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Chair

Mr. Stephen Fuhr

Standing Committee on National Defence

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● (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.)): Good day. Welcome, everybody.

To our guests, welcome to our study on the naval readiness in the defence of North America. I'd like to welcome specifically our guests from the Naval Association of Canada, Vice-Admiral, retired, Drew Robertson; and Commodore, retired, Daniel Sing. Also, from the Navy League of Canada, we have Captain, retired, Harry Harsch. Thank you for coming, gentlemen.

I understand the gentlemen from the Naval Association of Canada are going to split their time. If you need to go over time a bit we're relatively flexible. Then we'll close off with the opening remarks with the Navy League of Canada for 10 minutes.

Over to the Naval Association of Canada. You have the floor.

Vice-Admiral (Retired) Drew Robertson (Naval Association of Canada): Thank you very much.

Many thanks for the opportunity for the Naval Association to appear before you. It's a pleasure, especially in my case since it's my first appearance not at the pleasure of a minister.

I'll deal with the strategic question of what Navy Canada has and will have on our present force, and then turn it over to my colleagues.

The navy responds to and deters other powers in our home waters, working of course with the air force. But all governments have also repeatedly used the navy to respond wherever our national interests are challenged, rather than wait for the challenge to arrive off our coast. Governments have ordered such deployments because supporting the international rules-based order has produced the peace and security on which our trade and prosperity depend. Indeed, such operations abroad have been the core business on which repeated governments have deployed the navy abroad, amounting to dozens of deployments globally for our ships, submarines, aircraft, and task groups over the last 20 years, even while the fleet at home maintained our security.

Yet despite an unbroken record of success on operations at home and abroad, the navy's capabilities and capacities have eroded steadily over the past 20 years, incrementally but increasingly compromising its ability to defend Canada or to act as a force for good abroad. There's been progress recently. The frigates are now well past mid-life, but they've been successfully modernized and our submarines are operational. Further, the national shipbuilding strategy is an important undertaking of considerable promise.

The question isn't whether Canada will successfully build warships; we always have. The question is whether we'll build warships with the capabilities and in the numbers required for the rising challenges. That said, for the Naval Association a regrettable observation is that over the last 20 years a succession of governments and eight parliaments have been unable to sustainably resource defence. The most clear sign of this has been that this G7 nation, with all its maritime interests at home and abroad, has seen its replenishment ships—two of them—and its destroyers—three—age into their mid-forties before being forced out of commission; not merely without relief, not with a gap, but without governments having even entered into contracts to build their replacements.

The navy's success of the last 20 years was due to investments in the fighting fleet that defended Canada made decades before. Here I include submarines, frigates, destroyers, maritime patrol aircraft and, of course, over water CF-18s as well. The youngest of these platforms is now 20 years of age. The oldest is the *Athabaskan* at 44 years of age. The ability of this government and those that follow to live off these legacy investments is rapidly coming to a close, even as the strategic risks for governments deepen. What are those risks today? Beyond having fewer ships for our defence, we've gapped long-held capabilities.

Canada no longer has the ability to independently control events at sea due to the loss of its task group air defence capability. It no longer has the ability to independently sustain deployed task forces abroad and must rely on others for at-sea refuelling and logistics support, even in our own home waters. Consequently, Canada is unlikely to be able to conduct a prolonged multi-rotation response to international events, nor is it likely to be offered the significant leadership opportunities at sea that such a response enables, particularly in complex operations of the kind we partake in repeatedly, including after 9/11 supporting our American allies for several years in the Middle East.

Looking ahead, on the present course future governments face greater reductions and rising risks. Today's fighting fleet of submarines and surface combatants is already smaller, which research has shown is required to achieve the enduring and bipartisan policy outcomes governments seek, such as maintaining our sovereignty and contributing to international peace and security.

As the parliamentary budget officer and others such as Dave Perry, who I know was here with you in the spring, have noted, the Armed Forces is unsustainable over the coming decade, likely to an amount in the tens of billions of dollars. So plans aimed at restoring the fighting fleets, including those to extend the life of Canada's four highly capable Victoria class submarines into the mid-2030s and then replace them with a new capability, as well as to replace our Aurora maritime patrol aircraft, are not only in jeopardy, they are headed hard aground.

At current budget levels, then, you can anticipate the RCN's fighting flight being further reduced over the coming 15 years, reduced eventually toward a figure—at least a figure in the press—of just nine surface combatants, which would be a 40% cut from the 15 of only two years ago, while the submarines and the air force's maritime patrol aircraft will not likely be affordable and will not likely be replaced, at least not as we currently know them.

● (1105)

Such changes would obviously each compound the risks that I cited earlier by significantly further eroding the maritime capabilities and capacities required to contribute meaningfully to continental and international operations. While for decades the government has often had major warships deployed to two theatres simultaneously, that would no longer be sustainable with a smaller fleet. But, most importantly, such a force would not be suitable or adequate for the vast challenge of defending our three-ocean home waters.

The Naval Association believes that this much smaller and unbalanced future force would consequently not be adequate to national need, especially given the rapid changes under way in the global maritime order: as nations throughout the world, but especially Russia and China, continue to narrow or close technological gaps that western navies have enjoyed for decades, and continue to make significant and disproportionate investments in maritime forces, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region; as great state co-operation continues to give way to competition and confrontation at the expense of the international rules-based order, especially at sea and, most notably, in the South and East China seas; and, finally, as Canada's third and largest, but least accessible and most fragile, ocean space opens to commercial shipping and resource extraction and as the navy and air force secure our sovereignty there.

For the Naval Association, the success of the defence policy review depends on bringing spending levels into balance over the medium to long term with the defence outcomes governments expect. The Naval Association would argue, as I have, that defending Canada in the new strategic environment will require increased investment to achieve what governments expect of the Armed Forces, not less.

In making such investments, the Naval Association would observe that, in addition to securing Canada's defence, there is no better insurance against strategic risk and unforeseen global shocks than a balanced, multi-purpose, and combat-capable maritime force.

The association also believes that this defence policy review represents a moment of strategic opportunity, not just to balance the defence outcomes and resources, but to allow the Armed Forces to be restructured for the challenges of this century. The force structure of the 20th century should be reshaped for the challenges ahead.

Such strategy-driven measures will take vision, commitment, and effort, but the result would be an Armed Forces clearly better prepared to defend Canada.

Thank you very much for your interest. I look forward to any questions you may have.

The Chair: Commodore Sing, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Commodore (Retired) Daniel Sing (Director, Naval Affairs, Naval Association of Canada): As intimated by Vice-Admiral Robertson, the Naval Association of Canada feels it is important to affirm that it is very difficult to examine the state of the Royal Canadian Navy solely from the perspective of the defence of North America, as the Royal Canadian Navy has an important and complementary role to play beyond the 12 nautical miles of territorial seas that surround North America.

The Naval Association of Canada also feels it is important to provide you with a quick perspective on the kind of navy Canada needs. Like our country and its ocean estate, the underlying issues are vast. These scene-setting remarks will only skim the surface of many considerations. To save time, I will read only the portions highlighted in grey in the 15-page document I submitted to the clerk last Friday.

● (1110)

[*English*]

The Naval Association of Canada believes the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Navy must be combat-capable. If military forces are adequately combat-capable, they normally have little difficulty performing less demanding tasks.

Canada's peace and security contributions to the United Nations, to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and to other defence and security arrangements, especially those with the United States, must be meaningful.

Without the establishment and continuous maintenance of ready to deploy, ready to act, capable, and effective Canadian naval and maritime air forces, purposely designed to operate against current and future threats in Canadian, international, and far-away waters, Canada's intertwined national interests of peace and security and economic prosperity will be at risk.

[*Translation*]

The number of naval platforms and crews, and their characteristics are principally a function of five factors: the threat or risk to the nation's defence, security and economic prosperity; the maritime defence and security outputs desired by the government; the maintenance requirements of the platforms and their equipment; the quality of life considerations of the platforms' crews; and the financial resources available for the acquisition of equipment, operations, training and maintenance.

[*English*]

The Naval Association of Canada agrees with the North American threat assessment that was captured in the committee's September report on "NORAD and Aerial Readiness". The most important threat to assess is the future one. Unfortunately, it is also the most difficult to predict. An unclear or debatable assessment of future threats does not facilitate difficult military capability and equipment choices. Optimum military forces, which take years to design and procure—and in some instances decades—can only be properly identified if the future threat has been correctly predicted.

[*Translation*]

Nowadays, threat weapons are faster, stealthier, longer-range and more effective. The proliferation and improvements of submarines, mines, anti-ship torpedoes, anti-ship missiles, and cruise and ballistic missiles, in particular, represent increasing potential to do harm, directly or indirectly, to North America. Such evolving threats should not be discounted, and preventive and/or protective measures need to be considered and implemented.

The Naval Association of Canada believes the Royal Canadian Navy, subject to difficult equipment choices, has an important role to play against all of these threats.

[*English*]

The need to conduct maintenance, trials, and individual and collective training adds to the overall number of platforms required to generate a given set of naval outputs. Given the difficulty of correctly predicting the future, acquiring and maintaining balanced, multi-purpose, flexible, and combat-capable military capabilities on land, on and below the seas, and in the air, seems prudent.

Combat-capable naval ships and submarines, and maritime aircraft and their sophisticated sensors, weapons, and communications equipment, are not inexpensive. Spending on defence and on the Royal Canadian Navy is like buying insurance: you have to pay for it up front, you don't know when you will ever need to use it to its full capacity, and you can't readily acquire some or more when a crisis suddenly emerges.

[*Translation*]

The Royal Canadian Navy is principally responsible for: monitoring Canada's ocean estate and approaches; when necessary, asserting and defending Canada's maritime sovereignty; and, as directed by the government, contributing to international peace and security.

In order to exercise sovereignty, a nation must first know what is going on in, near and, at times, far away from its sovereign territory, be it on a land, on and below the seas, and in the air. This is normally achieved through surveillance. Moreover, it must be able to respond, normally with mobile assets, to incidents or challenges, potential or actual, in a timely fashion.

The purpose, nature, cost and effectiveness of the surveillance technologies vary widely. It is not easy to optimize a single solution for multiple purposes.

At sea, above-water surveillance technologies are mostly electromagnetic in nature, whereas below water, surveillance technologies are mostly acoustic in nature.

Beyond the increasing potential threat posed by missiles, among other weapons, which can be launched from submerged submarines, the need to conduct undersea surveillance must not be overlooked.

● (1115)

[*English*]

Once an actionable surveillance picture has been generated, a mobile response asset or assets can be deployed—if not already deployed—to further refine the picture and/or to take whatever action might be warranted. Ships and submarines can deploy with no or little support to faraway places and remain on site for significant periods of time. Response can take one of two forms. Either the assets are called into action from their home base or they are already at sea and therefore are able to respond more quickly.

The Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Navy need to be able to exercise a reasonable degree of sea control on, above, and below the ocean surface wherever they are tasked to operate. Ideally, the Canadian Armed Forces and the RCN should be able to exercise sea control without the assistance of allies when operating in Canadian waters. Because it's difficult to predict future threats and situations, care must be taken to acquire and maintain the right number, mix, and quality of seagoing platforms and supporting services.

[*Translation*]

So that future governments will continue to be able to make meaningful contributions in times of tension, crisis or war, the Naval Association of Canada believes it is in the national interest to acquire and maintain a modern, balanced, multi-purpose, flexible and combat-capable maritime fleet.

[*English*]

Oceans and navies have played key roles in the prosperity, security, and defence of most, if not all, states, especially coastal ones. Going forward, the oceans will continue to play an important role in Canada's prosperity, security, and defence. Canada will continue to need a balanced, multi-purpose, flexible, combat-capable navy. A capable and effective navy cannot be easily and quickly created when a need arises. For it to be of use when needed, it must exist before difficult situations manifest themselves.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Captain Harsch, you are next.

Captain(N) (Retired) Harry Harsch (Vice-President, Maritime Affairs, Navy League of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, and thank you to the committee for the opportunity to represent the Navy League of Canada at today's committee meeting discussing the Royal Canadian Navy and naval readiness. I sincerely regret I did not have time to submit my opening remarks in advance. However, I have failed at retirement, and last week was a particularly challenging week. In my day job people would actually pay me and expect me to do stuff.

As background, I retired four years ago after over 36 years of service as a seagoing officer, including command of three warships, appointments as a senior Canadian officer at NATO's naval headquarters in the U.K., and as an attaché in both London and Copenhagen. However, I'm here today as the vice-president of maritime affairs for the Navy League of Canada, a volunteer position I have held for almost three years.

The Navy League of Canada was established in 1895. Its objective was to promote an interest in maritime affairs, and it was one of the key voices that led to the creation of Canada's navy in 1910.

Today the Navy League of Canada's primary focus is its two cadet programs that benefit over 10,000 young Canadians in over 260 communities across the country, but we also maintain our maritime affairs mandate to promote Canada's maritime interests, hence, my appearance here today.

In my remarks today I would like to make the following three points, all of which I believe are interrelated.

The first one is what the concept of readiness actually means in terms of generating naval forces that are able to do what the government asks them to do.

Second is the view that Canada is a maritime nation, and what that means in terms of the navy's role.

Finally, as work progresses towards the future fleet, the Navy League believes that flexibility with respect to capability is the crucial enabler to overall readiness, in other words, the RCN's ability to deploy at short notice to defend Canada and Canadian interests.

Readiness is multifaceted, but it really boils down to having a fleet that is capable of deploying at short notice, in some cases measured in hours, to bring meaningful effect to any given task as assigned by the Government of Canada. It encompasses personnel, material, technical, and combat readiness.

This can range from the traditional ready duty ship sailing literally within hours to conduct a search and rescue operation or to support other government departments in enforcing Canadian laws.

It can also include deploying within days to provide humanitarian assistance or disaster relief, in effect only as long as it takes to sort out the broad scope of the mission, and then load the ship with appropriate supplies.

Readiness also means combat-ready ships forward deployed around the world working in NATO task groups or with our other partners and allies, and it also means the capability to deploy a naval task group with as little as 10 days' notice in support of a host of complex operations.

In the first instance, readiness means having a capable, balanced, and flexible fleet of ships, submarines, and aircraft as well as effective, shore-based facilities from which to base them.

And once you have those capabilities, you then have to maintain them. Warships, submarines, and aircraft are highly complicated systems, and they work in hostile environmental conditions. In staff colleges you often hear the statement that no plan survives first contact with the enemy, which I believe is true, but the naval upshot to that is nothing survives in salt water. Proper maintenance means having the industrial base both in-house and commercially to be able to work on these intricate machines as well as having adequate spares on hand and an established supply chain that can meet demands.

And, of course, there's education and training for the ship's companies that operate these platforms. There's a saying the sea trainers are fond of using that goes, “Everything we do at sea is completely safe until we forget how utterly dangerous it is.” The only way one can mitigate those risks is by having competent crews. That competence is achieved through demanding and thorough individual training; refresher training; team training; all-ship training through challenging work-up programs; and multi-ship training exercises, both national and multinational.

As an aside, I wanted to pick up on something Vice-Admiral Ron Lloyd said a few months back about these multinational exercises that are not only essential to generating readiness, but more importantly, they are fundamental to holding alliances together, demonstrating group resolve to destabilizing developments, while confirming the RCN's ability to be interoperable and share information, logistical support, and intelligence. They are, in many respects, the lifeblood of an armed service that pays dividends, whether pursuing a national objective, deploying with the alliance, or building capacities with regional partners.

● (1120)

I would now like to move on to the concept of Canada as a maritime nation. Canada is bounded by three oceans, with the world's largest coastline, the second-largest continental shelf, and the fifth-largest exclusive economic zone. And as a trading nation, we are, I think it is fair to say, dependent on the oceans. That means that Canada is by definition a maritime nation, although it seems some do not appreciate that and what it means in terms of capability.

The potential challenges to national security that exist as a result of that dependence are convoluted. As a consequence, we have not always equipped our naval forces accordingly.

A properly equipped navy at the right degree of readiness is inherently flexible. It provides the government with a range of policy options across the spectrum of conflict from diplomacy to humanitarian operations to constabulary operations to the often-complicated world of peace support operations and all the way to war-fighting if necessary.

The Navy League believes that a balanced, multi-purpose, and combat-capable fleet is the key to that flexibility. The navy must be able to protect Canadian sovereignty and interests, whether in domestic situations, forward-deployed operations, or the plethora of contingency operations we find ourselves in today.

The RCN has been busy for pretty much as long as I can remember, from my early days as a Cold Warrior to commanding a frigate in the Arabian Gulf during hostilities in 2003. That was an amazing experience, by the way. I will never forget the privilege of leading some 240 of the most remarkable and courageous Canadians in what was, in every respect, a mission with uncertain outcomes.

The success of that mission was a perfect example of flexibility and why readiness matters whether in conducting escort operations in the Strait of Hormuz or conducting maritime interdiction and boarding operations in the broader Gulf region or saving the life of a horribly burned Iraqi merchant sailor just north of Dubai.

In fact, at the time, Admiral Robertson was my fleet commander, and he had just returned from the Gulf region having served as the first commander of the Canadian task group that deployed immediately after the attacks on New York and Washington.

While one could argue that the Cold War threat of nuclear annihilation kept the stakes comparatively high, it is my opinion that Canadian naval operations over the past 20 years or so have become increasingly more complex and more dangerous, just as the post-Cold War world has become more complex and more dangerous. The navy has always been up to the task; it just hasn't always been that good at telling its story to the broader audience.

Taking part in diverse deployments in support of the international campaign against terrorism, conducting counter-drug operations, providing protection for the World Food Programme, and addressing the menace of modern-day pirates off the coast of Somalia are all examples of what Canada's navy has been up to recently, and all demonstrate the value of having a standing fleet at an appropriate level of readiness. Of course those missions continue today, with Canadian ships forward-deployed with NATO and other allies to promote regional stability and security.

Given their ability to sail on very short notice, navies can also be leveraged to effect in support of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The RCN has frequently been at the forefront of these operations over the years.

A few of the many examples are the 1998 search-and-recovery operation in response to the crash of Swissair Flight 111 into the sea near Halifax, and the 2010 deployment to provide relief to earthquake-stricken Haiti. However, our ships are not necessarily best equipped for that role.

In that respect, the Navy League believes that ships like the Royal Netherlands Navy's Rotterdam and Karel Doorman classes or the U. K. Royal Fleet Auxiliary's Bay class, or the Royal Danish Navy's Absalon class have been used to meaningful effect in a variety of operations from humanitarian and disaster relief to supporting operations ashore.

The Navy League believes that such a capability would significantly add to the flexibility and the overall readiness of the RCN, but, this should not come at the expense of combat-capable frigate-type ships, which have consistently and frequently proven their utility in more challenging operations.

We are concerned, however, with the steady erosion of the fleet, in terms of both capabilities and numbers, notwithstanding the fact that the ships we have left are first class by any measure, particularly after the Halifax class modernization program. It seems that just as the number and complexity of operations involving naval forces, such as multi-functional and multinational operations conducted in support of UN mandates, are increasing, Canada's ability to deal with them is waning as a result of reduced capacity.

In conclusion, we often hear the phrase “the world needs more Canada." As someone who has served abroad with allies and partners, I have seen first-hand how Canadian Forces always excel when working and leading in a collective international environment, but we get credit only if we show up.

● (1125)

As Dr. Jim Boutilier quipped at the recent Maritime Security Challenges conference in Victoria, if you want to be seen, you need to be seen.

The Navy League of Canada believes that the readiness of our navy is predicated on having a flexible fleet based on the right numbers and types of ships, with the right support networks and well-trained and experienced sailors and aviators who are provided with the right level of support. We are optimistic that the national shipbuilding strategy will deliver the fleet Canada needs. It has the potential to rejuvenate the fleet and the Canadian industrial base that supports it.

Finally, as many of you may be aware, next Tuesday is Navy Day on Parliament Hill. This event is coordinated by the Navy League of Canada, and brings together government, the RCN, the Canadian Coast Guard, the Maritime Affairs Alliance, and the exceptional sailors program. We look forward to seeing you there.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

The first questioner will be Mr. Gerretsen. You have the floor.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, gentlemen, for being here today to share your insight with us.

I do have a question for each of you, so I apologize in advance if I come across as though I'm hurrying you along. I'm timed with respect to how much time I have.

My first question is for Admiral Robertson. You talked about, if I understood you correctly, the fleet being too small to protect our interests. Can you expand on that? I'm also curious on what the navy sees as the primary interest or focus in how it should be used.

VAdm Drew Robertson: If we look at the primary role of the navy as being to defend Canada and to protect the national rules-based order internationally, that's a pretty fair and simple summary. To believe that a navy is useful in both locations, it helps to understand not only that there may be a threat some day, but that there actually is potentially one today, that there are capabilities that could be turned against the international rules-based order today.

Happily, there's a country that is satisfying that, and another that's perhaps getting ready to. Look at Russia and the actions it's taken over the last six years. It has built up quite a list of activities contrary to the international rules-based order. Not only that, but as a member of the UN Security Council, the UN isn't going to be doing anything about it. It's what NATO does to deter the actions of Russia that matters.

Although we all talk about needing ships that are capable for war fighting, and we believe that quite honestly, perhaps most important is that the ability to wage war, matched with political intent from something like the alliance, means we don't ever wind up going there —the deterrence is effective. That's why there's a ship today reassuring the European allies, and a ship today then deterring.

● (1130)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Did I hear you correctly that the fleet is too small to protect our interests?

VAdm Drew Robertson: It is already decreasing, with the loss of two supply ships. That means we can't even refuel the destroyers in our own waters. And it's going to get smaller if the current budget is an indicator of where we will be going over time.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay, this leads into something that Captain Harsch was talking about. You defined “readiness” quite well; you gave us a picture of what it was. I didn't hear much about whether or not Canada is ready.

Capt(N) Harry Harsch: I did allude to that with respect to the 12 modernized Halifax class frigates. In fact, as part of this conference I was at last week in Victoria I had an opportunity to go to sea in HMCS *Calgary*, which is one of the modernized ships. It's incredible. I thought the ship I commanded, the *Fredericton*, was an amazing piece of kit. The difference is that the evolutionary improvements that the Halifax class modernization brings, specifically with respect to command and control, are amazing.

We had Senator Daniel Lang with us at this particular event, and one thing that struck him was the ship's company. It was a high readiness ship's company, as I alluded to in my remarks, with just amazing young Canadians who form these crews.

Are we ready? I think we're as ready as we've ever been, absolutely. The problem is we just don't have enough ships that are ready.

The other important point is that with 12 frigates, it doesn't mean we have 12 frigates available at any given time. There are going to be some that will be available for operations or on operations, some that are in maintenance periods after operations or once they get to a certain time and need to go into a refit period, and then there are the ones that are preparing for operations. So having 12 ships means you may have four or five available on a good day.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

Commodore Sing, you talked about the evolving threats that the navy faces. Can you give any examples of how the navy is responding to the evolution of the threats?

In particular, over the last several decades, we have seen this change in what we view as threats, away from single large actors to smaller threats that we're seeing from more rogue actors. Can you give some examples of the evolution of the threats and how the navy is responding to them?

Cmdre Daniel Sing: This concept of threat has many facets. The one you alluded to was: who might be menacing us?

In days gone by in the Cold War, it was easy to recognize the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact as being that group of countries menacing the livelihood of the west. As recent history has demonstrated, that threat has, at least in perception, decreased. In reality, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the challenges that the Soviet Union had in adapting to its new political realities, we've seen the rise of different types of threats, and not necessarily state threats. Who could have fathomed two or three years before 9/11 the concept that individual human beings, part of a small group, might develop a plan to crash aircraft into the World Trade buildings?

● (1135)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Right, so how has that changed the way that the navy operates?

Cmdre Daniel Sing: Those types of threats have changed, but haven't changed the way navies operate. I believe, in reading the report on your investigation into NORAD and aerial readiness, that many of the speakers spoke to the different facets or elements of threat. They continuously came back to the fact that just because a potential aerial threat from Russia is unlikely does not mean that military forces don't expend a considerable amount of time, energy, and effort looking at ways to defeat that threat if it were to manifest itself. Similarly, I believe navies around the world do the same thing.

While navies per se can't do all that much in dealing with ISIS in Mosul or what's happening in Aleppo today, it doesn't mean that the navy has discarded the notion of the evolution of supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles, the greater distances of intermediate and short-range ballistic missiles, with the verbal threats being made by the leader of North Korea vis-à-vis the United States, and as a consequence also implicating Canada. Naval forces around the world, including the Canadian navy, are developing means of countering these types of threats.

As one small example, recently the Canadian navy has argued the case, and was successful, in moving forward in investing in the Evolved Seasparrow Missile Block 2, in order to counter what it knows, in collaboration with allies, to be increasing capabilities from potential adversaries, mostly military.

Recently in the Red Sea, the U.S. Navy and the United Arab Emirates have come under attack from Yemeni forces firing anti-ship missiles of Chinese origin adapted to attack warships in international waters. They were successful in the case of the UAE. They've made, I understand, three attacks against the United States' naval forces in international waters in the last week. They were unsuccessful, but they're only unsuccessful because Americans and others continue to work to defeat the evolving threat.

The Chair: That's your time.

Thank you very much.

Mrs. Gallant, you have the floor.

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

In this ever-changing, ever-evolving threat environment, what capabilities should the Royal Canadian Navy be looking to acquire in the future?

VAdm Drew Robertson: Aside from the numbers issue, to be able to deploy where required, it's also important that the ships be ready to deal with the challenges of not just today but of the future as well. Let's take the surface combatants that would be built seven, 10 years from now. They will not be modernized until mid-life, which means sometime around 2040 or 2045. Whatever exists today has to be extrapolated to what the threat will be a decade-plus hence, and that is why the requirements are the way they are. What is required is not simply a replacement of one capability in the outgoing ships with the same one, but something looking to the challenges of the future.

The force that fired the cruise missile against an American destroyer, which Commodore Sing referred to, were the Houthi rebels. Something similar had been done by Hezbollah a decade earlier. If you picture that as a threat from rebels, imagine what state competitors are putting into their platforms. These weapons will be used in their regions and, as has been done in the past, in our waters as well.

If you're looking for precise capabilities that would be required, the only thing that the navy doesn't have that would be contemplated and is common in other navies, including some of the European navies about the same size as ours, would be the ability to conduct precision strikes ashore. In this our navy has a limited capability, with a system it's acquiring. We would be looking, however, to have a greater capability to influence events ashore, mostly in support of Canadian Forces. We are also considering the potential of having a ballistic missile defence. This is not a strategic ballistic missile defence; this is a theatre capability. It's an anti-air problem, effectively, to be used to defend an area where Canadian Forces operating just ashore were attacked by short-range or medium-range ballistic missiles from enemies.

That's another potential, but those cost money. As I alluded to in my opening remarks, there isn't enough money for the replacement of the fleet that exists, so you could put those additional capabilities down as desirable, probably necessary for the effectiveness of the Armed Forces in the long term, but subject to the question of money.

● (1140)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: To what extent should the Royal Canadian Navy be focused on our Arctic waters?

VAdm Drew Robertson: I'll answer that in a relatively simple way. Sailors around the world are going to view the Arctic as open water. As there's more open water, you're going to see more activity from navies. Navies will use the Arctic in the same manner they use any other ocean in the world. In that regard, aside from the Arctic offshore patrol ship, which will be able to establish a presence in Arctic waters, there's going to be a need for enhanced surveillance and communications capability. This kind of capability was already alluded to in your earlier study into the air defence.

The only other capability, not for the submarines we have today but for the replacements I would advocate, would be those having to do with under-ice activities, within the means of the technology of the day. That is going to develop beyond what I could anticipate today, since the decision about that kind of capability would be made a decade hence, but that is what one would want so that others couldn't take refuge under the ice.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: China and Russia are trying to use international sea law to stake territorial claims. Is this any threat to Canada, and what actions, if any, should Canada take to stop these claims?

VAdm Drew Robertson: You've raised a fundamental question about what countries are doing with respect to international law and freedom of navigation. I would start by saying that the freedom of navigation is not a case of great states do what they will. Rather freedom of navigation is a grand compromise, a grand agreement, reached in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which one can think of as the constitution of the oceans under the United Nations.

The compromise was between nation-states trying to enclose the seas—as one can argue China is trying to do in the South China Sea at the moment for their purposes to exclude other forces and then be able to become the regional power—and between other nations that argued that the seas should be open and free. The compromise in UNCLOS was very small territorial seas, a very small band around every country, small economic zones, and then the vast majority of the seas are free for use. So any attempt by other countries to carve off part of the ocean as their own is simply going against the international rules-based organization of which UNCLOS is but one aspect and should be viewed with great concern in Canada since that right to the sea is not only something that is in UNCLOS but we know what happens when it's denied, and that is areas are closed off. Countries then become subject to the pressure of the country that has enclosed an ocean. Trade is denied, and on it goes effectively.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you for that.

I'm going to give the floor to Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to start off by thanking the three of you for your service and for appearing before the committee today and for the very frank and open opinions and discussion on what you think our navy needs.

I hail from a riding on Vancouver Island, which neighbours Mr. Garrison's, who is the regular member of this committee and his riding is home to CFB Esquimalt.

My riding includes the city of Langford. A lot of people there are either directly or indirectly employed at CFB Esquimalt, and I can tell you that when I was out knocking on doors I certainly heard an earful about the state of our navy, a lot of opinions on what we needed, and a lot of those opinions closely mirrored the testimony you've given today.

Admiral Robertson, you did appear last month before the standing Senate committee and I'm guessing that your testimony from that period has not changed much to date. You're still very much of the same opinions.

VAdm Drew Robertson: Yes.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: With respect to all of the questions that have already been asked, I'm curious about the dollar figure that you see between our current budget and what you think needs to be spent in order to make sure that we have a balanced, multi-purpose, and combat-capable maritime force, because in your testimony you did mention that current budget levels are not sustainable for our future needs. I'm just curious as to whether you've arrived at some sort of a dollar figure on that front.

VAdm Drew Robertson: I would defer to the parliamentary budget officer's analysis of the force structure of the Canadian Forces and the dollar cost of maintaining that over time. That study had a variety of caveats in it, which means it's indicative rather than precise. Dave Perry has done similar work. It's about the Canadian Forces as a whole, though, and not about any one part of it.

I think fundamentally the answer is this. As less than 1% of GDP is being spent on a force that was purchased during a time when defence money was much higher, we shouldn't be surprised about the decline over time. How could we be surprised about an imbalance going forward given that the budget was effectively set in 1996? That's the low point, 1996-97, the point at which the international environment was the quietest it's been for our entire lives. It was set then. How could that budget be sufficient to provide the desired outcomes of several governments given the change in the international circumstances? For instance, neither China nor Russia were on the long-term radar for most folks despite the fact that they were then already building the capabilities they would be using a decade later. There's also the fact that Canada is gaining a new ocean. It's hard to imagine that a budget set in 1996 would be sufficient.

Don't get me wrong. I know that the budget has changed with inflation over time. But it's still pretty clear why the parliamentary budget officer and folks like Dave Perry are talking about the figures they're talking about.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you.

Our defence procurement process has made the news on multiple occasions over previous years. There's a variety of opinions out there on how the process needs to be fixed and what's wrong with it in the first place. I'd be curious to hear individual testimony from the three of you on some of the key issues and challenges facing our defence procurement process, specifically in regard to the acquisition of major naval platforms.

● (1150)

VAdm Drew Robertson: I'll start by saying that the fundamental issue is political will, and the understanding by folks like you that the country actually needs military capability, that Canada's contribution internationally matters, and that you'll be held to account in a decade's time for the state of what you have bequeathed your successors. That political will actually requires not only money but also policy.

I'll give you one example: the Canada First defence policy. When it was published I got more traction in Ottawa, because I could roll the document up and hit people with it. It said what the government said it was going to do. An accumulation of government speeches is a start toward policy. A document actually makes a difference in motivating the people around town who need to be motivated. You'll understand that the people who don't have the ships aren't the ones who can do anything about getting the ships. It's really the political direction that motivates this town.

The only other part to the process that's lower is execution. Execution had, for some period of time, suffered from paralysis... well, delay due to risk as people tried to deal with the fact that acquiring warships is inherently the most complex undertaking a country will pursue. There is risk at every stage of designing and building warships, and yet we've done it successfully in the past for decades. There has to be some trade-off between the political, the reputational, the financial, and all of the various risks that people in this town are paid to deal with. If they don't deal with them expeditiously, the operational risk for the country and for the governments to follow rises.

The fact that the navy doesn't have ships is not the problem. The problem is that the government doesn't have maritime security. We need people to make decisions and mitigate risk quickly and get on with reducing the operational risks that will come a decade hence.

The Chair: Gentlemen, very quickly, if you each want to make a comment, we're running out of time on this one.

Cmdre Daniel Sing: Defence procurement is not easy. I don't care which political party you come from and your best desires and intent, it is not easy. It is especially not easy in the Canadian parliamentary system of government. In the end, and Admiral Robertson alluded to it, it is about political will, and it is about political leadership.

As a former military man, I have always been of the opinion that where there is a will, there is a way; if you want something badly, you can get it. I take solace in the apparent recent decision to elevate defence procurement issues to a special or cabinet committee level endeavour. I think that's a very good first step in moving a lot of the procurement issues along.

Part of the problem stems from our typically Canadian desire to want to do things perfectly, and to be guided by reasonable, understandable principles, including value for money. However, I am not sure we collectively share the same understanding of what value for money truly means. We often get into situations and circumstances where in our search for ideal value for money, we are actually wasting money.

The last point I will make is that many other western governments make the necessary difficult decisions and often don't bat an eyelash about upsetting this concept of free, fair, open, industrial competition. If you look at some of the defence procurement activities that people like to hold out as being examples of how we can do things, many of them have been sole sourced.

I'm not saying that's necessarily wrong, but it goes against the underlying desires to want to be open, free, transparent, and to seek the ultimate value for taxpayers' dollars. In these instances, you get push-back that it wasn't free, open, and transparent, but in my opinion, you're getting bang for buck much more quickly.

I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

● (1155)

The Chair: I'm going to have to move on to the next questioner, but perhaps we could circle back to that at the end.

Mr. Spengemann, you have the floor.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for being here, for your service to our nation, and for sharing your expertise. It's much appreciated.

I'd like to start with the dichotomy, if there is one, between domestic and international operations. You made a very compelling argument that, in light of our coastline and the complexity of our threat environment, we need to do more to defend Canada here at home. However, then we have international operations, and many Canadians may see that as something that detracts from our ability to do sovereignty assertion or defence at home.

I'm wondering if you could give us a bit of a flavour of what international naval operations are about, what our allies are thinking about our navy, what they say we should do more of or less of, and highlight the complementarity between international operations and good domestic security and defence.

That's the first sort of category, and then I'm hoping to get to some human resource-related questions.

VAdm Drew Robertson: I'll quickly tackle the home and abroad piece. Let me take Russia as a practical example, because it's doing things that are most noticed by Canadians, although one could also look at what China is doing and make the same kind of case.

Russia fired cruise missiles from the Caspian Sea across Iran and across Iraq into Syria from frigates; and it also fired cruise missiles from the Mediterranean into Syria from submarines. Those capabilities are exactly the kinds of things that were spoken about when people were commenting on submarine- and ship-launched capabilities back in the spring in the context of the air defence of North America.

The time to deter Russia is now, not at some later date, although we want the capabilities to be able to deal with Russian platforms when they do show up off our coast. That is why we've had a ship with NATO forces doing reassurance or deterrence and why we also contributed to a major NATO exercise called Trident Juncture a year ago. I think you would know that the submarine that was on that exercise was turned after the exercise to operational employment. The same thing happened again this year when a submarine was in European waters for exercises in the Baltic. It got turned to operational purposes.

So it all adds up to a series of efforts to show military capability from an alliance nation, driven by the fact that it's the Government of Canada that deploys those forces. Once they turn operational, it's the Government of Canada that makes those decisions, and those are being made in European waters and supporting European allies. So you have both military capability and political will being deployed to European waters, rather than waiting for those platforms to show up off our coasts and deal with them here.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Admiral, briefly, what's the perception among our allies—not just NATO, but maybe a bit more broadly—about the state of the Canadian Navy? What are they telling us that we need to do more of?

VAdm Drew Robertson: I am too dated to give you that which is current. I will merely tell you that when I retired back in 2009, the navy's contributions were highly valued by allies, including the United States Navy, for what we are able to do, the manner in which our navy is able to work seamlessly with their and other NATO navies. That's, of course, the benefit of the alliance.

I'll leave it to the others.

Capt(N) Harry Harsch: To pick up on the admiral's point, certainly my experience with NATO, which again is a bit dated, is that when we send ships to a variety of missions, either NATO or multinational, or whatever, we matter. We do very well. We have first-class ships—world-class ships—and we have world-class crews. However, as I mentioned in my remarks, that only counts when you actually show up. As Jim Boutilier said, if you want to be seen, you need to be seen. So you need to have the mass, and you need to have the capacity at the right level of readiness to be able to actually deploy.

I'll give you some practical examples to answer your first question as to why it's important, or how the away game affects the home game.

One was the campaign against terrorism immediately in the wake of 9/11. It was a long distance away, and in fact, we were part of that. We believed very strongly that it made a difference with respect to the defence of Canada.

More specifically, our recent intervention in counter-piracy off the coast of Somalia is another example where the away game affected the home game. At the time, before the piracy became under control, very large ships were being routinely attacked, routinely captured, and the down-range effect in North America was an immediate spike in the price of fuel simply because of the fact that tankers, to avoid the threat, had to go the long way around and avoid the Suez Canal.

● (1200)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: I only have a minute left. Let me turn, if may, to the second area that I wanted to ask about.

Each of your organizations, the Navy League and the Naval Association, has the mandate of interacting with the Canadian public and educating the Canadian public about our navy. What is your assessment of the general state of awareness of the Canadian public about our navy ? Then what I want to get into is, how can your organizations help to generate recruitment interest in the Canadian Navy? What is your assessment of that state of interest at the moment?

I don't have a lot time, but with the indulgence of the chair, maybe we can get some quick answers on that.

Cmdre Daniel Sing: Thank you.

I would say that unfortunately the general public awareness about the navy is relatively low in general terms. Of course, everyone reads the newspaper headlines, and in the last year and a half to two years, there regrettably has been no lack of senior correspondents writing about the rusting out of the navy and so on and so forth. But the underlying principles about the need for the navy and how the navy contributes to the defence of Canada, the defence of North America, and international peace and security are, generally speaking, not well known by the public.

That said, both of our organizations endeavour on a daily basis to try to improve that. That's one of our principal reasons for being here.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thanks very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move on to five-minute questions now.

Mr. Jean Rioux, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, Canada has three seas. That's important, and I liked one of your previous remarks to the effect that Canada had to be seen to assert its role.

I would really like to talk about the Arctic. We have a significant surveillance role to play, especially since we know that Russia is now much more aggressive. We have a monitoring obligation and have to be able to respond. That's also a waterway that will become more navigable.

What kind of control do we have over the Arctic? It is being said that new Arctic/offshore patrol vessels should be delivered between 2018 and 2024. In the meantime, can we ensure our sovereignty, defence and surveillance?

I was surprised to read in the notes that there have apparently been no ice-breaking vessels since 1950. Is that a significant shortcoming?

Cmdre Daniel Sing: Thank you, Mr. Rioux.

Surveillance of our coasts is provided in all three oceans. Let's not forget that a lot more activities are currently taking place on the Atlantic the Pacific coasts than in the Arctic. Of course, that should change, as there will be as many activities in the Arctic as on the two shores in the future.

The Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Armed Forces are involved in the monitoring of that entire territory. There are certainly technological challenges to overcome to ensure the same level of surveillance as what we are currently providing on the two coasts, but some progress is being made. The RADARSAT system is a very useful tool, among others. The Americans are very interested in that technology that largely contributes to the image they have of what is happening in the north.

The Royal Canadian Navy used to have an ice-breaking vessel and divested itself of that capacity when it transferred it to the Canadian Coast Guard. As you know, Arctic/offshore patrol vessels are not meant to be used as ice breakers. They are rather designed to navigate when necessary through ice that is several years old and up to one metre thick where it is more difficult to navigate.

From the perspective of the Royal Canadian Navy and the Canadian Armed Forces, only large vessels—mostly Russian and sometimes nuclear—have the capacity to venture into the northern ice cap. Once they are in the ice, those vessels advance at a very low speed of two to three knots. When necessary, should those large vessels enter our waters without our permission, it would not be difficult for the Canadian Armed Forces to keep things under control. If the situation got more serious, an F-18 with a bomb would be entirely capable of targeting such a vessel.

I feel that it is important to acquire a patrol vessel. I believe that the vessel's capacities would be adequate for the current situation.

As Vice-Admiral Robertson mentioned, once the ice melts, there will be a lot more people up there, including the Royal Canadian Navy with its vessels that, although they are not designed specifically to navigate through ice, will be able to do so. Exercising our sovereignty in waters where ice is retreating will essentially be the same as the exercise of our sovereignty in the current waters of the Atlantic and the Pacific.

Thank you.

● (1205)

[*English*]

The Chair: That's your time on that one.

We'll move on to Mr. Paul-Hus. You have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Commodore Sing, my question ties in with the answer you just provided.

Let's look at the situation from strategic, operational and tactical standpoints. Last week, my colleague Cheryl Galland and I had an opportunity to spend 24 hours on a mission in a Canadian submarine. We carried out an intervention and procedures by attacking one of our frigates. We also spent two days obtaining information on the various systems. I also saw our future offshore vessels currently being built in the Irving shipyard. I understand that those vessels will not really be armed, that they will rather be used to patrol, to exercise an influence over the territory and to ensure Canada's presence in the Arctic waters.

For naval forces, I think the most formidable weapon is the submarine because it is difficult to detect. In addition, a torpedo will sink anything you want. Should we not be thinking more about increasing our submarine capacity? It's a fact that frigates have Sparrow missiles, but a Canadian frigate is not difficult to destroy, and a foreign aircraft can easily bomb it. However, the submarine is truly a formidable weapon.

From a strategic point of view, for Canada's defence, do you think that we should rather invest in submarines? If so, how many of them?

[*English*]

VAdm Drew Robertson: Indeed, submarines are fundamental to the effectiveness of the Canadian navy and the Canadian Forces, and they're essential for sovereignty. There are are couple of reasons for that. If you've been on board I'm sure they gave you a lecture about all of these aspects.

There's a reason that countries, large and small, throughout the Asia-Pacific region are all investing in significant submarine capability. That's in part because the platforms are exceptionally capable at looking after the defence of territorial waters and because China now owns the second largest submarine fleet in the world. More broadly, it's their stealth and lethality that make them the dominant platform at sea for deterrence, for war fighting, and for independent operations, whether that's for intelligence collection or war fighting by themselves.

When I talk about war fighting, you'll remember that the key to this is that it's the deterrence that come with owning those platforms that hopefully means they don't wind up having to be used. But that capability is there, and the key to that capability under stealth is simply that the mere presence or belief that a submarine is in a region is enough to change the operational thinking of adversaries and make them reconsider their plans.

To get to the bottom line of all of this, it's because—and we've all been commanding officers—there is no platform at sea that so worries or creates fear in an adversary's mind as submarines. Now, as to how many, that's an issue of consideration of what the government wishes to accomplish in the future and at what cost. All I will say is that Australia, with a population of two-thirds of ours, currently owns six submarines and is going to replace them with 12 French and Australian-built French submarines. That gives you an indication of how much Australia values the capability. It's partly because of the neighbourhood they live in.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have another minute.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: You may continue.

[*English*]

Capt(N) Harry Harsch: Can I add that I don't think it's an either-or concept in the sense that frigates are important. The Harry DeWolf class is important. Submarines are important. Replenishment ships are important. The problem we have frequently in the Canadian context is there's just that much money and it's just not enough to spread around. I think an additional investment is required.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: That was the point of my question. Given the limited budget, if we want to ensure an effective defence, I think that the submarine is the most effective weapon we can have in terms of detection and counter-attack. The frigate has its use, of course, but choices have to be made. Today, the Standing Committee on National Defence is trying to get an idea of naval operations. Should Canada give more consideration to the submarine?

[*English*]

VAdm Drew Robertson: We keep coming back to the word "balanced" capability and that's because we look at the combination of all of these platforms and what they can achieve together. We would not advocate not having maritime patrol aircraft, not having helicopters, frigates, submarines, and those capabilities. It is a portfolio approach to risk effectively, and hence balance. It would be as if we were to start playing a game of chess with nothing but knights on the board on our side and the other fellow has.... It's the balance that brings the real capability to the navy.

The Chair: Thank you for that. I'm going to give the floor over to Ms. Romanado.

Welcome back. You have five minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is a delight to be back on the Hill. I've been travelling the last couple of weeks for electoral reform. I was actually in Iqaluit up until about 11 o'clock this morning, so I'm happy to be back.

We've talked a lot about material assets today, which are incredibly important. I myself have two sons serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, so they're constantly telling me what they need, their shopping list.

That being said, I want to talk a bit about our personnel, the most important asset of our Canadian Armed Forces. We understand that we do have a difficult time in terms of recruitment and retention for our Royal Canadian Navy. I'd like to know if you could speak to that, where we are, where we need to be, and your suggestions on how we get there.

● (1215)

Cmdre Daniel Sing: Obviously you have in front of you retired naval officers of a few years back, but we're here representing our respective associations and, unfortunately, while we have anecdotal information about the state of personnel and recruiting in the military and in the navy, we're really not well equipped this morning to speak specifically to those issues. Those would be questions better suited for the navy and the Armed Forces.

Having said all of that, if you wish to recruit and retain highly qualified, highly motivated human resources for any endeavour in life, one key consideration of people for joining and staying with an organization is their sense of purpose, their sense of worth, the sense that their public service and duty is recognized and appreciated. One of the ways by which individuals glean whether or not their service is appreciated is whether they get a sense that the leadership of the organization has a clear vision for the future and backs that vision up with an allocation of resources that is reasonable, but which is steady and doesn't change every four to eight years.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Understood.

Cmdre Daniel Sing: I believe one of the many issues that would cause people who would think to join the military to either not join or to leave is when they sense, because we're taking left turns at Albuquerque too frequently, that the leadership doesn't truly believe that what it is they're calling these people to do is really worthwhile. That's just a personal opinion.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

Would you like to say something?

Capt(N) Harry Harsch: I just wanted to add that my experience with sailors is they like being at sea. They like doing stuff on the ocean. They like going to interesting places. They like having a sense of purpose. In fact, what really astonished me in my career was when we went to the Gulf. We were in a very hot place, a very dangerous place for six months, with very few port visits, but this crew was amazing. I couldn't irritate them. These guys were doing their business, and for sailors to go to sea and do their business is very important for them, for their own sense of self-worth, self-actualization.

Equally, though, there's another piece. In another ship I was in, when you get to the end of the fiscal year, if you don't have a ship that has a program, then guess what happens? You run out of money and the first thing to get clawed back is the fuel budget. So the fuel budget is clawed back, you have a program, and guess what? In January, February, and March you're probably not doing anything simply because of what is an insignificant amount of money, really; but it's significant in the sense that the envelope that it's in is unavailable, and you have to cancel things at the last minute.

Cmdre Daniel Sing: Perhaps I could just add to what Captain Harsch just said. I think it's very important. Within what we believe the nation wishes to contribute of its national treasure towards defence, we can go and get *x* number of planes, trains, and automobiles, we can get *y* number of people and stuff like that; but if, for other reasons, we don't provide sufficient resources to enable the maintenance of the equipment, to take care of the people, and to provide them with the opportunities to practise their craft and their skill, then you'll have nice, shiny ships and people alongside in Esquimalt or Halifax harbour not sailing enough, and people start losing interest.

Thank you.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I want to thank you. Again, thank you for your service to Canada.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Mr. Bezan, you have the floor.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Thank you for your service, gentlemen, and your leadership that you've given during service and after service to the Royal Canadian Navy.

First of all, I appreciate the Bugs Bunny reference. I was a big fan as a kid, too.

You talked about making investments and you talked about military personnel, and I want to follow up on what Ms. Romanado just said. Do you feel that we have enough sailors entering the Royal Canadian Navy right now and where are we at with the reserve force of the navy on both the east and west coasts?

● (1220)

Cmdre Daniel Sing: Being the youngest who is retired, and recognizing that my information is now two years dated and that was not my area of expertise, I would again ask you to ask that of the navy when they come.

Mr. James Bezan: We will, when we get that chance.

Cmdre Daniel Sing: On the issue of naval reserves, the last I heard was that we were having challenges recruiting and retaining naval reservists. We previously had this concept whereby we would man up to 12 maritime coastal defence vessels, six on each coast, with reservists. We've come to the conclusion that we don't have enough people joining the reserve and staying in the reserve to man the numbers of ships we need to be manned, so just before I retired, the navy introduced a mixed crewing concept—or they reintroduced a mixed crewing concept, because we've had this in the past. We have just brought it back.

That is an issue, yes.

Mr. James Bezan: Is there an indication whether that is working?

Cmdre Daniel Sing: I have no recent indications of whether or not.... It is working, in the sense that, with the mixed crewing option —a combination of reservists and regular force—we are now able to send MCDVs or maritime coastal defence vessels to sea. Whether or not that has an impact on changing people's attitudes towards joining and staying in the reserve, I don't know.

Mr. James Bezan: Okay.

The second question I have goes back to the question of submarines. Our Victoria class submarines are old, going through a refit, and going to have only a limited life extension. Admiral Robertson alluded to the fact that Australia is moving up to 12. That was part of the defence white paper they came out with a couple of years ago.

Based upon the coastline that we have and the fact that the Arctic Ocean is under ice for a large portion of the season, do you feel that the best way to patrol the Arctic would be with submarines?

Second, not just from a deterrence standpoint of having submarines, but.... Gentlemen, what's the best way to hunt enemy subs and deter enemy subs? Is it the mixed fleet aspect, or is there any one particular asset that is more important than others?

VAdm Drew Robertson: I'll take the second part first. If they have a hunt in waters off our two coasts, it comes down to a co-operative relationship with our American neighbours and the intelligence that is shared among members of the Five Eyes, a community one small part of which is that kind of intelligence.

Anything that comes to this side of the Atlantic or the Pacific—and we've had both happen in the past—would be a team effort and would involve national sensors—national-level intelligence collection methods, in other words—and national platforms at sea, of the kind the United States Navy has that are focused on acoustics. Then it would involve maritime patrol aircraft and submarines, and potentially the use of surface ships as well, in the absence of or to complement the others.

All would be involved, and not only involved, but.... You can imagine that in certain circumstances for submarines approaching North America, you would want not only to know where the vessel is, but also, if it is a cruise missile firer, to figure out what the plan is to deal with that, which, for the most part, requires being relatively close to be able to deal with it. All of the above get used.

Now, which one would I wish to use first? Maritime patrol aircraft...and then put submarines into the right position to deal with the other submarines. As always, if you can use maritime patrol aircraft alone, they have a certain invulnerability to submarines that's quite attractive.

● (1225)

Mr. James Bezan: Can any of that be done with drone technology, from the standpoint of both subsurface and aerial?

VAdm Drew Robertson: If you look at the capabilities sought for Canadian UAVs, or indeed the ones used by the United States—the Triton UAV that the United States Navy is purchasing—they all carry radar, which can be useful for detecting only periscopes or submarines' raised masts, but they do not have acoustic capabilities, and that's what one really needs at sea. As Commodore Sing indicated, that's how you detect something.

Capt(N) Harry Harsch: Can I add that ASW, anti-submarine warfare, is very much a team sport. First you have to know where to look, and that's where intelligence and maritime patrol aircraft, because they have the speed, are able to assist. They also have the weapon system, but they don't have the persistence. A frigate would have persistence, a submarine would have persistence, and it depends on what kind of weapon you intend to use. Surface ship frigates have speed. Submarines, again, don't, and the more speed a submarine uses, the more vulnerable it becomes and the more quickly it depletes its batteries, in the case of a diesel-electric submarine like Canada has, so it is a team sport.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to Mr. Fisher.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks, gentlemen, for this. The amount of information you have presented to us this morning is incredible.

Last week we heard from Vice-Admiral Lloyd about the Halifax class modernization and its potential, or its possible potential, after the spring of 2018 when the last frigate is delivered.

My question is in regard to possible capacity or capability and readiness to take on jobs for other countries' fleets. If we're recognized for this ability and we're set up for this, do you see this as being something as a potential, some type of bailiwick we should get involved in, servicing and modernizing other fleets?

VAdm Drew Robertson: Could I just clarify? Do you mean things like cooperating with other fleets—

Capt(N) Harry Harsch: Other fleets with technical—

Mr. Darren Fisher: The actual modernization of other fleets, like other fleets in other—

VAdm Drew Robertson: Oh, right.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I'd like your perspectives on this. My question is on your thoughts, and I represent Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and Shearwater and I'm right there by the dockyard, so if we have the capability, if we have the capacity—and I'm not certain that we do—is that something you three feel we should consider taking on in the future? Again, Ms. Romanado talked about personnel and you spoke about sense of purpose and sense of worth and that their service is appreciated. Is this something that we should consider, going out and making our services available to other countries and modernizing their fleets?

VAdm Drew Robertson: When Lockheed Martin won the contract to modernize the Halifax class, they did it with a set of capabilities that they could market internationally. With intent. They did that to make sure that which was used would not be constrained by national American rules, the result of which is a very capable system, as you would have heard from Admiral Lloyd, that can be marketed and has been marketed. Two New Zealand frigates will be modernized with the same capability effectively—

Capt(N) (Ret'd) Harry Harsch: Effectively.

VAdm Drew Robertson: —in the hands of Seaspan on the west coast. That's a great success, and while that's not the navy's doing—that of course is civilian industry and Seaspan's doing—there's no doubt in my mind they will be marketing that capability more broadly. All navies wind up being used as showpieces for their own nation's industrial base, so other countries would want to see how effective that modernization is going to be and the New Zealand ships only have to look at the success achieved in the Halifax class.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Back to sense of purpose, sense of worth, is there any morale issue? Is there any issue with contracting out services at the dockyard in Halifax? I asked the question last week and I got a sense that there was a bit of a best business case for everything. Is there any issue, in your mind, of contracting out services and having private industry working side-by-side with members of the navy?

● (1230)

VAdm Drew Robertson: You mean working not just with members of the navy but alongside public servants who work—

Mr. Darren Fisher: Yes.

VAdm Drew Robertson: —and make our navy effective by the work they do in the dockyards.

Do you want to go ahead?

Capt(N) Harry Harsch: Sure. That, I think, has been standard for a number of years. We have done the refits of our ships in civilian yards. Some refits have been done in-house, particularly on the west coast, but what you might be getting at is what the U.K. went through a number of years ago, where they actually privatized their dockyards. Is that—

Mr. Darren Fisher: We're getting some feedback from constituents who work in the dockyards and such, who are asking those questions. It seems like it's something new to us here. Perhaps it's not.

Capt(N) Harry Harsch: The whole idea of commercial contractors being involved in maintenance of ships is absolutely nothing new. It's something that has gone on for as long as I can remember. The focus on different pieces of kit have changed, for example the Victoria class submarines. Traditionally, the old Oberons were maintained by the Halifax dockyard. Now they're maintained by Babcock in the Victoria yard, which is a significant change. But my personal opinion is it's a positive change with respect to maintaining the submarines.

Mr. Darren Fisher: How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds for a question and an answer.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Okay. Can I ask this really quickly?

As you know, we did the aerial readiness review in June. We talked a lot about a capability gap. Would you suggest that we potentially have a capability gap in the navy?

VAdm Drew Robertson: With respect to the aerial side or...?

Mr. Darren Fisher: No, with respect to the navy side.

VAdm Drew Robertson: We have multiple capability gaps at this point. In fact, the gaps are turning into—

Capt(N) Harry Harsch: Chasms.

VAdm Drew Robertson: Yes, in some cases, with respect to supply ships, as just one example. The fact that we can't put a supply ship to sea to keep frigates and destroyers on station doing the work they need to do at sea is an indication. We can't even get gas.

Both the previous government and this government took steps to get us towards the point where we can have a rental—effectively, a leased ship—for six years for Canada, such that at least on one coast the skills won't perish and there will be an ability to keep ships at sea longer.

Yes, we have multiple capability gaps.

The Chair: Thanks.

Mr. MacGregor, you get a small three-minute question.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to change to the potential acquisition of a large amphibious assault-style ship. I know that's been discussed. The Royal Canadian Navy discussed that in "Leadmark 2050".

Looking at the future, the changing nature of threats, and what the Royal Canadian Navy would potentially be involved in, I want to hear your opinion. Do you believe that this would be an integral part of any future Canadian Navy needs? Or should we be concentrating in other areas? Should we be concentrating more on the surface, on capital ships and submarines? Or do you think an acquisition of amphibious-style ships would also be important?

VAdm Drew Robertson: Simply put, an amphibious ship is quite different from a humanitarian assistance ship, or a humanitarian assistance-peace support-disaster relief kind of ship. A humanitarian assistance ship, while not quite built to warship standards, is still a complex undertaking, and not merely for the ship. It's a national capability that's delivered and that integrates land, sea, and air capabilities to, in effect, deliver to shore in a foreign country. Each piece of that has its own costs, as does bringing it all together into a package and deploying at an operationally relevant level. At a certain level, it's irrelevant because it's too small. At a level that produces operationally relevant capability, it starts to get rather expensive.

In view of what I've outlined in terms of the shortfall in defence capabilities and defence spending, I think that pushes the discussion of an amphibious capability far off into the future. One needs to have the basic capabilities first before one moves beyond that, despite the fact that Australia has procured two such ships from the Spanish shipbuilders to give them capability in their region.

● (1235)

Capt(N) Harry Harsch: I think the other aspect here, though, as the admiral alluded to, is that an amphibious ship means a fundamental change in how the Canadian Armed Forces does its business. It means, in effect, marines. Most countries that operate amphibious ships have marines. There are other countries.... The Danish run the Absalon class that has effectively a lot of air in a warship, and it provides that sort of flexibility that I was talking about in my remarks with respect to options for government in terms of humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, operations such as counter-piracy, and those sorts of things, which aren't part of war-fighting. You can accept that level of risk on a less capable ship.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We'll go to five-minute questions now. I'll give the first one to Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of quick questions.

First, we talked about investments. Of course, NATO has the aspirational target of 2% of GDP. Do you believe that if Canada were able to start making strides toward that aspirational target of 2% of GDP it would provide the money to make the investments into the extra ships that are required for the Royal Canadian Navy?

Second, is there the capacity in the existing shipyards to actually produce those extra ships? That goes above and beyond what's currently in the national shipbuilding strategy.

Cmdre Daniel Sing: The NAC believes that moving towards NATO's aspirational target of 2% would be a good thing for this nation moving forward, no ifs, ands, or buts. If the country were to move in that direction, we do not see why naval requirements and the requirements of other services in the Canadian Armed Forces could not be better satisfied.

With respect to capacity, I think this is an issue that can be worked on. If we see and obtain steady-state, predictable funding into the future—and by future I mean more than 10 years—I don't see any reason why we, as a nation, could not develop a plan to spend that money properly.

VAdm Drew Robertson: Regarding that 2% aspirational target, I would only add that it's useful to have such targets, even if one doesn't see this country actually achieving 2%. What I can tell you is that the bipartisan approach to national defence in this country under eight previous governments—which was to decrease the resources available to defence—is not going to take us to where governments would like to be. Every time the 2% issue is raised to politicians, what they immediately do is misdirect to the success of the Canadian Forces today, which are using the legacy equipment that was purchased during a time when defence spending was indeed higher. Politicians point to the success and say that everything's fine, ignoring the fact that the legacy equipment, as I pointed out, is old. Everything that defends maritime security in this country is more than 20 years of age. I could talk about the Sea Kings, which are in their fifties at this point. Simply put, that average age means that we are headed for problems at the current funding levels.

While it doesn't have to be 2%, staying below 1% of GDP is going to mean a need to fundamentally rethink the defence of Canada, that is to say, Canadian defence policy. If it's going to be 1% of GDP that we're using, or less, then I think one has to start with what matters to Canadians. What matters to them is that Canadian governments always look to the defence of this country. To put it another way, what matters is that Canadians never lose confidence in government's ability to defend this country, and that we never lose the confidence of American leadership in our contribution towards continental defence.

If the starting point for a future defence strategy is a continuation of defence funding of less than 1%, then perhaps the starting point should be how to secure on, above, and below the water on all three ocean approaches. That doesn't mean that's all the Canadian Forces would do in the future, but it certainly means that you'd have a rational starting point from which to re-examine how to deal with much less funding.

Of course, it won't surprise you that the Naval Association and Navy League would then point out that those platforms procured for the defence of North America do the same job 13 miles off our coast that they'll do 13 miles off somebody else's coast. Consequently, they would be available not only for the defence of North America and the defence of Canada, but also for international operations as well.

● (1240)

Capt(N) Harry Harsch: Picking up on what the admiral said, as Canadians we want to matter. We want to matter both at home and abroad. My experience is that we do, when we're there. To throw it back to government, because of the funding level, we're not able to sustain the kind of presence that I think Canadians want us to sustain abroad, whether we're alongside in a port in a diplomatic mission, flying a large Canadian ensign, or whether we're sitting, as the admiral suggested, a little over 12 miles off somebody's coast in something which is a little more significant. We want to matter, and you matter by having the vessels and having the people flying the flag.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

I'm going to give the next question to Mr. McKay.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Strangely enough, I want to follow on with Mr. Bezan's concern, because this is where the rubber hits the road.

Admiral Robertson, I want to go back to your original remarks about the budget. The Conservative Party just released a paper that says that in order to create a stable, predictable, long-term budget for the Canadian Armed Forces, the ultimate goal being meeting NATO standards, it would take a minimum of 2% of GDP. There's not really much to disagree with in their paper.

The problem, as I see it, is that if in fact you are to meet your 2% standard within a decade, that's about a $2-billion or $3-billion increase in the budget on an annual basis. If you say that publicly, then you hear this gagging sound on the part of the Canadian public, and that gagging sound is reflected in their politicians.

I would be interested in your thoughts as to how to get beyond the "we want to matter" rhetoric, "showing up when we show up" sort of thing, and how to convince, if you will, the Canadian public, and therefore the people who will vote on the budget, to get past this stall point? We are in a genteel decline, as we speak, given the current budget parameters, even with the escalator. It's just a glorified way of covering off inflation, military inflation, for the time being.

I would be interested in your thoughts with respect to getting off this dialogue of the deaf.

VAdm Drew Robertson: If my answer is unsatisfactory, I'm sure my two colleagues would love to pile on to what amounts to a political question in reality.

My starting point would be that without a foreign policy review that informs why we're doing things internationally, you have a harder job starting off. This has been a common problem in Canada. It should be relatively straightforward, to look internationally at what's going on. Of course, my focus is on great powers, but there are many other aspects to foreign policy that would have to be included.

It's to look internationally, comment on what's happening, and to start to make the case that Canada has a role to play because it must, not because it would like to. The western democracies have a role to play, if they wish the international rules-based order to be maintained. That's something that has been favourable, not just for the western democracies, but indeed globally for the post-Second World War period.

Back in June, Minister Sajjan went to a conference called the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. He spoke about Canada's enduring interests and strategic outcomes when he was there. I will give you three quick quotes, because they stuck with me. He said:

> Canada is...a Pacific nation....That is why Canada is committed to increasing our engagement in the Asia-Pacific region.
>
> We are dedicated to building upon our past contributions as we adjust to an evolving international dynamic and reinforce a rules-based international order.
>
> We are committed to making a meaningful contribution to preventing conflict and bolstering security.

Those are three great statements, but they are both the argument for, and cannot be accomplished without, a capable Armed Forces, especially in the eyes of folks in the Asia-Pacific region. It is actually demonstrating that those comments have something behind them, both the political will and the military capabilities. Without both, they will not be taken seriously by our partners in the Asia-Pacific region, all of whom recognize that there is a need for those kinds of statements today by countries that believe in the long-term maintenance—

● (1245)

Hon. John McKay: I wouldn't disagree with any of that.

My core question, if you will, is how you convince the people around this table, and the people in the House of Commons, and the public they represent. When the cheque hits the table, they all head for the washroom.

That's what is happening. It has happened for years. Everybody loves the military; they just don't want to pay for it.

VAdm Drew Robertson: Right. It's not so much loving the military, it's loving the effect that can be achieved.

If countries don't wish to play a role in the Asia-Pacific region, one way of not being taken seriously at security dialogues or at international conferences, and also tangentially in issues related to trade, is to not have any capability that's been to the region recently. Of course, we have collectively had a problem—Canada has, that is—with respect to the modernization of Halifax class. There have not been ships to send abroad and so on.

But if I look at the grave risk of straying well beyond my area of expertise, it would be that the distance from Melbourne up to the middle of the East China Sea is about one day shorter than the distance from the East China Sea to Vancouver. So while Australia knows it's an Asia-Pacific nation, somehow Canada doesn't have that central in its mind. That Canada has an interest in what happens there is self-evident to us. So you look at what Australia is doing spending 1.9% of GDP. Why? The common phrasing is because of the neighbourhood Australia lives in. If they're 10 days away from that neighbourhood, we're 11 days away and our trade passes through it and so on.

Hon. John McKay: They put up $32 billion and we put up $20 billion. We've got a third more population.

VAdm Drew Robertson: Indeed.

The Chair: Given the time we have left, I think we can go to three three-minute questions left. I'd like to offer Mr. MacGregor a question if he would like to take it. It may be bad timing, or I can circle back.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'm good to go. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to just revisit the submarine issue because I'm very interested in our acquisition of the Victoria class submarines. When you look at the capabilities that China and Russia—which historically has been very strong in its submarine fleet—are developing, how do you see our Victoria class submarines, which were built in the late 1970s, matching up to that kind of a threat?

● (1250)

VAdm Drew Robertson: As somebody who's had American submarine commanding officers sit in my office—as a commander down on the east coast—and talk to me after they've done an exercise with the Victoria class boats it's easy to make the case that our Victoria class are British-built submarines that feature some aspects that are British technology and many aspects that are American technology, including silencing and a variety of other subsystems in the submarine.

Consequently, when you put the Victoria class against British or American submarines in exercises, you tend to wind up with a draw, or with the skill of the captain perhaps determining some outcome. But they're very closely matched, except that nuclear submarines of course can go from one part of the theatre to another part at 28 knots, whereas a Victoria class takes longer to get from A to B. So they are capable boats by design.

The boats that are being built by all of the countries that build submarines at the moment are all very good products. But certainly with the modernization that's been done to the Victoria class today, there is no hesitation in turning to the government and saying "ready".

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: The Russians have been probing our Arctic borders in a bit of a game of brinkmanship and I've heard it mentioned before that anti-submarine warfare, or at least detecting and catching them, is a team effort. Are you satisfied that our current submarine capability works well going into the future for that particular detection of Russian incursions, or is it still very much letting the Americans with their territory in Alaska take the lead and so on?

VAdm Drew Robertson: It has less to do with geographic positioning and more to do with ice. That is because our current submarines have limited capability.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I think it's about 90 hours.

VAdm Drew Robertson: In fact, I'm not even sure—

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'm just looking it up.

VAdm Drew Robertson: However, when it comes to all the other tasks that submarines take on, you should have no concern about their capability.

The other point I'd make about submarines is simply that it's important to recognize the contribution made to, let's call it the NATO navy, or on the west coast, to the allied navies. If you think of the RIMPAC exercises that unfold every two years off Hawaii, they are a great training opportunity, bringing the like-minded western nations together to practise their skills, and not only practise their skills but also make sure that what they're doing is known to the Chinese and the Russians by inviting the Chinese and the Russians either as observers or indeed, as happened last summer, sending a Chinese warship to participate in those parts of the exercises that were at an appropriate classification level. Why? Because it all contributes to deterrence when they get to come and have a close look at what our forces are capable of doing.

When you think of western navies, I'd like you to think as a practical example that China has 60 submarines, which it does; Russia has 40; and America has about 75. Remember that America's submarines are used globally every day, are demanded by each of the combatant commanders for all the things that they are able to do, including intelligence, surveillance, and special operations; and China and Russia have an advantage, which is that they can concentrate where they wish to be rather than worry about where platforms are around the world.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Before we go to our final quick questions, because we have to wrap up at one o'clock, could I ask for an undertaking to have, Admiral, perhaps you or the other two gentlemen maybe submit in writing your take on the capability gap? That was a question that was asked. We can talk about that a bit more, but would you be agreeable to doing that for us?

● (1255)

VAdm Drew Robertson: Perhaps, yes, but I'd appreciate discussing it briefly after.

The Chair: Yes, absolutely, we can do that after we adjourn.

Mr. Bezan, you have a couple of minutes.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I have a question of privilege that I want to raise, which will probably take up the rest of our time, so I want to thank the witnesses for attending.

I don't think they want to sit through a big debate on parliamentary procedure.

The Chair: Okay, but—

Mr. James Bezan: No. I have the floor. I want to raise a question of privilege.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. James Bezan: I do this with a great deal of regret that I have to raise a question of privilege at committee. I want the committee to work. I want us to find consensus and to be able to work constructively. But there have been a few things that have happened recently that I want to raise as things that I feel are moved by certain individuals to intimidate us as the opposition carrying out our role here.

Page 83 of O'Brien and Bosc says that the "assaulting, threatening, obstructing or intimidating a Member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties" would be considered contempt.

I do want to raise these points, and as you know, as Chair, you can't rule on this, but we can make a decision as a committee on whether or not we report this back to the House.

Just bear with me as I go through the process. I don't want to go back and revisit what was clearly laid out in our report tabled in September, which dealt with the breach of privilege that happened here at committee. That's outlined on page 75 and 76.

I do want to say that the one thing we didn't address after that is that those of us on the Conservative side did go and read the blues of the meeting where the report was finalized, and we can say that we found some of the comments made, by particularly you, Mr. Chair, were not at all glowing in any way, shape, or form. We found things that we felt, as opposition members, were destructive to the overall attitude and tenor that we have here and the demeanour with which we should be conducting ourselves as committee members. But since it was done in camera, we can't discuss in public what was said.

I want to go on to talk about a couple of things. First of all, if you look at the last formal meeting, which was on September 29, you'll see we had the substitute parliamentary secretary Leona Alleslev, who is a parliamentary secretary. I raised the point during that meeting that it is against what the mandate letter to the government House leader says.

This is actually a letter from the Prime Minister, and I realize this hasn't been reflected in the Standing Orders yet, but there is a letter from the Prime Minister to the government House leader that says:

> Strengthening Parliamentary committees so that they can better scrutinize legislation. This includes: ensuring that Parliamentary committees are properly resourced to bring in expert witnesses and are sufficiently staffed to continue to provide reliable, non-partisan research; strengthening the role of Parliamentary committee chairs, including elections by secret ballot; and changing the rules so that ministers and parliamentary secretaries no longer have a vote on committees.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: How is that a question of privilege?

The Chair: You do have to get to a point, James. You have to actually cite a rule, a committee rule, that's been violated, and you just admitted there isn't one. So—

Mr. James Bezan: I believe that I've been intimidated here, and that is a breach of privilege. Let me lay the situation out on the floor. And as you know, we did conduct committee business in camera at the end of the meeting, and again, this particular parliamentary secretary, in the mandate letter to Minister Foote says that—and of course she represents the minister. It says in their mandate letters that we will work with the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, to launch an open and transparent competition to replace the CF-18 fighter aircraft—

The Chair: You need to cite the rule that was broken, James.

● (1300)

Mr. James Bezan: According to page 1050, in chapter 20, when we start doing questions of privilege, we are to "clearly describe the situation", "summarize the facts", "provide the names of the people involved"—I'm providing the names of the people and the action they took, which I felt was intimidation—and state why there is a "breach of privilege". I am doing that. I respectfully asked that my colleagues allow me to put this on the table so that I can clearly show that there is intimidation going on here.

I'll just say that the parliamentary secretary is very closely tied to this committee, and that the mandate letter from the Prime Minister says they should not be participating in committees. When we have a committee that deals with things like national shipbuilding and the replacement of our CF-18s, which are clearly in that minister's mandate letter, it does raise an issue.

There is one final thing that I wish to raise. I realize that as Chair you have the right to speak on behalf of the committee to the media; however, when you tweet—and this was just brought to my attention, though it goes back to September 20—to Lee Berthiaume that you "could have taken JB"—meaning me—"2 task on his other claims 'tyranny' Really? His words don't support that". This, to me, demonstrates that you're trying to intimidate me. You did it publicly, and it's on the record, so that's something we all can see.

All of you who know me realize I'm no shrinking violet. I'm very tough to intimidate. I do believe, though, that this is an attempt to quash the opinions of the opposition members of this committee, and it's being done systematically. I'm not sure where the "sunny ways" are that was talked about a year ago after the election, but I can tell you it's pretty cloudy days over here.

I would move the motion that there is a prima facie case of privilege in trying to intimidate members of the opposition, and that we report this back to the House.

The Chair: Is there any discussion?

An hon. member: It's not discussion. You can't go....

The Chair: I'll suspend for two minutes.

● (1300)

(Pause)

● (1305)

The Chair: The clerk just concurred with my options. Based on what you described, and what we were all here for when the previous...First of all, the parliamentary secretary was here. There is no rule that says she can't be here. She can't be a parliamentary secretary on her particular committee. She's a parliamentary secretary for a different department from the one this committee is considering. There's no rule saying this can't be the case. I don't think that's intimidating, I don't.

With regard to my tweet, I also don't think that's intimidating, James.

You have some options, but I'm not willing to move forward with your claim.

Mr. James Bezan: In that case, I challenge the ruling of the chair. I'd like a recorded vote, please.

The Chair: He's challenged it. The question is whether the chair's decision should be sustained.

We're going to vote to sustain my decision to not call this a breach of privilege.

There's no debate here, so all in favour of—

Mr. James Bezan: I want it recorded, please.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Philippe Grenier-Michaud): I will have to call a recorded vote.

[Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 5; nays 3]

An hon. member: I move to adjourn, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.