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Chair

The Honourable Peter Kent

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC)): Colleagues, in the interest of time, our witnesses' time and the short time they're with us this afternoon, we will begin and continue our study of the defence of North America. We have two witnesses from the Department of National Defence joining us for the first hour of our meeting today: Brigadier-General P.J. Bury, director general, reserves and cadets; and Rear-Admiral J.J. Bennett, chief, reserves and cadets.

I understand, Rear-Admiral, that you'll be delivering opening remarks.

Thank you.

Rear-Admiral J.J. Bennett (Chief, Reserves and Cadets, Department of National Defence): Reservists bring a wealth of important skills, training, and experience to the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, and represent the wide diversity of this nation. We serve as both a strategic and operational resource for the Canadian Armed Forces by providing depth and breadth to the military's capabilities, as well as a vital link to Canadian communities.

With respect to today's topic, it's important to note that the reserve force consists of four very different subcomponents, not all of which are trained for or serve on operations or contribute to the defence of North America. Our cadet instructors are not trained for, nor will they be called upon to serve on, any domestic response or operational capacity. The primary reserve—closely aligned with the Royal Canadian Navy, Royal Canadian Air Force, Canadian Army, health services, judge advocate general, and special ops—and the Canadian Rangers are the only reserve subcomponents trained and employed for domestic operations.

The Canadian Armed Forces' unified force of maritime, land, and air elements is based on a total force concept that integrates full- and part-time military personnel to provide multi-purpose, combat-capable armed forces. Under this concept, regular forces are maintained to provide the government with a ready response capability. Reserve forces are intended for augmentation and sustainment for regular units and, in some cases, unique complementary tasks.

The total force concept also provides the framework for training and equipping the reserves. With the total force concept in mind, environmental commanders have designed their delivery of capability based upon a scaled response in conjunction with the required speed of response. Simply put, the regular force can more readily respond to crises due to its breadth of training and full-time nature, and is usually called upon as first responder for the Canadian Armed Forces. However in the case of a domestic response, owing to the immense geography of our nation and current Canadian Armed Forces footprint, the reserve would often be in a better position to respond due to their proximity and familiarity with the affected community.

However, reserves are generally held at a lower level of readiness and agree to serve voluntarily for operations. Therefore, there are a few distinct considerations to keep in mind for the employment of reservists in domestic operations, including notice, preparation time, as well as the fact that more than 80% of the reserve force who serve the military on a part-time basis need to return to civilian employment or studies in a timely manner following any operation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair and committee members, BGen Bury and I are very pleased to be here to speak to you regarding the role of the reserve force in the defence of North America.

The Chief of the Defence Staff's vision for the primary reserve is a force that consists predominantly of part-time professional CF members, located throughout Canada, ready with reasonable notice to conduct or contribute to domestic and international operations to safeguard the defence and security of Canada.

[*English*]

The contributions of reserves to operations and their connections with Canadians are critical to the nation and to the environments and communities in which we serve. We must ensure that we attract, develop, support, and retain a ready, capable, motivated, and relevant primary reserve force as a strategic and operational resource for Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces well into the future.

In addition to our work to renew the Canada First defence strategy, the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces continue to review and refine our readiness levels and training requirements as well as the balance of full- and part-time military and civilian personnel to meet our institutional needs into the future. There have been and continue to be ongoing reviews and validation of primary reserve roles, missions, and tasks; establishment, recruiting, and retention; the balance of full- and part-time personnel; budget, compensation, and benefits; equipment and infrastructure; training; and care of our ill and injured and their families.

We are interested in expanding the use of reservists' civilian skills based on our success in operations with civil-military cooperation and civilian medical expertise through our health service reserves. We are also considering expanding reserve areas of expertise in the future to include capabilities like cyber.

[*Translation*]

Recent history has demonstrated the value of a highly trained and well led primary reserve that can be seamlessly integrated into the regular force whether that is on a mission or backfilling positions while others deploy.

● (1540)

[*English*]

Our successful integration of primary reservists on operations over the past two decades, combined with the provision of domestic capabilities for the Canadian Armed Forces, like the Arctic response company groups, sovereignty patrols, and coastal defence, has confirmed that our reserve force remains a foundation of Canada's defence and security. A sustainable reserve trained and equipped to meet the operational and security needs of our nation is critical to the operational success and the defence of North America.

Primary reservists are essential to the Canadian Armed Forces' ability to successfully execute international and domestic operations, and the Canadian Rangers have proven themselves to be critical not only to our domestic response in remote and isolated parts of this nation but to the training and employment of forces members in the Arctic.

The past 15 years have seen an exponential growth in the trust and dependence upon reserves to support and deliver on the defence of North America. Reservists have also deployed to every corner of the world in the delivery of operational excellence that has made Canada and Canadians proud.

Our collective challenge is to maintain the momentum of our total force approach and integrated model, and ensure we attract, train, employ, and retain a highly professional and motivated reserve force that will continue to be an effective and relevant part of Canada's defence well into the future.

Thank you. Merci beaucoup.

The Chair: Thank you, Admiral Bennett.

We will now begin with our first round of questioning, seven-minute lengths.

Mr. Chisu, go ahead please.

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

You were speaking about the reserves generally. All reservists maintain a civilian life outside of the military, often including full-time employment. I'm not speaking about class B, because they don't have full employment in civilian life; they have employment in the military. I'm speaking about class A.

What efforts are made by the Canadian Armed Forces to help reservists and their employers maintain the balance between their military and civilian commitments? I'm not speaking about the public service. I am not speaking about the police. I am speaking about private companies. I am speaking about other national companies, how they are managing this balance between civilian life and military life.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Thank you very much for the question.

If I could just make a correction first, some class B is for short-term periods, and people may have taken a leave of absence from their civilian career, so there's also that balance of maintaining contact.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: In my career I have seen class B for 20 and 25 years.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: That is the case for some, but there are others who may take a leave, so it is across the reserve force.

For over 30 years we've relied on voluntary employer support and support from academic institutions, for the most part. There are two sides to that equation. Part of the responsibility is the reservists' to inform and engage their employer about their military service and what they can bring back to that employer or their academics. The other is on the side of the business owner, the corporation, or the institution.

We have worked very hard to have a series of programs that engage and inform employers about the benefits of hiring reservists and supporting them. We reward employers. We're just going through a cycle of awards now at the provincial level, and we'll have our national awards in May.

We have also just started new programs. In the last 10 years, we developed legislation at the provincial and federal levels, and this past fall the government announced a new program of compensation for reservists' employers who allow them time off for operations.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: I have a question about the training of the reservists. There was a departmental performance report that indicated there were difficulties in data reporting and measuring the effectiveness of the initial training received by the primary reservists.

I am particularly concerned about the training that is received in the reserves. I don't know—maybe you can inform me about this—if it is at the same level as the regular forces. That is very important because it also impacts on the next question that I will put. How are the careers of the reservists going forward to have the same kind of senior positions?

● (1545)

RAdm J.J. Bennett: There are differences between the environments of each of the services. For the most part, the majority, the primary reserve, trains to the same standard as the regular force. What differs may be where it is delivered. Certainly from the outset, the Royal Canadian Navy and Royal Canadian Air Force and health services all do the same basic training. The army has different models of delivery, but achieves the same standard for basic training of recruits, officers, and non-commissioned members.

As you progress through your trade, again sometimes it's delivered in the same schoolhouses as the regular force. Our leadership training is common across the Canadian Armed Forces. What varies is the occupational training. There are some reserve-specific courses and some reserve-specific training there, because we aren't required to train to the same depth and breadth as the regular force. I'll use the example of vehicle tech. Reserve vehicle techs would train to what was a known standard and be accredited across the Canadian Armed Forces but may not have to know how to do oil changes or tire changes on the entire fleet of Canadian Armed Forces vehicles; it would be specific to the reserve. There are also reserve-specific occupations. In the navy there are different types of engineers who work predominantly on the coastal defence vessels versus the frigates.

Again, training is comparable. It is to a standard that is equal across the Canadian Forces for common training.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: If it is comparable, as you say, when you are making the transfer from the primary reserve to the regular force, are there some problems there?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: It isn't necessarily with the training. It can be, depending on your trade or your occupation. Again—

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: I'm speaking about engineers, for example.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: In that case there is a known difference between transferring from the regular force to the reserve, and from the reserve to the regular force, if you are in a trade that is only resident within the reserve or has different parameters from your regular force counterpart. There can be a challenge in doing prior learning assessments or equivalencies. In some cases, if that trade is not even resident in the reserve force, we may have to reclassify someone transferring from the regular force, or vice versa. Credit is still given for basic officer training or your basic recruit training, and all your leadership skills; it's just on the occupation where there are differences.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Okay. When you are giving the training modules, how can you envisage training people when they are already working full time? For example, there are packets of training that take two months or something like that, and people don't have vacation for two months.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: It's the same challenge for the regular force for extended periods of training, where it takes them away from—

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: A regular force is a regular force, sorry.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: But it does take them away from employment.

With the reserve, we have alternative delivery methods, where not all of it is delivered residentially. We use online training. We use distributed training. We've also distributed to the unit level, so you will do the majority of it at your unit level, and then do only what is necessary in a schoolhouse there. We are looking at advanced notification as well. Of course, we look at modularization carefully because it can delay career progression and pay increases. So we try wherever possible to put the training into not only achievable blocks, but also to deliver it in different ways.

The Chair: That's your time, Mr. Chisu.

Mr. Harris, you have seven minutes, please.

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

Thank you for joining us today. Rear-Admiral Bennett, it's a pleasure to have you here on this issue.

Of course, reservists have been around a long time in Canada, in fact they were the primary army for many years before the First World War.

Can I ask you for some information on the strength of the reserve force, and perhaps to break it down. The primary reserve consists of the army, navy, and air force reserve, I take it.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Plus health services, the JAG, and the the special operations reserve.

Mr. Jack Harris: Okay. So they're included in the primary reserve, but they're not specifically associated with the army, navy, or air force?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: No. Health services are affiliated under the chief of miliary personnel and the surgeon general, although they wear an army uniform. The JAG officers are affiliated with environmental uniforms, but work on behalf of the judge advocate general and special operations forces aligned with them.

● (1550)

Mr. Jack Harris: What's the current strength of the primary reserves in Canada?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: The number that we use is the average paid strength, as opposed to the number of people with reserve ID cards. That varies a little. The average paid strength over a period is about 21,700. The total number of reservists who are enrolled in the primary reserve is 27,100.

Mr. Jack Harris: Is that 21,700 in the primary reserves?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Yes, that is just in the primary reserve.

There are just over 8,000—

Mr. Jack Harris: So 27,000 is the authorized complement—

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Yes.

Mr. Jack Harris: —and 21,700 is the actual.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Yes, it is our average paid strength

Mr. Jack Harris: Does that mean that you're 6,000 short of your complement?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: No, it means.... In the reserve, because people parade or train on a part-time basis, that number may surge at certain periods during the year. We average it out over a period of about nine months, so the average paid strength of people who are attending on a regular basis is just over 21,000.

Mr. Jack Harris: But the absolute number could be—

RAdm J.J. Bennett: It is 27,100 who are enrolled.

Mr. Jack Harris: And in the supplementary reserve you're talking about what?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: There are about 15,600.

Mr. Jack Harris: That includes Rangers.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: No, that's the supplementary reserve. There are just over 5,000 Canadian Rangers.

Mr. Jack Harris: I was asking about the supplementary reserves. The 15,600 is not the supplementary reserves.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Yes, that's the supplementary reserves.

Mr. Jack Harris: Does that include the 5,000 Rangers?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: No, the Canadian Rangers.... There are four sub-components of the reserve force: the primary reserve—

Mr. Jack Harris: We have the primary complement that is 27,000, with 21,000 average paid. We have the supplementary, excluding the Rangers, at 15,600. We have the Rangers at 5,000.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Yes, and cadet instructors—

Mr. Jack Harris: And cadet instructors are what?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: —are just over 8,000.

Mr. Jack Harris: That is 8,000.

You announced a year ago that there would be a reduction in the number of administrative people within the cadet instructors from 800 to 400.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: That's full-time personnel, employed year round.

Mr. Jack Harris: These are not people who deliver the programs in the army across the country.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Not generally at the corps and squadron level, no; these are people who work in headquarters or who work in support of the program.

Mr. Jack Harris: How have these numbers gone down? Have we seen individuals, this money...?

I think when you announced this program, you said you'd have money available to focus on the program and to ensure support for the cadets at the local level. Can you advise what funding has been made available as a result of this program?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Yes, we're only partway through a five-year renewal program, which goes out until 2018, but we have been able to reduce some of the administrative overhead to the program. The number of people working full time is being reduced slowly.

We have provided additional support at the local level, the corps and squadrons, in terms of resources available to them for activities, as well as increasing the number of adults who are working directly at the community level.

Mr. Jack Harris: Can you give us the numbers, how much money has been made available to that program?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: I can't at this point because my appearance was for reserves, but we can provide that.

Mr. Jack Harris: Perhaps you can provide that to us.

We were told it was cadets and reserves, so if you don't mind I have a couple of other questions on cadets.

One issue that came up a long time ago, but has been very concerning to people involved, is the advanced training that cadets might receive, such as pilot training. Can you give me an answer to that? Have the hours of pilot training been reduced?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: No, there have been no significant changes to the cadet flying program, either gliding or power flight. There was some discussion of our reducing glider flight in favour of allowing more cadets to have a greater experience and a greater number of hours of flying, because the glider program is quite expensive in terms of maintenance and supervision. But we have not made significant changes. The same number of cadets continue to enjoy the experience in both glider and power flight.

Mr. Jack Harris: Was the decision to eliminate the glider program changed?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: We were directed to not eliminate the glider program and to maintain it.

Mr. Jack Harris: Good, so that's continued. I'm glad to hear that.

The plans and priorities report for 2014-15 talked about reducing the number of supplementary reserves to 9,000 members. Can you tell us more about that and why you would do that? And 6,000 people appear to be eliminated from that supplementary reserve program.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: The supplementary reserve are not active members of the Canadian Armed Forces. They are not required to train on a regular basis. It's simply a holding list.

● (1555)

Mr. Jack Harris: They're available for call-up.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Yes, they're available as required or as they volunteer.

Years ago we used to hold people on the supplementary reserve for an indefinite period. There were over 50,000 supplementary reservists.

We found that in some cases, after five years—and in other occupations, after ten years—there was significant fading of skills, so bringing those people back in required a significant amount of training or refresher courses to bring their skills up. The list has been reduced gradually, in terms of both numbers and how long people are held, so we don't spend the same amount on both administering that group of people who are in fact on a holding list and also training them.

Mr. Jack Harris: I think that pretty well explains it.

I have one final question regarding—

The Chair: Briefly, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: —the access to medical assistance by reservists. We heard a lot of complaints at this committee about the follow-up with reservists after they deployed. Have you set up a mechanism at the administrative level of the reserve program to ensure that every person on deployment does get a specific follow-up and that you now track these people and where they are to make sure they have access to care if they need it?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Through my shop I have not. I know that the service commanders are very active in that, in particular the commander of the Canadian Army, to ensure that we follow up. That is a chain of command responsibility, but we are cognizant of, especially concerned about, individual augmentees who are not geographically located near a base. So, yes, we're being very proactive in ensuring that everyone has follow-on interviews and access and awareness. Not just those who are serving, but those who may have left the reserve force as well. That is a chain of command responsibility.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

That's your time.

Mr. Williamson, please.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you, Chair. General, Admiral, thank you for coming today.

Reserve units can play a role in CAF domestic operations. Could you expand on how they contribute to these operations, and maybe give us a few examples? If they are required, how quickly they can be deployed for search and rescue or in response to a natural disaster within our country?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Let me speak to your last point first.

We have always had more reservists respond than were required at very short notice, especially if it is within that geographical area. But certainly in the case of floods, whether in the Saguenay region, Saint-Jean, or Winnipeg, we have had a national response to them.

One of our challenges is ensuring that we don't search too early in the process, so that we don't take people away from their civilian jobs. But certainly our voluntary response has never been an issue, and we continue to have great success in preparing and answering the call.

In terms of the reserve units responding, there's a bit of a misnomer regarding that term; there are formed units of reservists as opposed to a specific unit. So it may not be the Loyal Edmonton Regiment , or HMCS *Chippawa*. But there are units of reservists that sometimes are drawn from a larger geographical area. So in the case of port security, port inspection, diving responses, they may come from a number of units.

We coordinate exercises throughout the year to ensure that those groups are trained as a formed body, and in fact we train more individuals to ensure that on short notice we get a sufficiently trained cadre.

In terms of the army reserve, I'll have General Bury speak to the success with things like the Arctic Response Company Group, Territorial Battalion Group, and those type of responses

Brigadier-General P.J. Bury (Director General, Reserves and Cadets, Department of National Defence): Thank you, sir.

The Canadian Army does have territorial battalion groups. There is one for each of the brigade groups. These are not standing units but they bring together the leadership and train for domestic response scenarios on a regular basis. Many of the divisions will train with other government departments, the RCMP, and provincial emergency management coordinators in a whole-of-government approach to domestic operations.

The domestic response companies are part of the territorial battalion groups. These are companies of soldiers, sailors, and aviators who will come together, many times on quite short notice, to respond to fires, floods, what have you.

Nested within the battalion group structure is the Arctic Reserve Company Group. There are a number of these throughout the country and they train specifically for deploying and operating in very austere northern and Arctic environments.

● (1600)

Mr. John Williamson: That's very good. Thank you.

Announcements have recently been made regarding increased benefits for reservists within the CAF. Could either of you comment on how these benefits will impact our reserve units?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: The announcements were for benefits for reservists who are veterans, not across the entire reserve force, so that's just one point of correction. It won't have as big an impact at the reserve unit level, although it's great for morale, and great for those who may have been injured and their families as well. Certainly, it has been well received across the reserve force, with very positive feedback from those who are serving and veterans.

Mr. John Williamson: That's very good.

General, do you have any comments?

BGen P.J. Bury: No, I think that sums it up, thank you.

Mr. John Williamson: I just don't want to leave you out.

Could I have you comment on the recruitment process for reservists? And how does it differ from the recruitment process for regular forces?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: The only variation is that reserve units can be at a source of information or a point of contact, as opposed to the regular force who must initiate the process at a recruiting centre. The army and the navy use their local units as an attraction centre, to assist with the initial processing, although all files, regular and reserve, primary reserve, and our cadet instructors, must go through the recruiting processing that is centralized across the Canadian Forces recruiting group. There are different standards and different testing for those on the cadet side of the house and Canadian Rangers. The primary reserve recruiting process is exactly the same as the regular force, with the exception, as I say, of being able to do part of the processing at a local unit.

Mr. John Williamson: What about transition? If you're a regular force member, could you transfer out for a while and go back? How does that work?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Yes, in fact that's one of the things we'd like to facilitate. Right now we have two human resource management and pay systems: one for the regular force, one for the reserves. That doesn't allow for the transferability or ease of transfer that we would like to see. We'd like to aim for, and we are in fact going to, an amalgamated system that will allow for a continuum of career, with electronic records. At this point in time, you can transfer. It is a bit cumbersome and a bit time consuming, in that, as we discussed earlier, it does depend on whether your trade, your occupation, and your rank fit with the local unit. But you can transfer both into and out of regular and reserve force.

Mr. John Williamson: Okay.

Finally, Admiral Bennett, I want to congratulate you on your appointment as the defence champion of women. Could you maybe elaborate as to what this posting involves? I'm curious. My wife is in the navy and I'd like to know all about it, so I can go home and tell her about it. She might already know, but I don't.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Our champions are part of our employment equity and diversity program. In fact each of the government departments does have designated groups. There are four of the designated groups, and in our case, each of those has a champion: visible minorities, aboriginals, persons with disability, and women. In our case, a champion is a senior member of the organization who works to champion the cause, as the word implies. In my case, because I am a member of that group, I can also represent our constituents outside of the department and the Canadian Armed Forces. It's to help identify systemic issues, occupational barriers, and other items. In my job it goes beyond that, in fact, in engaging and informing women about opportunities within the Canadian Armed Forces, about our evolution, and internationally as well, because of our role on the world stage with the use of women in combat and the integration of women. It's an interesting combination that originally stems out of that employment equity and diversity portfolio.

The Chair: Thank you.

The time is up, Mr. Williamson.

We'll go to Ms. Murray, please, for seven minutes.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Well, thank you for being here to help us understand this important portfolio. In British Columbia, of course, the reserves are the face of the Canadian Armed Forces, so they're very important to us British Columbians. We were very proud of the contribution the reservists made in Afghanistan, with so many deployed.

There's been commentary from the ombudsman and from previous committees about the challenge of reservists coming back from deployment who may have been injured, have mental injuries, and may be at risk for PTSD. If they drop out of their work place, or they drop out of active connection with their reserve unit, they fall into the cracks. So there were suggestions in a 2009 committee report as to how to prevent that. Could you tell me what's been implemented that's changed that situation, if anything?

● (1605)

RAdm J.J. Bennett: I can speak generally about the reserve force, and then I'll turn to General Bury about what the army has done, because the majority of those deployed in Afghanistan did come from the army reserve.

First, we have always made the point that access to care has to be geographically dispersed, and in the case of the Canadian Armed Forces in particular we are using civilian providers for mental well-being. That's important in areas where you don't co-locate with a base, and as you mentioned, in British Columbia with the diversity there.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Excuse me. I'm particularly interested in the gap where you don't actually follow them to know that they're in trouble.

Could we have a really short answer to that? I have a few other questions. Thanks.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Okay. I'll let General Bury speak to what the army has done.

BGen P.J. Bury: Thank you, ma'am.

One of the items that the chain of command is very conscious about is the health and welfare of the soldiers, sailors, and aviators who are returning to Canada. There is a process whereby the commanding officer of the unit will track and is mandated to track the appointments and almost the demobilization, if I could use that term, of the individual. That includes ensuring that the individual does attend the appointments with the health services, mental health providers—

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay. I understand that there is a check—

BGen P.J. Bury: There is.

Ms. Joyce Murray: —upon their return, but what if they drop out of their unit? What kind of framework for systematic follow-up is there over the coming years? I ask because it's not just immediate: sometimes these problems are present five or more years later.

BGen P.J. Bury: They do. If the individual goes on what we call "non-effective strength", if he drops off parading, it becomes very problematic. In order to—

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay. So we haven't really solved that yet.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Well, it remains the responsibility of the chain of command and we do what we can to follow them, but as well, if the individual is no longer in that local area, it's hard to track. We work very hard to have a system of support and stay in contact with them, both formally and informally.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Who is responsible for that?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: The commanding officer—

Ms. Joyce Murray: There's that, so.... I'm very interested in this. Is there actually a framework and an accountability for following...? I mean, we work very hard and it can be a difficult....

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Not an accountability—once the person has released, the commanding officer isn't accountable—but we are working to ensure that contact is maintained. It's much easier now through social media and through networking, and—

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay. I think that if it's the "try hard" but there's not actually a system of accountability, we have more work to do on that.

I also was interested in the retention of reservists. I understand that the present retention rate has been a problem. Can you tell me what that rate is and what steps are being taken to improve retention?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Retention has always been a bit of a challenge in the reserves, in that we lose about 50% of our people in the first five years after they have joined. It varies by service for retention levels, and it also depends on the amount of training and the deployment. We've recently noticed a surge in the post-Afghanistan period as people returned to units and find that they're certainly not getting the same level of excitement from exercises and unit-level training that they did in Afghanistan.

We've worked very hard on a number of programs, some of which are an attraction and retention combination. We have an education reimbursement program that pays reservists $2,000 a year over a period of four years. It's based on successful attendance at the reserve unit. It's paid a year in arrears.

We're also looking at trying to keep people engaged and interested at the unit level with career progression and leadership opportunities and those types of things—

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you for that.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: —but there is a standard five-year pattern of attrition as students graduate and then start their first job.

● (1610)

Ms. Joyce Murray: I also am interested in recruitment. I understand that it's well below target, especially for the air reserves, but for the naval reserves as well. What's happening there? What's being done to improve recruitment?

Also, how long does it take from the beginning to actually recruit someone? I understand that in the regular forces it's a big enough problem that people head off to take up a university degree because they haven't even heard back eight months after their application. Are there similar challenges with reserves?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Any delay in reserve recruiting is more problematic, especially for university students who want a guarantee of summer employment or for high school students who may have other options.

As I mentioned earlier, what we've tried to do, in particular in the army reserve and the naval reserve, is to do more at the unit level so that people don't have to go into a recruiting centre and so that they're dealing with the same people over again. We're taking on some of the administration and the processing to try to speed things up and to maintain contact with that individual. We find that it's one of the greatest demotivators when they just haven't heard back—

Ms. Joyce Murray: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...the budget for that—

The Chair: Ms. Murray, I'm afraid that's your time.

We'll hear from Ms. Gallant, please, in beginning the five-minute round.

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

It was mentioned that you're the defence champion for women. However, what measures are being implemented in the reserves with respect to UN Resolution 1325?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: In fact, I'm quite proactive in that file. I sit on a NATO committee for reserves, representing Canada, and just briefed on that. We're about to celebrate the 15th anniversary of that resolution; we look at Canada's part.

The reserves are more diverse. We have higher percentages generally of visible minorities, aboriginals, and women across our force. Our presence on operations has meant that we've been able to utilize not only civilian skills but the presence of women.

Part of that resolution is to better integrate and inform societies about women in combat. The presence of Canadian women in uniform, regular or reserve, was part of that.

In our pre-deployment training as well, we've integrated gender awareness training. It's something that we're more aware of in the reserve world, so we're helping the regular force in terms of adoption of some of that as well.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What about the application of UN 1325 with respect to being in theatre and how women in conflict are being dealt with, from the reservists' point of view?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: It isn't something that is reserve or regular per se. Canada's pre-deployment training, as well as our cultural awareness when we go into any theatre of operation, includes those gender considerations.

We've gone beyond that as well to look at the different ways women interact with women. We were quite instrumental in Afghanistan in women being able to integrate in a village and being able not only to gather intelligence but to help inform and engage women and children. Also, just serving as an example in that culture and that community, I think having women see Canadian women in uniform who are leading men and who are driving vehicles...there's that sort of thing as well.

While we may not have labelled it particularly with a checklist for Resolution 1325, Canada has been very proactive and has had a leading role in that. As well, I think, reservists, with our civilian expertise, language, and cultural awareness that we've brought to this, have been able to integrate in a number of operational scenarios that we might not otherwise have been able to.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you for explaining that, because Mr. Harris and I were at a briefing with the NATO parliamentary association internationally, and during a part of the briefing they put up on a screen the rankings in terms of countries that had adopted most of the measures. Canada was at the very top, so we thank you for making our entire delegation proud that day.

I do have a question in terms of maternity leave. For regular forces personnel, the women attend the doctor at the base clinic. How are the reservists who go on maternity leave dealt with in terms of both their compensation and their health care?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: It depends on whether you are a full-time or part-time reservist at the time you apply for maternity leave. As a part-time reservist, you must maintain your civilian medical care. If you're a full-time reservist for a period of more than six months, that is, if you're on a term of employment, then you will receive medical care that is comparable with that of the regular force.

Again, there are differences. Not all reservists would receive full and comprehensive Canadian Armed Forces medical care, nor do regular forces as well. Because of the special nature of some pregnancies, they are often offered civilian expertise or access to civilian care.

For part-time class A reservists, the majority of reservists, they have to maintain their provincial health care and their own doctor, so they aren't provided with medical care in that case for maternity.

● (1615)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: In terms of compensation...?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: You are not compensated if you are not entitled and eligible to medical care through the military prior to, then you would not be compensated during your pregnancy, but that's well communicated.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gallant.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Ms. Élaine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Bennett, I would first like to thank you for your presentation.

Several months ago, we were looking at the issue that our troops deployed in Afghanistan did not have access to francophone, or at least bilingual, military psychologists on the ground. They had to call on the American forces to obtain the services there. This issue is affecting both the regular force members and the reservists deployed.

Could the Health Services Reserve be called upon since it has its own military psychologists who can be deployed? Could that be something to consider? I would like to hear what you have to say about that.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: May I answer in English?

Ms. Élaine Michaud: No problem at all.

[*English*]

RAdm J.J. Bennett: To the extent possible, if we were to have psychologists or social workers who were enrolled in the reserve... and, by all means, across a variety of languages, including French, we also have employed civilians, so certainly the spectrum of care provided here in Canada is much wider than that provided in deployment.

Maybe General Bury can speak to whether that was the case in theatre.

BGen P.J. Bury: A number of individuals were deployed, but for reservists it comes out as a task, and while we try to match language profiles with the battle group going into theatre, many times it will be a matter of who is available at the time, who has the training, and what portion of that block of time in theatre they can go for, because some of the health-services individuals do not go for an entire six-month or nine-month rotation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: I understand that, but the real issue remains that there are not enough resources to provide the services required under the Official Languages Act.

My question was whether, after those events, there has been a plan to officially hire military psychologists in the Health Services Reserve.

[*English*]

RAdm J.J. Bennett: While that isn't my area of responsibility and expertise, I do know that health services are expanding their use of and integrating those with civilian skills on the medical side. I can't speak for any programs formally, but I do know there is an opportunity to exploit reservists for a variety of medical skills, including those in psychology.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Thank you very much.

Earlier, you mentioned the issue of access to medical care for reservists coming back from their mission. You said that you are increasingly trying to use social media to keep in touch with them if they leave the reserve.

What is your actual strategy in that sense? Do you contact their loved ones? Can you elaborate on that?

[*English*]

RAdm J.J. Bennett: As we mentioned, one of the greatest challenges is that in the reserve you don't have to go through a formal release program as you would in the regular force. Reservists can simply stop parading at a unit, which makes it very difficult for us to keep in contact with them. We rely on their last address or their email.

What we have found to be more effective in the reserve network is that network of friends or schoolmates or people at work who keep track of them. I think people are less intimidated if you reach out through social media than if you arrive at their house, but we do have a challenge in the reserves with people who just make a choice not to show up anymore—and that's for everything from getting uniforms back to providing resources to ensuring that we have that contact.

Again, we have an excellent network, and there's a real camaraderie at the unit level, and wherever possible we try to exploit that so that people will keep in touch by checking Facebook statuses and reaching out to families as well.

● (1620)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: My understanding is that designated people in the unit get in touch with them if there have been problems. A proactive approach would be taken by the superiors of the person who has left the reserve in order to contact their loved ones with a view to meeting with the individual afterwards.

Have I understood what you said correctly?

[*English*]

RAdm J.J. Bennett: There is no formal program, but certainly the commanding officer and the regimental sergeant major will do their best to provide any resources possible or to keep in contact through those who are friends with them.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Okay.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: The time is up, Madame Michaud.

Mr. Bezan, go ahead, please, for five minutes.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here.

Admiral Bennett, it's always good to see you.

I want to get back to our topic at hand, which is the defence of North America and the role the reserve force is playing in that. I was interested in your comments earlier about CIMIC being a specialty we may want to employ within the reserve force. I know that within the reserves—and, I would expect, in the regular force as well—there is an opportunity to get more people with diverse languages and ethnicities, enabling us to carry out various training opportunities, previously in Afghanistan, and now in Iraq, Ukraine, and eastern Europe. There may be some opportunities especially with regard to the issues you mentioned already: health services, medical professionals, and CIMICs.

Could you talk on that basis with regard to how the reserve force can augment what we are doing with those types of opportunities within the overall sphere of the defence of North America?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: One of the things we have to improve first is our inventory of civilian skills. Our database is fairly restrictive right now, in that it only records the two official languages we have. In our personnel management system that's being developed across the Canadian Armed Forces, we will have an inventory that will allow for greater space to provide civilian qualifications, civilian employer, languages beyond English and French.

At this point when we have a need identified, we often have to send out a message looking for native speakers or cultural awareness. We've used that to great effect in special operations as well. Special operations have utilized civilian skills with police, dog handlers, people in law enforcement. Medical health services, as we said, has developed a way to attract, retain, and train medical professionals so they don't have to deploy or be employed in the same traditional model of a year-long or a six-month deployment.

Again, on domestic deployment in particular, we've also utilized local knowledge and connections in the case of local disaster emergency response—someone who is connected through the city council or the chamber of commerce, or has professional skills. Unfortunately, it's often been a happy coincidence or discovery. Once we establish that inventory of civilian skills, that will go a long way.

It's ironic, though, that a number of reservists prefer not to work in their civilian realm; they would rather apply their military skills. It isn't that they're reluctant to do that, but oftentimes they will be trained in two very diverse situations.

We do think there is a great opportunity for cost saving, as well, with people who can be better trained or more extensively trained and bring their civilian experience. That's why we're looking at things like cyber. That is an area of expertise that someone could bring into the force, as opposed to simply sharing a qualification or a background.

Mr. James Bezan: Cyber has been a major issue that we have talked about at this committee. It will be a large component of the report: how we best defend, and also conduct warfare, in cyber.

If you're looking at that from a reserves capability, are you looking at this broad spectrum, or specialized units?

● (1625)

RAdm J.J. Bennett: I would say it's a bit of both.

It isn't us looking at it specifically—it's through our chief of cyber—but we're looking at the experience of other nations and their use of reserves. The U.K. and the U.S. have a reserve component with cyber capability, and we're looking at that, whether it's a standing capability, a capability that is brought to the Canadian Armed Forces in a different way, so that these people are working from home or they're....

I think the reason we call it a reserve capability is that they will be held within the Canadian Armed Forces in a different manner. It's not that they will necessarily be part-time or after-supper soldiers or sailors; it would be resident.... It's much like we hold our professionals in the health service reserve in a slightly different way—they're not required to come out every Tuesday or Thursday, or one weekend a month—but considering across the gambit of both, in terms of the protection, the warfare, and I guess a more diverse cyber capability than we had originally considered.

The Chair: That's time, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Already? I just got started.

The Chair: Mr. Harris, you will have three minutes before we must suspend to set up for our next witness via teleconference.

If you could, you have three minutes, sir.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you very much.

I was very glad that Ms. Gallant brought the question of Resolution 1325 to the committee. It's an important resolution.

I didn't acknowledge your role as a champion for women, although it's for the entire armed forces, not just for reserves, as I understand.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: It's for DND and the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Jack Harris: I would like to follow up by noting Resolution 1325. There are several other resolutions that are related to that as well. NATO adopted a series of action plans, the latest one being June 2014, with 14 outcomes and special goals.

Is that action plan that NATO adopted what you follow in terms of an action plan for Canada? Is that something you follow, and is there any report that indicates a measure of our success as a country and a military in following those goals and seeking those outcomes?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: DFATD actually has the lead on that, and through our policy section—ADM Policy—we do have desk officers who work both with the UN and NATO resolutions and action plans. It isn't my specific area of responsibility as the champion, but, yes, Canada's report is through DFATD.

Mr. Jack Harris: But is that your menu, as it were, in the action you might undertake in your role as a champion for women in Defence?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: No, my role, as I've said, is more specific to the employment equity and diversity portfolios, although I have an interest in that UN resolution and the NATO work that follows because I am a member in uniform. I'm not the lead for that, but I do work with our team in ADM Policy and I provide input into our report that then goes to DFATD that produces Canada's report.

Mr. Jack Harris: So effectively you report through the chain of command and DFATD handles the international aspect?

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Not me personally as the champion of women. I am one of the people who provides input to DFATD for our departmental report.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Harris.

Thank you, Admiral Bennett and General Bury, for your time with us this afternoon. You have made a worthy contribution to our study of the defence of North America, and we thank you for it.

RAdm J.J. Bennett: Thank you.

The Chair: Colleagues, we will suspend and set up for the teleconference with our next witness.

● (1625)

(Pause)

● (1630)

The Chair: Colleagues, we will resume with our second witness of the afternoon from the Department of National Defence, Colonel David Lowthian, commander of 8 Wing Trenton.

Colonel, thank you very much for joining us this afternoon.

Colonel David W. Lowthian (Commander, 8 Wing (Trenton), Department of National Defence): Thank you very much for the kind introduction.

The Chair: Thank you for making time available for us today. Could you offer us your opening remarks, please, sir?

Col David W. Lowthian: Members of the Standing Committee on National Defence, ladies and gentlemen, I'm honoured to extend greetings on behalf of the men and women of 8 Wing at Canadian Forces Base Trenton. From delivering supplies to the High Arctic to airlifting troops, equipment, and humanitarian loads worldwide, 8 Wing takes pride in being the hub of Canada's air mobility operations and remains committed to contributing to the defence of North America.

As a host of NORAD's quick reaction alert, 8 Wing Trenton provides essential ground support so that the CF-18 Hornets can be airborne immediately to protect our airspace from potential air threats. 8 Wing at Canadian Forces Base Trenton is at the forefront of Canadian military airlift, with its fleets of tactical and strategic transport and search and rescue aircraft. We are responsible for search and rescue operations over a large area under the jurisdiction of the joint rescue coordination centre at Trenton.

The 424 Squadron, which operates the CH-146 Griffon helicopter and the CC-130H Hercules fleet, has been serving Canadians within the 10,000,000 square kilometres of the Trenton search and rescue region, comprising most of the province of Quebec, all of Ontario, the prairie provinces, and the entire Arctic.

Over the years the 424 Squadron members have committed themselves to saving lives and have supported international relief missions such as in Haiti and in Jamaica. In December 2013 a crew from 424 Squadron rescued a crane operator who was trapped above a massive building fire in Kingston, Ontario, which gained global coverage. In 2014 the squadron launched more than 170 search and rescue missions.

We also have a major air disaster capability, also known as MAJAID, which is readily deployable when needed. In August 2011 while on exercise during Operation Nanook, the MAJAID capability was tasked to help the victims of the First Air flight 6560 crash.

Daily flights to the four corners of the globe are routine for 8 Wing, which is highly responsive to international events. The CC-177 Globemaster operated by 429 Squadron, the CC-130J Hercules operated by 436 Squadron, the CC-150 Polaris aircraft operated by 437 Squadron, and the CC-144 Challenger aircraft operated by 412 Squadron supported by air movement professionals from 2 Air Movements Squadron have provided essential airlift support to Canadian Armed Forces operations within Canada and abroad.

Some of these missions include our 10-year mission in Afghanistan, Operation Mobile in Libya, Air Task Force Mali, and most recently our air bridge and sustainment flight support to various Canadian Armed Forces missions, such as Operation Reassurance in eastern Europe, Operation Sirona in Sierra Leone, Operation Calument in Egypt, Operation Impact in Kuwait, and Operation Nanook in support of Canada's Arctic sovereignty. 8 Wing looks forward to the upcoming delivery of a fifth C-17 Globemaster aircraft. This incredible strategic airlift capability permits the Canadian Armed Forces to fly higher, heavier, faster, farther, and deeper in support of domestic and global operations.

Along with higher profile deployments, aircraft and personnel from 8 Wing Trenton are involved with resupplying Canadian Forces Station Alert, the world's most northerly inhabited location and a station that upholds Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic. We also provide the equipment warehouse for the Disaster Assistance Response Team, the DART. This quick response team has provided humanitarian aid to Pakistan following a devastating earthquake in 2005 during Operation Plateau; to Sri Lanka in 2005 following the tsunami that hit the region during Operation Structure; to Turkey in 1999 after a severe earthquake during Operation Torrent; to Haiti after a devastating earthquake in 2010 during Operation Hestia; and to the Phillippines in 2013 to help the victims of Typhoon Haiyan during Operation Renaissance.

Currently there are approximately 3,200 regular force, 600 reserve force, and 500 civilian members who make up the workforce at 8 Wing at Canadian Forces Base Trenton. We are honoured to serve Canadians and take pride as the home of Canada's air mobility forces, and as a centre of excellence for global operations.

● (1635)

8 Wing at Canadian Forces Base Trenton remains committed to the defence of North America and the promotion of Canadian interests worldwide.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Colonel.

We'll begin now with our first round of questions in seven-minute segments.

Mr. Norlock, please.

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

Thank you, Colonel, for appearing today.

As commander of 8 Wing Trenton, the hub of air mobility operations in Canada, could you update this committee on the contributions of the various squadrons at CFB Trenton to the safety and security of the Canadian Arctic, to Canadians at large, and in particular to the defence of North America, the reason for this study?

Col David W. Lowthian: Yes, sir. Thank you for the question.

Routinely here at 8 Wing we do conduct resupply and sustainment missions for Canada's Arctic. Canadian Forces station Alert receives flights weekly or biweekly from 436 Squadron operating the CC-130J Hercules. As well, twice a year we undergo Operation Boxtop. It lasts two to three weeks and provides a wet lift and dry lift of goods up to Canadian Forces station Alert. A similar operation that supports the station in Eureka is Operation Nevus. In a similar fashion, it's mostly for dry goods and some wet lift.

Being more or less the airlift gateway to all operations at home and abroad, again speaking of Canada's north, routinely when the army conducts short or extended operations and exercises in Canada's north, it is our aircraft that are flying to various locations in the north to get them there. Similarly, should our fighters have to deploy to an FOL, again it will be our aircraft, be it the CC-130J Hercules or the C-17 Globemaster, that will be bringing personnel and equipment to some of our forward operating locations in the Arctic. At the same time, should our fighters require air-to-air refuelling en route to the northern locations, it will be our CC-150 Polaris aircraft. Of the five, two of them are configured to provide air-to-air refuelling not only for Canadian fighters but also when we do deploy, similar to Operation Impact abroad, multinational fighters as well.

On the search and rescue front, 424 Squadron is responsive within the Trenton search and rescue region, which, as described in my opening statement, covers the Prairies, Ontario, much of Quebec, and then all the way up into the Arctic. Their inventory are C-130H Hercules aircraft and CH-146 Griffon helicopters; 8 Wing shares that mandate with 17 Wing Winnipeg because of the size of the region.

● (1640)

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much.

I understand you played a directing role in JOINTEX, an exercise that demonstrates the abilities of a Canadian-led multinational joint integrated task force. Could you please elaborate on Canada's role as a leader in this exercise, and how JOINTEX contributes to the defence of North America?

Col David W. Lowthian: JOINTEX 15 will take place in the fall, but many of the planning iterations are being pursued right now. I've been appointed as deputy commander for this specific exercise. I was also chief of staff for the first JOINTEX in 2013, two years ago. It had a different look in that it was conducted entirely in Canada, and any multinational participation was all notional. It was a mix of live and simulated. There was a very efficient use of the resources. It bridged three ongoing operations or exercises—army, navy, and air force. JOINTEX provided that command and control capstone to provide direction, leadership, and accountability so that Canadian interests, both nationally and within the coalition, were looked after.

The nucleus of this command and control capability resides within 1st Canadian Division based out of Kingston, Ontario. It's a relatively small headquarters, commanded by a two-star general and scalable upwards of about 400 people, to manage an operation of such scale, a multinational joint inter-agency task force, just as described. JOINTEX 15 is very much in line with this in that it will exercise this capability in the same way. It will grow from that nucleus. However, this exercise will be nested within a NATO exercise called Trident Juncture, which is an exercise that NATO uses to ready their NATO response force on a six-month rotation. Over the next year Portugal, Italy, and Spain will be participating as well. We've been able to join up on what is, as far as exercise skills go, a fairly large one, so there will be a great training benefit from that.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you.

I guess it was last year—time flies—when Minister Nicholson was in attendance at 8 Wing to announce the addition of the fifth CC-177 Globemaster.

Can you expand on the effect this additional Globemaster will have on the entire fleet, and how it contributes to the readiness of Canadian Forces troops at CFB Trenton?

Col David W. Lowthian: We have four C-17 aircraft now, and in about one week's time we will receive a fifth. The serviceability and availability rate of that aircraft is exceptional, but again, there are only four. So a fifth aircraft will provide the Canadian Armed Forces, and the Canadian government for that matter, with the flexibility to respond in great ways should there be competing demands.

From my perspective, the best example would have occurred last year during Operation Renaissance, when we established an air bridge operation from Trenton through Comox, British Columbia, through Honolulu at air force base Hickam, onwards to Guam, and then into the Philippines. It was quite an extraordinary air bridge to what is probably the most challenging location at which one could imagine setting one up, and every 24 hours we sent out one aircraft from our fleet of four. At the same time we were still bringing troops home from Afghanistan. As well during that period, we were given the task of carrying some vehicles in support of the UN overseas. We did all of this with our fleet of four aircraft. There was some stress on the availability. We were able to do it all, but all of that was to say that with a fifth aircraft, we will have much more flexibility to support interests such as all of these.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Colonel.

Thank you, Mr. Norlock.

Mr. Harris, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you very much for joining us today. CFB Trenton obviously has a huge responsibility, some of which is for the defence of North America directly, such as with the CF-18 fast response through NORAD. But much of your work is in transport, and I have a specific question about the Globemaster. Following the latest announcement, we will now have five. Can you tell us what percentage of the use of the Globemasters is devoted to domestic operations or the North American context, and what percentage is involved in assisting internationally? I know these are strategic airlifts and it's important for Canada to have them, but in terms of the defence of North America, is there a breakdown you can give us of the use these aircraft will be put to?

Col David W. Lowthian: Mr. Harris, I can't give you an exact figure offhand. I will tell you, though, that when we first got our fleet of C-17s in the 2007-08 time frame, the first two missions following the delivery of the first aircraft involved a humanitarian airlift to Jamaica, followed by our first mission into Kandahar airfield. Going into Kandahar was more or less a weekly mission during that era.

That certainly left the question of what the C-17 could bring us domestically, and we saw that expand quite quickly as we introduced that aircraft into Arctic operations. The Royal Canadian Air Force is the first air force to employ the C-17 aircraft on snow-covered gravel airstrips such as those at Resolute Bay and CFS Alert. Up until Canada procured these aircraft, Boeing had never tested that capability. Other nations hadn't employed the C-17 in that way. Our USAF partners in Alaska had not employed it in that way. So we paved the way in 2010.

Since then, that aircraft has been a great enabler to operating in Canada's north. It has had a hand in activating our FOLs. It has been an enabler for refuelling not only CFS Alert but also Inuvik and Iqaluit, when and as required.

Mr. Jack Harris: That's a fairly huge plane to be using as a refueller for Alert, if I may say so, but I do get the idea that it could be useful from a strategic airlift point of view in terms of operating in the north if necessary.

Mr. Chairman, I neglected to mention that my colleague Mr. Chisholm has one specific question on the Arctic. I was going to start with him and come back to me. Can I do it that way? Can I interrupt this? Is that okay with you?

The Chair: Your time can be shared.

Mr. Jack Harris: I was going to start with him and then come to me, but we'll leave him to the end.

I'm interested in your responsibility for search and rescue, General. The important role you play in Trenton is, as you've pointed out, for a huge area: most of Quebec, all of Ontario, the prairie provinces, and the High Arctic as far north as you can go.

I want to ask about the use of the Griffon helicopters as search and rescue aircraft. They apparently were put there temporarily in 2005, which is nine years ago.

They have about half the range of the Cormorants. They are not as capable for search and rescue at sea, and of course the Great Lakes are a major part of your area. As well, they can't really get to the Arctic very easily. You mentioned the role of 17 Wing, which has a Hercules available but not helicopters.

Are you satisfied with that, sir? The Auditor General didn't seem to be. An internal report said that they were a higher risk for pilots and crew and also much less capable, the Cormorant being able to carry 30 accident victims and the Griffon four.

What urgency do you feel exists to do something about that? We know that the government acquired from the U.S. presidential fleet nine airframes that had already flown and that the former defence minister, Mr. MacKay, ordered a study on getting them active in the spring of 2014. What progress is being made on that? Are you satisfied, you having such a huge area of responsibility with the least capable search and rescue helicopters?

● (1650)

Col David W. Lowthian: Thank you for the question, Mr. Harris.

Certainly we need a capability that possesses the range to reach into our Arctic when called on as such, which the Hercules aircraft indeed provides. It's our standby posture among our entire search and rescue capability that permits us to be as responsive as we need to be in getting the right assets in the air and ultimately the right assets on the ground to be first on scene.

Much of that expertise resides with our search and rescue technician capability. What I've witnessed and observed in my time here is that regardless of which aircraft is first on scene, it's a matter of getting that first responder, or team of first responders, on the ground. The C-130 is still a good platform to do this in reaching into Canada's Arctic. I have yet to see it have any issues in that regard.

Mr. Jack Harris: You're satisfied that you don't need Cormorants or the equivalent capability out of Trenton for that area. It surprises me to hear that.

I do know that in 2011 it took four days for a Cormorant to travel from Greenwood, Nova Scotia, to rescue an Inuk hunter on a ice floe in Resolute. I know that he was provided a drop-down from a Hercules, but that seems to me to be an inadequate response for the vast areas of the north that we have.

To the specific question about the availability of Cormorants or the American presidential fleet—

The Chair: Be very brief, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Do you have any information on that program or project?

Col David W. Lowthian: No, sir, I do not.

The Chair: That's your time.

Ms. Gallant, please, for seven minutes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Since we we're talking about helicopters, I just want to review, because some of the members haven't been on the committee as long as the issue of helicopters and search and rescue has been on the agenda. It goes back to 1997. That federal election campaign was on the cancellation of the EH-101 project.

That EH-101 had three different versions. One was for the maritime, to replace the choppers we have now on the frigates—the Sea Kings. There was a search and rescue version, and there was a utility version as well. Now we have the Cyclones that are coming into effect for our maritime needs. We have the Chinooks at Petawawa for our utility needs, and we are awaiting the search and rescue. What's important is that those three different versions of the EH-101 would have had interchangeable parts and we wouldn't be encountering the problems we see with parts regarding the Cormorant.

I'm going to talk about the C-17 as well.

A number of years ago, the military, in conjunction with Parliament, had a program whereby parliamentarians were able to familiarize themselves with the different aspects of air, land, and sea with the military. A number of us visited your wing, and we saw one of the first C-17s. At that particular time the crew as well as the pilots were being run off their feet. The complaint was that they needed more crew, more planes; they had so much demand for them.

It's good to hear that we have another C-17. However, in terms of the personnel, have we met the demands there, or are they still pressed for time? Are they getting the training they need, the time off they need? Do we have enough people to crew these C-17s?

Col David W. Lowthian: When was your visit to 8 Wing, ma'am?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I think that was 2009.

● (1655)

Col David W. Lowthian: Okay.

I was the commanding officer of 429 Squadron at that time when we brought on the entire fleet. I started with zero airplanes and ended with four.

You were probably talking to air crew, pilots, loadmasters, but also maintainers. I would argue that with any new capability that we do procure, there is the issue of achieving that balance of aircraft commander and first officer, to speak for the pilots. So the limiting factor there would be aircraft commanders. At that time, I would have had 32 pilots in total, which one would argue would be 16 crews, but if I only had 7 aircraft commanders at that time, I really only had 7 crews. I was limited by that number.

Since that time, we've maintained a fairly steep experience and training program. It was probably around 2010 or so that we achieved that ideal balance, being about 60% aircraft commanders and 40% first officers.

The same thing can be said for our loadmasters in achieving their unrestricted qualifications so they can lead a mission from the back of the aircraft when deployed. Up until that point, the restricted loadmasters have to be partnered with one who possesses those qualifications.

Lastly, with respect to our maintainers, again it was a brand new aircraft that they had to learn. Technologically speaking, a lot of the systems are computer-based, so it's finding that balance between an airframe technician and one who is smart on aircraft software.

Once we had that balance in place, we had to train them to get their qualifications. They graduate from an A-level qualification to a C-level one, and within that there are various accountabilities before they can actually sign and release an aircraft. Again, that takes time —much like the pilots, the loadmasters—to get there. I can reassure you that now, and probably since 2010-11, the qualifications, the balance, and the numbers have been quite healthy.

Adding a fifth C-17 to that fleet is not a stressor on personnel in the way it would have been in 2008-09 when you visited Trenton.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

With respect to pilots for a C-17, are there any commercial planes where pilot skills could be transferrable to this aspect of the military? Are there pilots on other planes in the civilian world who can be trained up for the C-17s, or do you have to start from scratch with new recruits in the Canadian Forces and build them up to that point?

Col David W. Lowthian: I guess what's remarkable about any new aircraft now is it seems that the training technology is quite advanced, simulation especially.

Many of our pilots on the C-17 and others within our fleet are very well newly winged graduates, as we will call them, and have spent maybe two to three years in our military: basic training, language training, survival, and other courses that are required onwards to their pilot training. After their wings, they require about three and a half months with the United States Air Force where we do our training at Altus Air Force Base in Oklahoma, and they come back and they still have a restricted qualification at that point. It takes them about another 30 months or so to graduate through the various levels as a first officer to become an aircraft commander on that aircraft.

To get back to your question with regard to whether we do that with a civilian pilot, I would say that shortly after I joined as a pilot, we were taking in a lot of graduates from flying colleges and they were more or less fast-tracked through our wings training system. Rather than taking three years to get their wings they might have taken maybe half that time, including basic training, etc. Then they were able to go on to the operational training units for aircraft at that time like the C-130 Hercules and the CP-140 Aurora, etc.

The Chair: That's the end of your time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Michaud, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Mr. Chair, if I may, I will let Mr. Chisholm —

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. Ms. Murray, yes.

● (1700)

Ms. Élaine Michaud: I thought that was odd. I'll take it, but....

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thanks very much.

It's good to hear from you today. I have three questions.

One of them is regarding the search and rescue fleet replacement plan, and we're aware the then Chief of the Defence Staff General Henault identified this as a priority in 2003. The Conservative Party campaigned on replacing the 17 search and rescue fleet replacement program in 2005. It's been identified as a priority in the Canada First defence strategy, but as of today there is still no request for proposals.

I understand that the Buffalos are out in the west coast, and we love them dearly even though they need to go to museums to replace parts by now. I just want to understand how the aging fleet and the replacements not yet in sight affect your operational cost structure in your fleet at Trenton.

Col David W. Lowthian: Thank you for the question, ma'am.

I'll speak specifically for the C-130H fleet that we have here in Trenton, where we have five aircraft to maintain. Through a specialized team of maintainers and some contract personnel, they're able to keep this fleet fairly healthy to meet the response postures that we're mandated to hold. I haven't seen any serviceability issues that would prevent me from meeting my mandate here.

As to the life expectancy of the aircraft, we're okay there as well by having procured this CC-130J model Hercules specifically for the tactical airlift role. It has allowed us to put our energies into the H model fleet only for its search and rescue role. That's allowed us to more or less corral the expertise and the aircraft that we had to focus mainly on that role.

The same thing can be said for the Griffon fleet, obviously part of a larger fleet when you think of the tactical aviation aspect but these aircraft here, the three CH-146s that I have are committed entirely to search and rescue, they're not interchanged with our attack aviation partners.

Ms. Joyce Murray: You've moved the pieces around to avoid the higher downtime and operations maintenance costs of keeping aging fleets useable.

I also wanted to ask about the strategic airlift capability in Operation Impact. I think a previous question was about how Canada's defence of North America would be affected if these planes were in an international theatre.

Could you tell me what our special competence is given that we are the ones providing this much strategic airlift capability? Is this an area of particular competence for Canada and how do we compare with other coalition partners in the use of these kinds of planes for delivery of supplies and materials in the operations theatre, and in Operation Impact specifically?

The Chair: One moment, please, Colonel. We have a point of order.

Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: The study is on the defence of North America. I know that the colonel is well briefed on everything we're doing in Operation Impact, especially with the C-17s and the other heavy-lift tactical aircraft. I would just say that we're here to discuss the state of the defence of North America. I would leave it to the colonel on whether or not he wants to reply to that, but it is beyond the scope of our study today.

The Chair: All right. I—

Yes, Ms. Murray?

Ms. Joyce Murray: I just would like to make the point.... I know that Mr. Bezan loves to interfere with my questions with points of order pretty much every time, and I would like—

Mr. James Bezan: Then stay on topic.

Ms. Joyce Murray: —to make the point that there is a connection between the use of assets internationally compared to what's available here. That's already been established, so I'm asking why there is a specific competency such that we would be using this.

Secondly, Mr. Bezan's party spares no effort or opportunity to point out that their view is that Operation Impact is directly about terrorist threats to Canada and North America, so there is a clear and direct connection, at least in the Conservative Prime Minister's mind. Therefore, I would think that's good enough to ask this question here in committee.

● (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Murray.

Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

Colonel, please answer within the context of the defence of North America, but recognizing, of course, the load that missions abroad place on your ability to serve and defend North America.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Well, no, my question was, is there a special competency and contribution that Canada is making through its strategic airlift capability and is that why it's a critical part of our mission in Iraq?

The Chair: Colonel, the floor is yours.

Col David W. Lowthian: Thank you.

I'll speak first of all to the strategic airlift capability, because up until 2007, before we had the C-17, the CC-177 Globemaster, we were somewhat challenged in our ability to respond in the way we have since we've obtained that aircraft. There are four elements to the strategic airlift capability that the C-17 brings to me as commander of 8 Wing, to my squadron commander who's in charge of deploying these aircraft, and ultimately to Canada as a whole: responsiveness, relevance, reliability, and reach. Those are four elements, I would argue, that it brings in spades, and that we benefit from as a service and as a way of projecting our values and our capabilities.

In a responsive manner, it can leave when we're told and when we need it to. We don't have to lease that capability anymore. In regard to relevance, with the size of loads that it can carry, whether it's for a humanitarian cause or to support our troops deployed on a combat mission, we're getting in volume the equipment they require. Also, when there's outsized cargo, etc., we know that we can bring it. On reliability, this capability is more than just an aircraft. It comes with a global sustainment and support partnership with other services that fly this aircraft, with Boeing. Last is its reach. With the distances it can fly and the speeds at which it can fly, we know that we can build air bridges—like we did for Op Renaissance into the Philippines—in really no other way.

That's really what a strategic airlift capability like the C-17's provides us: responsiveness, relevance, reliability, and reach. As I said, whether it's a combat or humanitarian mission that we're supporting, it can do it like no other capability, and we own the decision as to when and where it goes.

Ms. Joyce Murray: So it makes a unique contribution to the coalition efforts in Operation Impact?

Col David W. Lowthian: To any operation.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

I have a last question about air reserves. I note that you have air reserves in your responsibility.

Earlier in the conversation at this committee, there was a discussion about recruitment being at 9.1% whereas the target is 70% to 100%. Is that a challenge in Trenton and within your area of command? If so, what's being done to address that lack of recruitment in air reserves?

Col David W. Lowthian: With overall manning levels here in Trenton, for each priory that my units hold, I am quite satisfied with where I'm at. When you do bring up the element of reservists within the air force, this is where the air force may be a different paradigm than, say, the army. We would be comparing apples to oranges in this case. The reason I say this is that for the army to recruit reservists and fill the ranks with infantry soldiers who require some baseline basic training and then some infantry-specific training, it doesn't take that long to build that capacity.

It is different, though, for an air force that relies on a technician force that is skilled in airworthiness decisions and practices, be it for airframe—i.e., engines, landing gear, those types of structures—or, more and more so now, for the software components that allow an aircraft to answer to the mission that it does today. Lastly, there is a structures element to what they do in rebuilding parts and components that takes considerable training. In fact, the civilian qualifications on the outside would equate to at least a three-year college diploma and some experience to get them there. I think that's probably the biggest challenge on reservists within the air force.

● (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Colonel. Ms. Murray, that's time.

Beginning the five-minute round is Mr. Williamson, please.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Colonel, thank you for joining us here today by teleconference.

I just have a couple of questions to begin with. We've recently heard about Canadian Forces Station Alert. Could you first expand on the role that 8 Wing Trenton plays in supporting Alert, and also how this role contributes to Canada's protection and surveillance of the Arctic?

Col David W. Lowthian: Certainly, sir. Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

First of all, with Trenton being an air mobility hub, we possess the capabilities there to reach into the Arctic and keep them sustained on a weekly or so basis. That's number one.

Number two is command and control. The commanding officer up in Alert right now, Major Brian Tang, answers to me. I am the formation commander who ensures that his command and control requirements are supported. That's number two.

The third element, of course, which is in evolution right now, is infrastructure. Contracting and looking after the infrastructure at CFS Alert is an 8 Wing responsibility that is in the processes of being handed off to the ADM(IE), our Assistant Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Environment. They are taking that on, as they are with just about every other base in Canada over the next year or so.

Those are my three roles there.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you.

You were saying that you might be up to Alert weekly. What plane or planes typically go up to bring up supplies and personnel changes, etc.?

Col David W. Lowthian: We call that a 85/86 mission. On a routine basis, it would normally be a CC-130J Hercules aircraft that would go. Having said that, though, we have sent some of our H models from our search and rescue squad up there to give the crews more Arctic exposure.

Lastly, once in a while you will see the C-17 tasked, if there is a larger-than-normal load. We take advantage of those flights, as mentioned earlier, in that when that aircraft goes in full of cargo and personnel, it can also carry more fuel in its tanks than most of our other aircraft. They always seize that opportunity and offload the extra fuel from the tanks of the aircraft to support Alert.

Mr. John Williamson: Very good.

I'm curious about the weather conditions. How do they impact this? For example, over a course of twelve months, are there long periods of time when we are unable to get to CFS Alert, or is it more like a week or a shorter period of time when the weather prohibits flights in or out?

Col David W. Lowthian: That is a good question. You're talking to someone who's done numerous missions up north, probably some of the most challenging flying a pilot will see. There are circumstances where winds or visibility could be such that you can't get into your destination.

Typically, what we will do, if that does happen—and it does not happen frequently—is that we'll land at an alternative aerodrome and try to wait out the weather if it's a matter of a couple of days. Once in a while, but seldomly, do we bring an aircraft back with cargo because it cannot get in due to extended phase conditions, as we call them. I seldom see that.

Mr. John Williamson: As one of Canada's busiest air bases, I understand that CFB Trenton is currently undergoing a considerable transformation.

Could you please elaborate on what new infrastructure is under construction, and how it will contribute to the effectiveness of the operation carried out by CFA troops stationed at CFB Trenton?

Col David W. Lowthian: Having procured the airlift capability of the C-17 back in 2007 and onwards, and then soon followed by the tactical airlift capability that 17 CC-130J aircraft provided, we more or less put aircraft on the ramp and started employing them without the infrastructure in place. That placed some burden on our operations here upfront, in that we were relying heavily on our partners to the south for hangar space, etc. We had to grow into that.

What we see here is number one hangar to the north, which has two bays. It hosts the C-17, which does allow us now to conduct our mid-term and heavier maintenance at home as opposed to taking our aircraft elsewhere. A very similar hangar, number six hangar, is going up on the south side of the airfield as well, to support the same thing. That hangar can accommodate a CC-150 Polaris aircraft at the same time.

On the north side we have a two-bay hangar to support our CC-130J aircraft, on the ramp space to the north. There are plans on paper to put up a four-bay hangar on the south side adjacent to hangar number six, as previously mentioned, to support the same thing.

There's a 15-bay fire hall that is almost complete. It should be finished this summer and operational in the fall, which will allow us to respond at a crash fire response level of 8, a CFR level of 8, which is the minimum requirement for supporting aircraft such as the C-17 and the CC-150: first, the size of the aircraft; second, the number of them that we do have; and third, because they're built of composite material.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Colonel.

Mr. Chisholm, I understand you'll be sharing time with Madame Michaud.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Thank you very much, Colonel. It's been an interesting presentation.

I want to talk about your responsibilities in the Arctic, particularly as they relate to search and rescue and sovereignty. Mr. Harris mentioned earlier our concerns with the response time on search and rescue, the equipment you have available, and the time it takes to respond. That's only going to get worse as time goes on, with increasing commercial traffic in that area.

I'm also thinking about the sovereignty responsibilities, with the increasing presence of countries like Russia, for example, with assets in the Arctic.

Do you see us moving to an air base north of 60° as being one way to not only meet our obligations around SAR but also to properly conduct our sovereignty patrols?

Col David W. Lowthian: From my perspective as 8 Wing commander, as said, I'm satisfied with our ability to respond appropriately within that region. I don't really have any assessment on what a northern airfield would provide us at this time.

What I do know is that our ability to preposition to the north, if and when required, is uninhibited with the capabilities that we do have.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Thank you, Colonel.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Colonel Lowthian, thank you for appearing before us today. I will also talk about search and rescue.

In April 2014, the Canadian Press reported that the defence department was planning to introduce a 30-minute response time at all times for search and rescue squadrons in Canada. In the past, that has been considered too costly and too demanding in terms of staffing.

The article also said that two reports were studying search and rescue incidents as well as the costs associated with having a response service at all times. The idea was submitted to the headquarters in charge of overseeing the operations in Canada and abroad.

Could you briefly comment on the findings of those two reports and elaborate on what the situation is for the Royal Canadian Air Force in terms of making a 30-minute service available at all times?

● (1720)

[*English*]

Col David W. Lowthian: Thank you for your question.

With regard to response times here at Trenton—and in fact this would speak to all of the search and rescue capability across the country—over the last two years, we've modified the 30-minute response posture that we do maintain.

Historically, it has been a 30-minute response posture Monday to Friday in daytime hours, 8 to 4 o'clock. Not last summer, but the summer before, in the summer of 2013, we introduced a modified posture during the summer months—by summer months I mean the long weekend in May until Labour Day weekend. The reason behind this was to slew or adjust the response posture timing, so that they would better meet historically higher risk periods to respond in 30 minutes or less.

In the summer of 2013, we met with some very marked success, if you will, by modifying that posture closer to a Thursday to a Monday 30-minute response posture, between midday and later evening hours, and having our two-hour response posture moved to the periods where there was less risk. Statistically, we met with better success.

We have since modified or improved upon that last summer, where we adjusted and expanded the hours where the 30-minute liability was offered. Again, we met with better success.

To move to 30 minutes around the clock would probably be very resource intense. I'd imagine there would have to be considerable study and some manpower assessments that would go behind that.

The Chair: Mr. Bezan, for five minutes.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to split my time with Mr. Chisu.

Colonel, it's good seeing you again. It's always nice to hear from the experts out in the field. It's too bad that we weren't able to visit you, because 8 Wing is just a fantastic base and continues to grow and serve Canada so well. We appreciate your leadership there.

I have two questions for you. First, what role does 8 Wing play in the NORAD context, particularly in defence of Arctic sovereignty?

Second, you mentioned the forward operating locations in the Arctic. Could you elaborate on what role those FOLs play in the defence of our Arctic sovereignty, especially as has been mentioned previously, with the increased posturing that we're seeing from the Russian federation?

Col David W. Lowthian: Thanks, Mr. Bezan.

With regard to NORAD, I mentioned our QRA, quick reaction alert, capability that we have at 8 Wing. That is in fact one of our two NORAD mandates. When the fighter jets based out of Bagotville are ordered to respond or pre-position, we are one of the locations at which they will pre-position. We're a very strategic location in time and space. A map would [*Inaudible—Editor*] that.

We are prepared at all times to receive F-18 jets and to some degree service them and maintain them with our trained expertise up to a point where Bagotville would have to deploy some of their technicians here. We're that first line of resistance.

Similarly, I mentioned that two of our CC-150 Polaris Airbus aircraft are in fact configured to provide air-to-air refuelling for our F-18 jets. They, too, are on a response posture—it is classified—to provide that capability throughout Canada.

Lastly, I don't have a lot of knowledge really as to the structure or the operations of the FOLs, but I will tell you that with our mobile air movements teams, based out of 2 Air Movements Squadron, with our ability to move personnel and equipment, as well as with our tanker capability, we are routinely used in exercises and have been activated in the past to deploy to the north or to assist with our fighter operations to deploy to the north.

● (1725)

The Chair: Mr. Norlock.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Chisu.

Colonel, I know you were asked about the infrastructure at CFB Trenton.

I just wonder if you could repeat what you said. How does that infrastructure improvement contribute to our defence of North America? Could I have a short answer, please? I know that Mr. Chisu has a lot of questions for you.

The Chair: Actually, just one moment, Colonel.

Mr. Bezan shared his time with you, Mr. Norlock.

Mr. Rick Norlock: I said “Mr. Chisu”.

I'll just ask the question.

Sorry, Colonel, we're confusing you because it appears that we're confused.

Col David W. Lowthian: That's not a problem, and I will give a short answer, I assure you.

At the end of the day, with the servicing and the second-line and third-line maintenance required for these newer fleets, there is quite a requirement within our hangars that we didn't quite have here in Canada at the time to service both the C-17 and the J model. We now have that.

Up until that point it would affect aircraft availability more than anything else. It would not affect serviceability so much, though it did to some degree, but mainly we would be spending time and hours sending our aircraft to the United States so that we could operate or [*Inaudible—Editor*] them down there. So we would lose airframe hours, which would not be available for us to use for our requirements here in Canada. Airplanes would be down for an extended period and as well they would just not be available.

It allows us to leverage more availability out of aircraft and to maintain very healthy numbers with regard to their serviceability.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Thank you very much, Colonel. I have a very short question.

You mentioned in your presentation that as a host to NORAD's quick reaction alert, 8 Wing Trenton provides essential ground support so that the CF-18 Hornets can be airborne immediately to protect our airspace from potential air threats.

There are worries about Russia in the Arctic, and so on. Right now the Russians are conducting one of the biggest exercises ever seen. What is our reaction, or what do you think about it, or what is your perspective on that?

Col David W. Lowthian: Mr. Chisu, you're asking for my opinion on Russia's exercise or operations in the Arctic?

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Yes.

Col David W. Lowthian: Any nation is entitled to exercise and operate within its own borders, and our ability to understand or monitor what they're doing and to at least be aware of them, should they have other designs, is proficient. Our response posture, I believe, is capable of working within NORAD to respond in such a way.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have time for one final brief question by Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for your update on the 30-minute posture study. That's what it was called.

Can we now assume that this is a permanent feature of the operations of the search and rescue out of Trenton on an ongoing basis, with a 30-minute posture? I've heard that the CF-18s have a five-minute response time when on high alert. Is that the general rule, or is there another posture? Or is that a state secret?

Col David W. Lowthian: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

I'll address the CF-18 question first. That is classified. In fact, I don't have that within reach here.

Speaking for the search and rescue posture, yes, there's always a 30-minute response posture year-round. It's in the summer months that we modify it as such so that it is extended and it's more in line with where our citizens would be more at risk. So, yes, that would be a permanent modification. Every summer, May through September, you'll see that posture modified as such.

Mr. Jack Harris: That's good to hear.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your time with us this afternoon, Colonel Lowthian. It is appreciated. Our thanks, again, from the committee for assisting in our study of the defence of North America.

Colleagues, this meeting is adjourned.