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• (1100)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): I'll bring this meeting to order.

Colleagues, you'll notice that we sent out an amended notice. We were anticipating having some Public Safety officials, but they apparently are preoccupied with something or other on the east coast. We'll have to reschedule them.

I want to again welcome Major-General Prévost here. We don't generally hand out frequent flyer cards, but at least there's some comfort in knowing that you do have a day job. That's good. Thank you for that.

Brigadier-General Major, do whatever Major-General Prévost does and you'll be fine.

With that, I'll ask Major-General Prévost to bring forward his opening statement.

Major-General Paul Prévost (Director of Staff, Strategic Joint Staff, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. It's a pleasure again for me to join you this morning in committee as we now take a look at the challenges that rising domestic deployments pose on the Canadian Armed Forces.

[*Translation*]

I am Major-General Paul Prévost and as Director of the Canadian Forces Strategic Joint Staff, my role is to provide recommendations to the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Department of Defence on the employment of the Canadian Forces in operations both internationally and domestically.

[*English*]

It's a very topical subject at the moment, given the situation in Atlantic Canada in the aftermath of Hurricane Fiona. I want to take this opportunity to pass on our thoughts to the people of Nova Scotia, P.E.I., les Îles-de-la-Madeleine and Newfoundland in these difficult times, to those who have lost a loved one, those who have lost their homes or their businesses, and all those affected by the natural disasters. The Canadian Armed Forces is working with our partners in the Atlantic region to bring back some normalcy as quickly as we can.

[*Translation*]

In the context of domestic operations, an important part of my responsibilities is to coordinate between the Department of Defence

and all federal agencies that have an important role to play in the federal government's contribution in response to national, provincial, territorial or local emergencies.

[*English*]

Emergency management in Canada is a shared responsibility that relies on ongoing co-operation and communication among all levels of government. In Canada, the provincial and territorial governments and local authorities, including indigenous governments, provide the first response to the vast majority of emergencies. More than 90% of emergencies in Canada are handled locally and do not require direct federal involvement.

Providing assistance to civil authorities during domestic crises or major emergencies is one of the eight missions of the Canadian Armed Forces. In most cases, the Canadian Armed Forces is called upon when one of the following occurs: Either the authorities do not have sufficient resources to deal with the emergency, or the Canadian Armed Forces has a unique capability not readily available to the applicable authorities.

While the Canadian Armed Forces is always prepared to support civil authorities and partners, its capabilities and trained personnel are finite and should be involved only when no other organization has the capacity to respond. This is very much the case right now in Atlantic Canada.

It is best to think of the Canadian Armed Forces as a force of last resort, and this is for multiple reasons: first, to ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces maintains its readiness to respond to other emergencies, internationally or nationally, but also to ensure that local governments develop the resilience required as first responders. That said, there has been an increasing demand on the Canadian Armed Forces over the last decade to respond to natural disasters across the country such as floods, fires, snowstorms and now hurricanes.

In 2021, the military responded to seven requests for assistance for disaster relief operations from provinces and territories. This compares to an average of almost four requests for assistance per year between 2017 and 2021, and twice per year between 2010 and 2016. In other words, the Canadian Armed Forces' involvement in response to natural disasters has broadly doubled every five years since 2010. This does not include the 118 requests for assistance received by the Canadian Armed Forces in response to the pandemic.

The anticipated increase in the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events across Canada, as well as the broader changes in the Arctic, may lead to growing demands for military emergency assistance. This comes at a time when the Canadian Armed Forces is going through challenges in growing our force in a competitive environment where demands on personnel exceed the supply in both the private and the public sector.

Although the Canadian Armed Forces will stand ready to respond to domestic crises, the increased frequency will have implications on human, materiel and financial resources, as well as our overall readiness to execute the full range of core missions outlined in the defence policy. This will be a subject of discussion as we submit our defence policy update this fall.

For this reason, the Department of National Defence will continue to work with its federal partners to assess how to improve, at all echelons, our readiness and ability to respond to natural disasters.

[Translation]

I thank you once again for the opportunity to provide an update on this very important subject.

● (1105)

With me today is Brigadier-General Josh Major, Commander of 4th Canadian Division in Toronto, who is responsible for the Canadian Forces in the Ontario region, both in terms of training troops and employing the Canadian Forces in domestic crises. Together we hope to answer your questions.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Gallant, you have six minutes, please.

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

First of all, what could be the consequences of military troops not trained and equipped for the full spectrum of military operations, including war fighting?

MGen Paul Prévost: We train our troops with the tools we have to respond to international and domestic crises. Obviously, we do have priorities. Responding to domestic crises is always a core mission at the forefront of what we do, and we mitigate the impact of preparing our troops for those operations, and the ones abroad, as well as we can.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: My concern is about troop strength. According to reports, 4,800 recruits were enrolled the fiscal year after the lockdowns, but we're getting only about half the number of applicants needed per month to meet the goal of 5,900 members this year.

As of now, what is the force strength in total of regular forces and reserves?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, right now in the Canadian Armed Forces, on the regular force, which the member asked about, we have 63,871 troops, as my last stats show. We also have

29,247 members of the reserves, and there are also 5,241 rangers in the CAF right now.

In total, I would say that is about 10,000 personnel short of where we'd like to be, and for that reason all hands are on deck right now in order to recruit and retain as many CAF members as we have.

Thank you.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We're witnessing a major ground war in Europe. During the war in Afghanistan, the Canadian Forces was at stage three of mobilization. Just a decade ago, that's where we were, and that was our level of strength at that time.

What would be the impact on our army's ability to do its job in a future conflict if the reserve army were to become a climate change defence force, which is what some of our members are suggesting?

● (1110)

MGen Paul Prévost: We look at our forces as a total force. Regular forces, reserve forces and our rangers all train to different levels for different tasks. At the same time, the reserve force that we have is well trained in order to respond to domestic operations, as well as international operations. It's a volunteer force but, at the same time, always ready to respond to the needs of Canadians, and for peace internationally, abroad.

On this, I will pass it on to my colleague, Brigadier-General Major.

Brigadier-General Josh J. Major (Commander, 4th Canadian Division and Joint Task Force (Central), Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence): Major-General, thank you for allowing me to comment on this.

As mentioned, the army is a one-army team. We have, as was mentioned, several parts—the regular force, the reserve force and the rangers—for whom we integrate the training at different levels to ensure that we have the required force structures, training and equipment ready to go to respond to the needs either internationally or domestically.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Given that our regular infantry battalions are down to two companies per unit, how important is it that the reserve army be able to augment these forces to produce the higher-level units, like a brigade for Latvia?

BGen Josh J. Major: There is a great effort going forward right now not just to augment the regular force with reserve units but to truly integrate them into our force generation activities as we look toward fulfilling our mandates of Operation Reassurance, Operation Unifier, or Operation Impact.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We observed during the conflict in Afghanistan, which we were called to stabilize, that the reserve forces at that time were well trained and fit seamlessly into the regular forces when called upon. However, we're down in strength significantly, and if we have hived off those individuals in the reserve to more of a specialty, which is what is being suggested in this study, toward disaster relief as opposed to training for fighting a war, how are we going to fill the holes that we already have in the companies that need to be sent, even to Latvia?

BGen Josh J. Major: Right now, we are training. We are in our force generation model to prepare for future missions to Latvia and to support Unifier. We are focusing on the integration of reserve soldiers with our regular force to provide the number of forces available to deliver the effects that the Government of Canada is seeking to deliver in those areas.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Lambropoulos, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here to answer our questions. It happens to come at the right time, I think.

Increasingly, we see that climate change is posing a greater threat to our country. Hurricane Fiona is just one devastating example of what might be coming and what we may be faced with in the future. Currently, we don't have a civilian task force to take care of these natural disasters or to help Canadians overcome the effects of them. It's been a topic of discussion at previous meetings as well, but clearly we can't leave people suffering when such devastating natural disasters hit home. We have to help people in the best way we can.

Can you tell us what unique capabilities the Canadian Armed Forces has that a civilian task force would not necessarily have? Why is it best for them to be taking care of these issues rather than another group? Why is it that we need to continue to offer this kind of support?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, I'll start with that question and I'll see if my colleague has something to add.

I can't speculate on what that civilian force would have and would not have. One thing for sure is that responding to the needs of Canadians in times of need is one of the eight core missions of the Canadian Armed Forces. It is important right now that the Canadian Armed Forces put their hands to work to help the people in Atlantic Canada or for any other natural disasters that exceed local capacities.

There are many capabilities in the Canadian Armed Forces that are readily available that are not necessarily available right now in civil society. Sometimes it's the ability to project our force in isolated communities. I think of Iqaluit last year when they had issues with potable water. We were able to quickly deploy, for instance, purification water units in those areas.

There are many capabilities in terms of navy, air force and army capabilities that we can bring to bear in times of need. I know that is being discussed with Public Safety. Unfortunately, we don't have

them here to talk about future concepts. At this time, the Canadian Armed Forces remains a very good tool to apply resources when local authorities need them.

Josh, go ahead.

• (1115)

BGen Josh J. Major: Mr. Chair, if I may, I will just add to General Prévost's comments.

The CAF competencies, which allow us to provide some unique capabilities, deal primarily with our planning abilities, our mobility assets and our logistical requirement to show up self-sustained, so that we don't add to any pressures on the local situation. This enables us to be a flexible option to assist local authorities in delivering aid to Canadians when it's required.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much for that answer.

Given this information, and given the fact that the world is currently not necessarily at peace and the demand for our military is potentially going to increase in the coming years, is our military ready to meet the increasing need? What would you say is most crucial to focus on? What additional capabilities does the CAF need in order to continue to respond to multiple domestic emergencies while also maintaining its military role and be able to do both things properly?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, it's a very complicated question to answer briefly.

Obviously, it's always a question of priority. We have all eyes on Ukraine, as we have had for almost a year now. It's entering its eighth month of conflict. At the same time, there are priorities here nationally that we have to look after.

In terms of the capabilities for the future, this will be part of the Department of National Defence. Our minister will submit the defence policy update for discussion in cabinet. We keep a close eye on that.

To come back to the domestic front, I think it's important that as the increase in weather events is happening, one thing we notice, especially since the pandemic started, is that the whole of government and all governments have been at play with better communication, better coordination and understanding the tools that we have to respond. We've noticed more resilience at the provincial and local community level. That is good news, and hopefully that will help the Canadian Armed Forces, in the future, concentrate on the broader mission that we have.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I have one minute left.

I'm going to take the opportunity to thank the Canadian Armed Forces for everything they are doing. I know they will try their best to help people who have been affected in the affected areas to overcome this crisis. My heart is with the families of those who lost their home, family members and loved ones. Just know that Canada stands in solidarity with you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank both of our witnesses, with special thanks to Major-General Prévost, who is always available.

Major-General Prévost, you mentioned in your talking points that the armed forces respond when the provinces lack resources, which was the case during Hurricane Fiona.

Could you elaborate on this lack of resources? Was it the human resources that were lacking? Was it the level of technical difficulty of the operation that was involved?

What was missing that caused the provinces to ask for the armed forces?

MGen Paul Prévost: I thank the member for her question.

When there is a hurricane, there is usually time to see it coming. We then have many discussions at many levels, including with the federal government and the provinces. That's when the analysis is done as to whether or not our resources will be called upon. In the case of a hurricane of Fiona's magnitude, we know that there will be insufficient local resources and capacity and that communications will be affected by movements on the ground.

We then conduct a preliminary analysis. In the last few days, prior to Fiona's arrival, the scale of the disaster was evident and we knew that the Canadian Forces would likely be called upon. We received comments from Brigadier-General Major on the matter.

One of the advantages of the Canadian Forces is that they arrive in an organized fashion. They have a command and control system that helps with communication on the ground and provides additional manpower to do the job. That's what we were asked to do right from the start, to go out into the field to allow the linemen from the hydro crews to restore power.

So that was the main request that was made to us, in addition to the request for air assets to move troops and members on the ground.

I will now hand over to Brigadier-General Major.

• (1120)

BGen Josh J. Major: I also thank the member for her question.

The other principle that we always keep in mind in our planning is that we should always try to anticipate what will happen in a foreseeable natural disaster. However, when disaster strikes, unexpected events always occur. But the flexibility of the Canadian Forces allows us to react quickly to assist the various government agencies that need help.

Ms. Christine Normandin: My next question has two parts.

During the analysis that follows the request to use the military, is a rating used to assess the level of dangerousness or complexity associated with the deployment or request?

Is the primary reason for using the forces the level of difficulty, complexity or dangerousness of an event, or the operational capability, as you mentioned? In other words, are the Canadian Forces used more for their ability to quickly put in place a chain of command and resources or because a situation is dangerous or complex?

What is the most important consideration? What was it in the context of Fiona's arrival?

MGen Paul Prévost: I would say that the main factor that weighed in during discussions with the province during Hurricane Fiona was the magnitude and the danger of that hurricane. It was a question of whether the province's resources would be sufficient. Sometimes there are enough first responders on the ground, but we know that communication systems and power will be affected. So the discussions evolve over time, but they are based on the scale of the disaster. Of course, all disasters are dangerous, but it's the scale of the disaster that weighs heavily in the decision-making process.

The most important resources that need to be considered very early in the process are the liaison officers that we send to the provincial coordination centres to ensure better liaison with the Canadian Forces. Also, the first resources that we offer to the provinces are the people that we deploy to help with the planning in the coordination centres. So it's a concerted effort commensurate with the scale of the disaster. We are trying to be as proactive as possible. We had already sent people to the command centres in the provinces in the days before the disaster.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Let me come back to the level of dangerousness. Not everyone can intervene in forest fires, for example.

Is this part of the assessment upstream when forces are asked to respond? Is there some sort of dangerousness rating or something like that?

MGen Paul Prévost: I thank the member for this question.

With regard to forest fires, while both phenomena present dangers, a hurricane is more dangerous and of greater magnitude than a forest fire. There are places where it is easier to use the Canadian Forces. The Canadian Forces are not well equipped to respond to forest fires. We leave it to the experts on the front lines. They are the ones who fight fires in general. We come in to support to make sure the fire doesn't start again, to do patrols and to help the people in the area, but we leave it to the provincial authorities to deal with the forest fires, because they are the ones who have the capacity to do it. They are on the front lines and close to the danger.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Normandin.

Ms. Mathysen, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. It's good to see you once again.

The previous witnesses on this study and you, yourselves, were talking about the unique capabilities of the Canadian Armed Forces, their infrastructure, what they can do and how quickly they can respond. We certainly saw this during the pandemic. The military was called upon to do warehouse management and supply chain management.

Could you unpack the difference between the unique capability of the Canadian Armed Forces in those instances versus the significant underfunding of what is ultimately expected to be there in terms of a public resource or a public service?

• (1125)

MGen Paul Prévost: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's a good question.

I would say that one of the unique capabilities—other than the hard tools that you think of with the military—is our planning power. We train our people to plan their campaigns. We spend a lot of time looking at contingencies—branch plans, as we call them. This is a unique capability that we bring in early in any response. That's why we push people to the fore to help local communities plan around those contingencies.

The member mentioned the distribution of vaccines, for instance. This is a place where our role in the Canadian Armed Forces was to help plan the effort rather than to distribute the vaccines per se.

I'll turn to my colleague, Brigadier-General Major, to complement.

BGen Josh J. Major: In addition to the formal training that we receive in planning at all levels in a career as a Canadian Armed Forces member, I would also not want to discount the individual desire of each member to give their 100%, which goes without saying. There's a lot of initiative, which we encourage, of course. We see that translated across as our members conduct what we would consider non-traditional tasks and apply some of the training they've received to be able to achieve the local effect requested by whatever level of government.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: In terms of that specialization and unique capability, ultimately one could argue that if a public service—for example, the health care system or what have you—hadn't been potentially underfunded and hadn't experienced so much chronic underfunding of its infrastructure, an emergency wouldn't be as severe.

I also want to lump into that Newfoundland, for example. It hasn't had its own provincial emergency response. There has been more and more reliance upon the Canadian Armed Forces, over and over. Is there an understanding or a fear that, potentially, because of this chronic underfunding and because of provinces shifting funding to other resources and services, not emergency funding, there will be more reliance upon the Canadian Armed Forces and less of that unique capability response?

MGen Paul Prévost: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's a good question, again.

Obviously, I can't speculate. I'm not aware of levels of funding in the different provinces. What I can say from where I sit in the

Canadian Armed Forces is that we've noticed—specifically because of the pandemic, which was very anomalous as an event—the resilience being built at local, municipal and provincial levels. We see that resilience has been built, and I think people have noticed over the last few years that climate change is bringing more weather events upon us. We've seen more coordination at all levels and better capabilities at the local level being put in place, so hopefully we will continue on that track so that we don't have to rely on the Canadian Armed Forces as often as we do.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Is there anything from Brigadier-General Major?

BGen Josh J. Major: Mr. Chair, thanks for that question.

Again, as emphasized, I would just say that we are the force of last resort. However, make no mistake, support to Canadians when required is our top priority, and we'll continue to be ready to provide that support whenever and wherever it's required.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: To sort of flip that, is there any instance or scenario where the Canadian Armed Forces wouldn't be seen by the provinces as providing the right kind of supports in terms of the relationship...or they wouldn't be accepted in terms of that conflict that exists, or non-conflict, or working together? Have you ever seen any example of that?

• (1130)

BGen Josh J. Major: We have a robust process in place when interacting with provincial authorities for a request for assistance, at which point there is obviously a discussion that occurs between provincial officials, municipal officials and the Canadian Armed Forces in trying to determine the correct response in terms of a particular situation. Those negotiations will continue after the request for assistance has been authorized and as the situation develops. A key piece of that relationship is communication, to ensure that the proper resource is used to address the issue of the day.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Mathysen.

Mr. Doherty, this is the five-minute round, and you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses who are here.

Time and again, we are seeing, especially when there are wildfires in my province of British Columbia, international forces having to come and actually fight our fires. Our military are there for access and egress, primarily, protection of property, rolling up of hoses, etc.

Would it not make common sense to try to put in some form of either wildfire suppression training or other disaster relief training as part of basic training for our regular force, or would this be viewed as dulling the spear?

BGen Josh J. Major: Mr. Chair, that's a very good question.

Having dealt with support to wildfires in British Columbia in the past, we know there is a fine line, of course, that needs to be established between what the Canadian Armed Forces can bring to the table and what professional firefighters and fire management bring to the table.

In order to maintain our ability to respond to a wide variety of different natural disasters or to support provincial authorities or territorial authorities or indigenous communities, we need to be able to remain as flexible as possible. Therefore, we try to keep our broad competency base well trained in order to meet not just domestic, but also international obligations. Then, when required, we do a bit of specialized training in order to provide that value added, which, as specifically relates to wildfires, is the ability to support the firefighting professionals in their work, allowing them to focus on the key issue, which is the fire, and allowing us to do a bit of the mop-up operation behind them.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Would it make more sense, then, to look at our reserve units or rangers for this training?

BGen Josh J. Major: Mr. Chair, thank you for that follow-up question.

Again, the reserves train to meet the same obligations as the regular force in terms of the mission sets we're asking them to provide either domestically or internationally. The rangers, as well, have a unique capability that allows them to be a sensor and allows us to get an idea of what is required in certain communities. That is then the foothold that other elements of the CAF can use to flow the appropriate resource into that particular area.

What I would say in direct answer to your question is that flexibility, which we have by remaining broad-based and then focusing to respond to a particular situation, is part of our strength to respond to Government of Canada needs.

Mr. Todd Doherty: I'm a proud member of a disaster relief unit called Team Rubicon. We have Team Rubicon here in Canada. It's an international organization. We have the St. John Ambulance and the Red Cross, just to name a few. Could these volunteer organizations not be used more in disaster relief? I know that the Red Cross is there very often, specifically more as a paperwork service or logistical service when we have massive events like the wildfires in B.C., or the flooding across B.C. and Atlantic Canada.

Are there some organizations that you feel perhaps the Canadian government should be looking at to engage more in these types of events?

• (1135)

BGen Josh J. Major: Mr. Chair, thank you for that question.

I won't speculate on what organizations the government can use more or less of. What I will say to that question is that as the Canadian Armed Forces goes into different disaster areas in support of local, provincial and territorial authorities, we value the contribution that all different partners bring, and we work side by side with them to be able to achieve the mandate, which is to ensure that Canadians are well taken care of in their time of need.

The Chair: We'll have half a minute.

Mr. Fisher, go ahead.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here again. Acknowledging that you do have day jobs and understanding just how important those day jobs are, I want to thank you both. If you could, please pass along my thanks to the Canadian Armed Forces on behalf of the people of Atlantic Canada.

As each year goes by, the effects of climate change become more and more severe. Right now, my home province of Nova Scotia, and Atlantic Canada and eastern Quebec—as you know and as you've acknowledged, with thanks—are dealing with the aftermath of hurricane Fiona. It seems strange to call it a brutal storm. It's so severe that we'll probably find out it was the biggest storm ever to hit our shores.

Last night in my speech in the House of Commons, I said that the government moved faster than the speed of light. Without batting an eye, the Prime Minister, Minister Blair and, of course, Minister Anand responded to the provinces' requests for help with an immediate yes.

We already have Canadian Armed Forces personnel on the ground. They are incredible, and they're doing what they can to help. They're supporting Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and P.E.I. It is important to acknowledge that, as you know, in Atlantic Canada we have a large number of Canadian Armed Forces personnel, and we're very proud of them. They're cleaning up their own homes, all due to the damage of hurricane Fiona.

This storm showcases the importance of operational readiness for these domestic deployments. I wonder, gentlemen, if you could walk us through the process that provinces use to request assistance from the federal government. How are the resources coordinated, and under what conditions is the Canadian Armed Forces brought in?

MGen Paul Prévost: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's again a very good question this morning.

This process starts when we can see the event coming. Floods are one of them; hurricanes are one of them. This process starts with conversations between officials at the federal, provincial and municipal levels on the predicted track, in this case, and the size of it, which looked initially much like Dorian in 2019.

Discussions start at that level, first in terms of what the impact is going to be here, where the predicted track is, where the vulnerable communities are and what they will need. It's a dialogue and a bit of a negotiation on what the best way to apply the different resources is, because the provinces understand their tool kits. At the federal level, we understand our tool kits in terms of not only the Canadian Armed Forces but a whole bunch of federal resources that can apply here.

It's a conversation that is led by Public Safety Canada, with the government operations centre as the chair. We then have discussions internally and with the province, and we come to an agreement about how we think we should divide the labour. That's how it starts.

As the event hits, we get confirmation that this will be required. Then there's an exchange of letters from the provincial elected members to Minister Blair, and then Minister Anand, to agree on what the federal support will be, as well as the tasks assigned to the Canadian Armed Forces in this case.

I'll pass it on to Brigadier-General Major.

BGen Josh J. Major: Thank you, Major-General Prévost.

Additionally, as this process described by Major-General Prévost is under way, the Canadian Armed Forces takes a number of steps to ensure that we are ready to support as requested by the provincial and territorial governments. We will ensure that the requisite number of troops are ready to depart when the call comes. We pre-position equipment. We establish liaisons. We send reconnaissance teams to different areas to ensure that we have a good understanding of that particular area. Then we ensure that we are able to smoothly transition into those areas to provide the support right away.

As a situation develops, there are a number of processes we follow. If local troops are not adequate to fill the needs as requested and approved by the different levels of government, then we will ensure that we have the troops ready to come in from different parts of Canada if that is what is required.

• (1140)

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

As a follow-up, how does the Canadian Armed Forces determine how they allocate their own resources to respond to a particular disaster? Can you describe this in terms of the current efforts in Atlantic Canada?

BGen Josh J. Major: Yes, Mr. Chair, thank you for that question. That's an important question as well, procedurally speaking.

As the conversation about the request for assistance occurs, of course different levels of the chain of command are made aware of what is being discussed. That allows us to actually start activating the different parts that we need in order to achieve the desired effect. If those parts aren't sufficient in a particular area, then other elements within the Canadian Armed Forces are stood up, be they in the army, the air force or the navy. They are either moved or pre-positioned to be able to deliver that effect very quickly.

Every element of the CAF has responsibility domestically to have forces on standby to be able to respond to requests for assistance within very short notice. That allows us to then flow forces once all the approvals are obtained.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Major-General Prévost, I would like to come back to a point you made. You said that the training of each member of the Canadian Armed Forces included the development of good skills in various aspects: organization, the establishment of a chain of command that is easy to put in place, logistics and communications. Several hundred of these members are currently deployed.

I would like to know if this inherent training is required for each of the people involved in the field.

Is it necessary that only members of the Canadian Armed Forces be on site?

For example, would it be possible to have rapidly deployable civilians on the scene and only a few members of the Canadian Armed Forces to handle the logistics portion, communications, and in some way set the course of action?

MGen Paul Prévost: I thank the member for her question.

Regarding the first part of the question, I would say that the Canadian Armed Forces' basic training allows our good soldiers to follow their orders and have a basic ability to act, as my colleague mentioned earlier. They also have a willingness to serve and help Canadians in need. They acquire certain capabilities through first aid courses as well as other basic skills to understand situations.

Regarding the second part of the question, I would say that when events like this occur, our state of readiness allows us to bring troops together quickly to discuss and train specifically for we're expecting. One of the situations that comes to mind is forest fires, as was mentioned previously. In a case like that, the major-general and his teams do more specific forest fire training. They are very short training sessions, but the goal is to remind people of what they will have to do. So there's basic general training for the entire Canadian Armed Forces, and then there's ad hoc training depending on how they are used.

Finally, to answer the last question, I would say that it is quite possible. It would be more up to my colleagues at Public Safety Canada to answer it and describe what they see for the future. But at the moment, we have civil society, which has great capacity, and we have emergency measures organizations in each of the communities and provinces, and we all complement each other.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: When a reservist is called to go and respond as needed, what steps do they have to take with their employers and how much time are they usually given?

BGen Josh J. Major: The process we go through is this. If we have an understanding that a disaster is incoming, like hurricane Fiona, it allows an opportunity for the reserve units to speak with their personnel. Their personnel, of course, then communicate with their employers.

We have a system in place where we have immediate response units. Of course, that's supported by domestic response companies, which comprise reservists. A number of reservists know that they are on a certain notice to move. They advise their employers of that.

Certainly, if we take hurricane Fiona as an example, the overwhelming amount of support and the number of our great reservists who were volunteering, even outside of the construct of the domestic response company to respond, have been tremendous. Certainly you will see that there is never really any issue in terms of a domestic response emerging to have our reservists ready to go in short order to respond to the needs of their communities.

• (1145)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I agree that these people are incredible. The fact that they're willing to respond so quickly is really quite amazing. It always makes me so grateful. Certainly, if I were on the other end, that would be what I would hope. But as we continue to rely upon them over and over, if this is going to increase, if we know that climate change emergencies are going to increase, do you foresee any sort of push-back, especially from the employer's side, of not being able to rely upon their employees in the regular way that they are needed for work?

BGen Josh J. Major: I can't speculate, unfortunately, about different companies or employers and how they feel in response to their local soldiers, sailors and aviators in the reserve force providing that support. I can say that we have a robust process in place where reservists, when they're on call, so to speak—of course, the notice to move is different from the one for the regular force—are able to provide their employers with an indication that they could be called up. In this particular case, we've seen no adverse effects.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Motz, you have five minutes plus 30 seconds.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair. I appreciate your graciousness.

Gentlemen, thank you for being here. We've talked for months now in this committee about the reality of a shortfall in human resources in the Canadian Armed Forces—significant resources. The reasons for that are complex, as we all know, but to me they have some connection. To me, it has some connection to CAF's response obligations to domestic emergencies.

I say that because in conversations with many current and former serving members of the armed forces, they cite some of the domestic obligations they had with training and in actual deployments as one of the reasons to which they attribute their early retirement, or for those who were seeking a possible career in the armed forces as a reason not to join the armed forces.

What are your thoughts on combatting this reality?

MGen Paul Prévost: I don't want to speculate here. I haven't seen any complaints that the response to domestic operations or international operations is one of the reasons that we have a shortfall in the members of the Canadian Forces. As we've just discussed, in the instance of the reserve, the reserve is a volunteer force. Nothing obliges reserve members to stay in the Canadian Armed Forces. They join us because they want to serve. They want to serve Canadians mainly in domestic operations but also in operations abroad. Should they not want to volunteer for an operation, they don't have to.

What we see time and again is that when there is a natural disaster crisis in Canada, more volunteers show up than we have employment for at the initial stages. As the crisis develops, then we're able to apply that manpower to—

Mr. Glen Motz: I'm sorry, General. I'm not referring to reserve forces. I'm talking about regular forces. I can only repeat what I have been told by multiple members of the Canadian Armed Forces, both current and past.

Let me go back a bit. In early May, this committee heard testimony and a proposal by Josh Bowen. He indicated to the committee that the Government of Canada should establish a federally funded, volunteer-based national civilian disaster response organization that will work closely with NGOs to coordinate civilian capacity to respond to domestic emergencies.

In your estimation, gentlemen, what are the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach? What would be the implications to the Canadian Armed Forces deployment as a last-resort option, which they should be, and not first-resort?

• (1150)

MGen Paul Prévost: Maybe I'll start, but my answer will be very short, Mr. Chair.

I can't speculate, and I'm not involved in those discussions at all, but I think as climate change is happening, more and more natural disasters are likely to occur. The more resources we're able to provide in times of need to Canadians in response to any weather event...is good news.

Mr. Glen Motz: Brigadier-General Major, go ahead.

BGen Josh J. Major: Thank you.

Of course, in line with General Prévost, I won't speculate. However, I can tell you that although the Canadian Armed Forces, of course, should be used as a force of last resort, will always prepare ourselves to be ready to respond to our number one priority, which is protecting Canadians in time of need.

Mr. Glen Motz: My question actually was quite simple. What are the advantages or disadvantages to use the Canadian Armed Forces...for such a civilian capacity organization to be stood up?

MGen Paul Prévost: We haven't looked at that in detail, Mr. Chair. What I'll say is that I can only see advantages at this point. The more we can work together at all levels of government on those issues, the better it will be in times of need.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you.

You mentioned earlier in your presentation, Major-General Prévost, that each province and territory has different capacities for emergency management response. I'm curious to know.... If there were emergency management capacity-building efforts provincially and territorially at the local level, would that reduce the need for CAF to deploy to assist civilian authorities on a regular basis, so it can truly be the last-resort option?

MGen Paul Prévost: I think, Mr. Chair—and I can't speculate, again—that the provinces over time, in recent years, have put in place better emergency management apparatuses. The discussion among the federal level, the provincial level and local communities is stronger than it's ever been.

What I mentioned before is that when there are shortages in staffing power to plan in response to events, this is where the Canadian Armed Forces can help. Obviously, there are many communities in Canada, and many are isolated communities. This is what our rangers provide in isolated and northern communities, this planning power to help local governments respond to those crises.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robillard, you have five minutes.

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Do the Canadian Armed Forces require additional capacity to continue to respond to multiple national emergencies?

MGen Paul Prévost: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If I may, I will answer the question first, and then let my colleague provide a more detailed response.

The resources that the Canadian Forces need most right now are human resources. For a national response, we need people. The troops are currently mobilized to ensure that we can fill the ranks of the Canadian Forces with as many people as possible to reach our capacity. We are currently short 10,000 members, according to our mandate. This is the primary resource of most concern and the one we need to focus on. As for responding to national capacity, we can use a range of tools, and local authorities usually provide what we don't have.

I'll let Brigadier-General Major round out my answer.

BGen Josh J. Major: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his question.

I would add the following: even though we all know that the Canadian Armed Forces are short 10,000 people, we have put procedures in place to ensure that we have forces ready and able to respond to Canadians' needs at home, but also to meet our international obligations. We do this by privatizing our efforts, so that we are able to meet those needs.

• (1155)

Mr. Yves Robillard: There is no doubt that climate change is increasing the severity and frequency of natural disasters, but we have also heard that climate change has broader security implications.

Can you tell us how the Canadian Armed Forces are adapting to these changes relative to their traditional defence and security roles?

MGen Paul Prévost: I thank the member for his excellent question.

It is true that climate change is affecting weather events in Canada, as noted at the start of the meeting. However, it is also a source of international security concerns. Climate change is bringing more conflict to areas of the world that are already disadvantaged, such as desert areas, since resources are very scarce to be being with. I'm talking about food security, for instance. Climate change also exacerbates some of the problems populations experience, whether it is international security, natural disasters or conflicts, and the Canadian Armed Forces may be called upon to respond to them on an international level.

Mr. Yves Robillard: What can local, provincial and federal authorities do to help relieve the mounting pressure on the Canadian Armed Forces to respond to domestic emergencies?

Major-General Paul Prévost: I thank the member for his question.

I will start the answer and then pass it to my colleague if he wishes to add anything.

I feel that we're on the right path. These past few years, we've had to face a pandemic, of course, but in addition, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, the number of natural events where the federal government has had to get involved has doubled about every five years. These events have led local, provincial and federal authorities to seek out tools and ways to better collaborate. Furthermore, a number of civilian organizations, including not-for-profit ones, have stepped up and are always ready to answer the call in the event of a crisis. All partners using the same coordination and communication mechanisms builds domestic resilience.

BGen Josh J. Major: Madam Chair, I would add that—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ)): I'm sorry to interrupt you, Major General, but the member's time is up.

Ms. Gallant, you now have the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Now, in the hurricane down east, as well as other tragedies like Swissair, the military may have been the only entity, not the best entity, to take care of disasters of such scope. Even inland, we have the flooding, and there's nothing more warming than to see a Chinook from 450 Squadron carrying pallets of sandbags. The military already conducts exercises that have the dual function of caring for civilian needs, such as building a helipad for a hospital, because that's something they would do in theatre.

My question is about mitigation, trying to prevent where possible the level of devastation that occurs. Would it be possible to have more training exercises that serve the dual purpose of perhaps building berms or a Duff's Ditch, projects of that extent that would provide for mitigation—with the funding coming from the carbon tax revenues, of course, not from the military coffers? Would it be feasible to have more practical applications, both militarily and civilian, so that we can practise disaster prevention?

● (1200)

BGen Josh J. Major: Certainly, I don't wish to speculate on the extent to which those exercises can occur, but in the past, there have been different military exercises where a specific unit.... In this case, what is being referred to is specific to engineers, as many of these activities are. We speak of berms, for example. Engineers have gone in and built Bailey bridges, which they have left in place to service other communities. It is conceivably possible, but I wouldn't wish to speculate on the amount or the level to which that could be done in the future.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay.

You mentioned engineers, and that leads to my next question. One of the propositions is that we have a type of army corps of engineers, but we're short of people for the military as it is. We're short of people to fill civilian positions.

Given what you know about the strength in respect to our engineers, would it be feasible to have an army corps of engineers—similar but not the same as that in the United States, for example—or would that separate entity detract from the human resources available, which are already in short supply for the military?

BGen Josh J. Major: Madam Chair, thanks for that question. It certainly is an interesting question.

As far as I'm aware, no study is being done right now to look into those possibilities. I wouldn't want to speculate on the type of personnel or the pool that would be drawn from for each. Perhaps something that would require more study would be to look at the U.S. corps of army engineers, which is an entity distinct from, say, the U.S. Army engineers. Each provides a different level of combat support.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: If such an entity were stood up, would that allow the military to do more of the training that only the military can do? We've said that all eyes are on Ukraine, but we have to have some eyes on our Arctic as well. Would it relieve some of the human resource pressure if we had a separate entity, not necessarily to fight disasters alone but perhaps to mitigate the effects of disasters?

BGen Josh J. Major: Thank you for that question.

I wouldn't want to necessarily speculate without having a firm understanding of what this corps of engineers would be mandated to do. It's difficult to describe what their task would be in relation to Canadian Armed Forces engineering tasks.

Understanding with foresight the path that the Canadian Armed Forces currently trains for will allow us to continue into the future, as those are skills that we need to maintain.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Should the militia or Canada's reserve army be trained to fight climate change or weather events, the way they were a civil defence force during the Cold War, in the so-called hook-and-ladder days?

BGen Josh J. Major: Mr. Chair, it's an interesting question.

We're examining the reserve force right now. They are currently training on generally the same tasks that we are asking of the regular force, to allow us to integrate and to be able to respond either domestically or internationally without creating a niche capability.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gallant.

Mr. May, you have five minutes.

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here with us this morning.

One of the things I've been keenly focused on in my role as parliamentary secretary for defence is the infrastructure that we currently have and some of the challenges and deficiencies we have.

To what extent are CAF current facilities located across Canada at risk due to extreme weather?

MGen Paul Prévost: I'm not an expert on infrastructure in Canada, but what I can say is that throughout hurricane Fiona that just went through the Maritimes, our military infrastructure withstood the storm. There's no impact on our operations right now in Atlantic Canada due to the storm.

That's all I can provide right now.

Mr. Bryan May: Beyond the circumstances we're faced with immediately, do you have any insight on specific facilities that might be at risk as a result of not just extreme weather in general but climate change?

● (1205)

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, that's a good question.

Again, as I said, I'm not an expert on infrastructure for the Canadian Armed Forces. What we know is that we have probably the biggest portfolio of infrastructure for the federal government. Some of it is aging. This will be part of the defence policy update in terms of what needs to be done. I know there are great efforts to green our portfolio, to revamp our portfolio. The status of exactly what the vulnerabilities at this point are I cannot speak to.

Mr. Bryan May: Thank you.

How do provincial and territorial emergency management organizations, NGOs, the CAF and other federal entities co-operate and collaborate during these types of domestic emergencies?

The Chair: Please be brief.

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, I can certainly speak to that, as I'm involved in pretty much every domestic crisis we have in Canada in terms of the discussions between the federal partners, as well as the provinces and sometimes the local partners.

On those discussions, I would say that this is something the pandemic brought to us: a good assessment of all the tools available, because there were so many facets in the pandemic that we had to deal with. Those discussions are strong. Everybody's on speed dial, and we have some great discussions internally and within the federal government, but also with every emergency management authority in every territory and the provinces. There are great discussions.

When it's required, we also bring in the local levels. I think of when we respond to a crisis in first nation communities, to forest fires, evacuations and COVID outbreaks like those we've lived through over the last two and a half years. We bring all levels into the same room to have good discussions on what the needs are and how we can best address them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. May.

I didn't know we still had speed dial.

You have two and a half minutes, Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Major General Prévost, I'd like to come back to what Mr. Fisher asked, that you explain the process for working with the CAF.

We know that the CAF doesn't stay at an emergency location indefinitely. What's the process for having the CAF leave? How do they get to the point where they say they no longer need the military?

MGen Paul Prévost: That's an excellent question, Mr. Chair.

When the CAF responds to a domestic crisis, initially the focus is on understanding the tasks the province wants it to perform and allocating the resources required to do so.

As soon as this analysis begins, teams look at what are called transition criteria. These are used to determine how long the province will need the CAF and what other capacities could be called upon to meet the subsequent needs brought on by the crisis. So, that analysis begins immediately when boots hit the ground. Discussions are held with provincial officials to determine what cri-

teria will need to be met before we can all shake hands and the CAF can say goodbye.

Ms. Christine Normandin: One of the issues that's been raised about using the CAF is that it's much more expensive than using civilian resources.

You might tell me that most of the cost is associated with the initial deployment and it goes down each day the CAF is used from there on. Would you like to comment on that?

Would it be worthwhile to work on that aspect to ensure a quicker transition?

MGen Paul Prévost: I'd like to thank the member for her question.

I don't have an answer for that at the moment. It's a good question, and I will keep it in mind for our analysis.

That being said, when Canadians need help, it's important that all levels of government participate as best they can to remedy the situation as quickly as possible.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: To go away from this direct subject a little, but in relation to it, one incredible program that exists in my community and many others is of course the cadets program. Oftentimes, it teaches young people such incredible leadership and also the value of public service and the roles within the armed forces at all the different stages and in all the different branches. It can often lead to those young people giving of themselves in so many ways throughout their lives, whether that's in the reserves, the actual armed forces or different areas of public service.

Certainly, it's a program that's provided free—or has been in the past—and it's barrier-free in that regard. Recently, there have been changes to the cadet program, and now it actually costs the students money—those young people and their parents—to participate. Do you believe that ultimately this is a potential problem when we're talking about recruitment, when we're talking about starting that service early and seeing the value leading into reserves? Also, if we're going into crisis after crisis and relying upon the armed forces for civil aid, do you see that as a link and potential remedy to that?

• (1210)

MGen Paul Prévost: Unfortunately, Mr. Chair, neither I nor my colleague will be able to provide much here, as we're not involved at all in policies that reference our cadet program, other than to say that I believe it's a great program. I support it every summer and through the year in its activities. This is a great way to build Canadians with leadership who will serve in society in many ways in the future.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Well, we could then agree that ultimately to maintain it, and to ensure that it remains as barrier-free as possible, is a good way to move forward with that program.

The Chair: I'm sure the answer to that is "yes".

Go ahead, Mr. Doherty.

Mr. Todd Doherty: We know that we have at least 100 CAF troops currently deployed in Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador. Is that enough? Should there be more? Why were there only 100 in the initial deployment?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, I can certainly respond to that.

This morning, we have 150 troops in each of the provinces—Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and P.E.I.—so we're up to 150 this morning and, as the minister mentioned yesterday, more to come should the provinces ask for them.

One thing to remember is that when these crises start, we have to understand the problem. Emergency management centres in the provinces get the calls and understand where the pressures are, what the damage is and what the priority will be. So there are planning efforts to start with. As we understand the problem better, the troops unfold on the ground to be able to tackle the issues as mandated or as asked by the province. We were at 100 yesterday, and we're at 150 now. As the provinces determine where the effort needs to be, we'll reassign forces as applicable.

I'll pass it on to my colleague now.

BGen Josh J. Major: Thank you for the question.

From an internal force generation of troops and personnel ready to respond, as we gain a better understanding through that interaction between the local, provincial and territorial authorities and the Canadian Armed Forces, it allows us to prepare additional capacity. It might be something like the HMCS *Margaret Brooke*, dispatched to the southwest corner of Newfoundland to assist with wellness checks, or the alert of different assets within the Royal Canadian Air Force so that we are ready to respond if a request for additional capabilities is made.

Mr. Todd Doherty: This might be a silly question, but what's the priority? Is it responding to international conflict or responding to domestic issues?

MGen Paul Prévost: It's responding to domestic issues. I think our defence policy lays it out well in its title: "strong at home, secure in North America, engaged in the world".

Mr. Todd Doherty: Briefing materials for this committee seem to be based on two assumptions—one, that there will be an increase to climate change-related incidents that the Canadian Forces will have to respond to; and two, that the Canadian Forces will have to balance these domestic operations with military operations abroad. How do you respond to these subjective assumptions, and what can be done to better prepare our CAF for that?

• (1215)

BGen Josh J. Major: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that question. It's an important question.

Of course, as has been mentioned here at this committee, the amount of domestic response that the Canadian Armed Forces has

been responding to has only been increasing. The world, of course, is becoming a more dangerous place. What we have in place are systems of managed readiness, which allow us both to ensure that we have domestic capability at home ready to respond throughout the different regions of Canada, and to concurrently prepare our forces to respond to our mandates as given to us by the Government of Canada to achieve international obligations. We are, of course, always balancing those two, understanding that support to Canadians is our top priority.

Mr. Todd Doherty: How do the events of what's just taken place in the last four or five days seriously hamper our international efforts—or do they?

BGen Josh J. Major: I'm not quite sure.... For my clarity, are we talking about Fiona for the past four or five days?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Yes, that's correct. I'm sorry. The world is ever-changing, but I should have been clearer: the domestic events in the last four days, compared to what we are dealing with internationally as well.

BGen Josh J. Major: Mr. Chair, thank you for that clarification.

We continue to manage the same process that we have used for the past few years as we've navigated through the COVID pandemic and other domestic emergencies. We have procedures in place to ensure that we are able to deliver the required and requested number of forces—in particular for Fiona—while still being able to train and to be ready to meet our obligations. The forces that are currently providing great support to Canadians in Atlantic Canada are dedicated solely to that task, while we have other forces that continue their preparations in view of meeting our international obligations.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Doherty.

Before I call on Ms. O'Connell for five minutes, we've gone through three rounds, so is there an appetite to go four rounds? Also, is there an ability for Major-General Prévost and Brigadier-General Major to sit for another round?

First of all, is there an appetite?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Bryan May: We can have one question for each party.

The Chair: Sure. That's okay.

We'll have one question for each party, Ms. O'Connell for five minutes and then—

Mr. Darren Fisher: We have to acknowledge that they have important work to do.

The Chair: I know. Major-General Prévost said he had a day job.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Darren Fisher: That's a day job, exactly. He has spent a lot of time with us lately.

The Chair: With that, we have Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to both of you for being here.

Major-General Prévost, in your opening remarks you spoke about the doubling of requests every five years, if I wrote that down correctly. Obviously, with climate change, extreme weather events are more prevalent, so it's not surprising to see that increase.

However, based on the nature of our study and some of the information and testimony we've had, I'm curious to know if anyone in CAF—whether it's either of you or those who might report to you—has looked at provincial and territorial budgets or programming to see if there are investments being made at the local levels in terms of this increased frequency of major events like climate change.

The context of this question is that some of the testimony we heard is that there is no urgency in some places to increase resources to be able to deal with these events at the local level because CAF has become the first line of request, etc. I'm just curious to know if that has been looked at at all and if there's any...I don't want to say “any truth to it”, because I'm sure the testimony here was incredibly truthful, but is there any data backing that up or have you actually engaged to help local authorities also increase their capacity as we're seeing more frequent extreme weather events domestically?

• (1220)

MGen Paul Prévost: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

We have not looked at this. This would be Public Safety's mandate to discuss with provinces on emergency management. Obviously, every level of government has its own responsibility in terms of emergency management, and you would think that every government has at heart the safety of its own citizens.

What I'll say, though, is that what we've observed over the last three years is increased coordination and increased awareness and understanding of each jurisdiction in terms of capabilities, and we have.... The chair laughed at my “speed dial”, so I'll say that we have a Teams speed dial conference that gets stood up when these crises happen, and what we've seen is increased resilience.

Obviously, all levels of government in every province are watching climate change. At the same time, there are places where it's more difficult to have all the resources in place. I think of all the first nation and isolated communities we have in Canada. This is where the CAF, through the pandemic, spent a lot of attention in doing an analysis on what we can do for those communities, because they're difficult to access. They don't have the planning capacity and all the resources available.

All that is to say that I haven't looked into specific investments in provinces, but what we can see is an increased resilience pan-government.

Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you. That's helpful.

I'd like to follow up on one of your answers. You mentioned, in terms of the reservists, that sometimes you have more people putting their hands up than you need for the particular event.

In a different study, and I'm tying together the two studies.... We've seen recent media reports, too, of a recruitment issue in CAF. Is there any look at or thought about creating some sort of unit specifically to react to natural disasters or emergency situations domestically, as a specific recruitment idea? I think there are a lot of Canadians who might want to put their hand up to join CAF, but some of the potential international commitments might not be feasible. We heard this in a different study on retention and recruitment.

Is this an idea? If you clearly see reservists putting their hands up, there is a huge desire for Canadians to serve domestically in this time. Is there a thought about creating some sort of unit as a recruitment idea, or is there no discussion on that level, based on the style that recruitment is—

The Chair: That was a long question. Give a short answer, please.

BGen Josh J. Major: Yes, Mr. Chair. I will provide a short answer.

As far as I'm aware, there has been no study.

I would emphasize the great work done by the whole team protecting Canadians. Being in the reserves is a voluntary decision, and they work in a voluntary capacity that allows them to respond domestically or internationally, per their own decision. It's great to see them providing great value to Canadians in Atlantic Canada as we speak.

The Chair: Mr. Allison, you have one question.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Thank you, gentlemen, for being here.

As we look at the potential down the road for civil unlawfulness, riots, disturbances and stuff like that, what type of role...? We often talk about bringing in CAF for events like that. We're talking about a natural disaster, but what about when it comes to civil unrest? What would you see your role being? What would be a requirement if you were called in to help in a particular area?

MGen Paul Prévost: That's a great question.

When it comes to assistance to law enforcement, this is something the Canadian Armed Forces can do, but it is something I think everybody has to be careful with. In the Canadian Armed Forces, we prefer to provide assistance to law enforcement in a supporting role. If there are ways we can assist law enforcement without performing law enforcement tasks ourselves, that's always better, for multiple reasons.

When these discussions arise.... It requires very good discussions between the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Public Safety, who would be making such a request. It is best to employ the Canadian Armed Forces in any role in the periphery of civil unrest, rather than dealing with the law enforcement itself.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allison.

Mr. May, you have one question.

Mr. Bryan May: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for sharing their time with us so readily and frequently.

I know that often in your position, you can't address questions that you're not asked, so I want to open it up to ask what we haven't asked you. What recommendations would you bring to the table that we may not have thought of?

MGen Paul Prévost: Maybe I'll start.

I think we have some challenges ahead—not only in the CAF, but as a whole of society—with climate change. It's something we have to pay attention to. Our defence policy update, coming this fall, is looking at that issue: how we need to restructure and how we need to get additional resources and capabilities.

With the resources we have right now, we're able to meet one of our core missions. What's encouraging, as well, is the whole-of-government table—all governments—that has been stood up to increase the resilience to better protect Canadians.

Go ahead, Josh.

BGen Josh J. Major: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to comment.

As was mentioned several times during this hearing, the number of times the CAF has been requested to assist, either domestically or internationally, has continued to increase, and it certainly won't be going down in the future—at least in the near future.

We are of course bringing together the team of the CAF and the different component parts, be it the regular force, the reserve force, rangers or public servants. That really creates a great strength, which allows us to meet the requirements of any emergency, and perhaps that's the last point I would leave on that particular caseover.

The Chair: Madame Normandin, you have one question.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to ask a question somewhat outside the specific scope of calling on the CAF. In terms of coordination on the ground, correct me if I'm wrong, it's the public safety agencies in the provinces that coordinate all partners on the ground, right?

So when two partners want to do something together, they have to make sure that they go through the public safety agencies before setting up an initiative. Does that work well?

Are there things that need to be reviewed, especially since we will likely see more and more partners involved, like the CAF, fire-fighters, the Red Cross and so on?

Should command be reviewed and improved for the future?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, I will answer and then see if my colleague would like to add something.

The member is absolutely right. We receive requests for assistance from the provinces and the resources provided are handled by their emergency management centre. It's important that the centre

control the resources. Of course, many civilians are doing things on their own, even though that might not be well coordinated, but when it comes to government resources, coordination must be done at the provincial emergency management centres. The CAF is always there to support those centres.

As I mentioned earlier, from the outset, we provide resources to the provincial centres based on the nature and magnitude of the emergency, to help them plan things and coordinate the day-to-day allocation of resources.

Brigadier General, is there anything you'd like to add?

BGen Josh J. Major: The CAF always works under the authority of civilian organizations in order to meet their needs. In terms of the guidance provided at a higher level, whether it comes from the provincial or federal government, the local level does a very good job coordinating and people really want to come together to make it work when the time comes to help Canadians.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Just to build from that coordination, that ability to work with all those civilian-led.... If the government ultimately were to create a volunteer NGO-based response, a civil disaster response body, does the CAF have the capacity to actually do the training for them, either regionally or in some different form? Is that capacity there now, considering the difficulties we have in terms of recruitment and retention?

• (1230)

BGen Josh J. Major: Mr. Chair, thank you for that question.

It's hard to speculate right now on what an entity such as that would require in terms of training or coordination. Certainly, if it were to be something that would be set up in the future, that is something we'd have to look at to see what training, if any, the CAF would be able to provide to ensure we could seamlessly coordinate if required for a future event.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Before I call on Mr. Fisher for a thank you, I just want to ask a question. The government is about to do SSE 2.0. That is a policy document, so it's policy people who input into that document. Your role, as I understand it, is that whatever the policy is, that is what you implement. That's your role. Can you point us to someone who is in the military shop, presumably in the policy shop, who has been giving some thought to these questions as to the changing relationship between civil authority and, for want of a better term, military aid?

As you can see, a lot of the questions that were asked here were largely policy questions, what-ifs. I'm sure both of you have thought about it a lot, but you're not necessarily the people we should be asking these questions. You can also see that members are really engaged in this subject matter, because the questions were pretty high-level questions. Is there some place you could point us to, some individual or shop you could point us to, that would allow us to engage in what is more of a policy discussion?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

You're absolutely right; these are policy questions. At the same time, military uniforms—me, for instance—are advising those policy directorates on what our advice is. Ultimately, the chief will also provide his advice to the minister.

We do have an entire policy section that's looking at North America, domestic response, NORAD—so Canada and the U.S., basically. They will be the best people to go to, and we can provide those names after the session if you'd like.

The Chair: That would be appreciated.

That brings our time to a close.

I know that Mr. Fisher wanted to say thank you.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I thanked you both previously, but on behalf of Atlantic Canadians, I want to thank you for the effort that the Canadian Armed Forces is putting into taking care of Atlantic Canadians.

I'd like to also, if I could, presumptuously perhaps, thank you on behalf of the entire committee. I know that Mr. Allison has family in Nova Scotia. We all have strong connections to the Atlantic provinces here on this committee.

I want to sincerely thank you on behalf of Atlantic Canada. Please pass that along to your forces. We love them. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

On behalf of the committee, I also want to thank you—particularly you, Major-General Prévost. As I indicated at the beginning, you should be up for some frequent flyer points. However, in order to be able to collect your frequent flyer points, we'll be expecting you to appear before the committee, as opposed to being virtually before the committee as you are currently. Otherwise, we're not quite sure that you are real, Major-General.

Colleagues, Thursday has collapsed for us. It's a natural consequence of asking witnesses to come, cancelling them, asking them to come again and cancelling them again. That is what we did during the spring, out of...just reality. We don't have a lineup for Thursday. My proposal is that we use the time for a subcommittee meeting to scope out what we're going to do for the fall, if that meets with the general approval of colleagues.

With that, again, thank you. No doubt, Major-General Prévost, we'll see you again.

The meeting is adjourned.

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