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Chair

Mr. James Bezan

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● (0850)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)): Good morning, everyone.

We're going to continue our study on readiness. Joining us this morning is Vice-Admiral Bruce Donaldson. Of course we've had the vice-admiral here before on supplementary estimates.

We have our full contingent.

Before the admiral starts, just to remind everyone, tomorrow is the deadline for getting the last of your witness lists in to the clerk so that we can organize the last of the study on readiness. We want to get it done some time in February.

Also, now that the House has approved our trip to Toronto and Kingston—and we are going to have a public meeting in Kingston—think about who you would like to have at that committee meeting in Kingston, who those invitees to testify might be. We'll ask that everyone take that into consideration when you submit your witness lists today or tomorrow.

With that, Admiral, the floor is yours.

Vice-Admiral Bruce Donaldson (Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, committee members.

I'd like to start by thanking you for the invitation to discuss Canadian Forces readiness from my perspective as Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, and to thank you for taking this on as an area of study and for spending so much time with so many of my colleagues. I'll try to answer any outstanding questions you may have as you begin to wrap up this phase of the study.

When you first began examining the issue of readiness last month, you heard from General Natynczyk, who described a few of our most notable operational successes over the last couple of years, such as our quick response to the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti or our rapid deployment to Libya this past spring, and how the Canadian Forces' high level of readiness was key to delivering the operational effect that was needed in these situations.

In the simplest of terms, General Natynczyk described readiness as “the ability to get the right people, with the right skills and the right equipment, into the right place at the right time...and to sustain that for as long as is required”.

[*Translation*]

Since then, you've heard from some of the many stakeholders across the defence team who helped contribute to those successes and whose efforts help generate and sustain the operational readiness of the Canadian Forces. Over the past few weeks, they have provided you with a great deal of information about the different ingredients of readiness and you have raised some excellent questions about the management, costs, and future of Canadian Forces readiness.

As the officer responsible for the realization of defence program objectives, I am in the best position to provide answers.

[*English*]

In particular, I know that some committee members have raised questions about government's current fiscal situation and how this could have a potential impact on our operational readiness. The short answer to that question, Mr. Chair, is that the readiness levels of the Canadian Forces, and what readiness looks like overall, will almost certainly change significantly over the coming years. However, I'd add that the government's fiscal policy will only be one of the many factors influencing this change. This is because the Canadian Forces as a whole will be transitioning to a new strategic reality over the same timeframe.

For nearly a decade now, the Canadian Forces have essentially operated in a war-time posture because of our sizeable commitments in Afghanistan. When it comes to resource management, all bets are off when a military goes to war. To deliver on our operational objectives and protect our deployed personnel, the government and the Canadian Forces accepted a significant increase in costs associated with equipment, personnel, and readiness. In addition to helping us succeed in Afghanistan, this short-term surge in operational focus helped achieve the broader readiness levels described to you by the Chief of Defence Staff, the readiness that allowed us to deploy so quickly to Haiti and to Libya and enabled us to modernize and coordinate such sizeable security efforts in support of the Vancouver Olympics and the G-8 and G-20 events in Ontario.

[*Translation*]

Of course, now that our combat mission has concluded and we are no longer sustaining a 3,000 person task force in Kandahar province, we must take steps to bring our resource requirements back into balance with broader priorities, both in terms of the economic priorities of Canadians as well as in support of our own longer-term capability requirements.

[*English*]

In this context, determining how much to invest in operational readiness is a complex undertaking. For any given potential operation there are a number of different questions related to readiness that need to be asked, such as how big will the operation be, how quickly will we need to deploy, how independent will we need to be, or what enablers can we rely upon other countries to provide, how long will we need to sustain our commitment, and how many other operations should we be prepared to undertake at the same time?

Each of these questions touches on a different aspect of readiness for our force, and for each one, the more ambitious we become, the more resources we must be prepared to invest, resources that then cannot be invested in other areas, such as developing new capabilities or upgrading our infrastructure. No matter how we respond to these kinds of questions, the answers must be achievable within our forecasted budget levels, and they must be sustainable in the long term.

Fortunately, we knew we would have to face these challenges well in advance of the close-out of our combat operations. We acted early on a number of fronts to rebalance the Canadian Forces in response to this transition. Like other federal departments and agencies, we have completed a strategic review and continue to work in support of the government's deficit reduction action plan, but we have also undertaken a number of internally initiated programs in an effort to identify and incorporate lessons learned from our recent operations, to strategically reorient the structures and practices of the defence team, and to prepare ourselves for the security challenges of the future.

This transformation effort is well under way, but it will take time to complete. In some cases the suggestions arising from these studies and initiatives are already being implemented, while in others they are still under review.

● (0855)

[*Translation*]

But while it is too soon to predict its exact outcome, we will continue to focus the end product on delivering the same three core roles outlined in the Canada First defence strategy: defending Canadians at home, contributing to the defence of North America, and projecting Canadian leadership abroad.

[*English*]

To achieve this vision we will continue to respect the same four pillars of personnel, equipment, infrastructure, and readiness, and we'll balance our resource investment across all four accordingly, because this is what generates effective, deployable capabilities. After all, even the finest soldier can't be deployed without thousands of hours of training, a base from which to operate, and all of the equipment, logistics, and medical support that he or she requires. And even the most advanced aircraft requires a capable pilot, either on the ground or in the aircraft, a reliable ground crew, a hangar, a runway, and adequate fuel and armaments to succeed in its mission.

Of course, adapting to this new post-Afghanistan context and achieving the right investment balance will require tough decisions. Building a new capability or even sustaining the current level of some capabilities will require trade-offs in others. After all, as the Chief of the Defence Staff said, readiness is expensive, so we'll have to be strategic and selective about where and how we devote our resources.

[*Translation*]

Unfortunately, this may require us to sacrifice some operational agility and flexibility in the short term so that we can generate capabilities we'll need in the longer term.

[*English*]

I cannot promise that over the next few years we will be able to sustain all of our six core missions simultaneously to the extent that we did in 2010. However, what I can promise is that the Canadian Forces will be ready to deliver the best operational output possible with the resources that we have. After all, Mr. Chair, we have a great integrated team at National Defence, with a common vision and an impressive track record, and by continuing the great work that is already under way, I believe we have every reason to be confident that in moving forward we will continue to deliver on the defence and security needs of Canadians and their government.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, and I look forward to your questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Admiral, for your opening comments.

We're going to go to our first round. Mr. Kellway, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Thank you very much.

Vice-Admiral, thank you very much for coming here today.

Your comments in many respects are very similar to those of the chief and the other commanders of the various parts of the Canadian Forces who have come before us, in that you've provided the same definition of readiness, you've talked about a transformation, but you've also concluded that the forces are ready to deliver.

Is there anything in your presentation this morning that implies that the Canadian Forces aren't ready?

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: No, sir. But what I can say is that as we look forward to the future, the question really is, ready for what? These are policy decisions made by government. As we shape the future force and as we orient the future force, these are some decisions that will have to be taken so that in a resource-constrained environment, as we are all in, we can actually shape the force to be ready for what Canadians and the government wish us to respond to.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Okay.

Mr. Chair, I have no further questions.

On behalf of the official opposition, Vice-Admiral, I thank you for your leadership, and the chief as well, as well as all the other chiefs and commanders who have come before us. I hope you will in some fashion pass on our best wishes for a merry Christmas and a happy new year to all the troops, and our thanks for the service they have provided to our country. All the best.

Thank you.

● (0900)

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Thank you, sir. I'll pass that on.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chisu, you're up.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Thank you very much, Admiral, for your presentation.

I am delighted to hear that everything is going well in the Canadian Forces.

You mentioned in your presentation as one of the points preparing ourselves for the security challenges of the future. I understand that the security challenges to our military and generally for our government are threats that cannot be neglected at this point. So what is your organization's analysis of Canada's future security environment? And what types of operations should the Canadian Forces be preparing for?

In this context, can you explain lessons learned from Afghanistan from the intelligence point of view, the fusion centres and something...? What is your role in cyber warfare and other issues that can gravely affect our forces in operations—not in combat operations, but also in other types of operations?

I am just outlining the context of the threat from China—and less from Russia. China is a threat on these issues and our deployment in every part of the world—be it in combat, be it in peacekeeping operations, and be it in other fields. They can also be a threat to our own computer systems.

Can you elaborate on these things as to how we are ready, and how we are preparing ourselves for these issues?

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Thank you for your question, sir.

We have eight hours, do we?

Let me offer a couple of thoughts on that, sir.

First of all, in terms of future security environment, we do work across the department and the Canadian Forces to make judgments about security trends, not just in defence, but in other aspects of social and economic development that may affect the future security environment, so we can shape our forces to be ready for it. We also compare notes with allies and we work as whole-of-government in coming to these judgments.

It is very, very difficult to predict the future. What I can say is that we've come to the shocking conclusion that the future will be just as unpredictable and fraught with security challenges as the present, and that our best strategy is to prepare our forces to be flexible, to be combat-capable, to be interoperable with our allies, and to be resilient in warfare.

Now, when we look at things like cyber threats and this type of thing, what we're talking about principally from a Canadian Forces standpoint is making sure that our forces are survivable in the future warfare environment. So we're doing a lot of work in that domain with the rest of government and within the Canadian Forces to understand the types of vulnerabilities that we have in our systems, and to strengthen them against attack, to make sure that in the information warfare domain we will prevail and we will triumph, and to make sure that as emerging capabilities are assessed around the world in terms of military capability, the Canadian Forces are in the position to remain world-class in terms of our ability to operate in potential future environments.

I can also say that in the area of cyber warfare it is very much a growth industry. It is a big concern, we all know, of our government and of our allies. We continue to partner with our allies and with the rest of government to understand that developing domain and to participate where we can in it.

I'm not sure that this gives you a great detailed sense of what we're tackling, but I can say that within the force development domain, I have put a team together to do this very thing, and to make sure that as we're shaping future forces they will be compatible with that threat environment and with our allies to operate in the future.

In terms of lessons learned in Afghanistan, particularly in intelligence, I think the biggest lesson we learned was that when something happens, it's too late to try to throw a team together to assess intelligence. We put an all-source intelligence centre together in Afghanistan, and we evolved it over a number of years. As we repatriate that, and we have repatriated that, we don't want to disperse that knowledge and those practices, that doctrine, and that structure back into our institutions, so that we can just pull it all together again in the future. So we are looking at how we would keep a core of that. You can only afford to keep so many people sitting around waiting just in case, but we are looking at keeping a core of that so that we could reconstitute it quickly. We have a large number of people ready, trained, and available to repopulate it for a new mission, should that be required.

I'll also say that domestically we've learned an awful lot about managing information, managing support to law enforcement, which is principally our role in major security support and this type of thing, and an all-source information management centre, separating intelligence from criminal intelligence, from situational awareness, in a way that is consistent with Canadian law. It's something we worked an awful lot on before the Olympics, and that stands us in good stead moving forward.

I hope that starts to answer some of your questions.

● (0905)

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Yes, it does.

I know that as Vice Chief of Defence Staff you have a lot of responsibilities. Actually, you are responsible for preparing the readiness, basically, for the Canadian operation of forces. So can you just elaborate the same way on the intelligence? What about the UAVs that we are looking to improve? This is part of the intelligence, just a corollary from the intelligence part, so it was very useful in Afghanistan, and that is probably the future. Are you looking forward to improving the UAVs?

I remember in Afghanistan, when I was deployed, it was the Danish, or whatever that.... If you can speak about this....

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Yes, sir.

I confirm that uninhabited aerial vehicles are becoming more and more an important part of situational awareness on the battlefield at the level of individual units, at the level of formations, and in fact at the level of nations.

But let me step back before I talk about that and say that modern warfare requires accurate weapons, it requires a speedy response in defence and in attack, and it requires agility. But the core and the centre of gravity of modern warfare capability is information management, because accurate weapons are useless if you don't have accurate information.

In fact, in a modern warfare environment, the idea of conducting an attack on scanty information borders on illegal, and we're highly conscious of our responsibilities in warfare. So information management is critically important. Information management relates to the collection, analysis, and processing of information, turning it into understanding, and disseminating it to those who need to know it.

The All Source Intelligence Centre is an important part of that analysis and dissemination, but on the collection side, every component of a battlefield, regardless of whether it's in the air, on the ground, or on or under the ocean, is a sensor for gathering information, as are other sources of intelligence. They are brought together and fused into an understanding of the picture.

We found in Afghanistan, as we have found in other domains—in Libya and many others—that uninhabited aerial vehicles are a tremendous asset in collecting information, in monitoring activities and movements, in fact, and in some cases in delivering weapons. The advantage they have is that you can put them at a higher degree of risk because they are uninhabited. The disadvantage they have is that they cannot make judgments. You have to connect the instrument with some way of making a judgment about the information it's gathering so you can control it.

● (0910)

The Chair: Thank you.

Your time has expired.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Thank you very much, Admiral, for your eloquent explanation.

The Chair: Mr. McKay, you have the floor.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Admiral Donaldson.

In some respects I'm tempted to adopt Mr. Kellway's remarks and say that we've had a succession of people in here much like you and all of your colleagues, all of whom say you're ready, so we should just wind this whole thing up and say that you're ready. I'm going to resist that temptation, but still wish a merry Christmas to you and also to those troops you so ably represent and who do such a fine representation for us.

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Thank you.

Hon. John McKay: Syria is heating up; it's pretty fair to say that. You can see the diplomatic moves that are coming. The Arab League has basically isolated Syria. We have a warship in the vicinity. The opposition is moving beyond their base. Turkey is adopting a stance that is, for want of a better term, far more belligerent. There are refugee flows back and forth.

It's not unreasonable to anticipate that the world is going to require a greater intervention. I wonder whether you could share with the committee the state of readiness of the forces to participate in that state of readiness, with possibly an intervention or possibly just simply an evacuation of Canadian nationals or dual nationals, or whatever. Could you tell us about your state of readiness? I would have thought that any prudent planning would have to include Syria as the foremost potential point of intervention.

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Sir, thank you for the question.

History has taught us that the most likely point of intervention is not always the point that demands the intervention. But let me talk a little bit about the potential for deployment to that region of the world. We've been tracking it very closely for some time.

We maintain readiness to evacuate Canadian citizens all the time. We have aircraft and we have a group of soldiers ready to deploy to assist that. When there is an area of the world where the likelihood of a requirement for Canadian Forces participation in evacuation goes up, then our level of readiness and our level of planning goes up at the same time. I can say that we are tracking this very closely and we remain ready to respond.

I can also say that the Canadian Forces, by virtue of its size, has capacity limitations for major international conflict. We have always looked to partner with allied nations in delivering full military effect in far-flung areas of the world, as we have in Afghanistan and as we did in Libya through NATO. So the question becomes, in a potential or another operation in that part of the world, what type of contribution would be appropriate for Canada?

I can say that across a number of fronts we retain readiness, as we demonstrated in Libya and as we have demonstrated in Afghanistan. We retain readiness to participate in that type of action, but the key questions are: what type of action will it be, what will be the authorization for that action, and what will the government decide in terms of a Canadian contribution?

I can say that as we reconstitute from Afghanistan, we are further capacity-limited than we have been typically—just as we reconstitute the equipment that was in Afghanistan. But I can also say that in an emergency, and particularly here at home, we are ready to deal with any eventuality.

● (0915)

Hon. John McKay: Staying with Syria for the moment, we're given to understand that the Minister of Foreign Affairs is about to make an announcement. I'm assuming that the Canadian Forces would be involved in that announcement. The announcement may well be, as a minimum, the evacuation of Canadians.

That is a bit of a risky undertaking in and of itself, and may well engender some resistance on the part of the Syrians. Effectively, the question here is, how ready are we to intervene to secure the safety of Canadians in Syria? The secondary question really is, are we prepared to be involved in any securitization of territory or whatever, in conjunction with the forces of resistance to the Assad government?

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: First of all, sir, I wouldn't want to speculate on an impending ministerial announcement—

Hon. John McKay: Apparently it's not going to be a long speculation.

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: —but I would say that any evacuation mission depends upon the circumstances on the ground. It is far more expeditious, it is far cheaper, and frankly far less angst-ridden for Canadians to evacuate using commercial means. If aircraft are still flying and if vessels are still going into port, just to make their way, get on a plane, and leave is far easier than doing this in a military context.

So there are ways, and the consular offices, embassies, etc., remain in contact with Canadians in countries. And they're far better positioned to speak to how they go about this than I am, but there are ways of communicating to people and giving them direction—suggesting they leave or directing them to leave.

If there is a requirement for Canadian Forces support, it's often because those normal means are either insufficient or are not available.

Hon. John McKay: You talked about capacity limits. What does that mean?

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Capacity limits mean, for example, that we have only so many aircraft. We have only so many C-17s, only so many Airbus or so many Hercules aircraft, etc.

But in terms of a full-fledged evacuation, I think we're well positioned to contribute to what invariably would be an effort coordinated with, I would think, the Americans, the Brits, the French, and others.

In that type of an operation, we tend to take all comers. Obviously we want to rescue Canadians, but quite often we don't have a full aircraft, and we'll take anybody who is leaving. The forces of other nations will do that too.

Finally, we are ready to do things like securing an airfield or securing a port and that type of thing. The Canadian Forces maintain combat troops ready to do that. It is certainly not the preferred option for us or, generally speaking, for the country in question. The host country has a huge interest in allowing people who wish to depart to do so. We generally can rely on either cooperation or acquiescence in matters like this.

I defer to my colleagues in Foreign Affairs to discuss how that's gone historically. But I'm fairly optimistic that it would be a rare occasion when we would need to fight our way in. We would have to do that very carefully, because doing that could put Canadians at greater risk, frankly.

Does that answer your question?

The Chair: Time expired a couple of minutes ago, but we'll keep on going.

We're going to go to the five-minute round.

Mr. Norlock, you have the floor.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Through you to our witness, thank you for coming today.

My background is in uniform also, but more in a civilian capacity.

● (0920)

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: It's just as important, sir.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Yes, well, we all complement each other.

One of the managerial techniques we utilized was management by results. This has to do with measuring.

As Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, how do you ensure that the Canadian Forces are able to fulfill the six core missions as outlined in the Canada First defence strategy?

There are three parts to the question. The second part is how you decide how to allocate resources. Presumably you allocate them where levels are lower. But how do you measure readiness, and what's the measuring capacity? What metrics do you use to determine the readiness?

Finally—and I think this is probably what we are most interested in or focused on—you have to compare. Part of measuring is comparing. So what is the current state of readiness in the Canadian Forces compared to what it was a year ago? And then could you compare that to what it was 10 years ago, so this committee can have a good idea as to our readiness measurement ability?

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Well, sir, first of all, how do I measure readiness? This has been a fairly challenging aspect of managing Canadian defence for some time. We have historically left it to the heads of the army, navy, and air force to measure their levels of readiness and to confirm that to the centre.

Readiness is measured in terms of the capacity to survive and succeed in missions at a very high risk and a high level of complexity, the capacity to survive and achieve mission success in a lower level of risk and complexity, and the number of units that are not at either of those two levels of readiness and are in fact generating towards or have just cycled out of those two levels of readiness.

We have established that common metric across the Canadian Forces, notwithstanding that if you're talking about an army unit, it's really quite a different thing to measure than a navy ship, or an aircraft, or a squadron in the air force. But those are the basic and strategic levels of readiness that we have focused on.

We have typically asked the heads of the army, navy, and air force to produce as much readiness as they can with the resources they've historically had—that we either bump up a little bit or take down a little bit each year—and to tell us what is the effect of fewer resources or what effect they can achieve with more resources. So we're really managing that kind of 10% band.

We're doing a fundamental review now of the readiness requirements of the Canadian Forces so that we can establish 100% of the ready forces we need in order to be able to conduct those six missions concurrently, and so that we can take to government what are the types of trade-offs we're facing in a resource-constrained environment moving forward.

I would say that we always hold a number of ships, a number of aircraft, and a number of army units at high readiness, that is, they are ready to deploy into high-intensity operations and fight and win for Canada at home or abroad. I can say that the number at that high readiness is consistent with our commitments to NATO and consistent with our view of the threats. As things change, we can cycle more units into high readiness with the right amount of notice. As resources become more constrained, we can shift readiness out of one service or one type of platform and invest it in another so that we can compensate for it. But that's how we go about measuring it.

We do it in two domains. The first is current readiness. We track current readiness now against our expectations in those domains: high readiness, standard readiness. We do that weekly. Generally speaking, the service commanders report that. We also track it in the future domain. This is when I say we're doing the work to establish that readiness baseline for the future so that we can do resource planning around it, and we can make sure we have committed future resources against the cost of readiness in the future, moving there.

You ask about resource allocation. Historically, we have allocated resources based on what we used to do and have asked people to produce as much readiness as they could. Now we've become more prescriptive and far more specific. We will be continuing to develop ways of measuring degrees of readiness that relate not so much to the basic judgment of commanders as specific criteria that will have been met; this, however, is a complex business, and particularly with the introduction of new platforms and that sort of thing, it will be an evolving business moving forward.

Finally—and it has taken a while for me to get to the question you say everyone is most interested in—how are we doing compared to a year ago and how are we doing compared to 10 years ago? One year ago we were generating 3,000 Canadian Forces members to deploy to Afghanistan about every six months, between six months and a year. It depended on the rotations. We had a road to war where, with those 3,000 deployed, we saw another 3,000 who were getting ready to deploy and a further 3,000 who were being identified and being given the basic components of readiness so they could start on that road to war. There are quite a lot of people engaged in that readiness stream.

● (0925)

So I would say the Canadian Forces, between that requirement and the other challenges in 2010 that required us to raise our level of readiness, to hone it, and to be prepared, were at the highest level of readiness and the highest level of operational capability we've been at since probably after the Second World War, if not during the Second World War. But as I said in my opening remarks, that was a bit of an artificial benchmark.

My view is that we are less ready today because we are reconstituting and we are shifting into a more realistic steady state of readiness for the Canadian Forces, which will be affordable over the long term.

We're looking at some adjustments as well. I would put the Canadian Forces today against any other military in the world. I'd say that 10 years ago I would not have been able to say that.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time has expired.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Moore, you have five minutes.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): First, I thank you for being here today. We appreciate your being here. I was a member of the Canadian Forces for a little over three and a half years. I would like to wish you happy holidays and I would very much appreciate it if you could pass those wishes along to your colleagues.

My question is similar to Mr. Kellway's. I would like to know whether you think the readiness of the Canadian Forces includes some of the weakest aspects.

[*English*]

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: With regard to the level of readiness, I think we have areas that we need to continue to work on in the Canadian Forces. I think we're doing a good job of looking after ill and injured, but I think we can continue to improve with regard to looking after families.

On the level of readiness, I'll start with the navy. I'll say two things.

The first is that the destroyers and the replenishment ships are old and difficult to keep at a level of readiness consistent with our expectations. They're also very expensive to keep at that level of readiness. So as quickly as possible we are advancing the shipbuilding replacement program so that the air defence capability and the command and control capability for deployed maritime forces can be made more robust. I think managing that gap in replenishment and in command and control and air defence ships for the navy will be an area of challenge over the next five to ten years.

We have had a challenging period with the submarines in the navy, but I'm confident that we are emerging from what the navy commander calls a “long beginning” to bring those submarines that will be exceptionally powerful components of the Canadian Forces back into a level of full weaponized operational service that will return value for Canada.

On the air side, I would say the challenge lies in the number of new platforms being introduced. There are a lot of very capable platforms being brought into the air force all at the same time. They're introducing more new platforms at the same time than we have ever introduced before. We're working that area very carefully, and the commander of the air force is watching that very carefully, particularly on the people side, to make sure we don't introduce weakness that draws away from the level of readiness we need in the air force.

On the army side, as I have said, we have redeployed from a long mission in Afghanistan, and a lot of the army's equipment and a number of the army's vehicles are being refurbished, because the conditions in Afghanistan were difficult. The equipment needs to be brought back up, not to perfect condition but to a usable condition, so we have the right number of vehicles and weapons systems for the army ready to deploy on the level of notice we expect.

That is an area the army is working through, and I think it will take about a year and a half until we are over most of that whole reconstitution bubble and back in steady state for the army. It doesn't mean we can't respond with the army, but it does mean that the number of concurrent missions would be limited right now because of that.

Does that answer your question?

● (0930)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Yes. I had the opportunity to speak to General Natynczyk. That is all I had to ask the leadership of the Canadian Forces. That is more than enough for me. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll continue on.

I have Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Vice-Admiral.

In your presentation, the portion that caught my attention, of course, was the part where you said you couldn't promise that over the next few years the Canadian Forces would be able to sustain all six core missions simultaneously, as happened last year. Looking at the six core missions, we would certainly think being able to deliver on some of those—doing domestic operations, responding to major terrorist attacks, supporting civilian authorities in a time of natural disaster—is not optional.

In your planning, obviously you've looked ahead and said that you might not be able to do what you did last year. Do we no longer have six core capabilities to start with in the planning stage? Do we take them as they come and then say we can't do any more? How do you plan for that when certainly we would anticipate that there's a priority in those six core missions?

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Thank you very much for the question.

In my opening remarks I actually said that we can't guarantee that we could respond to all six to the same extent we did in 2010. In fact, to prepare us to respond the way we did in 2010 took about two years of preparation. We stood up the operational commands—Expeditionary Force Command, Canada Command, and Operational Support Command—so as to be able to manage that period of vulnerability and to make sure that, as we were doing some of those six missions, we could still retain the capacity to do the others.

If you look at a major security event, for example, the presumption is that you would have at least six months, if not a year or two, to prepare security support for the police for an event like that. But my view is that without that type of notice, and a short notice major security event...if we were committed to another major operation abroad, if we were doing another humanitarian mission, and if we were responding to a terrorist attack as well as a floods and fires, we might tell the government that there was not an awful lot left to be providing security support to the police without more notice. That's really what I'm getting at: how quickly do you want to respond to these things?

This is fundamental to the structure of readiness for a force. With six core missions—and I agree with you, sir, that there is not one of those for which I would say, “Oh well, we just don't have to do that”—if you decide to respond to one with everything you have, you can't respond to the others. So the question is, how much do you want to have ready to hold against each of those six, and how much do you want to risk-manage against those?

Let's be clear: we don't risk-manage security of Canadians at home. We don't risk-manage day-to-day operations. These are fundamental to how we're structured and how we're ready to respond. But for some of the other responses—for example, to a humanitarian disaster, or even for a second, or a first, major international operation—we might have to decide just what level of forces we wished to commit to that operation in order to make sure we retained sufficient forces to be able to respond to others.

In modelling the future force in a resource-constrained environment, these are the types of issues that we would take to government, so that the options for shaping a force within the available envelope would be understood.

Does that answer your question?

● (0935)

Mr. Mark Strahl: It does. It leads to maybe more questions, such as what it would take for you to be able to promise that over the next few years you would be able to meet those six core missions as you have previously.

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: What I could say is that if I could not promise that I could meet each of those six, then I would make that clear to government, because that's my job.

It's quite clear: we have those six missions and we must be able to respond to them. But there is a difference between responding to major security support with 1,200 people and with 4,500 people. There is a difference between responding to a natural disaster in Canada with 1,000 people and with 10,000 people. There's a difference between the response to an international humanitarian crisis, for example, with two ships and 2,000 people, or with five ships, eight aircraft, and 15,000 people. So the question is, what types of response packages do you want to have available, and at what level of readiness would you hold them?

We are always conscious that when we commit forces—for example, in the recent operation in Libya—we have to immediately start thinking about who will replace those forces if this mission continues, because we can't keep them there forever, and what other forces are available that remain to respond to the other requirements? In many cases, we will identify forces to come up to a higher level of readiness because we have deployed forces to a mission.

But it gets back, again, to managing readiness in the force. If you are holding forces that can be brought up to a level of readiness in about 30 days, that's very different from forces that will take six months to come up to that level of readiness. So in managing the whole machine, that is what readiness—that portion, that pillar of the Canadian Forces—is all about: managing that whole force within limited resources.

I would say that at the core of this is an understanding that if all six of them happened at once, what is sufficient in each of those areas to respond to the expectations of government...? That's a policy decision of government.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brahmi, you have the floor.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Chair, I do not have any other questions to ask. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Moving right along, we'll go to Ms. Gallant.

You have the floor.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Through you to our witness, Mr. Chairman, my question has partly to do with the NATO response force. Originally, it was supposed to be a rapid response force, but I understand from what we've been told that the next regiment with the highest state of readiness would be deployed as part of this international force. They must first train together and then become available for a six-month period. But for rapid deployment, the training together would take some time, so we really don't have that rapid element in terms of an entire regiment.

So what I'm wondering is, within the Canadian Forces, do we have a tactical regiment that is self-sustaining, an all-arms light brigade tasked with rapid reinforcement of NATO forces, one that has a signals squadron element, an infantry field artillery, field engineers, service support, and a mechanized element? Is there something of that nature in place right now?

● (0940)

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Thank you for the question.

Yes, there is, although I wouldn't characterize it as a regiment. I would characterize it as a battle group, which is a flexible instrument that is structured to respond to the specific conditions on the ground. It is the army commander's responsibility to maintain forces at that level of capability.

But I would say that we do not hold them at a level of capability that would see us deploy them in two days as a force that big; it would be hugely expensive to hold them at that level of readiness. So we tend to hold them at a level of readiness that is sufficient, within the warning time we think we will have, to be able to bring them up to that very short notice level of readiness so they can deploy on time when we need them.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Which group is this? Which unit is this?

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Well, I can't tell you exactly what unit it is. I can take that on notice, if I can share that information, and pass that on.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay.

What I'm describing is different from any special forces, CSOR, or anything like that. I'm talking about a ready battle group.

The capability that I'm looking to find out whether or not we still have is what we had in capability with the airborne. They were originally stood up for the defence of Canada, operations against small-scale enemy incursions into the north and the provision of short-notice response to United Nations requests for peace operations, including patrolling, winter operations, domestic operations, and to help in response to civil authorities.

Now northern sovereignty and the defence of the north are our government's priorities. While the main threat may have changed, there are still threats that have been expressed to this committee—threats involving human trafficking, the smuggling of drugs and people, environmental threats, and the protection of our natural resources. So at a time when this is our government's priority—and we all agree that we can't be every place at the same time when it comes to the vast expanse of our north—what you're telling me is that we don't have a really rapid response capability of that nature to respond to whatever threats could befall us.

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: No. What I'm saying is that in terms of an immediate reaction to a large-scale military attack in the north, it needs to be held at a level of readiness that's consistent with our view of the threat.

Now as you've pointed out, there are threats in many other areas that require a much more agile and rapid response capability. We have immediate reaction units at a high level of readiness across the country, in three different locations, that very quickly can be deployed to deal with a requirement for a Canadian Forces reaction to natural disasters, to low-level requirements for presence, and to manage those types of situations, particularly in conjunction with other government departments.

We have a joint task force in the north with headquarters in the north. It has very close relationships with the territorial governments, so that we can position the Canadian Forces to respond immediately to security requirements in the north that require a Canadian Forces response. And we have ongoing relationships with the federal agencies responsible for those responses as well, to coordinate them.

We have special reserve companies that are trained in Arctic operations, so that they are able to be deployed into those conditions and have a level of understanding of the operating conditions so that they can work very quickly and capably in the north, and we continue to develop that capability.

Finally, we have the Canadian Rangers, who live in the north, understand the north, and are available to respond in the north on a daily and hourly basis. In fact, they are the eyes and ears of the north for the Canadian Forces. They do amazing work in bringing problems to our attention, being the first military responders on the ground to understand a situation, and helping us coordinate a response with the territorial governments and the federal government.

In terms of a major battle group ready to deploy into the north, that is not a posture that we keep at a very high level of readiness at the moment.

● (0945)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: The ones you describe, do they train together?

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Yes, they do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before I pass the questioning over to Mr. Opitz, I have to vacate the chair. I have to run over to the House to table a bill. Mr. McKay will take over the chair.

If I don't make it back before the committee adjourns, I just want to wish each and every one of you a very merry Christmas, a joyous time with your families and friends back home, and I look forward to seeing all of you in the new year.

Admiral, thanks for coming in today, and please share our season's greetings with all the families of the Canadian armed forces.

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: I will do so. Thank you, sir.

The Chair: Mr. Opitz, you have the floor.

Mr. McKay, I ask that you take the chair.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming today, Admiral. It's a delight to see you again.

Sir, you started off your career as a reservist in 1977. I remember what those days were like because I started in 1978. What is your view of the reserves now? We've been very integrated. The reserves have very easily plugged into regular force units, certainly most recently on deployment to Afghanistan, but prior to that on other missions in Bosnia and on the smaller missions, UN missions, and African missions that we've sent people on abroad.

What's your view of making sure that level of training, that level of awareness, and that ability to plug and play, if you want to use that term, between the reserves and the regular force remains at a high state, or as high as it can, given the current circumstances?

As you and I both remember, back in the day—three decades-plus—there were clear divisions. And now everything has changed, and there's a very close level of cooperation. People come back and forth, and there's a lot of component transferring into the regular forces, as you did in the early eighties.

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Right, and the other way as well, sir.

● (0950)

Mr. Ted Opitz: Yes.

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Thank you for the question.

I've seen the reserves evolve significantly over the course of my career. To my mind, the reserves are in a much stronger place than they were when I joined the Canadian Forces.

We have seen almost a full circle, in that when I joined the reserves, the reserve force was very much a mobilization force: an augmentation force lest the country go to war and need that pool of trained people.

It became clear that we couldn't train people quickly enough in the reserves to fulfill the roles we would expect of the regular force, because the regular force was really quite small and specialized at the time. We evolved the reserves into specialized roles for the reserves in many areas in the army, the navy, and the air force.

When the heightened operational tempo came along, a lot of reservists expressed an interest in folding into a regular force training road to operations, as it were, and deploying with the regular force. I think the reserves really proved that they bring huge capability to the fight, and that the types of skill sets reservists bring are different from the regular force in many respects, but their professional competencies are exactly the same. We've reoriented the preparation of training of reservists to position them to be able to fold into Canadian Forces operations.

We have relied on them heavily to be able to support operations and to backfill at a time when we had a very high operational tempo. We need to shift back to really investing in that part-time reserve that can deploy on operations with the regular force; investing in training and capability for the part-time reserve; capturing the incredible experiences people have brought back from operations and plugging that back into the armoury floor, the naval reserve divisions, and the air reserves to create the enthusiasm, the commitment, and the ongoing expertise that will position us for the future.

Some aspects of the reserves will continue to be an important component of our total force. The army has significant reserve components in some of their ready forces, and they have structured themselves that way for a reason. The air force relies heavily on reserves just to manage surge in their operations, and they've been surging for a while. The navy is looking at a shift in the employment of reserves, from maritime coastal defence vessels being an exclusive domain to how reserve employment could be advantageous across the entire fleet to make the personnel pool more flexible and more agile.

I could talk about reserves for a couple of hours, but I see this as continuing to evolve. As we transition out of this high period of operational tempo, when we have relied so heavily on reserves on a full-time basis, a big priority for us is to invest in reserve capability and training on a part-time basis so they can continue to participate as we go along; it will give us that surge capacity in the future.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you, Mr. Opitz. Your time is finished.

We'll go to Mr. Alexander.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Ajax—Pickering, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

I would like to join my voice to those of colleagues wishing you and everyone who works in NDHQ and across the Canadian Forces in all branches, even in the most far-flung places well beyond Kabul and parts of Africa and so forth, the very best for the holiday season and a merry Christmas. All of us really do appreciate the tempo you maintain and the sacrifices that have been made particularly in recent years. We hope 2010 was an exceptional year. Certainly it was in terms of our recent history. As the season unfolds we have an enormous amount to be thankful for in terms of the work you and your colleagues have done, so we wish everyone a merry Christmas.

I really want to delve into some of your earlier remarks about readiness. Obviously our readiness is an expression of the priorities that have been set by the government and by circumstances in the world, but by being ready for certain missions, we are, in effect, saying we're not ready for other ones, or we are less ready for other ones.

You said that the mission that actually arises as a new priority is often not the one we could predict. We can't predict earthquakes. We couldn't predict 9/11 and so forth.

We have come to have a lot of confidence in the ability of the Canadian Forces to retool and to become ready for new missions, and we understand that readiness involves equipment. It involves training. We understand it involves human resources. There have been improvements on all of those fronts, but there's an issue we haven't heard about yet, which is really the rate of preparation. Obviously it's better to do a lot of training over a long period, but you don't always have that time.

I was wondering if you could discuss how that factor has evolved recently in response to Afghanistan and other missions. How quickly can we become ready for a new mission, and are we doing a better job of that now? Are we doing it faster? Are we able to do it faster than we could in the past? If not, what sacrifices or compromises does this involve?

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Thank you for the question. It's a very interesting question.

Have we improved our rate of preparing forces? We understand the minimum training requirements to put people into harm's way in a modern combat environment, particularly on the ground in Afghanistan now but also in the air and at sea, better than we did 10 or 12 years ago.

What does that mean in terms of the rate of preparation? In some cases it takes more preparation now for people to be ready. We've also confirmed the base skill set that we expect people to have. When we're talking about reserve preparedness, it's very important to me that we have revised the base skill set we expect every reservist to have so that when we start this next echelon of training to prepare for an operation, it's not a question of weapons skills, first aid skills, etc. I would say that we have reaffirmed the basic skill set we expect every soldier, sailor, airman, and airwoman to have. That encompasses fitness as well. It encompasses an awareness of current tactics, techniques, and procedures, but any training for an operation will be specialized.

I would say that we have a better idea of the timeline. I would say that we're investing early, better than we were before, so that we can reduce the amount of mission-specific training that is required. But I would say that we view the first rotation, or "rotation zero", of an operation as a learning event as much as a doing event.

The other thing we have is a highly developed opportunity to turn lessons learned back into training for the next rotation, almost instantaneously, to the point where in Afghanistan, after we'd had a major incident, if we had learned something from it, that got translated back immediately into the rotation that was planning to come into theatre and was incorporated into their training.

In terms of the agility of preparation and speed of preparation, we have come a long way, but we do invest in making sure the people we put in harm's way are ready to deal with those realities, and there is only so much time you can cut without actually increasing the risk level for people.

Does that—

● (0955)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you, Mr. Alexander.

Mr. Kellway.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Vice-Admiral, I just wanted to reiterate my thanks to you for being here and to all the other chiefs of various part of the forces.

The fact that I have no questions for you today is not to suggest that your comments at the beginning were not helpful or to suggest that any of the other observations and comments from other generals and admirals who have come before us haven't been helpful. It's actually been very educational for me, as a new person on this committee and in this file. I think we've kind of run the course on the issue of readiness, and in fact that we did so quite some time ago.

I appreciate your comments today.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you, Mr. Kellway.

Minister Baird has now made his announcement, and possibly you'll feel a little less constrained about responding to questions about Syria.

Following on, in effect, Mr. Alexander's question, can you take us through an exercise in preparation for readiness for, in this particular instance, Syria? I'm assuming that the forces have been thinking about this for a fair bit of time at this point. Can you explain to us not only how you go about that, but the lessons you've learned and incorporated from Afghanistan and from Libya, how you think about this, and what stages of preparation you're at, please?

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Well, sir, I wouldn't want to give the impression, following on from Minister Baird's announcement, that there would be a contemplation of a military mission in Syria. We are always ready for missions that the Government of Canada may direct us to undertake. We're always ready to provide options for the Government of Canada.

But perhaps it would be more helpful if I were to talk about how we prepared for the mission in Libya and how we advised government on that.

Would that address the same question?

● (1000)

The Vice-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Well, in politics I'd call that a dodge, but I'll leave it, as that might actually be useful and instructive to the committee.

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: We found the situation in Libya to be quite a surprise, in that six months before or eight months before it was not a part of the world we were really concerned about, and it fairly rapidly turned into a part of the world we were quite concerned about.

The first area of concern in Libya in particular was the safety of Canadians, in fact, the safety of the international community. An initial tranche of planning was aimed at making sure Canadians could be safely evacuated from the country if the situation warranted it, and in fact it did. So the whole of government considered options for doing this and put forward a number of options to government. A decision was made on how to proceed, and then it was revised as the situation developed. Canadian Forces got involved. We had identified a number of aircraft that could be turned to that role, and once it became clear that the Canadian Forces were required, the government directed us to get involved. The aircraft were there within a day to participate in that mission.

We evacuated not just a number of Canadians, but, in cooperation with a number of international partners, in a coordinated operation that was led by the U.K, thousands of people from the areas of conflict to safety.

At the same time—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. John McKay): When was it decided to put the ship in?

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: At the same time, sir, we were watching the situation as it developed. We were watching the concern in the international community and at the UN.

Looking at the forces that we had ready and the forces that we could make ready, we prepared a series of capability options for the government. We took that forward to offer what capability the Canadian Forces could contribute should the situation worsen, should the international community provide the basis for intervening and the government decide to respond with the Canadian Forces.

We had put options together that we took to the government. As the situation evolved, the government made decisions about the type of Canadian Forces involvement and in fact the type of Government of Canada involvement that would be a follow-on to the developing situation.

One of the things about a warship, sir, is that it takes a while for a warship to get into theatre. Quite often, if you wait until you need it, it's too late. The advantage of a warship, though, is that you can send it anywhere you like, and it's not an expression of anything other than national interest and sovereignty.

So the decision was made earlier to have a warship in the region because of the flexibility it gave for any requirement for further evacuations of people that came to light, and also because of the flexibility it offered in a developing multinational situation or in fact as an expression of independent Canadian interest. Following that, the government made a decision, after the United Nations Security Council took a position on the matter, to join the coalition operation. Shortly after that, the aircraft that we had put on a heightened level of notice to move were ready to go, moved immediately into theatre, and commenced operations the next day.

That's how it all came together. There were a number of options that were put on the table. After options were selected, we continued to advise the government on further Canadian Forces options that would be available should the conditions worsen and should the government wish to have a more robust response. That's our business: it's to be ready to respond in that way. We identified and held the level of readiness of other forces, should things have gotten worse and should the international community and the government have decided to intervene in different ways, so that we could respond to that quickly to meet the need.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you. I'd like to follow that up, but I'm out of time.

For the Conservatives, Chris.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Thanks.

We're going to ask two questions, one by me and one by Mr. Chisu, but I'll start.

Admiral, about the environment that is space, we understand that it belongs to you in the chain of command, for lack of—

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: I just rent it, sir.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Chris Alexander: You rent it.

We do understand that Canada doesn't have forces in space. We rely on it for communications, etc. But perhaps you could comment on our readiness to do what needs to be done to support missions from space. In making that comment, and given the importance of imagery and communications that rely on satellites in orbit or geostationary satellites, perhaps you could also comment on what Canada's current assessment is of the military risks that we face in space.

For decades there has been concern about some militarization of space, a weaponization of space. To what extent are our capabilities in the communications realm vulnerable there? How do we assess that and its relationship to readiness?

● (1005)

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: Thank you. Another great and complex question.

I'm conscious that I'm probably taking too long to answer some of these questions, and I apologize, but clearly it's a subject that interests me and I want to make sure that I can be as clear as possible.

Let me talk about four domains of space: the way it supports operations in terms of communications, the way it supports operations in terms of awareness, the way it gives us awareness of a threat, and the threats that are posed in space.

Let me start by saying that we are very conscious of the Canadian interest in preventing the weaponization of space, and we continue to work very carefully to support that policy of the Government of Canada. As well, the Government of Canada has an interest in space that goes beyond the Canadian Forces, and we work very closely with the Canadian Space Agency and other government departments to manage the government interest in that domain.

From a Canadian Forces perspective, one of our principal uses of space, historically, is to provide communications. Using satellite communications is in fact an excellent way of getting the high-speed, high data rate communications that we need for our modern command and control systems. We invest where we can in that. Historically, we've rented satellites in order to do that for us, and it tends to be quite expensive and you tend to pay by the volume of information. We partner where we can with allied communications systems, but it has historically been insufficient to meet all of our needs. We continue to look for ways to invest in secure, guaranteed, high data rate communications, and spend less money on it because it tends to be quite expensive. There are a couple of initiatives we're pursuing that you may have heard about, which represent cost avoidance in the future, at a fraction of the cost today, by making investments today in that type of capability.

In terms of awareness, we use RADARSAT quite a lot, we use weather satellites, and we use other types of satellites available through allies to increase our awareness of what's going on. That's a very important component of our use of space, because in terms of intelligence surveillance and response and in terms of just being able to understand the domains we're going into, we rely heavily on space instruments to do that for us. We have a number of different programs and a number of different mechanisms for doing that.

In terms of the threat in space, we need a degree of awareness of what is going on in space because quite often space can be used as a domain within which weapons travel that can be a threat to Canada. So an awareness of what's going on in space is very important. As well, space debris has posed problems for us historically, and we're enhancing our ability to understand what type of space debris may be posing a threat to Canada and to predict as best we can—although it is a hugely inexact science—the threat that it may pose to us, so that we can respond to it appropriately.

Finally, there is a threat in space, and we have seen it develop. We have seen weapons testing, and it would be, I think, self-evident that countries would wish to deny potential adversaries the use of space in a conflict. There is work going on in that domain, and we track it carefully. We have to understand the vulnerability of our own space sensors and certainly of allied space sensors, and we work to try make them as robust as we can. But a satellite is a pretty vulnerable piece of kit up in space.

● (1010)

Mr. Chris Alexander: Is there time for a second question?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. John McKay): We're already 35 seconds over.

Colleagues, 10 seconds? I'm fine with that. I'm a much more flexible chair.

Mr. Chisu.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Thank you.

Admiral, I also would like to take this opportunity to convey my best wishes to all members of the Canadian Forces, especially my colleagues in the military engineering branch, for the upcoming holidays.

As a former combat and construction engineer, my question is related to infrastructure. We talked a lot about personnel and about equipment, but infrastructure is playing a fundamental role in assuring that the readiness of the troops is complete.

So what can you tell me about the infrastructure, as far as us needing to house the planes and the helicopters, and to prepare facilities for training our troops to get them up to speed for operations, and so on?

Also, I'm asking this question because—

The Vice-Chair (Hon. John McKay): This is a brief question, isn't it?

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: I'm asking this question because it's related to when you are doing cuts, and infrastructure is very much on the chopping block.

Can you tell us how we are maintaining infrastructure to be a viable part of our readiness?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Do you think you can be relatively brief on that answer?

VAdm Bruce Donaldson: First of all, infrastructure is an equal pillar in our business. We take it seriously. It's very important, and as I said in my remarks, without infrastructure we cannot conduct our operations.

Secondly, we have a lot of infrastructure: we have a lot of buildings, and we have a lot of land. We're the biggest landholder in government. We have thousands and thousands of buildings to maintain. It's a real challenge, but we're committed to maintaining the infrastructure we have and recapitalizing the infrastructure through the Canada First defence strategy.

We set money aside for maintenance and repair, as well as for new construction and demolition. We have had problems with spending all of that money for maintenance and repair, and we are adjusting how we allocate and manage it, so as to be able to spend more and meet our expectations and the goals we have set for ourselves, which are industry standards for recapitalization.

In terms of new construction, we've had challenges with the length of time it has taken for projects to get approvals, and we're changing the process we go through for that. We're trying to change levels of approvals, and we're trying to lump new infrastructure into more of a program view, where we approve a program as opposed to a whole bunch of individual projects. This way, we can speed up the processing and get construction under way, in order to more closely mirror industry standards in delivery as opposed to standards we've achieved in the past that we find unacceptable.

Does that answer your question?

The Vice-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you, Mr. Chisu.

I have learned my lesson. One never asks a politician to ask a brief question.

Personally, and on behalf of the committee, I want to wish you and yours and the forces you represent a merry Christmas and a happy new year. It would be nice if 2012 was an exception and it was a peaceful year, but the threat assessment doesn't seem to be indicating that.

To colleagues as well, merry Christmas and a happy new year.

With that, thank you very much.

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