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Chair: Mr. Sven Spengemann

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1650)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): Colleagues, welcome to meeting number 2 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to the order of reference of today, October 22, 2020, the committee will proceed to a briefing on the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is being held in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of September 23, 2020. Proceedings will be posted on the House of Commons website. For your information, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entire committee.

[English]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline briefly a few rules to follow.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of either the floor, English or French.

[Translation]

Members attending in person must conduct themselves as they would normally if all committee members were meeting in person in a committee room and keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for wearing masks, as well as health protocols.

[English]

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. The microphones of those in the room will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer.

When you have 30 seconds remaining in your questioning time, I will signal you by holding up a yellow sheet of paper.

When you're not speaking, your microphone should be on mute.

Now I would like to welcome our witnesses from Global Affairs Canada.

[Translation]

We have with us David Sproule, senior Arctic official and director general of Arctic, Eurasian and European affairs, as well as Shanili Anand, acting director general of export controls.

[English]

With that, I would like to turn the floor over—

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Chair, on a point of order, seeing that we started 51 minutes late, could you tell us for our own benefit when the meeting will adjourn?

Thank you.

The Chair: It will be at 5:45, Mr. Chong, if that's agreeable. Unless somebody has strict views to the contrary, I would propose that we go until 5:45 p.m..

Mr. Sproule, we will turn the floor over to you now for your remarks, for up to 15 minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. David Sproule (Senior Arctic Official and Director General, Arctic, Eurasian and European Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Chairman.

I will provide a short overview of the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh.

I am accompanied by my colleague, Shalini Anand. She will answer any questions that may come up with regard to export permits for the region.

Nagorno-Karabakh is a historical flashpoint between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous region within Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. The ethnic Armenian Karabakhis declared independence in 1991, triggering a three-year war that pitted Azerbaijan against Karabakh separatists and Armenia, until a ceasefire was reached in May 1994. The war and the expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Armenia and seven adjacent territories occupied by Armenia resulted in over one million refugees and internally displaced persons. Today Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven adjacent territories account for almost 14% of Azerbaijani territory. They remain occupied by Armenian and separatists forces.

Instability in this region carries high risks of spillover that could involve Turkey, Russia and Iran. The OSCE Minsk Group, co-chaired by France, Russia and the United States, mediates the conflict, but progress has been minimal. Despite outbreaks of violence over the years, this has been largely a frozen conflict.

The new outbreak of violence since September 27 appears to be the worst since the 1990s. Both Azerbaijan and Armenia accuse the other of causing the outbreak. The fighting has included the use of armour, air power and artillery. Both sides have accused each other of recruiting foreign fighters, but these allegations remain difficult to verify.

Fighting has continued both along and beyond the line of contact. Aggressive political rhetoric about the hostilities have come from both sides. The bombardment of cities has become a major characteristic of the conflict. The capital of Nagorno-Karabakh has been regularly bombed, while Armenia has launched missile attacks on major Azerbaijani cities. Civilian casualties continue to rise. All claims by either side remain extremely difficult to verify. Two Russian-brokered ceasefires between Armenia and Azerbaijan have failed to take hold.

Armenia and Azerbaijan maintain mutually exclusive negotiating positions around the modalities for determining the final status of Nagorno-Karabakh, making reaching a consensus very difficult. The return of seven occupied territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh is particularly contentious. Armenia views the security of the corridor connecting the region to Armenia through two Armenian-controlled districts as vital to their broader security of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan considers the return of occupied territories and the right of return for internally displaced persons as condition for the beginning of normalization of relations.

Azerbaijan has been facing domestic pressure to reach a peace settlement that would involve the return of lost territory. Smaller clashes earlier in July produced a groundswell of popular support for the war. While Armenia's 2018 Velvet Revolution brought about expectations of a reset in the peace process, this has not occurred. It has fuelled fears in Azerbaijan that no peace can be achieved through negotiation. Armenia has never recognized Nagorno-Karabakh, but Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan has said that this is now a possibility.

Turkey is playing a strong role in support of Azerbaijan, which they consider a brethren nation. Such support is long standing, with Turkey having closed its border with Armenia due to the conflict in 1993. Turkey and Azerbaijan conducted large joint military exercises in July 2020. However, Turkey has said it is not involved militarily in the current conflict and denied allegations that Turkish F-16s shot down an Armenian fighter jet.

• (1655)

Despite its long-standing substantial political, economic and military support for Armenia, Russia has made public statements calling on both sides to reduce tension. Russia is actively mediating and now has brokered two ceasefires. On October 21, Russia hosted both foreign ministers for bilateral talks.

Russia is the largest supplier of military equipment to both Armenia and Azerbaijan and has around [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

Hon. Michael Chong: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I can't hear anything.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong.

We will just ask IT people to see if they can restore it.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): I lost it after “Russia hosted both foreign ministers for bilateral talks” and the rest is missing.

The Chair: It's the same here.

IT, let's turn it over to you to see if it can be restored.

I'm advised that IT is in contact with Mr. Sproule and is attempting to restore the connection.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira): Mr. Chair, could you please confirm that we're suspended?

The Chair: We are. Do we need a formal motion? My understanding is that we're suspended until the connection has been restored or until we're advised otherwise. If the connection cannot be restored, then we will have to adjourn and potentially reschedule for another opportunity.

• (1655)

(Pause)

• (1700)

The Chair: I can hear you, Mr. Sproule. Let's just check with interpretation that they have the same feed that they had previously. Okay, I'm getting a thumbs-up, Mr. Sproule, we'll turn it back over to you for your continued testimony.

Mr. David Sproule: Thank you.

Despite its long-standing substantial political, economic and military support to Armenia, Russia's public statements call on both sides to reduce tensions. Russia is actively mediating and has now brokered two ceasefires, neither of which has held. On October 21, Russia hosted both foreign ministers for further bilateral talks.

Russia is the largest supplier of military equipment to both Armenia and Azerbaijan, and has around 3,000 troops stationed at a base near Yerevan in Armenia. The Collective Security Treaty Organisation, led by Russia, and of which Armenia is a member, could be used to justify Russia's entry into the conflict. However, Russia has stated that the CSTO provisions only apply to Armenia, not to Nagorno-Karabakh.

Canada's position on the Nagorno-Karabakh situation is long-standing and emphasizes the principles of non-use of force, territorial integrity and self-determination. While Canada recognizes Azerbaijan's territorial integrity, we do not prejudice the form of a future settlement.

Canada fully supports the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group. Minister Champagne and U.K. Foreign Minister Raab issued joint statements, on September 29 and October 5, condemning the violence and calling for a peaceful negotiated resolution through the framework provided by the OSCE's Minsk process.

In 2019, Turkey was Canada's third-largest non-U.S. export destination for military goods and technology, receiving approximately \$151.4 million in Canadian military exports, accounting for approximately 4.03% of the total value of non-U.S. military exports. In the case of Armenia, under the same period, export of military goods and technology from Canada were minimal, totalling only \$1,453.20. As for Azerbaijan, we need to go back to 2017 to see the latest Canadian export of military goods and technology, for a value of \$50,016.

On October 5, 2020, Minister Champagne released a statement announcing the suspension of export permits to Turkey relevant to Nagorno-Karabakh and the conflict. This decision followed various allegations of the possible export to Azerbaijan of Turkish drones with Canadian components, and reports that these drones may have been used in combat operations. Canadian officials are currently investigating these allegations. The suspension will allow time to further assess the situation. Global Affairs Canada has informed the Canadian companies whose permits have been suspended.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sproule. That leaves us a bit more time for questioning than we may have anticipated.

Let's go to our first round of questions now.

I will pass the floor to Mr. Chong for six minutes, please.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are for Madam Anand in particular and focus on the export of Canadian-made military equipment to Turkey.

In October last year, the government banned all military exports to Turkey in conjunction with some NATO allies, in light of what it said were Turkey's "military actions" in northeastern Syria. Does the reference to those military actions involve drones?

• (1705)

Ms. Shalini Anand (Acting Director General, Export Controls, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Just as a small point of clarification, actually, on October 11, 2019, Canada put into place a suspension on the issuance of all new exports.

Hon. Michael Chong: That's right, and I'm wondering whether the reason for that suspension included drones being used inappropriately by Turkey.

Ms. Shalini Anand: The reason for the suspension at the time was Turkey's incursion into northeastern Syria—

Hon. Michael Chong: Northeastern Syria—

Ms. Shalini Anand: That's correct.

Hon. Michael Chong: —I understand that, but did that incursion involve the use of drones at the time?

Ms. Shalini Anand: I'm sorry, I'm not aware if that specific incursion and the reason behind—

Hon. Michael Chong: I have a limited amount of time, so I just want to get through some questions.

Ms. Shalini Anand: I understand.

Hon. Michael Chong: Last April, the government created an exemption for category 2 military exports. Why is that?

Ms. Shalini Anand: On April 16, we lifted the full suspension from the issuance of all new permits.

Hon. Michael Chong: That's right. Why was that done? Why was that action taken?

Ms. Shalini Anand: Well, that action was taken—and Canada is very much in line with our other European allies on this—

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay, well—

Ms. Shalini Anand: —to focus on restrictions on group 2 munitions and military items that could be sent to Turkey ultimately via export-controlled permits.

Hon. Michael Chong: I understand that, but why was that decision taken?

Ms. Shalini Anand: The decision was taken so as to not restrict the exports—

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay, I understand.

Ms. Shalini Anand: —of all export-controlled items to Turkey.

Hon. Michael Chong: There have been reports that Turkey has used these drones against the Kurds, the PKK, in Turkey proper and against the YPG in Syria and in Iraq. It may have possibly diverted these drones to Libya.

There needs to be a risk assessment, which Global Affairs has done. What was the conclusion of the risk assessment analysis regarding the purpose for which WESCAM proposed exporting these targeting systems to Turkey?

What was the conclusion of that risk assessment that was done?

Ms. Shalini Anand: Just to clarify, there are possible allegations of Canadian technology on the drones. Canada is not responsible for—

Hon. Michael Chong: No, what I'm saying—

Ms. Shalini Anand: Yes.

Hon. Michael Chong: —to be clear, is that seven targeting systems were exported by a company in Burlington, Ontario, to Turkey, to Baykar. We know that. At least two export permits were issued to do that.

What was the conclusion of the risk assessment analysis in granting these export permits?

Was that risk assessment done, and if so, what was its conclusion?

Ms. Shalini Anand: We always undertake a full risk assessment—

Hon. Michael Chong: I understand that, but what was the conclusion?

Ms. Shalini Anand: The conclusion of risk assessments when the permits are issued is, ultimately, that there are no substantial risks.

Since the Arms Trade Treaty has come into effect in September—

Hon. Michael Chong: Sorry, I only have two minutes left.

In this particular case then, GAC agreed, and concluded in its risk assessment, that it was appropriate for these export permits to be granted. Is that what you're telling us?

Ms. Shalini Anand: I think what's important to keep in mind is that the allegations that you mentioned earlier... We're presently in the process of—

Hon. Michael Chong: I haven't made an allegation. I've just said that there have been seven targeting systems exported from Burlington, Ontario, to Turkey. I never made any mention of these ending up in the conflict zone. I'm simply asked if GAC's analysis concluded that the approval of these export permits was appropriate in the circumstances.

Ms. Shalini Anand: I've explained to you in general terms, of course, that we go through an Arms Trade Treaty evaluation process since the Arms Trade Treaty came into effect, so any permits, generally speaking, would have to go through that evaluation.

I can't comment on the details of any specific permits for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Hon. Michael Chong: I understand that, but the reason I ask is that we know that Baykar lobbied PCO in February and that, in the same month, L3Harris WESCAM also lobbied Minister Champagne's office. We know that the Prime Minister and President Erdogan spoke in April, and it was publicly reported that Prime Minister Trudeau committed to taking steps to address Turkish concerns regarding Canadian military exports to Turkey.

Another question is this: Was there any direction from the Prime Minister's Office or Minister Champagne's office to approve these export permits?

Ms. Shalini Anand: Again, I'm not in a position to discuss specific export permits for specific companies.

Hon. Michael Chong: Can you tell us then how many export permits were approved in the springtime?

Ms. Shalini Anand: I've actually asked that question as well. Unfortunately, I'm not in a position to reveal numbers—

Hon. Michael Chong: We know that at least two export permits have been granted. We hear that over a dozen have been granted. We would like to know how many export permits have been granted and the details of those export permits.

If the department could give that information to the clerk of the committee in the near future, it would be helpful for the committee's work.

• (1710)

Ms. Shalini Anand: Understood. We'll endeavour to come back.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Chong, I think that's your time. Thank you very much.

Next on the speaking list I have Dr. Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As I understand it, any arms sales have to fall under the treaty negotiated with the NATO members. I don't think Canada is acting on its own; Canada is complying, hopefully, with the treaty agreements on arms sales. I think that's fair. I understand you cannot tell us some things because they are under security lockdown. We can't hear some things in a public meeting that concern security issues.

I want to move on and ask Mr. Sproule some questions.

Yesterday, on Wednesday, there was a European message that the Armenian Prime Minister has declared that Armenia is beyond the ability to negotiate a settlement of the conflict. In other words, he drew a line in the sand and is asking for volunteers to join an Armenian militia. I want to know how true that is.

Secondly, you spoke very well of the Turkey-Azerbaijan friendship. It is my understanding that there are bilateral agreements specifically between Russia and Armenia. Today, how does that affect what is going on with Russia being the honest broker? I know there are three co-chairs for the Minsk Group. One is Russia, one is France and one is the United States.

The question for me, then, is this: In your best estimation, given what the Armenian Prime Minister said on Wednesday and given that he has asked people to join the militia, do you really believe that the Minsk process will take place? Do you really believe there is an opportunity to start peace talks? Do you believe there is good faith on the part of Russia, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan? Well, there is no good faith with two of them. Is there good faith on the part of these two larger countries—Turkey and Russia?

Mr. David Sproule: There are a number of questions in that. Let me try to answer those in turn.

Insofar as the security agreement between Russia and Armenia is concerned, it has come up for discussion. There has been consideration of whether or not there is an obligation on Russia's part vis-à-vis Armenia. I think the determination on the Russian side has been that it applies to incursions on Armenian soil, but not necessarily on the soil of Nagorno-Karabakh. That certainly assists Russia in playing a mediating role in this conflict.

As for the question about whether there is any reasonable chance for the OSCE Minsk process to work, there was some progress last year. There was an agreement in March. There was a meeting of the chairs of the group. Following from that, at the foreign ministers level, there was an agreement in June that there should be a return of prisoners as a result of the fighting that had gone on.

The OSCE group has met on many occasions over the years. It hasn't effectively brought a peace settlement in terms of things. It is our strong view that it is the best process to address the issue and should be utilized.

The difficulty—

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you, Mr. Sproule.,

I agree that it is the best process. I think that most OSCE members believe that it is the best process. The point is, and the question that I asked, was about the Armenian Prime Minister's putting up his flag two days ago, saying that there is no reasonable way that they are going back to the table and then asking the people of his country to join the militia.

That may be a spoiler there. I'm getting this through the OSCE back door, but I think there may be a feeling that Russia is trying to build this—even though it says it isn't—into a faceoff with Turkey and, by extension, with NATO. There is a feeling that there is a bit of trouble brewing there that is underscoring the problem, and this lets Russia, and possibly Turkey, not act in good faith at all, even though they say they are.

• (1715)

Mr. David Sproule: Well, up until this time, Russia has acted in a very positive manner in trying to bring the two sides together. It has worked out ceasefires on two different occasions, though unfortunately those failed. It has spoken to the foreign ministers of both countries, as well as their heads of government, so it is actively working on it.

Russia, of course, has a very activist foreign policy, and so has Turkey, and they have been able to sort out some of their difficulties—most of their difficulties—in dialogues between their heads of government, Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Putin. An example of that has been some of the tensions that arose when both countries' forces were present in Idlib in northeast Syria some months back.

We are supportive of any ongoing efforts to undertake mediation with a view to a possible settlement of the problem, but we would also strongly support the established mechanism that has been in place for some time and is readily available to both sides.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron, you have six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sproule, in your presentation, you indicated that it was difficult to verify the allegations regarding the presence of Syrian mercenaries. However, French President Emmanuel Macron has directly accused Turkey of allowing Syrian jihadists to cross into Nagorno-Karabakh to fight Armenia. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has also alluded to these Syrian mercenaries, who are reportedly being paid by Turkey. It even documents their movements and their death toll.

If the President of France and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights have made such a strong statement, how can we claim today that the allegations remain difficult to verify?

Is there no relationship between the Canadian and French intelligence agencies that allows for these verifications to be made?

[English]

Mr. David Sproule: Well sir, I can't speak for France and their information or where it comes from. I'm not aware....

What we would like to see is more of an opportunity to monitor the situation on the ground. Unfortunately, due to the conflict, as well as the COVID situation, all OSCE monitors who are normally there to look into these kinds of allegations are not present, and therefore it's very difficult to verify allegations such as that.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Is there no relationship between the French and Canadian intelligence agencies that would confirm the information that led the French president to make such a statement?

[English]

Mr. David Sproule: The nature and source of the information that France has received and their willingness or ability to share information such as that.... I'm not aware of what has been done or what could be done in that regard.

As I said, for this conflict, we have relied heavily on the mechanism that's been in place: independent monitoring of the situation on the part of the OSCE.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I would just like to point out that France is co-chairing the Minsk Group, which is tasked with trying to find a solution to this conflict. Speaking of the conflict, wouldn't you say that this disaster was entirely predictable?

I feel that at least two factors point in that direction. First, Azerbaijan has always opposed international monitoring of the border. Second, at the end of June this year, when UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, on Malaysia's initiative, called for a kind of global ceasefire during the health crisis, 170 states at the United Nations agreed to the request. The list of 170 states includes Armenia, but not Azerbaijan. It's as if they don't want to tie their hands by committing to take no military action. A few weeks later, first in July and August, and then in September, conflicts did indeed happen in the region.

Don't you think it was a disaster that was waiting to happen, based on the information I just provided?

• (1720)

[English]

Mr. David Sproule: Canada has actively encouraged both sides to step back from the conflict and to implement ceasefires. So far it has not been successful.

In terms of the question you asked about verification of the allegations of foreign fighters, I'm not aware of the other two chairs of the Minsk Group having confirmed or commented on the presence of foreign fighters. To my knowledge, it has been France alone.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: As we mentioned earlier, Canada has suspended the export of sensors that Turkey in particular uses in its drones.

Turkey's foreign minister has criticized Canada for having a double standard, so to speak, because it continues to export tanks to Saudi Arabia, for example, which the UN has directly accused of grievous human rights violations, particularly in Yemen.

Why ban the export of weapons to Turkey and continue to export them to Saudi Arabia?

[English]

Mr. David Sproule: Are you directing the question at me or my colleague?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I guess I am asking whoever can answer the question.

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, you're running out of time.

[English]

Maybe there's a chance to circle back in the next round.

The last speaker in this round is Mr. Harris.

You have six minutes, sir. The floor is yours.

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

Firstly, to the witness regarding the export of military goods, are there conditions related to third party brokerage contained in the export permits granting the export of goods to Turkey, as required by the Arms Trade Treaty?

Ms. Shalini Anand: Mr. Chair, I'm not entirely sure I understand the question, but I will attempt to answer what I understand.

Mr. Jack Harris: If I may clarify, the Arms Trade Treaty talks about brokerage, end-user obligations and trade to third parties. Do the export permits granted to Turkey last April include provisions with respect to third party trade?

Ms. Shalini Anand: Because of commercial confidentiality, I can't speak about individual export permits that have or have not been granted. I can say that generally any export permit applications that we receive are reviewed against Arms Trade Treaty criteria—

Mr. Jack Harris: Tell me specifically whether the provisions that apply to Turkey affect the end-user, wherever the goods go. Are those included in that? Are there restrictions on that, in other words? Yes or no?

Ms. Shalini Anand: I'm sorry. I will just clarify that brokering permits are a separate category of permit, but they are also subject—

Mr. Jack Harris: Were any of those granted to Turkey as well?

Ms. Shalini Anand: Again, I can't comment on individual permits, but I can say that brokering permits also go through—

Mr. Jack Harris: I don't ask for any particular permits. Since April have any permits been granted to Turkey involving brokerage?

Ms. Shalini Anand: I'm sorry, because of commercial confidentiality, we don't comment on permits that may or may not have been granted. I can look into what we may be able to provide—

• (1725)

Mr. Jack Harris: We clearly need to know more information about Canada's trade.

In April a panel of experts was discussed to reflect on Canada's compliance with the Arms Trade Treaty. Has that been appointed yet?

Ms. Shalini Anand: The panel has not been appointed. I can give you a little bit more information about that panel.

Mr. Jack Harris: If it hasn't been appointed, I just want to know when it's going to be appointed and when it will get to work. If you don't know the answer to that question, that's fine. We'll have to ask someone else.

Ms. Shalini Anand: Yes, we are working to establish the panel and its mandate and membership. As you pointed out, it will be responsible for evaluating permits, and experts haven't been—

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you. We will wait to hear when the panel is formed. I only have a couple of minutes here and I would like to speak to your colleague.

This war, which was in a ceasefire, with some breakouts since 1994 but now continues, appears at this point to have no end in sight, although the Minsk Group—which you talked about—actually had a set of principles in 2009 that appeared to be agreed upon in the sense that there was a statement saying....

These are called the “Madrid principles”, consisting of six principles for a resolution. The then chair countries asked the presidents to resolve the few remaining differences between them and finalize their arrangement on these basic principles. These are based on the non-use of force, territorial integrity and equal rights and self-determination of peoples, which Minister Champagne talked about recently.

Is there any hope, sir, for the Madrid principles and the OSCE approach to be effective in this situation, despite the stands being taken by both countries right now?

Mr. David Sproule: Yes. I am very hopeful. I think they both recognize—certainly their populations do—the great costs of the conflict ongoing. During most of the last 20 years, there has been a cessation of hostilities, and after every breakout in the past, we have reverted back to that cessation. Much of the time, it has been after negotiations and in conjunction with the work of the Minsk Group. So we are certainly hopeful that this will happen again.

Mr. Jack Harris: I have one question. You mentioned in your briefing that there were over a million refugees and internally displaced persons as a result of the war up until the ceasefire in 1994. Could you tell me the status of those individuals currently and since 1994?

Mr. David Sproule: Some have remained separated from where they were, but, by and large, most of the Azerbaijani internally displaced people and refugees have not returned to their homes.

Mr. Jack Harris: I've heard the number is somewhere in the range of 700,000 or 800,000. Is that correct?

Mr. David Sproule: Yes. I've heard those kinds of ranges myself.

Mr. Jack Harris: I see I have 30 seconds left.

Thank you, Chair, for reminding me of that.

What action can Canada take as a result of Mr. Champagne's visit to Europe? He met with NATO. He met with officials. He met with the Minsk Group people. Is there anything that could be offered now by way of progress from that trip?

The Chair: Be very briefly, Mr. Sproule. Then Mr. Harris may have a chance to go back in the next round.

Mr. David Sproule: Canada is actively consulting and working with those who are directly involved, mostly via the Minsk Group chairs plus the larger committee, in an effort to use that mechanism to bring pressure onto the two sides.

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

We'll have to go to our next round of speakers.

We will start off with five-minute rounds. I will pass the floor to Mr. Diotte.

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): This is for Ms. Anand. It's basically a pretty straightforward question. I just wonder why Canada allowed the export of seven air strike-targeting devices to Turkey this May despite the arms embargo.

• (1730)

Hon. Hedy Fry: You're not listening to the answer, are you?

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Excuse me, but I'm not talking to you, Ms. Fry.

Ms. Shalini Anand: I can't comment on any individual export permits. What I can say is that in April of this year, 2020, Canada reduced the restrictions on Turkey. In October 2019, Canada put in place a suspension on the issuance of all new export permits to Turkey.

Presently and since April, restrictions continue to apply to military exports, the export of military munitions items to Turkey. However, we are considering on a case-by-case basis whether there are exceptional circumstances, including, for example but not limited to, NATO co-operation programs that may justify the issuance of a group 2 permit. That, in general terms, is our export controls policy towards Turkey, and that's what changed in April. But again, I cannot comment on individual export permits because of commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Many stories about this have been in The Globe and Mail and lots of other papers, so it's not as though it's a state secret, obviously.

Do you think that Canada is in violation of its international commitments such as the Wassenaar Arrangement?

Ms. Shalini Anand: What I can say is that in September 2019, Canada acceded to the Arms Trade Treaty, and we assess all export permits applications as relevant against that and against our domestic Export and Import Permits Act to ensure that we are compliant with those requirements before issuing any export permits. We are members, as you noted, of a number of multilateral export controls regimes and the regulatory framework that we have in place as well as the process to assess each of these permits is in line with those multilateral export controls regimes including the Wassenaar Arrangement you mentioned.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Great.

Right now, there's a report that at least one Canadian citizen has been killed in the recent conflict. My question to either of you is, how many Canadians are currently in the conflict zone, and what, if any, plans are being arranged to evacuate them?

Mr. David Sproule: If I may respond, we're not aware of Canadians in the conflict zone. No names have been brought to our attention, or we have not received information to that effect at this time.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Where are you getting your information? Is there a network out there? What's your main source of information on such things?

Mr. David Sproule: In consular cases, usually families, friends, relatives or contacts report if one of their friends or loved ones are involved in a difficult situation requiring Canadian assistance. To my knowledge, we haven't had any of those reports.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: How well prepared would the local governments, international organizations, NGOs and communities be to deal with an estimated 140,000 people currently displaced by this conflict, especially considering that we're in the middle of a global pandemic?

Mr. David Sproule: Sir, you're quite right. The COVID situation has made everything more difficult for operations within Nagorno-Karabakh, but I am pleased to say that Canada has just announced \$350,000 for the International Committee of the Red Cross to assist those who have been affected by the hostilities. The impact, of course, is quite severe in terms of the living conditions they face, having to leave their homes and the risks they are under.

The Chair: Mr. Diotte, thanks very much. That's your time.

Our next questioner is Ms. Sahota, please, for five minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): I want to carry on with the conversation started by Mr. Harris and Mr. Diotte about displaced people. The number you had stated earlier, or Mr. Harris stated it and you agreed, of 700,000 to 800,000 people seems quite large. How many do you think currently have been affected or displaced with the tensions that have risen in the last little while?

• (1735)

Mr. David Sproule: Just to clarify, the figures I discussed with your colleague had to do with overall, since the outbreak of the conflict in the early 1990s. It's a total amount. We do not have a good feel for how many have been displaced as a result of the recent outbreak of hostilities. It could be in the tens of thousands. It's not clear.

Again, we're really handicapped by the fact that we don't have the usual kinds of monitors within Nagorno-Karabakh who could assist in giving us a better estimate.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Who were the usual monitors before this? What organizations or international groups were you receiving information from?

Mr. David Sproule: Primarily, it is the OSCE, as well as other humanitarian organizations that are present, with whom we keep in close liaison to exchange information of this nature. Of course, we also welcome any independent media coverage that goes on that can undertake reporting on the situation.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Regarding the funding that Canada has provided, the \$350,000, you said, for the International Committee of the Red Cross, what type of access does the Red Cross have? What exactly are those funds going to be devoted to?

Mr. David Sproule: I think it's the usual type of humanitarian assistance in a crisis such as this. I would presume it would be things such as clothing, food stuffs, shelter, safe passage and those sorts of things, the real, immediate needs that you find in any conflict crisis or humanitarian disaster of this nature.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: In terms of the talks, we've heard that the Prime Minister and our foreign affairs minister have had talks with a few countries. I'd like to hear a bit more about the talks that have happened with our European partners and the EU. What is their feel? What role is the international community wishing to play in this dispute?

The U.S. hasn't really been referred to at all in this conversation. Could you shed some light as to their thinking on this conflict?

Mr. David Sproule: Well, our minister has been in close touch with the key players, the countries that have an influence on the situation. Of course, he has been in touch with his Turkish counterpart.

The Prime Minister has been in touch with Mr. Erdogan, the president of Turkey. He has also been in touch with the Armenian Prime Minister and has expressed our concerns and our views about the situation. He has urged upon the chairman, as have all members of the OSCE Minsk Group, the importance of utilizing OSCE and has offered help in their ongoing assistance in mediating the crisis.

As far as the United States is concerned, you will know that they are one of the chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group and therefore have

been quite active with the other two countries that are part of it. Tomorrow, Secretary Pompeo is hosting a meeting in Washington of the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia to try to resolve some of the immediate issues, with an eye to a more long-term solution. I'm sure they will discuss fully utilizing the OSCE process as well.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Have there been any discussions between Azerbaijan and Canadian officials?

Mr. David Sproule: Yes, we're in touch. We use our embassies to get in touch and find out about the situation, to understand the positions that Azerbaijan has taken and to get a fuller picture—

• (1740)

The Chair: My apologies, Mr. Sproule, I have to cut you off here.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Ms. Sahota.

I now give the floor to Mr. Bergeron for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Speaking of contact between Canada and Azerbaijan, if I understand correctly, the two countries are co-hosting a UN General Assembly session on fighting COVID-19. As I said earlier, a good number of countries, 170 in total, responded to the UN secretary-general's call for a comprehensive global ceasefire. It dates back to this past June, so before hostilities resumed. Yet, curiously, Azerbaijan is not on the list of countries that supported Malaysia's initiative in response to the UN secretary-general's appeal.

Given the current conflict, is it not now a bit awkward for Canada to join with one of the parties to the conflict to talk about the COVID-19 pandemic when Azerbaijan has been unwilling to join in a global ceasefire as part of the fight against COVID-19?

[*English*]

Mr. David Sproule: I would not agree with your characterization, which implies that Canada is siding with Azerbaijan in the current conflict. Canada's interaction with Azerbaijan is in an effort to encourage it to cease hostilities, to seek a peaceful and negotiated settlement and to try to resolve the issue peacefully. Conflict will not resolve the situation.

Much of our interaction, of course, is in an effort to understand the situation from the Azerbaijani side. Of course, we are actively engaged with officials from Armenia and at the political level to understand the situation from their point of view and to get a better grasp of what's happening on the ground, and of course encourage them in the direction we encourage both parties to go, which is to find a negotiated settlement for this ongoing problem.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

This is perfectly timed.

We have one more speaker.

Mr. Harris, the floor is yours, for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Let me go back to some comments you made, Mr. Sproule, about the lack of knowledge on the ground and on working with Armenia and Azerbaijan. You mentioned the use of embassies.

Do we have either an embassy—I don't think we have an embassy—or a diplomatic mission to either Azerbaijan or Armenia? If so, where are they located? Does this have any effect on our ability to know what's going on or even provide some assistance in trying to reduce the conflict?

Mr. David Sproule: No, we do not have resident missions in either of those countries. We look after our Azerbaijan interests from our mission in Ankara, and insofar as Armenia is concerned, our mission in Moscow—

Mr. Jack Harris: How does that affect our ability to know what's going on or to be able to influence or assist in helping find a solution?

Mr. David Sproule: It's always easier to undertake this kind of work if we have a resident mission.

Mr. Jack Harris: I understand that.

Mr. David Sproule: But what we do is to ensure that the contacts and communications with the host government are frequent. We have visits. Our contacts and our networks continue. These are

all information gathering methods that we've been able to undertake, and of course we undertake some of that work here from headquarters with the representatives accredited to Canada.

Mr. Jack Harris: Do you have an assessment of the humanitarian difficulties there now? We've heard reports today that even some of the medical personnel who are dealing with the wounded are themselves affected by COVID. Is there some overall assessment of that? Can you tell us about it?

Mr. David Sproule: We will continue to get in touch with humanitarian organizations, such as the ICRC and those who do have some sort of eyes on the ground—which are minimal of course—to find out. We will also liaise carefully with many like-minded countries who do have missions in those countries and who usually are very active and supportive of our efforts to find information and to assess the situation as it evolves.

● (1745)

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

Thank you, Mr. Sproule and Ms. Anand, for your presence here today. We've gone a bit past our scheduled time, but this extended second round has allowed each party to ask an additional set of questions.

My thanks to all of my colleagues for their indulgence, and also to our IT team for trying so hard to keep us connected. These are not easy times with technology, but we will find our way forward and solve challenges.

The meeting is adjourned until our next session.

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