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Chair

Mr. Michael Levitt

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. I would like to call to order meeting 125 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

This is also our first session on the new study, which we will begin today, on Canada's support for international democratic development.

With that in mind, I would like to welcome our first two witnesses. We have Christopher MacLennan from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. He's the assistant deputy minister, global issues and development. We also have Shelley Whiting, director general, office of human rights, freedoms and inclusion.

We will ask you to provide your testimony. Then we will open it up to the members for questions.

Mr. MacLennan, please begin.

Mr. Christopher MacLennan (Assistant Deputy Minister, Global Issues and Development, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much. I will provide a brief statement on behalf of the department. Then both Shelley and I, obviously, will be very pleased to take any questions you might have.

I will mention off the top that I am assistant deputy minister responsible for, basically, the development assistance aspects of Canada's involvement in democracy promotion. Shelley is more involved on the foreign affairs side, which has to do mostly with our diplomacy and democratic promotion through other means.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to discuss our support, past and present, to democratic development. Promoting democracy abroad, as everybody here is aware, has been a long-time integral part of Canada's foreign policy and international assistance, but as the 2007 committee report noted, despite remarkable progress, in their words, “the continued forward march of democracy is no sure thing, and that in the current environment retreat is threatening progress.

I think this is truer today in 2019 than it probably was in 2007. Indeed, the growing threats to the progress of democratic development 12 years ago have now resulted in an overall retreat in democracy, according to most experts.

Popular discontent has appeared in many countries as a result of the failure of these governments to provide effective solutions to important and legitimate domestic issues such as unemployment, a lack of opportunity, inequality and mass migration. Moreover, malicious actors, including authoritarian regimes and their proxies, have increased their efforts to shape public opinion and perception so as to undermine democracy and more broadly the rules-based international order.

While foreign interference is not new, its impact has grown in scale and speed due to cheaper and more accessible digital technology and data. As a result, we have seen declining citizen confidence and engagement in democratic institutions, growing distress between governments and civil society, and the manipulation and discrediting of political parties and their processes.

Of particular concern is the shrinking civic space, one of the key pillars of democracy. The largest democratic declines have taken place in the areas of civil liberties, freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly, civil society participation and media integrity. It is in this context that we're working today.

[*Translation*]

For its part, Global Affairs Canada has adapted. In 2013, the Canadian International Development Agency and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade were merged, which has resulted in a consistent use of government tools to promote democracy.

Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Development have now both made the commitment set out in their mandate letter to defend the values of inclusive and accountable governance, including through the promotion of human rights, gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, peaceful pluralism, and inclusion and respect for diversity.

In June 2017, the government adopted its feminist international aid policy, which emphasizes inclusive governance focused on democracy and political participation, human rights and the rule of law for all citizens, regardless of their gender identity or any other aspect of their identity. This policy underscores the Government of Canada's commitment to provide inclusive and human rights-based development assistance as recommended in the committee's 2007 study.

Global Affairs Canada supports a wide range of programs and initiatives in all regions of the world to promote inclusive governance. In working with a wide range of partners, we leverage the expertise of Canadian NGOs, multilateral organizations and international institutions, and the engagement of grassroots civil society. What we do and who we do it with depends a lot on local context; we often have to adapt and seize on opportunities as they arise.

Through a feminist approach, the government is giving priority to the leadership and political participation of women. For example, it is working with the Interparliamentary Union to strengthen women's decision-making in parliaments and increase the capacity of parliamentarians—women and men—to adopt gender-sensitive reforms and laws.

In countries like Indonesia and Kenya, Canada supports the equitable access of marginalized or vulnerable groups, including youth and persons with disabilities, to participate in electoral processes.

● (0850)

In addition, Canada is providing up to $24 million to support electoral observation missions in Ukraine in preparation for the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections, as well as to support longer-term and sustainable electoral reform.

[*English*]

Globally, programming focused on inclusive governance in areas such as government and civil society, democracy and political participation, and the rule of law and human rights totalled approximately $293 million in 2017-18, with approximately $170 million channelled specifically to promoting democracy.

As mentioned previously, Canada's efforts in this domain are not limited to international development assistance. As part of its feminist foreign policy, Canada has taken actions to strengthen democracy and resilience in peaceful and inclusive societies, at both the international level and through our work through our network of missions abroad.

In the G7, Canada has been a vocal supporter of democratic values. As part of our 2018 presidency, we spearheaded a joint declaration with G7 members that held up democracy as critical in defending against foreign threats. At the G7 summit in Charlevoix, leaders announced the G7 rapid response mechanism. This mechanism strengthens G7 coordination in identifying and responding to diverse and evolving threats to G7 democratic processes. The coordination unit is hosted in Canada on an ongoing basis.

Furthermore, through our broad network of diplomatic missions, Canada engages government officials of other like-minded states and civil society partners to advocate for and provide support to democratic development in those countries. Depending on the context, this is done through quiet diplomacy or through more public and open dialogue. This includes Canada's support for international election observation missions, including the deployment of hundreds of Canadians in recent years as observers, and co-sponsoring resolutions on human rights defenders in supporting their participation in international fora. Our missions are also provided with the "Voices at risk" guidelines to support and protect human rights defenders.

In conclusion, Global Affairs Canada welcomes the committee's interest in what we all agree is an important priority area.

We look forward to taking your questions.

The Chair: Wonderful. Thank you very much.

We are going to begin with MP Alleslev, please.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you very much for being here today.

This is certainly an important topic, and it's somewhat disconcerting. You're saying, if I understand you correctly, that democracy is in retreat.

We continue to invest and our investment hasn't drastically changed over the last 12 years.

If we continue on this path, what level of confidence do we have that the outcome will be different? Can you help us to understand the critical performance indicators? How do we know that the efforts we're making are achieving the objectives?

● (0855)

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: This is a very difficult space to work in. In international development, everybody knows that we work in some of the most difficult places in the world with what is, relatively speaking, a very small amount of money to make a difference.

There are some types of development assistance where the opportunities are pretty direct to understanding what an investment will get you in terms of a return on your dollar. For example, when we invest in vaccinations, we have a clear understanding of how much the vaccination costs and what you get in return, which is a life saved if that person never contracts the disease.

This is fundamentally a different type of programming. Every country has a different culture, different understandings of governance, and all governance, as we understand in Canada, of course—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: That's very fair, but I'm sorry, I don't have much time.

Of course, we understand the challenges. That's why we have experts like you to deal with those challenges. We need to be able to tell Canadian society that we're doing the right thing but that our investments, our efforts, are in fact achieving objectives and outcomes.

Can you please help us to understand how we are measuring that and, if democracy is in retreat, what are we doing differently that will achieve a different outcome?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: One of the things we're doing is placing a greater focus on working to ensure that there is a greater understanding at local levels, and a greater inclusion at local levels of a broader group of participation. In some of the places in which we're working, obviously the democratic space has been constricting. What we're trying to do is open up that democratic space.

We are doing that by ensuring that all communities are able to take part in democratic processes. For example, we're providing support to local women's organizations through the women's voice and leadership program to allow them to advocate on behalf of women's rights, including their right to take part in political processes. We are also working with LGBTQ groups to help them understand and exercise their rights within the context of the countries in which we're working.

The overall question of the retreat of democracy is obviously taking place at a global level, in terms of some of the Freedom House indices and whatnot. That's a really difficult indicator to move, because it's operating at a global perspective. What our programming attempts to achieve is to work at local levels, working directly with governments that are willing to work with us to strengthen their institutions, whether it be judicial institutions, their audit functions, to try to promote a better understanding of democracy.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Is there any relationship to peacekeeping operations and the role of setting the foundation for you to be able to go in and do that work? I don't like the term "peacekeeping", because of course it's a little bit archaic and presumes that's there peace and war, but have you noticed whether the dramatic decline in peacekeeping operations has been having an effect on that shrinking democratic space within which you're trying to operate?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: We've already mentioned how difficult it is to work in many of the contexts. When you're working in a fragile state, it's even more difficult. Security, obviously, is the number one priority. It's difficult to have any type of good development result in a place that is so fragile that the security of its citizens is not maintained and that there's no stability. Peacekeeping is critically important.

That being said, there are many other ways as well of helping the stability of a country. Sometimes it's not necessarily, as you mentioned, a "peace-war" type of problem that's the problem of the fragility. It might also be environment related or drought related. Obviously, all of these factors contribute to these problems. That makes it a much more complex issue to deal with.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: So, in your mind, you would argue that those two do need to go together. Stability and security are precursors to the ability to work in that democratic space.

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: Obviously, to do any development assistance you require an environment that is stable and secure to the greatest extent possible. That being said, we work in very fragile contexts nonetheless. You actually can accomplish stuff in very fragile places; it's just much more difficult and requires a different approach.

● (0900)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Vandenbeld, please.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you very much for being here for what is a very important and timely study.

You mentioned, Mr. MacLennan, in your opening remarks that you believe the 2007 report of this committee, which recommended a large-scale entity in Canada that would coordinate and be a framework for democracy promotion, is even truer today than it was in 2007. Can you explain why you feel that way?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: I think what I said was that in terms of the situation in the early 2000s which led to the House of Commons recommendation, the situation today is probably.... The demand for those types of institutions is probably higher. I have to admit that I don't know if it's necessarily a new institution that's required. I think what we need to think about is how the situation has evolved. In the early 2000 period we were still on that high of what's called the third wave in democratization and a belief that all countries were on a track to eventually become democratic. In the 2000s came the first signs that maybe that wasn't quite true. That's why you saw an uptick in the recognition that we needed more political approaches, for example, support to political parties and whatnot.

I think today we've seen that it was true what was happening in the 2000s. There's definitely a need to evolve the way we're doing our things and to really think closely about what's required to make the difference.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Obviously, long-term presence when you're doing democracy promotion in a country is very important. Many countries have dedicated entities of some sort. I'd like to define "democracy" more as the institutional development: legislative capacity building, political party support, elections, working with the institutions. Where does that actually sit within Global Affairs right now?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: It sits in a couple of places, but the majority of that type of spending lies with our bilateral programming, our country-level programming with individual projects according to country context and local context. We also have some programming through our peace and security operations.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: In 2005 something called a democracy council was created. It actually brought in a lot of the NGOs and other actors that were working in this field to try to perform coordinating functions. Does that exist now, or what happened to that?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: It does not exist, to my knowledge. I'm sure the people who made up the council still exist and their interest in the issue exists, but I don't think the council has met in a very long time.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Is there a space somewhere within Global Affairs where all of the things Canada is doing with regard to democracy promotion and institutional promotion are in one place, i.e., a place where the best practices can be found, where there's a policy piece to it, and where the capacity building and the technical assistance can be coordinated? Is there a place where this can happen within Global Affairs right now?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: The way I would describe it, the way we're organized at Global Affairs for the purposes of development assistance, is that under my team we're responsible for all of the sectoral policy advice and sectoral coordination. My team is responsible, in this case, for inclusive governance and democracy.

However, the budgets exist for this in the bilateral programming, and they take advantage of opportunities as they arise. What they do is that they follow the policies we devise and then institute them through their individual programming choices within the country context.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: You mentioned that there's $170 million specifically for democracy promotion, but we know, of course, that democracy promotion writ large includes a lot of things, such as civil society and that sort of thing. How much of that is actually dedicated to institutional capacity building?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: That's a difficult question. We'd have to probably see if we can give you that answer.

Basically, of the two numbers I gave you, one is larger and is what's called inclusive governance, which includes a broad variety of things. One example I'll give you is support to an audit office in a country, maybe in their agriculture department. That's not considered democracy promotion, but it is a governance activity.

The specifics of the democracy promotion speak to some of the things you're talking about, such as legislatures, parliaments, elections and whatnot. Is it all institution building? Not necessarily, but it's the smaller number, I think, that you were referring to.

● (0905)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: So there's really no—

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: It's not a dedicated envelope, which I think is an important thing to recognize. There's no dedicated envelope of spending. Instead, there are the bilateral programs and other programs to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. That's the reason you see the number go up and down from one year to the next.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: On the lessons learned, if you're doing it through bilateral programs, of course, things tend to be in silos. You have experts in a particular country or region. Where are the coordination, the lessons learned and the building of best practices? Where does that happen?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: That happens in my shop.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Okay. Is that being done at the moment?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: Yes.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: We know that Canadians, when we go around the world.... Canada is particularly good at this kind of work.

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: Yes.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Most of the major international organizations, such as the UNDP, the OSCE and also a lot of other specific countries—the Netherlands, the U.S.—hire Canadians, yet a lot of that knowledge and a lot of that is happening outside of Canada. Is there a mechanism or a way such that Global Affairs is able to somehow coordinate?

In particular, we also have a lot of our diasporic communities that are going abroad and helping to build democracies in their home countries. Is there somewhere that this kind of knowledge is being collected and coordinated and best practices are being drawn from that? This is beneficial to Canada as well, because we would learn a lot about what's happening on the ground in these countries.

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: At the present time, we're not actually tracking Canadians who are working in other democracy promotion agencies and whatnot. That said, we're keenly aware of which Canadian CSOs are active in this space, and we often will work with them. For example, there is the Forum of Federations. We work with them for the promotion of more federalist approaches to governance and democracy, and CANADEM as well. We're actively using and working with Canadian organizations, but in terms of tracking Canadians who are working abroad, no.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Laverdière, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. MacLennan, Ms. Whiting, thank you for being with us this morning.

I would like to make a comment before I begin. You mentioned the decline of democracy around the world, but this is not exclusive to developing countries. Take, for example, Poland, Turkey and even our neighbours to the south, not far from here. I would like to come back a little bit to the point that was raised, that is, that it only affects developing countries and that, as a result, our policies would have been a failure.

Can we also say that this is a general decline and not specific to developing countries?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: That's a very good question for theorists. I'm not one of them.

This is indeed a phenomenon that is not only widespread in developing countries at the moment. However, I think there is a big difference between well-established and less established democracies in terms of their ability to resist change. In some developing countries, where democracy is not necessarily very deeply rooted, it is more difficult.

There are, of course, fears and concerns about some countries such as Hungary and Poland, which are now referred to as non-liberal democracies, that is, countries where we want to continue to hold elections and respect some aspects of democracy, but eliminate some others. We hope that these democracies are well enough established to resist this phenomenon, but this remains to be seen.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Okay.

You also mentioned support for women's organizations in the field, local organizations. I remember seeing the following figure a few years ago: 0.03% of our international development envelope went to local women's organizations.

Is this percentage still in the same range or has there been an improvement?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: There has been a significant improvement. The government has already announced the creation of the women's voice and leadership program, a five-year, $150-million program to help local organizations support women's rights and gender equality.

Last year, Ms. Bibeau, Minister of International Development, announced the creation of a new gender equality fund, which also aims to find processes or ways to channel more money to local organizations. It is still an announcement of $300 million Canadian, in partnership with the private sector.

● (0910)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Do we have an idea of the total amount of all these announcements in the overall envelope?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: I don't have the figures with me, but we could find them and send them to you.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: That would be appreciated.

I would now like to come back to an aspect that has already been discussed. Many Canadian institutions are involved in democratic development, including your department, the International Development Research Centre, the Parliamentary Centre, the Canadian Council for International Cooperation and the Forum of Federations.

I am not one of those who believe that if we built a kind of new superstructure that would bring all this together, we would be more efficient. I think the diversified approach is preferable.

Are there any gaps? Is there an aspect of the issue that is not sufficiently covered by all these institutions?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: Democratic development assistance differs significantly from other sectors because it involves political aspects. As part of our bilateral relationship, it is very easy for a department to provide support to a developing country, whether it is to set up audit offices or to provide assistance in the training of judges. What is much more difficult, however, is to offer highly political things, such as support to opposition parties and organizations. This was recognized in the 2007 report, I believe. It is another path, when it comes to touching on much more political things. Offering political assistance can even put at risk our partners in countries where there is resistance to this type of assistance.

This is an issue for all donor countries. We are wondering how to provide services in a way that will ensure that they are well received. We are wondering how to encourage a country that may not be on the right track at the moment to do things differently. This is where it gets more difficult.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Sidhu, please.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for coming in front of the committee this morning.

You touched on the very extensive study that was done in 2007, about 224 pages and 28 recommendations. The main theme from the committee was for Canada to become a large actor in democratic development. You did touch on the fact that, lately, there has been a gender lens and LGBTQ put into it.

My question is this: By doing this study, do we have more suggestions, more room to tell the government in which direction to go? You did mention that there's enough money put aside. Where do you go with this study? We have four meetings with people like you coming to talk to us. What would be the new recommendation on top of the extensive study? That committee travelled around the world, as well, so it was done up to that level. What else can we add on? Do we have more space in this to tell the government?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: More space? I think the study from 2007 was a very valid study, and as you mentioned, was very detailed and is still very helpful. I think the difference, in what advice would be helpful, is much better understanding of how the situation has changed since that time. I know you're going to be hearing testimony from actors in the space and from others, and I think it would be very helpful to understand that the recommendations from that committee made perfect sense at the time. Are they still the right recommendations for what we're facing today? Is there a need to increase or decrease the amount of money that we invest in these areas? Is this the best place for Canada to make a difference?

All of that is always welcome from a government department.

● (0915)

Mr. Jati Sidhu: With the changing world, as you said, even in 2007 the committee thought it would be very difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the development. Can you describe any projects where the Canadian government has been successful in that regard?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: I can give you an idea of some of the things that we're doing, but you've put your finger on one of the more difficult aspects of this.

The easier projects to measure in results achieved are the ones.... If we think about a scale between projects that are purely developmental—what I mean by that is projects supporting the audit function, ensuring that the audit office is capable of doing audits—through to opening up political space by working with dissidents, which is very political, our ability to measure progress over the short term of a project is much easier on that developmental side. We built the audit office. We helped them train the right people. We ensured that they had all the tools they needed, and they are now capable of doing audits of that particular department.

Supporting dissidents at the other end of the spectrum is even difficult to determine the proper measures. You provide support to them in, perhaps, a better understanding of how to use social media, and a better understanding of the options available that other countries have used to open up political space in a non-democratic country, and the results don't take place in a year. The results are maybe over a decade and you may not see those results for a long time.

Our ability to measure on that end has been quite difficult. This is why your previous question I think is important. Within that space, some recent studies have shown that drive to have measurable results has pushed a lot of spending down toward the development side and out of this space. It's called tame or non-tame democratic assistance.

By forcing us to work in purely developmental areas, you get results that are more easily explained, but there's a tendency now—talking obviously about the entire industry—to move out of the space that's more highly political and where it's more difficult to demonstrate true results.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now move to MP Wrzesnewskyj.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. MacLennan, you began your presentation by talking about the retreat of democracy and then you expanded on that a little by saying we were still in the afterglow of the third wave of democratization with the collapse of the Warsaw Pact Soviet Union, but if we looked closely, we would have been able to see that democracy and the expansion of democracy were under attack at that time. We're still in that era, this hubris, the end of history, as many of the academics were talking about in the west.

Would you not agree that one of the first very clear signals to the west that democracy and that form of governance were under attack was the Orange Revolution of 2004? Some 50 million people in a country rose up because they saw their democratic aspirations being hijacked in a very methodical way by those who saw an alternate model of development, economic progress, under a system of autocracy. If we had looked closely, we would have seen that the beginnings were there in that time.

Would you agree with that premise?

● (0920)

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: I wouldn't disagree with it. I think I might add to it.

In “The End of History?”, Francis Fukuyama's very interesting way of describing that period, one thing was kind of right about the notions of the end of history: that there was no alternative to at least having the appearance of being a democracy.

Two things happened, I think, post the fall of the Soviet Union. One was that we underestimated the importance of nationalism, and the fact that nationalism was a core element of the way democracies see themselves and popular sovereignty. We didn't see that important strident element to democracy; hence, Yugoslavia and what happened in the early 1990s.

The other aspect was that I don't think we were really prepared for countries that were going to have the veneer of a democracy, and then subvert some core elements of democracy and democratic understanding in ways that we didn't expect. Yes, they still had elections, and yes, they still had parliaments, but they were not following the rule of law and they were closing democratic spaces.

Now in the social media age—and this is one of the key things we're dealing with now—it's kind of gone into hyperdrive, that ability to subvert on a daily basis the democratic spaces that are so critical to holding parliamentarians to account.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: You stated something else that I'd like to address: that the funding for democracy building is, in actual fact, modest. Considering those modest means we have to work with, the uniqueness of Canada—the word “unique” is overused and used incorrectly.... Canada is unique. We're a multicultural nation. We're not a melting pot. There are some other countries that are also built on immigration.

In Canada, especially considering our population, we see Canadians, more so than most people, doing incredible work right around the globe.

I'd like to return to 2004 because we did something that no other country had done. At that time, we directly engaged 500 Canadians who were vetted to make sure that they would be neutral in the electoral processes in Ukraine. We were able to reach into places and to find things that normal observer missions.... It wasn't just because of the number, but we didn't require translators. With modest resources, we leveraged such a great amount of work and cultural understanding. They knew what to look for, how to read people, and often in many of these countries translators and drivers actually work for the forces that may not be friends of democracy.

I mentioned this because.... After that major observer mission, did we have an assessment on whether we considered it a success or a failure? Would you be able to undertake to table that assessment for the committee?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: I'm not familiar with whether there was an assessment post-2004, but we will definitely look to see if one was done. If there was, we'll present it.

If I could just mention that I do agree with you. Yes, there is a Canadian model. We're all a part of that model and a product of that model. I can tell you, when we're interacting with our developing country partners there is a great thirst for many aspects of the Canadian model. Federalism is one of them. Federalism should not be understated in terms of that importance in certain aspects of managing national conflict, religious minority conflict, and sometimes just grand variations from one region to another.

There are many places where they're looking for a Canadian voice, for a number of reasons. We're not an imperialist country; we've never had an empire. Many of those things sound a bit clichéd, but the truth is that we hear it on a regular basis from our partners.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you.

You're out of time.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: I'd like to request one quick undertaking. What year was Canada Corps eliminated and what were the reasons for that?

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. He will have another turn.

The Chair: That's fine.

MP Ziad Aboultaif, go ahead, please.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Good morning and thank you for being here today.

We know that you can't teach democracy. It's more of a practice. It takes so many sacrifices and years of development to get a society to adopt it. We also know that only about four and a half per cent of the world population lives in full democracies and the other 95% is really struggling to get there. We seem to be experiencing a comeback of old regimes in some of the empires that have been very significant at imposing their way through.

Besides that, we have the plans and the money and the know-how to go and promote our democracies. In major parts of the world, in every corner almost, we are having a comeback. I'm not going to call it an enemy, but we have another opinion coming forward more aggressively than ever. We have the money and the power, and we have two battles to fight, not just one.

That brings me back to the SDGs, the United Nations SDGs. For goal number 16, Canada coincides with about four or five elements —numbers 16.3, 16.5, 16.7 and 16.8. The question is, within those measures and within those areas that we're trying to improve and with millions of dollars that we're taking away from our own society to try to promote democracies and to help other communities out there or other countries, how is your department able to measure the effectiveness of what we do? In reality, we have to come back to Canadians and tell Canadians that we are spending this kind of money and we're talking hundreds of millions of dollars. So far, we really don't have any answers or enough answers to say how effective this is, or how much of a breakthrough we've made in Indonesia or Kenya or the DRC or the Americas region or anywhere.

On the measures, it's very important for us to know in this committee how your department is able to show or to tell us how much progress we are making.

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: For every single project, there is a set of indicators and a set of results identified specific to that project. Right now we have a project in which we're supporting the electoral processes in Indonesia because they have an election that's upcoming. The goal is to help Indonesia not only to manage its election effectively but also to avoid violence and to increase participation.

That project will have core indicators attached to it, which will be aligned with the department's departmental results framework. That is then reported publicly to Parliament in terms of what is accomplished. Obviously, there will be a roll-up of what you will see in the departmental results framework, which will include that project plus all of the other projects associated with our democracy assistance.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: From the records, it is good that we have mechanisms to monitor and we have some benchmarks at least to be able to measure where we're going from here.

When has a department—because, as you know, governments come and go but departments remain there—ever said, “We're failing here. This is not good. This is not based on expectations, so let's see if we can eliminate, recommend eliminating or changing or at least take a different direction in tracking how we're going to do this and how we are we going to move forward.”

Does the department stop and say, “This is the time to say forget about this, and let's try something else”?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: I think you see that when you look at exactly where governments will decide to place the emphasis and where they spend their development assistance dollars. One of the key things that the present government identified was huge gaps in sexual reproductive health and rights and how these were actually core to advancing women in developing countries and allowing them to participate not only economically but also politically, and to promote democracy.

The government identified that as a clear gap and a place where increased funding was required. That's an example of saying we need to focus more here than we have been in the past here.

● (0930)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: The focus that this government adopted, is it based on recommendations from the department or from within what the government's thinking that this is the way we're going to be more effective?

Can you advise us on that?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: It's the way it always works. The public service provides its best advice to a government. Then the government takes that advice along with its platform and its choices. Together those two streams produce a decision of the government.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Just as a final note, you put your recommendations through and you wait for the politicians to make a decision. Is that correct?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: We provide advice to the political level.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: And it's up to the politicians to make those decisions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now move to MP Graham, please.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Thank you.

We've heard some concerns from the other side about what we'll call bang for our buck on these investments.

Do we have any way of assessing what our adversaries are spending on undermining democracy?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: That's a very good question.

The short answer, I think, is no. It's very difficult. It's definitely one of those spaces that is evolving every single year as technology changes and as the stakes change.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Can we see trends that they're investing more than they would have 20 years ago?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: I don't know. I would presume so, but I don't know.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: There's no way of quantifying that.

When we are talking about our investments, there's no way of comparing what we're spending against. There's no comparing that.

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: That's correct.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: What are the risks for us of becoming insular and not spending on this outreach?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: I think the risks to Canada obviously are that we are fully conscious of the fact that there are these actors out there that are actively looking to undermine democratic processes, including in our own country. We've watched the news over the last few weeks and the fact that this is a concern for Canadians and it's a concern for others.

The rapid response mechanism from the G7 is probably the very best example of all G7 countries taking this issue very seriously and looking to counter it to the best extent possible.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: If, for example, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea announced that they were going to invest in democracy in Canada, how would we react?

In other words—

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: Surprised, probably would be....

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: But they call themselves democratic.

How do we define democracy for the purpose of promoting it, for the purpose of this study?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: For the purpose of this study, obviously there is no one definition of democracy. For us I think it's a couple of core elements.

A democracy is about popular sovereignty, with a wide understanding of what citizenship means. It means it's constitutional. There is the rule of law that determines how these things take place, how the democratic processes are to unfold. It also includes an open and free media and open and free accountability processes to ensure that governments are held to account.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Fair enough.

I have a note here that says we spend $12 million on International Foundation for Electoral Systems, $8.2 million on International Foundation for Electoral Systems, and $5.7 million on National Democratic Institute projects. These are all American organizations.

Are there equivalent Canadian organizations or is it all centralized in this way?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: It's not centralized. There are Canadian organizations as well. There's the Forum of Federations and CANADEM, which does electoral observations. There is a long list actually of Canadian organizations, particularly in the judicial area and judicial strengthening, that are available. There's a B.C. organization responsible....

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I'm going to pass my remaining time to Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you, Mr. Graham.

I'd like to return to this whole question of alternate models that are being providing to other countries, different governance models. We see the Chinese being very active. They've increased their activity. They have this program of development in many countries that are undergoing important changes.

Are we tracking in any way whatsoever...? It comes back to Mr. Graham's question. Are we tracking these other actors, whether it's China or Russia, in terms of how they're involved and the resultant outcomes in terms of movement towards democracy or away from democracy? Are we tracking that?

● (0935)

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: I don't know if I would say we are tracking it, because sometimes it's a very intangible thing. It's not always a direct relationship between actions and which countries they're taking place in.

We're keenly aware...and this goes back to the conversation from the 1990s and the notions of the end of history. China, since basically the 1990s or since 2001 maybe when they joined the WTO, provides an alternative model for many developing countries about reducing poverty and creating economic growth. There are many developing countries that are looking to that model as one that will help them reduce poverty but also maintain their controls in their society.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Recently, the Chinese ambassador to Canada wrote an op-ed piece in which he used certain phraseology that we're beginning to encounter in other developing parts of the world: "western egotism" and “white supremacy”. This is almost like code wording. “Western egotism” is the assumption that democratic rights and human rights are innate, and “white supremacy” that the international rules-based order we developed post-World War II was just a system of white supremacy.

Would you like to comment on that?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: In the area of democratic assistance, we're keenly aware that every place we're working in has its own culture and its own approach to governance, and you have to be respectful of these. There is no monolithic way to have a democracy. Our democracy is very different from the democracy south of the border.

What we will always do, no matter what country we're operating in, is understand that there are certain core principles and elements to what we believe is a democracy, and we believe they're universal. We don't believe simply that democracy is only for westerners. We believe that in fact there are ways to adapt basic, core democratic principles to the local cultures we're working within. There are alternative views in the world, and that's exactly what we're trying to counter.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to jump to MP Laverdière for a short question, to wrap up.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question will be brief. What is happening with CANADEM? I think the nature of the relationship between the government and CANADEM has changed. Could you tell us about this and the reasons for this change?

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: I'm sorry, but I don't necessarily have an answer to your question. I'm not sure I understand correctly.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Okay, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: I want to thank you both for being here with us this morning and for kicking off this study with some very interesting discussion.

Members, I am going to suspend for a few minutes while we get our next panel online.

● (0935)

(Pause)

● (0940)

The Chair: We are very pleased to have two panellists with us from Washington, D.C., by video conference.

We have Derek Mitchell, president of the National Democratic Institute. Mr. Mitchell was named president of the National Democratic Institute, NDI, in 2018, having previously served as U.S. ambassador to Myanmar from 2012 to 2016. As a prior role, Ambassador Mitchell served as principal deputy assistant secretary of defense from 2001 to 2009 and also as a senior fellow for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

As well, we have Dr. Daniel Twining, president of the International Republican Institute. He was named president of the IRI in September 2017, having previously served as counsellor and director of the Asia program at the German Marshall Fund of the United States. His past experience includes serving on the U.S. Secretary of State's policy planning staff and acting as foreign policy adviser to U.S. Senator John McCain. Dr. Twining holds a doctorate in philosophy from Oxford University, where he was a Fulbright Oxford scholar.

Welcome, gentlemen.

Ambassador Mitchell, you're going to go first, since you're on video conference. I might add that you're probably avoiding some really cold weather later today, so being where you are is probably a wise move. May I have you begin with ten minutes of testimony. Then we'll go to Dr. Twining, and then we'll turn it over to the members for lots of questions, I'm sure.

Please go ahead, sir.

Mr. Derek Mitchell (President, National Democratic Institute): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that.

We are getting a bit of a thaw down here in Washington, so it's nice to get out of the polar vortex for a few days.

I'm sorry I can't be there with you this morning, but I really am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you all on this topic.

I want to start by giving a little bit of historical context. I see us in three phases of democracy support work. Many of you know that in the United States, the NDI, the IRI and the National Endowment for Democracy were all established during the Reagan administration during a speech at Westminster he gave in 1982. That was the first phase of democracy support. That was during the Communist era, during the Cold War era, and they had very much an ideological bent, but this whole realm of democracy support really hadn't been defined precisely. Our institutes were among those who really sought to define it 35 years ago.

The second phase came with the end of the Cold War, as was mentioned before, the end-of-history phase when it seemed that the tide was coming in and that there was historical inevitability to democracy. It was just a matter, in our view, of working with democratic processes and institutions and with peoples around the world to just let it simmer for a generation or two, and things would naturally come our way. That inevitability was baked into the programming we did. We felt that the expansion of democracy, that the third wave of democratization, was taking off in a very comfortable way for 15 or 20 years.

I think we are in a fundamentally different moment now. I would call it "the autocrats strike back", the authoritarian learning. Those who have a different view of the way their society should be ordered, and those authoritarians out there who saw the spread of democracy to be a challenge to them and somehow threatening to their very existence found a way to learn and push back in this moment. They took advantage of popular frustration, with expectations quite high that democracy perhaps.... In some societies, they felt that if they just went democratic, then it would be easy. They would become rich and powerful like the west.

It was evident that it wasn't going to be that simple; it wasn't going to be that easy or short term. Economic inequality emerged. Corruption emerged. Mindsets, we found, changed more slowly than institutions and processes. You found folks who would take over, who had the old mindsets, who would use the processes and maybe develop some of the institutions, but wouldn't necessarily ingrain the democratic mindsets in development. You had corrupt environments that people got frustrated with and associated with democracy.

You also had demagogues exploiting the politics of fear. That can happen in any country and in any democracy. Identity politics and immigration, we're seeing that in many different countries, focusing on the other. The general perception that democracy is not delivering became a defining issue for many of these democracies, even those democracies that we felt were entrenched, even our own democracies. That was creating a backlash, a recession.

One other development that was a wild card in all this was the rise of digital technologies, Silicon Valley and the social media platforms that were used and exploited by those who wanted to undermine unity and undermine democracy, to provide platforms for hate and division and to create uncertainty and play with the democratic forums. People didn't recognize soon enough just how pernicious that can be to democracy.

We've learned a bunch of lessons. Our different organizations have learned these lessons, many of which I've already discussed: that building a culture of democracy is not easy; that it takes time and it's as important as institutions and processes; that we need to develop a culture, and culture and mindsets change much more slowly; that we have to be patient and we have to work hard at that; that democracy has to deliver; and that economic inequality, corruption, fear and insecurity all work against democracy.

● (0945)

We have to be alert to it. As Madeleine Albright likes to say, people don't just like to vote, but they like to eat, and I think they also need to feel that the government works for them.

I think what we've done, though, is provide some resilience that international networks like NDI, IRI and others have developed. They actually work, and we're seeing push-back in many countries with the expectation of democratic process. Even if there is a recession of democracy, in fact, the expectation of democratic process is there and there are resilient networks that exist that we can work with.

We need to be working on technology. We're slow to understand that the impact of technology is a lesson.

We also need to recognize inclusivity. Democracy and democratic societies must be fully inclusive. As Secretary Albright, our chair, says, democracy without women is impossible. We've learned over and over that, when women are engaged in politics, democracy is more resilient, development is more sustainable, compromise is more likely and peace processes are more lasting. Likewise, all segments of society must be part of democracy—youth, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTI, and people with disabilities.

Without that inclusivity, you don't have the grounding, the foundations of democracy, and I have to say that—and I hope it's not a partisan thing to say—in the United States I think democracy will win out. We are being saved by women, people of colour and others who are going out and fighting for democracy in the United States. I think it's our wild card, and I think it demonstrates lessons learned for other countries. We need to be focusing on that.

I think this is absolutely a critical time. This is a critical moment. I think it's actually the defining issue of our time. When we look at national security and we look at our national well-being, what are the defining values, norms and rules of the international system in the 21st century? How will we define it?

I heard a question in the previous session that China talks about white supremacists or western egotism. In fact, what we had created in the previous century had worked for everyone. It had actually tied the hands of the west to allow everyone to grow. We've seen a remarkable development in the world in the past 50 years, a remarkable development, even for China and even for the under-developed nations.

It works. Democracy has worked. Freedom has worked. But now, there are challenges to that system and to those rules, values and norms that I think will have an impact on our own security and the security of others, and to human dignity, frankly. When I talk about some of the headwinds we have seen in recent years, the push-back of autocrats, I have to say that, in recent years, the last several years, the United States has been AWOL. There has not been leadership. But in fact, all countries need to be playing this.

This is not simply a western thing, or certainly not just a U.S. thing. We need Canada. Canada has been playing a strong role just in the past few weeks on Venezuela, in an exemplary fashion. This is not a U.S. assignment. NDI is a U.S. organization, but we have networks of people all over the world, and we represent something that works for people around the world.

I would very much encourage Canada and other countries to be part of that. We're trying to encourage Japan to be part of that, and anyone else who stands for these values, norms and rules as others try to shape them in their image going forward.

Very quickly, I don't want to take up much more time, because I do want to hear from Dan and the questions, but as for recommendations as to how you should think about this, I think there are things you're already thinking about in Canada, such as women in front. You have a feminist foreign policy. I think that's great. That is strategic, not just a nice thing, but it's a strategic thing for all of us and our security. I think you're in a good position to lead.

Number two, political parties need help. I think you have very strong political parties and activists who can share skills and strategy.

Number three is the youth bulge. Do not ignore the youth bulge. Young people under 30 are a majority in many of the countries in play around the world: in eastern Europe—they're on the move—in Africa absolutely, in Latin America, the Middle East, North Africa and Asia. This is a critical asset to invest in over the long term. This is not a short-term game but a long-term game we're talking about when it comes to democracy. They are also most at risk of radicalization, of extremism, so they are a point of opportunity but also a challenge, if we don't address that.

● (0950)

In terms of technology programs, Canada has great internal capacity through your Citizen Lab at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. We have been working at NDI with your Citizen Lab. Technology programs are very important.

As for citizen education and civics, you're already taking the lead on that. Focusing on Latin America, if you're thinking about a particular area, I think what you've done with the Lima Group is outstanding and exemplary.

In terms of connecting to economic aid, you're in TPP and CETA, and you are otherwise well placed to ensure that democracy delivers, that trade agreements and such are done with values, that we're working to build a common set of rules and norms, and that it is delivered to marginalized populations and regions equitably. This is all extremely important going forward. I think you are very well placed.

If we are now in a moment of democratic recession, it requires a democratic stimulus. Now is the time for us all to reinvest, recommit, and not succumb to fatalism but to lean forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hope I didn't go too far past my time.

● (0955)

The Chair: No. You were good. Thank you very much, Ambassador Mitchell.

We're going to go straight away to Dr. Twining, please.

Dr. Daniel Twining (President, International Republican Institute): Thanks, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. It's wonderful to be here with you.

You see why Derek Mitchell is such a terrific colleague for us at IRI. Our teams at NDI and IRI work very closely together, so despite any judgments you may make about American politics, it's working in the democracy space, our bipartisan ethic.

I would like to begin by thanking all of you for Canada's terrific leadership. On Venezuela, on Ukraine, on women's empowerment, on so many issues in the world today, Canada remains a principled voice. We're just very grateful, at a period when the west—and the community of democracies writ large—is under so much pressure from within and without. Really, I would argue that our democratic way of life, the way Canadians and Americans live, is put at risk by a world in which authoritarian forces are on the march and playing offence. There is a strategic value to this discussion that you are having about modernizing democracy assistance for this new world that Derek sketched out.

Let me very quickly set the scene by talking about what has changed since you, this committee, really looked closely at democracy assistance over 10 years ago. I have four quick points.

One is the re-emergence of great power competition, which is real. I don't need to tell you. Russia and China, in different ways, are projecting authoritarian influence. They are trying to build a world that is more safe for authoritarian forms of government and for their leadership, elements of which are highly inimical to western interests and our way of life. That is a big difference from 2007. That includes Russia's disinformation assault on open societies, including the United States, Canada and our European allies. It includes the corruption and other forms of malign influence associated with China's belt and road initiative and other forms of global engagement, not all of which are insidious, but some of which do undercut our alliances and open societies.

Two is we're living in a world of refugees. I'm sorry to tell you, but you know this. There are more refugees in the world today than any time since 1945. It's worth reflecting on that. More than at any time since the end of the Second World War are people displaced by conflict in this world we live in today. Frankly, that's a failure, and we know why these people are trying to flee. They are trying to flee conflict-ridden societies that are not governed by law and institutions. They are driven by desperation. Migrants out of Central America, for instance, are trying to escape gangster societies where they and their families are not safe. This requires a greater level of engagement from all of us.

Three—Derek mentioned this very articulately—is the digital revolution that has done many great things, but has also empowered and amplified extreme voices in our societies, and created new forms of fragmentation. This is something we do need to come to grips with, because it foundationally affects our democratic order.

Four is the hollowing-out of democratic order by strongmen who preserve some forms of democracy but use their standing to concentrate executive power at the expense of other institutions: parliaments, free media, active civil societies, political competition.

That's the quick assessment. What do we need to do? I'm going to be quite brief here, but I do have five ideas, not inclusive.

One is to realize that we actually live in an increasingly middle-class world. When we think about development assistance writ large, the absolute focus on ending poverty was an appropriate target, I would argue, 10, 20, 30, 40 years ago. Today, given what we are working with in terms of this enormous rising middle-class in the world, I would argue that development assistance should focus on democracy, rights, governance, transparency, accountability and anti-corruption. It should focus on helping governments deliver for their citizens, so that we don't need to keep helping desperate people—migrants, refugees—and we don't need to backfill governments that are not meeting basic commitments to their citizens.

I would argue that democracy assistance actually should supersede other forms of assistance, because other forms of assistance are not very effective where you have a kleptocratic strongman in power, or a failed state.

Two is to really embrace a mission—Canada, America, the west—in helping our partners out there in the world build political resiliency to not only be effective democracies but also to avoid succumbing to insidious forms of influence from authoritarian actors, including China and Russia.

● (1000)

We travel a lot, all of us. I've never been anywhere where anybody wanted to be part of a new Russian empire or part of a new Chinese sphere of influence. People everywhere care so much about their sovereign rights and are very anxious about threats to their sovereign independence from authoritarian great powers. So, helping our partners out there build resiliency, including strong civic institutions, effective media, free courts, etc., to help them maintain their independence, should be a strategy.

The third is to expose corruption. Tom Carothers, who is a scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, has done research showing that over the last five years, 10% of all governments in the world—sometimes through election, sometimes through street revolution—have changed due to civic activism against corruption and that the driving civic force out in the world today is anti-corruption sentiment. You see it today on the streets of Iran, where people are striking. You see it in Venezuela, where Venezuelans are fed up with living in a kleptocratic narco state where the elites live very well and everybody else cannot get enough to eat. This is a powerful force.

I would argue, when we think of Russia's assault on the west and our open societies, that with regard to Vladimir Putin who apparently is worth $95 billion, it's worth investigating, understanding and helping Russian citizens understand where that money came from because, actually, a lot of it was their money before the Kremlin oligarchs consolidated a form of power that made them all very rich.

Innovating in the democracy space to expose and to help partners on the ground expose corruption in their societies is a very powerful tool, including in countries that, frankly, may not be pro-western, pro-American. People care so deeply about this issue.

The fourth is to invest in recreating political balance in societies where politics have become imbalanced through strongman forms of control. That's stronger parliaments. That's more engaged women, youth and other marginalized communities, getting them much more involved in politics in their countries. That's free media. That's legal assistance and other forms of assistance. It's all to try to recreate the balance that has been lost through strongman forms of control.

An important part of this is investing in the next generation. In countries like the Philippines and Turkey, young political leaders, and young leaders writ large, do not want to live in a country that's run by one man in perpetuity. That's also true of young leaders in the ruling parties, leaders who actually want some space to emerge in their own right. Investing in young leaders as part of an effort to create balance is valuable.

Finally, invest in citizen security. Rather than build a wall on the southern border of the United States, I would argue that it would be much more effective to spend that money helping Central American societies govern themselves in just and effective ways so that all these desperate people don't want to leave. The same is true in the Middle East. The conflagration that has been Syria and the conflagration that has been Yemen are driving desperate people away. We've seen it in Southeast Asia in Myanmar: the Rohingya crisis. I could go on and on. Really, at the end of the day, we should be addressing the problem at the source.

The U.S. ambassador to Nigeria told me when I was there that there are going to be 400 million Nigerians by the year 2100. He said that if Nigeria cannot effectively govern itself and provide opportunity, 100 million of those people will leave. Guess where they will want to come? So, this is a big task for us, including in Africa.

Let me wrap up, in 10 seconds, by just arguing that we're in a competition with authoritarians—authoritarians externally and authoritarians within open societies. They're using what the National Endowment for Democracy has called sharp power. They're not using military instruments. They're using sharp power, which is like a malign form of soft power—a set of sharp power tools to erode, hollow out and assault democracies and democratic institutions. It's time for us in the west to modernize and revitalize our democracy assistance tool kit to try to level the playing field.

Thank you.

● (1005)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will go straight into questions from members.

We are going to begin with MP Alleslev.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much for the incredible and powerful testimony from both of you. It's highly complex with a lot of moving pieces. It feels as though the erosion is increasing exponentially, and it's not limited to them. It's also within our own democracies.

Can you help us to understand and prioritize what we should be doing at home? We still believe that we don't have, necessarily, a problem with our own democracy. Can we achieve democratic institution support in other countries while our own home flank is rapidly under pressure as well?

Dr. Daniel Twining: I would argue very briefly that in America we have been working on our democracy for 200 years and we obviously have a lot more work to do, but you are seeing why we have checks and balances, mid-term elections, a separation of power between the executive and legislative, strong institutions and a vibrant media.

When I travel in the world, our interlocutors, NDI and IRI partners, don't say that democracy in America is under such stress that we have no standing to talk to them. They say our system is incredibly resilient, and it's a system, not any form of personalized rule. They need our help. We can offer it in humility, not saying we're trying to project some American or Canadian model. We're not trying to impose anything, but just those foundational building blocks of a successful democracy and a successful civil society are things that we know something about in America, in Canada, and we can help other countries establish them. I think the point that our democracies are continual works in progress is a powerful one that speaks to people.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I was thinking around social media and the undermining from other great powers within our own democracy while perhaps we're not either keeping up or paying attention to be able to address it. I didn't necessarily mean from within our own structures, and yet those same instruments are being used to even greater effect in those emerging democracies. Do we need to address that?

Dr. Daniel Twining: Derek, do you want to take that one?

Mr. Derek Mitchell: Sure.

Yes, Silicon Valley is a country unto itself in some ways. Some countries have sent ambassadors to Silicon Valley to work with them. We have a Silicon Valley program. We have an office there because I consider this an absolutely essential component of getting democracy right. What these social media platforms are doing to seep in and undermine the sinews of democracy, to alienate, isolate and divide people, and enabling others from the outside—and inside—to push disinformation and undermine facts, which are the foundation of democracy.... We have to get their assistance, and we're doing what we can to try to do that.

NDI has 50-plus offices around the world, so we feel as if we have a unique opportunity to take what we know of context on the ground, then feed what's going on there back through Washington or right back to Silicon Valley to get them to respond quickly, both to the initial issue of the moment, as well as the bigger issues that their platforms create. We're also creating networks of folks who are themselves on the ground, who are organizing themselves, who are their own tech geniuses, who are countering disinformation, to network them between countries to develop best practices.

We're doing our best, given the facts of these platforms, to try to counter the worst effects of it, as well as trying to figure out how we harness it for a positive agenda, because they will exist for the foreseeable future. More technologies are coming down the road, and we all have to understand the best way of harnessing them.

● (1010)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: That's excellent.

To change themes a bit, could we talk about security and stability and what you would argue is the role or opportunity for what we would have called peacekeeping, but peacekeeping in a modern context toward the promotion of democratic structures?

Dr. Daniel Twining: Peacekeeping is a means to an end. Peacekeeping cannot be a permanent thing that we do. Fundamentally, the reason there is a need for peacekeeping operations is some kind of political failure in a society like the Balkans, ethnic conflict in parts of Africa, all forms of struggle, civil war. Again, coming back to my argument, let's attack the problem at the source. Peacekeeping is a valuable tool, but at the end of the day, we need to create societies that work so our peacekeepers can come home.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Yes, but do we need more peacekeeping? In many of those countries that are facing those kinds of challenges, is it more difficult to build institutions when there is insecurity and instability as a foundational element?

Dr. Daniel Twining: Yes.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: It would appear from the outside that what we were doing in the late 1980s and 1990s was significantly greater as a world than what we're doing today.

Dr. Daniel Twining: Yes, if peacekeeping can buy time, as it can, for a political settlement, or a cooling of political conflict, military conflict, absolutely, yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are now going to move to MP Vandenbeld, please.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much.

Actually, it's very refreshing to see the bipartisan support for this kind of democracy promotion that we see with the republican institute and the democratic institute. How much of that do you think is because of the larger funding mechanism, the National Endowment for Democracy, which is under Congress, as opposed to being part of the administration? Of course, that has created funding—you mentioned 35 years—which then has created space for the emergence of these wide networks. Really, I'd say that the NDI and the IRI are primarily networks of democracy promotion.

How much of that was allowed to flourish because of the fact that you had an endowment fund under Congress that was long term and allowed for the building of the resiliency and that kind of consistency and constant presence?

I'll start with Mr. Mitchell and then go to Mr. Twining.

Mr. Derek Mitchell: Thank you very much for that question.

I do think the fact that it has been under Congress has been a benefit to us. I think the fact of bipartisanship.... We get that question a lot, even from those in Congress. Why is there a republican institute and why is there a democratic institute? We were patterned after the German *stiftungs*, which divided their work according to ideology, but the NDI decided not to do its work based only on ideology. It was based on small-d democracy, on democrats, whatever their ideology, going forward. I think it helps that we have two institutes when it comes to Congress, because it switches back and forth between different partisan or party leadership.

I suppose it can be a double-edged sword in a way, but it has worked out well for us overall. We have had consistent support because of Congress, which traditionally has been the repository of national norms and values in the country. The executive can get overwhelmed by big picture policy, realism and how to get along with other countries, and values can get lost or downgraded in the list of important interests, but the legislature is always the one that says, “No, we have a certain meaning behind our country that the American people want to maintain.”

If we didn't have Congress in the past few years...this administration was cutting us drastically, by 30% to 40%. It would go up to the Hill and the Hill would say, “Thank you for your interest in national security, and we do the budget, so we're putting back all this money and in fact increasing it a little bit.”

We can't rely on that. We have to be able to explain to the American people why we do what we do and why it's important, and not rely on individual senators or staff members, but it has worked very well so far that it has been in Congress.

● (1015)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Mr. Twining.

Dr. Daniel Twining: Of course, I agree with all of that. Can I just add one thing? As all of you think about your institutional structures here, one thing that has helped us is that the IRI, NDI and the National Endowment for Democracy, are one and two degrees removed from the government, from the executive branch and from the Congress.

Governments do have to walk a diplomatic fine line with sensitive relationships: Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, Iran, etc. The Congress appropriates money that we compete for through grants and we then go out as non-profit, non-governmental organizations to do that work to empower citizens and leaders around the world. Our government is supporting it, but in a removed way that does not complicate diplomatic relations unduly, so it is worth thinking about that, rather than having it be bureaucratized in a ministry.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you.

I note that our 2007 report also recommended that something be "under Parliament".

In terms of the funding, we talked about the costs of democracy promotion, but what are the costs of not promoting democracy? What are the costs in terms of what you mentioned, Mr. Twining, such as migration, refugee flows and conflict? Not having inclusive democracies obviously has great costs for the world, but also in our own countries when those refugee flows are coming in.

I noted, Mr. Mitchell, you mentioned that it's actually a time for democratic stimulus

Mr. Twining, you said—and this is quite significant—that democracy promotion should perhaps "supersede other forms of assistance", because without democracy, when you have corruption and authoritarianism, a lot of the other assistance isn't as effective. I wonder if you could elaborate a bit for our committee. If we're looking at some sort of a larger investment in democracy, particularly something under Parliament, that costs money. What is the flip side? What is the cost of not investing in this area?

We'll start with Mr. Twining this time and then go to Mr. Mitchell.

Dr. Daniel Twining: The cost is horrific. My wife is British, and she's working on Brexit. I would argue that there's a direct line from the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and the refugee crisis that flowed from that to the pressure on the European Union that has produced some extremist politics in the continent and has helped lead to Brexit. That is the cost. I don't know what the cost of that is, but that is an extraordinary line to trace: two or three million Syrian and Iraqi refugees actually cracking up our core alliance in the west, the European Union.

We know the cost of wars because we help pay for them and participate in them. Democracy assistance looks to me like cents on the dollar. Of course the great thing about democracy assistance is that ultimately countries graduate from it—and they want to graduate from it. They don't want to be conflict-ridden people, and these societies don't want to be dependants. So you are making an investment that yields dividends, which allows those countries over time to graduate, because they succeed.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Mr. Mitchell.

Mr. Derek Mitchell: It's always difficult to prove a negative—the dog that didn't bark, and how much is the opportunity cost there—but as Dan says, you can see the results of places that fail. There is a logic to democracy. It's not simply an ideology. When you don't have accountability of abusive power, lack of transparency leads to corruption, which leads to injustice and tyranny of majorities, which leads to refugee flows and instability that crosses borders. That has monetary impact. It means we have to pay for more in our security services.

I've worked in the Pentagon. Actually I worked at NDI before but went for 20 years to the Pentagon, and I saw it very much connected not because you impose democracy. That goes too far. That's an oxymoron. As Madeleine Albright says, you can't impose democracy. But you don't want to have to spend so much on security. You'd much rather spend on the preventives, and democracy is a preventive. It promotes human dignity. It promotes human rights, which creates then a self-sustaining and self-corrective inside countries, so you don't have the cross-border impacts that affect our national security, that cost billions of dollars rather than the millions that typically go into democracy work.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: And—

The Chair: Thank you very much. Sorry, but your time is up.

Next is MP Laverdière.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Mitchell, but the other witnesses can also comment.

Among the threats to democracy, you mentioned economic inequalities. This is a phenomenon we see, not only in Venezuela, Russia and other countries where there is corruption, but also in Canada—although not necessarily at the same level—where it is growing.

Could you tell us more or comment on it?

● (1020)

[*English*]

Mr. Derek Mitchell: You're exactly right. I'm not suggesting that we're any different. In fact, I would use us as an example of how economic inequality can lead to people's frustrations and lead to extreme measures when it comes to their voting or in terms of their politics. So we're not excluded from the dynamics that we've been seeing over the past generation, which means we have to be alert to not just the political components of democracy but to how democracy has to be ingrained into how we think about economic policy, how we do economic policy, how we think about corruption issues as well, which also feed into the inequality questions and injustice that people feel and get angry about.

One of the lessons learned is not just that if the economy goes up, then democracy is more likely sustained. The economy writ large can go up, but if some people move ahead or if there is a high level of corruption or there is inequality and people feel that it's not working for them and that there are elites, a rural-urban divide, an alienation from the system, a sense that politicians are not there for them, then a demagogue can come in and say, "I represent you; I'm a populist; I speak for you". They denigrate the institutions, and once the institutions are gone and the norms are gone, then it's a free-for-all. Then it's rule by an individual.

If you don't get people's daily life at the heart of these questions, that people don't just have to vote but they have to eat and have to feel that they are recognized and that minorities have rights, then you're not going to get at the real big picture of democratic development. That's just a lesson we've learned. It's not enough to have institutions and processes; there has to be this culture and there has to be an economic component as well.

Dr. Daniel Twining: I would add that in many developing countries, people go into government to get rich. You don't do that in Canada. This is still the pathway to material prosperity, because of corruption, kleptocracy, etc. Tackling those at the source, making it clear that taxpayer stewardship is not a means to personal enrichment.... Only open politics can do that. Only politics that are transparent and accountable, and involve alternation in power and a degree of accountability between institutions and with courts, etc., can do that. Otherwise, you just have this open wound of public money going into private purses.

Open politics should be a leveller, because by definition, they crack up any kind of closed, elite structure in which one tribe, or one family or one party monopolizes political control and steers the economy accordingly.

In Malaysia, one reason you had this extraordinary democratic transition last year is that one party had been in power for 61 years. Every big businessman in Malaysia needed to be quite intimate with that ruling party in order for his prosperity, his business, to thrive. You've had an alternation in power there, and that has trickled down into the private sector and into the economy.

I will close with one thought. The populist wave in the west right now may fail, because populists arguably cannot deliver on their promises. They are too expensive. I would include populism of the left and of the right in this. There are lots of promises being thrown around in America now, as we look towards our 2020 presidential election, about new benefits for people. I'm not sure how we're going to pay for those. I would say the same things about the populism on the right that you see in places like Italy. At the end of the day, it's budget busting, and it's not sustainable.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much.

You also mentioned inclusiveness. With regard to the representation of women, I am proud to belong to a political party where 40% of the members of Parliament are women, which beats all the other parties. Forgive me for that little partisan comment. You also mentioned young people. This is an issue that concerns me very much.

What can be done to encourage political participation among young people?

● (1025)

[*English*]

Dr. Daniel Twining: Derek, go ahead.

Mr. Derek Mitchell: It's interesting to note up front that many of the reports that have come out.... Freedom House came out today with its democracy index, but The Economist issued their democracy index a few weeks ago. They said that faith in democratic institutions is down, but actually political participation is up, particularly among women, and also, to some degree, youth. A lot of the participation is taking to the streets or in frustration. They're not confident about political parties. They think they're exclusive and dominated by the older generation. These are cultural as well as political issues.

In fact, participation is up, and there is a thirst to participate in a way that works for them. This idea that young people—even in the United States we hear these facts, and overseas—are not interested in democracy.... I think you disaggregate democracy, and say, "Would you like to participate in your public affairs? Would you like to have accountability? Do you want to have freedom to associate, free speech, transparency and the ability to represent your communities?" "Yes, yes, yes and yes." "Then that means you want democracy." They don't have the way to participate. They don't feel confident that the rules and institutions now work for them, which is a huge challenge. It's not something necessarily that an NDI or an IRI can fix.

We have to think about how we provide different guidance or assistance, or learn lessons where young people can productively engage.

If you look at Africa, there is a youth explosion, and a youth network out of Nigeria that is extremely exciting and very interesting. The future of democracy will be based on these young people. Investing in them now and trying to find a way for them to engage and get some of the establishment to allow them to engage in the interest of broader national development will be very important.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will move to MP Saini.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you.

Good morning to both of you. Thank you very much. It's been very informative today.

Mr. Twining, I'll start with you.

In 1944 part of the reason for the Bretton Woods conference was to maintain a stable world order. Fast-forward about 70 years and that's beginning to fray. You've written quite forcefully that there should be trilateral co-operation between Asia, Europe and America, and that now the compact would be useful in bringing back the liberal international order.

My question for you is simple in a way and complex in a way. You mentioned Russia and China. When you have two countries that are implicating themselves in the domestic affairs of other countries, either through force or economically....

I'll give you one example right now, and that's Venezuela. People may not realize that the biggest investor in Venezuela right now is China. The only three countries that are supporting the current regime are China, Russia and Turkey. I'm just pointing out one example, but if you look at Latin America, at Africa, or at parts of Asia, the economic implications of certain countries are so strong that half the economies are dependent on that one country or the investment of that one country.

If we go into those countries, the ones that need the most help, where there are no free and fair elections, where you have corruption, where you don't have freedom of the press, how do we change the nature of that country or promote democratic institutions when that same leadership is profiting from non-democratic institutions?

Dr. Daniel Twining: It's a hard question. I'll begin where you did, with North American co-operation with Europe and Asia. We talk about the west these days, but of course the west is actually global. It certainly includes Japan as part of the G7 and core rich democracies, but I would argue that over time, it increasingly should include India. India is the world's biggest democracy.

Frankly, they may have a lot more to offer developing societies as they come up in terms of their own level of development than obviously rich countries like Canada and the United States have. Thinking about the challenge, the Indian system is more acutely aware of the China challenge writ large, I would argue, than many of us are in the west. The Japanese have so much at stake because they are marooned in this region with these rising autocracies, powerful autocracies, in Russia and China. When we think about democratic co-operation in new ways, that should mean a core group of big democracies acting in concert together, because we are all dealing with the same challenges.

That's one. Two, the Venezuela thing is very interesting, because it is exposing Russia's interest in controlling oil prices by sustaining the Maduro regime in power. It's exposing China's enormous investments in this kleptocracy in the form of bonds and energy resources. Frankly, part of what we see in the IRI and NDI work around the world is resentment in countries—in Africa, in the Pacific, in the Indian Ocean—of foreign countries' claims to their resources through corrupt political dealings with their leaders.

In the Maldives there was just a democratic transition a few months ago. You had an elected dictator who took power and abolished the Supreme Court and consolidated all control. He held an election because he thought he could win it, as these people often do, and 90% of voters turned out and deposed him. It turns out that they are now swimming in a sea of Chinese investment and infrastructure crooked dealings, just like the new Malaysian government is swimming in a sea of crooked dealings and trying to get out of it.

I think the more we collectively can expose some of these deals that often happen behind closed doors—behind, say, the Maduro regime and Beijing, or the Maduro regime and Russian oligarchic interests—the better, because citizens really resent that in those countries.

● (1030)

Mr. Raj Saini: In certain countries where you want to do democratic development, there might be some resistance because they don't want any foreign influence or any foreigners telling them how they should do this or do that. How do we maintain that fine line between being perceived as trying to revitalize or strengthen institutions as opposed to directly having an internal effect on the domestic politics of any country?

Dr. Daniel Twining: Perhaps I could just do 10 seconds on this and then I'll defer to Derek.

I went to Bosnia on one of my first IRI trips. It turned out that everybody was there in the Balkans doing all sorts of things. You had the Turks, the Saudis, the Iranians, the Chinese and the Russians. Every Bosnian political leader I met said, “Where is America? Where is the west? Where is Europe? All these other countries are here.”

So the situation we're in today, and so many, as you've seen in Venezuela, is that other actors are there, whether we are there or not.

Derek has more to say on this, I'm sure.

Mr. Derek Mitchell: Yes. Your question gets to the heart of how NDI does its work in essence. This is the challenge in every country we go to. We work in the most sensitive part of a country, its politics, where power and often money is in the balance. We have to prove ourselves, through our record in the past and through understanding context and very careful diplomacy with a full range of people in the country to say, “This is what we are. This is what we do. We are here because you have invited us in. We won't be there if you don't invite us in, but we seek your success. We don't seek an outcome to your policies. What we want to do is assist you in developing a process for you to determine your own futures, in fact, excluding external interference and allow you to have a say in your own futures.”

The theory behind this is that if they do that, they will be a more stable society, be a better market for our business, and it will not be a fount of insecurity in a region. It will be a good partner to the United States when it comes to us or any country that cares about democracy, because we tend to have similar values. It doesn't exclude anybody. It's not anti anybody. We don't come with an agenda. But in every country we go to—at least when I was working there 20 years ago; maybe it's easier now—we would have to prove ourselves and have to explain why we were not there to impose and that we are not America trying to impose an American system but we are trying to share experiences around the world and we come with a great deal of humility.

That's the best way to do it. I think it has demonstrated results in the past 35 years.

Mr. Raj Saini: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Wrzesnewskyj, please.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

Dr. Twining, I would like to thank you on a personal level, as the son and grandson of refugees, for referencing—it's not a perfect correlation—the correlation between what has been labelled as a retreat of democracy and the rising number of refugees globally. There is an important point here when you talk about having an opportunity to feed yourself as opposed to vote. On a very personal level, Canada was freedom's shore for my family. They had never experienced democracy but they had experienced how your right to eat very literally could be taken from you if you don't have democracy. Voting was sacrosanct in our family. I just wanted to thank you for referencing that.

I'd like to turn to a comment that was made that technology today is almost pernicious, I believe that's the wording that was used, to democracy. I was quite encouraged to hear from Mr. Mitchell that you are working with Silicon Valley. Could you comment on, or do we know, what is happening with organizations like Huawei which are going around the world and saying, “Look, we'll sell you this technology at a cheaper price, plus you can monitor your citizens in ways that you've never been able to in the past”?

● (1035)

Mr. Derek Mitchell: Yes, it's extremely dangerous. There's 5G and AI and all the different technologies that are developing now that will dominate our lives and shape what we hear, what we know, and in some ways how we think and our perspective on facts. The Chinese are quite strategic about this. They are pretty conscious about their desire to reach out to the world and shape things. In some ways it's defensive. They want to protect the Communist Party, but certainly there is an offensive component to it where it comes at the expense of others' sovereignty and others' well-being.

There is no company in China that is purely independent of the government. There is always going to be a Communist Party member in its leadership. The head of Huawei is a former PLA officer. I think countries are waking up to the challenge. The key, again, as in everything with democracy and international affairs, is transparency. The Chinese and others will work very well in the shadows. Huawei was a very easy way to get into the systems of other countries and undermine, I think, the sovereignty of others. But I think countries are alert to that now and are now thinking about ways to counter it.

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj: Thank you.

I have one quick, last point. In the past, during the Cold War, we had Voice of America and Radio Canada International, which, by the way, has pretty much wrapped up all their work. They were quite effective in reaching into countries. We seem to have been leapfrogged by organizations like Russia Today. Do you have any comments on investments and that sort of reaching out to people in countries, and NGOs being closed up in Russia itself? It's an embattled democracy in so many ways. Do you have any commentary when it comes to that?

Dr. Daniel Twining: Just to be clear, this is not just about broadcasting but about the whole suite of tools.

During the Cold War, we created a suite of tools to project our message of the open society into this totalitarian space controlled by the Soviet empire. We let many of those tools wither after the end of the Cold War. Derek talked about that phase, phase two. We let them wither and we need to recreate them. I'm not sure we need exactly the same instruments. We probably need some different instruments, but when we think about broadcasting, when we think about democracy assistance, when we think about exchanges and scholarships and all of these human engagements, we need more of that. Frankly, we walked away from the tool kit. We let it get rusty.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go for our final questions to MP O'Toole, please.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both very much. You were very informative. This is a study that all members, all sides politically, have a lot of interest in.

The big problem the Trudeau government has had on foreign policy has been where there are countries that don't share our values, but we may share interests. This is the balance we see in foreign policy. China, Saudi Arabia, Cuba and the Philippines.... There are a number where we don't share values and we've had diplomatic rows. Those are the countries where we have to be promoting democratic reform, human rights and a range of things.

Mr. Mitchell, you talked about how building a culture of democracy is not easy. It's a slow-going process.

My question is for both of you. How is the challenge...? I'll use this as an example. In Canada, we didn't legalize same-sex marriage until 2005. I think we all agree that's a positive thing. The U.S., at the federal level, is still really having that debate. How can we best advance bare-bones democratic rights to liberty, freedom of association and expression, those sorts of things, when we also import a number of our progressive values, as we might say, to countries that are in the Stone Age, comparatively, on a democratic level? Sometimes I worry, with the Trudeau government, that a lot of their progressive agenda on trade and all these sorts of things are far more for their domestic political audience than they are for the countries for which they are intended.

I'd love to hear you both on this, because I'm wondering whether that will slow the process of democratic reform in some of these countries.

● (1040)

Dr. Daniel Twining: I would just say—Derek will probably have more thoughts—values are different in different societies, but our principle is that citizens should be free to decide whether women can drive or participate in a country like Saudi Arabia or Iran.

I was testifying on Capitol Hill with Derek's predecessor, and somebody asked us about the women's empowerment agenda on a set of specific issues, abortion, etc. Our response, collectively, was that those are for those countries, those people, to decide, but if we can empower women to be political deciders, that solves a whole lot of other problems. The main thing for us, I think, is making sure that politics in these countries is inclusive of the spectrum of that society, so that women, marginalized communities and other voices have an equal vote and an equal voice in those countries which, in all of the countries you mentioned, they currently do not.

Mr. Derek Mitchell: We have to explain to these countries or share the experience of our countries that we are stronger when we are inclusive to make it also in their interest. If you seek national development, if you truly care about your national power, then you must include women. Every study suggests that. You must include all. You must empower folks. Not every autocrat is going to listen to that. All of the elites are not going to listen to that, because power is the currency, and they may not want to loosen that power. You do want to encourage folks in the country, the broad swath of the citizenry, to recognize that keeping anybody down or leaving anybody behind is going to come at their expense, that if they leave anybody out, then they might be next.

I like to quote Martin Luther King, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”. Nobody is excluded from injustice if you start chipping away at it. In fact, the more inclusive you are, the more stable and secure you will be.

We try to share those experiences. It will take time, because cultures, as you say, are at different levels of development. They have different histories, but I don't think we walk away from that. I think we defend that and do it with confidence, but do it with, again, humility and understanding of local contexts, of how we do it in a way that might take root sooner rather than later.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll have a very short, final engagement from MP Laverdière—

Oh, you didn't want another one. Sorry, I got the wires crossed there.

To those in Washington, D.C. and to Dr. Twining here, this was a tremendous way for us to start our engagement on this very important issue. I want to thank all of you for giving us so much food for thought as we start to dig deeper into this issue.

With that, we shall adjourn.