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Chair

The Honourable Maxime Bernier

Standing Committee on National Defence

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● (1115)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC)): Welcome everyone.

[*English*]

This is meeting number 23. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, February 23, 2009. we will continue our study on Arctic sovereignty.

I am pleased to have with us, by video conference, Professor Michael Byers, professor and Canada research chair at the University of British Columbia. We also have with us, by video conference, Greg Poelzer, professor at the University of Saskatoon. Thank you for being with us.

We will start with Professor Byers.

Professor Michael Byers (Professor and Canada Research Chair, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia): Thank you very much, Monsieur Bernier, for inviting me.

As you probably know, I am the leader of two ArcticNet projects on Arctic sovereignty, ArcticNet being a consortium of more than 100 scientists from 27 Canadian universities and five federal departments. I've also travelled extensively in the Arctic. I've sailed the Northwest Passage. And last summer I served as a consultant to the Senate committee on fisheries and oceans during its preparation of a report on Arctic shipping.

Now, the circumpolar Arctic is a place where distances are measured in thousands of kilometres. To give you a sense of perspective, it is roughly the same distance from Ottawa to Oxford, England, as it is from Ottawa to the North Pole. And indeed, Oxford, England, is considerably farther north than Ottawa is. So I am actually closer to the North Pole than the members are in Ottawa. For this reason, the most significant security threat exists along the southern fringes of the Arctic, in places such as Baffin Bay, the Beaufort Sea, and the Northwest Passage. And those threats involve non-state actors such as drug smugglers, illegal immigrants, and possibly terrorists.

Former U.S. ambassador Paul Cellucci has expressed concern that rogue states and terrorist groups might use the Northwest Passage to traffic in weapons of mass destruction. And he's right, for as unlikely as these risks might seem at first, it is difficult to imagine a captain in charge of this kind of cargo choosing the closely scrutinized Panama Canal over an ice-free, under-policed Northwest Passage. And it was because of threats of this kind that the United States, with active Canadian participation, led the creation of the proliferation and security initiative in 2003.

An ice-free Northwest Passage could also serve as an entry point into North America for drugs, guns, illegal immigrants, and perhaps even terrorists. Dozens of gravel airstrips are scattered along the waterway, a forgotten legacy of the Cold War and countless research and prospecting expeditions. It would be relatively easy to transfer passengers or cargo from an ocean-going vessel to a Twin Otter and fly them to another small airstrip farther south.

Each summer cruise ships put hundreds of undocumented foreign nationals on shore at communities such as Pond Inlet and Resolute Bay, which have scheduled air service but no immigration controls.

We already know that attempts at illegal immigration occur in the north. In September 2006 a Romanian man sailed from Greenland to Grise Fjord, intent on returning to Toronto after having been deported from there. He was arrested by the RCMP.

In the next month, two Turkish sailors jumped ship at Churchill, Manitoba, and bought train tickets to Winnipeg. They too were arrested by the RCMP.

In August 2007, five Norwegian adventurers, complete with horned Viking helmets and intent on challenging Canada's Northwest Passage claim, arrived in Cambridge Bay. The RCMP and the Canadian Coast Guard conducted a maritime interdiction of their yacht, and they were promptly deported.

These incidents are, I would suggest, actually quite reassuring. They demonstrate that the RCMP and the coast guard, if they have appropriate equipment and support, are capable of dealing with the non-state threat.

As for the Canadian Forces, their most important role in the Arctic is the provision of search and rescue. And for reasons beyond their control, they're not currently up to that task. Four old, slow Twin Otter aircraft based in Yellowknife constitute the entirety of the Canadian Forces' Arctic air fleet. Hercules aircraft based in Trenton, Ontario, are relied on for most of the serious search and rescues, but they take six hours to reach the Northwest Passage and, once there, can only drop search and rescue technicians rather than hoist anyone on board.

None of the Canadian Forces Cormorant search and rescue helicopters is based in the Arctic, not even in summer. As I understand, it's because it's considered inefficient to locate dedicated search and rescue assets in a region with such a sparse population and, consequentially, low statistical risk of accidents, but the Arctic is a large and inhospitable place, and when accidents occur, they tend to be serious.

Cruise ships pose a particular risk, given the large numbers of often elderly passengers on board. In November 2007 a Canadian-owned vessel, the MV*Explorer*, sank during an Antarctic voyage. Fortunately the sea was calm, two other cruise ships were close by, and all the crew and passengers were saved. The MV*Explorer* could just as easily have sunk in the Canadian Arctic in rough seas and with no help nearby.

Search and rescue is also needed for airplane accidents. More than 90,000 commercial flights take transpolar or high latitude routes over Canadian territory each year. Retired Colonel Pierre LeBlanc told me the prospect of a commercial airline accident was the one thing that kept him awake at night during his many years commanding Canadian Forces northern area.

For the moment, Cormorant helicopters, like the Hercules aircraft, are deployed on specific missions from southern locations, and this causes delays and drives up the costs. Let me give you an extreme example. In June 2006 the Canadian Forces deployed one Hercules aircraft from Trenton, two Hercules aircraft from Winnipeg, one Aurora aircraft from Greenwood, Nova Scotia, and one Cormorant helicopter from Gander, Newfoundland, all to rescue three Inuit hunters whose boat had run out of fuel near Hall Beach, Nunavut.

There is an easy short-term remedy to this situation: the deployment of Cormorants to the Arctic in summertime. I would recommend one for Iqaluit and the other for Inuvik in the Northwest Territories. Since both locations are already forward staging points for CFA teams, the presence of a Cormorant should be easy to manage. They have a range in excess of 1,000 kilometres and could easily cover the two areas of greatest maritime activity in the Arctic, Baffin Bay and the Beaufort Sea, while also providing coverage of both the eastern and western portions of the Northwest Passage. They could then be redeployed to the east and west coasts at the end of the summer, in time for the winter storms that create the greatest search and rescue needs there.

Improving our search and rescue capacity in and around the Northwest Passage would also facilitate the enforcement of Canadian laws and thus the credibility of our sovereignty claim. A long-range search and rescue helicopter is the perfect platform for boarding ocean-going vessels.

Building naval vessels specifically for the Arctic is inefficient. Indeed, I would suggest that it's happening only because the coast guard is not a branch of the Canadian Forces. If the coast guard were part of the Canadian Forces, we'd be recapitalizing the icebreaker fleet, adding a light machine gun to the forward deck of each vessel, and putting proper long-range maritime helicopters on board. The coast guard could then provide search and rescue, assist with the non-state actor challenge, and still provide its existing range of other essential services, such as breaking ice for commercial vessels, maintaining navigation devices, and supporting Arctic research. I believe your committee should be exploring how the coast guard and Canadian Forces can partner in the Arctic. One obvious starting point would be for some coast guard personnel to be trained in forcible interdiction techniques by the Canadian Forces, equipped for that purpose, and made members of the naval reserve.

So what about the Arctic offshore patrol ships the Canadian Forces are due to acquire, starting in 2015? The first thing to note is that they will not be true Arctic vessels. I prefer to think of them as replacements for the Kingston class maritime coastal defence vessels, with some additional ice strengthening that will enable them to be used in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in winter and places like Baffin Bay in summer.

● (1120)

Incidentally, Baffin Bay is where the Danish navy's ice-strengthened frigates are designed to operate in conditions quite distinct from McClure Strait and Viscount Melville Sound. The Arctic offshore patrol ships will not be designed to break ice and, for this reason, will not be sent into the Northwest Passage, at least until climate change causes all the multi-year ice to disappear.

This brings me to the *Diefenbaker*, the $720 million polar icebreaker announced last year. Unlike the Arctic offshore patrol ships, the icebreaker is intended for the coast guard, but it's also much larger and more powerful than sea-ice projections warrant and, therefore, excessively expensive. Given the reality of climate change, you could spend the same amount of money and acquire two or three mid-sized icebreakers similar to the existing *Terry Fox*, which would give much greater coverage across the north than any single vessel.

I understand that the procurement process for the *Diefenbaker* was suspended last autumn, and I'm not surprised. To adopt a timely metaphor, the government decided to build a Cadillac rather than three Smart cars. It's time to reassess that plan and recapitalize the coast guard fleet on a less grand but ultimately more useful basis, with input from, and the full support of, the Canadian Forces.

Thank you very much for your attention. *Merci beaucoup*.

● (1125)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Byers.

Now I will give the floor to Professor Poelzer, please.

Professor Greg Poelzer (Professor, University of Saskatchewan): I'd like to thank the committee members for the kind invitation to speak on the Arctic sovereignty issue, which is obviously a very important issue to Canada. I'd argue that, unlike in previous decades, it's unlikely to disappear off the national and international policy agenda.

Many of the points Professor Byers has raised pertained to specifics around defence, so I won't address those. I think those were covered extremely well.

What I'd like to do is draw a little bit on comparative lessons. My own work over the last 20 years has predominantly been research on northern development in Russia. I've been there about 24 times over the last 19 years or so in my capacity as dean of undergraduate studies for the University of the Arctic, which I guess has given me a comparative perspective from all eight Arctic states on the question of Arctic sovereignty.

If I were to make recommendations to the Canadian government regarding Arctic sovereignty and a strategy around strengthening Arctic sovereignty, I'd focus on three particular areas. One is defence. The second is region building. The final one is nation building.

In terms of defence, there will be better experts than I on what technical capabilities would be required in strengthening our defence capabilities, but we don't have a strong year-round defence capability in our own Arctic. This is in sharp contrast to other countries, such as the United States in Alaska, the Nordic countries, and of course Russia. In that, we're quite different from the other circumpolar countries.

Is the issue fundamentally about state threats? I would argue that at least for the imminent future that is fairly unlikely. But Professor Byers just pointed out some of the very important reasons why strengthening our defence capability is important. One is around search and rescue capabilities, of course: that we have timely and effective search and rescue capabilities. The other is human and environmental security. The question is not will there be increased tourism and shipping coming into our Arctic waters; it's already occurring, particularly on the tourist side of things. That is likely to increase, not decrease, over the coming decades.

But there is another dimension that is often overlooked. It's the socio-economic research and educational impact of investments around defence. If you look at the world-class research that goes on at a place like the University of Alaska Fairbanks in geomatics, geophysics, and so forth, a large part of that is because of the investment of the American military in the Arctic region. The same is true in the Nordic countries as well as Russia.

The other big advantage, of course, of greater defence investments is providing transportation and communication infrastructure and strengthening that, which helps on the research front as well as on economic development. When we are talking about defence investments in Canada in terms of strengthening our sovereignty, it's not just around the borders issue and surveillance. There is a tremendous amount of educational and socio-economic spinoffs.

Before I finish with that, the other area is our Canadian Rangers program. It's not only in the territorial north but across the provincial north and in the coastal areas. North of 60, as I'm sure the committee members are fully aware, there is great pride in this program, and it is one that needs to be supported and strengthened.

The second area in addition to defence in which Canada needs to do far better than we have historically as a country is the area of region building. In that area, frankly, the original leaders have been the indigenous organizations, particularly what was formerly the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. We're talking about the Arctic Athabaskan Council and the Gwich'in Council International in particular. They have been pioneers in circumpolar cooperation.

● (1130)

If we draw on comparative lessons and look at the Barents region in particular, the Nordic countries have very much taken a strategy of incorporating Russia. It's not just Canada. I know there's the play in the media about the threat from the United States to Canadian sovereignty, but in fact there's a lot of cooperation between the United States and Canada in the Arctic. But we aren't the only country that has to deal with living with a large neighbour. If you take a country such as Norway, which borders Russia, it does have to deal with the Russian bear.

The strategy, especially since Gorbachev, has been one of integration economically with indigenous organizations in the sphere of education, as well as with subnational governments at the county or provincial level and at the municipal level. If you've witnessed what has been going on in the Barents region, it has led to a tremendous transformation and cooperation in the economic, cultural, and educational spheres there.

As well, there's the growth of a new leadership in Russia, particularly in northwest Russia, which has greater appreciation, sensitivity, and values that we might proudly call western democratic values. But there's also an increasing respect and understanding on the Nordic side of Russian values, interests, and so on. That's helping to mitigate what could potentially be quite difficult issues around everything from fisheries to petroleum resource development in the Barents area.

The third and final area I want to address is nation building.

In Canada, as a country, we should be quite proud. In terms of the world, we've been a magnificent experiment of federalism. It has not been without challenges, but we have successfully built a country from sea to sea in many regards. If you think of John A. MacDonald and the massive investments his government undertook in building the transportation network from sea to sea and pulling the country together, again this was as much an issue around Canadian sovereignty vis-à-vis our neighbour to the south as it was economic interests. But we haven't done the same thing in the north: we have not built Canada from sea to sea to sea.

If you look at the types of investments in the social, economic, and educational infrastructure that come with complete nation building, Canada does lag behind other countries. I'll give one example. As I'm sure all committee members are fully aware, we are the only state of the eight Arctic states without a university in our own Arctic region. We like to think of Canada as the kinder, gentler nation on the North American continent, and in many regards we are, but in other ways we fundamentally are not. If you look at the University of Alaska's system, between 1997 and 2004 it produced 10,000 graduates. If you think about the capacity that affords in terms of environmental management, building successful businesses in the private sector, and involvement in governance, it has tremendous impact. We aren't in the game. Even Greenland has the University of Greenland. If you go to northern Norway, there are at least a half dozen post-secondary or degree-granting institutions. Canada needs to be engaged in fundamental ways in completing nation building. Norway has an equalization policy that makes it very attractive to live in northern Norway for professionals, with world-class health care facilities and so on. We haven't made similar investments as a country.

And part of that is we have to recognize the changing dynamics in Canada. I think if we have a very strong Canada, a very strong north, with very capable devolved authorities to territorial governments, staffing where the vast majority is.... For example, with the Government of Nunavut, if we achieve those objectives of Inuit government governed by Inuit—and we aren't there yet—then I think we'll have a much stronger presence and operation for Canada. By completing nation building, we will strengthen our Arctic sovereignty.

But I think two challenges have remained for Canada over the last two decades that I think a lot of Canadians and policy-makers may not fully appreciate. One is the disconnect. We talk a good talk, as Canadians, about the true north strong and free, but there has been an increasing disconnect with rural Canada, aboriginal Canada—first nations, Métis, and Inuit—and northern Canada. I would argue that has been the case for a couple of reasons, one being the intergenerational urban Canadians. Twenty years ago, many Canadians, even if they lived in cities, either came from a rural area or still had relatives working on farms or in the north in rural communities. That's increasingly less the case, and it's a reality, but it's a reality that policy-makers need to be aware of in terms of connecting to our north, so it's not simply out of sight and out of mind.

● (1135)

The other reason is new Canadians, who have profoundly enriched Canada. We need increased immigration in this country from all parts of the world. It's profoundly important for the success of Canada globally, and especially in a global economic system. But for new Canadians, there isn't a natural connection to rural Canada or to the north—and half of the people in the city of Toronto, for example, have not been born in Canada. I think as a strategy for the country, we have to connect both new Canadians and intergenerational urban Canadians, the vast majority of whom live below the 49th parallel in Canada, to our north. I think this is very important for the kinds of investments we will need in Canada in the area of nation building, in the area of region building, and in the area of defence to strengthen Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Poelzer.

Now I will give the floor to the Honourable Denis Coderre.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): It is a great pleasure to have you both.

I understand, Professor Poelzer, that what you're basically saying is that to assume our sovereignty we must make sure we are present—and I'm not necessarily talking about defence. We need defence as a tool of respect, to put it that way. But we clearly need, first, on our own part, to raise awareness if something's going on up north. Second, I'm very interested in your points on region and nation building. So can you expand a little bit on those.

Secondly, Professor Byers, besides all the issues of defence procurement, which I agree with, let's talk a bit about the structure. Like you, I think the coast guard should be under the Department of Defence. They should keep their autonomy, of course, but for obvious reasons they would have more resources if they were under National Defence, so I would like you to talk about that.

Finally, to both of you, let's talk about monitoring, because if we're talking about illegal immigration or drug dealers or terrorism, at a certain level the coast guard said that something will be coming forth soon regarding monitoring. But what's your evaluation of what we're doing? You had some anecdotes, Professor Byers, when you talked about the RCMP doing a great job—and kudos to them—but overall, what would be your evaluation of the monitoring as a whole?

The Chair: Professor Poelzer.

Prof. Greg Poelzer: You bet. I'll deal with the region building question. I go back again to the Barents region, where there has been high activity over the past 10 or 20 years with the Nordic countries and with Russia in particular. That has been fairly successful.

If we look at what's going on in Canada in the same period of time, even if you look at the Arctic Council, for example, we have a reputation as a country within the circumpolar world as being great initiators of good ideas, but as a country we're very poor on follow-up. There are numerous initiatives for which we simply aren't in the game in terms of circumpolar cooperation.

In that support for indigenous participants, for example, through the Arctic Council—referencing that one again—we need to make investments in educational cooperation. If you take the University of the Arctic as one example, we haven't been particularly good at sustaining that.

It's interesting, by comparison, that under the previous government the University of the Arctic was funded at a rate of about 25¢ per northern resident. Under the current government, it's funded at about 50¢, so there is a doubling of funding, and that's appreciated, of course, for those involved in the University of the Arctic. But if you go over to a country like Norway, where they already have post-secondary educational institutions that are cooperating with Russia, and so on, they're spending anywhere from $1.60 to $1.70 per northern resident even though they already have half a dozen post-secondary institutions. So in those kinds of areas, Canada is vastly behind.

For subnational governments, again, small governments don't have the fiscal resources to engage in circumpolar cooperation. You do see that support from Nordic countries and to a certain extent from the Russian Federation as well for their subnational governments to have this kind of engagement.

So we have to step those things up—greater cooperation, of course, with Alaska and greater cooperation with Russia. The Russians are particularly important because the Russians, in terms of region building, do look to Canada. We have very similar geography.

● (1140)

Hon. Denis Coderre: Yes, we've noticed that.

Prof. Greg Poelzer: We have similar challenges that way, and we're both federal countries.

Hon. Denis Coderre: We're a bit limited in the time, Professor Poelzer. I'm sorry about that.

Professor Byers.

Prof. Michael Byers: I will keep it very short, Monsieur Coderre.

First of all, you're absolutely right, I think the coast guard is an orphan in terms of the federal bureaucracy in Ottawa, and placing it underneath the umbrella of the Department of National Defence would be a good thing as long as DND understood that those essential civilian functions need to be continued too. And it's that balance that needs to be achieved. But absolutely, we should be relying on the experts in Arctic navigation to provide that policing and sovereignty assertion function in the north, and the coast guard does that very well.

In terms of monitoring, there are RCMP officers in every northern community. There are Canadian Rangers in every northern community. RADARSAT-2, our synthetic aperture radar satellite, is now in orbit providing exceptional surveillance over the Arctic. That is, of course, what it was designed to do. The Canadian Forces is building two ground stations to work with RADARSAT-2. That's an excellent initiative.

There are underwater listening devices in the Canadian Arctic. It's Ottawa's best-kept secret. And now the Department of National Defence is working to develop new technology there. This is all happening in the context of NORAD cooperation. Three years ago the Canadian government and the United States expanded the scope of NORAD to include maritime surveillance, including in the Northwest Passage, so we are working on surveillance with our American partners.

And then finally, we have some air surveillance. The Canadian Forces has Aurora long-range surveillance aircraft that are used from time to time. And I believe they are developing unmanned aerial vehicles, drones, which could also provide that visual confirmation of the kind of information that ground or satellite assets might come across.

Hon. Denis Coderre: For my last question, I have noticed that at the political level the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence were very vocal, to say the least, regarding the Russian exercise. It depends on where you stand. What is your evaluation of that?

Prof. Michael Byers: I would simply like to point out that the American four-star general in charge of NORAD was very quick to correct the Canadian Minister of Defence by pointing out that the Russian planes came nowhere close to Canadian airspace, and that "the Russians acted professionally".

It is a bit ironic that at the same time as Russian aircraft were causing this controversy in Ottawa, the senior lawyer at the Department of Foreign Affairs was negotiating with his Russian counterpart about the possibility of Russia and Canada making a joint submission to the United Nations Commission on the limits of the continental shelf with respect to jurisdiction over the Arctic Ocean seabed. Behind the scenes there was a lot of cooperation, but of course Arctic sovereignty is a domestic political issue as much as an international one.

● (1145)

The Chair: Next is Mr. Bachand for seven minutes.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): I'll will be speaking in French, so you should put on your translation devices if you want to hear me.

[*Translation*]

I want to begin by thanking both of you for your very interesting presentation, even though it dealt mainly with the military side of things and with policing.

I've just returned from Norway where I was attending a meeting of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association. Several years ago, I raised the issue of how the opening up of the Northwest Passage would impact NATO, Europe and the Americas. I could just as easily have been speaking Chinese, as far as NATO proceedings were concerned. No one had a clue as to what I was talking about. For the past year of so, this has become a hot topic in NATO circles, hot enough to generate some discussion and studies that will continue this fall.

Five countries have staked a claim to the Arctic and four of them are NATO members. It is all well and good for NATO to hold talks, but I really don't see that it has a role to play in ensuring security and a military presence. And yet, that is the role that NATO officials seem to want the organization to play for some reason. Our future should not be left in the hands of NATO. I'd like to hear your views on this.

Obviously, Russia is often in the hot seat. Yesterday, the Finnish embassy confirmed to me that their airspace is often violated. A number of people have been caught off guard somewhat by Russia's actions. They want to cooperate with this country, but many people, primarily those from Scandinavian countries, have told us that they find it hard to stand up to Russia.

How do you feel about NATO playing a future role in the Arctic? Is this something that should be considered or would the nationalistic sentiments of each country preclude a NATO presence in the Arctic?

[*English*]

Prof. Michael Byers: I'll start with a short answer to the question before handing it over to Greg.

First of all, on the Northwest Passage, it is important to remember that the principal opponent of Canada's legal position is the United States, and both the United States and Canada are members of NATO. I believe that many European NATO members regard the situation as one that first needs to be resolved between the two North American NATO members, and then the Europeans will follow the lead. Obviously the United States has more influence in NATO than Canada does, but I do believe it is essentially a bilateral issue that is susceptible to bilateral negotiations.

Roughly a year ago, I partnered with Paul Cellucci, the former U. S. ambassador to Canada, and we conducted a model negotiation involving leading American and Canadian experts, seven from each country. We spent two days trying to discuss how the two countries could cooperate and build confidence with respect to the Northwest Passage. We were working towards an American recognition of Canada's legal position. We made an astounding amount of progress.

I would ask your committee to urge the Canadian government and our diplomats to engage proactively with our American friends. As the ice melts and the activity increases, there will be security threats to Canada and the United States alike. By far the best way to deal with those security threats is to have the full force of a domestic legal system applicable to them, the full force of a domestic immigration legal system, of criminal laws. It's fairly obvious that only one country's domestic legal system could apply to the Northwest Passage, i.e., the coastal state along the entire 3,000 kilometres of that waterway.

The final point has to do with the Nordic countries and the relationship with Russia. Although there are tensions and occasional problems, most of which originate from the Russian side, the Norwegians have managed to make considerable progress, negotiating a maritime boundary in the southern Barents Sea with Russia. They also have a complex but ongoing relationship over the Svalbard Islands and Spitsbergen. The Norwegians have learned to work with the Russians. Although I don't support the Russian government or many of its actions, I am pleased that Russia is embracing the Law of the Sea and working on international cooperation in this area.

● (1150)

Prof. Greg Poelzer: As to whether Canada should embrace NATO participation in Arctic sovereignty issues, I would say yes. But we must use caution. The Northwest Passage issue is predominantly, though not exclusively, a bilateral one. It has broader international implications, but it's best managed on a bilateral basis in cooperation with the United States. With NATO, though, it is important for Canada to have multilateral engagement. We don't want to confine ourselves to a bilateral position, and we certainly don't want to act in a unilateral fashion. I think it is important to have strength through cooperation, through institutions like NATO.

Why the caution? Why don't we take a big cue from Norway? Denmark's in a slightly different situation. Of course there's the Greenland issue, but Denmark is fundamentally a continental power, a continental country, while Norway is much more a true Arctic country. Greenland's in a different situation. I advise caution because NATO isn't just the northern allies; it's all of mainland Europe. There is an interest in Arctic resources, like fisheries. I suggest caution because European interests in the Arctic are not always going to be benign for Canadian or Norwegian interests. That's why I say that we should regard NATO's participation with approval tempered by caution.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, both of you, for your presentations.

I was interested, Professor Byers, in your comments about the interaction between the role of the navy or the Canadian Forces and the coast guard. When we talk about activity in the north and the kinds of things that we need to do there—(a) create a presence, and (b) be able to enforce certain regulations, whether they be environmental or the immigration notions you referred to—the coast guard actually has that capability—a boarding capability, for example, through fisheries enforcement, on the east coast and west coast.

I'm interested in the question of cost. The Canadian Forces have very ambitious capital programs over the next number of years. At some point the taxpayer is going to perhaps balk at some of the costs. What would be the relative cost of providing the kinds of services that we actually need in order to show a presence, monitor activity, and enforce Canadian regulations by using the coast guard versus naval activity?

● (1155)

Prof. Michael Byers: My suggestion is that we could actually save some money by using the coast guard or developing the coast guard and having it partner with the Canadian Forces. One needs to think about this in terms of what it actually takes to provide a presence and also an interdiction capacity, because in the Northwest Passage, it's the ability to actually stop ships that will be the ultimate test of Canadian control there.

What you need for that are helicopters. You need to be able to put a handful of armed sailors onto the deck of a cargo vessel. It doesn't really matter which department actually owns the helicopter as long as the sailors get there.

The problem is that we've been draining the coast guard of resources for decades now. The helicopters on the icebreakers are old Messerschmitt helicopters that Karlheinz Schreiber helped us to buy. They have a range of only 350 kilometres, and they carry only four passengers. A Cormorant helicopter, by comparison, can fly over 1,000 kilometres without refuelling and can carry up to 30 passengers. They're serious long-range maritime helicopters. We need new helicopters for the coast guard and, ultimately, also new icebreakers to replace what is a rapidly aging fleet. The *Louis S. St-Laurent* is forty years old now, but we don't need this $700 million plus Cadillac of the *Diefenbaker*.

The other thing that people need to realize is that you can actually double-hat either Canadian Forces or Canadian Coast Guard personnel. A coast guard captain could be a naval reserve officer, just like a coast guard officer is often also double-hatted as a fisheries enforcement officer. You don't need necessarily to have dedicated, solely military personnel to fulfill a lot of these functions. You need more partnership, more focus on efficiencies, more thinking about putting multi-purpose platforms into the Arctic and focusing on what is the real need, which from a sovereignty perspective in the Northwest Passage again is being able to put those four or five sailors onto the deck of a non-compliant cargo ship, not a Russian destroyer. We're talking about a non-compliant, single-hull tanker flagged with a Liberian flag and a captain who doesn't want to comply with Canada's Arctic environmental regulations. That's the real kind of challenge we face.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

My second question has to do with cost also.

Icebreaking capability is pretty important. Professor Pharand, the emeritus professor of law at the University of Ottawa, was with us. He has recently written a paper that also talks about the need for an icebreaking capability of the *Terry Fox* class. He points out that the Russians currently have 12 icebreakers operating, whereas we only have a couple, and that they intend to add more. Your notion of a three-for-one idea sounds very attractive if you think we could have *Terry Fox* class icebreakers for the cost of the *Diefenbaker*. Is this something that you know other people have talked about? Has that costing actually been done, to your knowledge?

Prof. Michael Byers: I don't know if the costing has been done precisely, but I've certainly asked many people, including the coast guard, what it would take to provide these kinds of vessels.

One of the issues—and you'll will be very sensitive to this as someone from the Atlantic provinces—is whether we build these ships in Canada or whether we buy them off the shelf abroad. It will cost more and take longer to build them in Canada than it would be to buy them from Finland or from South Korea. That then gets into issues of timelines and priorities and the sense of urgency that we feel. Balance that against the fact that shipbuilding might be a very sensible part of an economic stimulus package.

These are issues that you and your colleagues will have to think hard about. But we don't need a Cadillac icebreaker like the *Diefenbaker* being built today, although I sure wish we had built the Polar 8 back in the 1980s, which, had it been built, would have been at the peak of its performance right now and would have given us that 12-month-a-year capacity throughout the Arctic archipelago. That would have made a very strong statement about our seriousness concerning Arctic sovereignty.

● (1200)

Mr. Jack Harris: If I have time for one final question—and both of you may have a comment on this—what would you regard as the biggest threat to Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic? Are we talking about non-state actors or are we talking about state actors?

Prof. Michael Byers: Very briefly, before Greg jumps in, non-state actors absolutely. Probably the greatest threat to Canadian sovereignty is a non-state actor, a private commercial ship deciding to run through the Northwest Passage without permission, because it does not comply with Canada's environmental laws, and then our having to grapple with whether or not we interdict a vessel, causing an international controversy and probably many diplomatic protests, or let the vessel sail through.

That could happen this summer.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you very much, Professor Byers.

Now I will give the floor to Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both witnesses for being here. I have a couple of quick comments first, then some questions.

Professor Byers, as you know, search and rescue in Canada, including the north, is based on risk assessment and cost. If we had unlimited resources and unlimited people, obviously we'd be in a lot of places that we can't currently be in at the moment.

The other point is that if you have Russian bears who ultimately wind up within 41 miles of Inuvik, we can say that's not very close, but when the intercept is coming from well over a thousand miles away in Cold Lake, then how long do you wait? Also, General Renuart, whose own forces conduct these missions all the time, fully supports that kind of operation and the necessity for conducting it.

I have a couple of questions for you specifically, first to Professor Byers.

We've talked about the threat of state players, non-state players, and so on. What's your view of the Russian plan to field an Arctic-specific military force that they announced a little while ago?

Prof. Michael Byers: Thank you very much for the question.

I agree with you about risk assessment, but my point is that the risks are going up in the Arctic in terms of a need for search and rescue. I would like to ask you how you think Canada would look if an Airbus 340 or a Boeing 777 crash-landed on Ellesmere Island and we couldn't get to them for two or three days. That's a serious challenge in terms of our reputation and our profile as an Arctic sovereign country.

In terms of the CF-18 intercepts of Russian bombers, that's a good thing. At a minimum, it's very good training for our pilots. It has been happening quite a bit, as it happened for decades during the Cold War. I understand you might have had some experience with this yourself.

In terms of the Russian plans for a military force for the Arctic, again, I am cautious with respect to the Russians. I think the Russian government is far from democratic, and we need to be vigilant, but we also need to be careful not to overinflate the threat. There are journalists who'd like to report on the potential for conflict while playing down actual cooperation.

From one perspective, what the Russians are doing is no different from what other Arctic countries are doing: increasing their northern presence to deal with, among other things, the non-state threats like terrorists, like smugglers. Take these reports with a grain of salt and, to the degree that it is possible, engage the Russians diplomatically, work with them, build confidence on matters like cooperation in search and rescue, so that we avoid the kind of arms race that could develop if this momentum were to continue beyond what is reasonable, with respect to the current situation, into something that could actually cause a series of much more serious problems.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Of course that's common sense. To quote Reagan, trust but verify, I guess.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is the current lead within the Government of Canada for matters of Arctic sovereignty. Professor Byers and Professor Poelzer, do you think they are the appropriate agency to lead, or would you see that being perhaps National Defence?

Professor Poelzer, I guess.

Prof. Greg Poelzer: My understanding is that there's a mix on these issues within Canada. I think the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development is the appropriate lead agency. There's a huge depth of experience, including through the circumpolar liaison directorate and other divisions within DIAND. That department does provide and has tremendous supports for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade when they're at Arctic Council and other fora.

I think we need a routing, domestically, in our circumpolar cooperation and on Arctic sovereignty issues, so I think it's quite appropriate. If you go back to my comment about nation building, I think that's appropriate.

● (1205)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Professor Byers.

Prof. Michael Byers: If I could jump in here very quickly, of course INAC is the lead, but as I understand it, the PMO is also taking a very substantial interest, and that's a good thing. I think that certainly getting that leadership at the highest level, joining up different departments and thinking about how to promote efficiencies and cover all the bases, is exactly where Canadian Arctic policy needs to go.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Professor Byers, you've done a lot of work on the interface between politics and law, and legal arguments for Canadian sovereignty in the north. Is there a precedent that exists, situations where countries may fail to respect legal decisions, legal rights, once the Law of the Sea is refined or expanded and so on? How do you see us exercising our sovereignty in a circumstance where somebody basically says, buzz off, we're going to do what we want?

Prof. Michael Byers: Let's take the scenario that I have briefly described, of a flag-of-convenience vessel making a run through the Northwest Passage this summer. That situation will give us roughly three to four days to make a decision before the vessel is through, assuming that the passage is ice-free, as it has been the last two summers. Four days is not a lot of time for a major decision involving some very sensitive international diplomacy.

So we should be engaging with other countries now to talk about how we would like to work with them to deal with that scenario. For instance, we should be talking with the United States about how they might assist us in quietly pressuring the flag-of-convenience state to actually require that the vessel register with our northern shipping registration scheme. They should request Canada's permission, in a sense comply with the basic requirements of surveillance and policing in the Arctic, so as to avoid the danger of that dangerous negative precedent. Proactive diplomacy with the United States is advised, because the United States is starting to realize, as Paul Cellucci has made clear in the last couple of years, that a wild west scenario in the Northwest Passage is not in the interests of the United States or Canada. And we are partners in the defence of North America, so they should be encouraged to think in a forward-looking way about how they would deal with that kind of situation.

The other issue that needs to be put on the table is that we are currently engaged in a very complex legal and scientific exercise concerning the mapping of the seabed under the Arctic Ocean. It is absolutely imperative that Canadian scientists have the support necessary to complete that mapping by 2013, which is the deadline for making our submission to the UN.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Byers.

Now I will give the floor to Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): *Merci.*

Before I start, I have to disagree with the comments of Mr. Hawn. Of course, I think any analysis would show that there's a critical need for search and rescue in the Arctic. So Mr. Byers, your statements were music to my ears. As you probably know, I have been pushing in the media and in Parliament for the last several years for search and rescue north of 60. If the commander was worried about an Airbus 330, what about a cruise ship with 3,000 passengers? That would be an even bigger job....

I think you brought up an excellent point about the risk. If you have a lifeguard in one pool and then you have another pool with no lifeguard, and you ask how many times did the public interact with a lifeguard in the pool with no lifeguard, well, the answer would be zero. You don't have any requests if you have no service there. I think that if the service was there, you'd have more requests. Second of all, in the south you've got more civilian services that can actually respond. And as you said, it's a lot warmer, so you're not going to die within an hour or two, as you might in the north. These are all factors that should add to the arguments that you were making about search and rescue in the north for both fixed-wing planes and helicopters.

Mr. Byers.

Prof. Michael Byers: Thank you. I'm glad you agree with me. I want to make it absolutely clear that a whole range of things can be done to facilitate search and rescue at reduced cost.

Emergency satellite beacons are being given to Inuit hunters in northern communities, so when they go out on the land they can activate the devices if they are in trouble. This enables search and rescue teams to find them quickly. It's very cost-efficient and should be supported and made much more widespread. It doesn't get away from the need for a helicopter, but certainly there are ways we can deal with these challenges if we recognize the reality of accidents and that they can be extraordinarily serious.

If we are a serious Arctic country engaged in all of this diplomacy and making it such an important part of our foreign policy, and an accident happens and a couple of hundred elderly German tourists die in the Northwest Passage because we can't get to them in time, our entire Arctic foreign policy will be shot. We have to balance the risk, not just to life but to the entire dimension of Canadian Arctic policy and the perception as to whether or not we're a serious Arctic country.

We absolutely need the fixed-wing search and rescue aircraft you mentioned. Having four Twin Otters in Yellowknife simply doesn't cut it in the 21st century. We need to have planes that can move quickly and drop SAR technicians from the air. They need to be placed in the Arctic so that response is timely, instead of waiting for very large, expensive aircraft to fly in a long way—from Comox, Trenton, or Greenwood.

● (1210)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I'm delighted that you mentioned the Beaufort Sea in your opening remarks. We often forget that it probably has the most immediate economic effect on Canada, and most people don't mention it when talking about Arctic sovereignty.

Can you elaborate on what we should be doing to solve that dispute?

Prof. Michael Byers: We have a maritime boundary dispute with the United States in the Beaufort Sea that revolves around different interpretations of an 1825 treaty between Russia and Great Britain. It creates a disputed sector of just over 6,000 square miles of seabed that is likely to be very rich in hydrocarbons.

There are a couple of easy solutions to this, and we really should sort it out. One is to draw a line straight through the middle of the disputed sector and split in two, thus resolving the dispute. Another more imaginative approach would be to declare a joint development zone for hydrocarbons. Other countries have done this elsewhere in the world. It provides the legal certainty that the oil companies need, and in the context of a North American energy market under chapter 6 of NAFTA, it's no big deal economically to think in this direction. In fact, it could show some real bilateral cooperation on this important front.

But we need to get something done, not in the least because we are now mapping the extended continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles. Where the line beyond 200 nautical miles goes depends a lot on where the line within 200 nautical miles is. So the Beaufort Sea dispute needs to be resolved by 2013.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Byers.

Mr. Boughen.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I welcome both of the professors sharing their time with us today.

Professor Byers, you talked quite a bit about different aircraft and ships that you see as necessities for the north. What complement of aircraft and ships would be necessary to do the job, and where would you see those vehicles being harboured? What would be the base port?

Prof. Michael Byers: Thank you.

First of all, I've changed my mind on the Arctic offshore patrol ships in the last couple of years. Now that I think of them as replacements for the marine coastal patrol vessels, I begin to see a role for them along the west coast, the east coast, and up into places like Baffin Bay. The ice strengthening will simply add some utility to those replacement vessels. I think the Canadian Forces should get those vessels, but we should stop calling them Arctic vessels and realize that we do need additional capacity in the High Arctic and that the additional capacity should be provided by the Coast Guard.

In that context, we need to talk about recapitalizing the coast guard icebreaking fleet, not with seriously heavy polar icebreakers such as the Russians have, but with vessels like the *Terry Fox* and other medium icebreakers, which can go where we need them to go at any point when another vessel might be in Canada's Arctic waters.

In terms of a base for these vessels, a couple of years ago the Prime Minister announced the renovation of the old wharf at Nanisivik on northern Baffin Island. That makes some sense, because the wharf is already there, but it's not a terribly accessible location and it's not a replacement for a deepwater facility at Iqaluit on southern Baffin Island, which the Government of Nunavut has been requesting for a number of years.

The reality is that any vessels we use in the Arctic will be extremely long-range and in all likelihood will occasionally come south to places such as St. John's or Halifax, and that's okay. What we need during the summer months, when the activity is taking place, is the ability to surge into the Arctic with vessels that can fulfill a multitude of different functions, and we need some vessels that can go into the heart of the archipelago and assert our sovereignty there.

● (1215)

Mr. Ray Boughen: What kind of aircraft complement do you see? I know you've talked about some of the aircraft that are currently there and made some reference to them. What's your idea of the complement of aircraft that we should have, and where would those aircraft be based?

Prof. Michael Byers: I think helicopters are a crucial part of the mix. At least in the short term, I would like to see one or two Cormorant helicopters deployed to the Arctic in those late summer months when they'll actually be needed, and I would like to see more serious, longer-range helicopters on our coast guard icebreakers. Having an icebreaker in the heart of the Canadian archipelago with a helicopter that can only go 150 kilometres away from the vessel is not a serious assertion of Arctic capability. We need better birds on our boats.

In terms of fixed-wing capacity, I would like to see new fixed-wing assets in places such as Whitehorse, Yellowknife, and perhaps Iqaluit, with SAR techs who parachute down in an emergency situation. I understand that's part of the long-term plan, for instance, with the acquisition of Spartan aircraft, but if aircraft like that are put into the north, let's make sure they actually have the personnel who can do the parachute jumps and get down to the surface quickly.

The Chair: You still have 20 seconds.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Professor Poelzer, you talked about a university. Where would you see it located, and what do you see in terms of a college? Do you see anything like the two-year programs that focus on trades training in the college area? Could you tell us what your thoughts are on those two issues?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Prof. Greg Poelzer: The three Arctic colleges—Yukon College, Aurora College, and Nunavut Arctic College—have done a remarkably good job with limited resources, both on the trades side and on the post-secondary side.

If you want to build a university in the Arctic, you're talking five to ten years down the road, realistically. It's going to need partnership with other post-secondary institutions in Canada. There won't be one location, because the three territories are so varied. There are huge differences from Yukon to Nunavut to Northwest Territories. You're going to need multiple campuses, quite frankly, even if it was—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Prof. Greg Poelzer: It couldn't be one location.

The Chair: Perfect.

M. Paillé dispose maintenant de cinq minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you for coming here.

I would like to start by discussing the difficulty for Canada to respond to an accident in the Arctic. Can you tell us which northern nation is the best prepared or already has the necessary equipment and resources to respond to an accident in the Arctic?

● (1220)

[*English*]

Prof. Michael Byers: Very briefly, any of the other Arctic countries are significantly better prepared than Canada is to provide search and rescue in their territory and, to some degree, in Canadian territory. There is some cooperative planning going on between Canada and the United States in terms of search and rescue in the western Arctic, and there is some planning, together with Denmark, concerning search and rescue between Greenland and Canada. There needs to be more of that.

The fact of the matter is that if there's a major airplane crash anywhere in the Arctic, we will be calling on our NATO partners to help. Certainly, I don't think it really matters to the passengers on the ground whether it's an American or a Canadian or a Danish helicopter that gets to them first. So there's cooperative planning on that domain.

We should also be talking with the Russians about cooperation on search and rescue. There's not a whole lot of activity that happens in the middle of the Arctic Ocean right now, but there are, of course, tourists and adventurers who do venture into that vast and inhospitable place. And yes, we need to be thinking ahead as to how we would deal with a crisis situation there.

But it's cooperation, not competition, when it comes to search and rescue.

Prof. Greg Poelzer: I agree.

Whether you look at northern Norway or even Russia, which is obviously not in the same economic situation as Canada is—Canada is obviously far richer per capita—their search and rescue capabilities in very remote regions of the Russian Arctic, including the High Arctic, far exceed those of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: We all agree that it is important for Canada to have the ability to respond in future. Earlier, you spoke about the Canadian Forces and about strengthening the regions.

The ideal thing would be for this to happen as quickly as possible. In your opinion, what would be the critical point if Canada failed to act, if it was almost impossible for Canada to catch up with other countries, or if it was at a clear disadvantage over them?

As you know, there is an administrative maze to contend with. Creating or implementing a new program or system can often be a very complex undertaking.

In the short term, is there a point of no return, a deadline or a critical point that Canada should not move beyond?

[*English*]

Prof. Greg Poelzer: If I were to pick a deadline, it would have been maybe about 1990, but it's never too late to catch up. We are late in the game, but the go time is now.

It's not as if we have to build a number of things from scratch. There is Canada-Russia business cooperation. Much of it is in the north, strengthening those kinds of things. There's Northern Forum, in terms of municipality associations; there are the indigenous organizations; there are things like the University of the Arctic; there is the Arctic Council. So we have a lot of things; we wouldn't be starting from scratch.

What we have to do, quite frankly, is take Canada seriously. We only take Canada seriously from coast to coast. As Canadians, as a society, as a government—and it cuts across broadly—we don't take our north seriously. We talk the talk, but we don't walk the walk. It's the kind of thing—the deployment Michael Byers has identified in terms of capability—that's going to cost, absolutely. But it costs to be a country, and other countries have made that investment.

And sooner is obviously much better than later. I do want to point out that the kinds of investments we need to put in are going to have economic benefits, whether it's in icebreakers, fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters, and so forth—and, I would argue, a much broader deployment across the Arctic, multiple sites, permanent sites. What does it cost to have high unemployment in indigenous communities? That also costs Canada.

These military investments, which are critically important investments around region building and nation building, are going to yield benefits back to Canada, even in the short run. Inaction costs us. Action is going to reduce costs in the long term.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Professor.

Now I will give the floor to Mr. Payne.

● (1225)

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome you, as my previous colleagues have done. It's really important that we hear your thoughts in terms of what's going on in the north, as I think it is a very important strategic area for our country and our government.

I'd like to ask Mr. Byers first. I wanted to review your one comment when I thought you said the number of commercial flights going across the North Pole was 90,000, but I wasn't sure if that was correct.

Prof. Michael Byers: It is correct. It's a staggering number, and to just illustrate this, there are more people who fly over the Canadian Arctic every day than live on the ground. There are 104,000 people living north of 60 degrees, and there are more than that number of people who fly over there on long-range commercial aircraft. Yes, these planes are extraordinarily safe, but as we saw yesterday with the Air France plane, sometimes things will go wrong.

In that context, there is one more point in terms of search and rescue. We also have less than perfect radar coverage in the Canadian Arctic. So if you're on a transpolar flight, you go out of Canadian radar contact a lot farther south than you encounter that contact on the Russian side. The Russians have better civilian radar and civilian communications than we do in the Arctic, and if we are serious about Arctic sovereignty and providing search and rescue, providing adequate radar coverage would be a small component of doing that.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Thank you.

The other thing I wanted to ask you, Mr. Byers, is this. I understand you're currently doing research on implications of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and on mechanisms to grant control beyond the 200-mile limit. Could you maybe describe the expected process in cases where countries may have conflicting views or jurisdiction, or what they're looking for in terms of claims?

Prof. Michael Byers: I'll come back to my very first point, which is that the Arctic is a very large place and so most of the Arctic will fall unquestionably, indisputably, into one or another country's sovereign jurisdiction. Russia will get a large amount of seabed on the Russian side of the ocean; Canada will get a large amount of seabed on our side of the ocean. The actual potential overlaps only amount to about 5% or 10% of the whole. So we're not talking about the whole Arctic in potential dispute; we're talking about some overlaps.

A lot of this will be resolved by the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf by looking at the science to determine whether the seabed is a natural prolongation of one country's continental shelf as opposed to another country's continental shelf. There will be potentially some remaining disputes, and those will be ultimately left to diplomatic negotiation. We have a dispute and we will have a dispute with Denmark and the Lincoln Sea over a couple of hundred kilometres of seabed. Let's sort that out now so it doesn't cause problems in the future. And it's the same thing in the Beaufort Sea, with the Americans, in terms of the dispute there.

Then in terms of the Russians, in terms of that area in the middle of the Arctic Ocean, it's a good thing for us to be talking, as Alan Kessel, the senior lawyer at DFAIT, was talking with the Russians about filing a joint set of claims, so we actually sort that out between ourselves, split any difference, and resolve it diplomatically rather than throwing it off to some third body like the UN commission.

The fact of the matter is that oil and gas exploitation in the very middle of the Arctic Ocean isn't going to happen for 100 years. It is so far north, it is so inhospitable. It is in total darkness for several months each year, and the North Pole itself is in 4,000 metres of water. There's some symbolic value attached to this, but in terms of practical value, resolving the issue with the Russians now would be a very sensible thing.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Poelzer, I understand you had the opportunity to observe recent Canadian Forces exercises near Iqaluit. Could you share your experiences and any recommendations that may have come out of that?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, please.

Prof. Greg Poelzer: Thank you very much for the question.

Yes, it was Operation Nanook last year. It was Arctic sovereignty exercises involving a couple...[*Technical Difficulty*]...approach. So it involved multiple federal government departments, with the Government of Nunavut and local...[*Technical Difficulty*]....

The exercises we participated in involved both the coast guard—so the civilian arm—as well as the armed forces with both air force and naval.... It was quite impressive, frankly. As a Canadian you couldn't be but awestruck by the level of professionalism, the hospitality provided by the Canadian Forces personnel as well as the coast guard. It's something Canadians ought rightly to be very proud of.

What we have seen of the level of the current government's approach is absolutely on the right track in terms of upping the intergovernmental or the whole of government approach in dealing with both human security issues and environmental security issues.

● (1230)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor.

Now I will give the floor to Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I have three questions. I'll put them all first, so you can get your answers in quickly.

Greg—if you don't take too long—you talked about the university. In Canada, universities are normally funded by the provinces. In fact, I talked to the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George and asked them if the federal government put any money in, and they said no.

For Mr. Byers, I have two quick questions. One is in regard to the implications of losing our legal battle on the Northwest Passage and it becoming an international strait. Outline a bit the implications of the overflights that will then be allowed over the middle of Canada's Arctic. Secondly, Justin wants to know, related to the Northwest Passage, under our assumption that it's ours, our sovereignty, what we should be doing to enforce that sovereignty.

Prof. Greg Poelzer: On the university question, first of all, a big thank you, Larry. You've been one of the hugest supporters of the University of the Arctic historically. We couldn't be here today without the support and leadership you've provided. I want to make that note.

In terms of provincial and the equivalent territorial support, it's true that a lot of base funding for universities does come from the province. We would need to see that, obviously, from the territorial government, but university activities are heavily funded by the federal government. You can look at CFI grants or at the tri-council funding grants around research. Lots of infrastructure is paid for by the federal government. So I think there is a very important federal government role to play in a university that is north of 60. I think there's still a fiduciary responsibility constitutionally to the north, and there is certainly a fiduciary responsibility to the aboriginal peoples of Canada.

On a practical level, the territories simply don't have the capacity to go it alone. It's going to require partnership with the federal government.

Prof. Michael Byers: Thank you. Those are a couple of very interesting questions about the Northwest Passage.

If the Northwest Passage becomes an international strait—that is, if the American legal position prevails—what are the consequences in terms of overflights, because it's not only an international strait for ships but also an international strait for the purposes of aircraft?

It just so happens that the Northwest Passage, as a corridor, is not very practical for civilian aviation, and Canada already allows civilian aviation to use our airspace in return for some pretty modest fees.

Ironically, the only consequence I can see is that those Russian bombers might actually do exercises through our Northwest Passage if the Americans succeed with their legal position. There's a terrible irony here, because Russia is the one country that actually explicitly supports Canada's legal position, because they have a waterway on their side of the Arctic Ocean that the Americans also maintain is an international strait and the Russians say, “No way; it's our internal waters.”

In terms of how to enforce sovereignty in the Northwest Passage, the best way, quite frankly, is to provide lots of good reasons for other countries and international shipping companies to accept Canada's jurisdiction. Let's provide world-class search and rescue. Let's provide world-class shipping charts. Let's provide really good icebreaking for commercial vessels. Let's provide port facilities so that if a vessel has a problem with its equipment, it can actually pull into a port and be safe from Arctic storms. Let's develop the Northwest Passage as a commercial waterway subject to Canadian jurisdiction, just like we developed the St. Lawrence Seaway a couple of generations ago to facilitate the use of that waterway under the umbrella of both Canadian and American sovereignty.

That's the true answer. Let's get our Arctic sovereignty by providing carrots rather than waving sticks. You have to have some sticks as well, but this investment in a Northwest Passage, a kind of Arctic gateway, is something that would make a huge difference today.

● (1235)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will give the floor now to Mr. Blaney.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Bernier.

Before I put some questions to the two witnesses, I would like to mention a few things.

Your work, your research and the role you play already help to ensure Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic. Your work is extremely important, and this is as true of the scientific research that you are carrying out with ArcticNet as it is of your efforts to set up a research and study centre in the High Arctic. This is much to your credit. The quality of your responses and the depth of your comments prove that your work will indeed be valuable to us.

My first question is for Mr. Poelzer.

Sir, of the three considerations, namely defence, the increase in regional capabilities and the sense of belonging and recognizing the North as a Canadian value, I want to focus on defence. I'd like to hear more from you about our requirements.

You spoke about being able to navigate in these waters and to ensure Canada's sovereignty in the High Arctic on a year-round basis. Somewhat more specific questions have been raised about the type of icebreaker Canada possesses.

Do you think it is important for Canada to have ships capable of navigating these waters twelve months of the year? What combination of vessels, of security, air surveillance and rescue services would you like to see in place?

I'll come back to Mr. Byers if I have any time remaining.

[*English*]

Prof. Greg Poelzer: From my perspective, if we're going to be a self-respecting country, ideally...we won't have it overnight but I think we need to have a year-round surveillance of the full extent of our territory. We aren't there yet. It won't come overnight, but that's the goal we should seek.

Our challenges, of course, are quite different from those of, say, Norway. They do have the benefit of the gulf stream, and their capabilities in terms of defence surveillance are a little less formidable. Russia does have similar challenges to Canada's. In my view, we should. If we're going to be a country from sea to sea to sea, we need that year-round capability. What is needed is a mix of surveillance capability on the defence, as well as search and rescue, and we aren't anywhere close to providing it as a country.

The situation in the north would not be tolerated whatsoever in the south, whether it be southern Ontario, southern British Columbia, or in the lower half of Alberta or other parts of Canada. It wouldn't be tolerated at all. We do need to have a very strong search and rescue capability in our north, and we do need, I would argue, permanent year-round Canadian Forces bases that have multiple capabilities. We don't have that. If you go by contrast and look at Alaska, and you look again at Russia, let alone the Nordic countries, those capabilities are there.

It's very important for Canadian Arctic sovereignty, and I'll come back on one point about Russia. I think Michael Byers is quite right. We do need to go to the fullest extent on the diplomacy route with Russia. With Russia, we cannot also be naive, either—I'm talking in general, about Russia's behaviour internationally. It doesn't always follow international norms. This is a big worry in Norway. They see the Russian bear resurging, and that is a concern.

So I think we always have to extend the diplomatic initiatives and strengthen those—I think that's vitally important and our best route—but we always have to back that up. In the international system, the effectiveness of search and rescue in terms of our credibility and in terms of surveillance of our north is vitally important, but so is defence. We need to have a presence in terms of defence, to have that credibility in order to assert our own Arctic sovereignty.

● (1240)

Mr. Steven Blaney: Do I understand that the role of search and rescue would go to Defence, in your opinion, instead of the coast guard?

Prof. Greg Poelzer: No. It has to be a mix. There has to be a mix in looking for those kinds of efficiencies that have already been raised. The coast guard does excellent work around search and rescue and, to a certain degree, civilian surveillance, but inevitably you're going to need a very, very strong defence role. The logistical challenges in operating in an Arctic theatre are so immense that you do require a very strong backbone of defence capability.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor.

I will now give the floor to our last member, Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to continue on the topic of search and rescue. I do have to challenge Mr. Bagnell's analogy of a lifeguard in a pool. I mean, people don't decide to drown or not drown because there's no lifeguard or because there is one. Aircraft don't decide to crash or not crash because there are SAR assets there or not. It's a simple fact.

I would love to have the capacity to put aircraft in all kinds of bases across the north. I think we all would. Statistically, based on history, they would be very underutilized most of the time. Well over 95% of the SAR incidents happen in the south, not in the north.

There is the ultimate risk of the doomsday scenario of a major airliner crashing in the north. That's there for sure, but do we position all our assets or a disproportionate number of assets for that doomsday scenario? Or do we have strong plans, as we do with the MAJAID planning that the Canadian Forces has done, along with our allies, including the Russians, who are a significant part of that?

There are finite resources. If we took a Cormorant away from Gander, I'm sure Jack Harris would be all over us. We'd love to have the assets to do that. If we had support for funding that level of defence spending and if we had the people, I'm sure we'd do that. But I do have to challenge the wish to do all of this with limited resources and without the historical evidence to back up the need.

Prof. Greg Poelzer: Well, in terms of the investment, here I would suggest not thinking solely about search and rescue and this catastrophic event that might occur. It's great to have the capability for that and that's justifiable in and of itself, but there are other things that having that kind of presence does in terms of the economic spinoffs and the northern development piece, with the support around economic development, social development, communications, telecommunications, and environmental and resource management.

Look at Royal Military College, which is one of the world's leaders, frankly, in environmental management, site reclamation, and so on. DND is at the forefront of that.

So if you look at those spinoffs and that kind of investment over a broader set of activities, it's well worth the investment. I wouldn't limit it to search and rescue.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I agree with that entirely. I'm saying, let's broaden that focus.

Prof. Michael Byers: Could I jump in here for a minute?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Go ahead, please.

Prof. Michael Byers: I agree with you that historically there may not have been a need for dedicated search and rescue assets, but the Arctic is changing very quickly. My colleague David Barber at the University of Manitoba, Canada's leading sea ice scientist, is now predicting a total melt-out of all the Arctic sea ice as early as 2013. We're already seeing 150 cruise ships in Baffin Bay each summer. The amount of activity is increasing at a huge rate.

Yes, David Barber might be wrong, and maybe the ice won't disappear so quickly, but search and rescue, like all issues of national defence, requires planning for the worst-case scenario rather than the best-case scenario. The worst-case scenario, I'd like to suggest, is pretty serious indeed.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I agree, but it does come back to the matter of having the assets to do that. As it changes, yes, we need to change with it. There's no question about that.

Professor Poelzer, my last one is to you. You have stated—and I don't disagree at all—that in a lot of areas we are probably the least prepared of the eight circumpolar nations. Why do you think that is? How did we get there?

Prof. Greg Poelzer: Again, it's a question of how we talk the talk but don't walk the walk. The vast majority of the Canadian population lives in the south. Even if you include the provincial north along with the territorial north, that constitutes about 5% of the Canadian population.

That situation, I argue, is getting worse if you care about the north in terms of where it should sit on the national agenda and the policy agenda. It comes back to two reasons, one being that southernness of Canada and the intergenerational urban Canadians in large urban centres. The disconnect with northern, rural, and aboriginal issues is growing, not decreasing. As well, new Canadians, who are vital for the success of Canada, also tend to settle in southern urban cities.

So in a variety of things, we do need a very proactive engagement of southern Canada with northern and rural Canada. If we don't get on that ball, then the argument about the kind of investment around search and rescue and educational infrastructure is going to be, I suggest, an even steeper hill to climb.

● (1245)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I agree.

Would you agree that this is a situation that we have been developing over a very long period of time in Canada? You mentioned 1990.

Prof. Greg Poelzer: Absolutely. We could say since the post-war period, frankly.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank our two witnesses for being with us by teleconference. I know it is not always easy to do it like that, but it was and it is very profitable for the committee, so thank you very much.

Prof. Greg Poelzer: Thank you for the kind invitation.

Prof. Michael Byers: Thank you as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

This concludes the 23rd meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence. Thank you very much and have a nice day.

To our witnesses in Europe, I wish you a pleasant day as well. Goodbye.

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