

LAWYERS FOR SECURE IMMIGRATION

SECU Testimony on Foiled Terrorist Plot in Toronto

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security (SECU) hears evidence on the foiled Toronto Terror Plot and Security Screening processes for immigration and citizenship, prompting questions about Gaza Reunification program.

Lawyers for Secure Immigration (L4SI) advocates for government measures that will protect and enhance the integrity and security of the immigration system, for a safer and stronger country, and will ensure the safety and security of all Canadians.

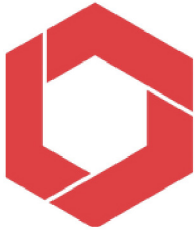
We reiterate our recommendation regarding the reunification of permanent residents and Canadian citizens from Gaza with their Canadian relatives, by having Canada allocate more resources to ensure a robust security and background verification process. As Gaza is controlled by designated terrorist organizations, our country must have all appropriate measures in place to prevent any members or supporters of terrorist organizations from entering Canada.

The testimony heard by the Committee today concerning security screening highlights the need for Canadian security specialists to interview individual applicants before they are allowed to embark for Canada, and again, a second time, by an officer with the Canada Border Services Agency, when they arrive at a port of entry in Canada, before being admitted to Canada.

We recommend that all interview records be kept and maintained for not less than 25 years, with special attention to the answers provided by applicants to the following questions:

1. Have you ever been a member of any designated terrorist organization at any time?
2. Has any member of your family been a member of any designated terrorist organization at any time (father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, grandfather, grandmother)?
3. Have you ever provided funds to any designated terrorist organization or to a member of any designated terrorist organization at any time?





LAWYERS FOR SECURE IMMIGRATION

4. Has any member of your family ever provided funds to or been a member of any designated terrorist organization at any time (father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, grandfather, grandmother)?
5. Have you ever provided accommodation, at any time, to a member of any designated terrorist organization?
6. Has any member of your family ever provided accommodation to a member of any designated terrorist organization (father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, grandfather, grandmother)?
7. Have you ever harboured or watched over a non-combatant/civilian on behalf of any designated terrorist organization?
8. Has any member of your family ever harboured or watched over a non-combatant/civilian on behalf of any designated terrorist organization (father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, grandfather, grandmother)?
9. Have you ever participated in, assisted in, or witnessed the kidnapping of a non-combatant/civilian on behalf of any designated terrorist organization at any time?
10. Has any member of your family ever participated in, assisted in, or witnessed the kidnapping of a non-combatant/civilian on behalf of any designated terrorist organization at any time? (father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, grandfather, grandmother)?
11. Have you ever participated in or assisted in a rocket shelling attack at any time?
12. Has any member of your family ever participated in or assisted in a rocket shelling attack (father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, grandfather, grandmother)?

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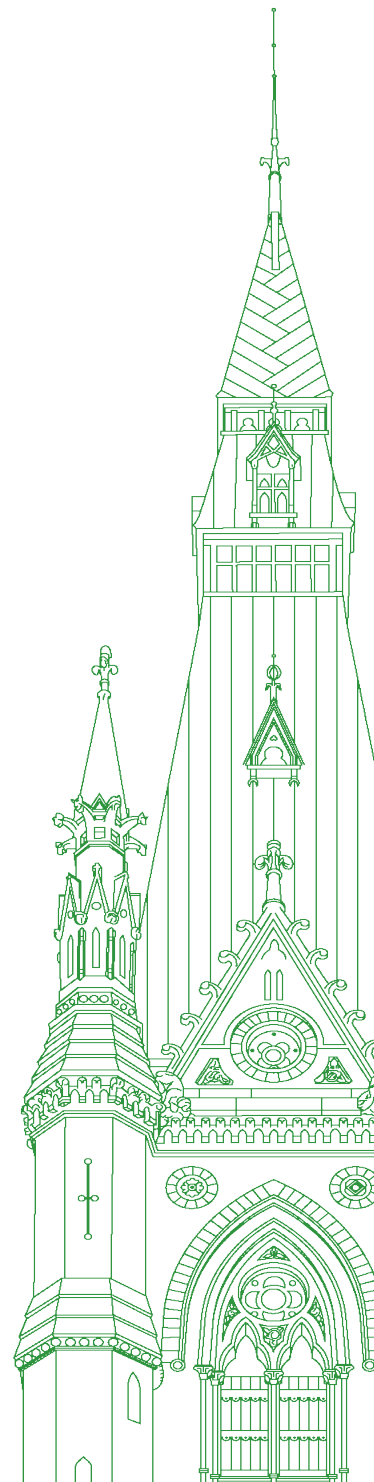
Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 117

Wednesday, August 28, 2024

Chair: Mr. Ron McKinnon



Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Wednesday, August 28, 2024

• (1235)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 117 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

I'm not going to read what I read just a few minutes ago, but use the black headsets and keep them away from the mics.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. To ensure that the meeting runs smoothly, I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of members.

Wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For members in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The committee clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your understanding in this regard. Also, as a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

On another item of business, when we have people speaking online, the sound in this room is not very good, apparently because of feedback issues. We are recommending that when someone online is speaking, they should use a headset. Then we should be able to hear them well.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on August 13, the committee is meeting to review the foiled terrorist plot in Toronto and the security screening process for permanent residence and citizenship application.

I want to remind members that there is currently a section 517 publication ban in place. A section 517 publication ban prohibits the publication of any information, evidence or representations made at or in anticipation of a bail hearing. Any bail conditions, any reasons of the bail court and any evidence or materials relied upon at the bail hearing are prohibited from disclosure.

I asked the House of Commons legal counsel to give us some advice on this as well. I can't find the note, but apparently, documents that we receive during the meeting and exchange among ourselves during the meeting are covered by privilege.

Here it is. While this ban has no impact on proceedings based on the privilege of freedom of speech, members should, out of respect for the judiciary, exercise great caution and not refer to any of the facts relating to the bail hearing for the individuals involved in this case. Furthermore, parliamentary privilege does not provide protection for statements that are made outside of official parliamentary

proceedings. Members should be mindful of this when making any comments publicly to the media or when using social media.

We also note the application of the *sub judice* convention, which suggests that members should refrain from discussing matters that are currently before the courts. Members should exercise caution and not refer unduly or unnecessarily to matters that are before the courts. I think we're all aware of this, but it never hurts to be more aware.

I'd now like to welcome the witnesses.

From the Canada Border Services Agency, we have Aaron McCrorie, vice-president of intelligence and enforcement. With the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, we have Vanessa Lloyd, interim director. From the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, we have Pemi Gill, assistant deputy minister, and Aiesha Zafar, assistant deputy minister of migration integrity. Finally, with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we have Jennifer Gates-Flaherty, director general, Canadian criminal real time identification services.

We'll go straight away into questions. I propose a break halfway through so that we have a five-minute break. We will start a new round of questions after that.

We'll start a six-minute round with Ms. Lantsman.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Thanks for joining us.

I'm going to go back to what we were talking about when the minister was here. While we appreciate the work of the agencies and the speed at which they acted when they had the information—I can understand why people would say that's how the system works—what we haven't gotten to the bottom of here today is our concern about why you didn't have the information after this individual had been in this country for six years. From the chronology you provided this committee right before we started, he had six different incidents with security checks.

Mr. McCrorie or Ms. Lloyd, how can Canadians be sure that there are proper checks in the system so they can make sure that this didn't happen before, that there aren't terrorists in our midst and that this won't happen again? You can appreciate that Canadians want the answer to that question.

• (1240)

Mr. Aaron McCrorie (Vice-President, Intelligence and Enforcement, Canada Border Services Agency): Mr. Chair, I can start, and then Vanessa may want to join in.

What I'd like to describe is that, in fact, I think we have a very robust system in place when it comes to security screening. You heard a little about it in the previous session. It starts with the assessment that is done by our colleagues in the IRCC, and then based on risk indicators, comprehensive files are referred to the CBSA and to CSIS to do comprehensive security screening. We can describe in more detail what is entailed in that, but I'd say, from a CBSA point of view, it's about understanding the person who's in front of us, reviewing the information we have, understanding their travel history, their work history and where they're coming from, and then doing in-depth analysis in terms of both open source research and running names and information, aliases, against a range of our intelligence and enforcement databases.

If necessary, then we also dig further into getting information from domestic as well as international partners. We then provide a recommendation to IRCC in terms of...

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: That has all been covered. I just want you to appreciate that this individual, who is allegedly on an ISIS video from 2015 that was publicly available, was in this country for six years before the RCMP thwarted a terrorist plot that would have killed people in the GTA, somewhere in Toronto, presumably, after six security checks. You can appreciate why Canadians are concerned, can't you?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: Again, our outcome, the goal that we're focused on, is to ensure the protection of Canada and of Canadians. When we make our decisions and when we do our analysis, it's based on the information we have available at any given moment in time.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: You think this is the most robust process that could have happened in this case. Are you telling Canadians that?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I'm telling Canadians that we have a robust system in place, but as the minister indicated as well earlier, we are asking ourselves this: Do improvements need to be made? We are conducting a review—

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Wasn't there a failure in this?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I would go back to the point that we made the best decisions we could at those moments in time with the information that was available.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Canadians watching this see, again, six security checks, six years, of this individual, who is publicly on an ISIS videotape and who is now behind bars or being held on very serious terrorism charges.

Do you really believe that the system worked as it should? The minister dismissed anything that was wrong with the system today in his testimony. Do you really think that's how the system should work here? Are you really telling Canadians who are watching at home that the system is robust and that everything worked as it should in this case?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: What I'm trying to tell Canadians is that we're asking ourselves if there can be improvements made to the system. We're taking a very hard look at that. We're doing that in collaboration with our partners in CSIS and in IRCC. We're going to do a representative sample of cases that have had positive assessments in the past and are going to ask ourselves if we have missed

anything, if there are any systemic issues or any gaps in our processes—

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Have you missed anything? There have been six incidents of security checks here. Of course you've missed something. These guys were just arrested. A father-son duo was just arrested in a hotel room 10 minutes from the riding that I represent and within 40 minutes of the ridings that committee members here represent. Of course you've missed something.

Have there been any consequences for anybody who has been involved in any of these checks?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: There's nothing to indicate at this moment in time that we had information available to us when we made those decisions that would—

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Is that a problem?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I'm saying that we're asking ourselves if we need to review some of our processes and systems.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: I appreciate that you're asking yourself these questions, but don't you think it's a problem that you didn't know that this guy was awarded a visa here six years ago, after being in an ISIS video from 2015 that is publicly available and that he was arrested with his son days before committing a terrorist attack?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I'm apologizing, but I just have to repeat that, in fact, we made the best decisions that we could at that moment in time based on the information we had. I think we have robust systems in place, but we are asking ourselves, can we do more? We're looking backwards to see if, in fact, we need to do more.

● (1245)

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: I don't think there is a single Canadian watching today who would agree that you have robust systems in place if this is what happened. I don't think there is a single Canadian watching today and saying, "Do you know what? The system worked exactly as it should."

What happened? Where were the failures? Why did this government fail?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I'm not sure there were any failures. Again, we are going to do a respective review to see if we missed anything. If there is, we will make corrections. We have 183 staff at CBSA who every day are conducting security screening. We get about 206,000 per year coming our way, and we issued about, I want to say, 130 decisions last year.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. McCrorie, there's a guy who slipped through the cracks. Can you assure Canadians that there haven't been any more, that there aren't terrorists in our midst and that this won't happen in the future?

I appreciate that you think this is a robust system that worked exactly as it should, but I think people watching this would disagree with you.

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I would assure Canadians that we have multiple lines of defence in place. If we don't capture them at the stage of security screening, we also look at people coming to the country. As you heard from earlier testimony, about 7,500 people were “no boarded” prior to even departing for Canada. About 37,000 people were turned away from Canada upon entry.

Then we have an additional line of defence in terms of our inland investigations. Last year we launched 8,000 inland investigations based on concerns about inadmissibility. When we find inadmissibility, we take those cases to the Immigration and Refugee Board, who's the decision-maker. Last year we removed 15,000 people, of whom about 700 to 800 were cases of serious inadmissibility.

There are multiple lines of defence in place. We don't rely on a single point of failure. We have multiple lines of defence. We're asking ourselves, do improvements need to be made? I think that's a powerful message for Canadians. We do want to know if improvements can be made. If there can be, we will make improvements.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lantsman.

We go now to Mr. Gaheer.

Mr. Gaheer, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I want to touch on the line of questioning by Ms. Lantsman. We in Canada obviously have tens and hundreds of thousands of people who seek to get a visitor visa to come to Canada. There are security screening processes to make sure that the wrong individuals don't get access to Canada. Obviously, in this case, someone did arrive in Canada and then filed an asylum claim.

Is it theoretically even possible to search every single video or to conduct a global facial recognition search on every video for the individuals who are applying for visitor visas to Canada? Do we even have the resources to scour the dark web for every single individual who applies for a visitor visa to Canada? Is that even possible, theoretically?

Ms. Aiesha Zafar (Assistant Deputy Minister, Migration Integrity, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Chair, I can start off by talking about how we initially screen temporary resident applicants, those coming in to visit Canada. Every application for an individual who wants to come to Canada as a visitor is screened by the IRCC with that initial security screening. We look at biometrics. Biometrics not only help us identify whether or not any criminality is known but also help us in terms of identity management. This is the first time we're seeing an individual, and we anchor that identity for the individual throughout the entire process.

Our officers are highly trained in different risk indicators. These risk indicators are created collaboratively with our partners at the CBSA and CSIS. Those risk indicators are clues for the officers when they're going through an application on where there might be some type of elevated risk or where there might be an opening to—

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Let me interrupt you. Once we've reached that elevated level of risk for that pool of people, is it possible to conduct a dark web search or a facial recognition search

through all the content on the Internet in the world for those individuals? I don't think that's theoretically even possible.

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] my colleagues at CBSA or CSIS, who would then, at that point, conduct a comprehensive security screening if we referred the application.

Vanessa, did you want to comment?

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd (Interim Director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Perhaps I can jump in, Mr. Chair.

I would refer the members of the committee to the information put before them in terms of the range of other tools that are available in each and every case. Upon referral, where we do have indications of a possible national security concern or a risk indicator—it doesn't mean there is information present at that time—we can apply a range of tools. You'll see in the material that we put to the committee that this can include, as we discussed this morning, checks with international partners, reviews of open sources and other tools.

I will refrain from getting into the specifics of our capabilities as it relates to the member's specific question in terms of technical capabilities and methodologies. What I can say in answer to part of the concern I'm hearing from the committee is that while I said this morning that there is an increasing and intensifying risk as it relates to violent extremism, the members should be assured and Canadians should be assured that there is a very small number of people who are present in Canada who are willing to mobilize to violence.

● (1250)

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: I still want to focus on the question regarding scouring the dark web. Should our law enforcement be scouring the dark web when it comes to conducting routine security screens and assessments?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: From a CBSA point of view, and Ted Gallivan alluded to this earlier, we are asking ourselves, do we need to do more in that particular space? As part of the review, we're asking ourselves, what's the feasibility of that? What would it take from a technology point of view? What would be the usability of the information that we'd get from that and the feasibility of our finding it?

It is a daunting challenge, but we are asking ourselves that question.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: I want to ask a question about the difference between an individual who has gotten a visitor visa, who lands in Canada at, for example, Pearson airport, which is in my riding, and who files for asylum at that airport—that's an inland claim—versus an individual who makes a claim prior to entering Canada. Can anyone on the panel speak to the different legal protections afforded to those two individuals, or maybe to how different the processes are for those two streams?

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Mr. Chair, as the member mentioned, every individual who is in Canada who claims asylum is subject to 100% security screening by our partners at the CBSA and CSIS. That comprehensive security screening is conducted on every asylum claimant in Canada.

With individuals who are looking to seek asylum coming into Canada from outside, they are assessed differently. I don't have all the details, as I am more on the migration integrity side. They are assessed to determine whether or not they could become permanent residents in Canada. Then they would go through, if it's approved, a permanent resident screening process.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Could we have a submission to the committee, if that's possible, of the difference in the security screening procedures for an overseas application seeking asylum versus an inland application seeking asylum?

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: We can certainly look into that.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gaheer.

[Translation]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. McCrorie. In the testimony he just gave, he told us that the current system was working well and there were no issues. This suggests to me that it's normal, so to speak, or at least, common or regular practice for people like these two men to be able to move around in Canada and get Canadian citizenship. Personally, I find that troubling. I sincerely believed, and I expect that I'm not alone, that the system was seriously flawed or broken. Yet, we're told that was not the case. I thought there was a funding problem, but we're told that isn't so.

I'd like to hear from Mr. McCrorie. If all this is normal, how many individuals like these two are likely fomenting terrorist attacks on Canadian soil as we speak?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I thank the member for his question.

[English]

Again, I want to reiterate that in fact we are concerned that these two individuals got through. That is why we are launching a collaborative review of our processes with our partners in the IRCC and CSIS to understand what happened and what, if anything, we could do differently.

What I would say is at the moment in time that the security screening partners reviewed these files, we made decisions based on a very robust process, based on the best information we had available at that time. When new information becomes available, for example, when somebody is in the country, there are different steps that we take. I won't comment on what CSIS and the RCMP may do in the criminal world, but from a CBSA point of view, if we have information regarding somebody's inadmissibility in the country, we will launch an inland investigation. As I noted, we're doing about 8,000 of those this year. Those inland investigations assess whether or not this person should be in the country. If not, we take

that file, that evidence, to the Immigration and Refugee Board, who will make a decision about whether or not that person should be removed from the country.

• (1255)

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. McCrorie, I understand that, once people like this get here, different processes are set in motion. However, isn't there some way to prevent them from coming?

I thought that terrorists or people who intend to commit terrorist attacks weren't even allowed to enter Canada. To say that we're going to let people like that in the country and then, after they've arrived, conduct a more detailed and thorough investigation, that seems worrisome to me. Wouldn't you agree?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I thank the member for his question.

[English]

I'm trying to describe in fact the multiple layers of defence that are in place. I think the member's question is absolutely right in terms of our first objective, which is to push the border out as far as possible. That is why we have a security screening process in place that starts with our colleagues in the IRCC and results in comprehensive security screening being done by CSIS and the CBSA. In 2023 we had 74,000 files come our way, of which we closed 38,000 in terms of people seeking to come to the country. That's the first line of defence—IRCC first, and then our comprehensive security review.

If somebody is on a plane or on a flight manifest on their way to the country, CBSA has additional defences or tools that we bring to bear. We have other lines of defence. We have our national targeting centre, which reviews all passenger manifests for people seeking to come to the country, and we have international liaison officers who are working overseas. They work with airlines and with local authorities to deny boarding to the people we deem to be inadmissible, about 7,500 in 2023.

The next line of defence is at the port of entry. We have highly trained and experienced border services officers—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. McCrorie, I'm sorry to interrupt. I don't mean to be rude, but we only have six minutes each to ask questions.

Correct me if I'm wrong, but based on your answer, you did everything you could with the tools that you and your colleagues had at your disposal. However, you also said this:

[English]

“If it can be improved, we will improve it.”

[Translation]

Do you have any suggestions? What can be done? I understand what you're saying, I mean, that you've closed 38,000 of the 74,000 cases, but, in your opinion, what can be done to improve the screening process and prevent this from happening again?

[English]

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: Mr. Chair, it is a great question. We're asking ourselves this right now.

I don't have any immediate views in terms of what changes, if any, we need to make, but I am working with my colleagues who are at the table with me today so that we can understand what happened and, again, if necessary, can make any changes we need to. The system is always going to be—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Clearly, with all due respect, Mr. McCrorie, other countries are reacting faster than we are. We found out that you were informed by a foreign government about the crimes that this person had committed elsewhere. That means some other countries are getting it right. Once again, and with all due respect, I think that everyone in your agency is competent and credible, but some people are achieving better results.

You have a certain amount of expertise in this area. Based on that, do you have a sense of what we can do? Before we undertake studies that are going to drag on for two or three years, does no one have any idea of something we can do now, this week, to improve our screening system and prevent cases like this from happening again?

[English]

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: First of all, I want to assure the member that this is not going to be a review that's going to take a couple of years. The minister was very clear in his direction to us that he's looking for results and for information as soon as possible, so we'll be, in the coming months, coming back to the minister with our recommendations and our understanding of what happened.

I think the challenge we're always going to be facing is that we make decisions based on the information that is available at a given moment in time. Can we do a better job of collectively gathering some of that information? I don't know. We need to determine that. However, if we don't have information, we can't make a contrary decision about somebody. That's the fundamental issue.

I'll just say, for example, that we've talked about the video. To CBSA's knowledge, and it's only to CBSA's knowledge, the one version that we've now identified has only been available for two years. That's when that information was available globally, and it was only available to us in the last couple of weeks. We can only use the information that we have to make decisions.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. MacGregor, you have six minutes.

• (1300)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much. Mr. Chair.

I think the witnesses would probably agree with me that concerns about individuals attempting to come to Canada are not just about the potential of they themselves committing an act of terror or some kind of injustice on Canadian soil, but also about the potential of some whose words may inspire or incite violence here in Canada. I do want to note that this can happen with individuals regardless of their political ideologies or their religious backgrounds. We can see that covering the entire spectrum. I've been on this committee long enough to have seen that, but I will point out one example that did make the news recently. This is just a few weeks old.

It's concerning the case of Mr. Mohamed Hoblos, who was scheduled to come to British Columbia to speak at Thompson Rivers University earlier this month. He has been registered in the European Union on the Schengen Information System, so he's been barred from entering Germany, Norway and the Netherlands, and I believe he was also detained and deported from Switzerland.

I just want to use him as an example, because there may be others, and I wanted to point out those countries, because of course Germany, Norway, the Netherlands and Switzerland are strong western democracies. They share the same values as Canada does, and I'm sure they have very similar outlooks to the Canadian government's. In comparison with other countries that are very much aligned with Canada's approach on the world stage and that share our values, what can we learn from other countries that may have decided to bar certain individuals, and are there other instances where those individuals have been admitted to Canada?

I would just like to hear from some of the people with us today their views on how Canada judges that information and why, at times, we may find ourselves at odds with some of our closest allies and partners who share our strong democratic values.

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: When an individual is inadmissible to Canada, it's based on legislation. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act clearly outlines the reasons why an individual would be inadmissible.

In the example that you provided, you mentioned something similar to hate speech. Under security inadmissibility in the IRPA, there are various reasons why an individual could be inadmissible. Those include engaging in terrorism and being a danger to the security of Canada. Our officers must be able to meet the threshold of having reasonable grounds to believe that an individual is inadmissible based on the requirements of the legislation.

When it comes to information that other countries have available to them, it is relevant to their own inadmissibility requirements, which may be different from those in our legislation. However, we do have an opportunity to review an individual. If they have been “convicted outside Canada of an offence that, if committed in Canada, would constitute an indictable offence under an Act of Parliament, or of two offences not arising out of a single occurrence”, that person would be deemed inadmissible. Our officers would then work with our national security and law enforcement partners, as well as our counsel, to ensure that we can meet the reasonable grounds to believe that there is an equivalent offence in Canada and therefore deem them inadmissible.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that answer.

My next question would be for CSIS.

There's not much Canada can do with individuals who become radicalized abroad. If we become aware of it, there's something we can do to prevent them from coming to Canada, but of course, gathering that kind of intelligence can sometimes be a very difficult task.

Are you able to speak to what kind of deradicalization efforts the Government of Canada is doing on Canadian soil to prevent permanent residents who are here already, our own citizens, from following a pretty dark path and potentially committing a crime? Can you speak to any of the efforts or kinds of resources being put into that kind of work?

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: I apologize to the member. That area is outside of my expertise, and I'm unable to give you that information.

• (1305)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Do any of the witnesses have anything they can add on that? Okay.

I'll leave it there, Mr. Chair, for the next questioner. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We'll start our second round of questions with Mr. Motz.

You have five minutes, please.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here.

I sat through the first two hours this morning and listened carefully, and I'm still concerned, as Canadians are, about how this happened. The confidence they need to ensure that it doesn't keep happening—we haven't had that yet today. I appreciate the fact that our national security apparatus acted responsibly and efficiently to thwart the attack. Kudos to them. However, a failure occurred. We need to ensure that this failure doesn't keep happening.

Mr. McCrorie, CBSA has a critical role and responsibility in the process to protect Canadian citizens from those coming into Canada with dangerous or divisive ideologies that pose a threat to our national security and public safety and to not allow them entry. You've talked about the multiple ways you do that. What's interesting is what I found when I went through the timeline we were given just before this meeting today about the various times the accused

in this matter, the senior, was refused as a “non-genuine visitor” and then received a temporary resident visa. He was not refused. He was given it. He was then assessed and a risk indicator was found. That happened over and over and over again. These risk indicators are when CBSA is supposed to step in and take over.

What checks did you actually conduct to make that happen? Do you have access to the database that my NDP colleague talked about, the Schengen database? Did you run this individual through the FBI database or through the Homeland Security database? Did you run them through anything that would give rise to...?

Obviously, someone in an office who was interviewing this individual had concerns. They identified a risk. That same risk appeared again months later. It appeared again years later. Yet this person was able to get temporary status, permanent status, and then become a Canadian citizen, all while these risks were being presented.

How can we sit here today and assure the Canadian public that we know there's a problem when we don't know the...? Obviously, this timeline identifies the problem, and yet he was still able to be here. I'm actually quite concerned about what that actually means.

You also indicated in previous testimony that the CBSA has a role to play in removing the people who are ordered removed from this country. Of those people ordered removed, how many actually remain at large? Do you know the answer to that?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: Well, I think of the ones that were removed, they were removed. There are about—

Mr. Glen Motz: There are thousands who are ordered removed. Some of them are ordered removed based on their risk to Canada.

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I apologize, because I don't have our removal stats immediately at hand. I think you're absolutely right in the sense that last year we actually did remove 15,000 people, but there are, for example, in publicly reported data, about 28,000 to 30,000 people we're trying to track down.

Mr. Glen Motz: Many of those you can't find, right?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: Correct.

Mr. Glen Motz: So it's reasonable to presume, based on how this individual gained access to this country and received citizenship, that some of those also have gotten into this country illegitimately.

This is for Ms. Zafar from the immigration department as well.

As you guys navigate this, you have a joint role to play. Really, you guys do the interviews and you guys are the first matter of defence before it gets to CSIS, if there's an issue. What do you do here? How do you check to make sure? Obviously, people lie to you all the time. Is that what happened here? What steps are being taken by both CBSA and IRCC to make sure you can see through the lies that obviously this person told? People come to Canada for legitimate reasons and for illegitimate reasons, for nefarious reasons. What are you doing to ensure that those who lie to you are caught and not allowed in?

• (1310)

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Mr. Chair, I would like to start by saying that the vast majority of those individuals who visit Canada, for whom we processed over seven million applications last year, are truthful and genuine visitors to Canada.

At the IRCC, we are responsible for determining not only admissibility but also eligibility. I would like to clarify the two. In terms of eligibility, are you eligible under the conditions set out in the act? Are you coming to be what you say you're coming to be? If you're applying as a visitor, do you intend to stay—

Mr. Glen Motz: With that in mind—

The Chair: Mr. Motz, you're done. I'm just giving her the time to answer your question.

Mr. Glen Motz: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Zafar.

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Thank you.

The eligibility would include whether you are a genuine visitor, so that's separate from the admissibility, where we would do the security screening and then perhaps would refer to our partners for a comprehensive security screening.

Our applications set out a number of different questions, where we do rely on the information that's provided by the applicants. However, the applications ask for a number of different details for the individuals to provide, and those details are then assessed against the risk indicator packages, which, again, are clues to the officer about where we might need to do a little more comprehensive digging.

We also submit biometrics to the RCMP, and we also have information sharing agreements with our Five Eyes partners, so we are able to check with them if there is any known derogatory information on the individual who is applying to enter Canada.

I would like to point out that the risk indicators are based on the serious inadmissibilities in the legislation, so it's not only on security grounds, which would include espionage, terrorism or danger to Canada but also could be for human rights or international rights violations. It could be for serious organized crime as well.

All of those different indicators are parts of our risk indicator packages, and my colleague at the CBSA—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm going to have to cut you off there.

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead very quickly, Mr. McCrorie.

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I would just add it's those risk indicators that are developed by CBSA and CSIS and that we provide training to IRCC officers on that tell if this is a file they should look at. It's not a definitive statement that there is a risk. It prompts the question that leads to the comprehensive security screening we do in partnership, not instead of, but we do it in partnership with organizations like CSIS.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Motz.

We go now to Ms. Zahid.

Go ahead for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Zafar or Ms. Gill, whoever can answer.

I know that all TRV applications, all permanent residents, temporary foreign workers and students, are screened and that you have a process at IRCC. What collaboration is there, and at what stage do you do it with the agencies like CSIS, CBSA and RCMP? Are all the applications referred to these agencies, or is it a portion of the applications if there are any concerns from your initial stage?

Can you also provide some details such as how many cases last year did you refer to them?

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Mr. Chair, absolutely all temporary resident applicants to Canada—that includes visitors, those coming on student permits and work permits—are screened by IRCC in that initial stage for security and for other reasons. We will look at the applications. The officers have to be fully convinced that the individual is not inadmissible to Canada. There may be some back and forth with the individual collecting further information.

As was mentioned earlier, our officers can also interview the individual to collect the information. If there are any concerns that remain outstanding or if there are risk indicators, our officers will then refer that for a more comprehensive security screening to the CBSA and to CSIS. When a recommendation is returned from the CBSA, our officer will take into consideration that recommendation.

We also are subject to the rules of procedural fairness. If an officer with a non-favourable recommendation from our security screening partners has further questions, they will provide a procedural fairness letter or some opportunity for the applicant to address those concerns in order to fully satisfy the officer that the individual is not inadmissible to Canada before rendering a final decision.

My colleagues at the CBSA or at CSIS may wish to talk more about the comprehensive security screening process.

● (1315)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Would you like to add something to that?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I would add that, in terms of when the file comes to us, as suggested, as part of our comprehensive security process, in addition to understanding who the applicant is, what their travel history and work history are, who they are and whether their story makes sense, we review their name against all of our internal intelligence and enforcement databases.

Thinking of some previous questions, we also have information sharing agreements with our Five Eyes partners and are able to make requests for information to partners around the world in order to gather information about people. For some of the systems—and I can't talk about the specific systems we have, again, because we don't want to give those adversaries information about what we do and how we do it—I can assure members of the committee that we do have access to information from international partners.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: My next question is in regard to citizenship. Can you explain to this committee more about the process of revocation and the thresholds that must be met in cases where you have to revoke citizenship from someone?

Ms. Pemi Gill (Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): There are, under the Citizenship Act, provisions that allow for the revocation of someone who has been granted citizenship. Under it, the minister of IRCC may seek a declaration from the Federal Court that the person obtained citizenship “by false representation or fraud or by knowingly concealing material circumstances.”

The process for this is such that the IRCC does an initial assessment as to whether or not there is sufficient evidence and information to proceed with starting the revocation process. The client, the individual, is then notified that there is some information and that we are assessing it. They're given 30 days, from a procedural fairness perspective, to provide any additional information they'd like to, at which time the IRCC, on behalf of the minister, advises the client that we are pursuing and moving forward with a revocation procedure. Depending on the circumstances and which of the three areas or combination of them applies—false representation, fraud or knowingly concealing material circumstances—we then proceed with a submission to the Federal Court, which would be the decision-maker for the revocation, although the client always has the choice to request that the minister of IRCC be the decision-maker.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Ms. Zafar, who represents the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

We know that the son arrived here from the United States. There is no mention of where the father came from. We are told that he entered Canada on February 5, 2018, at Lester B. Pearson Airport.

Do you know where the father came from?

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: I thank the member for his question.

[English]

At this time, due to the ongoing criminal proceedings, I am unable to provide any further details on the father.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Okay.

Can any of the other witnesses tell me where the father came from?

No one knows.

I'll go back to the son then, Ms. Zafar. I think—

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen has a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Just to clarify, it was said that no one knows, but can we understand if no one knows or if no one can provide the information? I think that's very important.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: It's impossible to tell.

That said, I don't want to waste my speaking time. Did you stop the timer, Mr. Chair?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, I've stopped your time.

Could we just clarify that question?

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: I thank the member for the clarification. It is correct to say, as Ms. Zafar mentioned, that we are unable to comment on that detail due to the ongoing proceedings.

The Chair: Very well. Thank you.

[Translation]

Please continue, Mr. Fortin.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll continue with Ms. Zafar.

In the son's case, the chronology of events shows that he arrived from the United States. He was born in Egypt and has Egyptian citizenship, but he arrived from the United States. He entered Canada and sought asylum in February 2020.

Why wasn't he returned to the United States under the safe third country agreement?

● (1320)

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: Thank you for the question.

[English]

Because he arrived at a port of entry—which are managed by CBSA—he made an inland claim. I can't speak about his details in particular, but if somebody arrives at a land port of entry and makes an inland immigration or refugee claim, we assess them against the safe third country agreement, the STCA. There are a number of exemptions that apply to the STCA, including if you have an anchor family member here, so if somebody—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: So what exception was applied in the son's case? Theoretically, he should have been sent back to the United States.

[English]

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I can't talk about this specific case. What I can say is that if you have family members in the country, that is one of the exemptions at play with the STCA.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Does this exception apply even if the family member is a terrorist?

[English]

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: The STCA says that if you have an anchor, for example, if you have a family member who's in the country, you're exempt from the STCA.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Yes, but, four times, that person—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin. I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: We have Mr. MacGregor, please, for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

This committee has been told several times today that when actionable intelligence became available, all the Canadian security agencies took action. We can see from the timeline that it was in June 2024 when CSIS became aware of the potential national security threat posed by the subject, who is an Egyptian national.

There have been a number of questions today about how we gather intelligence, how it's acted upon and how it's shared, and I know specifics can't be shared. When it comes to an organization like ISIS, whose main theatre of operations is in parts of the Middle East, which have for at least a decade or more suffered through war and all kinds of strife, I'm wondering if CSIS could just inform the committee and maybe Canadians, generally, what the challenges are in gathering intelligence in areas like that.

What are the kinds of challenges, whether it's from human-sourced intelligence or open source intelligence, when you are operating in a theatre that has experienced war for so long and that may have crumbling infrastructure and may have little to no government records? Can you talk a little about the challenges of what it's like to operate in that kind of an environment?

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I would say to the honourable member, I'm unable to go into the details of our specific operational activities either in Canada or abroad. What I can tell you is that the member is correct in that conflicts that are occurring abroad can have the potential to cross into our borders. That can be from a range of threats, whether it be ideologically motivated, politically motivated or religiously motivated.

I would again like to reassure the committee that, as stated earlier in our testimony, CSIS and our partner national security agencies have the resources and the capabilities to address all threats as soon as we become aware of them, regardless of their provenance.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

We'll go now to Mr. Motz for five minutes.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to go back to my previous line of questioning about the honesty, or lack thereof, of the senior suspect in this particular conversation. Do you believe it's likely, in this case, that he misrepresented himself on the files, and do you believe that he lied?

I'll ask both Mr. McCrorie and Ms. Zafar.

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Mr. Chair, due to the ongoing criminal proceedings, I cannot provide any further details on—

Mr. Glen Motz: That's not a question about the ongoing investigation. This is a question about his immigration status and how he got here. Obviously, he came in under false pretense. If what you're telling Canadians is that the systems that you have in place work and that they work fine, then you would have been able to identify some affiliation somewhere, and because you didn't, that would give me rise to believe that either the checks weren't done appropriately or properly, or that somebody misrepresented themselves, which is not new to either one of you and your departments. I'm just wondering if that's the case.

Mr. McCrorie, I would ask you that same question.

• (1325)

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: Mr. Chair, I'm under the same restrictions in terms of what I can comment about in these particular cases.

Mr. Glen Motz: We can draw conclusions based on what both of you can and can't say, and I appreciate that.

Ms. Zafar, you mentioned something, and I think, Mr. McCrorie, you did the same thing. You followed the requirements of the legislation for admissibility, admittance, etc.

Do you not think that Canadians have a right to believe and a right to expect that we must always err on the side of caution and that we must always be on the side of national security and public safety when we allow individuals in that we may not have all the answers about?

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Mr. Chair, our officers make every effort to to satisfy themselves that an individual is not inadmissible to Canada. Working with our partners, they will do a thorough review, based on the information that is available to them and to our partners at the time, to make that determination.

My colleague from the CBSA might have something that he wants to add.

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: Again, I would just echo the point that our staff undertake these thorough reviews. The criticism we get as an agency is not that we're not doing thorough reviews. Typically, the criticism is that we're taking too long, because we take the time necessary to do the most thorough review we can based on the best available information at any moment in time. It's based on that information that we provide a recommendation to our colleagues in IRCC.

Mr. Glen Motz: As you look at the current structure we have in place now to ensure that individuals do not enter the country in the manner in which this individual did, are there legislative things that we need to look at that need to be fixed? Is there some ideology or some position of this current government on lax immigration standards that impacts this, in your opinion?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: Mr. Chair, again, one of the reasons we are doing this review is to understand what happened in this particular case. Are there systemic issues? What solutions are required? It may be procedural fixes on our part. It may be allocation of resources. It may be, as I've suggested for CBSA, that we need to do more on the dark web. It may be legislative or regulatory changes.

It's premature for me to speculate as to what they are, but that's certainly on our agenda in terms of what we need to look at.

Mr. Glen Motz: Ms. Lantsman asked you a question earlier to which I believe you answered affirmatively. I'm sure every witness today understands what Canadians expect. You understand their concern, I take it. Is that a yes?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: Yes.

Mr. Glen Motz: It's obvious, then, that they need answers, and not just for this committee's sake but for the sake of our national security and public safety moving forward. If one individual got in this way, I'll guarantee you that there are others here already. We already know that, based on the 700 IRGC individuals who are already in this country. How they got here begs another question. How did we let in those people who already have affiliations to an organization that's a terrorist organization?

When you do this deep dive as to where the gaps were, I think you need to go beyond this case and look at all cases for both immigration and the CBSA on how we can fix this broken system, because it is broken.

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: In fact, what we want to do, to your point, is that we want to make sure that we do the level of analysis and the level of thinking about this that Canadians expect of us. I

don't want to give you an off-the-cuff answer in terms of what we need to do. We want to make sure we're looking at the system as a whole and not just looking at these two cases. As the minister and Mr. Gallivan indicated, we'll be looking at a representative sample of all the cases that we've processed over a period of time to understand if there are any gaps there and, again, what improvements, if any, we need to make.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

We'll go now to Ms. Damoff for five minutes, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I have a question with regard to the dark web. Several times today, the Conservative Party has talked about videos being readily available and publicly available. I recognize that you can't talk about information in this case, but let me quote from some research that's been done:

Key characteristics of the Darkweb include the inability to search or list them through legal platforms, passwords to gain entry when accessible, and hidden identities of users, network traffic, IP addresses, and data exchanged through them. While Darkweb was originally built for military communication and advocating freedom of speech, it has also provided technology enablement and power to adversaries to masquerade heinous activities.

I'm not being flippant here at all, but perhaps, Ms. Lloyd, this could be directed to you. How do you access the dark web?

● (1330)

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I'm not able to answer that question without revealing the details of our operational tradecraft methodologies and capabilities.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. As an individual, is it easy for me to google "darkweb.com" and be able to access information that's on there?

Again, I'm not trying to be flippant. It has been portrayed here today as being easy to access. You can't tell us how to access it, because it's in the national security interest not to share that information. Is it easy for me to access the dark web?

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I think what I can say is that we've spoken a bit this morning about the complexities of living in a digital age. That would be reflected in some of the conversation we've had today about the challenges of being able to access information at the time that information is perhaps needed with regard to decisions that have to be made or files that need to be reviewed.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

As for the other question I had, it was alleged that Canada didn't do as well as other countries in terms of security checks on these individuals. However, the minister, when he appeared, talked about an exchange he had with the U.K. and how grateful the U.K. was for the information that was provided by Canada.

I think it would be fair to say that the sharing of information allows us to broaden the net to make Canada safer, so it's not necessarily that one country is doing better than another. It's that we have a network, particularly the Five Eyes but other networks as well, where we can share information. It's not that Canada is doing a bad job; it's that we have a network to make Canada safer.

Perhaps I'll direct that to the CBSA.

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: A key element of our security screening program is our ability to gather data. First and foremost, we look at our own data sources, but we also rely on partners both domestically and internationally, especially in the Five Eyes but not exclusively. It is a two-way street. We share information with them and they share information with us, and there's a great deal of utility in that in terms of how we do our work.

Ms. Pam Damoff: That sharing is ongoing too. It's happening all the time among the security agencies. Is that correct?

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: That is correct.

Ms. Pam Damoff: It was just said that our system is broken. I would argue that it's not broken and that what happened in this particular case shows that it's not broken. The work that all of your agencies do—and I commend all of you—actually worked, and Canadians are safer because of that.

It's important not to be fearmongering here and making Canadians start to fear their neighbours, which is the sense that I'm getting from the questions. It's important that Canadians know that the agencies we entrust with our national security are actually doing the work that we entrust them with and are doing it well and keeping us safe.

Chair, I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

That wraps up round two. I'm going to suggest to the committee that we take a five-minute break and start again after the break with another round one. Is the committee okay with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Let's make it five minutes, not 10 or 15.

We are suspended.

● (1330) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1340)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

We will start a new round of questions, with a six-minute round, with Mr. Brock.

You have six minutes, please.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to start with refuting what I believe to be a false narrative at this committee. I've listened very carefully to my Liberal colleagues. I've listened to some of the commentary from these witnesses. I guess to a Canadian observer who is not entirely familiar with the circumstances that surrounded the creation of this particular meeting, one would think that all is well in Canada and that everything is working as it's intended to work: that CSIS is working appropriately; that the CBSA is working appropriately; that law enforcement's working appropriately; and that the government is doing its job. That can't be further from the truth.

The number one responsibility of Justin Trudeau and his government and the number one responsibility of the CBSA and of CSIS is to keep Canadians safe, not some of the time, but all of the time. What has happened here is that we were within a hair's breadth—minutes, hours or potentially days away—of a mass casualty event on the Toronto Jewish community.

Clearly, this wasn't hatched overnight by the two accused. They were probably planning for days, weeks or months, all under the radar of CSIS, all under the radar of immigration, all under the radar of CBSA and all under the radar of our law enforcement. Therefore, I have one phrase to say to this committee and to Canadians: Thank God for France. Thank God for French intelligence, which gave CSIS the tip. This wasn't a national in France who was planning something against Canadians. This was an individual whom we granted Canadian citizenship to and who completely fell under the radar map until a tip went to CSIS, and then CSIS got the RCMP involved, and we stopped what could have been a significant mass casualty event.

I'm sorry to all the witnesses. You failed in your responsibilities to keep us safe. You didn't do your jobs. But for the grace of God and good French intelligence, they are behind bars, where they should be.

I listened very carefully to Mr. McCrorie's words. We have a “robust” and “thorough” system. Our reviews of individuals coming into our country take time. You talked about what Canadians expect. Well, sir, I can tell you that I have reports from news media that strongly suggest that the two accused in custody is by no means a one-off.

In fact, I'm going to read from this report. This is from the National Post a few weeks ago: American authorities “recently announced the apprehension of 233 terrorist suspects seeking entry from Canada into the United States.”

Were you aware of that, CSIS?

● (1345)

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: I'm sorry. I apologize. I'm not familiar with the direct reference that you may be alleging to in the media.

Mr. Larry Brock: How about Mr. McCrorie? Was CBSA aware of this?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: Again, like my colleague, I'm not aware of the direct reference that you're speaking—

Mr. Larry Brock: There were 233 would-be terrorists walking the streets of Canada, all under the radar map of this Prime Minister, this government, of our professional public service and of our security agency, who wanted to get into the United States and wreak havoc in that country, and they were walking freely.

I support my friend and colleague, Mr. Motz's, assessment. We do have a broken system. I hope to dear God, for the sake of the safety of Canadians, that you identify very quickly and robustly where the breakdown happened, and fire the individuals who didn't do their jobs.

Ms. Damoff talked about how difficult it is to access the dark web. Do you know what? Canadians aren't expecting Ms. Damoff to protect us. We're expecting that of CSIS, law enforcement and the government, who have access to the dark web. This should have been on your radar map, and you failed us.

There again, but for the grace of God and good intelligence from France....

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brock.

Does anyone wish to respond?

Go ahead.

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I would like to repeat my earlier testimony. I would refute the premise that this was a failure in that the good work of CSIS and our law enforcement partners between the time when CSIS received the information in June of 2024 and the time of the arrests on July 28, and the fact that these individuals are in custody, is testimony to the good work and professionalism of those officers in all of our agencies.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go now to Mr. Gerretsen for six minutes, please.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm surprised that Mr. Brock is so fond of France, considering the fact that he recently went there and got immediately called back to Canada by his boss after he took two plane tickets, I think, to finally make it there.

Nonetheless, I do want to ensure that the witnesses today know that not everybody around this table, or indeed Canadians, feels the same way that Mr. Brock does. What you just saw there was his stunt for social media, which he will use later and most likely to raise money for the Conservative Party of Canada. It was nothing more than that.

All of the focus today seems to have been on the fact that individuals entered into Canada who had a plan all along. As to whether or not that's true, we will let the courts determine it and deal with it appropriately. My question is this: Is it not true that for a lot of people who become radicalized, it happens to them after they're already here? You don't have to be somebody who is radicalized and enters Canada. You can actually already be in Canada or a Canadian citizen to become radicalized. Is that true?

• (1350)

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, as I believe we mentioned earlier this morning, the work of security services and the national security agency is continuous. Again, as I mentioned earlier, that is with regard to threats that come from without Canada and from within.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: So it's also from within Canada. That answers my question. It wasn't actually that long ago, I believe in 2019, that in Kingston a very similar circumstance to exactly what we're discussing here today occurred. An individual had become radicalized and had set up a plan to commit a terrorist act. As a result of another informant, who happened to be an FBI informant, that plot did not occur. The house that this individual had been supposedly bringing materials to in order to prepare a bomb was located three blocks from the elementary school that I went to when I was a child.

I want to thank you for the incredible work you do to keep us safe. We have been sitting here subject to especially that last rant by Mr. Brock, as though you are failures. You are not failures. You are keeping Canadians safe. In terms of what I had to listen to there moments ago, knowing what you know, and knowing how you know the processes and how they work, for you to have just sat there and taken what he said to you shows an incredible amount of discipline, at least from the position that I'm sitting in. You should all be personally commended for being able to do that.

Notwithstanding that, Mr. Brock tried to imply that there were many Canadians or people from Canada who the U.S. had turned away for people that he was identifying as terrorists.

Can you tell us how many people the CBSA turns away in a given year from entering into Canada?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: Mr. Chair, as I noted previously, there are probably two fundamental moments in which we are turning people away. One is prior to embarkation, where our national targeting centre is reviewing the—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No, I understand. I have a limited amount of time. How many people? I know the answer, if you don't.

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: There were 7,500 “no boards” in 2023, and then over 37,000 were allowed to leave—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Over 37,000 people. That would be just over 100 a day the CBSA is turning away for people entering into Canada.

Mr. Brock paints a very different picture. He paints a picture as though the border from Canada going into the United States is open and free for everyone to travel every way. You folks and the agencies and the departments that you represent do an incredible job if you're turning away 38,000 people within the last year from entering.

Notwithstanding the hyped-up rhetoric and what you've been subjected to listening to, I just want to conclude by thanking you for the incredible work that you do. We never want to see situations like this arise. We never want to allow people who have plans or who would like to act in a manner that has been described as happening to enter into this country. However, at least when somebody does slip through, you're still there because, as you said, you have multiple checks and balances and multiple layers in place to protect Canadians. I'm not only seeing it here. I saw it in my hometown where this happened in 2019. Because of the relationships you have with other countries, because of the collaboration you have with other countries, despite the politics that goes on in this room, we are safer, and I want to thank you for that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

Does anyone wish to respond?

[Translation]

It appears not.

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to go back to Mr. Gerretsen's last sentence. He said that, thanks to your good work, we are safer than we would be if you weren't on the job, and I'm inclined to agree. Where our opinions differ, however, is that I don't think the existing level of security inside Canada's borders is adequate. We need to do better.

I may be wrong. I'm no expert on immigration or national security, but the situation before us today, which is also the focus of our discussions over the next five meetings, seems very worrisome to me. The fact that we can't get answers, even though I fully understand the need for secrecy surrounding the judicial process, is no reassurance to the public. Furthermore, and I say this with all due respect, the answers that we've received so far offer no reassurance to Quebecers or Canadians either.

Both individuals, I mean the father and son, were arrested and are now incarcerated. I don't know the conditions of their incarceration. Is there any way to find out whether they are segregated or living alongside other criminals inside a penitentiary? Can anyone answer that question?

• (1355)

[English]

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Mr. Chair, we don't have the expertise as witnesses here to be able to respond to that question.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: So they could be sharing a cell or in contact with other criminals or terrorists. That worries me. I don't know if it would be possible, maybe at a later meeting, to get an answer to that question, I mean, what was done with the two individuals arrested. I think that's important to know.

Are other family members of these individuals, the father and son, here in Canada? Have other members of their family been subject to legal proceedings or checks? Can anyone answer that question?

[English]

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Mr. Chair, due to the ongoing criminal proceedings, we can't provide any more details around this case.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: It makes you wonder why the Liberals suggested these meetings if they knew from the start that we wouldn't be able to get answers to important questions.

I don't mind if we don't discuss the case of these two individuals and look at the process more generally, but even then, it all seems a little vague. You tell us that the process is perfect, it works great, and you don't need more staff or a bigger budget. Everything is perfect, everything is fine and nothing is broken. However, we aren't living in the land of make believe; there are terrorists walking our streets.

Mr. Brock mentioned that 233 alleged terrorists tried to enter the United States. I had some questions about that. I may have missed some information. For example, I don't know the time period involved. Obviously, those individuals were denied entry, at least, I would imagine so. But I haven't received an answer on that.

Do you have any answers on that, at least? I don't think it relates to the two individuals arrested.

[English]

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: I'm unfamiliar with the specific reference the member made. However, I can speak to the fact that we as the IR-CC, with our partners at the CBSA, work very closely with our partners in the U.S. In fact, we meet every two weeks, biweekly, with them at senior levels to look at issues related to migration and border security at our shared border.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Ms. Zafar, as we discussed earlier, when a person arrives at the Canadian border from a safe third country, in this case, the United States, the safe third country agreement requires that they be turned back. They don't even set foot on Canadian territory. Am I wrong?

What exceptions are there for allowing someone coming from a safe country to enter?

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: I thank the member for his question.

[English]

With regard to the safe third country agreement, as my colleague mentioned, the agreement does have some limited exceptions through which an individual, if they were to arrive in the U.S. first and then try to claim asylum in Canada, would be permitted to claim asylum in Canada.

In the case of a family exemption, as my colleague from the CBSA discussed earlier, if an individual who arrives first in the U.S. and then comes to Canada to claim asylum has a family member in Canada who is a citizen, a permanent resident or a convention refugee, or who in some cases has a pending refugee claim, they are permitted to claim asylum in Canada. My understanding is that this allows families to be kept together when they're seeking protection.

With regard to any further exemptions in the STCA, it's not my area of expertise.

• (1400)

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: If I understand correctly, Ms. Zafar, in the case that interests us, the son apparently entered Canada because the father was already here. However, when it comes to letting an individual from a safe third country into Canada based on having a family member in Canada, is no due diligence done again to investigate the situation of the family member in question? Is no check made to determine whether it's someone who committed acts of terrorism or violence abroad, as in the case here?

[English]

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: A chronology was provided to the committee earlier today, and I can't speak to any further details about the cases. However, the son did come to Canada, according to the chronology, at the Fort Erie land border on February 17, 2020. If we look at the chronology of the father, in 2020, the father was already a convention refugee in Canada.

With regard to security screening in general, all in-Canada asylum claims—this would be considered an in-Canada asylum claim because it was made at the border—are subject to 100% comprehensive security screening. As to what that comprehensive security screening comprises, I can turn to my colleague at the CBSA for further details.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Ms. Zafar.

[English]

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: One of the other documents that were shared with committee members has, I think, eight steps that outline the kind of security screening we go through [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] from a visa application point of view. In the case of asylum applicants, they get 100% comprehensive security screening, and that is done by both CBSA and CSIS. I'll talk a bit about what CBSA does.

When we do a comprehensive security screening, we're trying to understand who the person is, their travel history and where they're coming from. We don't look at every file exactly the same way. We have experts based on geography, which mirrors what our colleagues in other agencies do, and they have a good understanding of where somebody is coming from, what we need to look for and where to look for it. We do open source searches on the net. We also run names against aliases and run any other identifying information we may have against our own internal intelligence and enforcement databases. Based on what we find there, we may go further and seek information from domestic security partners and, if need be, international security partners. In some instances, that's a fairly

rapid process. In other instances, we need to do a request for information, which takes some more time, but we do take the time to do it.

We do a very thorough review. We're always looking to either negate concerns that might be identified or confirm them. If we reach the "reasonable grounds to believe" threshold, we'll provide a recommendation to our colleagues at IRCC—sorry, this is asylum, so it would go to the Immigration and Refugee Board for a decision. Our colleagues at CSIS will do a similar process.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

We'll go now to Mr. MacGregor for six minutes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We've covered a lot of ground in today's meetings, and I don't think there are many questions left to be asked that haven't already been covered extensively by several members from different parties, but I will say this. I suppose that by virtue of the fact that we had a successful arrest and had good coordination among our policing services, both local and RCMP, and the fact that these individuals are now behind bars and court processes are ongoing, those facts can be chalked up to success.

I do want to echo colleagues in thanking the members of the CBSA, of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, of the service and of the RCMP. Many of your members work in communities like mine. I've been at this committee long enough to sincerely appreciate the efforts that your members put into their jobs every single day. I know it can be a thankless task, and I know at times that they are very much the unsung heroes. Many times the public isn't even aware that you are doing this work, but I know enough to know that your members are working hard every day on our behalf. Hopefully, on the committee's behalf, I'd like to thank them.

Here's the little asterisk, though, in my statement. It is of concern that this plot was in the advanced stages that it was and that these two suspects were in Canada in the first place. I hope that all of our witnesses can appreciate today that Canadians are taking this seriously, and this committee is taking this seriously. I sincerely hope that you will conduct your internal investigations with haste and with thoroughness because we absolutely do want to make sure that a situation like this never occurs again.

I sincerely look forward to when we return in September because we will all be submitting the names of further witnesses to continue the study. Hopefully, this committee will be able to produce a good report and recommendations not only on what the executive branch should be doing, but also on policy tools, changes needed or changes to the legislation and whatnot.

Thanks again to the witnesses for being here today and to all the members of their respective agencies for the work that they do.

• (1405)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacGregor.

I'll also offer you the opportunity to respond, if you wish.

Go ahead, Mr. McCrorie.

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: Mr. Chair, I'd just like to assure the member that we do take this seriously.

In terms of the review that we've talked about, it will be a thorough review. The minister has been very clear that he wants it as soon as possible. Again, if there are changes required, we'll make those changes.

The Chair: Thank you.

That wraps up round one of this second hour.

I think we can go into an abbreviated round two, which would probably end with Mr. MacGregor.

If that's okay, we'll carry on with Mr. Caputo for five minutes, please.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair

Thank you again, everybody, for being here. This is my first round with this group here.

Ms. Lloyd, thank you so much for being here the whole day. It's probably getting a bit tiring at this point. We do thank you for that.

We are thankful as well about the fact that what we saw here, what's been widely reported and what's culminated in criminal charges.... We're obviously very happy that our security and law enforcement personnel foiled what would have been a catastrophic act. We're very thankful for that.

At the same time, I echo what my colleague Monsieur Fortin said. I wrote down that we got the answers, but the answers don't feel all that reassuring. To look at this, I'm trying to take off my hat as a lawyer or even as a parliamentarian. I try to look through the lens of my father, for instance, so I'm looking at this through the lens of the ordinary Canadian. For instance, with you, Mr. McCrorie, when you started out, you said, "I'm not sure there were any failures." You talked about the robust process. With all due respect, I'm not sure that satisfies the average Canadian. I'm not sure that satisfies my father, so I'm going to go through each of you.

Ms. Lloyd, can you see how, given what we know.... This is what we know. This person came into Canada in 2017. They were granted a permanent residency and were granted citizenship in 2024, despite there being evidence online of acts, active acts, with ISIS. Can you see how the average Canadian is not comforted by this notion of reassurance?

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I think the way I will response to the honourable member's question is this. I think Canadians in fact should be very reassured by the comments that I and my colleagues have made here today. We take our security screening responsibilities very seriously. We have intelligence professionals and officers at each of our three agencies who do their work on a daily basis with rigour and professionalism. They made the best decisions available to them on the information that was available to them at

that time as it relates to the security screening responsibilities they had on this and any file.

Most importantly—

Mr. Frank Caputo: I'll just stop you there, because I do want to ask the rest. I'm not trying to cut you off. We do have limited time.

I'll turn to you, Ms. Gill.

I'm not asking whether Canadians should be reassured, based on what you said. What I'm asking is this: Can you understand how Canadians have serious questions here? Perhaps Canadians are justified in not seeing this as a situation where there were no failures. Can you see how the average Canadian would see that?

• (1410)

Ms. Pemi Gill: I'll defer this question to my colleague Madam Zafar. Thank you.

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Mr. Chair, we came to the committee today and disclosed documents. We did so with the effort and intention of being able to meet the committee's objectives of understanding the immigration security screening process and also maintaining the confidence of Canadians in the immigration security screening systems. I understand that there are still outstanding questions. However, due to the ongoing criminal proceedings and other protections that we have outlined in the chronology, we aren't able to go into further detail.

Mr. Frank Caputo: I'm not asking about that. I'm saying that somebody came here in 2017 and they were this close to committing a terrorist act.

Will nobody on the panel acknowledge that Canadians are justified in being afraid, that Canadians can still have questions and that perhaps this isn't a situation where there were no failures? Is there anybody on the panel who will acknowledge that?

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Mr. Chair, the system we have in place is an ecosystem. The statement was made earlier that there is no one single point on which we rely for the safety and security of Canada. It starts with the initial touchpoint that we as IRCC have with an applicant. We have the "before Canada" piece. We've talked about CBSA and their ability to then use any additional information before an individual boards an aircraft, and the point of entry, if there's additional information that has been received where CBSA would be able to identify those threats. Then we have the domestic network as well.

Mr. Frank Caputo: I understand the processes. You've been through that very clearly. That's not what I'm asking about. For the last four minutes, I've been asking about how the average Canadian should see this, and the lens through which they should be looking at it, and whether the average Canadian...or whether you can see. With all due respect, you're here with the security apparatus—

The Chair: Mr. Caputo—

Mr. Frank Caputo: —just one moment, please—and the average Canadian is on the ground. I'm not sure they should be satisfied with this.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Caputo.

Do you have any last response? No. Okay.

We go now to Mr. MacDonald for five minutes.

Mr. Heath MacDonald (Malpeque, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I want to echo some of the sentiments of my colleagues in regard to the job that the witnesses do each and every day to keep Canadians safe. There's not a job out there that we can't improve that any of us do at any point in time in our lives. We'll continue to strive for excellence. This is part of the process.

Ms. Gates-Flaherty, can you talk a little bit about the greater Toronto area integrated national security enforcement team that actually made the arrest? Can you give us an overview of that team?

Ms. Jennifer Gates-Flaherty (Director General, Canadian Criminal Real Time Identification Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Mr. Chair, I'm here in my capacity as the director general of Canadian criminal real time identification services. I don't have in-depth information about those teams, but I certainly could come back to the committee in writing with information about the work of those groups.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Can anyone else on the panel speak about the greater Toronto area integrated national security enforcement team? No. Okay. I'll move on.

I just want to be clear on something else as well. This is on the trilateral agreements with each department. On the process of the trilateral, CSIS and CBSA provide security advice to IRCC. Is that correct?

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: That is correct.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: However, CSIS and CBSA do not make decisions on applications. Is that correct as well?

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: That's correct.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: How does IRCC consider advice from CSIS and CBSA, then, when the process is completed to that point?

• (1415)

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Mr. Chair, when a comprehensive security screening is concluded, CBSA will provide a recommendation as well as an assessment and information for the IRCC officer to consider. That recommendation can come back as favourable, at which point it indicates to the officer that there are no further concerns from a security screening perspective. It could come back as non-favourable, which indicates that there are concerns, or it could come back as inconclusive, which could indicate to the officer that more information is required for a recommendation.

Our officers will then take that into consideration. There are a number of things they can do with, for instance, a non-favourable recommendation. We are subject to and we do abide by the rules of procedural fairness, as I mentioned earlier. That means if we have adverse information on an applicant, then the officer will provide the opportunity for that applicant to address that adverse information. The information that's received, whether it's through an interview or in writing, is then assessed again by the officer before making a final decision. In that final decision, if it is an approval, the visa will be issued. If it is a refusal, after having given the applicant the opportunity for procedural fairness, the decision-maker, the of-

ficer, will put down all of their findings in their decision in writing to indicate to the applicant the refusal.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you.

Ms. Zafar, on this process, would the final say on the refugee claimant be with the RPD? Who has the final say?

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: It would be the refugee protection division of the Immigration and Refugee Board.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Okay. Thank you.

I have a quick question, and I know it was brought up earlier, on facial recognition. Are there any other countries in the world actually using facial recognition for security intelligence? Does anybody have any idea?

Ms. Vanessa Lloyd: Mr. Chair, I would decline to comment on the capabilities and the methodologies used by other countries, and I would remind the committee that other countries may do so under other pieces of legislation or authorities that may or may not apply in the Canadian context.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Thank you, Ms. Lloyd.

On a further note, just on the whole process of our trilateral, is this something that's being used very similarly in other countries, or can we compare?

Ms. Aiesha Zafar: Mr. Chair, I'm not familiar with the methodologies that other countries use for immigration screening at this time.

Mr. Heath MacDonald: Okay.

Thank you, Chair. That's all for me.

Thank you, witnesses.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

[Translation]

Mr. Fortin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McCrorie, the targets keep going up. We received 55,000 asylum claims in 2018, 64,000 in 2019, 24,000 in 2020, 25,000 in 2021 and nearly 92,000 in 2022. Canada's immigration targets are 485,000 permanent residents in 2024 and 500,000 in 2025 and 2026. More and more applications are being made by people who want to come to Canada and, so, more and more people are entering the country.

Don't you think that the resources needed to properly assess these applications should increase proportionately?

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I thank the member for his question.

[English]

From fiscal years 2022-23 to 2023-24—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Let's forget the numbers, Mr. McCrorie. I only have a minute left.

Are more resources needed?

[English]

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: What I'd say is that more resources would allow us to clear more files. We take the time necessary to do thorough research in every file we have, so what you're seeing is an increase in our inventory and issues around our timeliness.

The issue is that we're sacrificing our efficiency for our effectiveness. We're making sure that we do a good job on the files that we review. The time and energy it takes us to do that is having an impact on the number of files we can process at any given time, so you are seeing our inventory go up.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Have you made any requests to the Canadian government for an increase in resources, to ensure quicker action and more information gathering on asylum seekers, immigration applicants and others?

• (1420)

[English]

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: We co-operate with our colleagues in agencies and departments.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I'm not asking whether you're collaborating with your colleagues. I want to know whether you've requested for more resources.

[English]

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: I was going to say that yes, we work through our colleagues at, for example, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada as they look at immigration levels. We collaborate with them on what resources may be required.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Have you received any budget increases in the last two years? If so, how much?

M. Aaron McCrorie: I'm sorry.

[English]

I'm not sure that I understood the question, but what I was trying to say is that in the last two fiscal years, we did see our budget in this particular area go up by about 15%. The exact—

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Have you hired more people to do research?

[English]

Mr. Aaron McCrorie: We use that money to either hire new employees or pay overtime to the employees we have, or we sometimes bring in surge capacity from other parts of the agency to assist with the work.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: My time is up.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fortin.

[English]

Mr. MacGregor, you have the hammer with two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I don't have any further questions for the witnesses, so I'm okay. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

M. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: I can take that two minutes and a half, Mr. Chair.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I think in fairness we'll call it a day.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for their fortitude in bearing with us for all these many hours and for all their great answers. We look forward to talking with you again as we go forward. I'm sure we will have the opportunity to do so.

Committee members, I thank all of you for your diligence and hard work as well. We are all engaged in this very important study.

Thank you all. We are now adjourned.

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