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Opening Statement

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**United States Senate Committee on Homeland
Security and Governmental Affairs**

Hearing on

“Canada’s Fast-Track Refugee Plan: Unanswered Questions and
Implications for U.S. National Security”

SD-342 Dirksen Senate Office Building
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Wednesday, 3 February 2016

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Mr Chairman, Honourable Senators,

My name is David Harris. I am a Canadian lawyer and Director of the International Intelligence Program, *INS/IGNIS* Strategic Research Inc., with decades of experience in national-security affairs. My remit is to address security matters involving Canada’s Syrian-refugee influx and its implications for the United States and Canada.

The new Canadian government took office committed to fast-tracking 25,000 Syrian refugees into Canada, between early November 2015 and the end of that year. Complications led the government to adjust the intake goals, to 10,000 before the end of 2015 and another 15,000, prior to 1 March 2016. By last week, about 15,000 had entered Canada.¹ Recent reports indicate that Canada might raise its target-level and take in 50,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2016.

SECURITY

Given the threat-picture in Syria and the scale of intake, security considerations require thoughtful attention.

First, recall that the US population exceeds by nine times Canada’s 35-million population. Therefore, 25,000 thousand refugees in Canada would be the equivalent of 225,000 refugees in the US. All this, by 1 March.

Note: Content of sources cited in this presentation, or available through associated links, does not necessarily reflect the views of David B. Harris, *INS/IGNIS* Strategic Research Inc. or affiliated individuals or organizations.

¹ Government of Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “#WelcomeRefugees: Milestones and key figures,” <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/milestones.asp> (accessed 31 January 2016).

Britain, almost twice Canada's population, will take several years to admit 20,000. And FBI Director James Comey has highlighted screening difficulties America would face in admitting 10,000 Syrians. He warned that information-gaps could lead to inadequate screening.

If the extensive US intelligence system would have trouble security-screening 10,000 Syrians in a year, how likely is it that Canada, even with valuable US assistance, could adequately screen two-and-a-half times that number in four months?

Canada's special fast-track processing of 25,000 Syrians in four months, should be compared to the standard, non-fast-track process's 13-month timeline for government-assisted Syrian refugees and 27 months for the privately sponsored.² Note that this 25,000 figure is roughly equal to Canada's entire average annual refugee intake.

And remember the risk context.

Apart from accounts of a suspected ISIS aim of penetrating international refugee streams, a Lebanese cabinet minister warned in September 2015 that at least two percent of the 1.1 million Syrians in Lebanon's refugee camps – about 20,000 people – were connected to ISIS extremism.³ Canada takes refugees from Lebanese UNHCR camps.

More generally, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies polls determined that thirteen percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey – source countries for Canada's Syrian migrants – had positive views of IS.⁴ How many more might favour al Qaeda, al Nusra, Hezbollah, Assad militias and other non-IS threat-groups?

In some cases, evidence for screening might be available. Where, for example, a migrant's traces are on an IED in Syria or Iraq. Or, where time-consuming investigation connects dots.

² As of 27 January 2016, category selections on Canada's immigration department's website computer calculated "13 month(s)" for category selections "Refugee", "Government-assisted refugees" and "Syria". For categories "Refugees", "Privately sponsored refugees" and "Syria", the result was "27 month(s)". This meant that Syrian refugees subject to the established, standard process, rather than the fast-tracked one, faced a 27-month processing time if they were privately sponsored, and a 13-month processing time, if government-assisted. See Government of Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, "Check application processing times," Update of 27 January 2016, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/information/times/index.asp#> (accessed 29 January 2016).

³ Jack Blanchard, "Officials warn 20,000 ISIS jihadis 'have infiltrated Syrian refugee camps'," mirror.co.uk, 14 September 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/officials-warn-20000-isis-jihadis-6443516> (accessed 17 September 2015).

⁴ Ryan Mauro, "13 Percent of Syrian Refugees Support ISIS: Poll," clarionproject.org, 1 November 2015, http://www.clarionproject.org/analysis/13-percent-syrian-refugees-support-isis-poll?utm_source=dldr.it&utm_medium=twitter (accessed 3 November 2015).

But how readily can one gain access to a migrant's history, when that migrant is from a hostile or chaotic country? We cannot reliably confer with authorities of such jurisdictions – assuming authority exists – about many prospective refugees.

It is suggested in Canada that risk can be mitigated by barring unaccompanied adult Syrian males. But people lie about age, and many males and females below the age of majority are in ISIS ranks. And what effect would an adult-male embargo have on at-risk adult gay and other males targeted by terrorists?

Meanwhile, in favouring women with children, and men with families, do we know who is actually married to whom and whose children are accompanying whom? Are some ISIS fighters' families involved? Would they, in turn, sponsor relatives or ostensible relatives?

Are there safety issues for existing North American minorities, in a mass-movement from a homeland where the demonizing of Jews is national policy⁵ and life-threatening LGBT-persecution is a crisis?⁶ And what of the importing of people from a region where anti-black racism⁷ is an especially serious matter?

Beyond this, secret German government documents reportedly claim that refugee numbers should be multiplied by a "family factor" of between four and eight, to determine how many more migrants will ultimately be sponsored by current refugees.⁸ What could future, refugee-to-refugee "chain sponsorship" mean for Canadian stability and border security?

We must also ask what security resources are being diverted to the fast-track project, at a time when security is already burdened by an existing, annual immigration intake of almost 300,000, one of the biggest *per capita* figures in the world – at least double, *per capita*, American immigration.

In the past, there have been few newcomers to Canada crossing the US border for terrorist purposes. But, failed millennium bomber Ahmed Ressam, and Ghazi

⁵ United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Contemporary Global Anti-Semitism: A Report Provided to the United States Congress, state.gov, 13 March 2008, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/102406.htm#_Toc174854656 (31 January 2016); United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2010 Human Rights Report: Syria, state.gov, 8 April 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154473.htm> (accessed 30 January 2016).

⁶ Dan Littauer, "Syria's attack on gay people must end," theguardian.com, 7 July 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jul/07/homosexual-syria-persecution-lgbt-rights> (accessed 31 January 2016); Haley Bobseine, "Out and Down in Syria's Civil War," foreignpolicy.com, 4 December 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/12/04/out-and-down-in-syrias-civil-war/> (accessed 31 January 2016).

⁷ See, for example, Michael Curtis, "Racism in Arab Lands," gatestoneinstitute.org, 28 June 2016, <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3136/racism-arab-lands> (accessed 30 January 2016).

⁸ David Charter, The Times, "Angela Merkel hit by leaked forecast of 1.5 million migrants," theaustralian.com, 7 October 2015, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/angela-merkel-hit-by-leaked-forecast-of-15-million-migrants/news-story/f18b16b548247b42f634a8c0c8f6f197?> (accessed 27 January 2016).

Ibrahim Abu Mezer's 1997 arrest in his Brooklyn bomb factory, remind us of the cross-border risks. Concerns also exist that extremists could move north from the US,⁹ and about the chronic problem of migrants, with US-granted visas, from Syria and elsewhere, turning up in Canada and making refugee claims.

Greater transparency in Canada's Syrian-refugee security process would reassure Canadians and their allies. Fortunately, the current Canadian government's stated commitment to transparency gives hope that details of the Syrian refugee security process will be made public. Indeed, the Canadian government, through its ambassador in Washington, may have begun the process, with a recent statement. These security-related details should include security criteria used during Syrian migrants' security interviews; statistics regarding acceptance and rejection rates; and the record of time spent on the security investigation and screening, per refugee.

There is little doubt that those in Canada tasked with the job of screening refugees are doing the best they can, given the constraints, but the constraints are significant and we must be realistic about that fact.

Thank-you, Mr Chairman.

⁹ For an exploration of illicit border-crossing into and from the United States, including travel with various degrees of connection to terrorism, see Kathleen Smarick and Gary D. LaFree, "Border Crossings and Terrorist Attacks in the United States: Lessons for Protecting against Dangerous Entrants," Final Report to the Office of University Programs, Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (College Park MD: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism [START], 2012), http://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/files/publications/START_BorderCrossingsTerroristAttacks.pdf (accessed 31 January 2016), including Appendix element, "Descriptive Analyses of Data on Border Crossings by U.S. Terrorists," March 2012, http://www.start.umd.edu/sites/default/files/files/publications/START_BorderCrossingsTerroristAttacks_Appendices.pdf (accessed 31 January 2016). In this Appendix, see also Jaime Shoemaker, "Border Crossings and Terrorist Attacks in the United States: Case Studies," Report to Science and Technology Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (College Park, MD: START, 2012).