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Chair

Mr. James Bezan

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● (1105)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. We're back, under Standing Order 108(2), to study readiness. This is meeting number 33.

Joining us today—and I believe he is our last witness on readiness—from the University of Calgary is Professor Robert Huebert, who is the associate director of the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies.

Professor, I'm going to open up the floor to you for opening comments for about 10 minutes.

Dr. Robert Huebert (Associate Director, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary): Thank you very much.

It is indeed my privilege to be here to address you. My apologies for being a couple of minutes late. My taxi driver dropped me off at the wrong block, even though I got into an argument with him about which one it was.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Dr. Robert Huebert: He was pretty insistent that the West Block was the East Block.

An hon. member: Welcome to the Hill.

Dr. Robert Huebert: Yes.

This is an intriguing subject, of course, and one that I think the committee is very well advised to be addressing. Given the types of changes that we are now experiencing, both in the context of the international security sphere and in the context of the Canadian security environment, the idea of how we now prepare for readiness, of how we now prepare for a rapidly changing international system, is probably one of the most critical questions—if not the most critical—facing the Canadian Forces today. It's very apropos, in fact, that the work of your committee is examining this issue at this time.

I'll be having three sets of comments in terms of observations of what, in my assessment, are some of the key issues that we need to address when we talk about readiness.

The first one, of course, is environmental factors. What are we trying to become ready for? Why does it matter? Why is it so critically important that we give this the serious thought that we need to today?

The second aspect is, of course, what do we do to prepare for that readiness? What are some of the key elements that we, as a country, coming off the ending of a relatively long period of warfare...? It is indeed when we think of Afghanistan that we will look back and realize that we were in fact at war, regardless of what we were calling it, and that in fact we are now going from one war.... Be it either Syria or parts of Africa or Mexico, the next one will come much too rapidly for the international system in terms of the ability to sit and prepare and in terms of where we're going.

Finally, I will have a few concluding comments on what I think—in terms of assessment—would be the best area to go to in terms of the forces.

Let us begin. The first comment, of course, is one that probably does not resonate, at least in terms of political correctness, but we are finishing a war. Whether or not Afghanistan will be remembered in the complete context of the type of sacrifice that was required for those who participated, when the final telling is made and we recognize how much money was spent, how many lives were in fact lost and affected.... We often focus on the casualties, as we should, but what we often forget about are the wounded, both psychologically and physically. I think this is something that we as a society still have to come to terms with in a much better way than we have. But that's an issue for another topic.

Coming out of Afghanistan, we are going to be faced with a situation, too, and once again, it's a very uncomfortable truth: will it be the first war we come out of that ultimately we will have lost? There are possibilities, of course. We have to acknowledge this in this context of whether or not the Taliban will come back to power.

When we see some of what our allies are doing, when we see some of the efforts to basically disengage from the conflict, to wash their hands—whatever term you want to use—the issue is, are we going to be faced with the situation that this will ultimately be recognized as an event in which, as much as the individual professionalism of our forces came forward, the allied effort was unsuccessful? And that means defeat. Let's be blunt here in this particular context.

We know from history that for any country coming out of an unsuccessful conflict, be it the Americans with Vietnam or, if we want to go more historically, the Soviets with Afghanistan, it always is a point of reckoning for the forces. I think this is something we have to be very, very sensitive to.

The second major environmental factor we face that is probably equally confounding is that we are seeing our allies go through a series of what I would characterize as major economic missteps, which incidentally may of course make us, from an economic perspective, stewards who are that much better in terms of our international economic performance.

But nevertheless, when we look to the south, to our American allies, and when we look to the Europeans, all we see is economic crisis. We are seeing the manner in which this is reflecting both in terms of how they are thinking of themselves as a society and in terms of how they are preparing themselves for defence purposes. Right across the board, we see massive cuts—either being instituted or about to be instituted—and as a result we are probably facing for the first time considerations that our allies are not going to be able to provide us with complete dominance, particularly when we talk about air power or sea power.

These are long-term ramifications. But I think we have to seriously start recognizing that the superiority that we, as western allies, gathered at so much blood by 1943 and that we have never surrendered, the complete air domination we have had, may become in jeopardy. It won't be because of the better ability of an enemy. Rather, it will be because of the economic crises. When we look at the cuts to the F-35s, the F-22s, and the Eurofighters and so forth, these are very troubling developments, which we see worldwide, in terms of our future operations and our state of readiness.

The third environmental factor, and perhaps the most troubling, is the continuation of dangers internationally. Syria, of course, is entering the first year of its agony, and there is no sign that it will be letting up at any point soon. Try to consider our situation, our economics, if indeed these types of crises start spreading into countries such as Saudi Arabia. Try to imagine the impact on oil and gas and what that means for our international economics and our requirement to involve ourselves if the so-called Arab Spring does, in fact, move itself into the Arabian peninsula. That will truly be of epic proportions, because in that type of environment, everybody will be intervening for their own interests, and that will just make it that much more complicated for Canada.

We also see the proliferation of missile and weaponry technology at a rate we pretend is not there. When the full story is told of the achievement of the Pakistanis in achieving nuclear weapons, and the full story of the involvement of the so-called Pakistani father of the atomic bomb, Khan, is actually told, we will have a very telling story in which the proliferation and exchange of these deadly weapons is, if anything, increasing rather than decreasing in the modern era.

All of this means that the type of environment Canadian Forces will be asked to participate in will become much more dangerous, will be much more deadly, and unfortunately, will be on a much broader basis than what we have faced. We have to acknowledge the inclusion of weapons of mass destruction.

Ultimately, Canada is a warrior state that does not want to call itself that. Once again, if we are honest with ourselves, from an empirical perspective, since our involvement in the Boer War, Canada has been one of the most active deployers of military forces overseas, short of the very strongest powers. Take out the Americans, British, French, and Soviets. When you start looking at who else has participated the most, the list narrows very quickly to countries such as Australia and us. Once again, we can call it peacekeeping, peace enforcement, protection of allies, NATO commitment, or whatever, but we have a history, and one of interest, which I suspect will not diminish any time in the future. Hence, the need for readiness becomes that much more important.

Where can we look with regard to where some of the issues will be coming from? The new reality is that in terms of readiness, this is going to be a come-as-you-are party, as it is often referred to in the literature. We're not going to be able to pick and choose. And the crises that are coming down the road will be occurring at a rate that will catch us off guard.

Many Canadians, of course, are not aware and pretend that the events in Mexico are not leading to the possibility of Mexico becoming a failed state. But if you look at most of the open literature on what's happening with regard to the type of warfare now extending among the various drug cartels and the increasing inability of the federal government to control those issues, the possibility of Mexico deteriorating into some form of civil war, narco-war, or whatever adjective we add, is something that I think Canada, as a North American state, will not be able to ignore. It will be one of those situations when, of course, we will follow the lead of our American neighbours to the south. But it will be a very difficult issue that will test the readiness of the Canadian Forces.

We also have to recognize that we will not be able to depend on our allies for the complete type of overlay of forces they have provided us in the past. In the immediate future, there isn't that much of a problem. We will continue doing business as we've done business for the last 20 years. That means the type of support the Americans, the British, and the French have provided in Indonesia, East Timor, of course, Yugoslavia, Libya, and Afghanistan, all the areas everyone said we wouldn't do at the end of the Cold War but that we in fact did. That type of support is going to be diminishing, and we will have to stand more and more on the protection of our own forces, if we choose to follow our historical orientation.

● (1110)

So how do we do this? I would suggest there are two major elements that we have to focus the most on. The first one is on the state of readiness, and this is something as Canadians that we don't have that good a history of doing. We are going to have to increasingly create, develop, and perfect our ability to have our own strategic analysis. Traditionally what we have done is rely on our allies. Once again we go back to the Boer War, where we really started deploying as a nation overseas, but then you get into World War I, World War II, the Korean conflict, the Cold War, and the post-Cold War era. The overall strategic orientation of what we say we need has tended to follow what we have devised in consultation with our allies, but generally speaking we have tended to follow what our allies have suggested. Our naval commitment during the Cold War of anti-submarine warfare was predominantly devised because of our allied command suggestions. The type of air protection we provided was, once again, at the suggestion of our allies.

I would suggest that in this modern era, to truly be ready we need to start thinking much more in strategic terms rather than in tactical terms.

● (1115)

The Chair: I'm going to have to cut you off there. You are already a minute and a half over your allocation of time. Maybe you can tell them your further comments in the Q and A portion.

Because we only have an hour, we're going to take that first round and instead of making it seven we're going to do five minutes.

Mr. Christopherson, you have the floor.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you.

Please don't use all my time, but take a couple of minutes to finish your thought, because I thought you were getting to the crux of our issues here. I'll use some of my time to allow you to finish, please.

Dr. Robert Huebert: I would say the most important is that we need to have that strategic independent analysis. I think the types of reports General Leslie provided in transformation is a critical point for the structural organization, but I do think it's missing the point that we need to start looking more. It's not good enough to just simply have a white paper at the beginning of every new government. That has been the Canadian practice, Liberal or Conservative. We need a process that we can anticipate, that we can start looking at and considering.

That leads to the second point I would leave you with, and that is the procurement point. The experimentation we are doing with the national shipbuilding strategy and many of the techniques we are now developing in terms of a much more open process, where we are working with industry, where we are trying to develop a capability rather than the platforms—I believe that is indeed a model that we should be looking to in terms of procurement of our other forces. Now, we're not going to be able to do exactly what we've done with shipbuilding in the context of the aerospace requirements that we will face, but I think many of the techniques that are now being pioneered in how to make it truly competitive in a truly uncompetitive industry.... I mean, hence we can see all the issues with the F-35 because of the lack of competition in that regard.

As we look to the future in terms of the types of forces...we need to rationalize, the way we are in fact doing for the shipbuilding strategy.

Thank you.

Mr. David Christopherson: Great. Thank you very much.

We're down to the final parts of our public submissions, and we'll be grappling with a report. Hopefully in an ideal world we will be unanimous in our agreement, but given the political world we're in, that may not be possible.

Given that that's where we're about to head, with a blank slate, where would you start? We've just turned to you and said we like the way you're thinking, we like your approach, go. What would be step 1, step 2, and step 3, in terms of how you would begin to address the question of readiness?

Dr. Robert Huebert: The first step is to create a greater independent mindset amongst our senior military and political decision-makers when it comes to issue of security. We are going to have to be acting on our own, so that means in the context of not thinking just simply about how you deal with the more incremental things, such as strategic reviews, saving money, but that you start addressing the big question of what you need a strategy for, why you need readiness. That has to obviously be with the chief of defence staff, but I would contend that it has to be the number one important mission that he or she has in terms of future development.

The second is, of course, the issue of a broader procurement strategy. As I said, I'm a big fan of where I see the shipbuilding strategy going. I've been a major critic in terms of how we've done it on an ad hoc basis, be it the Sea Kings or the frigates. Whatever major procurement issue we have, we've tended to be platform-focused. We've tended to be ad hoc. We need to be thinking of a much broader, longer-term procedure, very much along the thinking that has come forward with the shipbuilding strategy.

The third issue I would suggest, in terms of a blank slate, is, of course, this: we have to get out of the mindset that Afghanistan is over, everything is hunky-dory, and now we don't have to worry about anything else. I think that's a very dangerous mindset overall.

Mr. David Christopherson: The approach you're suggesting would be even more difficult for us, because we actually need to do both. There are still some areas in which our international approach is multilateral with our allies. We are a country that focuses on UN cooperation. We need two parallel tracks: one in which we maintain our relationship as a partner with our natural allies, our NATO allies, and another that reflects our strategic interests in a stand-alone capacity. Really, we need both tracks happening. So what you're suggesting is that the job is even tougher now than it's been in the past.

● (1120)

Dr. Robert Huebert: Absolutely. Going with our allies is the best. Let me be clear on that. My idea would be to let the Europeans figure out their crisis with the euro and the Greeks, and let the Americans figure out how to get out of political deadlock. Meanwhile, we can proceed as we proceeded for the last 20 years. I think that's the ideal. My fear is that the time is now past. It's not that we are choosing to be a more unilateral nation; we are going to be forced to be a more unilateral nation.

The Chair: Mr. Norlock.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): I believe Mr. Strahl was first.

The Chair: Sorry, Mr. Strahl.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to the professor for his comments.

When we are operating in an expeditionary manner, we are always going to be doing that with our allies. You're suggesting that this model may not always apply in the future. But given the current context and the desire to work with our allies when we go abroad, how important is it to have interoperability with our allies when we procure new equipment?

Dr. Robert Huebert: The key to interoperability is communication. When push comes to shove, interoperability depends on the ability to communicate, to integrate intelligence. The type of environment, the type of future, I'm talking about is one in which we won't be operating strictly by ourselves but rather with allies who will be providing us with less assistance. So interoperability has to remain a top priority. But the ability of these forces to defend themselves, to provide force protection, and to act as an independent unit is going to be that much more critical to the safety of the Canadian personnel we deploy. We have to have interoperability, but we also have to make sure that the equipment we buy in the future can operate more independently, because the support that our allies will be able to provide us with will be much more limited.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I know that you have written extensively on the Arctic. I would like your comments on Canada's readiness as it pertains to the Arctic. Are we doing what's necessary to have a military presence there? How is our level of readiness in the Arctic in comparison with Russia's?

Dr. Robert Huebert: I like our plan. You can see the change that we have in our thinking. It goes back to the Martin administration. That's where we start to see the Arctic figuring quite prominently. The Harper government has followed through in both enforcement and in surveillance capability. The question for the Arctic is always whether we will actually do what we say we're going to do. We have a long history of coming up with extensive plans and not following through. I'm more optimistic: I see indications that we are going to go ahead this time.

How do we compare with others? The Russians are redeveloping their strategic capability. Their strategic capability is based in the Kola Peninsula. Even if the Arctic wasn't melting, even if the Arctic wasn't the Arctic, the Arctic is going to be remilitarized because of its geopolitical location and increasing Russian capability. The American submarine forces are already responding accordingly, and we're starting to get back into some signs of the so-called great game.

The other country that we have to start looking at very seriously is China. The Chinese are making massive expenditures in their Arctic science and capabilities. They're building their own icebreakers and they're saying they're going to become an Arctic power. They are a country we haven't paid much attention to in the Arctic. If we're having this conversation in about five years, I think they are the ones we're going to be looking at.

● (1125)

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I still have one minute. Okay.

Going back to your comments, do you believe that the Canada First defence strategy adequately addresses going forward? I have heard the minister refer to that as an evergreen document recently. I just wanted your comments.

In terms of the future that you have laid out for us, do you think the CFDS is going to be adequate to address those concerns?

Dr. Robert Huebert: I need to choose my words carefully here. I like the direction in which the Harper white paper went. Let's be blunt; it's a white paper. We don't call it that, but that's in effect what it is.

I like the attempt it has made in maintaining what I see as a bipartisan recognition that you have to have multi-capable forces dealing with a whole host of issues. That's really what the paper does.

What I don't like—and this isn't just about the Canada First paper, but it's our whole mindset—is this deal where we think we've done the strategic heavy thinking, we've come up.... And you can find it going all the way back to Trudeau's white papers, and we see this with every single government that then comes in. They do the defence white paper right up to the beginning and say, “We've thought about it; nothing is going to change.” In fact, historically we've never done a second white paper in one administration.

We need an ongoing process that deals with those big questions and constantly is having course adjustments as we go by. So you have the big picture, but you're also dealing with the issues that are developing. A lot has changed since the Canada First strategy in terms of some of the details. We have to re-entrench that thinking also, I think.

The Chair: Ms. Sgro, you have the floor.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Mr. Huebert, it's been fascinating listening to you. Where do you see the next threats coming from?

Dr. Robert Huebert: If we're going to be honest with ourselves, it's going to be somewhere where we don't think of it.

Once again, if you look back at the end of the Cold War, you'll see that nobody was thinking we'd be going into Yugoslavia to the degree we did. Regarding East Timor, no one was thinking we were prepared to fight the Indonesians. In other words, we have the succession of basically being surprised, but that's the nature of the beast.

I'm really fearful of what's happening in Mexico right now, because that is not a discretionary conflict. If that state does in fact implode on the trajectory that some people are now saying it is headed, I don't see how Canada could avoid being involved in that context. We can say no perhaps to Syria; we can say no to the Horn of Africa. If Mexico implodes, we can't say no.

The other really troubling one, I think, that we have not been paying any attention to is if Saudi Arabia deteriorates into the type of inter-fighting we're seeing in northern Africa. If Saudi Arabia collapses, I do not see how we can avoid going into that particular conflict. That one will be very messy because the stakes are so big and everybody will be involved.

Hon. Judy Sgro: I think your comments today are very helpful for all of us, as parliamentarians, to ensure not only the safety today of Canadians but safety worldwide with the ongoing nuclear threats and other issues that are there.

With the F-35s, are we going in the right direction? What if Canada ends up going alone on them?

Dr. Robert Huebert: If we look into the future, the two certainties I would say about the Canadian Forces are that we are going to have to ensure that we have the ability to maintain the protection of North America and our part of aerospace protection, and that we remain a country that sees its security by involving our military overseas. Those are the two constants I see regardless of the mythologies we may have about ourselves. That's what the empirical evidence tells me.

The empirical evidence also tells me that the Americans are heading into a situation where, if they are not surrendering the air dominance they've had, they're going to be severely reducing it. For the protection of North American airspace, given the types of environments we see in China and Russia—and I'll be blunt in terms of those being the two most obvious successor countries to aerospace threats to Canada—we are going to need to have some maintenance of aerospace protection or the Americans will do it for us.

On the American issue, okay, if we surrender sovereignty on that, it's not going to be a problem. Not being able to protect aerospace, that's a problem.

We are also going to have to have the types of capabilities the F-35 gives for the proper protection of an increasingly dangerous surface-to-air missile capability that we're going to be seeing. This is why you want stealth.

The F-35 itself, is it a good plane or is it not? We're not going to know until it's really operational. The problem is that there are no alternatives. There are no other equivalent stealth capabilities short of the F-22, which an act of Congress says they can't sell to anyone else. Ergo, we face the situation of losing aerospace protection in North America in the long term as the F-18s have to be retired, and we also face the difficulties of telling our troops to go into danger zones without adequate aerospace protection. I do not think we can rely on our allies into the future as we have in the past.

● (1130)

Hon. Judy Sgro: I wanted to give you the last minute to make some further points.

Dr. Robert Huebert: The last point is if it's not the F-35, we're going to need something along that line. We need something that has stealth capability. We need something that is going to be under Canadian control, and we're going to need something that provides us with the fast air capability of getting, say, from Ottawa to Tuktoyaktuk in a very quick period of time.

That's the reality of the future, and the real problem we face—I do have sympathy for the decision-makers faced with this situation. There aren't competitors any more. You can't go to, say, an F-37, as we could in the past, when we were considering.

This is going to be the problem. It's going to be expensive, but I don't see an alternative, to be perfectly honest.

Hon. Judy Sgro: It has to be very difficult. There aren't a whole lot of alternatives. The need is there. You've indicated that, because it's not just Canada that's looking at this situation, but you're saying there are no alternatives.

Dr. Robert Huebert: That's the problem.

This is why countries like Norway and Australia, as much as it's paining them from an expense perspective, have not pulled out. They're hoping the Americans do not reduce the numbers. The critical point is not how much the Australians or the Norwegians or us, for that matter...it's the Americans going back on their initial promises. They said they were going to buy about 3,200. They cut that substantially, and that's where the cost will balloon.

The Chair: In the interest of our last half hour here and trying to make sure everybody gets a chance to ask some questions, we're going to reduce the time in this round to four minutes.

Mr. Norlock, you have the floor.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and through you to the witness, thank you for coming today. Because it's such a short period of time, I'd like to home in on one area of your expertise, which is the Arctic.

The specific questions are: how has the establishment of facilities such as the Arctic training centre and the Nanisivik Naval Facility enhanced the readiness of the Canadian Forces in the Arctic, and additionally, how do facilities like those two contribute to the overall development of the region?

Dr. Robert Huebert: Of course, the critical point that we often forget, once we have the Arctic offshore patrol vessels, is if you're sending forces from Halifax up to Nanisivik, you're travelling a distance that is greater than if you're sending those same vessels to London. I think a lot of people don't recognize the distances involved.

The other problem we face when we look at Nunavut and parts of the Northwest Territories is that there is no infrastructure. What the communities have in terms of oil supplies, gas, any type of fuel, is what they need for themselves. There is no Esso, no Shell, up there that can sell to our forces. The question of having Nanisivik, the question of having the ability over at Resolute Bay, means that we have pre-positioning capabilities when the requirements arise. They will increasingly arise.

For a state of readiness for the Canadian Forces, these are initial steps. These are simply getting the type of infrastructure that, say, the Soviets/Russians and the Norwegians have had for quite some time.

We're playing a certain degree of catch-up for that capability. It's going to be difficult. It's expensive. There's no question whatsoever, but unfortunately, I have to tell you they are first steps.

We are going to have to be looking, then, at what we do in the western Arctic, which is quite frankly the next area we are going to have to be looking at in terms of these pre-deployments for readiness.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much.

In a similar vein, could you touch on whether the international SAR treaty will improve relations between Canada and the Arctic Council allies?

At the same time, how does a treaty such as this assist the Canadian Forces in maintaining a ready force in the high north?

● (1135)

Dr. Robert Huebert: I can't be a bigger fan of what we've seen for the Arctic Council. Let's be clear—and once again it's a bipartisan push—that both Mulroney and Chrétien deserve a lot of credit for their push and support of the Arctic Council. When Canada put the Arctic Council forward, that's precisely what we wanted it to do: we wanted it to be a high-level, regional, political body to address issues such as search and rescue, confidence-building, and so forth. It was the Americans who said, "No, we're not ready for that", and basically put the brakes on it.

Now the Americans have changed their position, thank goodness. As a result, the search and rescue agreement is a superb first step. It unifies us. It gets us talking to the Russians. It gets us talking to the Americans. It gets us talking to the Danes in a way that if we have these little hiccups such as Hans Island, we can perhaps avoid them in the first place by having the person-to-person conversation. They can say, "Okay, this is silly. Let's not send our frigate to land troops on the island." And we can just avoid it that way.

So it opens up avenues. It forces us to train. I also hope that we are open and honest in terms of the shortcomings, and there will be massive shortcomings when we start saying, okay, what do we actually have to respond to the next time a liner hits an iceberg or a rock and we don't get perfect conditions, as we've had in the last few years? And we can start saying, okay, what do we have to do for the next steps? In that regard, this agreement is superb. It starts building the type of confidence that I'm hoping we'll start seeing in terms of other types of exercise operations, so that when we start addressing other constabulatory issues, such as fishing resources, which will become a growing issue in the north, we in fact have at least a common voice amongst the Arctic states. Quite frankly, it's going to be the issues with the non-Arctic states coming into the Arctic region that are going to be diplomatically some of the most difficult ones to resolve.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kellway, you're up.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you, thank you, Professor Huebert, for coming today. It's been very interesting to date.

In your comments you made a statement, "...if we choose to follow our historical orientation." Yet, in your assessment of security risks, it almost suggests that following our historical orientation may in fact be impossible, especially if we are forced, through economics, to act more unilaterally on defence and security issues.

Could you tell us how much of your assessment is based on actually following our historical orientation? Or is your assessment free from that? Is there another way of reorienting ourselves, in fact?

Dr. Robert Huebert: This is the hard one, because we have attempted to bring in a greater independence, a greater withdrawal from the international community. We see this in the inter-war period. We see some of the issues in terms of when Trudeau brought forward the defence and foreign policy review. But ultimately, I think, it's the fact that we are an international trading country, with one of the highest standards of living, where Canadians come from such multiple backgrounds. And even though we really do have the political ability to say no to the world, if we wanted to cut ourselves off, we'd never go isolationist to the degree of, say, Albania, or whatever. But we could pull back. We do not have to be the country that everyone looks to as soon an international crisis occurs.

How many times did people look to, say, China for involvement, for providing peacekeepers, peace enforcements, or whatever, or Japan? There's a whole lot of historical reasons why not. We could choose to be like that, but I think because our interests are ultimately so tied into the international system now, we will not ever choose to do so. Therefore, that means that the security requirements that come with that type of integration that we have with the international system, with our culture, with who we are, mean that we will continue, even though we have the option of saying no without a complete destruction of Canadian security.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Thank you.

In response to Mr. Christopherson's question, your first step, you suggested, was to put together—and I think I got the words right—a greater mindset, which almost suggests to me, if I understood you correctly, that we need, in a sense, a greater mindset to even start thinking about this issue of readiness. This is interesting, given that we're supposed to be writing a report on readiness.

How do you start to put together that greater mindset? What does that greater mindset look like? Is it pulling in thoughts and people from outside the military establishment itself?

● (1140)

Dr. Robert Huebert: It's a little bit of both.

I'll give you an example. The navy, very much on its own—and once again, the full story hasn't been told—back in the 1990s started saying that they had to have a reassessment of what Canadian sea power meant. Through a series of the CMS at the time, they had the vision statement, and then they had the subsequent strategy known as Leadmark.

That created a lot of discussion and debate within the navy itself in terms of how to approach the procurement issues and set a standard of strategic thinking that lasted. The problem is that once they had Leadmark...basically you were told that you had a Canadian sea power strategy; it was done. The problem is that the efforts to bring something they're calling Horizon now, which will be the next follow-up, has certain political difficulties coming forward.

The air force and the army also have to start thinking with the same type of mentality that we saw in that context. We also have to be encouraging the ability to think of the strategic thoughts that are coming from the outside. We've taken a couple of steps backwards. It's self-interested, I'm very aware, but we've cut the academic sort of strategic analysis, and the SDF community is about to lose its funding. I think it's a bad step. Once again, in my self-interest, I'm not going to be too openly critical about it, but we need the type of thinking that comes from people saying that maybe we should be thinking in terms of isolationism, or more connection with it—in other words, considering all options, because that's the only way we can really stay on top of where the crisis is or will be coming.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chisu, you have the floor.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for your points.

I would be interested in the point of unilateralism that you expressed in the context of readiness and sovereignty in the Arctic. Let's face it, you were talking about the western Arctic, but there are two, one superpower and one less superpower on the betting street, so I'm not concerned about that, but I am about the Northwest Passage. The Northwest Passage is in our own territory. As you alluded to, there will be some other players in the game in the Arctic. I'm looking at the European Union and other people there. How do you think we should be ready for our Northwest Passage in the eastern Arctic?

Dr. Robert Huebert: That's easy. We do what the Russians are doing.

The Russians are basically saying they will follow international law and they will participate in every multilateral improvement of environmental standards. They're a major player in what's referred to as the polar code, which is going to be strengthening the creations of the environmental standards for new ships. They're basically putting in an enforcement capability that says they will follow international standards, which are the highest standards, but that they have rules for what you need to do if you're coming into the northern sea route, which is their term for the Northeast Passage.

What the Russians have been doing very successfully is saying, “World, come on in, we want you to come in, we want you under Russian standards, and, by the way, this is what happens to you if you don't follow our standards. We have these new port facilities. We're calling them the research and rescue, but we're deploying naval assets. And, by the way, we are also making sure that you have to pay a certain fee to support that infrastructure, and, by the way, you have to sign these contracts, which, in effect, say that you're acknowledging the northern sea route as internal waters.”

What we need to do is play by the international standards, create the type of vision that we want, but have that enforcement capability, so that when the Europeans—and they are probably going to be a bigger threat than the Americans, in my view, for the sovereignty—finally start saying “No, this is an international strait”, we can say, “Well, you can call it whatever you want, but these are our rules”, which means, de facto, that we would have control.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Do you think we should have a little bit more investment in that area and get more prepared?

Dr. Robert Huebert: Absolutely, there is no question, because the future is coming, and it will be there. Are we prepared for the Europeans or not?

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: I was raising this issue because the Russian mapping system is much better than ours, so we are behind on that.

Dr. Robert Huebert: Yes, we are.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: You pointed out very well the air support we need. I remember when I was in Afghanistan in 2007, we didn't have Chinooks, we didn't have helicopters, and that was a major problem for our operations.

● (1145)

Dr. Robert Huebert: Look at the amount that allied air forces were there. We were told that F-18s weren't required because the Europeans and the Americans had a surplus of fighter capability. You and I both know that we will always be down the list when calling on those forces when our personnel need them at certain times. This is going to be the environment that we are increasingly going to be in.

Let me be clear. When you say I'm saying unilateral, I'm not saying unilateral, but once we are operating in a multilateral format, we are going to have to have a more unilateral capability for our forces.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: So you are saying we are the second largest country in the world and we should have some capability to have control of our country.

Dr. Robert Huebert: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Our sovereignty.

Dr. Robert Huebert: Security, I'd say more than sovereignty. Sovereignty is an international term that my legal colleagues like.

Call it whatever you want, but make sure those coming in are following our rules to support our interests. That's the critical point, in my mind.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brahmi, go ahead.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like our witness to tell us a bit about submarines. Canada currently has four submarines, three of which are not operational. We know that one of them has returned and is currently undergoing tests.

Could the witness tell us about the possibility of not having any submarines? If Canada decided to no longer have any submarines, would there be any alternatives for protecting our coastlines?

[*English*]

Dr. Robert Huebert: Yes, that's the question. The problem we're facing with the submarines is that we let them stay in dock too long. We should have bought them at the time they were offered. Anybody who's ever left a car over winter knows what happens when it's parked and not moving. Well, salt water environments are even worse.

The danger we face is our future. Our international maritime trade is going to increasingly be in the Asia–Pacific region. We know, for example, that if the Northern Gateway pipeline goes forward, it is going to completely reorient our trade away from the Americans and towards the Chinese, the Japanese. That in effect means we will become much more involved with the international security issues surrounding the region. Submarines are still the best way, despite what movies show, of protecting your maritime trade in the event of a future crisis.

Now we can rely on the Americans, but once again I would suggest that if we're moving our trade more toward the Chinese and a conflict develops between the Americans and the Chinese, we're going to be in a very, shall I put it, interesting security dilemma at that point in time.

The more we can provide for the protection of that trade.... Once again, it has to be through submarines. It's not surface; it's submarines that are really the future. The more we can provide for our own capabilities, the more that both the Americans and the Chinese will have to take our considerations into account in terms of any conflict in that regard.

Unfortunately, the numbers speak.... There is an arms race going on in submarine construction in the Asia–Pacific—not in the Atlantic, but in the Asia–Pacific.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: You did answer one part of my question, regarding the offshore protection of our fleet. However, the second part I would also like you to talk about is the protection and monitoring of Canadian coasts, which are huge.You have still not talked about that.

What are the alternatives for monitoring our coasts and ensuring that we are not being spied on by Russian and other countries' submarines, which are located close to our shores? Are there any technological alternatives that would help us do away with submarines?

[*English*]

Dr. Robert Huebert: The flip answer is no, there's not. If you do not have the subs, increasingly you're not going to have the deterrence capability. You're not going to have that psychological factor over subs coming into our waters. They're saying, “Okay, we don't know where the Canadian subs are.” That's first and foremost. If you lose that, you lose 80%.

The alternative is to ensure that programs such as Northern Watch, which is a technological program we have to develop an indigenous capability of listening for subs under the water.... It's through acoustics that you listen for subs. That program is ongoing, but it's in spits and starts. We would need to have a much more extensive deployment of that type of SOSUS system, but one that is a much more independent system.

We're developing the technology. Will we actually make it operational and deploy it? Stay tuned on that one.

● (1150)

The Chair: Mr. Opitz.

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

Thank you for being here, Doctor. I remember you came out to CFC a couple of years ago when I was there as a staff officer. Thank you for being here today.

We, of course, have some gentle disagreements with our friends in the Arctic. I was just in Stockholm at the Arctic conference as well and found it quite interesting. The Americans didn't show up for that one, but hopefully they'll show up to Reykjavik.

With the U.S., as you know, it's the border area of the Beaufort Sea, which is an interesting case. With the Russians, of course, there is the shelf. You also mentioned Hans Island earlier, which may be a smaller issue but it's still an issue. So we have three, in particular, territorial disagreements on that. I'm going to ask you to comment on some of those and to give us your views and thoughts on how we go forward to resolving them, although there are some dispute mechanisms currently running through the UN and so forth.

It's interesting that China—and this was brought up there—is asking for observer status at the Arctic Council. You commented earlier about it definitely wanting to be a player in the Arctic when it's in fact not an Arctic nation. How do you see that playing out, especially since we are working with it more closely on trade? As Mr. Chisu pointed out earlier, the Northwest Passage is in our territorial waters. What are the challenges we might face, in fact, in enforcing our territorial sovereignty over that key passage?

Could you comment, sir?

Dr. Robert Huebert: The issue with the Chinese is an interesting one because it's not going to be just China and Canada in the Arctic; it's going to be Canada in the new relationship with the new China. We're seeing this in terms of a very well thought out Chinese strategy of buying into our resource industry. They're doing it in Australia. They're doing it in Iceland. They're doing it in Greenland. They're doing it all above board, and it's all rule-based, but it's a long-term strategy to give them a control in the long term, and I think it's going to be quite interesting.

On the other hand, they are going to be the future for much of our resource development. We are a resource exporter. The Americans have shown that they're starting to have some questionable market elements, and they are going to be the future. The question is how we balance that.

The Chinese also know that they need us for the resources, but the Chinese have also made it clear that when it comes to their core interests, it doesn't matter in terms of friendships or new possibilities, they will do what they need to do. We found that out at the University of Calgary when we had the audacity to give the Dalai Lama an honorary degree and we got delisted as a university. Basically our president had to go and make apologies for having an independent university style in order to get the Chinese to say that we're acceptable. We're going to need to deal with the Chinese in a way that I think has to be mature and realistic, but in a greater context.

For the Beaufort, we're missing opportunities. We should be doing what the Australians and the Indonesians did to resolve the situation of the East Timor sea. They still say their particular view stands, but they work together in terms of environmental standards, resource development, and protection. I really think that's what we have to do.

The Americans have shown that they still want to act independent, because they put a moratorium on their fishing, which of course included the zone that we dispute. I don't understand why they didn't come to us and say they wanted to do this together, they wanted to do this through joint management. What that tells me is that the Americans still don't remember they have a northern neighbour in that context, and that makes it dangerous. I think missteps can really make that disastrous when the oil and gas does start, and it will start in that region.

For the Northwest Passage, as I was saying earlier, the key is not asking for everyone's blessing. The key is going forward and just saying, “This is our capability. We're listening to the international community for what we think standards are, but, by the way, this is a homeland.” People, Canadians, live here and have lived here since time immemorial, so we're not talking about some abstract figure—which Europeans are increasingly talking about. We need to have that ability to say to them, “This is the way we're doing it, and if you do dumb things like having the seal ban, that's going to have a ramification in that context.”

For Hans Island, I think that illustrates it. It's a silly conflict, but as soon as the Danes got a new piece of equipment, an ice-capable frigate, they escalated the crisis in 2002, from one of their scientists going and leaving a bottle of Danish liquor and our going and leaving a bottle of CC. It had been handled that way since 1974. They get a new piece of kit and they land troops. What does that say in terms of how these issues spiral out of control? That's really why we need to have surveillance and enforcement. That really, to a large degree, remedies many of the issues we'll be facing in the future.

● (1155)

The Chair: Thank you. Your time has expired.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Morin, you have four minutes.

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): The part of your presentation that interested me the most is when you talked about a lack of strategy. I feel that is the most important issue. Correct me if I am wrong, but historically speaking, Canada has never had an independent strategy. We have always relied on the fact that we were on the right side when participating in conflicts initiated by others. There is always a price to pay for that.

For instance, one of my uncles died during a landing in France owing to a mistake made by Lord Mountbatten. Some ten thousand of our soldiers died because of that mistake. We are talking about a historical mistake recognized by all historians. We have always been dragged into conflicts without having our own position, our own strategy. In the very near future, we will face even more serious situations. We need not look any further than Iran's nuclear potential and certain countries' attitude when it comes to that. Without a sound strategy, we risk getting dragged into conflicts we cannot handle.

In terms of the Arctic, I think that the threat is not a Russian invasion, but rather an invasion of rotting cargo ships filled with stuff made in China and on its way to Europe. There is a risk of shipwrecks and environmental mishaps. In addition, fishing fleets could be coming in to loot the ships as soon as the ice melts.

I would like to hear your thoughts on the two issues I just raised. Thank you.

[*English*]

Dr. Robert Huebert: Absolutely. On your point about Dieppe, I couldn't agree more strongly. We've never had a grand strategy. Our strategy has always been to be a helpful ally. So when Mountbatten and the Brits needed to do a test landing in Europe, they said, “We'll send Canadians.” You could add to the list, of course: “We have to deter the Japanese, so let's send a whole bunch of untrained Winnipeggers to Hong Kong.” We were not able to say, “Whoa, this doesn't fit within our overall strategy. Why don't you send some of your own troops there for that type of protection? We're going to do something we think is more important for the overall grand victory.”

I think you're absolutely right, and your uncle paid in blood in that context. That's my point. We have to start thinking in terms of a grand strategy to protect Canadian interests. There's the grander issue of the ultimate continuation of security for the western world. I think we have to start taking a greater responsibility, to be honest.

I agree with you about the Arctic. The issue is not that the Russians are going to invade. The one issue we are going to face is that the Arctic will return to a certain similarity to the Cold War as far as geopolitical importance. In other words, the Russians aren't going to come to invade our territory—

Mr. Marc-André Morin: It's the economics of it.

● (1200)

Dr. Robert Huebert: It's going to be the economics and the fact that we have the continuing resumption of strategic balances between them. But we know that resources lead to conflict. The example I would cite is the Spratly Islands, the east Paracel, and the ongoing conflict between the Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese—everyone in Asia—about its resources.

That's what the Arctic is going to look like into the future, unless we can convince people we have the capability to say, “No. If you're going to come here to develop resources, you have to do it under the rule of law with Canadian interests at heart.”

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Your time is up.

[*English*]

Thank you.

Mrs. Gallant.

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

Dr. Huebert, during your introductory comments you mentioned the potential for gaps in covering airspace. What types of reductions are we experiencing?

Dr. Robert Huebert: There are two gaps we have that we need to recognize. The first one is, of course, for the continuing defence of North American airspace. The biggest challenge we're facing is that if you do not have a fast air capability, be it a future UAV or an F-18 and its successor.... We've already seen, since 2007, that the Russians resumed long-range strategic bomber patrols armed with active armaments. They go right up to the airspace. They don't cross into our boundaries, but they come right up to it. And they do this with the Norwegians and the Brits now. The only way they respond and stop is when we send our F-18s to actually intercept and say, first of all, from a surveillance capability, we see you; second of all, don't cross over into our airspace. That is continuing, and in fact it is increasing in terms of capability.

The second obvious one, of course, is if we go back to 9/11, when it's the unexpected aerospace threat that comes in. The problem we face there is we were looking out with NORAD instead of looking within. What's the next thing that we haven't seen? That's where the gaps come in. It's the unexpected, but it's also the developing trends that we're seeing from an aerospace requirement.

The third gap is that we're seeing a decrease in terms of our allies' capability in proving over-air assistance. The more we go overseas for deployment, the less we're going to be able to depend on them for the type of aerospace domination against future surface-to-air missile threats and the missile technologies that are proliferating.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: There was quite a conversation in this committee shortly after it was made public that the Russian jets did come up to our airspace. It was felt by the committee that really it was not a threat; they were just exercising and seeing what our capabilities are. Are you saying that these exercises the Russians conducted close to our airspace are actual threats we absolutely need to have the fighter jets ready to go forth on?

Dr. Robert Huebert: In my view, absolutely, yes. Russia has a huge aerospace capability over its own land territory and over its Arctic waters. The only reason you would actually sail or fly your aircraft with live bomb loads right up to the international border is to make a political statement. You make a political statement by doing it once or twice, saying, “We're back. We can do it.” Then you back off in that context. They have increased the number of flights. In fact, a Russian commander was asked point blank, “Why are you doing this? This is increasing tensions. You don't need to do this. You did it right when Obama comes to visit. We get it that you can do it.” His response was, “We like to operate in our operational area.” He was asked, “Why is this your operational area? It wasn't your operational area before 2007”, when Putin reasserted them.

Once again, in my view, it's needlessly belligerent. But the Russians don't do things that are needlessly belligerent. There's almost inevitably a reason behind why you would make the efforts you're making in this context. I think quite clearly they are, first, illustrating politically and strategically that they are back, but they are also practising a capability that they see a future need for. That's the most chilling part for me.

The Chair: You don't have time for another question.

Mr. Alexander, you have the last round.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Ajax—Pickering, CPC): I just have one quick question.

Thank you so much, Professor. Really, much of what we've heard around this table on readiness supports your vision of more attention being given to grand strategy and to all of the factors that have to go into determining what capabilities we need and what we need to be ready for. That has to be an emphasis for Canada in the future. Thank you for underlining that at the end of our discussions.

My question, and I agree with much of what you have said, is about the one issue on which I disagree, namely the outcome of the Afghan mission. It's obviously not a good week to be talking about the momentum from month to month, because there have been some setbacks. But just tell us a bit more why you now see a defeat for NATO, if I understood you correctly, to be a likely outcome, given that the objectives that were set were never set in terms of victory for NATO; they were set in terms of the ability of an Afghan government to protect itself and to prevent the country from becoming a host for major terrorist groups in the future. That objective to date has been achieved. Some would argue it's closer to being achieved in an enduring way than ever before. What makes you think otherwise?

● (1205)

Dr. Robert Huebert: Let me start.

I absolutely respect the type of work that you were doing prior to your entry into politics, and I have to commend you for that.

I absolutely, secondly, hope you are right in that particular context.

My hope is that what you have said is exactly that we will see the Afghanistan central government extending its reach into the provincial regions, that in fact we will see the moderate individuals that we tend to broad-brush as Taliban—and you know better than anyone else that to say there is one Taliban is just simply wrong—can then be brought in, that we can see development of a type of regime or society that will respect rule of law, that we can wean away from the extremism of the Taliban regime.

My fear is that we are basically entering into a situation that is being exasperated by these international economic drivers, so that we say we're there, we're done, now we're seeing.... We get into the mindset that the Afghans don't appreciate us; look at how quickly they're attacking us on all these issues, for right or wrong reasons. You know better than anyone else that's a misperception, but at what point do we wash our hands and say that's it, just as we did when...? You know the history. You know once the Soviets were pushed out, one of the biggest problems of the west was that our attention went totally away from Afghanistan, and that allowed the Taliban to come in.

Will we repeat that mistake, and then will it be a Taliban...? My suspicion would be they will call themselves something different, because if they call themselves Taliban, that will get people's attention. They'll call themselves something different, but go back to the fundamentalist problem that was created with the filling of that vacuum after the Soviets withdrew in the first place, which ultimately places us back.... Then you combine that with a collapsing Pakistan and all of a sudden we're back into a worse situation than if we had never intervened in the first place.

So that's what I see as the steps that would lead to a military defeat of what NATO was trying to do in that context, following on what you very properly elicited as our objectives.

The Chair: Everybody was able to ask questions, and we're out of time.

Professor Huebert, we really appreciate your assessment, your input, and your candour today. I found it very useful and interesting.

I'm going to just remind members of the steering committee that we will convene as soon as the floor is cleared, and we'll be in camera.

Professor, thank you again for coming, and safe travels home.

With that, we're adjourned.

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