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Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1310)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): Order, please.

We are the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Today is May 30, 2013. This is our 85th meeting.

This meeting is televised.

[English]

Pursuant to our ongoing study of the human rights situation in Iran, we have two witnesses: Mark Dubowitz, the executive director of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies; and Matthew Levitt, who is attached to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Gentlemen, you already know that you have about 10 minutes each for your presentations, following which we will have questions from the panellists here.

If any of the panellists have to get back to the House of Commons early, please signal that to me and we can try to adjust to have you go earlier. That will allow fulsome questions to be asked of the witnesses, even if we go past our nominal time to rise. That way, hopefully, if the committee is willing, we'll be able to get full questions and answers.

I don't know who wants to go first. Can I suggest that it be Mr. Dubowitz just because you're on the left?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mark Dubowitz (Executive Director, Foundation for Defense of Democracies): It's my pleasure. Thank you very much.

Honourable members of this subcommittee, I am privileged to appear before you today to discuss the role of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, the IRGC, in a vast system of domestic repression, and to encourage the government of Iran to end these human rights atrocities and the Government of Canada to designate the IRGC, in its entirety, under the Special Economic Measures Act, for its human rights abuses, and to add the IRGC, in its entirety, to Canada's Criminal Code for its terrorist activities.

While democracies fear external enemies, undemocratic regimes fear their own people. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the enmity between state and society reached new heights in the aftermath of the fraudulent June 12, 2009,

presidential election. As the Iranian public took to the streets chanting the slogan "where is my vote?" paranoid Islamic Republic authorities were looking for and finding—or so they thought—internal enemies, foreign agents, saboteurs, and so-called velvet revolutionaries.

In 2009, the Islamic Republic law enforcement forces were the visible first line of defence of the regime, but the IRGC and its Basij resistance force were the real agents of suppression of Iran's pro-democracy green movement. There is little indication that the IRGC and the Basij are playing a less sinister role in this year's presidential election. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that this presidential election will be as fraudulent as the last.

In the weeks prior to the coming June election, we've already heard from IRGC officials. Revolutionary Guard officers have openly declared they intend to manipulate the course of the election. As only one example, Mr. Hojjat al-Eslam Ali Saeidi, representative of the supreme leader to the IRGC, infamously declared "engineering elections is the natural duty of the guards". The Basij has intensified its much publicized war games not only to prepare for suppressing dissidents, but also to terrorize the dissidents into inaction and passivity.

The regime's brutality comes in many forms. The United States government, the U.S. Treasury Department, has recently designated the IRGC for human rights abuses because of its cyber-repression. As we know, Individuals arrested by the IRGC have been subjected to severe mental and physical abuse in a ward of the notorious Evin prison controlled by the IRGC. As Canadians well know, Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi was detained, tortured, and raped in Evin prison. She later died.

To better understand the role of the IRGC in this domestic repression, I turn to a brief analysis of how the IRGC has been transformed in recent years. Since the revolution of 1979, the IRGC has been the main pillar of defence for the regime, though it is not Iran's conventional army; that's an important distinction. The IRGC is constitutionally mandated to "safeguard the revolution and its achievements". The statute of the guards authorizes the IRGC to confront "counter-revolutionary" forces of all types with armed resistance, pursuit, and arrest.

The IRGC was originally conceived to counter both internal and external threats. It was forced to focus on external defence during the eight-year war with Iraq from 1980-1988. The external focus continued for almost two decades after that, but supreme leader Ali Khamenei in September 2007, appointed a man named Major-General Mohammad Ali Jafari as the seventh commander-in-chief in the history of the IRGC. This is a man who earned his stripes during the Iran-Iraq War; he served as commander of IRGC ground forces, but most importantly he was the founding father of the IRGC's strategic studies centre in 2005. Under Jafari's supervision, the centre, which really functions as the IRGC's think tank, began to conduct research into velvet revolutions and alleged U.S. soft regime change policies.

Jafari argued that the IRGC should focus on future internal threats to the Islamic Republic's stability rather than external threats. He has reorganized the IRGC in a way that is very important to understand. He's merged the Basij, the paramilitary force, into the IRGC, and he's restructured the IRGC to become less centralized, more focused on the provinces, and with enhanced capabilities as an anti-riot force.

• (1315)

We all saw Jafari's handiwork in the brutal suppression of the 2009 protests. All of you are very familiar with what happened; I won't go into the details. It's very important to understand there were human faces to the Iranians who were brutalized, murdered, raped, and tortured. One of those was a woman named Taraneh Mousavi. Last week, in fact, a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs in the U.S. Congress told the story of what happened to Taraneh. If I may, allow me to quickly recount what happened to this young woman.

She was described by her friends as a beautiful woman, very kind, with a warm voice. She played the piano with skill. She disappeared during the protest, arrested by security forces. Weeks later, her mother received an anonymous call from a government agent saying that her daughter had been hospitalized, listing injuries that could only have come about as a result of a brutal rape.

When her family went to the hospital, she was no longer there. According to one account, the family was told not to tell people when she had disappeared or any information about the kind of injuries she suffered. Her charred body was discovered a month after her arrest. Her family was told not to hold a funeral for her, and not to tell anyone the way she was killed.

The report of Taraneh's rape and murder is far from the only example of the torture and abuse we've seen in Iran's prisons. All of this has been evidenced by the UN special rapporteur's report and the State Department's Iran human rights report of 2012. All of this confirms the evidence we've seen of prisoners being held from weeks to months without charge or access to legal counsel, being subject to severe torture, beatings with batons, mock hangings, electrocution, rape, sleep deprivation, and denial of food or water.

So Jafari really had passed his test. He had killed over 70 unarmed protestors—opposition forces say the real number is several hundred. He had tortured and maimed and imprisoned many others, and he managed to persuade opposition leaders to urge their supporters to leave the streets. Unfortunately, but for Canada, the international community was silent, which may have contributed to

the decision of the Iranian opposition to abandon their peaceful protests.

Canada has been a leader in defending the human rights of Iranians. Canada continued to lead the way in holding the IRGC responsible for violating the human rights of Iranians by taking additional steps.

Here, I want to talk through some policy recommendations for how Canada can continue to lead the way. In December, 2012 the Canadian government added the IRGC's Quds Force to the list of terrorist groups under Canada's Criminal Code. This was a critical step in recognizing the IRGC's threat to international peace and security, and I'm sure Matt will talk about that in further detail.

I would urge the Government of Canada to take the next logical step and sanction the IRGC in its entirety for both its terrorist operations and its role in abusing the human rights of the Iranian people. This echoes the call from Foreign Minister Baird, who only a few weeks ago told a group of Iranian pro-democracy advocates at a Toronto conference that I attended, that Canada needs to call attention to Iran's "regressive clerical military dictatorship" and "protect dissenting voices...and those who have the courage to tell the truth about the Basij and the IRGC." Foreign Minister Baird said "The world must target the IRGC's assets, and expose the wealth they've been amassing at the expense of the people".

Indeed, if Canada were to designate the IRGC, this would be a substantive and symbolic step. It would target the IRGC's assets in this country and would expose the wealth they've been amassing at the expense of the people. All IRGC profits ultimately end up funding the IRGC's nefarious activities—it's nuclear and ballistic missile programs, its overseas terrorist proxies, and its vast apparatus of domestic human rights repression.

Canada must shut down the IRGC's entire commercial enterprise. This in turn requires a blanket designation of the IRGC as a terrorist organization and would render it illegal to have any financial dealings with the entity, as well as a blanket designation of the IRGC as a human rights abuser under subsection 4(1) of SEMA. This would impose substantive penalties, undermine the legitimacy of the Iranian regime, and send a powerful message to Iran's people.

Human rights abuses by the Iranian regime fulfill the basic criteria under subsection 4(1) of SEMA for the imposition of economic sanctions. We've seen SEMA being used to target IRGC entities and persons for proliferation-related activities, but SEMA has also been used to sanction human rights abuses by Syria's Assad government and its supporters, by the Government of Zimbabwe, by the Government of Burma, and by the Government of Sudan, among others. So we've seen SEMA used in numerous cases by the Canadian government to target a regime and elements of it for massive human rights abuses.

I want to conclude by summarizing the three grounds on which the IRGC should be designated for its human rights abuses. First, the IRGC has a constitutional mandate to “safeguard the revolution and its achievements”. In practice, that means that the revolution of 1979 is not an historical event, an event of the past, but an ongoing process or a permanent revolution. This, in turn, keeps Iran in a permanent state of emergency in which the IRGC is authorized to interpret any opposition to the regime as a counter-revolutionary act.

Second, the IRGC's statute authorizes the IRGC to violate the basic rights of Iranian citizens on the mere suspicion of those citizens being so-called counter-revolutionaries.

● (1320)

Third, as I've outlined, the reorganization of the IRGC under Major General Jafari and the domestic focus of the IRGC resulted in the killing of protesters in the wake of the 2009 fraudulent presidential election, and murder, torture, and abuse that continues until today.

To the extent that individual members of the IRGC demonstrate that they want to separate themselves from the IRGC, they should be removed individually from the sanctions. Prohibit the IRGC, and individually remove those members who have distanced themselves from the organization. But IRGC members need to be put to a fundamental choice by Canada, between continued association with a repressive, clerical, military dictatorship and respect for the human rights of their citizens.

In conclusion, this hearing could not be timelier, as we meet merely two weeks before the upcoming Iranian election, which is sure to be fraudulent and involve intimidation and repression by the IRGC. I commend your committee's courageous stand in support of the Iranian people. I hope your actions this week will be heard in the streets of Iran from Abadan to Isfahan, and from Tabriz to Tehran.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Levitt, perhaps we could ask you to start now.

Dr. Matthew Levitt (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, As an Individual): Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here and an honour to sit next to Mark Dubowitz.

I provided a longer testimony for the record, which I understand is being translated into French. This is just a summary of that.

In 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 3 there states: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” In this week, which we're marking here in the Canadian Parliament as Iran Accountability Week, it's especially appropriate to consider Iran's long record of supporting and carrying out acts of violence and terrorism in express violation of this right to “security of person”.

Iran has a long history of violating human rights at home, as you have heard. But some of its more recent violations are taking place in Syria, where Tehran is actively supporting Bashar al-Assad's government's targeting of the Syrian civilian population, and around the world, where Iranian agents and Iran's proxies from Hezbollah are targeting diplomats and civilians alike for assassination. In fact

these violations, both at home and abroad, are now more interconnected than ever. It is frequently the case that the people who direct and oversee the regime's human rights abuses at home and abroad are the same people.

When the revolution in Syria began in March 2011, the Quds Force was sent by Iran to help the Syrian regime stifle protesters. A month later, the U.S. government designated the entire IRGC Quds Force for human rights violations in Syria, specifically for repressing the people of Syria, for the use of violence and torture against them, and for the arbitrary arrest and detention of peaceful protesters.

Iran's Ministry of Intelligence and security forces, as well as the Iranian law enforcement forces, were also active in Syria and have also been designated by the U.S. government for human rights abuses. Both of these forces provided material support to Syria's General Intelligence Directorate, but they also dispatched their own personnel to Damascus to assist the Syrian government in suppressing the Syrian people. However, it is the Quds Force that is in charge and is the most active Iranian unit in Syria.

Several individuals from the Quds Force have been designated by the U.S. government for violations of human rights, among other charges. For example, in May 2011 the third-ranking Quds Force leader, Mohsen Chizari, was designated for human rights violations in helping the Syrian government violently repress protesters. Chizari had previously been detained by U.S. forces, in 2006 in Iraq, where evidence showed that he was importing weapons targeting coalition forces there, but the Iraqi government eventually released him.

This past January, a top Quds Force commander was killed in Syria near the border with Lebanon, when Israel attacked a convoy of Iranian weapons being delivered to Hezbollah in Lebanon. General Hassan Shateri had been a member of the Quds Force for decades. Iran described his work as “war reconstruction” in Lebanon and gave no explanation of what he was doing in Syria. But at his funeral, it was Hezbollah flags that were flying alongside the Quds Force flags, and the Supreme Leader Khamenei spoke at his funeral, calling him “our very own Imad Mughniyah”, a reference to Hezbollah's arch-terrorist.

The comparison with Mughniyah appears to be an admission that “reconstruction” was not exactly what Shateri was up to. In fact, he had already been designated by the U.S. Treasury, under an alias, for providing financial, material, and technological support to Hezbollah as the personal representative of Iran to Lebanon.

The U.S. Treasury has also designated the head of the Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani, not only for terrorist activities, which themselves are human rights abuses, but expressly for human rights violations in Syria as well. Then, just months after he was designated, Soleimani was exposed again for his involvement in the plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to Washington in a popular Washington, D.C. restaurant. Arbabsiar, the individual who pled guilty to that, was just sentenced earlier today.

In the assessment of the Director of National Intelligence, General James Clapper, the Arbabsiar plot shows the following:

...that some Iranian officials—probably including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei—have changed their calculus and are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States in response to real or perceived... actions that threaten the regime.

Iran's primary proxy terrorist group, Hezbollah, is now also deeply involved in Syria, despite the fact that the fighting alongside the murderous Assad regime is costing Hezbollah significant political standing back home in Lebanon, not least because Hezbollah's involvement is dragging a sectarian bloodbath over the border into Lebanon.

Hezbollah's destabilizing activities in Syria have, as one Lebanese journalist put it, "torn away the party's mask of virtue". Nonetheless, Hezbollah's activity in Syria is increasing as events in Qusayr have made clear. Iran and Hezbollah both are "all in" in support of the Assad regime.

● (1325)

In August 2012 Hezbollah was re-designated by the U.S. Department of the Treasury, this time not as a terrorist organization but for its destabilizing activities in Syria. Then a month later Treasury designated several members of Hezbollah's leadership for their roles in Syria, specifically noting that "Hizballah consistently uses terrorism against civilian targets to achieve its goals, and this trend has only increased recently". Under Nasrallah's leadership, the Treasury reported, Hezbollah has been "providing training, advice, and extensive logistical support" to the Assad regime in support of his violent crackdown on the Syrian people, and this has only increased.

Meanwhile, Iran's use of terrorism as a tool of foreign policy goes back all the way to the 1979 Islamic revolution. Writing a few years later, in 1986, the CIA assessed in a now declassified report entitled "Iranian Support for International Terrorism" that while Iran's support for terrorism was meant to further its national interest, it also stemmed from the clerical regime's perception that it has a religious duty to export its Islamic revolution and to wage, by whatever means, a constant struggle against the perceived oppressor states.

A few years later, in 1989, a CIA report highlighted several factors that made Iran more likely to take increased risks in support of terrorism, factors that faded somewhat after the mid-1990s but are now coming back with a vengeance.

The first was the dominance of radical elements within the clerical leadership, which translated into significant Iranian hostility toward the west. Then, as now, there was little chance that more pragmatic leaders would come to the fore. Furthermore, igniting tensions abroad could shift popular attention away from domestic problems, while asymmetrical warfare provided Tehran with a potent weapon at a time when its military and economy were weak.

According to CIA reporting in the late 1980s, Iranian leaders view terrorism as an important instrument of foreign policy that they use both to advance national goals and to export the regime's Islamic revolutionary ideals. When it comes to Iranian support of terrorism, its primary terrorist proxy group is Hezbollah. The relationship between the two has been described by the director of national intelligence as "a partnership arrangement with the Iranians as the senior partner." This "strategic partnership", as the director of the

National Counterterrorism Center put it, is the product of a long evolution from the 1980s, when Hezbollah was just a proxy of Iran.

Iran has used Hezbollah networks for a variety of terrorist activities that were in their interests, from carrying out assassinations of Iranian dissidents to the bombing of the Israeli embassy in Argentina in 1992, the AMIA Jewish community centre in Argentina in 1994, the Khobar Towers military barracks in 1996, and much more.

Hezbollah's Unit 1800 is dedicated to supporting Palestinian terrorist groups and infiltrating Hezbollah operatives into Israel to carry out its own reconnaissance and operations there, while its Unit 3800 was established specifically to train Iraqi Shia militants and conduct attacks targeting coalition forces in Iraq.

However, recently Iran has used Hezbollah even more closely tied to their nuclear ambitions. Over the past few years the Quds Force established a dedicated unit to target western diplomatic interests around the world—Unit 400. Meanwhile, Tehran instructed Hezbollah to target Israeli tourists around the world in an effort to deter the Israelis or others from taking action against Iran's nuclear program, and also to send a message that if anybody does target their nuclear facilities, more asymmetric terrorist operations would be awaiting them.

The deliberate targeting of civilians is another clear example of Iran's disregard for human rights. The results were made clear last July, when Hezbollah blew up a busload of Israelis in Burgas, Bulgaria, also killing a Bulgarian bus driver and injuring 30 others. Just two weeks earlier a Hezbollah agent, a European citizen, had been arrested in Cyprus. A week after the successful Burgas attack, which involved at least one Hezbollah operative who was a dual Lebanese-Canadian citizen, the Bulgarians found a Quds Force officer, who apparently might also have been a Canadian citizen, conducting surveillance of one of the main synagogues in Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria.

Following the arrest of Hossam Yaacoub in Cyprus, he admitted the following in his deposition:

I don't believe that the missions I executed in Cyprus were connected with the preparation of a terrorist attack in Cyprus. It was just collecting information about the Jews, and this is what my organization is doing everywhere in the world.

In conclusion, let there be no doubt: Iran is involved in severe human rights violations both at home and abroad. But since 2009 these violations have become more intertwined than ever before. The partnership of terrorist organizations like Hezbollah has amplified these violations with instructions from the Iranian leadership to target civilian tourists in terrorist attacks around the world. Then the Quds Force's own plotting is targeting American, British, Saudi, Israeli, and other diplomats as well.

● (1330)

Now Iran and Hezbollah provide significant assistance to the Assad regime's brutal campaign against its own people, the latest in a terrible litany of Iranian human rights abuses around the world. Indeed, the UN human rights body just passed a non-binding resolution condemning the intervention of foreign combatants—meaning Hezbollah and Iran—fighting on behalf of the Syrian regime in Qusayr in particular.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify before you.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Levitt.

Colleagues, in order to allow five minutes of questioning by each person, given the overruns that occur from time to time, it would be impossible for us to complete the meeting and be out of here exactly at 2. Do we have consent to go a few minutes beyond to ensure that everybody gets their five minutes? Is that okay?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Great. We've already made at least one change to accommodate one person who has to leave early, and we can keep on making those changes as long as you let the chair and the clerk know.

We will start with Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Dubowitz and Mr. Levitt.

Mr. Levitt, your colleague, Mehdi Khalaji from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy mentioned a while ago in an article that since the protest that followed the 2009 election, Iran's human rights abuses have worsened day by day. Considering your expertise as a director and a senior fellow for the Washington Institute's Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, what are some specific examples of human rights abuses that have worsened day by day? What can be done to improve the human rights situation in Iran?

Dr. Matthew Levitt: Thank you for the question.

Indeed, my colleague, Mehdi Khalaji, is one of the strongest voices out there on this issue.

Let me bring this directly to the issue that Mark and I have been discussing today, tying this not only to Iran's human rights abuses at home but also abroad, as there's a distinct connection between the two that goes back to the Green Revolution in 2009. According to multiple sources—and I get into this in my written testimony—when the Iranian regime decided to crack heads in an effort to suppress peaceful protests during the last election, the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, MOIS, which is a very professional intelligence organization, was uncomfortable with the idea of cracking heads of fellow Iranians. Because of that they were demoted as an organization, and key individuals were demoted as well.

The IRGC, the Basij Resistance Force, and the Quds Force were more than happy to do whatever the regime asked of them, including sniper attacks and bullying and sending the Basij into the university campuses etc. Because of that, they were promoted, which has had an effect on their ability to conduct operations abroad. It's actually made them less capable, because the IRGC in some of its asymmetric capabilities abroad is not as capable on its own without the support of the MOIS. So this has had an impact not only on their ability to do these things at home, but also abroad.

It's obvious that the Green Revolution was a turning point where the Iranian regime indicated to anybody who was watching that there

is really no limit to what it would do to keep itself in power, including to its own people. When it comes now to the events in Syria, it's willing to expend everything to do the same for its allies. So in the first instance it advised the Assad regime to stop suppressing social media. Suddenly social media proliferated, Facebook accounts were opened, and then it became clear that Iran was providing Syria with the know-how to track social media and to prevent protests. But that was just the beginning and it has gotten much worse. One of our concerns is that we see Iran providing Syria with all kinds of kinetic options—not just suppression of social media—to put down the rebellion in Syria, much as it did at home.

• (1335)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: The Iranian legal system allows numerous human rights violations, including discrimination against women and ethno/sectarian minorities and the imposition of brutal sentences such as stoning.

Could the witnesses offer their opinions on what specifically can be done to improve these legalities to end these brutal sentences?

Mr. Mark Dubowitz: Let me answer your question.

One thing we underestimate about the Iranian regime is this. Unlike Saddam's Iraq or North Korea, which are Stalinist dictatorships, the Iranian regime actually cares to some extent about its international reputation. These Iranian regime officials imagine themselves as supporters of a great global revolution, one that needs to expand internationally.

They're actually trying to be more popular. They're trying to gain popularity across elements of the Muslim world. So the naming and shaming element should not be underestimated. In fact, there are many Iranian dissidents today who are alive only because countries like Canada and others have actually named and shamed regime officials, highlighting the names of dissidents here and abroad, in Canada and Iran.

I think the work you're doing, for example during Iran Accountability Week in matching Canadian parliamentarians with Iranian dissidents, is critical to giving these people a name and a face and a story. It's clear to me that without that kind of exposure, those people would disappear in the night and never be heard from again. So keeping a spotlight on the individuals, not having this become a statistic, I think is number 1, it's critical. Number 2, actually designating the IRGC and the Basij Force for human rights abuses would be profoundly important, not only substantively but symbolically.

Again, these are individuals who are free to travel around the world and use Iranian embassies for diplomatic cover. Certainly, Alberto Nisman, the Argentine prosecutor, released a 500-page report only yesterday on the 1994 AMIA bombing, which Dr. Levitt talked about. What Dr. Nisman actually underscored is that the Iranians have used that AMIA business model to extend their influence through Latin America and around the world, using embassies, mosques, cultural bureaus and the whole infrastructure that affords the Iranian regime much flexibility and operational freedom to plan terrorist attacks and intimidate dissidents.

Again, I would applaud the Canadian government for having recognized that the Iranian embassy in Ottawa was being used for exactly that purpose, including for intimidation of Iranian Canadians, and for having expelled these so-called Iranian diplomats from Ottawa who, in many cases, were intelligence agents and IRGC officials. I think that was a very powerful message that you sent. I would encourage you to encourage your colleagues in Latin America and in Europe to do exactly the same thing.

● (1340)

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Liu, go ahead.

[English]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Merci.

Thank you to our witnesses for your testimony. It's very valuable and will be taken into account by the subcommittee.

In our last meeting we heard from Professor Payam Akhavan, from McGill University. He expressed serious concerns that the world community has in fact allowed the nuclear issue in Iran to eclipse the human rights situation there. He spoke of the fear of the so-called grand bargain whereby the Iranian leadership would make compromises with the global community on the nuclear issue in exchange for appeasement and disregard of its brutality against its own people. He noted that at the end of the line, it would be the Iranian people who would be the losers in this situation.

Would you care to comment on this?

Mr. Mark Dubowitz: As someone who has worked on non-proliferation and sanctions issues for many years, let me underscore that he's exactly right and I think this is exactly where we're heading. If Ali Khamenei and the Revolutionary Guards were smart, they would strike the so-called grand bargain with the P5+1. They would satisfy the nuclear demands of the international community, and all of the sanctions would go away.

The reason for that is that the majority of sanctions the United States has imposed are linked to Iran's nuclear program. Some sanctions are linked to Iran's terrorist activities, but very little has actually been linked to human rights. So he is completely right in assessing the risk, that a grand bargain would lead to this whole issue going away and our really ignoring Iran's human rights abuses. This is one of the major reasons why I think it's so important for a country like Canada to link sanctions and designations to human rights, not only on an individual level but also to actually go after the core state instruments of this repression, the IRGC and the Basij.

By designating the IRGC and the Basij for human rights abuses under SEMA, you will ensure that this will not go away, even if a nuclear deal is reached. I think that is one of the major policy recommendations that I and others have for the Canadian government: it is to actually underscore the human rights abuses at this scale and to this extent, and to have them be in the spotlight for years to come.

By naming and shaming the regime, by exposing its human rights abuses, by giving a face and a name and a story to the dissidents, we can perhaps address this issue even if the Iranian regime satisfies its nuclear obligations. By the way, I'm skeptical it will, but even if it

does, we do not want its human rights abuses to disappear into the night.

Ms. Laurin Liu: Thank you.

As you mentioned, we meet at a timely moment, a few weeks before the next elections. Would either of you be able to provide some information on the repression leading up to the election next month and on any specific cases?

Mr. Mark Dubowitz: In terms of specific cases leading up to the election in two weeks, yes. We've seen, as I mentioned, IRGC officials publicly talk about the repression, talk about how these elections should be engineered. We've seen the IRGC's cyber-defence command and its specific special department, the Centre for Inspecting Organised Crimes. This is its electronic repression squad, which goes out and closely monitors Iranian cyber-activities. It monitors websites, e-mails, Twitter, and Facebook, using western technology to actually identify Iranian dissidents and then using western technology to identify, target, find, and imprison them, and worse.

We're seeing a cyber-offensive on the one hand, and on the other hand we see the Basij and the IRGC gearing up for what they expect might be worse than what happened in 2009. Their fears are that this is not going to be a green movement that emerges out of the suburbs of north Tehran but may indeed involve protests that actually come out of the smaller cities and villages in Iran where you have a green movement combining with what I would call a blue movement. Those are blue-collar workers who are frustrated by the state of Iran's economy, the harmful economic policies of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the unemployment and inflation.

Their big fear is that these two movements, a green movement and a blue movement, are going to coalesce and lead to significant protests. To head that off they are already cracking down both physically and in the cyber-world to ensure that doesn't happen again.

● (1345)

Ms. Laurin Liu: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go next to Mr. Sweet.

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

I want to publicly commend my colleague, Professor Irwin Cotler, again for Iran Accountability Week. I want to fulfill my responsibility once more at the committee by mentioning the three people who I want to make sure the world is aware of. All of them are very real, of course, and we want to make sure that people know they have real personalities. There is Navid Khanjani, a Bahá'í student denied the right to go to university because of his faith. He was sentenced to 12 years of brutal imprisonment in Tehran's Evin prison.

There are also two others I have been advocating for: Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, a Christian pastor who has been sentenced to death for practising his faith, and also recently Pastor Saeed Abedini, a dual American-Iranian citizen who was arrested, beaten, and sentenced to eight years. His health is now deteriorating because of his beatings, and I don't know whether he'll survive any more of his incarceration.

Thank you for your patience on that, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your testimony. Can you supply the committee with this declassified CIA report that you mentioned earlier in your testimony, Mr. Levitt.

Dr. Matthew Levitt: Of course. I should have mentioned that parts of my testimony come from my forthcoming book on Hezbollah, which is also coming out here in Canada, in the next few weeks. All of that is publicly available there.

Mr. David Sweet: Briefly, because our time is limited, both of you have alluded to quite a sophisticated systemic leadership flow in this Iranian regime of repression. You've mentioned specifically in quite a number of references the Quds Force.

Where do they fall in the flow chart of leadership? How do they relate specifically to the republican guard, the Basij, which you say are now merged, and are they now aggregating or galvanizing any other organizations with these to oppress their own people?

Dr. Matthew Levitt: Both the Basij and Quds Force fall under the IRGC, but the most important thing to understand is the personality of and the relationship of Qassem Soleimani, the head of the Quds Force, to the supreme leader. Qassem Soleimani does not need to go through Jafari, the head of the IRGC. He has, we believe, a direct reporting line to the supreme leader.

People were very careful in the wake of the Arbabsiar plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington, D.C., not to say that the supreme leader called for this attack. The U.S., Britain, and others did go as far as pointing directly at Qassem Soleimani. I have no other hard evidence to point to, but if you believe that Qassem Soleimani would plot to blow up the Saudi ambassador to Washington, D.C. in a restaurant that's known to be frequented by U.S. senators without the okay of the supreme leader, I've got some bridges to sell you.

You hit the nail on the head in the fact that there is a systemic leadership issue here. There's no rogue element here. In fact anything can be done, as Mark and I have said, in support of this revolution that is ongoing. Therefore your point is very well taken and I included among my materials, which I understand are being translated, an article by my colleague Patrick Clawson who makes this exact same point. Republican or Democrat, the reality is that policy-makers would throw human rights under the bus if there were an opportunity to have a grand bargain. It's not nice but this is the reality, which is why, as Mark said, we have to incorporate this into everything we're doing.

I'll just add to what you said, Mark. It's not just about increasing the number of the human rights designations. Even when we're talking about exposing designations and other types of activity, we need to say, not willy nilly but whenever it is the case, and it almost always is the case, that it's the same people supporting terrorism, the

missile program, and the proliferation program who are also engaged in human rights abuses. When you have that evidence, make that point.

When I was the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Intelligence at Treasury, this is something I tried there, and they continue to try to do at Treasury. Fold that in there just to make it clear. It's the same people.

Mr. David Sweet: Just briefly and then you can add it to the rest of your answer.

By the way, rest assured, there are enough people around this table dedicated to human rights in Iran that the issue will not be thrown under the bus anytime soon.

•(1350)

The Chair: Yes, thank you very much.

Mr. David Sweet: Six hundred and eighty-six apparently was the number of candidates that tried to qualify for the elections. Only eight were chosen. I understand some of the 686 were actually insiders before. Can you give us your interpretation about what's possibly going on inside the regime with this outcome?

Mr. Mark Dubowitz: I think what's happening is that the supreme leader looked at the election of 2009 and realized that he had lost control. He had lost control of somebody that he had considered to be a loyalist. But what he had was a populist. He had a former mayor of Tehran who understood grass roots election politics and got too big for his boots and gave the supreme leader and the IRGC, Soleimani, Jafari, and this clerical military dictatorship some real heartburn over the past few years, in challenging the regime and appealing over their heads to the Iranian people.

So this time around, Khamenei took no chances. He would not let Rafsanjani run because he feared him as a power centre. He would not let Ahmadinejad's father-in-law and chief of staff Mashaei run, because he was too close to Ahmadinejad. So they whittled down that list as you said to eight persons, all of whom have impeccable revolutionary credentials. When you look at Jalili, who is reputed to be the front runner, he has made it very clear in his public statements over the past number of years, including the past number of weeks, that he shares Khamenei's view of the revolution, Iranian society, and of the rejection of the international community. He is a supreme loyalist.

When you look at Rezai and Velayati, these are two men who not only share the supreme leader's view of the revolution, but they have also been implicated by the Argentine prosecutor I mentioned, Alberto Nisman, for the 1994 attack against the AMIA centre in Buenos Aires. There are Interpol red notices that have been issued against these men. They're international fugitives who are running for the presidency.

So as you go down the list of the eight members who are running, Khamenei has ensured that none of the eight would be men that would challenge him, challenge Soleimani, challenge the Revolutionary Guards. In that sense, this election will be more fraudulent than the 2009 election. In that election they actually rigged votes to ensure that Ahmadinejad won; in this election, they've rigged the candidates so that no matter who wins, he will be a supreme loyalist.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It's just a procedural thing. I did circulate a notice of motion and I believe there may be a consensus for it. I think it would be symbolically good if we could adopt it today. You may want to do this after the meeting or...

The Chair: I'll just ask the question.

Have all members seen the notice?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: You'd have to actually move it, Mr. Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I move that the motion that has been circulated be adopted.

The Chair: All right. We'll see if there's unanimous consent, first of all.

Is there unanimous consent for the motion?

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: All right.

We'll make sure that gets out.

Please go to your questions; we just don't want to waste any of the time we have here.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My first question is for Mr. Dubowitz. I hope the government will adopt both of your suggestions regarding designating the IRGC as a human rights violator under SEMA and as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code.

Because you made the proper point about the importance of linking sanctions to human rights violations, my question is this. Are there other major entities or individuals looking at what the EU has done, and what the U.S. has recently done, that we should be looking to in order to maybe broaden our sanctioning of human rights violators here?

Mr. Mark Dubowitz: Mr. Cotler, it's actually a very timely question.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. Congress just unanimously adopted legislation last week called the Nuclear Iran Prevention Act of 2013. In the legislation there is a specific human rights provision that would require the administration to report back to Congress with a list of all Iranian officials who are implicated in human rights abuses, and then to give a 30-day or 60-day determination, after issuing that report, on the imposition of sanctions against the said individuals.

The premise is that this vast system of domestic repression, again, is headed up by one man, Ali Khamenei, but that there are many officials are involved, from IRGC commanders to prosecutors, judges, prison guards, members of the Basij, members of the Iranian Parliament. Really, as you go through the entire power apparatus of the Iranian regime, you find yourself able to map out a repressive apparatus of people who are actually specifically implicated in

murder, torture, imprisonment. The legislation would actually call for the identification of these individuals, the sanctioning of them, the freezing of their assets, the denial of travel visas, and call on other countries to adhere to these travel bans.

I think it would be a very good idea for the Canadian government—which again, has really taken the lead on this human rights issue, more so than our government, more so than even the Europeans—to designate under SEMA the IRGC for human rights abuses, and also go after the specific individuals in that apparatus of repression that I've named, specifically identifying and sanctioning them individually, as well as the collective.

• (1355)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Thank you. We will follow up on that.

Very quickly, if I may, I want to put a question to Matthew Levitt. Based on your research, I once wrote a piece about the Iranian-Hezbollah terrorist connection, which from 2011 up to the Burgas attack on July 18 spanned five continents, involving more than 25 countries.

I noticed, at least in my perspective, that it's receded since the attack on Burgas. Is that because of the Hezbollah involvement in Syria and its preoccupation there? Or has the nature and pattern of terrorist attacks inspired by Iran, carried out by Hezbollah, continued to cross continents and countries?

Dr. Matthew Levitt: It hasn't stopped in the least. We make a mistake when we sit and look at open sources of thinking that what gets reported publicly is what's happening. With covert organizations like Hezbollah and the Quds Force, there's a lot more happening than often gets reported. Whether it's suspicious surveillance or attempts that fail, Hezbollah surveillance at the airport in Johannesburg, from the Ukraine to Greece and Turkey, there are all kinds of things that continue on the Hezbollah side and on the Quds Force side.

Though I'm out of the intelligence community now, the people I speak to inform me that the nature of the threats from both Hezbollah and the Quds Force targeting civilians and diplomats respectively continue at a significant pace. In my book, for example, people won't be as surprised that there's more detail than most people know about regarding their activities in South America and North America, including Canada. But I think people would be surprised and I was surprised at how much information there was on Hezbollah in southeast Asia, in places like Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Africa and the Middle East, beyond Europe and the other places where we've known they've operated for a long time.

If I could add just one last comment to the earlier question on the issue of the number of candidates who can run. Mark is absolutely right that from the supreme leader's perspective, you have a president who went rogue and wanted to control the candidates. An Iranian friend of mine told me that after the last election that what was new in 2009 wasn't that the election was stolen, but that it was so blatantly and obviously and openly stolen. What he predicted then, and what is actually happening, is that the regime would just go back to using its institutional means of control to control the election in a much quieter way. That is what we're seeing and there's no surprise in that whatsoever. It's still an abuse of human rights; it's just not as obvious and therefore doesn't create as much anger and reaction both at home and abroad.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Thank you.

The Chair: We have to move now to our next questioner. That's Mr. Schellenberger.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for your testimony here today.

In order to improve the human rights situation in Iran, is it preferable to engage the Iranian government or authorities to support civil society or both? In other words, what is the most likely avenue for reform within Iran?

Dr. Matthew Levitt: Well, if you believe that this regime in Iran is reformable then I suppose that engaging with them makes a lot of logical sense. I don't believe that's the case. I believe this government in Iran is organized in such a way as to be repressive, to control who gets to run. I believe that to call the Iranian government a democratic government is a farce of democracy. It's not real democracy: you don't get to choose whom you're going to vote for, you don't get to choose who gets to run. An unelected element gets to choose that.

There are two governments in Iran. One is the pseudo-elected, and it basically doesn't have any real power anyway. The other is revolutionary, which isn't elected in the least and controls all of the elements of governmental power, from the media and judiciary to the military and intelligence and more. I don't believe that engagement with Iran has any chance of leading to civil society reform.

Now that doesn't mean there isn't a role for engagement, but I don't think it's with the government. There are civil society activists in Iran. Unfortunately, we can't openly meet with them in Iran. It would not be good for them. That's why we're sitting here today. But you can meet with them elsewhere. You have to do it quietly so as not to put them and their families in danger.

But there is a need to engage with, support, and find ways to back up those who are trying to build a civil society in Iran. I just don't believe that the government has any role in that whatsoever, other than trying to suppress exactly that type of activity.

• (1400)

Mr. Mark Dubowitz: I'll just add that one great example was the global dialogue conference in Toronto two weeks ago, which I believe was sponsored by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Munk School of Global Affairs. Iranian-Canadian civil society activists were brought to Toronto with their colleagues from Europe and were actually using technology so that 150,000 Iranians in Iran were able to view the conference and ask specific questions and provide comments via social media. I was there and thought it was a great example of how you can actually do what Matt is suggesting, namely engaging with Iranian civil society.

I would agree with Matt. I think the only engagement that is worth doing is not engagement with a regime on questions of democracy and human rights. The only engagement worth doing, to some extent, is on their nuclear program. I support a diplomatic track. The five rounds of discussions we've had so far with the Iranian regime on their nuclear program failed. It's fine to talk to them about their nuclear program. It's certainly more than fine to be imposing specific sanctions—counter proliferation sanctions, economic sanctions, and human rights sanctions—on the regime while you're doing that,

because clearly this is a regime whose calculus you will not change unless you impose significant pressure to break the nuclear will of Ali Khamenei and his Revolutionary Guards.

But there is no point in engaging with the regime on questions of civil society. Having said that, again, I think Canada takes the lead in engaging with civil society participants in ways that you did two weeks ago at the University of Toronto.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Thank you.

Iran was the chair of the UN disarmament conference. How badly is the UN's reputation compromised when Iran is in leadership positions within it?

Mr. Mark Dubowitz: You know, sir, it's even worse than that. That just sounds like a bad sitcom, but it actually is worse. The United Nations has been so penetrated by Iranian largesse, and the strange voting patterns and voting blocks of the UN, that the Iranians have not only chaired the disarmament conference, but I believe they've also chaired conferences on women's rights. They have a board seat at the UN's flagship agency, the United Nations Development Programme—the UNDP, I believe is the acronym—which doles out literally hundreds of millions of dollars every year around the world. Iran sits on its board of directors and makes decisions about where that money goes. Clearly, money buys it influence.

There's a litany of examples of how the United Nations has departed from its founding principles—which actually a great Canadian articulated at its origin. We see that the Iranians manipulate the institutions and the processes of the UN and get control of key agencies, and more importantly, of hundreds of millions of dollars of Canadian and U.S. taxpayer money to dole it out for their own purposes.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Schellenberg.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gravelle, the floor is yours.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Dubowitz, your organization, through its Iranian human rights projects, keeps track of international companies that sell equipment and technology to Iran, material that is used by the regime for human rights abuses. Would you be able to provide the subcommittee with the names of some of these companies, in particular any European or North American ones, as well as discuss the types of human rights abuses that they implicate?

• (1405)

Mr. Mark Dubowitz: Thank you for that question.

You're absolutely right. There has actually been some excellent reporting done by *The Wall Street Journal*, Reuters, and Bloomberg, in open sources over the past couple of years detailing international companies that are selling tools of electronic repression to the Iranian regime. I would be delighted to provide you with a detailed, well-footnoted report that we have. We haven't publicly released it yet, but we would certainly provide it to the committee. It contains specific names, dates, and technologies that have been transferred.

I would also underscore that there is an opportunity to complement what Canada did yesterday. Canada yesterday essentially imposed a trade embargo on Iran, but provided specific exceptions for technology that would help Iranians challenge what President Obama has called Iran's electronic curtain. That is the positive side of technology—our ability to provide technology to the Iranian people to help them circumvent this electronic repression.

The other side of it is for Canada, under SEMA, to specifically sanction any Canadian person involved in providing tools of repression—electronic tools of repression—to the Iranian regime. Canada has a robust software and telecom industry, including in this town, and it's absolutely imperative that these sophisticated tracking and targeting technologies sold by western companies for police-enforcement purposes to reputable police forces around the world—which are subject to due process, warrants, and checks and balances—not be sold to the Iranian regime. Selling it to any element of that regime means that the regime will use that technology to specifically target dissidents for murder, torture, and unjust imprisonment.

So, absolutely, I will follow up and send you a very detailed report naming the exact companies involved in this.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Thank you very much.

The Chair: I'll just mention, by the way, that anything you send of that nature should be sent to the clerk, who will then ensure that it's distributed in both English and French in order to conform with our rules. We'll make any necessary translations, but we are always very grateful for any material you can send. That of course applies to both of you.

Colleagues, you've been very generous in allowing us to go over our time.

Professor Cotler, did you have something else to say?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: No.

The Chair: Okay.

You've been very generous in allowing us to go over our time. I appreciate that. Thank you for the excellent testimony.

Just to be clear about this, we did pass that motion unanimously and we'll put out a press release to indicate that it's been done.

Thank you, colleagues.

We are adjourned.

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