted to ask came up this weekend. This weekend was obviously a pretty challenging place around the world, but one thing that was on CBC News was that Canada is very quickly becoming irrelevant in sub-Saharan Africa, or totally irrelevant, as the quote in the news said.

We had said there would be an Africa strategy. That has not come out. There was a note that our failure in terms of diplomacy, development and trade in the region meant that we were ceding much of Africa to other countries like China and Russia. I'm wondering if you could comment on that from that diplomatic standpoint.

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Sure. I'm delighted that you would pick a quotation that was taken from a committee that I was chairing.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I know.

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: We have embarked, in the Senate, on an Africa study. I know work is going on within the department. I know Mr. Oliphant is directly involved in that.

We thought it would be useful to look at that, so we are going to do a deep dive. We have just started. As you know with your own background, it has to be more than official development assistance. We have to look at countries that may have slipped back during the pandemic and see how trade, investment and other things can be increased.

At the same time, there's been an increase in activity by countries that don't necessarily follow the ODA rules that have been established by everyone else. Of course, China and Russia are the examples.

Sub-Saharan Africa is a difficult part of the continent. I know from my previous life that in our bilateral discussions with France, there was always a lot to talk about, but when we get into things like putting troops on the ground, an international peacekeeping force and the like, it can get very complicated, so—

● (1640)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Well, Canada's quite diminished in peacekeeping in the region. That's all around the world, but in Africa in particular.

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Yes, you can certainly make that argument.

The point is, if you look at the demographic trends in Africa, as you know, it's going to be exponential in terms of population and in terms of need. There is a real role for Canada there.

I would add that we are in a unique position in terms of two smaller organizations, which are the OIF—the Francophonie—and the Commonwealth, where we are the second-largest contributor, at least in terms of our dues, though not necessarily in terms of voluntary contributions.

That puts us in a special position that could be utilized as well, in my opinion.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I know I have a different opinion from that of many people within Global Affairs, but I did not believe that it was particularly good for the diplomatic and development portions of our foreign affairs to have Global Affairs all be in

one place, because I feel that trade has trumped the ability of our diplomacy and our development to take a meaningful place within our foreign policy. It's something I've seen for a long time that worries me. I know you've said there are some real benefits to having it in one place, and I'm sure there are, but there are obviously things that are lost if we don't recognize the value of diplomacy and development as well as our trade relationships.

Senator Boehm, I hope you'll forgive me, but I'm going to move a motion now, because this is what we have to do when we want to move things. That will probably take the rest of my time, but I read your report with a lot of interest, and I do thank you for coming before the committee.

Mr. Chair, I will be moving the motion that I distributed to the committee on February 5 on military goods and technology exports to Israel, and I will be asking for a recorded vote on that, if I could.

I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), and given that the value of military goods and technology exports to Israel from Canada exceeded \$21 million in 2022, and that there were 315 utilized export permits and a further 199 authorized for military goods and technology to Israel reported in the 2022 "Report on the Export of Military Goods", the committee order Global Affairs Canada to produce all documents, briefing notes, memorandums and emails within the department, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs' office, and between the department and the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Commercial Corporation, the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's Office related to the granting of any export or brokering permits for military goods and technology to Israel between 2020 and 2024, within 30 days of the adoption of this motion; and that these documents be provided to the committee without redactions except to protect cabinet confidences.

Obviously, this is something I'd like us to vote on right now. I'm happy to speak to it and say, basically, that this committee made a similar request a few years ago regarding Canadian military exports to Turkey. That resulted in important information that was made public and a study by this committee that led Canada to suspend military exports to Turkey—an action that we, of course, have seen reversed this month.

I have another motion on arms exports to India that I will be moving at another time.

I have been asking for clear answers on military exports to Israel for a long time. I have not been able to get any accurate answers, including to an Order Paper question for which I received two identical answers to two very separate questions.

I have received more than 250,000 emails in my inbox on this issue.

I would like us to have a recorded vote on this motion. Thank you.

● (1645)

The Chair: We have MP Oliphant.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Could I ask that we suspend the meeting for five minutes, for us to have a little caucus talk about this? We've seen the motion, obviously. It is appropriately presented today, but we don't necessarily have a position on it right now. I'd like to talk to my colleagues for a few minutes before we do that.

The Chair: Okay.

We have Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: As for Mr. Oliphant's request, I must say I'm a bit apprehensive. Whenever we've agreed to a recess to allow the Liberals to have a little caucus, generally, when they came back—pardon the common expression—“things got messy”. Generally, the meeting ended either with an adjournment or with dilatory motions that made it impossible for the committee to function.

I would like to believe in the good faith of our Liberal colleagues. I have no objection to agreeing to this suspension. However, I have to say that this is a case of once bitten, twice shy for me. Every experience we've had so far hasn't been extremely positive, when our Liberal colleagues come back from their little caucus, either here or at the Special Committee on the Canada-People's Republic of China Relationship. So I'm a little apprehensive.

[*English*]

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Perhaps I could respond. I think it's quite different when you're a caucus of one and you can have your own discussion in your head, than when you're a caucus of several and you respect each other as colleagues. I think it's a very different position to be in. I hope we're never a caucus of one, but...

Ms. Heather McPherson: Every one of us is a caucus of one, Robert.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I don't think I've ever been denied a request to suspend a meeting for a few minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: We have your report. I'm not exactly sure why—

The Chair: We'll suspend for three minutes, if that's okay.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: We may take longer than three minutes. We'll be back as soon as we can.

The Chair: Is five minutes good?

Hon. Robert Oliphant: We'll try, yes.

The Chair: At this juncture, allow me to thank Senator Boehm.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'm sorry, Senator.

[*English*]

The Chair: Senator, it seems like this is going to drag on for a bit longer.

Hon. Peter M. Boehm: Grand finale.

The Chair: The meeting is suspended.

• (1645)

(Pause)

• (1655)

The Chair: We will resume the meeting.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): On a point of order, first off, the notice of meeting indicated that the meeting would be done at 5:30 p.m., so I would like you to tell us when the meeting will adjourn today.

The Chair: Are the two witnesses here? Are they virtual today, the two additional witnesses?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Danielle Widmer): One is virtual and the other one is in person.

The Chair: Concerning the other two witnesses we were supposed to hear from, one is here, and one will be virtual.

• (1700)

Hon. Michael Chong: Are we adjourning when one is here and one is virtual?

The Chair: Is everyone okay with 5:45 p.m.? Okay, we will adjourn at 5:45 p.m.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, if I could suggest something constructive, why don't we hear from the two witnesses for half an hour and then go to the consideration of the motion on the floor?

The Chair: Is that agreeable to everyone?

Ms. Heather McPherson: No. Why wouldn't we just vote? We can vote and have it done in five minutes, and then we're good for the witnesses.

Hon. Michael Chong: I understand, Mr. Chair, that there are amendments to the motion at hand, and I anticipate that the debate on the amendments is going to go on for some time, and we risk not hearing from the two witnesses we agreed to in the calendar some time ago.

I think it would be reasonable to hear from the two witnesses who were scheduled to appear and who we prepared for, and then we can go to the consideration of the motion on the floor.

The Chair: Are there any—

Ms. Heather McPherson: With all due respect, I want this to get resolved today. This is on the floor. I would like us to deal with it.

Hon. Michael Chong: My opinion, Mr. Chair, on this point of order is that this committee has struggled to meet twice a week over the last 12 months. Many meetings have not taken place because we have not had a calendar. We finally agreed to a calendar, and the meeting is about to be derailed because of consideration of a motion that was not on the notice of meeting today.

We are likely faced with the situation that, if we go to the consideration of the motion, the two witnesses will not be heard from today. Again, the committee is getting off its agreed-upon track, and that is a source of frustration for me and I think for a number of members of the committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That's fair enough.

As I understand it, one of the witnesses came here from Toronto.

Go ahead, Madam McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With all due respect, when we talk about how this committee has not been able to work effectively over the last year, there were a number of times when the Conservative Party would be responsible for filibustering many of the motions and much of the work we brought forward.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Four months....

Ms. Heather McPherson: In fact, it was for four months, as my colleague Mr. Bergeron has pointed out.

That said, we put this on the notice paper on February 12. I read it in for the committee. This is a motion that has been there. I'm sorry that some members of the committee were not ready to vote on this.

We made it public. We told you it was coming. Then I tabled it according to the rules of our Standing Orders. This is exactly how it's meant to be done. I'm sorry if some members don't like that, but I would like this motion, which I brought forward using the tools I have as a member of this committee, to be resolved. I would like it to be voted upon.

Thank you.

The Chair: Does anyone else want to speak to this?

Go ahead, MP Chatel.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Chair, this is a motion that I put forward for the future of diplomacy. I had questions for the senator that are very important to me, because I want to do a comparative analysis. My colleague Heather prevented me from having more meetings on the comparative study of the future of diplomacy.

I'm in favour of the suggestion by Mr. Chong. I think we should return to the study and move quickly. We have two small amendments, and we shouldn't be wasting more time.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, MP McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Do I understand that, if it's already on the floor...? Do we not have to deal with the motion? Is that not, in fact, the rule of this committee?

The Chair: Someone can bring a point of order on that, but yes, you are correct. It is before the committee.

Does anyone else want to speak to this? No.

Are there any amendments?

Go ahead, MP Oliphant.

● (1705)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: It's on the floor and we are largely in favour of this. We think it's an important issue to be discussed.

However, we have two amendments.

One, where it says, "2020 and 2024", we would back that up to "2006 and 2024" in order to make it a longer term in the motion.

These are two separate amendments, but I'm going to put them into one, which is a bit risky. You can decide on that once I've said them.

Following "to protect cabinet confidences", add "respect privacy legislation and protect sensitive commercial interests".

The Chair: How far down would that be?

Hon. Robert Oliphant: That's right at the end. It's where it says, "without redactions except to protect cabinet confidences". It's "respect privacy legislation and protect sensitive commercial interests". That is standard language around export permits.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I would like the two proposed amendments to be considered separately, because I'm in favour of the first and against the second. I'm opposed to it because, before we decided to begin our study on arms sales to Turkey, when we heard from government officials, their all-too-easy defence was to invoke commercially sensitive issues to avoid answering the committee's questions.

Obviously, following this extremely frustrating appearance, we had to undertake our study, but we did so largely because we weren't given an answer, under the pretext of wanting to respect commercially sensitive information. I wouldn't want us to tie our hands at the outset by allowing anyone to use this excuse not to provide us with information, as has happened. We didn't make this up; it's exactly what we've experienced.

So I'd like to vote in favour of the first proposed amendment, but I'm strongly opposed to the second.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Like my colleague Mr. Bergeron, I support the first amendment. I think that is a strong amendment. I would take that as a friendly amendment.

On the second one, I think "respect privacy" makes a lot of sense, but protecting commercial interests when we are talking about weapons that have currently killed over 12,000 children... I think we can go ahead and waive that.

The Chair: May I propose that we deal with the first one first, then move to the second one?

Regarding Mr. Oliphant's amendment concerning the dates, does anyone want to speak to that, or do we want to go to a recorded vote?

Hon. Michael Chong: I'll just say that I find it a little ridiculous that we'd go back all the way to 2006, but we're not opposed to it.

The Chair: Is everyone unanimously in favour?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Is everyone clear on what the second amendment is?

Can you kindly read it one more time, Mr. Oliphant?

Hon. Robert Oliphant: It's "without redactions except to protect cabinet confidences, respect privacy legislation and protect sensitive commercial interests."

Let me say that, under our legislation and with respect to any arms export permit, we will always have our commercial interests protected. That is part of it. I want to be very explicit about that, because it is part of our system. That's not unusual. It's related to the fact that we don't give the names of companies that may have competitors. We are always careful. It doesn't mean we don't talk about the actual products. We don't name commercial interests, because that can put a Canadian company at risk in a variety of ways. That puts management jobs, labour union jobs and all kinds of people at risk.

We will still get the same information, but we will be protecting commercial interests.

• (1710)

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, if that's the usual practice, I don't see the need to add suspenders to the belt. I therefore move that the second part of the amendment proposed by Mr. Oliphant be deleted.

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: I think the language is great.

The Chair: Do you want to strike out the privacy aspect of it or the confidential—

Ms. Heather McPherson: No.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: It mentions "sensitive commercial"....

A voice: It's "sensitive commercial interests".

The Chair: Mr. Oliphant.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I will still speak in favour of it, partly because this is a request for papers. What we are trying to do is to give instructions to the bureaucrats or officials working with the Privy Council Office to do it. We are trying to give them the best advice we can on what to do.

They will, of course, follow all laws. They are obligated to do that. I think that by making this extra clear, we're respecting their work on this. I think it's an important principle, as well, that we acknowledge that there are commercial interests that we need to protect, as well as the lives of people around the world, if there is any misuse of these things. We'll be supporting that.

The Chair: Mr. Oliphant, just so I understand it, in the absence of this caveat, it is your opinion that this would not actually protect confidential, proprietary information.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I have no idea. I am just making it perfectly clear that our expectation is that we would share those interests and those concerns. I can't predict what the bureaucrats will do. That's their job. They are the officials, and they're under the law. I'm just trying to make it explicit.

The Chair: Okay, so you want to put it to a vote as is.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I'm not changing it.

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: First we're going to have to vote on the subamendment I proposed, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Given the complexities that would be involved, I think we should vote on the entire thing and then revisit it with what everyone considers.... If that is the friendly amendment or the subamendment that you propose, it will throw the meaning of the entire sentence into a tizzy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but the usual practice is that we vote on the subamendment first. Then we vote on the amendment, and then we vote on the motion as amended, if that's the case.

So we have to vote first on the subamendment that I proposed.

[*English*]

The Chair: The clerk was advising that we do it another way, but, sure, if you insist, then the subamendment—

Go ahead, Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: For our edification, can you tell us what the subamendment is, please?

The Chair: Yes. Let me read the entire sentence, and then I'll tell you what the subamendment is.

It currently reads, "that these documents be provided to the committee without redactions except to protect cabinet confidences, respect privacy legislation and protect sensitive commercial interests."

Mr. Bergeron is proposing that it read, "these documents be provided to the committee without redactions except to protect cabinet confidences and respect privacy legislation." He is in favour of eliminating "and protect sensitive commercial interests".

• (1715)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Let's vote.

Hon. Michael Chong: The subamendment is to strike the words—

The Chair: It's to strike "and protect sensitive commercial interests".

Ms. Heather McPherson: So let's vote.

The Chair: Yes. On division?

Hon. Michael Chong: To clarify, Mr. Oliphant had a motion regarding the whole clause, and—

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: He had an amendment.

Hon. Michael Chong: Sorry, I meant an amendment for the whole clause, and then Mr. Bergeron's subamendment is to strike "and protect sensitive commercial interests".

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm in favour of Mr. Bergeron's subamendment.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: The committee, it seems to me, in the majority—

The Chair: Yes, everyone is in—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Pass it on division.

(Subamendment agreed to on division)

The Chair: Okay. That's been struck.

On the actual amendment, do we want to put that to a vote, or is everyone unanimously in favour?

(Amendment as amended agreed to)

The Chair: We're now going to put the motion as amended to a vote.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: We will resume hearing from our witnesses. I will suspend for two minutes.

• (1715) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1720)

The Chair: Okay, we'll resume the meeting, given that we have very little time left.

Do we only want one round of questioning, since Mr. Chong..., or do we want two shorter rounds of two minutes?

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Let's do one good round per party.

The Chair: Okay. There will be one round of questions only.

We will resume today's hearing. Allow me to welcome the two witnesses we have with us today.

First of all, we're very grateful that Mr. Gar Pardy is with us here in person in the committee room. Also, Mr. Alex Neve, is with us from the University of Ottawa. Neither one of you, I think it's fair to say, requires an introduction; you are very well known to all the members.

We apologize because of the delay. There was a motion that was tabled. I understand that Mr. Neve has to leave at 5:45. We will actually be adjourning this meeting at 5:45.

Mr. Neve, since you are online, we will start with you. You have five minutes for your opening remarks, and then we will go to Mr. Pardy.

Mr. Neve for five minutes.

Mr. Alex Neve (Senior Fellow, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you so much, Mr. Ehsassi, and, as we're into the evening, good afternoon and good evening, committee.

This study of Canada's diplomatic capacity certainly comes at a crucial time. Harrowing crises in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Myanmar, a list that goes on, stand as wrenching testaments to the failures of our so-called international rules-based order, with devastating consequences for millions of civilians. Unprincipled use of vetoes at the Security Council blocks decisive international action. International human rights and humanitarian laws, always contested and challenged, are brazenly flouted like never before.

The ambit of your study is considerable. I'd like to focus on three points: bolstering Canada's global capacity to champion human rights, improving implementation of our own international human rights obligations, and bringing consistency and equal treatment to consular protection.

First, to be a global human rights champion requires much more than saying we are one.

Just over 75 years ago, adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, states recognized a universal truth, namely that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, yet we live in a world in which the rights and dignity of entire peoples are utterly disregarded, as we are seeing right now with Palestinians in Gaza. I can think of no other ambition and imperative that should more profoundly shape Canada's diplomatic capacity than universal human rights protection.

Canada regularly declares itself a global champion of human rights. There have certainly been high-water marks over the decades and the dedicated efforts of individual Canadians, which are truly commendable. However, there has been little tangible evidence of Canada's leadership as a nation for many years now. It's been 25 years since such Canadian accomplishments as establishing the International Criminal Court, banning landmines and protecting child soldiers.

I would suggest that we sorely need a mandated international human rights strategy and action plan that would establish transparent standards to ensure consistency in our human rights efforts across the globe; treat all human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights, equally; and set and appropriately resource clear priorities such as supporting human rights defenders, uniformly pursuing justice and accountability, and advancing women's human rights and gender equality.

Second, our contribution to global human rights protections starts with upholding international human rights at home. In a world in which states regularly disregard their human rights obligations, Canada should set an example. However, we do not. A consistent concern in UN reviews of Canada's human rights record is the lack of an effective process, coordinated across federal, provincial and territorial governments, to implement international human rights in Canada.

Canada was examined under the United Nations Human Rights Council's universal periodic review process for the fourth time in November. As they did in 2009, 2013 and 2018, a significant number of countries—25 this time—called on Canada to ratify a 22-year-old torture prevention treaty, the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, which we have been telling the UN we are considering doing for 18 years now. When Canada reports back to the UN next month, we will likely again hear that Canada is “considering” ratification. That will, frankly, again be received as empty words.

This domestic human rights gap undermines our human rights diplomacy. A recently established federal-provincial-territorial forum of ministers responsible for human rights is intended to make progress on this front but has been a deep disappointment. It has had little guidance from Global Affairs, and it needs it.

Finally, you are reviewing this committee's November 2018 report regarding consular services. The first and I believe most important recommendation in that report was for the government to carry out a review to ensure that “Canadians are not subject to arbitrary treatment or discrimination in the provision of consular services.”

In August I joined a civil society humanitarian delegation to northeast Syria that included Senator Kim Pate, retired Canadian ambassador Scott Heatherington, and immigration and human rights lawyer Hadayt Nazami. We were able to access some, though unfortunately not all, of the Canadian men, women and children who have been unlawfully detained in harsh conditions in camps and prisons there for the past seven years without charge, without trial, without access to lawyers, without contact with their families, without any means of challenging the reasons for their detention and without any consular visits.

• (1725)

Our delegation was deeply distressed by what we heard, which included health concerns and inhumane detention conditions. Thirteen Canadian children are held in an overcrowded, dangerous detention camp where they are not going to school, are living in fear and have been told that the Canadian government would be willing to bring them back to Canada, but not their mothers. This is a clear instance of the provision of consular services that is both arbitrary and discriminatory. I implore you to call on the government immediately to provide in-person consular support to these vulnerable and abandoned citizens, more than half of them children, and arrange for their repatriation to Canada.

Everything about how these cases are being handled betrays a commitment to the universality of human rights. That runs contrary to what the very essence of Canada's diplomatic capacity should be all about.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Neve. We're very grateful.

We will now go to Mr. Pardy for his opening remarks.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Gar Pardy (Former Ambassador and Policy Writer, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your kind invitation today. Given the fact that I'm into my ninth decade, these invitations are very rare indeed, so I very much welcome this one.

Of course, this is a very different world from when I was born in 1939. My mother would always remind me that there were two very important events that occurred in 1939. That's one she would use all the time.

The timing of this study, of course, for those of us involved in diplomacy around the world and trying to see how we fit into governments that come and go and this sort of thing.... There are significant changes in policies and approach. I think having a study of this nature, on the capacity of diplomacy, is generally overlooked when we look at foreign policy. We tend to look beyond whether or not we have the capacity to do so. Of course, capacity will determine whether we're able to protect and project the interests of Canada into the world.

As the senator mentioned earlier, Peter and I were colleagues in Central America for a number of years, chasing the wars down there. I became a member of the foreign service in 1967. It was still in the afterglow of Pearsonian diplomacy. The agenda was changing in that particular period beyond our ties with the United States and Europe to the new world created by decolonization and the self-determination of people. The empires largely disappeared. They were very much in place in 1945, but in 1945, when sovereign states got together in San Francisco to create the United Nations, there were only 52 countries. Today, there are 193. That in itself gives us the magnitude of the issues. I would suggest to you that with the way the world is today, it will not be long before we probably have 200 sovereign members of the United Nations.

In that sense, I think as an issue that gets overlooked as far as foreign policy is concerned in Canada, I would hope that the committee would note specifically that the indigenous people of the world remain a matter that will increasingly involve our international attention. It's not one. Canada, along with Australia and New Zealand and the United States, a few years ago mistakenly opposed a UNGA resolution on indigenous peoples. That, I think, was one of the more serious mistakes that Canada has made diplomatically in recent years.

As Peter mentioned, when I came to Ottawa in the 1960s, there was Canada-wide recruitment for the foreign service, and public interest was exceptionally high. It was not uncommon that somewhere between 7,000 and 9,000 people would apply for the number of jobs that were available. Today, we're into the age of contract arrangements and entry from other parts of the government. That in itself, as Peter noted, carries its own problems.

Equally, over this same period there are the name changes. We were first external affairs. Then we were foreign affairs. Today we are Global Affairs. Then the associated functions of trade, immigration and refugees and development were included within that body. The immigration and refugee function has returned to its domestic home, but as you all will note, those issues associated with immigration and refugees are as much a part of foreign policy today as anything else we are wont to do.

All foreign ministries around the world have undergone similar structural transformations and struggle to find a balance, if you like, in terms of how to meet the needs that those functions require. However, recruitment is still the main issue here. I'm glad that the committee asked Mr. Boehm a number of questions about the report that he was an author of in terms of how we recruit and whom we recruit. In effect, there is a set of characteristics that I think would be essential in terms of Canadian representation in other countries. This, of course, is the question of knowledge, aptitude and language acquisition abilities, and of course there's always personal flexibility.

• (1730)

These capabilities, while not necessarily unique to the foreign service, are essential for the persons required to provide the services that Canadians need internationally.

There is, of course, as I mentioned in terms of the personal suitability and in the changing Canadian mosaic that we deal with, the issue that has come up for any number of my colleagues of dual-career families: how they can adjust to, in effect, a rotational life in the foreign service.

I would also add a cautionary note for you to keep in mind: that large international events, including the conflicts that we are dealing with, have a daily if not an hourly effect on Canada's diplomatic activity. Today, global communications are faster than the proverbial speeding bullet, and no foreign ministry has the time for reflection before action is often required.

I would also mention one issue that I think we should give the committee some cautions on here, and these are the elections that are going to occur in the United States on November 5. As we all know if we watch the news at all, the political and social divisions in this, our most important relationship, have never been as extreme as they are today.

Equally, there are aspects of this reflected in our own elections and political system. What is unique is that these divisions have an existence—

• (1735)

The Chair: Mr. Pardy, I would ask you to wrap it up in less than 20 seconds.

Mr. Gar Pardy: Yes.

In the United States, no one has been able to do any sort of forecasting as far as what's going to happen on November 5. It's going to be one of these open agendas that's going to haunt us, I think, for the next 10 months.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Pardy.

We now open it up to questions from the members. Each member will be provided three minutes.

Mr. Epp.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

We've had several witnesses come to this committee on this study and testify to Canada's diminished status on the world stage. Certainly, Mr. Neve talked about advocating for human rights. Our Prime Minister's lecturing of the Italian prime minister and our Deputy Prime Minister's tweet of the Saudis have all had fallout. Other witnesses have come.... We have to repair and restore our image. Would your recommendation be that Canada further engage in multilateral institutions or more on bilaterals or minilaterals? What would be your recommendations on restoring our image so that we are more effective?

Perhaps you take issue with the premise of my question, which is Canada's place in the world. If you have a comment on that, by all means, let's start with Mr. Pardy and then I'll go to Mr. Neve.

Mr. Gar Pardy: I would agree with any comment that relates to the fact that we don't have the status we had 40 or 50 years ago. It's not necessarily what we do in the world. It's that the world has changed so dramatically during that period that the expectations of the rest of the world in effect do not necessarily include what Canada has on offer.

Whether or not we can in effect address that, I think, through our staffing means or where we have embassies.... We are tied to a very defined foreign policy matrix. We are an ally of the United States as far as North American defence is concerned and as far as outer space is concerned. We are a member of NATO. We are a member of the United Nations in all of its manifestations.

I don't think there are a lot of choices we can make for going either one way or the other. You have to do it across the board, and I think most countries try to do this. How much you can do in this kind of an atmosphere, with the resource space that we have, is the question.

Mr. Dave Epp: Mr. Neve.

Mr. Alex Neve: I share the concern that our standing and the things we're achieving concretely as a nation with respect to human rights are indeed not what they once were.

In answer to your question as to bilateral, multilateral and what kinds of strategies, I think it's all of the above. That's why I made the recommendation that we truly need to get into the habit—and I think it should be mandated by law—of developing an international human rights strategy and action plan and keeping it updated. Other countries do that, and that's exactly the approach that gives us the opportunity to make sure all the pieces fit together: the multilateral engagement, the bilateral intervention and even the moments of lecturing.

I agree that sometimes lecturing can be counterproductive. At other times, it's exactly what is needed, including a well-timed tweet, even when it provokes a negative reaction. However, when that's not part of a comprehensive action plan and strategy, I think we risk it being bits and pieces and not having a comprehensive agenda and strategy behind it.

Mr. Dave Epp: I would love to follow up with more questions, but obviously my time is up.

The Chair: It is. Thank you.

MP Alhabra, you have three minutes.

• (1740)

Hon. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses. Mr. Neve, it's good to see you, and Mr. Pardy, it's great to have you here.

I will focus my questions on you, Mr. Pardy. I have a couple of questions about consular services, and I know how passionate you are and how influential you have been in this regard over the years. Because of the limited time, I'll ask two questions at once.

First, you know that there's been movement to prescribe a service standard for the consular division, yet you also understand how important it is that consular officials have flexibility in how they pursue each case. How do you balance these two priorities? Second, do you think the consular division has enough resources?

Thank you.

Mr. Gar Pardy: Certainly, on the service standards, I wrote the first set of service standards for the consular function back in 1994, I think, and it's still there. It's had various iterations and this sort of thing. I follow this area fairly closely. I've been retired for 20 years, by the way, and a lot of things have gone on.

One thing I've noticed from following the media is that this is one area where Global Affairs Canada has been doing reasonably well, even in a situation such as Gaza, which is as difficult as one can imagine in terms of helping Canadians in difficulty and given the variety of actors and interests that are involved. My understanding is that we've gotten close to 700 Canadians out of Gaza in the last few weeks. That's not bad. There is a system there.

On the resourcing side, I think the problem you get into is whether or not you need a surge capacity in this area for the exceptional ones that come on. We never had a surge capacity. We would usually pick and choose. The thing to remember about consular services is that Canadians pay directly for this service. It is paid for by the people who buy a Canadian passport.

They spent a \$25 fee when it was on a five-year passport. When the government went to a 10-year passport, it did not increase the fee in accordance with roughly \$5 a year, which is what we implemented back in 1996. I can tell you that governments over the years have made money out of this consular fee, because the consular services have cost less than the money that was collected through this fee.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron for three minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon to the witnesses. I'm very happy to see you again.

Mr. Neve, I couldn't agree with you more that Canada is falling far short of its values, principles and reputation by misguidedly allowing children and women to literally rot in detention camps in Syria. I dare to hope that Canada will finally take action on this issue.

I have two questions for Mr. Pardy.

Mr. Pardy, last November, at the Summit of the Three Seas Initiative, it was suggested that Canada invest more in this strategic area and participate more actively. Oddly enough, when the official from Global Affairs Canada spoke at that conference, he explained that Canada was wondering about its role in this type of forum. What we heard at the Special Committee on the Canada-People's Republic of China Relationship was that, in order to deal with the superpowers, we need more multilateral initiatives. This recent response from Global Affairs Canada came as a bit of a surprise to us.

Also, in 2018, you appeared before this committee and stated that greater flexibility could facilitate negotiations through intermediaries and, as a result, lead to the release of hostages. You said: "...ransom is not the issue at all in these sorts of things; it is the process by which the government organizes itself and goes about it with the objective of saving the life of one of its citizens".

My two questions are as follows.

Where do you stand on multilateralism?

Do you think that things have changed much since 2018 with regard to Canadian citizens being taken hostage abroad?

• (1745)

[*English*]

Mr. Gar Pardy: On hostage-taking, as you know, in the post-war period the number of incidents that have occurred has been tremendous. For the period that I was there dealing with them, I was told when I retired that I dealt with 125 hostage situations, and not one Canadian died. I operated on the principle that in these situations, ransoms are going to be paid.

Now, there have been international agreements by the G7, other groups and that sort of thing that say ransom should not be paid. It's absolute nonsense. Every member of the G7 and just about every other country in the world, when faced with hostage situations, works out some sort of an arrangement, in effect, to get their people back.

We had a very tragic situation a few years ago in the southern Philippines. Those two people should never have died.

If you take the situation more recently, as far as China was concerned, the two Canadians in jail in China were hostages in every sense of the word. In effect, it was well within the power of the Canadian government to work out arrangements for their return.

We've done it in other situations, but for some reason or another we have lost the ability to do this, or the people who work the system will not take the flexibility that's available and get Canadians back alive. It's quite doable. Every other country is able to do it.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the last question and the last three minutes, we go to MP McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both of our witnesses for being here today. It's very interesting to me.

Alex, you talked a bit about having an international human rights strategy. We tried to bring that forward with an amendment during Bill C-281 last spring. It did not pass, which was disappointing.

You also talk a lot about Canada's role in the world.

What I wanted to ask you about is this. You look at Syria, where we treat some Canadian citizens differently from other Canadian citizens. You look at our arms strategy with cluster munitions, where we're not there any longer as a leader in disarmament. Then you look at things like the ICJ and how our response to the ICJ and the ICC is very different when it happens in certain contexts from when it happens in other contexts.

I'd like you to comment on the reputational risks to Canada. What does this actually mean when the rest of the world is watching Canada and sees that we apply human rights, citizenship and international law differently in different contexts?

What are the implications of that?

Mr. Alex Neve: I think the implications are very grave.

I say that not at all naively or suggesting that the world is awash with many other countries that have a stellar record. Obviously, we can look across the planet and find many countries that are similarly pursuing foreign policy in ways that are contradictory, hypocritical, undermining and ignoring universal standards.

However, I think we have always expected, demanded and seen much more from Canada. I think some of the examples you've highlighted, all of which are quite recent or even contemporary and playing out right now....

The approach we've taken to the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court and the vital role that those two global institutions should be playing in helping to tackle the impunity that is at the heart of what's happened in Israel and Gaza—coming from a country that has always championed those two institutions—is noted. It's certainly noted by other governments. It's noted by global civil society. It's noted within the UN, and it is not to our credit.

That will not serve us well with respect to ensuring that our voice is heard with respect to Israel and Gaza, and it will have reverberations more widely as well.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Mr. Pardy, did you want to comment on that as well?

Mr. Gar Pardy: No. I fully agree with Alex.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Okay.

Mr. Chair, that's good. I have 10 seconds left, so I am prepared to cede.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes questions by the members.

Allow me to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Neve and Mr. Pardy. We're very grateful for your expertise and for your time. Again, I apologize for the shifting schedule. Thank you.

Before the members leave, I have just two very quick questions.

First of all, did we want to ask the analysts kindly to prepare two work plans for us, one on our approach to Africa and another one on Iran?

Everyone is in favour.

The second thing is, insofar as our next session next Monday on Ukraine is concerned, is everyone okay with just having GAC officials brief us, or did we want to go above and beyond that?

Is everyone good with just keeping it restricted? I see consensus.

We have Mr. Bergeron.

• (1750)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Could we have the Canadian ambassador to Ukraine? We could set aside some time for her.

[English]

The Chair: Is everyone okay with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We will go with GAC officials, and then for the last 45 minutes or what have you we will go with the Ukrainian ambassador here in Ottawa. Thank you.

We have Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Can you ask the analysts to prepare two draft work plans for our review, one on the Iran study and one on the Africa study, so that we can review them when we come back from the break week? Thank you.

The Chair: Absolutely. That's excellent.

The meeting stands adjourned.

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