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Chair

Mr. James Bezan

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● (1110)

[*English*]

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

I apologize for being late. I was in a committee meeting that had an important vote and I had to wait until that vote took place before I came over.

Our first order of business was to have an election for vice-chair, but in the absence of Mr. Harris we will do that at the next available committee meeting. I understand he has other important business to be at.

We'll continue on right to our Standing Order 108(2) where we're undertaking a study of NATO's strategic concept and Canada's role in international defence cooperation.

Joining us is a witness from National Defence who is very familiar to the committee. She is Jill Sinclair, the assistant deputy minister of policy. Joining her is Colonel Brian Irwin, who is the director of NATO policy.

Welcome to both of you.

Ms. Sinclair, could you start off with your opening comments? Just so the committee knows, we're giving our witnesses today 15 minutes for opening testimony. That was agreed to by the subcommittee on national defence.

Ms. Jill Sinclair (Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy, Department of National Defence): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for giving me those 15 minutes.

[*English*]

It's always a pleasure to be here before the committee. I'm very pleased to be here as part of our integrated defence team with Colonel Irwin, director of NATO policy. As I've said before at this committee, we work as a total civil-military joined up team.

This morning, Mr. Chair, with your indulgence and that of the members, rather than read a prepared statement that you have in front of you, we've circulated a deck, which I hope everybody has. My intention is to walk you through this deck very quickly. It's an overview of NATO to give you some of the background that we think might be helpful to you as you begin your important and very timely work on NATO. It's important because NATO remains the pillar of transatlantic security. It's what the 2010 strategic concept called an unparalleled community of freedom, peace, security, and shared values. It's a foundation stone in Canada's defence and security policy. It's timely, of course, because we're looking towards the Chicago summit, May 20 and 21, where the alliance will continue its work on transformation, modernization, and reform.

[*Translation*]

So, if I may, I will make a short presentation.

[*English*]

I will do it on the basis of this deck.

I'm going to go very quickly through it.

To outline, I want to give you a sense of the background, the core business of NATO, the structure and governance, very quickly. I hope you'll be hearing from some NATO folks, from the commander of transformation and others, who will be able to give you the details, but I want to give you a sense of the structure and governance, and a little bit on Canada's engagement with the alliance. Obviously, we'll be open for all sorts of questions and discussion afterward.

In terms of historical background, the Washington Treaty is the foundation stone of NATO. In 1949—and just for historical context, that was three years after Churchill gave his iron curtain speech in Fulton, Missouri. That was the context within which NATO was originally established, a political and military organization. We'll come back to these themes a lot. It's not just the military. It's also a political organization. It's an association of countries with shared values, and it is embedded in the principle of collective defence, which we'll speak to a little bit later, and a comprehensive vision of security.

It's all about the transatlantic link. Obviously NATO binds Canada and the United States in an indivisible way with the security of Europe. It's an alliance that has gone through periodic phases of enlargement, even before the end of the Cold War—Spain came into the alliance in 1982. There has been continual transformation and modernization of this alliance.

We have a little map of NATO today. I won't go through it in any detail, but it shows you that we have 28 members. It gives you a bit of a sense of NATO today in terms of its reach and the countries that are engaged through NATO, either as allies or partners or friends or aspirants.

The essence of the alliance is collective defence. It's the bedrock of the alliance. Collective defence means article 5 of the Washington Treaty—an attack against one ally is considered an attack against all. Interestingly, in the long history of the alliance, article 5 has been invoked only once, and that was after 9/11, when the United States was attacked in that horrific incident that we all know.

But the alliance is constantly changing and evolving. In 2010 we looked at our strategic concept. That's something the alliance has done about every decade. It's bad timing, I suppose, that we had looked at the strategic concept last in 2001, just before the events of 9/11, so it was totally overcome by events the minute it was produced. In 2010 we took another look at the strategic concept and we looked at three core tasks—collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security, which is about partnership. Again, we can come back to all of these issues.

It was all about transformation because the world was changing, and we learned that post 9/11—cyber, weapons of mass destruction, energy, terrorism. There were new things that we had to do in order to make the Euro-Atlantic space safe, but there were also new things the alliance had to do to be a projector of security and stability, not just for allies but for all those who shared our common values.

Here we talk about moving toward Chicago, and I'm sure that will be of great interest to you, so again, we'd be happy to discuss that in the questions. In the spirit of transformation, we are moving toward Chicago, May 20 and 21. The strategic concept of 2010 is shaping a lot of that thinking, because that was just a strategic concept; now we have to actually implement it. There's a lot of detailed work that has to be done in terms of defence capabilities and other dimensions of NATO, and Colonel Irwin and I will be happy to talk to that.

The current NATO priorities as defined, as we go towards Chicago, are operations, capabilities, transformation, and reform.

If I can just make a quick cross-reference back to some of the work the committee has just done on readiness, it's really all about making NATO ready for its task. I think you'll find that the work you've done previously will help inform your thinking about where Canada wants NATO to go, but also where most allies are focusing their interest. Obviously we're drawing on the lessons we've learned from operations in Afghanistan, Libya, counter-piracy, humanitarian assistance. The whole of Chicago is about making sure that we draw on those experiences and position the alliance for its next phase of existence.

I'll say a very quick word on NATO mechanisms. You don't need to get into this too much at this point. As I said, I think you'll have some folks from the NATO secretariat who will be able to walk you through it.

What's important to remember is that NATO is a consensus decision-making organization. You're all familiar with what that means. It's kind of complex in that there are 28 folks around the table with different national approaches, but we work to consensus. It's an integrated civil and military structure.

Here I have to say that Canada, the Canadian delegation to NATO, is the poster child for an integrated civilian-military delegation. We are definitely the gold standard. Colonel Irwin was previously posted to the mission in NATO. There are only about half a dozen truly integrated national delegations at NATO. As I say, Canada is number one in how we bring the civilian and military pieces together.

There are national representations. The governance structure goes from leaders, who will be meeting in Chicago next week, down to what we call the permanent representatives—our ambassadors who sit in NATO on a daily basis.

This is just a little bit more “granularity”, as we say, in detail on the governance structures.

Let me just say a quick word about operations, because I think that's what most people think of when they think about NATO. NATO does crisis management operations and missions. The list here is one that I think is known to most of you: Afghanistan; Libya, most recently; Kosovo; we're doing counterterrorism operations in the Mediterranean, and have been there since the attacks of 9/11; counter-piracy; a NATO-engaged training mission in Iraq, which is where we first started to do a lot of the training and capacity building carried on in the mission in Afghanistan; again, Balkans operations, one of which continues today in Kosovo; and also civil emergency planning.

NATO is supposed to be of functional, practical help to all its allies, and as I say, to those with whom we can work because they share our values. We've learned within NATO that you can't do it alone. It has to be all about partnership.

NATO has long been open to partners, new partners in Europe and new partners outside of Europe. We've listed some of them here. Again, we can speak in more detail about what these mean. They range from the NATO-Russia relationship, which is an interesting one with its own dynamics—again, we can talk about that a bit—to our Mediterranean dialogue, which enables countries like Israel, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, and others to have a partnership arrangement with NATO in terms of practical work.

Also, in operations, as you'll all recall from the operation in Libya, we worked with the UAE, we worked with Jordan, we worked with Morocco, and of course, ISAF, which has dozens of countries associated with it in Afghanistan.

I mentioned very briefly NATO-Russia. There is a NATO-Russia Council, and there's a lot of history around this, obviously.

At this point, forgive me, because I should have apologized at the outset for.... There are many NATO experts at this table. Many apologies if I'm going over ground you already know.

NATO-Russia was established back in 2002. It's had its ups and downs, but the bottom line is that there is still a dialogue with Russia on a lot of practical issues. In fact, just last week in Brussels, foreign ministers met, as did defence ministers, and there was a NATO-Russia dialogue around that. You can see some of the practical areas that we're looking at with the Russians.

Finally, a word on NATO as its role is a foundation stone for Canadian defence and security. We were one of the original members of NATO. We helped write the Washington Treaty.

● (1115)

Mike Pearson wrote the famous article 2, which says that the alliance is about more than just the military, it's about the well-being and stability of all the countries within the alliance. That's permeated the work of NATO since the establishment of the Washington Treaty, an absolute pillar of Canada's defence policy. It reaffirms for us the fundamental importance of the transatlantic link. Again, I don't need to remind this committee about what that means for Canada. Our commitment to transatlantic security is in the fields of Vimy and Ypres and Passchendaele and on Juno Beach and elsewhere.

Article 5, that an attack against one is an attack against all, is extremely important to us, but also expeditionary operations. We have to meet security threats where they emerge. That doesn't mean sitting at home getting ready for masses of troops to come at us, we need to be much more flexible and agile as an alliance.

We consider it a primary forum for political and military discussions. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of National Defence share NATO as an institution, hence the joint ministerial meeting that took place in Brussels last week.

The priorities for Canada are operations, reform, and transformation.

This has to be an alliance that can do stuff for Canada. It's about having an alliance that's fit for purpose, where we can act together, we can discuss things frankly, we can act in an agile and flexible way, we can keep ourselves open to new partnerships, and we can do our core business. So that's what it's all about for Canada.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to complete this very quick, and I hope not too superficial, walk-through of NATO, and we'd be very delighted to take questions.

● (1120)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to our seven-minute round.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Moore, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Thank you for coming, Ms. Sinclair.

In our previous study, we spoke about the concept of smart defence on a number of occasions. We realized that, if every country tried to have armed forces equipped for every operational capability, it would not be financially viable. So we came to the conclusion that we had to come together, with other NATO countries, for example, to choose what our contribution would be so that our armed forces could provide operational capability while still remaining financially viable. It is most valid given that we have NATO, of course, but we also have missions with the United Nations. So we have to invest our money wisely in order to be able to meet all our obligations and not, for example, have to set UN missions to one side.

I would like to know your opinion of the aspects that Canada would be both interested in and able to provide, if we were moving towards the concept of smart defence.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you for the question. Let me answer first, then Colonel Irwin can answer too.

[*English*]

You're right that a smart defence is all about making the most out of defence budgets. Obviously, it goes without saying that everybody is feeling a fiscal restraint.

In terms of the capabilities that Canada can offer, and the most important, we have to look at this both in terms of what we need for our own national defence.... Because we have three oceans, vast territory, and a lot of national responsibility, Canada has to think about how we meet those responsibilities—that's what the Canada First defence strategy is all about—and then how we take that to the broader community of NATO.

What we found over time, especially now that we have things like the C-17 that gives us strategic airlift and things like that, is our ability to bring that expeditionary quality to NATO. We have a tremendous flexibility and an ability to sustain that a lot of our allies don't have, and that's because of our own national requirements: being able to go long distances, being able to sustain, having our armed forces members—and again, Brian can speak to this in more detail—plan for difficult operations, whether they're in Canada or abroad. So we bring an expertise and a training to the NATO family.

Also, increasingly, we've been using enablers, like UAVs and other things, to bring to NATO. Canada's track record of bringing our capability to NATO, and sustaining it, is one of the best in the alliance.

I don't know, Brian, if you'd like to add, or if, Chair, he might....

The Chair: Go ahead.

Colonel Brian Irwin (Director, NATO Policy, Department of National Defence): Good morning, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for this opportunity.

Just building on the comments, again, as we go towards Chicago, smart defence really fits within a larger look for delivering on what we agreed to in Lisbon, and for how we would achieve NATO's level of ambition, looking out to the year 2020 and beyond, in regard to the types of capabilities the alliance would need to have collectively to address its level of ambition. Within that, I think you will see emerging...and smart defence is really a part of it. It's about a framework. It's about a framework where nations can, either nationally or multinationally, contribute to that collective capability package.

I think part of smart defence is about encouraging some nations to perhaps pool certain capabilities. I think there are some obvious ones there. You have the Baltics, where it might make sense for them to collectively deliver some of the capabilities that NATO looks for.

But within that broader framework of delivering a capability to NATO, either multinationally or nationally, I think Canada is very well placed with those national capabilities in how it contributes. I'm happy to go into more details, of course.

● (1125)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: I understand. Because of the operations in which we have participated, either recently or over the years, I am well aware that Canada is currently in a good position. But, in the future, we still have to take an approach that will allow us to maintain our financial capability.

Given what has gone before, I would like to know if there are things that we would tend to develop less in the future. Will the question of smart defence be dealt with in Chicago too? Financially speaking, will we be able to keep our needs at the current level by using our acquisitions a little more strategically?

[*English*]

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Mr. Chairman, if I may say so, that's what smart defence is all about—for sure.

What NATO does—I think it's on an annual basis, Brian—is a comprehensive list of what capabilities we can bring to the alliance, and then there are discussions around whether there are overlaps or duplication. As Colonel Irwin said, the pooling of resources is a more useful discussion for European allies, in a way, just because they're closer together and they can deploy those and develop them in a closer kind of geographic space. So we have some very interesting initiatives there, like the air policing that the Baltic nations have done.

When it comes to Canada, as you've also said, we have to look at what our obligations are vis-à-vis the United States for NORAD. So we're looking at that multiplicity of the defence commitments and then at what we can bring to the pooled NATO smart or smarter defence effort.

I think we have found that our new capabilities such as the strategic airlift, for example.... As I was saying, this is something that has definitely been an enabler. The helicopters.... We've learned a lot from the operations in Afghanistan. Also, it's our ability to deploy quickly. We have tended to deploy without caveats. I mean, these sound a little ethereal, but they're extremely important. Also, it's to be able to sustain that deployment, which makes us a real asset, and I think it enables us to play into that NATO space most effectively.

In terms of national governments tailoring their national defence budgets to the overall smarter defence framework you've talked about, we're at a very early stage, I think, of having that discussion. As I say, amongst the Baltic countries, it's easier for some of the smaller ones. It's a very first step, but I think we'll have to see what the follow-up to Chicago is in terms of smart defence.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

[*English*]

Madam Gallant, you have the floor.

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

Perhaps as a victim of its own successes, learned Canadians question the necessity for a country to be a member of NATO. Why are Canada's participation and membership in NATO important to our country?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: NATO is a collective defence organization, a community of interest, and, as I say, a political-military organization. We tend to focus on those skeptics who say there's no military threat, so why do you need a NATO? Well, it belies or ignores the importance of the dialogue on the consultation that happens on a range of issues, from cyber-security to how you deal with weapons of mass destruction.

This is a community of values and interests, as well as a military alliance. Frankly, at the end of the day, it is a military alliance, too, and when something like 9/11 happens, it enables us to work together with our closest like-minded partners in defence of our common values and interests.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

As we begin our current study on NATO and the strategic concept paper, I think it's important that we as members of the committee have a solid understanding of what Canada's current contributions to NATO missions are. Can you describe them?

Col Brian Irwin: Great. Sure. Just very, very quickly, I'm running through the largest to the smallest.

Certainly in Afghanistan, there's the commitment to the ISAF mission. I'm sure you're all well aware of the commitment of trainers to the NATO training mission.

NATO's other missions.... In Kosovo that mission has drawn down significantly. We remain with a small Canadian presence participating within the headquarters.

NATO has a couple of maritime missions. One in the Mediterranean, Operation Active Endeavour, is a counterterrorism mission. We've had a ship deployed in the Mediterranean supporting that mission from time to time. As well, NATO has undertaken a counter-piracy mission, Operation Ocean Shield, off the Horn of Africa in the Gulf of Aden. There as well we've contributed right from the onset of that mission. We're not currently contributing to it, but we have.

Effectively, those are the larger missions.

● (1130)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Approximately what number of troops and personnel does the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces have committed in NATO, excluding operations?

Col Brian Irwin: If you were to talk about the NATO command structure itself, NATO's standing framework, it's about 350. That number will come and go, but that's what's contributed to the headquarters, both in North America and in Europe.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What sorts of roles and responsibilities do they have?

Col Brian Irwin: Quite a wide range. I'm sure you are all familiar with General Bouchard.

From NATO's headquarters in SHAPE, where they command operations through to its subordinate headquarters such as the one in Naples, we have a number of Canadians occupying positions of leadership. General Bouchard is the deputy commander in Naples. Within all those staffs you will see Canadians embedded throughout.

So it's a large command structure of roughly about 8,000. Within that about 350 Canadians are currently deployed.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Along the same lines as the previous questions about Canadian contributions to NATO, what would be the financial commitments that Canada has to the alliance?

Col Brian Irwin: I'd be happy to run through those figures as well.

Just as context, NATO's annual budget—both the budget of operations and the budget for investment—is about $3 billion, of which Canada contributes 5.94%. I think this year that translates into about $183 million.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: So that percentage then is the annual contribution. Is there an additional amount over and above what is required as the so-called annual contribution?

Col Brian Irwin: There's a framework for those contributions based on OECD recognized figures, gross national incomes. Those would be the contributions.

There are other programs that can be contributed to, but those lie outside or above and beyond—a research and development establishment where there might be a small contribution and the like.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Has our level of contribution changed substantially over the last five to ten years?

Col Brian Irwin: There's been a gradual.... There was a resetting of those contributions about five years ago, so there's been a gradual rebalancing, recognizing nations' gross national incomes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: In the 2010 national strategic concept paper, it set out a framework for NATO over the next 10 years. There's no doubt it's a very important document and will have an impact on the way Canada approaches joint or multilateral operations in the future.

What goals did Canada have going into the Lisbon meetings, and have these goals been met?

Col Brian Irwin: I think certainly right from the onset, we played a role in providing a member to the group of experts and the delegation that was put together to draft the strategic concept. I think it was an 11-member group. We did provide a special expert to that.

Again, not being involved in the drafting or the like, I think the work that was done or their contributions again reaffirm the importance of the transatlantic security link and the like.

I really wouldn't be well placed to give much more. I'd hand it over to Jill.

● (1135)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay.

Can you tell us why interoperability among the alliance is essential and what steps Canada has taken towards becoming interoperable to work with its allies?

Col Brian Irwin: Certainly, interoperability is in many respects what NATO is all about. It allows nations to bring what they can to an operation. So it goes right from the basics of NATO having standard agreements as to standardization of the type of fuel we might use in our airplanes or to the type of ammunition, on up through to, within our headquarters, how do we talk, how do we plan, and having a common approach to, again, having a higher level platform at the pol-mil level, where we can come together and collectively advance approaches—so agreeing on the framework for a future NATO mission.

But throughout all of that, it's absolutely essential that you have that ability to plug and play as a group of allies—not only as a group of allies, but increasingly, the partners are able to also plug into that. So it's a framework to plug and play at the political-military level, certainly, to plug in at that operational level within the headquarters and those staffs.

Then there are those basic standards of knowing and understanding what the NATO standard would be for certain things where you can plug in at the tactical level.

The Chair: Thank you, Colonel.

Moving on, Mr. McKay, you have the floor.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): I apologize for being a bit late.

The first question has to do with Afghanistan. Obviously, NATO has played a significant role and yesterday the Prime Minister opened the door to a post-2014 role. Has NATO or DND been asked to prepare for a post-2014 role?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you.

NATO's been looking at Afghanistan throughout this period. It will be one of the focuses of Chicago and so we'll look forward to seeing the outcome of the discussions there.

As you know, we discussed the ongoing commitment to Afghanistan at the last NATO summit, and so seeing how NATO, as an alliance, can pull through its effort in Afghanistan is something that has been discussed.

Hon. John McKay: So it is under active consideration? Am I reasonable to conclude that?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Within the NATO context, I'm not going to answer your question specifically, although I appreciate your effort to reframe it.

Within the current context, Afghanistan is on the Chicago agenda. We know that we've kind of all gone into this mission. We're discussing how we can continue the effort in Afghanistan. As the Colonel said, we currently have 950 trainers who will be there until March 2014 as the government has said, and the discussions at Chicago will reveal what they will reveal.

Hon. John McKay: It's kind of a curious ask that the joint forces, the elite troops, are being asked to stay. What would be behind that?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: I don't know about any ask for the elite forces to stay.

Hon. John McKay: Well, I thank you for avoiding the question.

Some Voices: oh! oh!

Hon. John McKay: Ah, you poor children.

The Chair: Just as a reminder, Mr. McKay, as well to our witnesses, as I've often quoted in here, in chapter 20 it's very explicit that members of the departments are excused from answering certain questions that may put their jobs in conflict with the ministers, and with things that are taking place that are discussions between staff and the ministers themselves and anything that might be determined as political versus that as the role of a civil servant. So I can quote it from the book if you wish, Mr. McKay, but I know that you're very familiar—

Hon. John McKay: I'd love a quote. As long as you don't take it out of my time, it's fine by me.

The Chair: I won't, no. You have another three minutes.

Hon. John McKay: Yes, well, thank you for that insight into parliamentary decorum.

Let me just change here. One of the reasons many Canadians are questioning the utility of NATO has to do with the unevenness of the contribution of various nations to the functions and tasks in NATO. Probably this became most obvious in the Libyan mission where Lieutenant-General Bouchard had significant difficulties with the various silos and the various contributions from various NATO nations, including (a) their economic capabilities, and (b) the caveats they would put on engagement.

Being in a theatre of conflict or a theatre of war is difficult at the best of times, but having various of your allies being able to go this far but not any further, or you can share this level of intelligence but not any further, creates some serious operational difficulties. Fortunately, the conflict went quickly and the difficulties of those caveats and economic circumstances were limited.

So the question I have, and I think this goes to the core of how NATO goes forward in the future, is this. What is the plan to overcome those limitations?

● (1140)

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you for the question.

Hon. John McKay: You can answer this one.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: I can answer this one.

You've pointed to the complexities of a multilateral organization that works by consensus and where each country has its own domestic political drivers and shapers.

We've learned a lot through Afghanistan and Libya. We shouldn't forget that these were our first real fighting missions in a long time. You were asking nations to do some really difficult stuff. It was very interesting to see the nature of the political debate across allied members. Some of them simply weren't willing to go there, and others, like Canada, were.

You asked what the plan is to deal with this. I think we are coming to an understanding that this is just a reality of the political geography of NATO. It's a diverse bunch of democracies and we're not going to be able to get to a single approach.

We have to figure out who can bring what to what fight, what they are prepared to do, and to make sure that we have the interoperability, and the visibility of what capabilities are available. We have to deal with some of the issues that General Bouchard pointed to, which are just kind of habits of working in a different way, because he was obviously frustrated by some of what he went through.

But the smarter defence piece, and again, Chicago and the work out of Chicago, a lot of this is going to be about how we have truly integrated the lessons we've learned from Libya, because not everybody is going to do everything all the time.

Hon. John McKay: Assuming you get past whether we do or don't stay in Afghanistan, is there a discussion about configurations within NATO, if you will, for nations that have greater willingness and greater capabilities, versus those who see it as an organization through which they can exercise political influence, or they are in there because they don't want the former Soviet Union coming too close to their territory?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you. That's a great question. I think it will be interesting to see how the alliance addresses that issue more specifically. What you want to do is to make sure you maintain the political cohesion of the alliance at 28. But you have to give space to those countries who want to do more to do more, and to those who have to do less to do less.

What you saw around Libya were ad hoc like-minded coalitions within NATO. You saw that within Afghanistan too, where Canada was in the group of the RC-South countries that were doing the heavy fighting in the south. That's emerging as a matter of practice.

What you have to make sure of is how you reconcile that matter of practice with the overarching political cohesion of this alliance. The decisions to do things, like Libya or Afghanistan, are taken at 28. Then you give countries the space under that *chapeau* to do what it is they are able to do, politically or practically or whatever else.

Hon. John McKay: My final question—because I'm running out of time—is on the ongoing relationship with Russia. If you project the NATO relationship with Russia over the next five years, assuming NATO continues to exist for the next five years, how do you see that relationship changing? How do you keep the dialogue going with the Russians?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: It's always dangerous to project, right?

Hon. John McKay: Yes.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Particularly with—

● (1145)

Hon. John McKay: But it's rather necessary in the circumstances.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Yes, it is. I think NATO's approach to Russia since the changes with the fall of the Soviet Union has been, “The doors are open. This alliance is not about you. It's not against you. The partnership *volets* are totally open on everything we are doing.”

It is really for Russia to determine what the nature of that relationship will be. The doors are wide open. We want maximum cooperation. Russia is going through a political transition. It will be interesting to see how they want to define their relationship with NATO.

As I say, there was a very constructive discussion in Brussels last week, at the foreign ministers level. So we do have a dialogue and a lot of practical input, including around Afghanistan and all sorts of difficult issues.

My hope would be that we can continue to develop that relationship with Russia, because they can be a partner in this security sphere that we are committed to.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to go on to our five-minute round, and to lead us off is Mr. Opitz.

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

Ms. Sinclair and Colonel, thank you both for being here today. I know you do a great job. You've worked very well together. Thank you for everything you do.

Ms. Sinclair, I've seen you on a number of occasions. How would you say, overall, that Canada's influence and reputation has increased among our partners and non-partners in the world because of our participation in NATO?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you.

I think because of the practical contributions that Canada brings to the alliance, we are seen by countries around the world, whether it's the Australians, or the Asians, or the Latin Americans, as a country that has a political voice at an important table, which NATO continues to be. And we actually bring practical capability to very difficult issues around the world.

I believe our participation in NATO, its operations, and its political nature really does maintain and project our influence with other countries around the world, too.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Colonel Irwin, can you talk a little more on the smart defence allocation of resources in terms of our strategic airlift helicopters, and some of the weapons platforms that we share?

You were posted to Brussels, right? From that perspective can you better define the pooling of equipment and resources as well as interoperability?

Col Brian Irwin: Thank you.

Whether that fits within smart defence or within the broader discussions of this capability package and how we approach defence planning, which is part of that package, again it comes back to what those national capabilities are that nations would say they have invested in and that reside within the alliance.

As you look at smart defence, there are perhaps some initiatives—and they are not new initiatives that you would see perhaps rolled out within that or under that heading of an opportunity for pooling and sharing. The ADM mentioned the air policing.

From a Canadian perspective, our contributions to a multinational approach are fairly modest so we would be participating in areas by improving practices with regard to delivery of logistics or deployed contracting and the like. Nations would be getting together and looking at how to perhaps procure a new refueler, or the like.

There are discrete initiatives that, multinationally, nations are going off and working on. And Canada has some limited contribution to that, but again, it's about a more national piece and where your national capabilities reside.

Mr. Ted Opitz: What do you think, in NATO's opinion, are the things that we do best? For example, we have the training mission of course going on in Kabul. Obviously, our combat skills over the time we've been deployed there have increased very sharply.

When I'm talking about training I'm not just talking about training over there. I'm also talking about CFC and the whole defence academy thing, and some of our other capabilities.

Could you describe what you think, in your opinion, NATO thinks we do best?

Col Brian Irwin: It's a difficult question because I'd be somewhat biased. But I think in many respects it's about delivering those combat-capable troops, first and foremost, that can deploy to Afghanistan and can really do some of the heavy lifting without caveats and the like, through to an air capability that's able to make impressive contributions. It's not only engaging targets, but it's also that mix of refuelers and that full reach that goes back to being able to have planners that can integrate into the system and the like.

I think our maritime contributions have been impressive. When we deploy a ship, we deploy a ship kitted out with all the bells and whistles, which the allies look at and say, that is a capable ship, a go-to ship.

I think when you look at our staff and how we contribute Canadians into the NATO staff, we hold good positions where we have influence on the shaping and development of plans. Folks really do like to have Canadians on their staff who are well trained and able to move issues forward.

● (1150)

Mr. Ted Opitz: Let's talk about staff for a second. Why do we develop such good staff officers?

Col Brian Irwin: I think we have a pretty impressive professional development program as to how we produce officers. I think we have a pretty robust framework similar to that of a healthy mix of both the U.K. and U.S. type of models. I think it's a pretty good professional development program.

The Chair: Thank you. Time has expired.

We're moving along. Mr. Kellway.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to Colonel Irwin and Ms. Sinclair for coming to see us again.

I detect in your comments an eagerness to play a large role in NATO and an enthusiasm for what some might see as an over-contribution to the organization. Let me suggest that maybe what's deserving of more enthusiasm would be a more balanced role for Canada within that organization. What worries me about the enthusiasm and the eagerness for playing this large role and punching above our weight within that organization is, first, the cost to Canadians. We are on the precipice of procuring billions upon billions of dollars of military equipment in order to be an expeditionary force without caveat, which, I guess, is the terminology you used. Also, as we come up to this notion of smart defence, which I take hasn't been worked out completely, I wonder if our enthusiasm is going to further that eagerness to build the Canadian Forces to play an even larger role in NATO.

I wonder if you could give me a response to all of that.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: I might go back to first principles a little bit about the alliance, because the question refers to our contribution to the organization. Our starting premise is that the organization is us and it is in our national interest. When we look at our contribution to things like operations in Afghanistan or Libya, we agreed to participate in those operations because it was in Canada's interests to participate in them. NATO was the vehicle through which we participated,but as you recall there were UN Security Council resolutions that endorsed these operations. So it's not so much about contributing to the organization for the sake of it. Rather, it's what we are able to bring, in support of our own national interests, to NATO, as the vehicle through which we do that.

As for costs to Canadians, the equipment and all of that, I might have gone over it too quickly. The fact is that Canada is a vast territory, and I think if the chief were here he would say this because I'm about to use his expression. We do expeditionary operations in Canada all the time in order to make the reach to the Arctic, to the coasts, to be able to do our missions out to our perimeter. The need for expeditionary capability is something that is inherently in Canada's interests. We then are able to bring that capability to the NATO mission when it's required and if we've determined that it's in Canada's interests to do so.

So I see these things as absolutely integral to one another as opposed to doing something for the organization that's at variance with what we do for Canada.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: On this issue of procurement, when I look at the billions of dollars that are planned and are being spent on things like close combat vehicles, surely those aren't for expeditionary forces within Canada. Those are for dropping forces and tires and boots on the ground around the world.

On the issue of interest, it seems to some people that NATO is an artifact of a world that is passing us by, if it has not already passed us by, the whole transatlantic thing. I wonder if our defence interests should be shifting to a different orientation, perhaps one that is more specific. The United States has made the argument that their focus is now more to the west as opposed to the Atlantic. Could you comment on that?

● (1155)

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you.

Simply a word on your afterword about being out in the world. The other thing I should have said is that the best way you secure yourself is forward defence. So what you want to do is to be able to meet threats as far away from your national shores as possible. So again, that ability to deploy, whether it's CCVs or others, is all part of the same package in a way.

On NATO being an artifact of a passing world, there should be a lively debate about the future of the alliance and whether it's still relevant. We have gone through that. We went through that when we had the discussion around the strategic concept. We went through that discussion at the end of the cold war, and we have to make sure that we're not all investing in something that's actually not necessary. But interestingly, things like Libya, things like counter-piracy, things like counterterrorism, all the stuff that we're doing, NATO support to the African union, the training that we're doing in Afghanistan now, all show that there is an enduring value in this alliance as a Euro-Atlantic community of interest, which is helping to bring security to other parts of the world.

In terms of shifting perspectives, you know, the U.S.—there's a lot of talk about the U.S. pivot, and they can talk to that themselves, I don't have to—has always been a pacific nation. Canada has always been a pacific nation. Do you have a little bit of emphasis? Yes, perhaps, a new emphasis.

Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sinclair.

Mr. Norlock, you have the floor.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and through you to the witnesses, thank you for appearing today.

It's always interesting to hear people use words that mean different things to different people, such as smart defence. To some people smart defence means being capable and able, as you articulated at the beginning of this—in your deck actually—and also through some of the questions. To some people, smart defence means the primary function of our military should be to be able to deliver aid to foreign nations using the military as the means by which to do that, and that anything we do should have a nice warm cuddly feeling—make a bonfire, lock your hands, pass the sandwiches around, and sing *Kumbaya*. To other people, it means we should be able to stand our ground in the world against anyone who poses a threat to the values that we believe make us the country we are.

I would suggest that a smart defence policy would be something that the hockey coach and the football coach says—that a good defence is a good offence. In other words, you're capable of defending yourself.

Would you also agree with me that one of the best ways to ensure that is to be able to be a valued partner to the rest of your alliances in the world, whether that be the United Nations that tends to use NATO as its muscle, and would you agree that if you want to be a valued partner, you need to bring something to the table? That means, in a modern era, a capability of going by land, air, or sea, and being a nation that can be counted on to exercise foreign policies through existing organizations that have a global value in a positive way.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: The short answer is yes, and your starting premise about smart defence meaning different things to different people is a very good point because it reminds me of an earlier question.

Smart defence, for us, is about deployable capability, getting that out the door and sustaining it.

For some allies, smart defence does mean "Do we have to spend so much on defence?" So we are having this discussion within NATO, and that's why smart defence is still a work in progress, because we haven't got a total view around that. But absolutely, being a valued partner...and you make the point about NATO having acted in support of the United Nations. It has acted in support of the Arab League. It acts in support of the European Union. We're helping the African Union. It's about bringing practical capability to meet real-world challenges.

● (1200)

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you.

If I have a couple of minutes left, I want to talk about nuclear capabilities. Nuclear disarmament is a worthy goal to have in today's unstable world, and there is a recognition towards the goal of disarmament in NATO's 2010 strategic concept.

How do you balance the realities of today, where there are unstable nations such as Iran and North Korea, and their possession of nuclear abilities? How do we balance that?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you very much.

NATO has had this discussion and continues to have this discussion. NATO is committed to working to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons. Until that world exists we will hedge our bets and maintain nuclear capability at much reduced levels of nuclear weapons. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has dramatically reduced nuclear weapons in Europe. Our reliance on nuclear weapons as part of NATO strategy has been reviewed. As long as there are nuclear weapons, we will hedge our bets.

Working on arms control and disarmament—the commitment of all NATO allies to the non-proliferation treaty, including article 6 that sees the elimination of nuclear weapons eventually, remains part of our working premise and ethos. We see arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament as important parts and contributions to peace and security.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you.

In our study on readiness, the committee talked in great detail about the Canada First defence strategy and the six core missions it set out for the Canadian Forces.

In its strategic concept paper, does NATO have its own core tasks or principles that seek to fulfill this as well? If so, what are they? I think we have to be succinct.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Our Canada First strategy has six core missions that are set out for the Canadian Forces. Does the NATO strategic concept paper have its own core tasks or principles it seeks to fulfill? If so, what are they?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: For NATO, not so much the strategic concept, but in the work that has been done we have core tasks and principles. Colonel Irwin has them right in front of him, so he's going to talk to this in more detail.

Col Brian Irwin: The three core task principles are collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security. Crisis management has been a part of the robust set of political and military capabilities to direct toward crises. Cooperative security speaks more to outreach to partners and the like.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time has expired.

[*Translation*]

Your turn, Mr. Brahmi.

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

I would like to go back to something that has occurred recently: Canada has withdrawn from two NATO programs, the AWACS and the UAVs.

There is a lot of speculation about the reasons for the withdrawal. Do you have any information? What is Canada's position on those two programs?

[*English*]

Col Brian Irwin: We spoke earlier about capability packages and being able to deliver national and/or multinational capabilities with both the AWACS and the AGS. It's about a decision to invest or reinvest in that national capability.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: To your knowledge, has Canada's withdrawal from the programs been criticized by any senior officers, or now retired officers with specific knowledge of this area?

[*English*]

Col Brian Irwin: It's hard to say. AWACS has been in for a long time.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Do you feel that this is an issue that will be discussed at the next NATO meeting in Chicago?

[*English*]

Col Brian Irwin: I would not expect that at all.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: It is said that some countries interpret the withdrawal as a response to the fact that Germany not only declined to get involved in the campaign in Libya but also voted against the NATO involvement in Libya. How do you respond to that theory?

[*English*]

Ms. Jill Sinclair: We see no linkages between these issues. The issues of AWACS and AGS were taken on their own merits for its own reasons. We've explained that to allies, and we don't link any of these issues at all. Canada's record in terms of contribution to NATO is clear. People just have to look at what we've done in Libya and what we're doing in Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Was the program useful when the F-18s took part in air support missions in Libya? Was the program able to help our F-18s?

[*English*]

Ms. Jill Sinclair: One of them doesn't exist yet. That's AGS. On AWACS, I think AWACS was deployed to a certain extent. It was, but I would also add that it wasn't used in other missions. It hasn't always been deployed in support of NATO operations in the way some might have liked it to be.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: If our participation in the AWACS program had been withdrawn during the operations in Libya, would it have changed the way in which we used the F-18s?

[*English*]

Ms. Jill Sinclair: That's a hypothetical question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Yes, it is a hypothetical question. But think about the situation.

There is nothing hypothetical about knowing whether Canada would be in a position to conduct the same operation that we did in Libya without the AWACS system. In other words, if Canada were asked to provide the same involvement today in terms of covering Libyan airspace, would we be able to do it given that we are no longer part of the AWACS program that provides the F-18s with information about their targets?

[*English*]

Ms. Jill Sinclair: I actually am not in a position to answer that. You would need an operational commander to give you that level of detail. AWACS is one part.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Could the colonel answer the question?

[*English*]

Col Brian Irwin: No, not at all.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: What do you say to people who think that Canada's withdrawal from the second program, the UAVs, could be interpreted as a signal that Canada wants to invest in UAVs more in the future?

[*English*]

Ms. Jill Sinclair: I would say that's somebody's extrapolation. It's not based in fact.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Is having a fleet of UAVs one of Canada's objectives today?

[*English*]

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Mr. Chair, I am not sure I am in a position to answer that question. I think the Canada First defence strategy maps out the range of capabilities the government would like the Canadian Forces to have in order to be a fully capable, combat-ready armed force.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next on the list is Mr. Strahl.

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

I want to let the witnesses know that I won't be trying to extract any question period fodder out of them with my questions.

One of the things that we have seen, as we've talked about, is that certain countries have taken the lead with NATO missions. Some of those countries that have taken a key role, such as the U.S. and the U.K., have had to, because of their financial situation, make significant reductions to their defence budgets. It's something that Canada didn't have to do because of our fiscal position.

Can you explain how you envision NATO's willingness to engage in future expeditionary missions will be affected by those key participatory nations having significant reductions in their defence packages?

● (1210)

Ms. Jill Sinclair: The impact of the global financial crisis has really been a topic of discussion around the NATO table, for the reasons you say, and the U.S. and the U.K. in particular, but there is no country that hasn't been untouched. If you look at what Poland is going through, or France or Germany, every country is trying to figure out how to deliver the same sort of impact but in a different way. That's why one of Canada's priorities has been for NATO to take a really hard look at the way we do our capability development and the way we spend NATO resources, basically to do the sort of bottom-up reviews as an organization that Canadian government departments have been doing. In the context of our own fiscal situation, it is a lot better than others. We're in an interesting position of being one of the few countries that is continuing to invest in its defence budget and not just simply slashing. We're just trying to do things a bit differently.

About NATO's willingness to engage, will the defence budgets have an impact on that? I think we're always selective about how we engage. At the end of the day, it's going to come down to the nature of the security challenge and whether countries are going to be willing to put in what they need to meet that security challenge. My own sense is that when they are visceral interests that are at stake, nations will still find a way to do it, but they are going to have to do it much smarter.

Mr. Mark Strahl: We talked about the fact that NATO operates on a consensus, with all member nations participating in that decision, whether or not they have any intention of participating in the mission that's agreed to. As NATO re-evaluates its strategic concept, has there ever been any discussion—I imagine it would be very unpopular at some level—to go to a Security Council-type model where the countries that are willing to participate are given more of a decision-making role going forward?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you. That's a great question.

Every so often people muse about whether we could get away from the consensus principle. But the importance of the alliance speaking with one voice, even if it's at the highest strategic level and then countries individually, nationally, decide how they're going to play that out, that remains so important in terms of the political projection of the alliance. That solidarity is extremely important and that debate to even get to consensus, when you know you're going into a discussion with countries that, frankly, might not even be interested. They have no desire to participate, but they can understand and put themselves in the shoes of their NATO colleagues, to say we understand this is important to you. It's a sophisticated and torturous exercise at times. But I don't think that moving to a Security Council-type model for decision-making would ever take off in any way.

What we are seeing, though, is more—and this refers to an earlier discussion—coalitions of the like-minded, who are going to do certain things together in certain ways under the rubric of an overarching whole-of-NATO decision.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Right.

Just briefly on the NATO training mission, concerns have been raised here about Canadians' perception of NATO, which is that Canada is always there and others sometimes are not. Could you explain or maybe just give some examples of countries that are there working with Canada on the training mission, whose contribution we may not be aware of, some of the smaller countries or countries that perhaps didn't participate in Libya, etc., countries other than the U. S., Australia, and the U.K. that are helping with the training mission right now?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: We might want to get back to you on that question with some of the details. But I can tell you that the Baltic states, for example.... There are a lot of smaller countries. People don't think about what Belgium does, for example, but Belgium is on the ground, and they continue to be on the ground with their F-16s in Afghanistan.

In terms of the training mission, you have countries as diverse as Georgia, those who would like to do more with NATO, through to, as I say, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. These countries are all bringing what they can. They are modest contributions, but they are part of a solidarity of effort. So there is a lot of diversity. As you say, a lot of publicity is given to those who don't play in the big games, but a lot of people are doing what they can to help out in these missions.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lapointe, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Thank you, *monsieur le président*. Thank you, Colonel Irwin.

[*Translation*]

I am going to take a few moments to ask some questions about parts of your presentation. I assure you that my questions on the matter demonstrate my deep respect for the work of the armed forces.

While some of the things that Mr. Norlock said sound very nice, I do not believe in the slightest that your work should come down to handing out sandwiches somewhere in the middle of Africa. But I do think that sending young people into the line of fire and into minefields is a very weighty decision. That is exactly what we have to do as part of NATO. I believe that we have the right to humbly ask a few questions. I have never been in a combat zone myself. I have never had to provide that kind of service to the country.

Since article 5 was written—and I refer to page 6 of your report—times have changed. Some of the problems we face are not clearly defined and that was not the case at the time. It was clear then that we could talk about one nation being another's aggressor. In your report, we read a lot about piracy, terrorism and cyberspace. These are all realities that have no national roots. Countries are not necessarily involved.

In cyberspace, for example, the threat can be from a group that is not national. It may originate somewhere in Asia but may use cyberspace to attack facilities in South Africa, for example. This is a completely different reality from the one that prevailed when article 5 was written. My question comes from those observations.

In terms of the upcoming negotiations and discussions, is there a desire to establish parameters so that a simple man in the street like me can understand under which criteria and under which circumstances NATO will or will not become involved? Do you follow the drift of my question?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: I think so.

[*English*]

You've touched upon the idea that 21st century security threats are not necessarily sovereign national security threats.

[*Translation*]

Is that what you mean by your question?

[*English*]

Mr. François Lapointe: Yes, that can make things complicated.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: That's exactly it.

Mr. François Lapointe: How do we analyze it so that at the end of the day we tell Canadians we are doing something about this event but we are not doing something about this other event. What are the filters to analyze all this?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jill Sinclair: I understand completely.

[*English*]

Mr. François Lapointe: Is it part of what you're going to discuss?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jill Sinclair: That is a very good question.

[*English*]

The problems, the security challenges now, are increasingly in that grey space. Cyber is an excellent example, and we can recall what happened with Estonia a while back when there was a cyber-attack on Estonian infrastructure. How do you reconcile an alliance, which is transforming itself but still probably a little bit more in the traditional space than in the new space? How do you figure out what you're going to do in response to those threats?

I'm not being evasive here, this really is a discussion that is ongoing now. How do you deal with cyber-threats? One of NATO's initial responses to dealing with cyber was at least to put out a cyber-policy, which we did in 2011, I believe. It doesn't talk about military responses. It's more about the political solidarity, the discussion and dialogue on how we can help nations that have come under say cyber-attack in different ways. One of the things that NATO did after the Estonia attack was to establish a centre of cyber-excellence in Estonia to help countries make themselves more robust against cyber-attacks. So we bring the expertise of the alliance to bear.

This is why it's so important to recall that the range of tools that NATO has is not just military. It's just like Canada. It's the whole thing. It's the dialogue. It's the political. It's scientific. It's research and development. So how do you make yourself robust from a security perspective with regard...? We don't have defined parameters yet, but we're trying to deal with these issues like cyber and the non-traditional security threats. We've come up against that in dealing with counterterrorism for the first time in Afghanistan. How do you deal with insurgents who are not nationally based insurgents necessarily? These are new things we're struggling with, to be honest.

● (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe: Would it be possible to come up with some reference points to help civil society, which has no military experience, to better grasp what is going on? Do you understand what I mean?

[*English*]

Ms. Jill Sinclair: The reference points, I think, are emerging. As Colonel Irwin just reminded me, NATO did establish a new position of assistant secretary general for emerging security challenges. That may well be somebody the committee would like to hear from. I think he's a Hungarian.

That's exactly what they're grappling with. In fact, when he comes, he will be able to give you some insights, too. How do you transform the alliance to deal? At the moment, there aren't those clear parameters to be able to explain this exactly.

Mr. François Lapointe: It's still working.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: It's still working. What Canadians can know is that there is a common community trying to address those issues together.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Ms. Sinclair, what was the name of that expert again?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: We can give it to you. It's Gábor Iklódy. He's the assistant secretary general for emerging security challenges. We can give you his name.

The Chair: Thank you. It's somebody we will consider calling.

Moving on, Mr. Alexander....

Mr. Chris Alexander (Ajax—Pickering, CPC): Thanks, Chair, and thanks to our witnesses for a very stimulating discussion so far.

If there was a small chuckle on our side when you mentioned that it was a Hungarian national, it's only because one of our members, who is absent, would be able to understand him in his national language, which is not a gift many of us have.

Thank you also, Ms. Sinclair, for the concept of “not nationally based insurgents”. I'm going to use that in another context. It expresses very well a challenge that we all know, of which we are all painfully aware in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Going back to the strategic concept, which is the theme of our report and which was very helpfully described in its broadest terms in your presentation, you've reminded us that there are these three fundamental tasks. Collective defence is, in a sense, a legacy from the past. That has existed since 1949 and in part is a legacy of the Cold War. Crisis management is something that is coming increasingly to the fore in the post-Cold War era, with the Balkans and successive missions that you mentioned. Then cooperative security is this concept of reaching out to a broader and broader range of partners and contacts through the various fora that you've described.

My impression, as a member of Parliament, as one of your former colleagues on the diplomatic circuit, is that crisis management really does take up most of the alliance's effort under this strategic concept. Is that correct or would you say...? How would you express the priority that's given to these three? Is it equal? Is there a precedent? Give us a view.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you.

Interestingly, part of the debate within the alliance is exactly around that question: where is the emphasis across these three tasks?

I think if you were to speak to some allies from certain parts of Europe they would say, “Look, the focus absolutely has to be on collective defence. The threat hasn't gone away. It's all about there.” I think if you speak to countries like Canada, it's much more on the crisis management and its on the cooperative security part of this.

So I think finding that balance is something that the alliance is still trying to determine. Obviously, we don't want to have to choose between and amongst those three lines of operation because they're all extremely important.

We have put a lot of emphasis on the crisis management piece. I was remiss in not mentioning earlier that in the strategic concept work, one of the important things that Canada brought to that was this idea of a comprehensive approach, the comprehensive approach to crisis management, which is something that Canada has done for many years. You can't just deal with the military. You have to have the diplomatic. You have to have the development. You have to be in there before the crisis develops. This is something that Canada very much brought to the strategic concept discussion.

● (1225)

Mr. Chris Alexander: Thank you for that. You spoke about the importance of transformation and smart defence. We'll be hearing more on that subject, obviously. Tell us a bit more about the capacity that NATO has itself to look at not just emerging challenges but emerging capabilities, and to identify what shared capabilities are going to be most important in the future.

We're working together on the F-35. We have very similar platforms for our surface combatants with other allies. Interoperability is the name of the game everywhere. But we know that in facing these new challenges, there are new capabilities that no one has in sufficient measure. Do we have a part of NATO that looks at that, that gives due attention to it, and what is Canada's contribution?

Col Brian Irwin: Actually, I think that's a great set-up for General Abrial, Supreme Allied Commander, Transformation, who I think will be meeting with you later on in your session, because that's certainly very much really at the core of his mandate. If you go through his terms of reference about exploring new concepts, doctrines, conducting experimentation, and the like, it's very much that looking forward—not just to the NATO 2020 but also that beyond part—as to the types of threats, but also the types of capabilities. So I think he will be really well placed to speak more to it.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Okay. What about new threats? You mentioned this assistant secretary general, but from the perspective of our committee, as you know, we studied readiness, and a recurring theme with almost every witness was that you have to do these things to be ready and to achieve high readiness, but no one can really answer the question of “Ready for what?” in today's world.

You can certainly discuss probabilities and so forth. Do we have a collective NATO staff, body, or joint staff that tries to look over the horizon at what operations may be coming into play a year down the road, or five years down the road?

Obviously, no one predicted quite the Libya operation that we ended up with. Certainly, no one predicted 9/11 on its scale. Is someone at least trying?

Col Brian Irwin: I would certainly say both. You have SACT, or commander of transformation, but you also have SACEUR, commander of operations, who does very much that closer end look of the years ahead. Very much between the two of them, their remit is to provide military advice to both the military committee but also to the council on those issues. They are very much part of that scanning the horizon and understanding those threats.

The Chair: Thank you. Time has expired.

Mr. Storseth, you have the last of the five-minute rounds.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I will be sharing my time with the parliamentary secretary, as I thought he had some excellent questions.

I did note that he talked about his diplomatic circuit. It sounded more like a party circuit than a work circuit.

I'd like to thank you guys very much for your presentation. I thought it was very educational. I do have some questions for you with regard to our role in NATO moving forward, particularly when it comes to interoperability and the importance that interoperability plays in relation to any agreements or treaties we sign around the world. Obviously we have to look at our responsibilities to the commitments we've already made to organizations like NATO.

One example I would give you is that of the Oslo process, from the cluster munitions agreement that came about a couple of years ago. Obviously we need to ratify that as a Canadian government, and in doing that, the discussion of interoperability becomes very pertinent. I'd be very interested in the position of the Department of National Defence, but also in the NATO perspective on how far we can go, and whether we're comfortable with where we are on interoperability for that.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you.

Just to begin, with regard to interoperability for Canada, everything we do is designed to make us interoperable with our allies, because we know we're not going to be doing stuff alone in any sort of expeditionary setting, so it is very inherent in the training and the exercising or the procurement or the equipment that we have.

In terms of things like treaties and other treaty arrangements, when we went into the negotiations on the cluster munitions convention, NATO allies spoke about this and caucused. In fact, I think it is article 21—I may be wrong—of the cluster munitions treaty that actually gives us the ability to maintain the interoperability, because it's extremely important to be able to have that in the spirit of the treaty itself.

As I say, the treaty itself has article 21, which was designed for that purpose. We have been able to find a compatibility between being able to get into a position to ratify the cluster munitions treaty and maintaining our ability to have interoperability.

● (1230)

Mr. Brian Storseth: The Department of National Defence is comfortable with article 21 and is also comfortable that it fits within the broader scope of NATO?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Absolutely.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Excellent. Thank you.

I have one more question for you on capacity. It is something you talked about to some extent in your briefing, which I found very interesting. With regard to capacity—and I thought this was very pertinent—because of our size, we as a country can be a very active and positive player in the international scene in missions like Afghanistan and others. I'd like you to address in a little more depth the importance of that capacity and whether there is anything else—you had mentioned the C-17s—that has helped us to create that capacity in our military.

Could you just address the importance of that moving forward as well? I think Haiti is another example of where this was crucial.

Col Brian Irwin: I think Haiti is a terrific example of how we have not only that physical capacity but the readiness capacity in that we were able to embark on something at fairly short notice with a fairly broad range of capability. Certainly within the alliance we bring some of those core capabilities: from the multi-purpose combat-capable land piece to the very capable air piece and the maritime piece and the like, which are robust and perhaps more robust than those of some others.

I think that in itself is impressive capacity.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: I would just add to that—and I think this is something we haven't talked about—our ability to mount a role 3 medical facility in theatre and to sustain it. We used that in Haiti. We've used it in Afghanistan. We've had helicopters to be able to take people off the ground so they don't have to go through IED-infested terrain. These are the sorts of capabilities that we've been able to use in multiple situations, whether it's close to home in Haiti, earthquake assistance elsewhere, or out in deployed operations.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Well done. That was exactly five minutes.

We'll move into our third round, where each party gets another five-minute question, and we'll start with Madam Moore.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: I would like to go back to the question of interoperability and to ask what happens when, in the context of interoperability, something is acquired that is not compatible with what we have in Canada. For example, if our tanker aircraft are not able to refuel certain planes, what is the best thing to do? If things are not compatible with what we have in Canada, is it better to go with the interoperability or to choose something that will work with what we already have?

I have another question. Can you give us some details about the cooperation between NATO and the UN? I would be interested in your view of that cooperation in the coming years.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

In terms of interoperability, maybe I have not explained it well. There has to be a coherence for our own purposes in what we procure. It just so happens that since the First World War, certainly since the Second World War, we have worked so closely together with allies, and we work with the United States in continental defence. We've worked with Europe, obviously, over many years. Interoperability is something that we factor in as a matter of first consideration, because there are very few occasions when we're going to procure something that is so singularly for Canada that there aren't other countries that have it, other countries with whom we can share that capability.

So we are not contorting ourselves to meet a NATO interoperability standard that somehow counts against what we need on a national basis. These are two sides of the same coin.

On NATO and the UN, NATO and the United Nations have been establishing progressively over the last decade, I would say, much closer relationships. This has been one of the priorities also that Canada has taken to the alliance in its discussions over the last number of years. We now have representatives in each other's headquarters, which never used to be the case, and certainly in terms of the UN seeing NATO as an important and helpful tool in realizing Security Council resolutions and other things, we have the experience of Afghanistan and of Libya to say there's an absolute dovetailing.

The final thing I would mention is that NATO derives its legitimacy from the UN charter. There is a provision within the UN charter that says there's an ability of organizations to establish themselves in regional organizations. So everything goes back to the UN charter, back to the relationship with the UN. Obviously, all NATO members are members of the United Nations.

● (1235)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: My question is about the economic aspects. As we often choose things that are interoperable, do we not run the risk of being at the mercy, if I can use that expression, of a single supplier? For example, if every country is running software from a certain company and it goes bankrupt, does that not complicate things a little? Are there ways to prevent situations like that from happening?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

NATO is an association of sovereign nations. Nations take their own decisions for their own reasons in the first instance. So there has never been.... I think NATO dreams of such coherence of approach, that NATO nations as a community would say they're all going to this particular supplier for this particular widget. It just doesn't happen that way, because nations take their own decisions.

What nations do is they take into consideration their desire—and that could be on a spectrum of little desire to a lot of desire—to make sure that whatever it is they're getting is going to allow them to, as Brian says, plug and play, to be able to actually join up with others and do things together because they use the same fuel or the same ammunition or they can speak on the same radios.

But NATO is fiercely an alliance of sovereign states in the first instance.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: By asking the question, I am trying to compare the situation with the world of medicine where, after one type of equipment is chosen, everything suddenly falls apart and we have to change 25 other things to get everything to work. That is what worries me. Sometimes, we want something to work everywhere but that leads to major changes in the equipment we already have and that we can't replace. Are problems like that occurring at the moment? Does Canada have things that are not compatible and that do not work together?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'd ask that you give a very short response, please.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: In fact, I'm afraid that I'm not in a position to answer that question. I just don't have the knowledge and expertise. Sorry.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McKay, you have the floor.

Hon. John McKay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's pretty obvious that at this point, we're looking, if you will, at almost seismic shifts in defence capability. The U.S. budget is somewhere around three-quarters of a trillion dollars. It's almost invariably going to go down to about half a billion dollars as civilians assert their control over the military. Whether it's Romney or Obama really doesn't much matter, because it just has to be reined in.

The U.S. is far and away the largest contributor to NATO. They've also suggested or said that they're going to be shifting their emphasis from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Isn't it virtually inevitable that NATO will be a reduced organization within a very foreseeable future?

● (1240)

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You're right in saying that the U.S. at the moment covers 21.7% of the NATO budget. It's a major contributor.

You might want to get somebody from the U.S. here to talk about U.S. policy, because I don't want to interpret it for them.

Their shift in emphasis from the Atlantic to the Pacific is a shift in focus and intensity. There's a message being sent to European allies. Frankly, it's a message Canada also sends to European allies. They have to step up to the plate a little bit more. That's all part of a healthy debate.

Is NATO a reduced organization? I don't know. Maybe it's a refocused organization. Maybe it will prioritize its spending in different ways. I'm not sure that it's going to be a reduced organization in terms of its political importance. It remains the singularly unique military organization in the world that can pull together an operation on behalf of the United Nations and on behalf of the EU to provide capacity-building for the African Union. It's actually unique. I'm not sure that it's going to be a reduced organization, but it has to be a transformed organization. There's no question.

Hon. John McKay: If you look at who's going to carry the freight if the Americans draw down, it won't likely be the Brits, because they are reducing their own military commitment. They've mothballed their aircraft carrier two years ahead of time. They've sold off their carrier fleet.

It won't likely be the French. There's really no other country that can step up to the plate. Yet the threat environment is.... Well, who knows what the threat environment is?

I'm kind of puzzled by your argument that it won't be reduced. On the basis of economics alone, it seems to me that economic constraints are going to invariably.... I'm not disagreeing with your argument about the importance of NATO as an alliance. I am questioning whether NATO as an entity will be able to do all the tasks it has been doing for the last, say, decade.

Ms. Jill Sinclair: I think that's a very good question, and I think that's a lot of the debate at the moment—what will we be able to do, what will we be able to afford? I don't want to speak for the United States. You might want to get somebody from the U.S. embassy or from Washington in here to talk to these issues. But the U.S. has been very clear that it still considers NATO, the indivisibility of its security with that of Europe, to be of fundamental importance to U.S. national security and interest. They'd like the Europeans to do a little bit more, as we all would.

The other thing that I think is important to pull out here is that it isn't just the raw dollar cost of what you spend in defence. It's then how you deploy and use those assets. It's a point that Canada has been making for ages. It isn't about what your percentage of GDP is. It's how much you actually make available when the needs arise. We have a lot of NATO allies who have a lot of assets who sit on their home territory and don't do anything. If they were more disposed to use them a little more frequently, then maybe we'd get better burden-sharing, notwithstanding all the things I've said about domestic, democratic processes. Everybody has to challenge themselves as to what we can bring to this collective effort, which is a preventive effort, a capacity-building effort, and occasionally, unfortunately, a fighting effort. There's an awful lot in NATO's collective resources.

The Chair: Time—

Hon. John McKay: No “final final” question? How about a penultimate final question?

The Chair: No. You're 20 seconds over now, so thank you.

Mr. Alexander.

● (1245)

Mr. Chris Alexander: Thank you very much, Chair.

I think another way of responding to John's concern is simply to note that, even if there's, as you were saying, downward pressure on the U.S. defence budget, it's not at all clear that they would fail to prioritize NATO. They are talking and acting more and more as if their reliance on allies and multilateral frameworks is going to stay the same or even increase in some ways.

On the whole question of the party circuit, though, I do need to mention that you don't know what it's about unless you've seen Mr. Storseth after a hockey game on one of those rare occasions when his team has won.

Voices: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chris Alexander: I had to retaliate.

I have one final observation. We're absolutely right to have a debate around this table and in Canada about the relevance of NATO today. There are some detractors. but I think our sense on our side is that there are a lot of supporters, proponents, people who believe in NATO in different ways for different reasons. Canadians generally believe in collective security. The missions we've been involved in, in the last decade, have at one point or another been resoundingly popular—in Afghanistan in the early days, in Libya last year. I just wanted that observation to be part of our discussion today.

Thank you, Jill Sinclair, for mentioning the U.N. Canada's security concerns beyond Afghanistan are concentrated, and there are also political concerns in a few countries in the Middle East—Iran, Syria. They're in the headlines and on our minds. We all see from a strategic concept that NATO's Mediterranean dialogue and Istanbul cooperation initiative, as well as some contact countries, are important elements of the collective security vocation of NATO. Could you tell us a bit more about what those groups do for NATO and with NATO?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Thanks very much.

The Mediterranean dialogue—which encompasses Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia—was elevated to partnership status in 2004. The Istanbul cooperation initiative was designed to reach out to other countries, principally the Gulf countries. I think what we saw, interestingly, in the Libya operation, for example, was that something that started as a bit of a place where the UAE and Qatar and Bahrain and Kuwait could have a chat with NATO, turned into a basis for real operational cooperation. We saw that in Libya. It was quite extraordinary.

In the Mediterranean dialogue, we have all sorts of training, consultation. We have discussions about cyber-threats, about maritime security issues. This is an effort by NATO to get the countries of the Mediterranean speaking to each other, which is a little bit unusual because some of those countries don't talk to each other and don't recognize the existence of certain countries, like Israel. So it's NATO's effort to foster dialogue, even between and amongst difficult partners, and then to say what we can do to practically cooperate, for example, in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, things that all countries can identify with. So that's what it is. These are not aspirants for membership; they are partners. Libya has shown just how useful that dialogue can be because it can lead to practical cooperation.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

Earlier, the country of Estonia was mentioned. I understand it doesn't have an air force, but NATO plays a role in that and as a consequence, Estonia is able to make contributions to NATO in other ways. Could you please describe that to us?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Brian, do you want to talk about the air policing initiative?

Col Brian Irwin: Very quickly, certainly NATO has an air policing program in which allies participate. Allies serve a six-month rotation in providing not only policing but being able to deploy aircraft to their region, so being able to fly that top cover in the Baltics.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Estonia didn't have to put money into the infrastructure and setting up an entire air force, but instead was able to deploy people, for example to Afghanistan, and make a contribution that way.

● (1250)

Col Brian Irwin: I'm not sure how that is connected.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are there any other such sharing arrangements with different countries?

Col Brian Irwin: I think there are some with logistics. As part of the NATO program, a group of allies offer up a C-17 capability as another example.

The Chair: Thank you, the time has expired.

To follow on that vein, Iceland has the same type of air defence proposal with NATO. That's my understanding. Canada actually had a squadron of CF-18s in Iceland.

Col Brian Irwin: That's correct.

The Chair: I have one question before we shut down questions.

As you can see, the committee is quite concerned about a number of things happening with the strategic concept, especially on the issue of NATO transformation and capacity of our allies within NATO because of deficit reduction in all the countries. Some of them are fairly significant in some of our allies.

As we're going into Chicago at the end of the month, you have capabilities, or that's something that's going to be talked about. When talking about capacity, we know that some of our allies will not have the same asset base that they've had in the past. Someone raised the point that there may be revenue shortfalls experienced by NATO if some members, because of deficit reduction, aren't able to pay their entire share. Does that mean we may be looking, from a political standpoint and a military standpoint, at bringing in new members?

I know that Ukraine and Georgia, among others, have expressed NATO interest and possible membership. Would that be a way to enhance capabilities as well as fund opportunities?

Ms. Jill Sinclair: Mr. Chair, I probably didn't give enough emphasis to this, but I can't tell you the seriousness with which NATO allies are discussing the impact of the global economic situation. The impact on defence budgets is serious. A lot of this work around smart defence and smarter defence and wringing every cent out of one's defence dollar is what's compelling the discussions around NATO. I assume this will happen at the level of leaders in an even more intense way in Chicago.

So far, no allies have indicated that they won't be able to pay their assessed contribution, the price of membership, their share. In fact, it's interesting to see the commitment of allies to NATO is so strong, particularly with the smaller countries, which as I say Poland and others, Greece, Portugal, you name it, are in pretty difficult situations. They are committed to staying within NATO because it collectively brings them something they can't get singularly. We haven't seen any indication at all, and I really don't think we will, that people won't be able to pay their basic share in the alliance.

On the question of new members, it's never been looked at in terms of a financial contribution to the alliance. As you will recall, in 2008 we agreed that one day Ukraine and Georgia would become members, but they have to actually determine that they want to be in the alliance. Ukraine has gone back and forth, as we know. They also have to meet our standards frankly, our democratic standards, our professional standards, our governance standards, our civil-military relations standards. There's a bit of work to be done there. I don't think we would ever look at expansion within NATO as a means to kind of grab people, but that's where the partnership piece comes in.

What's interesting about Afghanistan and Libya is that NATO has become a focal point for countries that want to do stuff with us. We were able to leverage and expand NATO core assets and capability in Libya because we had the U.A.E., Kuwait, and all the other partners who were playing along with us, similar to what the Australians and others are bringing into ISAF. That's NATO at its very best. It brings the core capability and lets others join in with it. It finds a space for that political dialogue to happen, then it lets us all operate together in a single space.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate that, especially your comments on Ukraine. I'm of Ukrainian heritage and have been following the unravelling of democracy within Ukraine over a number of years and I've expressed quite a bit of concern over things that have happened, especially in just the past week.

I want to thank you again, Jill Sinclair, the assistant deputy minister for policy within the Department of National Defence, for your insight and for taking the time out of your schedule to always come and brief us and be quite candid in your responses with us. I really do appreciate that.

Colonel Brian Irwin, again it's a pleasure to have you here as a witness today.

I understand a couple of points have been raised that want to be discussed here briefly, so I have Mr. Alexander and then Ms. Moore.

Witnesses, you're free to go. Thank you very much.

● (1255)

Mr. Chris Alexander: Thanks, Chair.

Thanks indeed to the witnesses.

As discussed among some of us, I hope we will have the support of all committee members, in the spirit of building the right witness base for our report, in proposing to invite the defence minister of Lithuania to appear before the committee for one hour on the 17th of May. This is an opportunity for us, because she will be in Canada on her way to the Chicago conference summit, and this is one of the kinds of opportunities that we agreed to look at. I can confirm that she is available in principle. If the committee agrees, we would have to formalize the invitation.

The Chair: You have comments on that point, Mr. McKay.

Hon. John McKay: My only comment is, if others are going through, it would be nice to get them here to talk about the very issues we've just been talking about: why do they see NATO as important?

Mr. Chris Alexander: Yes, and to have that session televised.

The Chair: We've already done some quick work here, Room 207C is available that day, and we will confirm her availability. She is in Canada from the 16th to the 18th before she goes on to Chicago, and has made herself available to us. So I see concurrence in that. We'll move ahead.

Madame Moore.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: I would just like you to check something. Several members of this committee are also members of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association. We are just getting the preliminary itinerary for an upcoming trip to Estonia. Those going to Estonia will not be back in time for the committee meeting on May 29. So it would be useful to check how many members of the committee will be away that day. If it is lots, maybe we should think about whether the meeting should be held or not, because, with just substitutes, it will not be as meaningful. We should just check.

[*English*]

The Chair: So you are talking about the 29th of May?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: It's Tuesday, May 29.

[*English*]

The Chair: Who else is going to be impacted by that?

Hon. John McKay: The translators have Tuesday the 29th of March. It's May.

The Chair: Anybody else on committee travel?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We haven't heard yet.

The Chair: You haven't heard, so nothing is confirmed yet. We do have Jack Granatstein confirmed for at least an hour. Mr. Regehr is also confirmed for the 29th.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: We just need to check. If only one or two members of the committee are away, that's fine. But it's different if five are away.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll have to roll with the punches as they come up.

Any comments? If not, I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

The meeting is adjourned.

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