HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

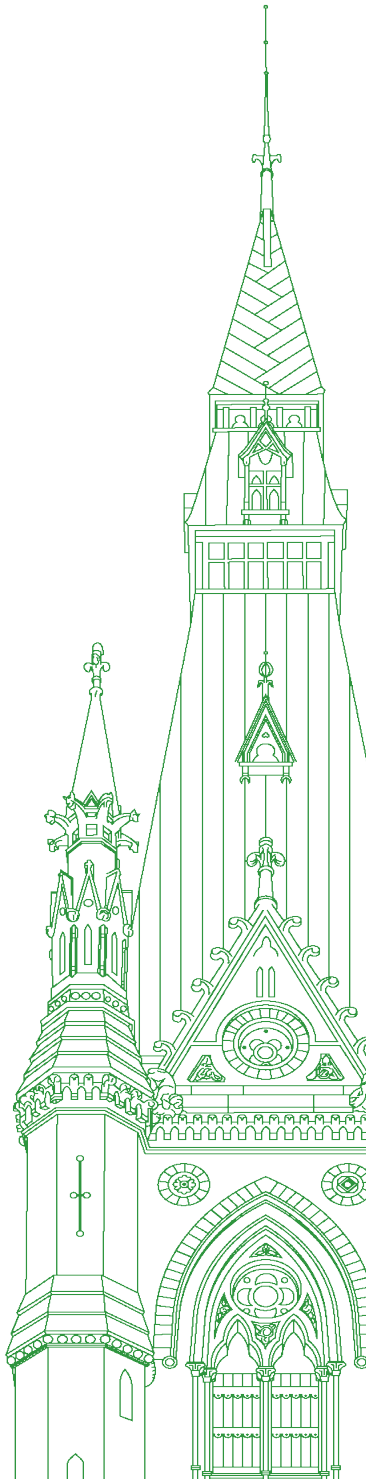
43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on National Defence

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 006

Monday, November 23, 2020



Chair: Mrs. Karen McCrimmon

Standing Committee on National Defence

Monday, November 23, 2020

● (1110)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

[*Translation*]

Good morning, everyone.

[*English*]

Welcome to meeting number six of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Wednesday, October 14, 2020, the committee is meeting today to study the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadian Armed Forces operations.

I would like to now welcome our witnesses. We have Monsieur Christian Leuprecht, professor at the Royal Military College of Canada. We have two representatives from the Canadian Red Cross, Mr. Conrad Sauvé, president and chief executive officer, and Mr. Jean-Philippe Tizi, chief of Canadian operations.

We have a witness from Rome, Italy. Mr. Amir Abdulla, deputy executive director of the United Nations World Food Programme, is here with us for the first hour, if we can get his technical issues ironed out. He will join us through this process.

We have opening statements to begin. Mr. Leuprecht, would you start with your opening statement, please?

[*Translation*]

Dr. Christian Leuprecht (Professor, Department of Political Science, Royal Military College of Canada, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My presentation will be in English, but please feel free to ask your questions in either official language.

[*English*]

This testimony draws in part on a piece I recently co-authored with Peter Kasurak on domestic operations of the Canadian Armed Forces that was published by the Centre for International Governance Innovation.

The pandemic has been consequential for the Canadian Armed Forces. The Canadian Armed Forces did not just have a plan, they were able to execute that plan—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Chair, I would like to raise a point of order.

There's a problem with the interpretation. I'm told that the interpreter can't do a proper job.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Do you want me to stop for a few moments?

[*English*]

The Chair: All right, sure.

Maybe we'll have the witnesses from the Red Cross begin, and then we'll come back to you, Mr. Leuprecht, when they have completed.

Is Mr. Sauvé or Mr. Tizi giving the opening address this morning?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Conrad Sauvé (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Red Cross): Madam Chair, I'll make the opening presentation.

Thank you, because it's a great pleasure for me to address the committee this morning. It is my pleasure to speak to you today on behalf of the more than 5,000 Canadian Red Cross personnel, including 2,000 volunteers, who have and continue to work tirelessly to support the Red Cross's COVID-19 response across the country.

The work we have accomplished with the federal and provincial governments, as well as with First Nations communities, has been a very important moment of partnership for us.

[*English*]

I wish to take this moment to acknowledge the incredible effort of Canadian Armed Forces personnel, who we have had the great privilege to work alongside at multiple points during this past year, including helping repatriate Canadian travellers and augmenting health surge capacity of long-term care. This is part of a long-standing experience for the Red Cross of working alongside the Canadian Armed Forces.

● (1115)

[*Translation*]

To put the Red Cross intervention in context, I would like to give you a little background. There are two important aspects that lead us to intervene within the framework of COVID-19. First, we have developed, with the support of the federal government, a capacity to respond to international health issues. The Canadian Red Cross has three field hospitals and 10 clinics. Over the past 10 years, we have been involved in more than 55 international operations, including the management of cholera and Ebola centres. This is an important part of our expertise, which we have leveraged in these operations.

Therefore, on the one hand, we have worked internationally, and we have expertise in infectious diseases. On the other hand, over the last 10 years, we have increased our interventions in Canada in support of municipalities and provinces. On a larger scale, we have responded to national emergencies, from forest fires to floods to Fort McMurray, among others. We are present across the country and have responded in both capacities.

[*English*]

Madam Chair, I'm placing this in context because this was the capacity we were going into, and I might say as well that the Canadian Red Cross trains over one million Canadians every year in first aid response. These were the capacities that we brought in.

Early on, the Public Health Agency and the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development called on us to support the repatriation of Canadians at CFB Trenton. The CAF were quite involved. We worked with them on the bases to provide support. We also deployed a mobile health clinic in that situation, and we deployed personnel to support the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development in Japan with the Canadians who were hospitalized there and who needed some social support.

In the months following, we brought the whole capacity of the Red Cross to bear here in our largest domestic response in our history.

I'm going to give you some of the highlights of this, and of course, we can exchange more in questions.

We pursued the work that we did at CFB Trenton in different airports around the country, and we supported more than 3,000 Canadians who were isolated. This includes five active sites.

We set up a virtual operations support centre for first nations, thanks to the support of the federal government here, and we supported over 244 indigenous communities with health and emergency guidance. We did this in English, French and five indigenous dialects.

In Toronto, we made more than 40,000 food deliveries to isolated seniors.

One of the most important parts of the operation, of course, was in epidemic control training. We helped in Quebec in over 157 long-term care facilities, working with the Quebec government in deploying some experts in epidemic control. We'll come back a lot to that aspect because it was one of the more important parts of the work in supporting institutions and stabilizing the situation in terms of the infection in the institutions.

We also trained over 10,000 of Quebec's provincial personnel in epidemic control, and provided support and training to over 1,000 members of the CAF who were deployed in the facilities.

Following this, we were asked to provide direct assistance to help the CAF transition out of of the long-term care centres in Quebec, which we did. We recruited and trained over 1,000 personnel in six weeks and deployed in 51 long-term care facilities. We've maintained capacity there, and we're still in 12 sites.

Currently, we're working in one site in Ontario, five in Manitoba, as well as in Nunavut, so we've managed to support the transition out in terms of the CAF while maintaining our capacity there.

In terms of the lessons learned in this operation, again, the expertise we developed internationally—in managing cholera and ebola treatment centres—was critical here and in understanding how we brought practical, tangible support to institutions that were in crisis by deploying our epidemic control experts and working alongside the personnel in the institutions to stabilize the situation and prevent the propagation of the infection within the institutions. That's been very critical in our operations.

The second part of the Red Cross' capacity is its ability to surge; the recruitment of 1,000 additional personnel in six weeks is testimony to that. I have to say that we've done that thanks to the availability of many Canadians who were temporarily out of work and who were very competent in the HR and service areas, so we managed to build that.

The other part, in terms of all these lessons learned, is the importance of collaboration and real-time sharing of information. Again, we really appreciate the support that the CAF gave to us in the transition from their work in long-term care settings to our presence there with regard to the profiles that they deployed that helped with both the recruitment and training we did.

In closing, Madam Chair, we are of [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] capacity, and we are working again with the Public Health Agency, with Public Safety and with provinces. We are still present and growing that capacity to support in this time of need. We also have an eye on next spring with regard to making sure that we are building capacity to respond to other events, be they fires or floods. I think that we have been quite fortunate in all of this challenging time to not have faced a major domestic emergency as we have faced in the past.

All of this speaks to the need to heighten our capacity.

● (1120)

[*Translation*]

Madam Chair, this concludes my presentation.

We are now ready to answer your questions.

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

[*English*]

Professor Leuprecht, can we try you again?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Let me try to do this all in English. Does that work for the interpreter?

The Chair: She is willing to try. Please speak slowly and clearly.

Over to you, professor.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Under Operation LENTUS, the Canadian Armed Forces' umbrella for domestic operations, the CAF executed Operation Laser, the CAF's response to the worldwide pandemic. The most important takeaway is one that has not been widely observed or reported. The greatest asset the CAF consistently provide in support of domestic ops is operational capacity, that is, the capacity to plan and execute, especially supply chains; logistics officers who know where to find stuff; the capacity to get it from here to there; and the managerial capacity to execute, if need be, without having to rely on other partners or equipment.

Most other departments consist only of strategic—that is to say policy—and tactical components, service delivery. The large, trained and experienced operational capacity that DND brings to bear to connect the strategic and tactical components and the necessary capacity not to have to rely on others to execute make the CAF unique in Canada.

That exceptional capacity enables the CAF to respond to critical demand, supporting the Public Health Agency of Canada with warehouse inventory to ascertain how much PPE there is, where it is, and optimize its distribution by flying PPE around the country to ensure no one runs out; or with going into 54 long-term care homes.

However, that capacity is also a moral hazard and it comes at a cost to the CAF, its members and the taxpayers. To assure domestic mission success for a diversity of short-fuse requests, the CAF have to maintain an ongoing level of readiness with a highly trained, well-educated roster of both specialized capacity and generalists, and the equipment to support such operations. As for the pandemic, since the CAF medical system supports its own members, it had to strip its own medical system to backstop external demand from select provinces. Should the CAF now expand their medical capacity? With no new resources, such questions raise the prospect of painful internal tradeoffs.

Over the past decade, Canada has become more reliant on the CAF to respond to domestic emergencies that are growing in frequency. The chief of the defence staff himself has testified before this committee that it's now almost routine, saying, “We have, I think, [for] the last three years, deployed to support provinces in firefighting and managing floods. It's...becoming a routine occurrence, which it had not been in the past.”

Commentators close to the military fend off an increase in the domestic deployment of the armed services. In December 2019, the commander of the Canadian Army cautioned, “...if this becomes of a larger scale, more frequent basis, it will start to affect our readiness.” CAF leaders wanted to see the armed forces' combat role preserved. The CAF have vehemently resisted anything other than a combat role since the 1950s.

As domestic operations become more frequent, what are the real costs and benefits to the CAF? First, I'd like to make the point that assigning domestic operations exclusively to the reserves, for example, would elicit an extremely negative response from the reserves because they have campaigned consistently for a mobilization role within the combat arms. Operation Laser, the CAF's response to the pandemic, reinforces the trend towards dependency by provinces and the federal government on the CAF. It was highly asymmetric. More than 1,700 troops were deployed for over two months across two provinces and another 22,000 put on standby. These 1,700 troops were doing non-traditional, non-military tasks. These are not normal Operation LENTUS-related tasks, such as forest fires or floods; they are dangerous tasks that require logistics and engineering support. But here, an armoured reconnaissance regiment was taking care of the elderly and doing social welfare calls.

These are not traditional military roles. Is this what the military should be doing? Should the CAF be backstopping abject provincial failure? Is this deployment sound policy?

Every member of the CAF deployed in Operation LENTUS is missing on force generation, training, recruitment and support to operations.

● (1125)

The CAF's initial reports on Operation Laser show an overwhelming need to address relatively straightforward care management weaknesses that better inspection and more aggressive remedial action by provinces could have averted. Indeed, better systems elsewhere explain why the CAF had to backstop only 54 long-term homes rather than the 400 there are across Ontario and Quebec. There were thousands of willing volunteers, yet we called in the CAF.

The Emergencies Act sets out the overall management structure for the federal response. The provinces have primary responsibility, and any federal government backup is to be coordinated through the Minister of Public Safety who, under the act, is responsible for coordinating the federal emergency response plan. The military is supposed to be called upon only when demand exceeds provincial capacity. Yet provinces have come to view the CAF as their first resort, rather than their last. In three recent cases, the provinces drafted and gained approval of requests for assistance before their own resources were exhausted. Newfoundland has entirely disbanded its emergency measures organization, further increasing its dependency on the federal government. Should the armed services have to deploy overseas in a crisis, CAF resources might well be unavailable for domestic operations. Even now, we got lucky. Imagine a call-up for the CAF for forest fires or floods alongside the pandemic and how quickly that might have overwhelmed resources. Therefore, just because they are capable, the CAF are not necessarily the optimal provider of emergency assistance. Much of the requirement appears to be for general labour for which the armed services are a very expensive source. Three inferences follow:

First, the trend of requests for assistance being made by the provinces and approved by the federal government before provincial resources have been exhausted is disconcerting. But this is ultimately a political problem, not a policy one.

Second, the Royal Canadian Air Force should continue to be the go-to source for aviation assets to support domestic operations. A separate fleet of federal government aircraft on standby would be inefficient and costly. Who would operate such a fleet? Only Transport Canada has a separate fleet of fixed-wing and rotary aviation. Chinooks and Griffons are earmarked for LENTUS-related tasks, but that is not their primary function within the CAF. Every regional joint task force has an immediate response unit to move large-scale on 24- to 48-hours' notice. No other organization in the country has that capacity.

Third, the expectation and requirement for the armed services to become involved in overwhelming disasters, such as the 1997 Red River floods and the 1998 ice storm, is unequivocal.

The CAF are a force of last resort. It is inappropriate to use the CAF to displace civilian capacity and labour. If there is a safety or security issue, yes, the CAF should go. But requests for provisions of service should be filled by civilian contractors or the Red Cross. Organizations other than the CAF have tents, sandbags and capacity for long-term care facilities.

The CAF have a well-defined responsibility for domestic operations. “Strong, Secure, Engaged” identifies disaster assistance as one of the eight core missions of the CAF. On the one hand, demand for CAF's assistance with domestic operations is highly likely to persist and to increase. On the other hand, the analysis raises three problems to be addressed.

Number one is how to address the moral hazard created by the federal government backstopping provinces that underinvest in emergency response capabilities and then call prematurely for federal assistance.

Number two is levelling asymmetries associated with implementing the federal emergency response plan. That requires more and better staffing for emergency response within other areas of the federal government, which is a habitual problem.

Number three is how to surge general or semi-skilled labour in an emergency. There are four models Canada could follow.

First is an alternative civilian organization. However, without a dedicated day job to occupy most of its idle time, an agency such as the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency turns out to be quite inefficient, large, bureaucratic, expensive and not very agile.

● (1130)

Second, the federal government could mobilize volunteer and skilled labour, but this raises a host of legal issues.

Third, in anticipation of potential scarcity in the CAF support for domestic operations in the event of large or urgent international defence commitments, the federal government could incentivize modest emergency services organizations that are similar to what we have in Australia and Germany with real operational capacity.

Fourth and finally, the best option may be for the federal government to reprioritize along with a slight formal expansion of the CAF to support their domestic role, and create a combined capability of about 2,000 regular and reserve soldiers to focus on improving infrastructure in remote first nations communities. This combined force would spend most of the year liaising, planning and preparing to deploy to the community in the summer, which could be postponed or rescheduled if they were called out, for instance, to a flood, a wildfire, a pandemic, or whatever it might be.

Such a dedicated domestic role has precedents in the 1920s, 1930s and post-war period. The Royal Canadian Air Force was tasked with mapping and charting Canada. During this process, the RCAF generated skills and planes for bush pilots. Only twice since the Second World War has the CAF reprioritized for major combat: the Korean War and the war in Afghanistan. These can thus be made to reverse the logic from seeing domestic operations as disrupting normal CAF planning activities to actual combat tasking being a plausible but an unlikely disruptor.

Finally, there are some people who think that CAF need a new service in addition to regular and reserved forces, a quasi third service. This is not recommendable. It would raise a myriad of legal and institutional hurdles.

There are two takeaways. First, the CAF need to rethink their posture. For decades they have prioritized expeditionary combat, but the CAF should reverse the logic and prioritize domestic operations. This would also have the advantage that it would make CAF spending more palatable to Canadians.

Second, the CAF must prepare for a future where mission success is not contingent on help from allies. Allied assets may well be tied up elsewhere or have other priorities, but on domestic operations especially allies will expect the CAF to pull their own weight. For Canada the pandemic is thus an object lesson in military autarky. It turns out that the organization has much to learn and relearn.

● (1135)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor.

Mr. Abdulla.

Mr. Amir Abdulla (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations World Food Programme): Madam Chair, honourable members and other witness guests, I am here today to share the experience that the World Food Programme had with the Canadian Armed Forces this summer as we worked to respond to the global response on the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are very grateful at WFP for the Canadian government's interest in how we're working to respond to COVID-19 in various ways. In fact, our executive director, David Beasley, spoke with your foreign affairs and international development committee last Thursday about our humanitarian work, so those of you on the committee will have heard him.

For those of you who are not familiar with WFP, we are the world's largest humanitarian organization fighting global hunger. On any day, we're feeding around 100 million people in over 80 countries. We also are the United Nations lead for logistics and emergency telecommunications.

On any given day, we are coordinating the movement of an average of 5,600 trucks, 50 ocean-going ships, 92 aircraft, and a network of 650 warehouses and six large humanitarian response depots. All of these work to deliver assistance to people living in some of the most inaccessible parts of the world.

We can only do that thanks to the strong support we get from the people and the Government of Canada, among others. Your partnership and collaboration have been critically important to WFP, and now more than ever before, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only does the world face an unprecedented health crisis, but we're also potentially confronting a looming hunger pandemic.

I know this sounds shocking, but if you look at some of the key numbers, you'll understand it. Every night, 690 million people already go to bed hungry. They are chronically food insecure. Another 135 million people are marching toward starvation. These are people who face severe food insecurity, primarily due to conflict and climate change. However, now because of the economic impact of COVID-19, a further 130 million people could also be pushed into starvation. The year 2021 remains to be immensely challenging.

The pandemic threatens the hard-won development and peacebuilding gains that have been achieved over decades. Without immediate, coordinated, international support, we will see increased civil unrest, rising migration and worsening conflicts.

I'm really here to pay tribute and thanks to the leadership that Canada has shown in calling for a global response to the virus. More specifically, earlier this year, WFP started an operation to provide common services and support to the humanitarian and health community as they responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this operation, WFP provided transport, storage and dispatch of partner cargo—mostly health supplies—to countries that required urgent medical equipment and other supplies to fight the pandemic.

We supported 389 different organizations with more than 1,400 passenger flights, transporting over 25,000 passengers to 68 destinations. We carried 85,000 cubic metres of cargo to 171 countries. WFP is proud of what we managed to achieve as the backbone of the logistics of the global humanitarian response.

Obviously, we could not do that on our own. At the time that we started all of this, we did not have sufficient air assets to respond to the overwhelming and increasing global demands for cargo transport, and the commercial aviation sector, as we all know, was struggling to cope.

● (1140)

As such, the WFP had to find another way to support its partners amidst the pandemic. That was primarily the use of military and civil defence assets in humanitarian operations, which is based on the principle of last resort. This takes place when three conditions are met: one, specific capability or asset requirement cannot be met with available civilian assets; two, foreign military and civil defence assets would help to meet that requirement and provide unique advantages in terms of capacity, availability and timeliness; and, three, the foreign military and civil defence assets would complement rather than replace civilian capacities.

Once these last-resort means were identified, the United Nations sent a request to member states asking for military and civil defence assets to be used for this operation.

I am pleased to say that Canada was among those member states that responded to the request, offering the support of the Royal Canadian Air Force. A CC-177 Globemaster and a flight crew of more than 30 people were deployed to the WFP hub in Panama in what we called Operation Globe.

For two weeks, the Royal Canadian Air Force team worked nonstop alongside the WFP team to organize a series of rotations to move health cargo from Panama to Guatemala, Honduras, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

During those two weeks, our teams worked side by side and around the clock, overcoming last-minute changes, which required an impressive amount of flexibility and co-operation from everyone involved.

This was no small task. It was the first time for many staff in both teams to work on such an operation. The learning curve was steep, but thanks to the tireless work of those on the ground, the operation was deemed a success, showing that timely action helps prevent rapid escalation of need and conflict.

Madam Chair, honourable members and guests, as the dynamics of the world continue to change, disasters continue to strike, and operating space is becoming even more crowded. It is in these spaces that understanding of the other is crucial. It is what allows us to coexist and fulfill our expected mandates and, in some cases such as this operation, even to co-operate and work together toward a common goal.

On behalf of WFP and the global humanitarian community, thank you to all of those who facilitated Operation Globe, but a special thanks to the Royal Canadian Air Force team that deployed to Panama and worked so hard alongside the WFP team. I really hope that those involved walked away from the experience with a greater understanding of each other.

In the long run, we know that investments in food security and the resilience of communities contribute to more stable and prosperous societies. The 2020 Nobel Peace Prize that we were recently awarded is a recognition of that important and crucial link between conflict and hunger and the critical role that food assistance can play in supporting the first step toward peace and stability. Now it's time for us all to stand together, to work together and stand by the world's poorest people, very often women and children, who are right at the front of that.

I thank you and hope that I can answer any questions you may have.

Madam Chair, thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak with you today.

● (1145)

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

We will start now with Mr. Dowdall, please.

Mr. Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Good morning, Madam Chair.

First and foremost, I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. I certainly enjoyed the comments of each of the witnesses today. My first questions will be for Professor Leuprecht.

I really enjoyed your presentation. There were a lot of eye-opening comments and certainly some food for thought on how we move forward.

We've heard about how Canada's international commitments at this time have been scaled back because of the COVID pandemic, whether it was for safety purposes or to assist in the long-term care homes. We have also heard about Russia and China increasing military exercises at the same time, when many of our troops are stuck here or in their barracks.

I'd like to ask you, Professor, in your opinion, how has this pandemic hurt Canada's readiness now to respond internationally?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: The 22,000 troops who were on standby to support Operation LENTUS, and specifically Operation Laser, is about one quarter of the entire deployable force, once you factor out people who are on medical leave or otherwise constrained.

Inherently, that is a very significant commitment. It is also part of the reason why the Canadian Armed Forces drew down some of their international commitments, precisely so that the members and the assets could be available if called upon to support domestic operations.

The question going forward is the trade-off that I tried to raise in my presentation between those domestic deployments and inherently, those assets not being available, as you point out, either for international operations, or possibly a worst-case scenario where we have critical, urgent international operations. It may coincide with a high demand for domestic operations, or multiple demands for domestic operations, such as a pandemic combined with floods or firefighting.

The fact that the Canadian Armed Forces had to essentially cannibalize their own medical services in order to backstop the issues raised by provincial policy—what I would call provincial failure—raises some very difficult questions for the Canadian Armed Forces, because it now means what capacity...If you had told someone in the Canadian Armed Forces two years ago that they would be going into long-term care homes, somebody would have had you committed to an institution. It would have been literally inconceivable, but of course, the Canadian Armed Forces have to be there to ensure mission success for the Government of Canada.

If you have constant resources, now you have very difficult conversations about what sort of backstop capacities the Canadian Armed Forces need to build for possible future domestic operations. God knows what other types of policy failures by provincial governments in terms of critical infrastructure we may be facing, for instance. That means that those are then investments the Canadian Armed Forces cannot make in international operations, or in continental defence for that matter.

● (1150)

Mr. Terry Dowdall: I certainly agree, there seems to be a lack of emergency preparedness in management that needs to be worked on with the provinces, municipalities, counties, whatever it may be, at this time.

My next question is for Mr. Sauvé from the Red Cross. I had the opportunity to see it in action. We had a state of emergency when I was mayor before, and the Red Cross had to come in when we had a tornado, so I want to thank you for your service, and express how important you are to local communities.

Is it time we have a different type of standing domestic relief force? Would the Red Cross be able to handle that type of responsibility?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: In the response to long-term care, with appropriate resources, we replaced the CAF operations. In Canada, we need to look at an increase of our standing capacity to surge up in these situations.

To answer your question, absolutely, the Red Cross can play a more important role. We've been growing this capacity, because of the natural disasters we've been facing, and now the pandemic has added another layer.

As I said in my introduction we're well equipped both on the pandemic side in terms of our experience internationally, and on the surge side domestically.

One aspect we need to bring in is the success we brought in terms of replacing CAF in the long-term care facilities when we were asked to do so, and ramp up, which is more a civilian capacity.

So, the answer is yes, the Red Cross can play an increased role in preparedness and response.

Mr. Terry Dowdall: We know you work beside DND. Could you highlight some of the things that could be improved upon in those circumstances?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: I think we have had a very strong relationship with DND through time, every time there's something very important. Really, the main thing is looking at where we bring assets and where they bring assets. Again, I think it's been highlighted that the logistical capacity to lift, in terms of the armed forces, is the main thing. That's one of the most important things, planning and logistics.

What we bring is the capacity to work in a civilian context. Of course, we work with civilians. We work with volunteers. We ramp up local capacity. When we look at the future of preparedness, we know, having been involved at the municipal level, that the response needs to start, in terms of the capacity, at the municipal level and then build up. Municipalities are the first to respond. Then as capacities are overwhelmed, it's provincial, and then we need to work together if it's larger than that. We need to put that agility into all aspects.

Benefiting from the best of both in terms of capacity—I think that's how we have worked in the past.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Spengemann, it's over to you.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Sauvé, it's a pleasure to see you again this morning.

Could you tell us more about the link between food security and humanitarian crises more broadly, and global or regional security in the Middle East or in North Africa, for example?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: Could you please repeat the question?

● (1155)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: What's the link between food security and humanitarian crises, and global or regional security?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: At the moment, we can't dissociate climate issues from food crises and conflicts. In the current context, they are interrelated.

For the Red Cross, the UN World Food Programme is crucial. Strengthening the local capacity of organizations and the Red Cross on the ground and a better global response are essential to address these major and growing problems.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you very much, Mr. Sauvé.

[*English*]

ASG Abdulla, it's great to have you with us. Thank you very much for your service, and congratulations on the award of the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize to the WFP team.

We had a chance to congratulate David Beasley last week. I just want to repeat my congratulations to you.

Sir, you've served as vice-chair of the UN Sustainable Development Group. You had particular attention on the sustainable development goals for 2030.

You can look at cases like those of Yemen, Syria, Lybia, Afghanistan and Iraq, cases in which both the United Nations and, in some respects, also Canada have been active on political and peace-building initiatives. Then you throw COVID-19 into the mix. You spoke about the link between conflict and hunger being exacerbated by COVID-19. I'm wondering if you could take some time just to elaborate on what those vectors are and how we could overcome them.

Mr. Amir Abdulla: Thank you very much for your repeated kind words on the award, which we see as a strong recognition of multilateralism as well. We see not only how multilateralism is something for WFP but also how multilateral responses can really help improve the situation.

On your specific question, for me there are two parts to that.

First of all, the link between conflict and hunger is well recognized in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2417, in which they are inextricably linked. In countries such as those you just mentioned, we see this play out every day.

Whether it is hunger driving conflict or conflict driving hunger, it's a vicious cycle. Then when you add climate to that, you end up with climate driving conflict driving hunger. That cycle comes up.

When you add the third C, COVID, then you have COVID in a time of conflict and climate. Then that circle and cycle become so vicious that it just tries to get.... So what we need to do is to create virtuous cycles, to sort of take things back the other way.

In a sense those virtuous cycles also take place through a series of Cs. They take place through collaboration—by all of us working together—and coordination—so that collaboration is best done in a manner such that you don't get overlaps and you reduce the gaps. For a voluntary funded organization, the third C, which is contributions, ends up becoming important. Without financial contributions, we can't keep that cycle going.

I think the SDGs in agenda 2030 and the SDGs for COVID brought into sharp focus how much things are interlinked. You can start with one, poverty; two, hunger; three, health; four, education; five, gender—which is hugely important; six, water, and carry on up to 17, going past 16 in conflict, and they are interlinked. COVID has brought that into sharp focus. If we don't solve one, we won't solve all of them.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: In the minute I have remaining, if you look at fragile states and at the provision of essential goods and services by non-state elements, some of which radicalize and some of which are politicizing these functions.... You're speaking to the defence committee. From a security perspective, do you have any worries about exacerbated conflicts along those very precise lines where failed states basically do not have the capacity to provide either nutrition or health services and undesirable elements will take over that role?

Mr. Amir Abdulla: I think you have touched on what is a fundamental threat or weakness. There are some areas of failed states where there are nefarious actors who will move into that gap. It is those gaps where organizations such as WFP, working with very neutral donors donors such as yourselves—and, if I may add, even at the appropriate times.... Notwithstanding, the draw that might seem to have on domestic...I would say that the amount of equipment or number of troops or personnel that would be deployed for an operation such as Operation Globe is very small, but the returns on impact on what people see is very high.

They see something. They don't have to join those nefarious elements. They will get their assistance from people who mean the right thing.

● (1200)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you very much, sir. It's been very helpful.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses who made remarks. They were all equally interesting.

My first question is for Mr. Leuprecht.

I carefully read your article entitled “Defining a role for the Canadian Armed Forces and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief” in the August 3rd edition of the *Hill Times*—I have it here. In that article, you say that there is a problem with the federal government having to provide assistance to the provinces, whose health systems are underfunded.

I would like to hear from you about the federal responsibility for this underfunding. The federal government's share of funding for the health care system is getting smaller and smaller. The impact of this underfunding is particularly acute in times of pandemic. In addition to absorbing the inflationary costs of health care, the provinces must compensate for federal underfunding.

At first, the legislation had federal health transfers at 50%, but now they are 22%. I'd like to hear from you on this.

[*English*]

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Because of the way the system is set up, I will reply in English. I have been instructed to stick with the one language, so I apologize. I could reply in French if we had the different system.

In my view, you heard the Premier of Quebec asking the Canadian Armed Forces in the spring to stay through the month of September in long-term care homes. It was thanks to the Red Cross, which provided the backfill capacity, that the Canadian Armed Forces were able to go from one home to the next and turn it from red to green.

I think this co-operation with the Red Cross demonstrated that the premier was expecting things that were perhaps not appropriate to ask of federal military assets. It also worries me, in terms of civil-military relations, if we expand the role of the military.

The federal government needs to play a much more aggressive role in working with provinces on prevention and in making sure that federal transfers should not necessarily be tied to specific expenditures. I think we have a significant gap that the pandemic, the floods and the wildfires exposed between a coordinated investment in critical infrastructure. I think the long-term care issue demonstrated that we perhaps also need to change our understanding of critical infrastructure. Once a premier calls in the military, then whatever has failed effectively becomes a piece of critical infrastructure.

I think we need to separate those two debates. Fiscal equalization is a political problem that the provinces and the federal government need to sort out. Then there is an operational issue of immediate tactical and operational response, where a failure to coordinate effectively between the federal and the provincial governments on medium-term strategic planing resulted in this particular deployment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I want to be clear, and correct me if I'm wrong, Mr. Leuprecht. The Prime Minister of Canada has put military personnel on standby to assist the provinces.

Am I correct in concluding that the federal government offered the military assistance first, even though it didn't have long-term care facilities in mind?

● (1205)

[*English*]

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: The military will carry out whatever it is asked to do by the political authority. The question is what the federal government can do so that provinces do not inadvertently place burdens on the federal government and operational demands on the military that are best handled within provincial jurisdiction with some strategic foresight and some medium-term planning.

I think there's more work to be done between the federal and provincial governments on that medium-term planning to anticipate these challenges and avert them in critical infrastructure in the long-term care, but there's also more to be done on the part of the federal government itself when it comes to emergency response, when it comes to, for instance, the logistical capacity within government departments.

There are many lessons to be learned here, but I would caution against tying fiscal health transfers to immediate operational and tactical failures on the ground that are really a function of provincial management and auditing of long-term care homes, rather than a function of how many dollars the federal and provincial governments agree is appropriate to be transferred and, of course, under what conditions, that is to say whether unconditional or conditional transfers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Logically, there should be no conditions, since health is a provincial jurisdiction. If the federal government doesn't provide its fair share of health care funding, we end up in a situation like the one we're in today.

Many say that Quebec was in trouble. It had exhausted all its resources when it asked for help from the Canadian Armed Forces.

Isn't that your opinion too?

[*English*]

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: As you know there are 33, I believe, transfers, most of which are unconditional, some of them conditional. Unconditional means the province makes a decision on how it spends those funds. We can see by virtue of the fact that the Canadian Armed Forces were called into long-term care homes in two provinces but not in the other eight provinces or three territories, that different provinces made different decisions in regard not just to the allocation of the funds available to them, but to the management and the auditing with regard to, for instance, long-term care.

We can learn from laboratories of experimentation what went right in different provinces and what could have been done better in other provinces, and so let's get together and try to make sure that we understand tactically and operationally what failed here rather than trying to turn this into a debate about how much additional dollars the federal government may or may not need to transfer. Ultimately, it is a provincial choice how the province spends unconditional transfers.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have Mr. Garrison, please.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): I'd like to thank all the witnesses for their valuable testimony here in committee today. I want to join my colleagues in thanking the World Food Programme for all their work around the world and congratulate them on their receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize.

The testimony we've had this morning, which clearly links hunger with conflict, climate crisis and COVID, is very useful.

My question to Mr. Abdulla, first and foremost, is you talked about the third C of responding in a virtuous cycle rather than the other cycle, and that being contributions. I'm not asking you to comment on the contributions of any individual nation at this point, but has there been a special appeal for funds and what has been the general response to that appeal, if there's been one?

Mr. Amir Abdulla: When the global COVID response began, again, using one of the virtuous Cs, there was a lot of coordination with OCHA, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, working very closely with the WHO. A global humanitarian response plan with a corresponding appeal was put out. Quite honestly, across the globe donors responded very generously to that.

WFP had two parts to that appeal. There was the appeal for common services and the logistics we would do on behalf of the system, such as the contribution Canada made, not only a financial contribution but also the in-kind support of the Royal Canadian Air Force. Then there was another part of the appeal, which was about the increased food security crisis. At the time of COVID, we already had quite significant needs. For the worst-affected countries, we estimated that up until the first quarter of next year, because that's the sort of long-term lead you need to get food lines going, it was close to $5 billion USD. The response against that was phenomenal, with more than 50% or 60% funded. I do have to point out that a lot of that $5 billion USD was not increased need. A lot of it was the need we have in South Sudan, Yemen and countries like that.

We will always have gaps, but we acknowledge within the World Food Programme that donors are very generous towards food crises and food security. They recognize it. It's very visible, and contributions are forthcoming. We appreciate that very much. We're often asked what the face of hunger really is. It's a hungry woman who is going without to feed her hungry child. That's what we see constantly. For us, that's why we have to advocate as we do.

We are hoping to get the virtuous cycle to a point where we can actually start to reduce need. One of the most frustrating things is having to save the same lives again and again and again, continuously. Unfortunately, it's conflict and climate. I mean, COVID we hope will pass, but if we don't come to grips with conflict and climate, those two Cs, and if we get rid of the third C....

Since I'm on the virtuous Cs, we certainly see Canada as the fourth C in the virtuous cycle.

● (1210)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much for that generous assessment.

Will additional things in terms of the coordination C and the logistics kinds of things be necessary? I think the entire world is facing a very grim three or four months here until vaccine distribution can start. Are there additional things you would be asking of organizations like the Canadian Armed Forces that would help with logistics and coordination?

Mr. Amir Abdulla: As we see the potential second, and in some places third, wave start to hit before the vaccines get there, we have not ruled out the likelihood or the eventuality that we may be coming back and once again asking for military and civil defence assets.

Right now there is no request out, but the cell that would trigger those requests is reviewing that. There was a meeting to review recently. There is no immediate request, but right now we feel we can't rule that out. It will be possibly sometime in the first quarter of next year until the vaccine gets going. One thing is that many of the logistics capacities will go into moving the vaccines, which will be hugely important, but all the other stuff needs to keep going too.

The Chair: Mr. Benzen, you are next.

● (1215)

Mr. Bob Benzen (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

Professor Leuprecht, you said a lot of very interesting things in your opening comments, and I'd like to follow up on a few. Clearly, with the pandemic, and all our other military commitments overseas, dealing with forest fires and whatnot, there's a high demand for the Canadian military. Yet, it doesn't seem we have enough resources. You talked a bit about the government's need to increase defence spending from 1.3% to 2% of its budget.

Can you talk a bit about that?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Let me just give you some data on recent operations.

There were 31 domestic operations from 2010 to 2020, including assistance activity for 23 operations. The number of and types of troops assigned for 29 of them, and the duration for 23 of them show the following patterns. The frequency of these operations is increasing, but the majority of these were relatively minor, they required fewer than 100 CAF personnel, and 16 out of 23 operations for which information is available were relatively short, so less than a fortnight in duration. While the size of operations has increased recently, post-2000s, floods have required call-outs of about 2,500 CAF personnel, whereas the 1997 Red River floods required 8,000 personnel, and the 1998 eastern Canada ice storm required 12,000 personnel.

The real critical point to get to is aviation transport, and of course, our colleagues have already flagged that. The evacuation of communities, airlifting supplies and personnel is in high demand. There has been some demand for specialists, such as engineers, and a great demand for general labour. However disruptive these operations might be, by and large, these are operations that should be within the capabilities of the CAF.

As the chief of the defence staff pointed out in his remarks before the committee, the CAF now builds this into its training and incidents operational cycles. What is disruptive is the size of the operations, and demands that are unconventional, for example, for floods and forest fires, the CAF now builds in. But the CAF, as I pointed out, had not built in a large pandemic operation of the size that it was asked to carry out. It demonstrated it could carry out that task, but it showed that with constant resources, there are very difficult trade-offs to be made.

We live, as our colleagues have pointed out, in an international security environment that is likely going to require more capacity and more demands, simply operationally. We live in an environment where our allies, and our key strategic ally, the United States, are calling for allies to do more on defence, and we have a growing requirement in terms of domestic operations.

In the past, people always said that Canada was a free rider. I've argued that Canada is not a free rider, it is an easy rider. It has spent just enough on defence. The problem is that what was just enough in the past is simply not enough in light of the challenges and the demands we are facing today in terms of domestic deployments, continental defence and international demands in terms of peace, stability and security, as well as our allied commitments.

Mr. Bob Benzen: That definitely means we should be doubling our spending, and going from $20 billion to $40 billion.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I would caution that what Canada needs is not necessarily a bigger military, because people always think that we need to recruit more people. We already have challenges on the recruitment side. We need a better military, and in many ways, a better organized military with the right kit, the right training and the right people. That has always been the strength of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Ultimately, it's exceptional people with exceptional kits that can be relied upon, and the ability to do that on our own. This is ultimately what's in question here, if we further undermine our ability to deliver for the organization, that we can deploy and be relied upon to deliver regardless what the government asks of its Canadian Armed Forces. I'm concerned that the current level of commitment is not enough to sustain that in light of the current operational tempo.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Monsieur Robillard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): My question is for the Red Cross.

Assuming there's an increase in outbreaks in long-term care facilities, is it possible that the Canadian Armed Forces could return to these facilities to assist the Red Cross?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: Is your question about the Canadian forces or the Red Cross? Are you asking if we'll be overwhelmed by the current situation?

Mr. Yves Robillard: Yes.

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: It depends on where. First of all, several things have been done in Quebec. I'd like to highlight the great collaboration with the Quebec ministry of health and services and the CIUSSSs.

In Quebec, we deployed personnel to replace military personnel in long-term care facilities, but we also helped train more than 7,000 employees of the ministry of health and social services. As a result, this ministry has increased its capacity to intervene in long-term care facilities.

We have the personnel to support the Quebec government in the current context. We have kept 500 employees available. At this point, I can't predict the future, but I can say that our capacity is quite good. We are in discussions with other provinces to increase capacity and provide the same kind of assistance.

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you.

With Operation Globe, Canada responded to a UN request for assistance in transporting food and medical equipment related to the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization.

What do you think of Canada's assistance during the pandemic?

Mr. Amir Abdulla: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I think for the Operation Globe, the specific contribution there came at a very critical time when we had health equipment, primarily from WHO but also from PAHO, the Pan-American Health Organization, that we were having great difficulty moving. Without the Royal Canadian Air Force equipment, that health equipment probably would have been delayed by at least two, three weeks or a month. At that point of the crisis, that three weeks to a month delay would have cost a significant number of lives, so the contribution was clearly a life-saving element.

Canada has also been a strong supporter of WFP on our food security operation. The contributions of Canada have been focused very much on our school meal programs that have a strong nutritional impact, but also focus very much on girls' education.

I have often said to those who support these programs that the single contribution is working on nutrition, education and gender. With one contribution you're empowering girls to go on to become empowered women who, themselves, will have more productive and better families. They will be in a better nutritional status, and they are better educated.

I think those types of programs are a cornerstone of Canada's contribution, and although they may not be directly on COVID, they certainly would have made people who were in COVID-impacted areas more resilient to the coming crisis.

I think overall we are very appreciative of Canada's contribution, and we think it's very much a quality contribution as well. It's not always just about the size of the contribution; it's about the quality of the contribution, and Canada has always been a high-quality donor.

Thank you.

● (1225)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: The floor is yours, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My questions are for Mr. Sauvé or Mr. Tizi.

Let me know which one of you would be best placed to answer.

I'd like to understand the mechanics or, at least some details, of the Red Cross's intervention in a situation like this, which has affected us all. In fact, you were affected too, you paid for it and you did it very well.

Was it the Canadian Armed Forces that gave you the financial resources to pay for Red Cross volunteers to take over from the military?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: No, the funds actually come from different places. We already have agreements with the provinces. For example, in some cases, the Quebec government has hired us to do activities. In the specific case of the Red Cross taking over for the military, the funds come from the federal government.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

I know that initially, a wage of $26 an hour was discussed. In the end, how much did the Red Cross pay its volunteers?

Do you know?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: Yes.

In fact, there's a difference. Here, we deployed employees, not necessarily volunteers. I could give you the final amount.

Our goal wasn't to recruit people to stay permanently in the health care system. So there was a difference between our goal and that of the Quebec government. The Government of Quebec conducted a recruitment campaign to find 10,000 more workers in this sector. We had a recruitment campaign to find people who wanted to intervene temporarily—

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Temporarily.

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: —in the emergency phase. So it has nothing to do with the permanent health care system.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Absolutely. I understand the process very well.

Did these people perform the same duties as the employees already on site?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: The objective was twofold. We had two types of teams. One was an infection control team, which was a very practical component, to support the institution and help them to tighten up their controls. The other team, which wasn't specialized, was there to help with any administrative and support tasks. It wasn't to replace the specialized area or the people trained in that area, but rather to provide general assistance, whether it was in managing the reception area or all sorts of other very general tasks.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In your speech, I believe you talked about six weeks of training.

Is that correct?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: No. I said that it took six weeks to recruit and train 1,000 people.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay, it was to recruit and train people.

What did the training entail exactly?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: It was general training to show how to help in a situation. In other words, the training covered general work and all instructions regarding protection, wearing PPE, and so forth.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You worked very diligently. I commend you for that.

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Next is Mr. Garrison, please.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to follow up with additional questions to the Red Cross, but first thank them of course for the enormous assistance they provided on very short notice. Can you talk a little bit about the transition between the Canadian Forces and the Red Cross moving in with volunteers, and how that proceeded, and how well you think that functioned?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: I think it went very well. First of all, I want to thank the Canadian Armed Forces. They really collaborated in terms of transferring all of the information. What was critical as well, and I think the most important to highlight, is that we worked very closely with the health and social services ministry of the Quebec government, because at the end of the day they're working with the institutions, knowing which ones needed our help. That was a daily co-ordination work. The transition went well. We are still present, I think, in 11 long-term care institutions, supporting the Quebec government there, and we've kept 1,500 people. These are not volunteers. As I was saying earlier, we recruited paid staff for this because it's an engagement of months in terms of the work that's required.

Mr. Randall Garrison: In terms of the 11 institutions where you're still providing assistance, is there a plan in place to phase out the Red Cross assistance? How long do you expect to be in those institutions?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: Again, this is supporting the Quebec government. I think we've extended our presence until March in these institutions or others, wherever there may be an overlap or a challenge. As I said, we are growing the support in Ontario and in Manitoba. In Manitoba we're in five long-term care institutions. On the same model, basically we are there to provide epidemic control and surge in institutions that could be overwhelmed.

● (1230)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

I know my time is very short. I want to go back to Mr. Abdulla from the World Food Programme and talk about which areas, regions or countries he thinks are most at risk in the next few months with the convergence of food shortages and the COVID crisis.

Mr. Amir Abdulla: Probably the most pressing country of concern at the moment is Yemen, where we have serious issues of access. We have actually had good news over the past few weeks where we've had some improved access. De facto authorities in Sana'a have actually started to allow us to do better targeting registration, including biometric registration, so we have a better sense that the assistance is getting to the people who are most in need.

When you have these difficult access and conflict countries where monitoring is not always the easiest, you really do need to have a very robust registration system. That has improved over the past few weeks. We had been facing some serious difficulties in that regard.

There's Yemen, where we have had, potentially, pockets of famine. Right behind Yemen has to come South Sudan, parts of northeast Nigeria and then across areas of the Sahel, including Mali, Niger and potentially Burkina Faso. They are, again, very heavily impacted by the climate and conflict paradigm. South Sudan has definitely been in the conflict and climate-related areas.

Those would be the countries of highest concern.

The Chair: Thank you very much. It's much appreciated.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gallant, you have the floor.

[*English*]

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

Dr. Leuprecht, we know Russia has used the pandemic to test NATO forces' readiness on many occasions and to demonstrate new conventional and hybrid capabilities.

Are you aware of any instances of Russia testing our domestic national defence or demonstrating new and conventional hybrid capabilities specifically against Canada?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Well, certainly Russia continues its intrusions into the NORAD air identification zones, and those have gone unabated. There have been some instances of increased activity, especially in the air domain.

If you consider the Canadian Armed Forces deployment to Latvia, then Canada finds itself under constant and daily persistent attack by Russia. I think what we can learn from the deployment in Latvia is that all western countries will need to learn to live in a situation that our allies in Latvia have found themselves in for years, which is this persistent effort, an asymmetric effort, by Russia in the conventional space—land, air, sea, aerospace and cyber domains—to undermine not just our troops and operations, but our societies and our institutions. We will have little choice but on the one hand to become more resilient and on the other hand to be able to draw clear red lines.

That points to the challenge that was already raised earlier, which is that the Canadian Armed Forces are doing a host of things today that they weren't doing in the aftermath of the Cold War, yet we have significantly fewer resources to carry out all of these activities. In cyber, for instance, information operations is one of those examples. It seems that Canadians and politicians are constantly happy to ask more of the Canadian Armed Forces, while either leaving resources constant or providing fewer resources. In terms of equipment, you could argue that we're not even keeping up in terms of what is required just to stay at the level we are at.

I think we are underestimating the resolve and the challenges that our adversaries and hostile activities against Canada pose to our Canadian interests, values, allies and partners. Also, there are those activities in other parts of the world, as our colleagues just talked about, in crisis situations, where we know that our adversaries are actively pouring fuel on the fire in order to create conflagration, which will then cause migration to Europe and other places in order to destabilize regions and allies and partners.

● (1235)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Then the pandemic in Canada has made us more reliant...and placed new burdens on technology for our day-to-day lives.

What kinds of cyber-attacks are we now more vulnerable to from nations such as Russia, Communist China or Iran in our current environment?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I would refer you to the excellent "National Cyber Threat Assessment 2020" that was released last week by the Communications Security Establishment. I would highlight in that assessment that—to the best of my knowledge—for the first time, CSE specifically identified China and Chinese activities in that assessment. The growing cognizance of that is increasingly important to calling out those players who are intentionally trying to undermine us and our institutions.

Certainly by becoming more connected as a result of the pandemic, we have also created a host of new vulnerabilities, whether that is within politics, government, the private sector or among our civil societies. That provides a host of new weak links that our adversaries are actively exploiting. We know, for instance, that universities and research institutions have been at the forefront, and we know this because of previous statements released by CSE in cooperation with partner countries.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Mr. Bagnell, please.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you.

Thank you to all the witnesses for your very interesting input, and congratulations to Mr. Abdulla for your Nobel Peace Prize.

Mr. Abdulla, you mentioned climate change a few times, which was very interesting.

I'd like it if you could comment on how climate change has affected the people who need the food you're delivering, and perhaps their own generation of food. Also, how is it affecting the providers of the food, being in a different climate?

Mr. Amir Abdulla: Thank you very much.

I think the impact of climate change in many of the countries that we provide assistance to can be seen on several fronts. On the food security front, you have serious and increased droughts. People have started to move the crops that were not as drought-resistant as they may have been. I think there are some agricultural techniques that one is looking at to improve.

In as many areas that you have droughts, there are others where you have repeated floods. We are also seeing issues of land degradation. People are having to use agricultural techniques that perhaps are not the best for the land because there is either too much water at times or not enough water at others. We need to improve people's capacities to have better harvesting and water storage.

Another impact we are seeing on food security is that as pastoral lands get reduced, where people can put their animals out to pasture, particularly herders and nomads—particularly in the Sahel—they are pushed southwards where they're starting to impact on what have traditionally been the farmers' areas, the farmlands. The herders have come into a clash with the farmers and then that begins tensions between those groups of people that then is exploited by people like ISIS, al Qaeda, and in West Africa al Qaeda, Boko Haram. They exploit the tensions and conflict that has arisen between people who are trying to source their food through different means.

From the supply side, I think one thing we are seeing is that because of the impact of certain climate issues on some countries, their ability to be as generous contributors as they have been in the past would be one impact. One other area that I did mean to pick up on was migration. We've seen migration that has been impacted with people moving from parts of Africa northwards from the Sahel and across the Mediterranean, but also in Central America there's what's known as the dry corridor. In many of the countries in Central America, the people are pushing northwards and a lot of that is driven by people's inability to have more than basic subsistence. Even basic subsistence agriculture on some of those marginalized lands is increasingly difficult.

Those would be just some of the key areas.

● (1240)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you.

I just have about 30 seconds left and I have a question for the Red Cross.

I'm curious as to the percentage of your workers in Canada who are paid and the percentage who are volunteers. Could you just give a rough figure because we only have about 20 seconds left.

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: A rough figure is we have about 20% paid staff to 80% volunteer. It's something around those numbers.

The Chair: Thank you.

We go to Mr. Bezan, please.

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

I know that time is short so I want to get to my questions. They will all be targeted towards Professor Leuprecht.

Professor, as we heard at committee last week, the Canadian Armed Forces are going to be playing a role in the distribution of COVID vaccines across the country. In your opinion, do you believe they have the logistical capability to do that and do you see any constraints?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I have no doubt, given the support the Canadian Armed Forces were able to provide to the Public Health Agency of Canada when called upon with personal protective equipment on the logistics side as well as on the supply chain and lift side, that they fully have the capability to provide whatever support is required in carrying out whatever strategic plan the government provides with regard to the distribution of the vaccine.

Of course, this is a zero-sum in the end because the more and the longer we have to rely on the Canadian Armed Forces to provide this logistical capacity and support means that capacity is not available for other types of operations or support.

● (1245)

Mr. James Bezan: I appreciate that. Thank you, Professor.

You made the comment, both in your written materials this summer and then also here in committee today, about the “moral hazard” we found ourselves in because the provincial governments have underinvested in emergency response. Do you believe that this is an abdication of their responsibilities? Should they be penalized for it?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: There is little political payoff for provincial governments to invest strategically in critical infrastructure, but it seems that when the federal government steps up with co-operation and with funding, then there is an incentive for the provinces to do so. I think this is a joint responsibility that they have to exercise.

I am concerned that in the aftermath of the pandemic, as provincial resources shrink, there may be an effort by politicians and governments provincially to focus on those things that get them the most votes, not on the things that will provide medium-term sustainability. The challenge for the federal government is that while the federal government can send invoices every time the Canadian Armed Forces are called out, that is highly fraught politically, of course, in particular when those invoices go to provinces that are already in dire fiscal circumstances.

Mr. James Bezan: We know that under National Defence Act—I believe it's part VI of the NDA—there is the aid to civil powers. Do we need to change any of that legislation to reflect the current realities we're facing and the abuse of the provinces calling in the armed forces every time they seem to get into trouble?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: We did change the act after the Canadian Armed Forces were called out to shovel snow in Toronto.

There are quirks of the act that go back to Confederation and that we are only now starting to iron out and bring into the 21st century. Under the act now, the minister is ultimately responsible for making the call, in coordination with the chief of the defence staff, who decides how to operationalize that call, so there's considerable discretion also on the part of the Canadian Armed Forces in how exactly to respond to that call.

I think that when we have issues.... For instance, if there are repeat issues where the federal government provides an opportunity to have those addressed in terms of critical infrastructure and provinces do not step up, or, as referenced, as seen in a place such as Fort McMurray, for instance, where we have significant delays in the construction of the critical infrastructure that could have averted some of the disaster we saw only months ago, perhaps there's an opportunity to rethink.

I think penalties are probably going to be less effective than trying to set the right incentives at the federal level and provide the right strategic planning capability for those incentives. I also think that the Canadian Armed Forces—so we don't always cannibalize our own organization—need to set up their own domestic response unit as—

Mr. James Bezan: Let's talk about that domestic response unit now. Are you talking about something similar to DART, which we have for international relief? Or are you thinking more of something along the lines of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which could provide that long-term infrastructure investment, particularly, as you mentioned, in the north and Arctic regions of Canada, but then be there to provide the humanitarian assistance for disaster relief?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I think a dedicated unit for domestic operations of about 2,000 reservists and regular force personnel who are the immediate front-line capacity for smaller types of call-outs and smaller types of operations.... But I also think there is an opportunity to have a conversation with provinces about standing up much more robust provincial emergency services organizations. Currently, we have tactical capacity to organize emergency measures, but we have no deployable capacity.

I think one of the things that we learned from the Red Cross is that we need to have a much more systematic surge capacity of volunteers. For instance, in Germany and Australia, that is coordinated through state emergency services like the Bundesanstalt Technisches Hilfswerk.

Currently, the Red Cross is having to pick up most of those pieces. I think there's more for government to do to make sure that the right volunteers and the right capabilities are available at the right moment, and the Canadian Armed Forces can then help to get that expertise to where it is needed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Baker, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My questions are for Mr. Sauvé, of the Red Cross.

First of all, I'd like to thank you and the Red Cross for your work in our long-term care facilities.

In my riding of Etobicoke-Centre, we lost 42 seniors at Eatonville Care Centre. It's one of the five centres where the Canadian forces provided assistance and was mentioned in their report about the appalling conditions in Ontario long-term care facilities.

You said that the Red Cross was involved in the training of the Canadian forces. You also took responsibility for the work done before that by the forces.

From your perspective, what impact has the work of the Canadian Armed Forces had in our long-term care facilities?

● (1250)

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: When it happened, it was necessary. In discussions over the past two years, it has been determined that the Canadian Armed Forces, which are trained for something else, should be the last resort.

The Red Cross has demonstrated that it's possible to develop a civilian capacity that can intervene in situations that require primarily a civilian operation. It was absolutely necessary to increase this capacity to deal with the problems that arose. We have demonstrated that we can replace the army. This is what happened in long-term care facilities, where a civilian capacity was put in place.

Whether it's climate events or a pandemic... It must be said that the pandemic is an exceptional situation. We must take the time to analyze the repercussions and see how we can improve the situation by putting systems in place.

We have been working for years with the provinces to improve the Red Cross response to emergencies. We need to take another step in this direction by having more capacity on a more permanent basis so that we can play a role in these situations and perhaps avoid having to call on the military.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I agree with you. The Red Cross has demonstrated its capabilities in several areas.

It would be interesting for my constituents who are listening to this discussion to know your point of view. You know a lot more about what's going on in these long-term care facilities than most people do.

Can you tell us what impact the Canadian Armed Forces' assistance has had on our seniors? I'm asking you this question so that my constituents can understand the impact you've had. In the last minute that I have left, I'd like to know what impact the Red Cross has had in caring for our seniors.

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: I can't speak for the Canadian forces, but I can say that the impact of the Red Cross's work in these facilities has been enormous.

Seniors in these institutions and several employees who worked there had contracted the virus. It was a vicious cycle. We were losing staff and were less able to provide services. There were significant gaps throughout the service chain.

The Red Cross provides assistance to organizations to rebuild trust and better control systems. We also provided additional staff during this period. On the other hand, we were losing staff and fear was building in these facilities. There was a lack of staff to provide essential services. We were able to stabilize the situation. The fear in the long-term care facilities was very significant.

In the future, there will be a need to build and maintain a rapid response capacity to respond to all kinds of emergencies.

It's important to remember that the provinces have taken over, certainly in Quebec, by recruiting more staff to meet the needs.

● (1255)

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The floor is yours, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

This is my last round to speak, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the witnesses for their participation and responses to the committee today. Frankly, it was very interesting.

My last question is for Mr. Abdulla.

Many people say that Yemen is experiencing the worst food crisis on the planet. In September, Canada was publicly identified by UN investigators as one of the countries contributing to the war in Yemen. Famine is known to result from war.

Can you tell us how Canada's sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia is worsening the food crisis in Yemen?

[*English*]

Mr. Amir Abdulla: That's a very difficult question to answer, obviously.

One thing here that is important to note is that weapons themselves don't create a food crisis. It's when those weapons are used, I would say, in a manner that is not fitting, and that happens, and the warning on that is on both sides.

The Saudis have been armed. They say that they're defending their national interests and their territory and that they have been attacked in their territory. This has been done so by arms that have been supplied on the other side. The issue here is that one hopes for a situation where there would be no need for arms to be supplied, but to directly correlate it is probably too strong a correlation that the presence of a lot of weapons in this area certainly exacerbates the situation.

Canada has played its role also in making sure that the food crisis is met by ensuring that food and cash vouchers are available to the people most in need, and you are one of our donors on the food security side. I would say that you need to point to that also. One hopes that the conflict ends and there will be no need for anybody to supply either side with weapons.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Go ahead, Mr. Garrison, please.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Since this is our last round of questions, I'd like to turn to Mr. Leuprecht.

Quite often in Canada there's a feeling that the countries named by Mr. Abdulla, Yemen and the band running from South Sudan across to northeast Nigeria, don't have a lot to do with Canada, and there is a tendency, therefore, for certainly the general public to say that these things may be unfortunate but they don't have much to do with Canada.

Can you comment on any threats to security from the deteriorating situation in Sahel in West Africa?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: As you know, I've written about the Sahara-Sahel.

We need to always remember that Europe is our second most important strategic partner after the United States. We saw what mass migration did and the aftermath that we are still living with in terms of European politics. We have, not just in terms of Canadian values but also in terms of Canadian interests, a strong interest in the region in part because we are one of the very few allies that can also bring francophone capacity to bear, and these are already the countries where we can see some Canadian Forces operations. I point particularly to the regular force operation in Niger, but also to the support, for instance, that Canada has been lending in all countries surrounding Syria, with the exception of Syria itself, in terms of regional stability. So, yes, our interests are clearly at stake.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Do you see more that Canada should be doing right now on the diplomatic front to address these threats in the Sahel?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: There's probably more that we can do in terms of coordination.

The challenge with diplomacy is always that we have very little capacity on the ground and a lot of work to be done. Part of this is how we resource not just our Canadian Armed Forces but also, generally, our international affairs, our international development and our international trade functions so that we can better assert our interests. Given that resources are limited, there is probably considerable opportunity for synergies both with other allied and partner countries and with member organizations to build capacity in order to try to have a sustainable path forward for a region that is going to bedevil us for decades to come.

● (1300)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Chair, with that I will conclude my questions.

Thank you very much to the witnesses.

Mr. James Bezan: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I wanted to raise the issue that we had technical difficulties again at the beginning of this meeting. We started 15 minutes late. I'd ask that we make sure all our witnesses are informed in the future that they need to have properly working microphones and that we have them online early enough so that all these problems are worked out before the meeting is supposed to start at the top of the hour.

Notice of this meeting was given over the weekend. We received it on Saturday. The briefing notes, I think, came out on Friday evening. The passwords and stuff did not come out until last night. That isn't enough time for us, as members, to prepare, especially over a weekend when our staff are off, and to pull together our own research papers and to make sure we are asking the best possible questions on this important study.

I'd ask you, Madam Chair, to ensure that proper notice is given in plenty of time so we can have our staff available to us to help us prepare for these meetings, on Monday mornings in particular, but that should be the practice at all times.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. Bagnell.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Related to that, I'm wondering if it's possible for the Library of Parliament to consider if we have a briefing like we have for these meetings—the meetings are all on the same topic, roughly, and a lot of the briefing paper is the same—if there's a way to identify what's new in it, either by putting it in italics or a different colour or something, so we don't have to look through the whole paper each time to see what's new from our first briefing.

The Chair: All right. Thank you very much for those interventions, Mr. Bezan and Mr. Bagnell.

Right now, Mr. Bezan, you have your last five minutes. If you want to share it with one of your colleagues, feel free to do so. Thank you.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Chair, I didn't realize we're extending, so I'm more than happy to ask a few more questions.

To the Red Cross, when the Canadian Armed Forces were deployed in long-term care facilities in Ontario and Quebec, they provided a report on what they saw. Will the Red Cross be providing a similar type of report on the care they're giving right now in other provinces?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: We have provided a report on any incident we witnessed directly to the health and social service authorities of the province in real time. I think we will provide a larger report on our findings and the surge and the lessons learned from this.

Mr. James Bezan: Will that report be made public?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: Yes, we'll make our report public on that aspect, absolutely.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you very much.

You already talked about transition, and we know you worked very closely with the Canadian Armed Forces already. To your knowledge, will the Red Cross be playing any role in vaccine distribution across the country?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: Of course, we've provided a lot of surge in this present operation, and we are sitting at the planning table with the Public Health Agency of Canada to see how we could contribute. Nothing has been defined at this stage, but we're obviously available to provide any help we can.

Mr. James Bezan: Professor Leuprecht, you were talking about setting up a new organization and making sure it's properly funded, without taking away from current readiness training and operations of the Canadian Armed Forces. We did mention, in the last go-around, the issues of possibly setting up something similar to a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers....

Can you drill down more on what you expect this organization to look like? Would it be army? You're saying it's a combination of reserve and regular forces.

Also, you did mention the whole issue of cost versus trade-offs with other areas of the Canadian Armed Forces. Where does the cost come from, and what is the trade-off from other capabilities of the armed forces?

● (1305)

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Given all the data that I provide in the written submission and also my publication, I think it is currently a difficult role for the organization in terms of trying to make the domestic operations work with all the other demands. So having a dedicated effort will assist in that regard.

If there's no new funding for that effort, it inherently means that it is going to come at a cost somewhere else, but it also provides then some opportunity to use that capacity for other types of operations that are domestic operations such as being able to improve the conditions of first nations, which is my suggestion. I think this can be a positive sum game for all involved.

I think the federal government needs to step up its own emergency planning and operations capacity on the civilian side. That was hampered here in terms of how the federal emergency response plan was rolled out. It needs to step up in terms of coordinating, being able to make sure that agencies such as the Public Health Agency of Canada have better logistical capacity, and to ensure that the provinces are able to provide the sort of surge capacity themselves that the federal government was ultimately called upon to do, both in terms of uniforms as well as the Red Cross.

Mr. James Bezan: Would you suggest then, Professor, that the disaster rapid relief team that we have through DART be also set up under this new group and then you'd have an international and a domestic arm within this new organization?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: The DART is essentially, if I'm correct, a team of about three people who are full-time and there's an ability to pull about 200 people on very short notice from across the organization.

What I'm proposing is a dedicated entity within the Canadian Armed Forces of about 2,000 people who work specifically on these issues. I think the demands are now so regular and so expansive that we need to build that capacity internally so we also have a better ability to anticipate precisely the sorts of demands that might be coming.

I think nobody had really anticipated that the Canadian Armed Forces would have to go into long-term care homes. They were, of course, prepared. They were educated and they were trained. There are better planning opportunities and, if that unit can plan for it, it can flag to the federal government where potential problems might be. Then the federal government can coordinate with the provinces to try to avert those problems in the future before they actually come to the point where we have to deploy the Canadian Armed Forces' surge capacity and work more proactively with the Red Cross from the beginning rather than having to wait a couple of months until the Red Cross can effectively backfill for the Canadian Armed Forces with the requisite capabilities.

If it wasn't for the Canadian Red Cross backfilling in June, the Canadian Armed Forces would perhaps even have had to stay much longer. It is thanks to the Red Cross that this was returned to being a civilian operation.

Mr. James Bezan: I share that gratitude as well for all the work the Red Cross has done in backstopping the Canadian Armed Forces.

Thank you.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madame Chair, I have a point of order.

I actually had my hand raised when Mr. Bezan was speaking to his point of order. My request is that as soon as it is known that a witness cannot attend the meeting please advise all the committee members as to the change and who may be coming in instead of the witness who was unavailable.

Thank you.

The Chair: All right, thank you very much. We'll take that.

Madame Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I want to thank you, Madam Chair, for making sure we complete the round, but I know we're short on time so I just have one small question. I do also want to thank all the witnesses for being very informative.

I think you've covered almost all of the topics but there's one piece that we haven't addressed today. This is to the Red Cross.

Could you tell us a little bit more about the collaboration between the Red Cross and the Canadian Armed Forces in Operation Globe on the repatriation effort and the efforts at Trenton, when we brought so many Canadians home at the beginning of this pandemic?

● (1310)

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: This is not the first time that we've done something similar. I think you have to put it in context.

I've been at the Red Cross for some time now. You have to remember when we brought in 5,000 Kosovar refugees some time ago. They were housed on a military base and we managed the services, the care there. We worked with the Canadian Armed Forces when we had a lot of people crossing the border in Quebec and the camp was set up. The military set up the logistics around the camp; we managed the services there. That's the type of complementary structure....

It's the same thing here. We deployed and took care of the people who were housed on the base in terms of everything they needed—the feeding and so on and so forth—and we expanded that to do it for anybody arriving in an airport who did not have a place to quarantine. We had a structure to put that in place.

The whole conversation here is that we began looking at what's specific to the military in terms of their capability and what can be delivered by civilian capacity, and where we're complementary.

If I may add, there was a question as well on the mobile stuff. I have to remind members, because we were mentioning the DART, that the Red Cross has three field hospitals as well. It has 10 mobile clinics. Again, on the civilian side, we have logistical and operational capability that can be put to use.

The Chair: All right, thank you.

We're coming to an end here. I would like to say thank you to all of our witnesses and thank you to our committee members. That was an amazing session with the witnesses and the questions from the team.

I would like to thank you for sharing your time with us today.

With that, this meeting is adjourned.