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Chair

Mr. James Bezan

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Good afternoon, everyone. Sorry for the delay. I had some technical difficulties that we are just sorting out. We're going to continue on with our study of Canada's role in international defence cooperation and NATO's strategic concept.

Joining us by video conference today from the University of Oxford is Professor Jennifer Welsh, the co-director of the Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict. I understand Professor Welsh is a prairie girl now living in the U.K. and teaching over there. It's great to have her join us.

She is a professor of international relations at the University of Oxford and a fellow of Somerville College. She is a former Jean Monnet fellow of the European University Institute in Florence and was a Cadieux research fellow in the policy and planning staff of the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs. Jennifer has taught international relations at the University of Toronto, McGill University, and the Central European University in Prague. She is an author, co-author and editor of several books and articles on international relations. She has a B.A. from the University of Saskatchewan and a master's and doctorate from the University of Oxford, where she studied as a Rhodes scholar. Congratulations on that.

Also joining us by video conference is Mr. Paul Ingram, who is the executive director of the British American Security Information Council. He's from London. Paul is executive director, developing BASIC's long-term strategy to help reduce global nuclear dangers through disarmament and collaborative non-proliferation and coordinating operations in London and Washington. In particular, he leads on BASIC's work as host to the BASIC Trident Commission in London and BASIC's NATO program, looking to reduce the alliance's dependency on nuclear weapons. He is also involved in BASIC's work on the diplomacy around Iran's nuclear program and promoting a weapons of mass destruction-free zone in the Middle East. He is the author of a number of BASIC's reports and briefings, covering a variety of nuclear and non-nuclear issues since 2002.

I welcome both of you by video conference. We're looking forward to hearing your expertise on this issue. I ask that your opening comments be 10 minutes or less. Hopefully technology will be cooperating through this whole process. Then we will have rounds of questions from all of our members.

I remind members that bells will be going off at 5:15 Ottawa time for votes tonight, so we will have to adjourn by that time.

Professor Welsh, could you bring us your opening comments, please?

Professor Jennifer Welsh (Co-Director, Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict, University of Oxford): Thanks very much. It's a pleasure to be with you.

In my 10 minutes I thought I would comment on the six points that are in the preface to the NATO strategic concept of 2010 and would begin with the first point in the preface: that the strategic concept is reconfirming the bond between our nations to defend one another against attack.

I see two challenges to that first point, certainly most recently illustrated by the events in Turkey that call into question the real meaning of article 5 of the NATO treaty, and show, if anyone needed reminding, that while this appears to be a binding commitment, it obviously involves discretion as to how states will act. I think recent events in Turkey remind us of the difficulties surrounding article 5.

Second, and something that is mentioned in a follow-up to the strategic concept, is the whole question of cybersecurity and how we can determine whether cyberattacks are attacks that would invoke principles of NATO.

That's with respect to the first principle that's mentioned in the preface to the document.

The strategic concept talks about committing the alliance to prevent crises as well as managing conflicts and stabilizing those conflict situations.

Ban Ki-moon declared 2012 as the Year of Prevention, and I read this sentence with a certain amount of cynicism about the degree to which prevention has been mentioned so often by states as a goal, but yet very rarely operationalized.

The questions for NATO for me would be twofold. How seriously does it really plan to take prevention—how far down in the temporal chain, if you will? Is it going to get involved in the root causes of conflict and atrocities, or is it going to do what it effectively did in Libya, meaning prevent the escalation of crises? It seems to me the prevention of escalation is all that we are able to mobilize political will around.

I would also say that if Libya is perceived to be a case of successful prevention of escalation and atrocities, there is a backlash against Libya that NATO certainly needs to be aware of. I would mention two things in particular here.

The first is the backlash against the perceived expansion of the mandate in Libya from the protection of civilians to regime change, as was illustrated by the expansion of NATO's targeting strategy. Many countries, both permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council, have raised real concerns after Libya about the interpretation of Resolution 1973. I will just say that those countries are not just China and Russia; they are also democratic states—India, South Africa, and Brazil—that are important for countries such as Canada to consider.

Second, the nature of the backlash against Libya was around the accountability of the alliance back to the Security Council. I think it is a very important issue for NATO, going forward, that much of the concern expressed by states following Libya was about the perceived lack of reporting back to the Security Council about what NATO was doing on the ground. NATO was delegated the responsibilities that lie with the Security Council and NATO will often be in that situation, so questions of accountability, I think, are really critical here.

Finally on this second point, the Libya campaign raises questions about what civilian protection means, and if this is going to be a future area of focus for NATO. First, can you protect solely from the air, as we appeared to do in Libya? Certainly there were special forces on the ground. Second, what is protection?

In thinking about how NATO evolved, we see it really evolved from being a roving shield, protecting civilians wherever they happened to be, to something that I would call, and some NATO officials have called, enduring protection, trying to essentially get at the Gadhafi regime's power to harm the population in a more fundamental sense. Did that mean regime change? I think that is a very important question, but certainly that is behind a lot of the opposition that has come to pass over Libya after the apparent success of the mission.

● (1540)

I'll just skip over the third and fourth aspects of the preface and move on to the fifth, given my time constraints.

To the point about keeping the door to NATO open to all European democracies that meet the standards of membership, I would describe myself as one who's cautious about enlargement, especially to countries such as Georgia, because I think NATO's greatest success has been deterrence, and deterrence relies on credibility. Arguably, the larger NATO becomes, the more it stretches its credibility, possibly to the breaking point. I think with a new American administration following the George W. Bush administration, the brakes were put on enlargement, to a certain extent. I personally think that was a good thing.

The last point talks about continuous reform to make the alliance more effective and efficient. As we saw at the recent Chicago summit, there was a big focus on the idea of smart defence, which is really a way of saying we should be using our resources more wisely.

Fostering specialization and pooling military capability means that we will have a more specialized military with respect to Canada on the ground, but it also means we are going to rely much more heavily on allies to show up with the capacity that we need. The experience in Afghanistan, particularly with respect to helicopters, points to the problems with relying on those allies to show up with what we need, so again I would just make a note of caution about specialization.

It will also mean, if we're serious about smart defence, that NATO members will need to rethink caveats, the politically imposed restrictions that they have, but also that Canada will also have to rethink its previous rejection of the notion of niche roles in favour of being a combat-capable force.

Let me just end by saying a bit about the F-35 debate. It seems to me the decision on F-35s means something very significant about Canada's capacity to contribute to expeditionary forces, expeditionary operations, which, of course, are stressed in the NATO strategic concept. If we are going to focus more on interoperable air capability, it does mean we may be able to focus much less on land forces. There is a trade-off that we need to think about. Obviously, this links to what we view as the most significant security challenges we might face, but by becoming more niche, we also, in effect, rule ourselves out of certain kinds of missions going forward.

I'll stop there. I hope I've given you enough food for thought for questions.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Professor. You stayed under the 10 minutes, and we will have plenty time for questions afterward.

Mr. Ingram, you now have the floor.

Mr. Paul Ingram (Executive Director, British American Security Information Council): Thank you very much. I too am very grateful for this opportunity to outline what I perceive to be the main issues around NATO's nuclear posture arising from the strategic concept and, more recently in May, the adoption of the deterrence and defence posture review.

There are three angles I would like to cover, the first being internal alliance-wide consultations and the need for cohesion going forward, not just in agreeing to a consensus document in the last two summits, but also in looking forward and the challenges that the alliance faces.

The second is the primary potential nuclear threat facing the alliance, namely Russia.

The third is the emergence of potential new threats coming from southeast of Europe.

Turning to the first, NATO cohesion, I think it would be a significant error to look at the last two summits and conclude that there is a clear cohesion amongst allies on the future of nuclear deterrence within Europe. Yes, there is support for nuclear deterrence as a concept, going forward, at least into the indefinite future, but one also has to remember that there is significant support across the membership of the alliance for the vision outlined by President Obama in 2009 for taking serious steps towards a world free of nuclear weapons. One of the most obvious and clear symbols of the obstacles to that is the continued deployment of what many perceive to be outdated, free-fall nuclear weapons within Europe. There is continuing disagreement over the longer-term future of these weapons, which will inevitably arise as investment decisions come forward over the next few years in some of the host states, particularly Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

What we have at the moment is a false consensus that has papered over the cracks of the disagreement. The problem here is that the public opinion in these countries certainly seems to be that we have long since moved away from the Cold War and that the range of these weapons is not relevant.

Indeed, they fulfill no military purpose. They are only there because to withdraw them would send unintentional signals to the Russians. This is really the essence behind the obstacles to change, particularly in central and eastern Europe, where there is little faith in the deployment of these weapons, even for deterrence purposes, because they would require the agreement of allies that they don't trust to come through in a crisis. Nevertheless, they don't want these weapons withdrawn so that those allies are even less committed to their ultimate protection against Russian influence. As a result, I think we have guns that are being held to the heads of allies, which is not a very conducive strategy for long-term alliance cohesion.

The second issue I wanted to deal with was Russia. The false consensus I was referring to earlier has come around to focusing on reciprocity and on these weapons for which we perceive no particular utility, other than to negotiate with the Russians to ensure that their far larger stocks of tactical nuclear weapons are reduced and that they are more transparent over them. This is a very laudable objective, but unfortunately the Russians are not yet ready to play ball, and even if there were an election next month of a president who was ready to deal with the Russians, it's not at all clear that the Russians are easy negotiating partners here. The reason for this is that the Russians perceive the ever-increasing capabilities of the alliance with significant alarm.

● (1550)

It may look very different from the perspective of Ottawa, but in Moscow there is certainly concern around those capabilities. Mixed with the willingness of the alliance, not only in action but also in the agreements of the alliance, to use its force to intervene around the world, they perceive this as an ever-decreasing capability of Russia to contain what they perceive to be an alliance with many ambitions. Therefore, whatever we think about our intentions, the Russians certainly are painting them as something that is very hostile to their interests.

On the positive side, the Russians don't have particular ongoing financial capabilities to expand their nuclear forces. Indeed, I think there is some suggestion that they will be willing to negotiate in future rounds of strategic negotiations, but they're not quite ready yet to deal on the issue we really want to deal with, which is tactical nuclear weapons. There's a lack of trust that is deepened by the votes in the U.S. Congress over the last few years and by the debates that took place even on the very simple ratification of the new START treaty.

With regard to the Middle East, I would expect you to be particularly interested in the emergence of threats coming from there. Of course, many people are talking about Iran and its nuclear program, and the possibility of an Israeli strike. Where does NATO fit into this? Well, NATO doesn't have a particularly direct role, but of course there is always the possibility that the Americans will be asking NATO to play some sort of role if the Americans were drawn into a conflict, if only for legitimacy purposes.

NATO has a policy of trying to prevent proliferation into the region, and that's a very laudable objective. I personally think that the best promise here is to be dealing with the region in a more balanced way, to be looking at it region-wide, and to be placing greater emphasis on the proposed conference at the end of this year on a WMD-free zone across the Middle East, a vision that is a long way away from being realized but that is nevertheless a process that could pull together very difficult partners in negotiations and build confidence over a longer period.

The NATO ally most involved—other than, of course, the United States—is Turkey, and I'm not entirely sure we can get away with the deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons in Turkey into the indefinite future and negotiate on a WMD-free zone in the Middle East. It will be very soon that the Iranians and others that are not necessarily allies of NATO will be referring to those deployments as influencing their decisions as to whether to go forward in building confidence toward a zone free of nuclear weapons.

I think I'm out of my 10 minutes now. I'm very willing to take questions.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you. Actually, you have about two minutes left. I appreciate that you guys were able to keep your comments to the point. It gives us more time for members to ask questions.

With that, we're going to start off with Mr. Harris. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to both of our guests. We're lucky to have the benefit of your knowledge and experience on this question.

Dr. Welsh, first of all, I was most interested in your comments about the Libyan mission and the concerns about what you called the backlash. We experienced it here as a party. We are now the official opposition. In opposition we supported the initial mission to Libya, but by the September date we're concerned about the very things you talked about in terms of mission creep, the regime change aspects, and other concerns that arose.

Are there any mechanisms you would recommend to avoid this kind of problem? We saw it. It was exasperating to us to support the notion of the international community's responsibility to protect, and then see nations, and NATO itself, as you say, extending the targets through different bodies, and also statements by defence ministers or governments about regime change throughout this.

Is there any mechanism that can stop it? NATO is involved, countries are involved, so when the leaders of these countries keep talking about it, it seems that it's then a NATO problem. Could you comment on that? Is there any mechanism that could be used to hold that back?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: You raise a very interesting point about the dilemma of a collective alliance and there being particular unilateral actions and statements on behalf of individual states.

To a certain extent, I don't think there's much that can be done about those individual state statements, if you will. With respect to the evolution of a Security Council-mandated action, and let's remember that this is what this was, if we were to go back to 1999, we can think about how things have changed.

Right up until the day of Resolution 1973, the Secretary General of NATO was saying that we will not act without a resolution from the Security Council, so the council authorized that action. NATO was the council's delegated authority, if you will.

There are actually mechanisms the United Nations has used for peacekeeping operations to exert some control. There are sunset clauses on peacekeeping missions. There are reporting requirements back to the Security Council. There are caveats you could put into missions.

Of course, these kinds of procedural mechanisms have their drawbacks, and the response, for example, of the United States to suggestions like these is to say that you're trying to slow down its operation and that you have to let militaries do what they will.

I think the days of the U.S., French, and U.K. militaries being able to say to the rest of the world, “Trust us; we're liberal democracies, and we will do the right thing in the field,” are over, in my view.

I think the move for accountability mechanisms when actions are mandated by the council is a very strong one. I would actually advise the committee to have a look at the proposal of the Brazilian government, called “responsibility while protecting”, which was released about a year ago in a letter to the UN Secretary-General, to get a flavour of some of the things being discussed around the accountability of actors like NATO.

Mr. Jack Harris: I have one other question on Canada's role.You mentioned the F-35 and potential niches for Canada. Of course, Canada has never used more than six or eight jets in expeditionary forces since it has had the F-18s, for example, back in the eighties. Is there another niche for Canada in perhaps other aspects of nation building?

You talked about that a little in your paper in June. There has been no call for nation building by Libya, by Canada, or by anybody else. They're doing their own thing, as well or as badly as we see. There doesn't seem to be any effort by NATO and the NATO countries collectively to put together some role for a civilian side or a governance side that would assist in either the prevention, or the prevention of the escalation, of problems. Do you see that as something that could be developed, or is that too theoretical and too far off in the future?

● (1600)

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: You identified building capacity and civilian assistance for what you call nation building. I wouldn't disagree that building that capacity is important. The question would be whether NATO is the right instrument for it.

If we think about how NATO is perceived globally, I think there would be huge issues around NATO driving those kinds of civilian activities. That's why you have to look much more at regional organizations or multilateral organizations like the United Nations to actually carry out those tasks. It's because of their perceived legitimacy. In the case of regional organizations, it's that they supposedly have more knowledge about these countries in their own region. In the case of the UN, it's the supposedly magic wand that's waved that says that if it's UN, it's multilateral, and therefore it's better. That perception exists.

While nation building, as you call it—which I would prefer to call assistance for building stable institutions—is definitely something we should consider investing in, I'm not sure that I would advise doing it through the NATO alliance per se.

Mr. Jack Harris: I have one final question, if I have a chance, Mr. Chair.

You mentioned in your earlier paper, and you mentioned it again today, that NATO believed and believes that it can't act alone outside this area without the Security Council. Would you give that the legitimacy of almost the rule of law with respect to what NATO can or can't do? It is a regional organization under the United Nations charter, etc., etc. I know that in practice, obviously, Rasmussen's comments underline that, but would that be at the height of the legal or conventional state of play?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I wouldn't call it a legal obligation yet. I think what we've seen is a belief that a Security Council authorization is politically and even morally desirable for NATO. Although it is true that under article 51 of the UN Charter force cannot be used except in self-defence or as part of a collective security operation, that doesn't mean that NATO always has to act under a council authorization. However, for these wars of choice like Libya, I think it has become the practice. That may build up over time into customary law, but I wouldn't yet call it a rule of law.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alexander, you have the floor.

Mr. Chris Alexander (Ajax—Pickering, CPC): Greetings to you both, and thank you so much for those presentations.

Professor Welsh, I wanted to explore the difficulties you've perceived with article 5, a cornerstone of the NATO alliance. You both mentioned that deterrence and collective defence is rooted in article 5. There was a suggestion after the First World War that the League of Nations should give an article 5 guarantee to all the other members of the league. That was refused back in 1919. It came back in 1949 with the North Atlantic Treaty and it has worked for a much more limited number of states. Prime Minister Borden was one of those refusing the blanket guarantee back in 1919.

For most of NATO's history it applied to under 20 states. Now it applies to 28 states. Professor Welsh, is it something that has given NATO the capacity to deter, or is it something that's coming under stress in Georgia, in Ukraine, in candidates for membership, and on the border with Turkey? Should we be revisiting this idea? I think our profound view is that it's worked, and that if we deny it forever and a day to countries like Georgia and Ukraine, we make them less stable. You may have a different view.

● (1605)

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: Let me clarify my comments. I agree that it has been one of the sources of the deterrent effect, but the way it has been interpreted, particularly after events in Turkey, as being an ironclad guarantee of a response isn't quite right. If you look at the actual article, you see that an attack upon one is equal to an attack upon all; however, for it to be activated, members of NATO have to agree, first, that there has been an attack. It may seem obvious in some cases, but if you go back to your League of Nations example, that was precisely the debate that was had about Manchuria. Was this aggression or not? Was this an attack?

Second, they have to agree that NATO will respond. That's a political decision.

In addition, article 5 doesn't specify the action that will occur. Each member does what it deems necessary. We know that in the case of Afghanistan, countries behaved very differently in response. It is about managing expectations around the type of action that might follow.

I don't at all advocate moving away from or lessening the importance of article 5 for NATO. I think it has been key to deterrence. My point about Georgia was just more caution. With caution has to come credibility, the credibility that you would activate that clause. At present, I don't see the same commitment to the security of those countries that existed for some of the earlier entrances to NATO after the end of the Cold War.

I just sound a note of caution about expansion. You're right that it could have a positive effect, but not if it is thrown around willy-nilly without the accompanying credibility of the commitment.

Mr. Chris Alexander: I think we all take your points about the accountability of NATO to the United Nations for operations like Libya when they take place under a UN Security Council mandate. Reporting, human rights, civilian casualties—all these had to be looked at and were looked at. What is the accountability and what is the recourse of NATO countries when the UN doesn't act, as in the case of Syria, and doesn't give a mandate, and the death toll rises above 30,000, as we know to be the case right now?

Building on that, you gestured at the defence reductions taking place in Europe—€50 billion was taken out of defence budgets in the last four years in Europe—in suggesting that we may, as Canada, be better served not to just have niche capabilities but to be able to deliver combat capabilities on a viable scale when required. What do you see those combat capabilities for Canada looking like in 2012 and beyond, as the pressure is on us to be a leading player in support of international peace and security only builds?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: Let me take the first question first, because they're two different questions.

Your question about what NATO should do if the Security Council is paralyzed, I think, is highly relevant. I foresee a very difficult period ahead for the Security Council, but currently we have no other form of accountability for the council other than political accountability. It was very interesting, for example, that you saw the UN General Assembly in August passing a resolution that was incredibly strongly worded, criticizing the council for the failure to act. The council needs to manage the downside that comes with the failure to meet the expectations of the UN membership. That's unfortunately the strongest stick we have.

I am one who believes that it doesn't mean there can never be any action. I think we need to begin to investigate those alternatives, and to simply say it's either Security Council authorization or nothing is really not to address the problem. We may be going back to an era not unlike what we saw in the 1980s, with the council unable to fulfill the weight of expectation that's been placed upon it. Let's think back to the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, back to India-Pakistan, years where the council did nothing.

The council's longer trajectory has been inaction, not action; this needs to be seriously considered by NATO countries in particular, but also by other regional actors.

On your second point about what combat-capable forces would look like, I do think from the perspective of an optimist that Afghanistan, while it is derided, did provide an opportunity for the Canadian Forces to develop an adaptable, flexible army. That is, I think, a highly prized capability that should not be squandered lightly. I do think that is an important capability that would be traded off if we're in a world of fixed resources whereby an investment in something like the F-35 means that instead we're banking on having interoperable air capacity.

I come back to my point about Libya: can you protect solely from the air? If the kinds of operations we're thinking about do include civilian protection, then it may be that we have to consider what kind of land forces we could actually mobilize.

There is, of course, the whole other dimension of what we need on the North American continent, but I think your question was more directed at what we need to do globally.

● (1610)

The Chair: The time has expired.

Mr. McKay, you have the last of the seven-minute round.

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

Thank you to you both for very excellent presentations.

Mr. Alexander, in some respects, anticipated a question I was interested in. The article 5 obligations under NATO and the responsibility to protect doctrine meet each other at the Turkish-Syrian border and at this point seem to be paralyzed by UN inaction or the inability of the UN to focus on a resolution, yet, ironically, the inability or unwillingness of the international community to intervene in Syria actually escalates the threat to Turkey. If the threat is escalated to Turkey, then presumably calls under section 5 might actually increase and get louder and louder.

My first question to you is this, Professor Welsh. What elements of the responsibility to protect doctrine or the new variation, which is responsibility while protecting, actually could be implemented now, absent a UN-sanctioned mandate?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: You raise a very general question about the responsibility to protect that I think is important to clarify. It is a principle that encompasses a broad range of measures that in some ways, if you think about the spectrum, including prevention, can even be non-coercive at a very early stage.

Very interestingly—this is just a bit of a tangent, because I was struck by that statement in the strategic concept about prevention—all of the world's watch lists about countries that were prone to either mass atrocities or conflict prior to 2011 included Syria in their top 10. None of them included Libya. Now, what does that tell us about our current capacity to monitor situations of concern and feed that information through to policy-makers and then act on the information we have?

Syria was consistently on these lists. That's my point about prevention. If we're serious about it, are we actually prepared to consider a range of actions? By the way, just because they're preventive doesn't mean they won't be threatening to state sovereignty. There's often this assumption that prevention is somehow warm and fuzzy and less difficult, but it can very often be incredibly intrusive.

The responsibility to protect includes a whole host of actions, only one of which includes military force, so to me the failure to authorize military intervention in Syria does not spell the failure of the responsibility to protect. The very fact that we are discussing atrocities, that there have been commissions of inquiry, that there have been very serious financial sanctions put in place, that there are now attempts to try to buttress the opposition and encourage them to consolidate and work together—all of these are ways of implementing the responsibility to protect.

Now, many of you will say, "Ah, but what good are any of them if you don't intervene militarily?" Well, at the end of the day you're making a probabilistic assessment as to whether you can do more harm than good through military intervention, and you have to make a prudent calculation about that. I think up that until very recently the prudent calculation was that intervention might cause more harm than it would actually address, but what we've been seeing over the past few weeks in Turkey is that we have to factor in the costs of inaction. It's precisely what you mentioned: this gradual spillover is now creating a new set of challenges.

Therefore I think that when policy-makers make those probabilistic assessments—which, by the way, are part of the responsibility to protect but also are part of good policy-making in NATO—they have to consider the implications of both action and inaction.

● (1615)

Hon. John McKay: Yes, a lot of the inaction in the past few months has led to very predictable consequences. The fear among some is that those predictable consequences are going to become larger and greater, and then the ability to actually intervene in any non-military way diminishes very quickly.

I appreciate your concern—

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I think that is where diplomacy is very important. Think back to Libya. One of biggest enabling factors for a council-authorized action was the request from the Arab League. Now, in retrospect, there's been lots of analysis of why that request was made and what the configuration was in the league; nonetheless, the fact that regional actors wanted action was huge.

The question is on the table: if the League of Arab States were to make a particular request in a particular way, with particular momentum behind it, would that change dynamics on the council? I can't say for sure, but those are the kinds of avenues we need to be exploring, and we need to be exploring what is it is possible to do short of a Security Council-authorized action.

Hon. John McKay: I have one final question for Professor Ingram, and that has to do with a report that Russia is withdrawing from a decommissioning of weapons. Now, I don't know whether that's a decommissioning of nuclear weapons, but they apparently have put the Americans on notice that come May of next year, they will no longer participate in this decommissioning exercise that's been going on for 20 years.

Do you have any observations with respect to that?

Mr. Paul Ingram: Just to clarify, this is the cooperative threat reduction program, otherwise known, more popularly, as the Nunn–Lugar initiative. This is an initiative that, as you say, has been going on for 20 years, whereby the Americans have been providing capital to decommission many of the excess Russian nuclear warheads, and indeed take a lot of the fissile material and burn it in reactors in the United States to produce electricity: atoms for peace, you could say.

My observation is that this is a symptom of the declining trust that the Russians have of the whole process. They're spiking their noses, frankly, on this, because the types of warheads that are being decommissioned are very outdated and far from being relevant to any kind of Russian security, whatever one's opinion is of what's good for Russian security.

I think it's a political football rather than a strong objection within Russia to the program itself. I'm not aware of those objections being present other than the fact that it is part of the indication that the Americans won the Cold War, and it's symbolic, therefore, within Russia. This withdrawal from the program I perceive to be a negative symbol of the potential for Russian cooperation, and it doesn't bode well for the future.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to move on to our five-minute round. Mr. Strahl will begin.

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

I appreciate this opportunity and the testimony we've heard so far.

I have a couple of questions. Going back to smart defence, we talked a lot about that in this study. We even got into it a bit on our previous study on readiness.

I just want to flesh out a little bit more, Dr. Welsh, your comments on the F-35 in particular. Some would say that in order for us to have smart defence, we need to be interoperable with our allies going forward, and that we're going to spend the capital on a replacement for our CF-18 regardless of what choice is made there.

Do you see advantages or disadvantages, or are you talking about a reduction in our expeditionary air force capability in order to focus more on the land forces that you spoke about earlier?

You ran out of time when you were mentioning that, and I'd like some more comments on that particular part of your presentation.

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I think the question I was trying to uncover is really what kind of Canadian Forces would provide the most influence mainly in multilateral efforts, whether we're thinking of NATO or UN types of operations. If you took the Libya example, you would say you want advanced interoperable aircraft. That would allow you the most effective participation in multilateral efforts. If you're thinking about Afghanistan, you might conclude that it's a flexible, adaptable army, although strategic lift can help greatly in that respect as well.

Canada is obviously making a decision to invest in its own security through investments in the air force and the navy for home defence, if you will, but also for some multilateral operations, and it wants to invest wisely in terms of its capability for these multilateral efforts.

The only suggestion I was making is that the F-35s will involve a trade-off. They may very well mean, unless other kinds of changes are made, less money for the flexible, adaptable army. It's just understanding what those trade-offs might be.

I'm making an assumption about a fixed pool of resources and I'm also completely aware of the other calls on taxpayers' money, so you're in a world of trade-offs. I'm just trying to explore what the implications might be. It might mean we would have less capacity to put boots on the ground where needed, but there may be scenarios in which we could combine F-35s with maintaining that capability.

To an extent it's just the challenges of our own North American space increasingly requiring our resources. It was really only in 2005 that North America came to be seen as a theatre of operations in its own right. That, obviously and rightly, is taking up a great deal of our thinking and our resources in terms of defence.

I don't know if that's helpful.

Mr. Mark Strahl: It will give us something to think about, that's for sure.

You mentioned something else that caught my attention. You mentioned whether NATO should have an accountability mechanism or whether there should be greater accountability to the UN when NATO is operating under a UN mandate.

I've heard some criticisms in the past that NATO doesn't want to be seen as the muscle for the UN. How do you reconcile those two—the need or the desire for NATO to remain independent and the UN's desire to ensure that they're not acting outside of a UN mandate?

It's probably a question that doesn't have an easy answer, but it was something that did twig some questions for me. I'd ask you to expand a little further on how you see NATO's relationship to the Security Council being practically applied.

● (1625)

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: There is a complex relationship here. The UN charter called for the development of a military staff command of real operational resources for the UN that never came to pass, so whenever the UN authorizes an operation it is relying on states to respond either through some kind of a coalition or through an alliance.

In the Libya campaign it was very interesting. In the first 10 days, it was not a NATO operation; it was a U.K.-U.S.-French operation. Interestingly, what I have heard, and this tells you a lot about the politics of these sorts of situations, is that the French and the U.K., who were very much out front in the beginning—and it's often said the U.S. led from behind in Libya—were very concerned about the optics of a French-British intervention in the Middle East. I heard the word "Suez" many times, so for them NATO was the solution for the legitimacy of what they wanted to do.

This will be the case for NATO; it will be seen as a good instrument for the states that comprise it. That also means, if we are to take on board this belief in the legitimacy of Security Council authorization, that NATO will often be operating as the arm or the operational agent for the UN. This isn't new; it's done it through peacekeeping before, but there are robust mechanisms for accountability with respect to peacekeeping—well, I should say there are mechanisms. Are they always as robust as they could be? However, for civilian protection operations that are different from peacekeeping....

This was not a consensual peacekeeping operation. The Security Council authorized the use of force without the consent of the Libyan state. This was a big deal. For those kinds of operations, currently we don't have those kinds of accountability mechanisms; they can be developed, but we need to start thinking about how that will happen.

I would be a little worried on the flip—

The Chair: I'm going to have to interject and stop you here. We have a five-minute time limit for questions and answers. We'll ask you to be very concise in your responses now that we're into the five-minute round.

With that, we'll move on.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Moore, go ahead.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to know how the situation in Syria is affecting the level of cooperation between NATO and Russia.

[*English*]

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: Does Paul want to answer this question?

I'm happy to answer, but Paul may have some thoughts, given that he mentioned Russia in his presentation.

Mr. Paul Ingram: I think clearly there have been a series of actions that NATO has undertaken over the years, from Kosovo onward, that the Russians have taken great exception to.

There are two angles here. The first is NATO taking action that the Russians are uncomfortable with because of the action itself; the second is that it demonstrates quite clearly NATO's capacity to intervene in regions outside of its own area of operations, which reinforces the Russian fear that NATO, as perceived within Russia, is a tool of western hegemony.

They didn't oppose the intervention actively in Libya, but they were very uncomfortable with it and felt taken along, as if on a train. They felt they faced undesirable choices one way or the other.

Again, I emphasize that this is a Russian perspective; it's not necessarily my perspective, but I'm often explaining perspectives that are different from our own.

From their perspective, this underlines their relative weakness with regard to the alliance, and their own need, therefore, to maintain vigilance to not trust the alliance. They perceive the willingness of the Americans and the alliance as a whole to move forward on projects such as missile defence and the development of novel conventional capabilities, whatever the consequence on the perceived security of other states, as indicators that NATO is not to be trusted.

● (1630)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Thank you very much.

In Libya's case, for example, we know that Gadhafi didn't become a dictator overnight. When we work alongside countries with less than stellar human rights track records, how do we approach that relationship, ethically speaking?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Ingram: Perhaps I could answer that first.

I think that we in the west need to be very cautious about measuring moral and ethical interventions purely by the measuring stick of military intervention. Professor Welsh stated quite clearly that responsibility to protect is not simply about military intervention. I would go further and say that the prime movement of responsibility to protect is not about military intervention. That's just the icing on the cake, the top of the iceberg. We need to be more consistent over a longer period with respect to countries like Libya and indeed across the Middle East.

In my observation, ethical and moral issues actually drive people's opinions in the Middle East more strongly than they do even here in Britain or over there in Canada. I perceive there to be a stronger attachment here to strategic calculations, to real political calculations, while in the Middle East it's quite common for people both in government and on the street to be perceiving inequality, unfairness, and immoral behaviour in virtually everything we do in the west. If we are to engage for ethical reasons—and I would very strongly support engagement for ethical reasons, using both military and other means—then we need to do so much more consistently and coherently than we have done up to now.

Libya is a prime example of that. Certainly in this country, recent governments had been cooperating very closely with Colonel Gadhafi for many years, ever since he started to cooperate with our governments on such issues as weapons of mass destruction and the like, despite the human rights abuses. There are documented cases of cooperation between our intelligence services here and his forces in handing over suspects who were opposition activists within Libya.

Therefore, if we're serious about the ethical engagement across the world—and I think we do need to be—we need to be much more serious across the piece than we have been up to now.

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: Could I make a very brief comment in response?

The Chair: You can, if you can do it in under 30 seconds.

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: Okay. I won't, then.

The Chair: We're out of time. We have to keep on moving.

Committee members, I will ask you to make sure to indicate which witnesses you would like to answer your questions. That would also help with our staff and with directing technology.

Mr. Opitz, you have the floor.

● (1635)

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

Mr. Ingram, you've written extensively about nuclear issues, disarmament, and so forth. Do you think Canada should join a NATO-led ballistic missile defence arrangement, or should we remain outside of it, as is presently the case?

Mr. Paul Ingram: I think Canada would need to look at its own national security interests. I have to say that I'm not sufficiently familiar with your own national security concerns to know whether you should join, but I would say that looking alliance-wide, it's very important that we take seriously the unintended consequences of the development of such technologies.

Missile defence will be essential if the world is to seriously move towards reduced and then zero nuclear weapons, but if we do so simply with our own security in mind and do not take into account the unintended consequences in terms of the reactions from states like Russia, China, and those in the Middle East, then we're only storing up trouble for the future.

Mr. Ted Opitz: I'd like to stay with that for a minute, because a lot of your stuff, as you said, is centred around nuclear disarmament.

In a case of totalitarian and theocratic states like North Korea and potentially Iran, would they take similar measures if they witnessed, for example, NATO disarming? Let me put it this way: would you not agree that as long as nuclear weapons are a reality, that pragmatically NATO should remain a nuclear alliance, given states such as the two I just mentioned as examples?

Mr. Paul Ingram: My opinion is that whatever my opinion, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance as long as there are nuclear weapons in the world.

I wasn't referring to any contest to that statement when I was referring earlier to there being a lack of cohesion amongst the alliance. I don't perceive that. I think the alliance will remain a nuclear alliance for as long as nuclear weapons remain in the world. It was particularly the deployment of the free-fall nuclear weapons that I think increasingly have no military value and no deterrence value. That was what I meant.

Mr. Ted Opitz: I'm going to shift to Professor Welsh.

Professor, you mentioned something very interesting a little while ago in one of your answers, and that was about a military staff command at the UN. If we take the example of Bosnia in the early part of the nineties, where the UN had its role at the beginning and NATO had its role at the end, could you compare and contrast some of that, and maybe add a comment on where you think a military staff command at the UN would have been useful?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: Well, what I meant when I was referring to the military staff committee was that it, by implication, would also have combat-ready or available forces to actually execute UN mandates itself, as opposed to having to contract those out.

What happened in the Balkans is that you actually had a fair amount of oversight—interestingly, by the UN Secretariat—over some of the decisions that were made with respect to targeting and the actions of troops on the ground, particularly with respect to safe areas. That didn't happen in Libya. In the Balkans you had NATO operating as a regional organization authorized by the council, but you had much more oversight from the UN than you had in the case of Libya.

Now, there were also problems with that. Many of the memoirs of generals from NATO countries have referred to the difficulties in getting a consensus between the UN and NATO countries on how to act in safe areas, but it did exist.

Mr. Ted Opitz: In your opinion, what do you think would have been the potential fallout if NATO had not intervened in places such as Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya? Do you think there are other international regional organizations that would have had the capacity to protect the local populations?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I think that in the case of Kosovo, there was no other candidate. NATO was the region's capable agent, if you will, so what you would have seen in that instance, if we believe the evidence put before decision-makers at the time, is more ethnic cleansing and more atrocities against civilians, although retrospectively, I think, the evidence much more shows that NATO's actions actually contributed to further ethnic cleansing. Nonetheless, I'm someone who believes that the action was legitimate, even though it was illegal.

The case of Afghanistan again is a very different situation, in that you don't have regional players of the kind you have in Europe, Latin America, or even Africa, so the possibility of there being a regional actor really doesn't come to light in the same way. The question is, what would have happened had NATO not become involved through ISAF in a much more multi-dimensional operation in Afghanistan, beyond what the Americans did very early in 2001? I think that's an interesting counterfactual that I'm sure we're all thinking about, but there was a moment there when we had an opportunity, through a massive show of force, to prevent the Taliban from having a foothold in Afghanistan, and we know where we are today.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you.

Your time has expired. We'll move on to Mr. Kellway.

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

I thank our guests for coming in today and sharing their expertise. It's been very interesting so far.

I'd like to start, Professor Welsh, with this issue of fixed resources. It seems to be an operating assumption for you. If we are working in a world of fixed resources, is the smart defence concept a sensible and viable response to that world?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I think in theory it is, but the experience of NATO gives me caution as to whether it could actually work.

As I mentioned, if you are going to specialize militarily as part of an alliance, you are going to have to rely on your allies in theatre to show up with the things that you need and to provide them for the collective in a way that will meet your objectives. I come back to the example of the helicopters in Afghanistan. Canadians were relying on the U.K. and the U.S. for helicopters, but those two countries prioritized their own efforts first. We found ourselves having to use convoys and create greater risks for our own soldiers because we did not have that capability. We specialized.

It will only work if you can have the assurance that your allies will provide that capability to you, and because of those realities and because of some of the caveats that countries have on their operations, this may not work perfectly. I don't say that to indicate that it's impossible, but NATO has to be thinking about how it can address that issue; otherwise, smart defence will leave countries very vulnerable in the field.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: Do you have any thoughts on how they can address that issue internally in the alliance?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I think it's more of a political commitment that one has to reach. I am a believer in procedures and not relying solely on political commitments. I think you would have to build in the expectation that you would provide those kinds of resources, and you may have to do it by mission as opposed to theoretically. Therefore, you create some peer pressure if you have committed in advance to providing that capability for the alliance in the field.

At the moment what we have is only political commitment, and we know where that has gotten us. We would have to build in, probably by mission, some commitments in advance to provide those sorts of resources.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: I presume it's a bit of a tricky thing to rely on missions to build up that practice.

In a different study of readiness, a number of military folks talked to us in terms of domestic defence as a kind of no-fail mission. When we're talking about multilateral missions, which from Canada's geography we usually perceive as being somewhere else in the world, do you see any kind of conflict between domestic defence requirements here in Canada versus participation in multilateral missions?

What I'm getting at is knowing where threats are coming from. I don't know whether you do any kind of threat analysis for Canada. How should Canada respond to what I think most of us generally perceive as two different issues of national domestic defence versus participation in multilateral missions?

● (1645)

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I think there is more of a conflict between the two if you take a very narrow conception of the national interest as being about direct threats to your security and prosperity on Canadian soil, if you will. Then it becomes much more of a direct conflict to say that what we're doing internationally is essentially discretion; it isn't essential. Anything we do overseas or abroad is something for us to choose.

If you take a more expanded conception of the national interest and you see instability and failure in states as having a potential impact on things that Canadians value, then to me there is less of a conflict. Then we come back to the question of whether our mission globally is only about the protection of our narrow national interest or whether we also want to stand up for certain values. That involves preventing mass atrocities against civilians, wherever they happen to reside.

I can't answer that question without referencing one's perspective on that fundamental issue of whether you have an expanded conception of the Canadian national interest or you have a very narrow one. If you have an expanded one, there isn't a conflict, because you believe you need to be investing in both kinds of operations.

The Chair: Thank you. Time has expired.

Mr. Chisu, it's your turn.

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

Thank you very much to the guests who are appearing before the committee.

I have a question for Professor Welsh. Something that you mentioned that is also discussed in great detail with the strategic concept is the need for NATO to have new membership and to establish a stronger partnership with countries or regions that are not members of the alliance.

You mentioned Georgia and you mentioned that you are not necessarily in favour of the expansion of NATO, despite the fact that NATO has had a crucial role in avoiding conflicts in Europe. Together with the European Union, which recently received the Nobel Prize, and NATO, of which most of the European countries are members, the NATO role was a positive one in avoiding war in Europe.

When you speak about Georgia or other countries, automatically we are going to have a relation with Russia, because they are threatened by the expansion of NATO. In your opinion, how important is it for NATO to continue to build strong relations and partnerships with other nations and, in the meantime, to mitigate the relations with Russia, or to alleviate the syndrome of cornering Russia?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: My statement referred to caution about expansion. It wasn't to suggest that NATO should never include Georgia. I think much depends on what we see in the coming decade. Actually, we just went through a very, very important political transition which demonstrated something vital about that society.

My point was about caution, given the letter of article 5, and also about recognizing that the war that occurred between Russia and Georgia in 2008 had multiple causes. I think there's concern from the record and analysis of that about some of the behaviour of the Georgians, despite what I would not want to suggest was good behaviour on the part of the Russians. It was just a note of caution about expansion; it was not to say they should never be part of the alliance.

I do think NATO, very much like the European Union, is an incredible magnet for change, and that's how it should use the power that it has. Absolutely, engagement with these countries is essential, as the French recognized throughout that crisis. In order to have any leverage at all in situations that become dangerous, as happened in 2008, you have to have been engaging well before. However, I just wanted to reiterate that we need to be very cautious about expanding membership today.

● (1650)

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: I have another question, and maybe both of you can answer. Some of the 28 NATO member states see Russia as a partner and others see it as a threat. To what extent do these divergent views impact NATO's ability to agree on a nuclear posture? How will NATO's plan to modernize the U.S. non-strategic nuclear weapons based in Europe affect NATO-Russia relations?

Mr. Paul Ingram: Maybe I will answer first.

The differences you refer to are at the heart of the challenge within the nuclear posture. As I said, we have a consensus document, but it's papering over the cracks. I don't perceive the Germans, the Dutch, and the Belgians to be hosting B61 bombs in 10 or 15 years' time, because they don't perceive Russia to be a threat. This is a problem, because the Baltic states in particular see NATO's nuclear posture as crucial to the article 5 commitment, and nuclear weapons here are symptoms rather than the ultimate cause of the problem.

Similarly, in response to your second question, when it comes to Russian perceptions, I personally don't think the Russians lie in their beds worrying at night about the B61 bomb in Europe. It doesn't have the range and therefore isn't a particular threat to the Russians, but they see it as a very useful way of ensuring that the alliance is not as cohesive as it might be.

Now, that's the case today. If we go through with a modernization process as proposed, the B61 Mod.12, which is the modernization of the current B61—which the Americans are now estimating will cost them somewhere in the region of $10 billion—will be putting tail fins on those bombs and making them far more capable. Putting them on the F-35 stealth planes could well change the Russian dynamic and perspective, and I think they will be perceiving this as symbolic, yet again, of the American and NATO's allies prioritizing their own capabilities over the relationship and over a more cooperative future relationship.

The Chair: Thank you. Time has expired.

I would suggest to both our witnesses that if you wanted to respond to questions today but never got a chance because of time limitations, I would encourage both of you to put them in writing and send them along to our analysts through our clerk so that we can see your written responses and use them in our deliberations.

We're going to keep moving along.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brahmi, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

[*English*]

Thank you to both of you for appearing before this committee.

My first question will be directed to Professor Welsh. I noted that at the beginning of your presentation you very rapidly mentioned cybersecurity. I know it's a very vast domain and a separate threat to NATO allies, but perhaps you could summarize your views on this topic.

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: It is a vast topic, and it's not an area of expertise for me per se, so I want to put that caveat on it.

Coming back to the comments I made in response to Mr. Alexander, I think the aspect of cybersecurity that is important for NATO is the difficulty of determining what constitutes an attack and also determining the origin of that attack.

I'm not suggesting for a moment that we can't surmount both of those difficulties, but they are difficulties, in terms of agreeing on what actually constitutes an attack. There's a lot of rhetoric that surrounds the activity on cyberspace and a lot of accusations are made, but we would need to think very carefully about agreeing on protocols for how that is defined if you have an alliance with a clause like article 5.

More broadly, there are some fascinating ethical issues here as well about the possible effects of cyberattack. Here we're talking about implications for civilians, which could be very widespread. NATO worried about this with respect to nuclear weapons—the ultimate indiscriminate weapon, in some respects—but cyberattacks are very similar if you think about the havoc they can wreak on domestic infrastructure.

Here we are dealing with a technology and a possible threat that will not be restricted to soldiers in uniform but could have devastating effects for civilians. That is the aspect of it that I think NATO will need to grapple with, because there is a view on the part of some that it's a lesser-evil technology, that using cyberattacks is better than using conventional armies. However, that's not the case if you take the view of the impact it might have on civilians.

There was a fascinating moment in the Libya campaign with respect to cybersecurity that I don't know if you've discussed or noted. That was the decision the Obama administration faced very early on as to whether it should take out Gadhafi's air defence systems with a cyberattack or with bombs. It chose the latter, even though that posed a greater risk to the United States. From what I've been able to learn, the reason for that decision was the fear of the precedent the attack would set and a fear of demonstrating the capability the U.S. had in that domain, particularly with respect to countries like China and Russia.

● (1655)

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: I have another question for Mr. Ingram. You mentioned many different countries that are potential threats from the nuclear point of view. You didn't mention North Korea.

What is the reason for that? Is there a regime change you see that will lead to less threat from that source?

Mr. Paul Ingram: It's a much less informed reason. It's largely because it's not an area that I cover, but I would comment that North Korea is a significant potential threat. I wouldn't say it's a significant threat at the moment to North America, but of course if it continues along its current trajectory, there could well be at least a capability, though I would question the intention to be able to attack North America. I would question that intention because North Korea is very much focused upon its own regime survival rather than having some sort of strategic conflict in a more conventional way.

The Chair: The time has expired.

We'll go over to 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 before us today. This has been lots of food for thought, but I'm going to shift some of the questioning now. I'll start my first question with Ms. Welsh.

The Arctic and in particular the Canadian Arctic is increasingly attracting a fair amount of international attention vis-à-vis natural resources, the melting of the ice, etc., and there are, of course, other Arctic nations who would wish to share in some of this in the region.

What role, if any, do you think there is for NATO in the high north, whether in establishing a base or in conducting training exercises? Could we have perhaps a minute and a half of discussion around those kinds of strategies?

● (1700)

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: At present, I take the view that there's not a large role for NATO with respect to the Arctic. That's not because I don't think the Arctic is vitally important—I do—but I think there are enormous governance challenges in the Arctic, and that is the primary issue we need to be investing in.

Whether the institutions and arrangements that we have are fit for the purpose, Canada is about to become the chair of the Arctic Council. At the moment, in particular, and I don't want to insinuate this was behind your question, there is an idea that we have opponents who threaten us in the Arctic, i.e., Russia. We need to be very careful about that, because I think Russia can still be a collaborator with us in thinking about solutions to governing the Arctic.

Therefore, at present I don't see this as a priority for NATO. It certainly is for the Canadian government, and thinking about its defence forces with respect to the Arctic is obviously a priority. I don't know if Mr. Ingram has other thoughts, but I wouldn't see it as a priority for NATO at this time.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you.

If we can now shift even more, this would be a question you could perhaps share, and I don't think it's going to require a lengthy answer.

There have been many reports indicating there's a shift in U.S. policy away from the North Atlantic to the Asia Pacific. In your opinion, how will this impact the future for the alliance? Is it actually a change in focus or just a balancing of priorities?

Perhaps Mr. Ingram, and then Ms. Welsh, can answer.

Mr. Paul Ingram: I perceive it to be a changing list of priorities for the United States. I think nevertheless that the United States still perceive its NATO allies as critical to what they used to call “pivot”, until they changed that name, because they still, as they did with a number of interventions up to now, see their NATO allies as essential for that refocus on other parts of the world. Nevertheless, I think the alliance has been slow, and continues to be slow, in changing its nature. You still have a number of allies who see the purpose of the alliance as largely to lock the Americans into Europe, and you're now in a situation in which there's real tension with that model as those allies are still try to keep and grasp the Americans. That creates a tension that I don't think is conducive to a fully functioning, proper relationship.

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I think I would agree that it's not just rebalancing. I do think there is a shift in priorities and emphasis, particularly in how assets are going to be deployed. I would agree that this will create issues with respect to the relationship between the United States and France, the U.K., and Germany, in particular, about the U.S.'s commitment to Europe, but I think we have to have a little bit of a historical perspective here. The level of commitment of the U.S. to Europe has always been a concern of the Europeans. It's an ongoing challenge.

We think back to the Vietnam war, we think about periods where the United States was engaged elsewhere. That doesn't mean that NATO is irrelevant, but, yes, it means it is harder than it was, for example, during the wars in the former Yugoslavia, to make the case that NATO is the pinnacle of U.S. defence and security concerns.

It definitely needs to be managed politically, but we mustn't forget the degree to which the U.S. still sees NATO as a hugely valuable tool of its own foreign policy and a mechanism for exerting its influence in meeting its objectives.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, very much.

I think your time is up, Mr. Norlock.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Gallant, you have the floor.

● (1705)

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

To both of our witnesses, what should NATO's role in energy security be?

The Chair: Mr. Ingram, do you want to go first?

Mr. Paul Ingram: Okay, I'll go first.

NATO's role in energy security clearly is about the relationship with Russia, by and large, and the Middle East. I think it does need to take energy security into account, but I think we're going to have to be cautious about using an alliance that is based upon the military in order to deal with energy security. It's far more important to be dealing with sources of energy from a diplomatic perspective than to be using a military alliance. The trouble is, if you are a military alliance, you see military threats far more quickly than you see opportunities for cooperation.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Let's go back to cybersecurity, then.

Did you have something to say?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I was just going to say that I think it very much depends on how widely you want to define energy and whether you want to consider water as part of energy and really want expand the remit. If you take seriously some of the claims about energy scarcity and its link to conflict, and if NATO were serious about prevention and about where the conflicts of the future might be, then obviously thinking about energy, the distribution of energy, and the likelihood of scarcity is not unimportant.

However, I would agree with Mr. Ingram in that I would be nervous as well about using an alliance with respect to the most immediate issues of energy security. I think NATO needs to be thinking about where the conflicts of the future might be and what the root causes of conflict around the world might be.

It comes back to something I said in my opening remarks about cynicism about prevention. I've seen many strategic concepts and policy documents talking about prevention of conflict, but very few organizations have really taken it seriously. If you were looking at energy security, to me that would be taking prevention seriously if you were to play out those scenarios and really think about what they might entail.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: This committee has been told that cybersecurity is the domain of the homeland security or public safety and that military cyberdefence applies to threats on military assets or communications.

In terms of NATO and its core commitments, how do you see cyberdefence developing? You mentioned protocols earlier. Should the cyberdefence be left to cooperation between civilian agencies within or outside NATO?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I think I can understand why at present we are making the distinctions that homeland security should deal with these aspects and that NATO or our defence institutions should deal with attacks on military infrastructure. However, as we move further down the line, it will be much harder to maintain those distinctions, so it would not be remiss, in my view, for NATO to think slightly more broadly about the types of threats that cyberattacks and activity in cyberspace might lead to, and what, as I mentioned before, the very notion of an attack might mean.

I think it's because we are so early in the game of thinking about how to manage cyberthreats and potential cyberattacks that we're making these bureaucratic divisions. As we move forward, I think it will be harder and harder to maintain them, although I can understand that there are real turf issues here, and also issues about civilian control.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Given that a cyberattack on government infrastructure may be the precursor to a physical assault, at what point would it be appropriate to consider invoking article 5?

● (1710)

The Chair: Is there any response?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I don't know; I really don't know. I've been thinking about this quite a lot, and I can see different scenarios, but I don't have a clear answer. I think it will involve a political judgment about whether we've moved from this stage of just infrastructure to an attack on sovereignty and territorial integrity.

It's very difficult for me to answer that in a definitive way. In a way, this is analogous to some of the debates that we used to have about pre-emption. What can you take to be action with a hostile intent? As in the debate over pre-emption, my worry is that we may indulge in worst-case-scenario thinking and assume that a full frontal assault is about to hit us. Then we might act pre-emptively in a way that could be questionable from a legitimacy and legality point of view. The answer to your question is one that NATO strategists should be putting a lot of time into thinking through. I'm sorry that I don't have a better answer for you today.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: I have a question about Russia and Syria. There is a lot of finger pointing going on about Russia and what they are doing or not doing. Is there any evidence of constructive engagement with Russia about a course of action in Syria? We all know Russia has interests in Syria. Is anybody telling them what we'd like them to cooperate on? Is there any evidence of that happening, or is it just rhetorical finger-wagging?

Mr. Paul Ingram: I think it's more complex than just Russian interests. The Russians I've talked to about this issue believe that the west is not coming up with any solutions either. They too see a lot of human rights abuses and challenges, and they don't dispute that there are many innocents being slaughtered, but they don't think the solutions the west is coming up with are effective. It's not just a disagreement about interests; it's a disagreement about how to go about dealing with the problem.

The Chair: Go ahead, Professor Welsh.

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I was just going to add that there was engagement with Russia. The U.S. and Europe believed, up until this past summer, that Russia had leverage with the Syrians, so for quite a long time there was some constructive engagement. The last vetoed Security Council resolution in July ended the belief that the Russians had leverage, and the engagement has been much less constructive since then.

The Chair: Mr. McKay is next.

Hon. John McKay: Professor Welsh, you were critical of NATO's accountability to the UN during and after the Libya mission. What do you think NATO could have done better? How could it mitigate some of the negative fallout that has resulted in the UN from this absence of accountability?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: I don't think this was all NATO's fault. What I was trying to suggest was that there weren't accountability mechanisms there. I was reading the testimony of General Bouchard to your committee; he said that we did what we do in NATO—that is, we did weekly briefings to the North Atlantic Council.

But then, what's the relationship between the North Atlantic Council and the Security Council? It is a question of demand and supply. There have to be procedures built into the Security Council mandates and the North Atlantic Council. The generals who are trying to fight the war need to be providing information about how the mission is evolving.

I would perhaps fault the individual states in the alliance in their public comments about their objectives in Libya, but it's not solely the fault of the alliance. I think it was also the UN itself that needed to find ways of demanding that kind of information.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you.

For the Conservatives, Mr. Alexander, go ahead, please.

Mr. Chris Alexander: Thanks.

My question is about ballistic missile defence. It's part of the emerging doctrine at NATO. It relates to both strategic deterrence and the aspiration of many new members to have that hard security umbrella because they're neighbours of Russia or they're near Russia.

Canada so far, since the 1980s, has remained outside of these sorts of negotiations and these sorts of discussions. Is that sustainable for Canada? Do you think we should join the NATO-led BMD or not?

Mr. Paul Ingram: Just to follow up on my earlier comments, I would say quite categorically that the alliance BMD is not so much directed towards Russia as it is directed towards Iran and other emerging nuclear states. The NATO umbrella will never be capable of tackling the sorts of capabilities that the Russians have, at least not for decades to come.

One has to ask whether Canada is really threatened by Iran. Is Canada really threatened by North Korea? If the answer, particularly to that second question, is yes, then you need to start thinking about whether missile defence contributes to your protection.

The Chair: Professor Welsh, do you want to respond?

Prof. Jennifer Welsh: No, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think we got around everyone quite well today. The technology seemed to work, and we always appreciate it when it does.

We definitely appreciate that both Professor Welsh and Mr. Ingram took time out of their busy schedules in the U.K. to join us by video conference and provide their expertise to help guide us in our deliberations on NATO's strategic concept and our role in international defence cooperation.

There are a lot of exciting things happening in the world, and a lot of concerning things, and definitely we have a lot to think about as we go forward in the preparation of a report for the House of Commons.

With that, I'm going to entertain a motion to adjourn so that we can get to the House. The bells are ringing.

An hon. member: So moved.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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