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• (0815)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

We are here with the minister and his entourage.

First of all, colleagues, the clerk received a letter concerning some corrections of numbers on the housing study. We'd already signed off on that.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Wilson): No. It's just on her appearance.

The Chair: Yes, well, it's on that particular appearance.

I asked the analysts to make sure that the numbers were not included in the report. I'm satisfied that's true, so I will be tabling it in the normal course of events. That's for your information.

We are here with Minister Blair to study his mandate.

I know the minister is beyond excited to be here, so I will turn it over to him for his five-minute opening statement. I think I should allow a few minutes for you to introduce some of your team, who are new to the committee but very welcome.

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of National Defence): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

First of all, let me assure you I'm not beyond excited, but I've come right up to the line.

Second, if I may, just as a point of clarification, you said I was here with an entourage and that's not entirely true. I'm here with my team and I'm delighted to have these fine people with me here today.

I'm joined this morning by Deputy Minister Stefanie Beck. I'm also joined by the vice chief of the defence staff, Lieutenant-General Stephen Kelsey. Our ADM of materiel, Nancy Tremblay, has joined us this morning. Also, from CSE, we have our ADM, Wendy Hadwen.

These are important members of our team and I'm sure they'll be able to provide information and insight over the course of my appearance here and later on in their own appearances later this morning.

Mr. Chair and members of the Standing Committee on National Defence, good morning and thank you for the kind invitation to appear before you to discuss my priorities as Minister of National Defence and to endeavour to answer any questions that you may have.

I believe very sincerely that it's good to check in regularly, given the volatility and rapid evolution of the threat environment that Canada and the rest of the world are facing. As the security landscape is shifting, so too must our priorities. We must do whatever is required to defend our nation and to keep Canadians safe. The job that we ask of our CAF members is a difficult and challenging one. We are doing everything we can to support them in that mission.

The world has changed considerably since the mandate letter was issued in 2021. As you'll recall, that was well before Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It was before an emboldened China ramped up its assertive, subversive and coercive behaviours and it was before the conflict in the Middle East began spilling over, at great risk to regional and global security.

While we've made considerable progress advancing our 2021 mandate, we've also had to reprioritize and adapt in response to this changing context.

My greatest priority will always be our people and that is a constant that must never change. We remain focused on making sure that they have the support and the resources they need to continue their excellent work that they do on behalf of our country.

For example, we know that CAF families are often at the bottom of local child care wait-lists when relocated or redeployed on short notice. That's why Canada's renewed defence policy, "Our North, Strong and Free", commits \$100 million over five years to enhance child care services for CAF personnel and their families.

We also know that frequent relocations and deployment create unique challenges for our military families when it comes to housing. Our Canadian Forces housing differential came into effect in July 2023 to help CAF members who are living off base adjust to housing costs when relocating in Canada. We are also going to invest in significant new housing for our members. We need to increase housing availability on bases to make sure CAF members and their families have safe, affordable housing.

We're putting forward vital initiatives to ensure that our defence team members have the resources and infrastructure that they need to thrive in their important roles. Serving one's country can be a difficult and challenging occupation. It should not be made more challenging by the conditions under which they serve.

We are also addressing a significant priority of culture change. We have to make sure that all of our CAF members feel well supported by the organization and their nation that they have sworn to protect. Since 2021, we've made some significant progress on Justice Arbour's 48 recommendations in her independent external comprehensive review of the Canadian Armed Forces to implement meaningful and long-lasting cultural change for the Canadian Armed Forces.

I think one of our best examples for that happened just a few weeks ago when Parliament began its second reading of Bill C-66, which will ensure the Criminal Code sexual assault cases in the CAF will be tried in the civilian justice system instead of in military court.

I want to take the opportunity to thank all members present here for their support of that legislation. I very much look forward to us completing second reading and bringing this bill before this committee to allow the committee to do its important work to make sure it is the best bill for the members of the Canadian Armed Forces. I believe that all the changes we're working on together will lead to durable military justice reform and it's going to help CAF members and the Canadian public regain trust in our system.

We're also very focused on making new investment. In response to an evolving global threat environment, we're also investing significantly in new platforms, equipment and capabilities.

The war in Ukraine has taught us a lot about our own strengths and vulnerabilities, as a country, a partner and an ally in our global security network. These lessons informed our updated defence policy, which places a new emphasis and sharp focus on defending our continent and Canada's Arctic, investing in advanced capabilities to better detect, deter and defeat threats, and building up our defence industrial base.

We must demonstrate to our allies that we remain a reliable and valuable partner. At the NATO summit in July, we announced that we will reach NATO's 2% target by 2032.

● (0820)

We're equipping our military with 21st-century capabilities that are going to allow us to operate across all domains, in all environments and alongside our allies and partners, starting with new ships, submarines, vehicles and planes that contribute to our Canadian Armed Forces' operational readiness. We are also modernizing command and control systems.

In order to do this effectively, we know that we must usher in new capabilities in a new era, and we need to find a new approach to modernizing defence procurement. We're actively reviewing our procurement processes to find inefficiencies and build better relationships with industry.

I would also note that we are making the largest investment in our navy and our air force since the Second World War. In "Our

North, Strong and Free", we've outlined how we'll invest in industry to create new production lines and secure supply chains that will allow us to increase production at home. This is going to be good for our military, but it will also be good for our workers, our industry and our economy.

Protecting national security is job one, and I want to acknowledge that we have a great deal to do. Since I got this job, I have tried to make it very clear that Canada must do more, and Canada will do more. We have to live up to our obligations to defend our country and to our international partners.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'll happily submit to any questions members may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Blair.

We'll turn to our six-minute round, starting with Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Thank you, Minister, for joining us this morning. I appreciate that, and all the other witnesses who are joining you from your defence team. Thank you for all of the work you all do in keeping Canada safe and supporting our Canadian Armed Forces and the important work they undertake.

Minister, in the defence policy update, when you look at the defence spending planned for this year of \$33.8 billion, the actual spending authorities for CAF and the Department of National Defence—I'm not talking about the creative accounting where we add in other eligible departments at about \$7 billion; I'm talking about the direct spending to CAF and the Department of National Defence—are only \$30 billion. Why is there a \$3-billion shortfall? Is that lapsed spending again, or is it part of the budget cuts?

Hon. Bill Blair: I believe my staff may be able to provide you a more detailed explanation either during this session or the next—

Mr. James Bezan: If they could send—

Hon. Bill Blair: —and I would invite them to do that.

If I may simply respond, in 2022-23, for example, we had \$1.57 billion in lapsed spending. That reflects some of the challenges we have in actually spending the money that has been allocated and budgeted for the national defence department. For the procurement of large platforms in particular, because we are stewards of taxpayer dollars, it's important that we make sure we are spending them well and wisely and getting the best possible value for those investments while, at the same time, acquiring the best equipment.

Of that \$1.57 billion that lapsed in 2022-23, \$1.5 billion of that, or 92%, is still available for defence spending for future years. This includes \$1 billion for adjustments to spending on capital infrastructure projects and \$240 million in carry-forward expenditures. I have—

Mr. James Bezan: That's fine. You can send that to the committee with the details, and we'll definitely look at it.

Hon. Bill Blair: —a rather long list.

By the way, if I may clarify something, it's not creative accounting; it's actual numbers.

Mr. James Bezan: Do you know, Minister, that, at \$30 billion, you actually allowed direct defence investment in the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence to slip below 1%? According to the Library of Parliament's calculation, we're at 0.95% when you don't account for other eligible departmental spending of \$8 billion.

• (0825)

Hon. Bill Blair: If I may clarify, the only time that Canada has ever gone below 1% spending—

Mr. James Bezan: It is right now.

Hon. Bill Blair: —was in 2013-14, when you were the parliamentary secretary to the minister of defence.

Mr. James Bezan: Those are two different worlds, Minister, and you know that.

Hon. Bill Blair: Currently, today—

Mr. James Bezan: You know those are two different worlds. There was no war in Ukraine. There was no war in Afghanistan. We were out of Libya. Now we're sitting here with war on our front pages in NATO's eastern flank.

Hon. Bill Blair: Listen, I don't care about the context or excuses for why it happened; it's only a fact that it did happen, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: I'm asking the questions here, Minister.

Hon. Bill Blair: If I may—

The Chair: Gentlemen, it works better when one person asks a question and another person gives an answer, not when you speak simultaneously. I've stopped the clock. I'll allow Mr. Bezan to ask his question again, and then we can go from there.

Mr. Bezan, go ahead.

Mr. James Bezan: I'm going to move on, because the minister is just going to talk over me rather than admit to the facts about defence spending when we're in a conflict situation with Ukraine, when we have a greater adversary than we've ever witnessed in China and when we have Israel defending its right to exist against terrorist organizations, along with the government of Iran and the terrorist regime in Tehran.

I want to get down to NORAD modernization at \$38.6 billion. We're getting new P-8s and we're getting new F-35s, finally, that are all going to be delivered in 2026. Our air wings across this country, including our forward operating locations, have to be modernized, and security has to be installed before we receive those planes.

To date, you've only spent \$30 million. Where is this money going? Why is it taking so long? We have planes coming and no infrastructure is being built.

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, Mr. Bezan, if I may be allowed to answer your question, we have actually budgeted \$38.6 billion for NORAD modernization. We're working very closely with the commander of NORAD and with our American allies in making those investments.

According to the plan in those investments, we know we needed to acquire new capabilities. Also, as you've already acknowledged, we signed a contract for the replacement of the CP-140s with the P-8s. Those will begin to be delivered by 2026, with full delivery by 2028. I think that's a very significant advancement.

Mr. James Bezan: Are the wings in Comox and Cold Lake going to be ready to receive them?

Hon. Bill Blair: I would also share with you that we are making concurrent, significant new investments in infrastructure, by building new airport runways and new infrastructure and acquiring hangar capabilities for the new aircraft that are being acquired.

However, as part of NORAD modernization, I think the most significant initial investments, according to the plan that has been put forward by Canada and the United States under the NORAD umbrella, are invests in over-the-horizon radar and over-the-polar radar—

Mr. James Bezan: Have you selected those sites yet where we're putting those up?

Hon. Bill Blair: If I may, we have been advised by our allies that they are working through issues with respect to that technology, which will determine where we should make the best investment in the sites for those—

The Chair: I think there should be some equivalency between answer and question. I think the minister has run past. You still have a minute, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you.

Just in my final minute here, Minister, yesterday you made a reference to the Geneva Convention and Israel's right to defend itself. Do you believe that Israel has a right to defend itself and retaliate against Iran for the attacks?

Hon. Bill Blair: I think Israel has a right to defend itself and diminish Iran's capacity to attack.

Mr. James Bezan: You made the comment about striking nuclear sites—and we're talking about weapons sites in Iran. You said that it's in violation of the Geneva Convention. I just want to read to you article 56, as it is in Canadian law on the Geneva Convention. It says: "Works or installations containing dangerous forces, namely dams, dykes and nuclear electrical generating stations, shall not be made the object of attack."

I know Mr. Poilievre was not talking about electrical sites like nuclear power stations; he was talking about nuclear weapons development sites that are happening right now in Iran. Do you not agree that those sites are fair game for Israel to retaliate against the regime in Tehran, yes or no?

Hon. Bill Blair: It's not a yes-or-no answer. Canada is a signatory to the 1977 protocols for the Geneva Convention, the law of armed conflict. That law very specifically prohibits attacking nuclear facilities—

• (0830)

Mr. James Bezan: Nuclear electrical facilities....

Hon. Bill Blair: —because of the risk it poses to innocent civilians and to the environment. That is a convention that the world has agreed to, and 174 countries have signed on to that protocol. I think it's reckless and irresponsible to call for attacks on nuclear facilities, which are very specifically prohibited under international humanitarian law.

Mr. James Bezan: It's electrical power.

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it there.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Mr. Collins, you have six minutes.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Minister.

In his parting speech, General Eyre highlighted that our democratic institutions are constantly under attack. You talked about the evolution of the threat environment in your opening statement. We know that Russia and China are part of a global group that is spreading disinformation and attacking our democratic institutions. The DPU highlights this issue.

Can you talk about how we address those issues domestically and then internationally with our partners?

Hon. Bill Blair: It's a multi-faceted question and, I think, an important one. I referenced the changing environment in my opening remarks, and I think we've highlighted that very specifically in “Our North, Strong and Free”, our new defence policy update. The changing environment requires an evolution in Canada's approach to its national defence and national security. Those things are very much related.

What we are seeing as a result of climate change is that our continent—our Arctic—is becoming far more accessible. We're seeing, with advances in new technologies, that those technologies threaten our security, and we need to be able to respond appropriately, which is going to require significant new investments.

We also talk very extensively about the activities of our adversaries. We're seeing, for example, that China is building up the largest military capability. It's an extraordinary investment in its military capability taking place over the past several years, which threatens to change the balance of security and power in the globe. It's something that we and our allies need to respond appropriately to. We're also seeing, as a result of Russia's attack on Ukraine, that—

The Chair: Excuse me. I'm having trouble listening to this exchange. If there is another conversation to be had, I would prefer it take place somewhere else other than the table.

Please continue.

Hon. Bill Blair: I agree that we're seeing activities from Russia. One of the things we see certainly is that they're challenging us militarily. They're also challenging us significantly in the cyber environment, and I think you highlighted in your question the importance of misinformation and disinformation. They are making efforts to destabilize our society, our institutions, important institutions like our political system, by engaging in polarizing rhetoric, misinformation, fearmongering, threats and coercion against some of our citizens. All of those behaviours are a non-kinetic form of warfare. It's asymmetrical, but it's something that Canada needs to respond to because they are direct threats.

For the Canadian Armed Forces and through our people at CSE, we are very much engaged in countering those threats and making sure that the connection between national defence and national security.... I think, it's very clear, and I think we all have a responsibility. It's going to require advances in our approaches and closer work with our allies.

I would share with you as well one thing from my experience—Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as an example. I think their intention was to destabilize the western alliance and to cause rifts between us. It's had exactly the opposite effect. In my experience, all of the nations of NATO, including Canada and the United States, have become far stronger, far more united, far more resolute in our purpose of making sure that we have the capabilities to counter the threat that Russia and China represent, and others too, by the way. We are also seeing that type of hostile activity from state actors such as Iran and North Korea. There is, unfortunately, a growing list of people who are clearly demonstrating that they are willing to engage in a number of very aggressive, assertive and negative behaviours towards our society, our culture, our institutions and our country.

Mr. Chad Collins: I'll follow up with another issue that's related to the changing environment, and that is related to artificial intelligence.

I've read your comments, I think, a month or two ago, in relation to our use of artificial intelligence. You highlighted the fact that we're going to use it, but it's not going to replace the work that the members of the Canadian Armed Forces do. It's going to assist them in their duties. You also talked about establishing international rules with our allies and partners. We know that with most international agreements, Russia and China are not a part of it, and they normally thumb their nose at it.

Minister, how do we deal with artificial intelligence as it relates to domestically assisting us, and then deal with those in the world who might use it for nefarious purposes?

Hon. Bill Blair: Thanks for that. It's a very important question as well. First of all, I think AI represents an extraordinary opportunity for our national defence, for our security establishment officials. By the way, there is an extraordinary level of expertise and capability in Canada. I think Canada has much to offer. Perhaps we can talk about that later on in this meeting. Canada has much to offer to our allies in those capabilities.

At the same time, we also recognize that the responsible use of AI, particularly in military applications, is something that is going to require some international consensus. However, I'm in complete agreement with you. Some of our adversaries have demonstrated that they would thumb their noses at such conventions, and will not use AI in an ethical way. We have to make sure that we have the capability....

I think it is still incumbent upon us to make sure that we use it in an appropriate and ethical way, and in order to do that, we may have to make sure that people are at the heart of the decisions that we ultimately make with respect to how we engage in military activity. At the same time, we have to have the capability of countering the negative applications that our adversaries could undertake. It is a very significant policy challenge. I know that there's been some extraordinary work that perhaps our officials could share with you, perhaps even in a more secure setting, about some of the work that's already under way.

● (0835)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Minister, thank you for making yourself available to us today.

I'd like to come back to the letter I sent you on June 28, in which I requested an inquiry into the actions of your predecessor, Mr. Sajjan.

We know that it was said in the news that the minister had mentioned that he had not given the order to prioritize the Sikh community, but had simply passed on information to the chain of command.

In a letter dated June 28, we asked you to investigate. We received a reply to this letter from the Department of National Defence on July 23, a month later, in which we were told that our letter was being reviewed.

Has an investigation been launched on your side, or have steps been taken to shed light on the matter?

[*English*]

The Chair: Before you answer that question, Minister....

I'm not sure that's within the minister's mandate. We're here to examine his mandate, not a predecessor's mandate.

I would be very concerned about ruling that question out of order, but I—

Mr. James Bezan: I have a point of order.

I believe that mandate letter that the minister is working on is the mandate letter of his predecessor.

The Chair: I don't know. I think the—

Hon. Bill Blair: [*Inaudible—Editor*] I inherited.

The Chair: Okay, if you're comfortable with that question....

My immediate reaction is that it is out of order, but I'm content to defer.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If I may, Madam, first of all, I did receive your letter. I've had my team make inquiries as to what information is available with respect to that period of time during the evacuation in Afghanistan.

I have received a response from my predecessor, Minister Sajjan, but I also understand that Minister Sajjan has agreed to appear before this committee. I think, respectfully, that I would allow him to offer his explanation to this committee rather than for me to try to interpret it on his behalf.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Yes, absolutely. I'm not asking you to interpret what was done by your predecessor. Rather, I'm asking you to enlighten us as to what's next and how information, even orders, are transmitted between the minister and the Canadian Armed Forces. I believe this falls within your mandate.

We understood that there seemed to be structural problems with the chain of command, and that certain information transmitted could be mistaken for orders given by the minister. That's precisely what my questions are about.

To your knowledge, are there any problems of understanding within the forces about the minister's role that influence the way his requests or orders are perceived by the forces?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much, Ms. Normandin.

First of all, I've been the minister at National Defence now for some period of time. I do not believe that I have any authority to issue orders to the Canadian Armed Forces and to the chief of defence.

There are some circumstances, some authorities, when they require my approval to give them a certain authority to undertake certain actions. However, I don't believe, in my own experience.... I've seen nothing in the National Defence Act that implies that I would have any authority to issue an order to the CDS or to any member of the Canadian Armed Forces.

● (0840)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much. That sheds a lot of light on the matter.

So I understand that, according to your understanding, a minister would be overstepping his role if he were to do something that could be likened to micromanaging or interfering in activities taking place in theatres of operations.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: I have an excellent working relationship and I have my vice chief of defence with me, who may want to add remarks to this.

We discuss their response to operations and they brief me on the actions that they're taking. I think it is my responsibility to ask a lot of questions, to get information and to clarify certain things. I think that the value of those discussions is that together we actually can produce better outcomes. However, I do not believe that it is my authority to issue an order to the Canadian Armed Forces.

There is a very significant separation between my duties as an elected official and as the Minister of National Defence, and the chief of defence's and her team's responsibility to manage and operate the Canadian Armed Forces.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you. I'm going to move on to another topic.

This summer, you announced \$500 million in support for Ukraine. That was three or four months ago.

How much of that \$500 million has been spent to date?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: Quite a bit of it has—about \$350 million. I stand to be corrected.

When we made that announcement, very shortly thereafter I also announced that we were committing a significant amount of money to the air defence coalition for the training of pilots. Canada was assuming a far more significant role in the training of Ukrainian fighter pilots. We were taking on responsibility for that and investing a fairly significant amount of money.

We've also committed money to two other coalitions. One is for the acquisition of munitions, which is primarily led by the Czech Republic. We're investing money in them to acquire munitions more quickly through the NATO coalition.

Finally, we're also investing fairly significantly—about \$79 million—in a German-led coalition for the acquisition of air defence missiles.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: At the beginning of the year, you wanted to quadruple production of 155-millimetre shells, which was around 5,000 per month. As the end of the year approaches, where are we now?

I guess we'll be able to answer that question in a future round, since I'm out of time.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: It's really important work in progress and I would be happy to come back to it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Mathysen, you have six minutes, please.

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

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for appearing today.

There have been 42,000 people killed in Gaza alone and almost 100,000 wounded, and now there's a land incursion of Lebanon. Thousands of Canadians, very concerned, have reached out to me on this issue.

The United States has confirmed that it is willing to support Israel in escalating this war. Will Canada stop supporting Israel, implement the two-way arms embargo and impose Magnitsky sanctions on Netanyahu?

Hon. Bill Blair: Those are questions frankly not entirely for me to answer, but I can tell you, first of all, Canada does believe in every sovereign nation's right to defend itself when attacked. We've just also passed the anniversary of the October 7 attack that was perpetrated by Hamas on Israel: 1,200 people killed, more than 250 people taken hostage, terrible atrocities committed on that date. We believe Israel has the right to defend itself, very similar to and guided by exactly the same laws as Ukraine's right to defend itself against the attack on their sovereign nation by Russia.

The laws of armed conflict I think clearly define in international humanitarian law what the limits of your ability to defend yourself look like. Canada has...and continues to seek a ceasefire in the Middle East. We believe conditionally in a two-state solution, in which Hamas would have no role in the formation of any future government in Palestine. We have also called for the laying down—

• (0845)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Minister—

Hon. Bill Blair: —of arms and the return of the hostages.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: In terms of length of question and answer, Mr. Chair...?

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: All right.

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon is a peacekeeping force whose mandate includes overseeing UN resolution 1701. The Israeli forces have tried to request that UNIFIL withdraw so they can continue their illegal incursion.

In fact, this morning there were reports that two United Nations peacekeepers were injured because of these strikes. What is your government's response or position to support the United Nations peacekeeping in the region and your reaction to this attack on UNIFIL soldiers?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, it is unfortunate in UN peacekeeping missions that—

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Does that fall into defending yourself or is that an attack on the United Nations?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, the application of the law in this case with respect to the law of armed conflict, I think it needs to be... I appreciate your concern that you're raising. I think that there need to be investigation and evidence. If there is evidence of any violating of those laws, then there are appropriate mechanisms of resolution and justice that can flow from those processes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: The ICC and the ICJ...?

Hon. Bill Blair: Canada is a signatory to the ICJ, and that is one of the mechanisms in which these matters can be resolved.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Israel has not allowed the following of those two important international bodies—

Hon. Bill Blair: All I can tell you is Canada's position with respect to these things. I'm not here to try to explain what Mr. Netanyahu is doing, but rather Canada's response to it, and I think it's been very clear. We very much support the International Court of Justice. We support the law and we follow the law of armed conflict and encourage all signatory nations to do just the same.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: It was touched upon earlier, but of course this week Conservative leader Poilievre made a truly appalling statement: that Israel could strike Iranian nuclear facilities.

We know how disastrous that could be. The international community has fought very hard to protect the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant from Putin's bombings. Your government called that reckless statement out. We certainly did, and now Iran has been threatening to proactively attack those nuclear facilities and escalate the conflict even further.

Minister, is the threat of an attack by Israel on nuclear facilities a red line for your government and will Canada finally commit to imposing sanctions on Netanyahu's dangerous government?

Hon. Bill Blair: Just to be really clear, it's not my job to start drawing red lines for other countries. Canada states its position very clearly that we believe very strongly in and support the international humanitarian law and the law of armed conflict. That very clearly prohibits attacks on nuclear facilities. We've made that position very clear for exactly the purposes that you outline.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: If this—

Hon. Bill Blair: We were very concerned with Russia's attack in the Zaporizhzhia region because of the nuclear facility there—

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Canada would take no action if this were to occur...?

Hon. Bill Blair: —and again, it has not yet happened. I think the appropriate course of action right now is for Canada to articulate its position in support of international law.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: There are thousands of Canadians still in Lebanon. I know that we've spoken about potential evacuation, but the problem is that so many people are unable to get to the airport themselves. I know of families who have tried to cross the border to Syria who have not been able to. What's the support that Canada will provide—through military forces, I suppose—to help those people? It's simply not safe on the roads that are either leading to the airport or leading to other places of safety.

Hon. Bill Blair: Global Affairs Canada has reached out, and right now—I don't have the precise numbers—just under 6,000 people have actually registered with Global Affairs Canada seeking information about assisted departure. The airport is still operating and is still accessible. That's the evaluation on the ground: that it's still accessible.

About 60 to 70 commercial flights are flying out of the Beirut airport every single day. Additionally, our country and a number of

our allies have been arranging booked seats on some of those planes. The uptake right now among Canadians who are inquiring about departing Lebanon is a little less than...it's about 30% of the seats that we have made available that people have actually taken. They are not reporting to us that they're not taking them because they can't get to the airport, and we are prepared to provide assistance if that is required, but that hasn't been asked for at this point in time.

The Chair: That completes our six-minute round.

Mr. Bezan, you have five minutes.

• (0850)

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, do you agree that foreign interference is a national security threat attacking our democratic institutions, including the Canadian Armed Forces, and the Department of National Defence is not immune to foreign interference?

Hon. Bill Blair: I agree. In fact, I sent you a letter in December of 2020 outlining that exact point.

Mr. James Bezan: I appreciate that.

Now, your former chief of staff kept the CSIS warrant off your desk for 54 days because it was politically sensitive to the Liberal Party—

The Chair: That's out of order, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: It's national security—

The Chair: That has not anything to do with his mandate. That is out of order.

Mr. James Bezan: I'd like to come back on this one.

The Chair: It is out of order.

Mr. James Bezan: Minister, as a current—

Hon. Bill Blair: It also contradicts the sworn testimony that the hearing heard yesterday, and his statement is completely false.

Mr. James Bezan: Well, what she actually said, since he answered the question—

The Chair: Well—

Mr. James Bezan: He addressed it. I should be allowed to—

The Chair: It's either out of order or it's not out of order. I have to say that once there is a response it gets to be part of the conversation.

Mr. James Bezan: So—

Hon. Bill Blair: Fair enough: If he's going to make a video it might as well have a little bit of truth in it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: All right. Carry on.

Mr. James Bezan: Again, in your current role, then, as Minister of National Defence, from time to time there are orders that come across your table that are going to be dealing with issues like foreign interference, like national security, that are going to require your sign-off.

Your former chief of staff withheld documents from you for 54 days. How does that not violate and contravene our national security?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, the premise of your question is false and contradicts the sworn testimony that the commission heard yesterday. As well, there's nothing political in decisions with respect to the national defence.

Mr. James Bezan: If I quote Ms. Astravas, she said: "At any time there is a name of someone I knew mentioned in a warrant or intelligence report, I always let the director and minister know." First of all, she must have let you know, then, and you must have been sitting out on it for 54 days, based upon her own testimony.

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Bezan, you're making stuff up that isn't true, and I appreciate that you want...and you're making a video, and that's fine, but what you're saying is simply not true, and it has been contradicted by the sworn testimony of other witnesses. I've appeared before that hearing three times and given sworn testimony and I'm very pleased to be able to go tomorrow and give that sworn testimony again, and what you're saying has been contradicted by all of the evidence that's been presented to the committee.

Mr. James Bezan: I disagree with that. I believe that the testimony does speak for itself, and it does show that a warrant sat around in your office, on your desk, and under the care of your former chief of staff that was actually.... You know, in the middle of it here we have a foreign interference inquiry being done by Justice Hogue, and I believe that the truth will be revealed in that process as well, never mind the testimony that's been given at the different committees here.

I will share the rest of my time with Mr. Allison.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

Do you believe that a terrorist regime like Iran should be allowed to develop nuclear weapons?

Hon. Bill Blair: I'm deeply concerned about the increasing military capability, including the acquisition of military weapons, by a regime such as Iran. It has been a state exporter of terrorism around the world and, through the IRGC and Quds Force, has demonstrated support for other terrorist organizations. Yes, it's deeply concerning that such a regime should have that sort of capability.

Mr. Dean Allison: Why wouldn't Israel, then, have the ability to attack those sites?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, I think the international community has a responsibility to do everything it can to prevent Iran from attaining those things, but at the same time, I think that should not be done in a way that puts countless lives and the environment at stake.

Mr. Dean Allison: Are they not legitimate targets?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, there are very limited circumstances under which those could be legitimate targets, but the international conventions on the law of armed conflict very specifically prohibit the targeting of nuclear facilities, which was, frankly, what your leader suggested.

Mr. Dean Allison: No, what he said was to go after sites that are actually responsible for developing nuclear weapons.

How many sites in Iran actually produce nuclear energy?

Hon. Bill Blair: I don't have that information.

Mr. Dean Allison: Does your team?

The World Nuclear Association says there's one. We're aware of it, where it is, so obviously we're not talking about targeting that. Why would we not just say that, obviously, we don't approve of their targeting sites that are approved electric...? That's not what Israel is saying, and that's not what our leader said, either.

• (0855)

Hon. Bill Blair: I think there is a very serious concern that, if anyone were to target a nuclear facility anywhere in the world—whether it be in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, or in any other place in the world—it would represent an unacceptable risk to innocent civilians and to the environment. That's why 174 countries signed on to an international convention that very specifically prohibits attacks on those facilities.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Lambropoulos, you have five minutes, please.

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

Thank you, Minister and team, for being here with us today.

My first question is about recruitment because, as we've heard time and time again, this is something that's really important and that we're not exactly where we need to be yet in terms of recruitment. A few weeks ago we had a witness come and tell us the goal would be for 6,400 new members to be recruited in this fiscal year. I'm wondering what your thoughts are on that and whether you think that is enough. If not, what can we do in order to make sure that those numbers grow at a quicker pace?

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much for what I think is one of our most important questions because, as I said in my opening remarks, people are our most important asset. As I've already commented, I've expressed very sincere concern that losing more people than we're able to take on is not a successful strategy, and we have to turn it around.

I am very pleased to report to this committee that there has been some outstanding work done by the Canadian Armed Forces, and the Department of National Defence to significantly improve our onboarding and our recruiting processes, and I think they have demonstrated real openness and commitment to doing what is necessary to resolve our hiring and personnel issues.

There's some very important work that's going on with the new CDS. I think it's more appropriate for her to perhaps come before this committee and outline the nature of her plan, but as I have been briefed, it includes, I think, significant new measures. It includes the introduction—as was recommended not only in our new defence policy but also in Justice Arbour's recommendations—of the establishment of a probationary period.

That's going to allow them to bring people in much more quickly to begin their basic training and, then, to complete some of the important security background checks, for example, before the person is in a sensitive position, but it enables us to get started and to really expedite the processes.

We're also seeing a very comprehensive re-evaluation that's going on, not in any way to compromise the very high standards that we require for everybody joining the Canadian Armed Forces and for their combat readiness, but at the same time, it's going to enable us to address, I think, more appropriately some of the impediments that we have identified in getting people in the door.

There has also been some really good work done because, as I know this committee has been advised, permanent residents were given the opportunity about two years ago to make applications to join the Canadian Armed Forces, and about 20,000 of them immediately signed up. We saw that the intake was impeded by some of the challenges in doing over again the security background checks for those individuals. There has been some really good work done among the Canadian Armed Forces, IRCC and others to expedite those processes, and I'm very encouraged by the path that we are currently on.

I believe that we have turned a very significant corner and that we will see an increase in recruitment, but we're not done. There are a number of really important initiatives I think we can undertake. I think the opportunity we can give Canadians to serve their country in the Canadian Armed Forces and to engage in real national public service for this country is a great opportunity for those young people, and it's a great opportunity for the Canadian Armed Forces, so we are committed.

One of the things that I have asked the CDS to look at is that there are a number of bottlenecks in those recruitment processes. Our capacity to put people through basic training is one of those bottlenecks, so we are looking at how we address that and how we increase that capacity.

We also have a very extensive and comprehensive review of our military colleges going on at Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and at RMC in Kingston. Those, I hope, are going to give us a number of recommendations that will enable us to make those more efficient and effective in getting the cadre of leadership that we're also going to require for the Canadian Armed Forces.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much.

I think you already mentioned a few of the obstacles and how to overcome them or mentioned that there are plans in the works, so I'll avoid that question.

Another really important point here is the issue of retention, making sure once they are there—and for those who are already

there—that they want to stay because it's a positive and healthy workplace culture. You have spoken a little about that as well. You spoke about Bill C-66. You spoke about Justice Arbour's recommendations.

Can you tell us where we are on those, how many of them we've actually accomplished or implemented and what your view is on how we can rebuild trust in the Canadian Armed Forces for future generations?

● (0900)

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, very quickly, just in response to Justice Arbour's recommendations, a little more than half of them have been fully implemented. We have also just recently published, in the spring of this year, our comprehensive implementation plan for the remaining recommendations, which schedules their full implementation by the end of 2025. That work is well under way.

The recommendation that did require changes to the National Defence Act was brought forward in Bill C-66, which hopefully will come to this committee for its important work very shortly.

We're also, as I mentioned, investing in housing because that's what members have told us is a challenge for them. We're investing in child care because that's important. We're working with the provinces on making sure, for Service Canada, that shared services are available to our members so that they can get access to a family doctor or that people can get assistance for their spouses to have employment. There are many things that we need to do on behalf of the Canadian Armed Forces, and we are working on them—

The Chair: We're going to have to leave the answer there, Madam Lambropoulos.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Ms. Normandin, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

I'll come back to my question about the production of 155-millimetre shells. It was 5,000 per month, and you promised to quadruple it. As the end of the year approaches, where are we now?

[*English*]

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, it's still a work in progress, but I've been to the munitions production plants in Quebec. I think that we've had a number of important conversations, and our team is working very closely with them. They told us two things. They told us that they need investment in their production lines and that they need secure supply chains in order to increase their production. They also need the certainty that would come with long-term contracts. They know that if the orders were there, they would produce to meet those orders.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: With all due respect, Minister, we know what the industry needs. My question concerns production. In fact, right now, how far along are we?

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: We are still working very much in the negotiation because, when we went to industry, they told us they needed a certain amount of money, of investment. When we went back to them with that money, they doubled it. Then we went back to them with another significant increase in our investment, and they doubled it again.

I have a responsibility to manage the Canadian taxpayer dollars, and we are stewards of those dollars. There's a negotiation taking place about what is the right investment in those industries, and there's also some work to do to complete the long-term contracts that they need. We are going to increase our production and our acquisition of those munitions because we need to do it, but we need to do it responsibly.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

During her last appearance before the committee, General Carignan implied, in veiled terms, that budget cuts were having an impact on troop training capacity.

I'd like to know if, when the cuts were announced a year ago, an impact study had been done, and if an impact study is currently being done to analyze the effect of the cuts on troops training capacity.

[English]

Hon. Bill Blair: To be really clear, we cut about \$211 million from our budget. We made those adjustments and those reductions on things like professional services, executive travel, hospitality and all of those things. I issued a very clear direction to the CDS and to the Department of National Defence that none of those reductions should impact on our operational readiness or on the important services that we supply to Canadian Armed Forces members. I believe, in the analysis that has taken place, that those important services and capabilities were not impacted by these reductions.

At the same time, I think it is incumbent upon every federal department to make sure that we're spending money well and wisely and that we're getting true value for the investment Canadians are making in their Canadian Armed Forces.

The Chair: We are out of time.

Madam Mathysen, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Part of the CAF-DND class action on sexual misconduct was that a number of clear deliverables were to be taken at the five-year anniversary, which is very quickly approaching.

One of those clear deliverables is the review of the mandate of the sexual misconduct support and resource centre. I've heard a lot from survivors of military sexual trauma about their complex relationships with the SMSRC. There are positives—certainly, that is

necessary to talk about—but there are also major gaps in the programming. There are concerns about the structure, and there are unanswered questions about the independence of the SMSRC.

When I asked the chief of the defence staff, General Carignan, during her appearance, there weren't concrete details. Can you tell this committee about the work being done to prepare for this review? Can you commit to ensuring that the review will be fulsome, with access to any documents necessary for this review? Will it have a wide enough scope to rebuild trust with survivors?

• (0905)

Hon. Bill Blair: You and I have had an opportunity to speak about some of these issues before. As I've acknowledged to you, a great deal of work has been done, but more needs to be done. I appreciate your acknowledging that, I think, we've made some real progress on the SMSRC and on the work that has been done in support of victims following this report. We are coming up, in February 2025, on the fifth anniversary, and there is a commitment there to that work.

I can share with you that we're currently pursuing a court appointment for the external review team lead. We think that's an important initiative. I think we've also been able to demonstrate our commitment to greater judicial independence of military justice actors by removing some of these conditions under Bill C-66 so that these matters are dealt with in the civilian system, rather than people having to go to their boss.

I also very strongly believe that the decision to pursue an investigation and a criminal prosecution is entirely the agency of the victim. At the same time, we have a responsibility to provide them with victim support services, no matter what is taking place.

We've also talked about some of the important work that's gone on with Justice Arbour's recommendations, with our implementation plan and with the appointment of the external monitor, who, by the way, every two months, produces a very comprehensive report, which I hope that you all have access to, that explains the progress of the work and the implementation of Justice Arbour's recommendations. We're moving on a number of other recommendations, including the Fish report. All of that needs to be coordinated and brought together in a meaningful way. Restoring trust for all of those people who have experienced this is our priority.

I'm very happy to continue, if you would like.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen and Mr. Minister.

Ms. Gallant, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): What instructions have you given your current chief of staff to ensure they don't withhold information from you that's vital to national security, like the way Zita, your former chief of staff at Public Safety, and the chief of staff for the former CDS, for Minister Sajjan, did during the Vance controversy?

The Chair: I would reiterate my view that this is the mandate of the current minister and his commentary on previous ministers' practices or non-practices is out of scope.

However, having said that, proceed.

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Chair, I'll defer to your ruling as to whether this is in scope or not.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay. There are no measures taken to overcome the problems we had, then, with the minister and Vance?

Hon. Bill Blair: As a point of clarification, I did not say that.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are you satisfied that Canada is investing sufficiently in cyber-capabilities to deter and respond to non-state cyber-aggression?

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, we got some really good news on that.

Just a few weeks ago, we stood up our new Canadian Armed Forces cyber command under General Yarker. They'll be located here in Ottawa, and there have been some very significant new investments.

In "Our North, Strong and Free", I would point out an investment of more than a billion dollars in cyber-capabilities at CSE and I'm sure that my colleagues from CSE will be able to expand on that.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How do the repeated breaches at GAC continue to occur?

Hon. Bill Blair: Again, in this room, unfortunately I'm not going to talk to you a little too much about those things. I think there's some great work that is being done, particularly by CSE.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: They need more money to get what needs to be done to keep them secure. How are you going to get that money?

Hon. Bill Blair: The Government of Canada experiences billions of attacks on its systems each and every day, and I think our officials do some extraordinary work and—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: GAC is still being attacked every day and the intruders are getting through.

Barracks for new recruits are in such poor condition they've had to be condemned, and you haven't allotted any money to replace these buildings on a number of bases. How are you going to recruit and retain our lower ranks when federal prisoners have better accommodations?

Hon. Bill Blair: Unfortunately, your question omits the fact that there is already existing funding for investing in those things.

I've recently been out. We're investing very significantly in new barracks in Esquimalt. We just opened up new barracks in Borden. There are already monies already allocated. I invite you to go to some of those bases and see the new facilities.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I do see my base. I've been to Petawawa. They've had to condemn two buildings, and there has been no money in sight to replace those buildings. They don't even have enough accommodations for the current lower ranks and we have to accommodate people coming in for training for the Latvia mission. Where are we going to put them all? They can't all be in tents all winter.

• (0910)

Hon. Bill Blair: I've already referenced that there's some really important work going on right now to increase our capacity to provide basic training and other training to all of our members. I would acknowledge that after decades of underinvestment in the Canadian Armed Forces, certainly through safe, strong and engaged and now through ONSF, we're making—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I'm passing it to my colleague now.

Hon. Bill Blair: I'm just answering your question, but if you'd like to pass it before I complete my answer, that's up to the chair.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: You've answered my question.

The Chair: You have a minute and a half, Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Don Stewart (Toronto—St. Paul's, CPC): Thank you.

Sir, are you okay with Iran developing nuclear weapons?

Hon. Bill Blair: No.

Mr. Don Stewart: Okay, because earlier you said you were just concerned about it. That's a much better answer.

I have something a little more basic to talk about. It's again about ammunition for our reserve forces. Reports that I've heard indicate that there's not enough nine-millimetre ammunition for our reserve soldiers to get certified on the new nine-millimetre pistols. I'm just wondering if there's any plan in place to accelerate that.

Hon. Bill Blair: We're spending about \$200 million on munitions currently. That's our current expenditure. It has not been reported to me by CAF or by any indication that the reserves don't have adequate munitions to train, but I don't have the information that you referenced.

Mr. Don Stewart: The other report I had was that half the army's equipment is unserviceable. There's a \$150-million shortfall due to government budget cuts. I just want to understand what that says about the Liberal government's commitment to our armed forces.

Hon. Bill Blair: You're conflating two very significant issues.

There is a real challenge with the maintenance of our equipment. A lot of it's old.

Mr. Don Stewart: I see the brand new LAVs at Denison sitting there for weeks on end and not moving.

Hon. Bill Blair: I'm glad you saw them, because we're delivering new vehicles. We've entered into contracts to deliver 1,500 new light and heavy trucks for the Canadian Armed Forces. We've also invested very significantly in new LAVs that are being delivered.

We're doing the work that previous governments neglected, in order to give our people what they need. We are investing in the maintenance of existing equipment, but replacing it is also a very important priority.

The Chair: We'll have to leave the answer there, however satisfactory or unsatisfactory it may be.

Mr. Powlowski, you have five minutes.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Minister, you talked about learning a lot from the war in Ukraine.

Certainly, one of the things we've learned is this: There seems to be a worldwide shortage of ammunition. The Ukrainians don't have enough 155-millimetre shells. Madame Normandin asked about the production of more shells and your response was, "well, there is a company that is going to provide them, but they doubled the price. Then, when we agreed to that, they doubled the price again."

I'm not sure how many companies there are making 155-millimetre shells, but it seems to me from your response that the problem is that we don't have enough companies making that form of ammunition, or, from a previous question, nine-millimetre ammunition. There seems to be, perhaps, a market failure. In normal times, there isn't enough demand for 155-millimetre shells, but now there is. It would be nice to think that, perhaps, in six months or a year, the war in Ukraine will be over and there may not be a demand. However, this would seem to me to be the kind of market failure that requires government intervention to support companies starting to produce 155-millimetre shells and other forms of ammunition.

Has there been any effort on the part of the government to give incentives to companies to start the production of ammunition?

• (0915)

Hon. Bill Blair: Yes, thank you very much, Marcus. This is a good opportunity for me to clarify my remarks.

I went to the industry, when I first came into this job, and told them they needed to increase their production, particularly around munitions, but not just munitions. We need a significant increase in military production right across this country. Our industries are very strong and capable, but for a very long time, there was a significant underinvestment. We went to them, and they said they needed to open new production lines. They needed new supply chains. This would require two things: an investment from government, and the security and certainty that long-term contracts provide.

That's one of the reasons why we brought forward, in our new defence policy update, significant new investment in both industry and those long-term contracts. What you have suggested is exactly what we're proposing to do. At the same time, this requires that we work very carefully with industry. They have told us that, even if we make investments in their production capability... You know, we already buy ammunition from them. We buy a lot of ammunition from them, but we need more. We're going to invest in those industries and offer them long-term contracts, but we also have an interim problem, because the Canadian Armed Forces need ammunition now, as do our Ukrainian friends.

That's one of the reasons why we entered into an agreement with the Czech Republic. We have been buying 155-millimetre ammunition for Ukraine through that Czech initiative because they're able to buy it on the market. We're funnelling money through those coalitions—as part of our NATO partnership—in order to acquire those munitions.

I am also prepared to purchase those on the international market for the Canadian Armed Forces, until the Canadian industry is capable of meeting our requirements. A number of lines of effort need to happen concurrently. We need to invest in Canadian industry. We need to work on those contracts with them. We need to build up their production. At the same time, we need the immediacy of responding, first of all, to the needs of the Canadian Armed Forces. That's my first priority. A very close second priority is making sure we're able to provide Ukraine with what it needs.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: Another thing that the war in Ukraine has taught us is the growing importance of drones. We've purchased F-35s, but if you look at what's happening in Ukraine, you'll see that Ukrainians have managed to do very well with some very cheap drones—sometimes costing hundreds of dollars—destroying much more expensive weaponry on the Russian side. This would certainly seem to be the way that warfare is going.

What are we doing specifically in terms of research to develop new and better drones, cheaper ways of producing drones, producing those drones and having those drones in our military?

The Chair: That's a pretty important question, but you've left him very little time to answer it.

You have 30 seconds or a little bit better.

Hon. Bill Blair: I 100% agree.

Canada has a very robust capability to build drones. We're investing in research and development. We're also looking at anti-drone technologies, and we've been testing those in Canada as well, along with our allies. It's important work.

Canada has also invested in Ukrainian production of its own drones, and that has been very helpful to Ukraine. We're investing in building some of those cheaper drones that they use so effectively. It also gives Canadian industry an opportunity to learn from the experience of the Ukrainians and to add that to our research and development. It's very much a partnership that is being developed.

We're also working very collaboratively because Canada is part of the drone coalition for NATO. Our industries and our government are working very closely with all of our allies. We see this as a new frontier for both defensive and offensive operations. I think that Canada has great capabilities, but we can do better and do more.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Powlowski.

On behalf of the committee, Minister, I'd like to thank you for your appearance here today.

I'm going to suspend for a minute or two while the minister leaves and the balance of the team remains in place. We'll then continue our rounds of questions.

With that, we're suspended.

• (0915) _____ (Pause) _____

• (0920)

The Chair: Colleagues, we're well past the two-minute break.

Mr. Stewart, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Don Stewart: Recently, there were 90 light tactical vehicles that were purchased by the DND for \$36 million. When you look at a picture of these, you'll see that there's no ballistic protection. They're like open-air dune buggies. I want to find out a bit more about that.

In testing, U.S. troops have actually ditched some of the vehicles and have chosen to finish their training missions on foot. I'm wondering why we would look at spending \$36 million on these vehicles that didn't pass testing with flying colours.

Lieutenant-General Stephen Kelsey (Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence): The procurement of those vehicles was based on what the army had asked for: mobility for light forces. Quite rightly, it's been pointed out that it's not the vehicle for highly protected or high-end combat operations.

It's not to say that, through tactics and training, the vehicle could not be employed. In this case, it still has its purpose. They're being fielded in Latvia, as is known, and there is training value that happens from those systems. Ideally, in close combat operations, it's a very different force, a different set of equipment, but in this case, for the specific role that the army requested for those light forces, it is satisfied with this vehicle.

• (0925)

Mr. Don Stewart: Is there a condition when we make purchases like this?

The purchase was made through GM Defense in Oshawa, my hometown, but the vehicles are made in the U.S. Is this just something off the shelf? Is this the way it happens in NATO, or is there a consideration given to a supply chain coming from Canada when we're spending money?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: I don't know the specifics, but perhaps our colleague would.

When we do those acquisitions, ideally we want a competitive bid so that we get best dollar for value. It's all so much the better if it's from an Oshawa company, in this case. However, because of the nature of that specific vehicle, many of the parts are made in Canada, assembled in the United States and then brought back into Canada.

Mr. Don Stewart: Can I go back to the question about the nine-millimetre ammunition?

I'm just wondering about the supply chain there. Is there a reason that the shelves would essentially be bare for training missions for some of our reserve units?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: Again, Nancy might know the specifics of our munition supply program and the way in which industry manufactures those. It's not a singular line for a nine-millimetre. It's a line that produces various natures. It's unfortunate that from time to time there's a shortage, perhaps based on training implications—

Mr. Don Stewart: Would this be the same in theatre, as in, "Sorry, there's a shortage; there's no ammo"?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: No, Mr. Chair, we would privilege those folks who are—

Mr. Don Stewart: Now that we're in kind of a globally hot situation, would we not want our soldiers to be trained up and certified on weapons in terms of readiness? Does this not speak to a gap in that?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: We agree that we would need a sufficient amount of munition, training areas and equipment to elevate a higher level of readiness across the board. The issue for us right now is also people. It's the munition availability and the stocks that we hold, but also a function of the time needed in the location.

I think the example was one of our fine reserve units. Not every unit is at the same level of readiness in our current construct, and therefore, depending on which one we use to elevate its training, may or may not have the ammunition we need.

Mr. Don Stewart: Okay.

Sticking with supply chains, recently there were some reports about our Arctic abilities, including the sleeping bag systems for our soldiers. Is there a plan in place to correct that so that we can operate in our Arctic environments?

Ms. Stefanie Beck (Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): There is indeed.

I think as everyone knows, in terms of those sleeping bags, that system in fact was procured very much as the army had requested. Notwithstanding that, there was always a plan for a second round to ensure that those for temperatures even colder than those required for that particular set were available. That contract is being let.

Mr. Don Stewart: I have a quick question about morale. Morale is such an important thing in the army. One thing that can improve morale is that every soldier has a complete kit. Does every soldier in the army have a sleeping bag, Arctic or not?

Ms. Stefanie Beck: Every soldier who needs to have a sleeping bag would have the appropriate kit.

Mr. Don Stewart: When I was with the reserves, we were asked to bring our sleeping bags back in because there weren't enough for soldiers who were being deployed.

Ms. Stefanie Beck: It would be the regular armed forces, right?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: I think, Chair, the question is fundamental to what we want to do with our reserves. We want to do more. We want to equip them better, but we also need to make choices. We want to spend the dollars we have available wisely. It means, unfortunately, that we manage equipment for the right time and the right place. Some units don't have all the equipment they wish they had.

Mr. Don Stewart: That's all I've got. Thank you.

• (0930)

Mr. James Bezan: Can I take that last one?

The Chair: No, you can't.

Madam Lalonde, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I'll come to you in a minute. I just want to bring forward and put on notice a motion.

The reason I am doing this is that there were some very reckless comments made by the leader of the official opposition on Monday night:

"I will vote against anti-Israel resolutions at the United Nations," he said. "I will back Israel's right to defend itself, which includes retaliating against those that attack Israel. Israel must be able to prevent Iran from using nuclear weapons, if necessary, that means proactively striking Iranian nuclear sites and oil installations to defund the terrorist regime."

For that reason, Mr. Chair, I would like to put on notice a motion. It reads as follows:

Given the reckless and dangerous comments of the Leader of the Opposition, Pierre Poilievre, calling for potential strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) the committee undertake a study of the law of armed conflict and Canada's obligations under international law.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I'm sorry about that. Thank you very much.

I want to say thanks to all of you for coming in front of our committee.

Ms. Hadwen, the minister did share and make reference to the possibility that you could continue expanding on some of the most recent investments made and the importance of your department, but also in the context of the international risk regarding cybersecurity, cyber-attacks, AI and everything. I know that there has been some great news, and I would really like you to expand on that for us this morning.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Wendy Hadwen (Deputy Chief, Strategic Policy, Planning and Partnerships, Communications Security Establishment): Thank you for the question, Ms. Lalonde.

[*English*]

Since 2020, CSE's Cyber Centre has been publicly warning that the state-sponsored cyber programs of the PRC, Russia, Iran and North Korea represent a significant threat. At least 20 incidents of

malicious cyber-activity on GC networks are talked about in our most recent annual report.

As the minister mentioned, we received, in the "Our North Strong and Free" defence policy update, approximately \$3 billion for the CSE to work together with the Canadian Armed Forces' new cyber command, in order to do everything in our capabilities using the full mandates we have, respectively, to counter these threats.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much for that. It is extremely good news.

I also understand, in talking with industry and individuals in that sphere, that Canada is leading. We're very proud of this. Thank you.

On another subject very dear to me—it was also briefly touched on by the minister—I had the pleasure, over the summer, of visiting numerous military bases and speaking with senior-ranking officers. I also spoke with lower-ranking officers. Their passion and energy, and their desire to serve our country, were extraordinary. I also know about recruitment and retention. That's also something they shared with me.

Could you further expand, for this committee, on some of the initiatives you would like to see go forward, in order to help the recruitment and retention piece?

Ms. Stefanie Beck: I'll start.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for the question. I'll answer first, but I'll let my colleagues give me a hand afterwards.

[*English*]

It's a very complex question, and one we have broken down into many different parts within the department, because restraints on recruitment revolve around many different things that have been touched upon already in this committee.

Questions around how slow we are to move people through the onboarding system, the security clearances required, the medical processes required, the training facilities we have, the barracks that are available or not, and the equipment.... Each of these things is a separate challenge we are dealing with individually so that, as a whole, we will be able to—as the chief said recently—not only hire 6,400 a year but also hopefully more than that.

In terms of retention, that goes hand in hand with offering adequate housing and making sure our CAF members are properly paid—which is the case, as they received salary increases last year. Of course, it's also about ensuring they have careers that are interesting and fulfilling. I think we can see that part easily. These are jobs people want to do.

We have no problem with the number of folks approaching us. We have a greater problem moving them through quickly enough that we manage to retain them.

• (0935)

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Please continue.

LGen Stephen Kelsey: It's heartening to learn about the motivation of young Canadians, and it's easy to be inspired. We must re-double our efforts and our responsibility to them.

This committee has recognized the connections between professional conduct and culture, people and recruitment, and how these affect readiness. Therefore it's no surprise to the committee that recruitment and changes to process, procedure and mindset are the number one priority for both our deputy and the chief of defence.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Normandin, the floor is yours for six minutes.

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

I thank the witnesses for being here.

I want to come back to the question I asked the minister in connection with the impact of budget cuts on troop training capabilities. The minister didn't say he hadn't heard that there had been negative repercussions. He was affirmative: He said there had been no impact. If he can be that assertive, I take it that studies have been done, or perhaps an impact analysis.

I'd like to know if any such studies have been carried out. If so, could those stating that there has been no impact on troop training be forwarded to the committee?

Ms. Stefanie Beck: I couldn't put my finger on any particular study. Having said that, it's important to make sure that we're able to train people as we go along so that they're ready when they need to be. Across the country, troops are being trained to be ready. This is called operational readiness. We need to ensure that troops are able to participate not only in the exercises we do in Canada, but also in the exercises we do abroad with our international partners. This is also the case for the deployment of troops to Latvia. As you can see, if we've been able to deploy these people and they've been able to participate in the exercises, it's because we've been able to work out the training issues as we go along.

Ms. Christine Normandin: As demand is growing, I would like to know if we have any documentation indicating that training is proportional to this growing demand and that this does not pose any problems in terms of resources.

Ms. Stefanie Beck: Actually, that's the big question we're facing at the moment. Perhaps the Vice-Chief of the Defence Staff would like to elaborate on this.

As we consider the number of people we can bring in each year, we have to think at the same time about the number of people who can take the various courses required. This means that we may have to change the different programs so that people can access them, and do so on an ongoing basis, so that people don't have to wait a few months or a few weeks between different courses.

I don't know if Lieutenant General Kelsey wants to add any clarification.

LGen Stephen Kelsey: Yes, thank you.

We've discussed the beginning of the process and the changes with regard to safety, the medical component, skills and changing mindsets.

As we said in our introduction, it's a pipeline, a continuum of capabilities, processes and priorities. That's why we have to make choices and decisions to reorient personnel or resources to increase training capacity, from basic training to deployment.

Ms. Christine Normandin: The minister mentioned that relations with the industry were sometimes complex. We heard a number of witnesses strongly suggest that Canada implement a defence industrial policy. We also know that NATO has called for increased industrial capacity in defence.

What policies are currently in place? Are we on the verge of one day seeing a uniquely Canadian defence and industry relations policy?

• (0940)

Ms. Stefanie Beck: We completely agree that we need to have a strategy for the defence industry in Canada. It's a strategy that would be complex to implement and would have repercussions across the country. In fact, we'd like to discuss it with this committee. We don't necessarily expect to do it here, in this forum, but it would be very useful to get your impressions on the subject.

As far as we're concerned, we want to create a strategic partnership with the various industry stakeholders in Canada and make sure we have the supply we need, when we need it.

Just on the ammunition question, we ran into an issue. The industry wasn't ready to increase deliveries, even though we knew it would become a necessity. Now we have the money, and that's what we want to do together.

Ms. Christine Normandin: I'd like to hear your comments on the announcement that was made on September 26 about the creation of the Canadian Armed Forces Cyber Command, or CAFCYBERCOM.

We know that Canada was already not conducting offensive operations in the cyber domain. I understand that won't be the case with CAFCYBERCOM either.

I'd like to know what the added value of creating CAFCYBERCOM is, because in the end, it seems to me to be no more and no less than a rearrangement of what already existed, with no additional capacity, no additional personnel and no additional specific mission.

Ms. Stefanie Beck: I can start answering, and then I can hand over to my colleagues to add clarification.

I would say that the most important thing to remember is that it means that we are prioritizing this activity. The issues we're facing at the moment show that it's only going to get bigger in the months to come. In fact, it's already happening. We've already talked about the government's investment in cybersecurity. We also see that our partners are putting a lot of emphasis on this. We're gaining a lot of opportunities for collaboration by doing a lot of work on this.

[English]

Wendy, did you want to add anything? Or Steve?

The Chair: It's an important question, and I would like to see it answered, but we've run out of time.

Madam Mathysen, please go ahead.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Just before this meeting began, we received a letter from the Department of National Defence on military housing. These numbers show that we're only on track to build 650 units across the whole country in the next five years.

I filed an Order Paper question earlier in the year. It claimed that the wait-list for CAF housing was 1,964 applicants, and we know the CAF needs to build about 5,000 new homes. The plan is currently not where it needs to be. What steps are you taking to fill this gap?

Ms. Stefanie Beck: Housing has been a challenge for us for decades, and we can only spend the money that we have, obviously. Though there is a lot of money coming up that you have seen and mentioned, and the number of houses that we are expected to build, it doesn't actually show what we currently spend, of course. We already have tens of millions of dollars annually in building and procuring new housing, as well as renovating the housing we already have.

In addition to that, though, and to the industrial strategy point, we are looking to work with the housing development industry very differently, because we know that we need housing in very different ways. We have land, obviously, and we have space available that we know the municipalities, provinces and territories want us to use for housing.

We are shortly going out with information to developers around the country—and very specifically in certain spots—and asking for information on levels of interest in building housing that could serve not only CAF members but also the local population and, indeed, where possible, focus on indigenous communities. What we would like as well is to be able to include in those new buildings day care—child care centres—and to make sure they are accessible to all, thereby hitting multiple stones at the same time.

There's a lot more to follow on that. It's really a good-news story, I hope, in working with the housing developers too.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Currently in the House, we have Bill C-66. I'm hoping that we can get past some shenanigans in the House in order to bring this bill to committee. A lot of people have been waiting a long time for it to be brought forward.

I know that there are a lot of concerns. We have a lot of work to do in this committee on that piece of legislation, but I'm concerned, too, about ensuring that more cases aren't stayed due to the transferring of cases between jurisdictions. Can you provide any updates

on how many cases have been successfully transferred and how many cases have successfully reached a verdict in the civilian courts? Also, have we seen any more cases stayed?

• (0945)

Ms. Stefanie Beck: I don't have that information, although I don't think any more have been stayed. We'll have to provide that to you later.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Okay. I would appreciate your providing that information to the committee.

Beyond culture change, there's this feeling amongst survivors that there's this rotten apple theory: that if we can get through a handful of bad actors on this stage, the problem will go away. They certainly believe that cannot happen and that the problem is a permissive culture that allows perpetrators to use their power and test how far they will go.

Beyond Bill C-66, what are the government's next steps in combatting sexual misconduct?

Ms. Stefanie Beck: We would certainly agree that there is no single solution: that there is no one bad apple or group that we could get rid of and that would make the difference. This is an ongoing challenge for all of us, and it starts at the level of recruitment, in making sure that the people we're recruiting understand the role and the responsibilities of being a member of the military and ensuring that they uphold the highest codes of conduct and behaviour throughout their career.

While we're also continuing through our training at every possible opportunity and demonstrating leadership at the top, both on the civilian side as well as on the uniformed side, there will be a constant demonstration of what is expected of military members throughout their careers. Maybe there are more specifics. You know, there is all—

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: That's fairly general. Are there specifics you can point to?

Ms. Stefanie Beck: Training for sure is an integral part of everything we do. The supports remain in place, as you have seen, but I'd really rather focus on prevention than on trying to deal with the impacts afterwards. I think that really comes down to how we react and interact daily with our colleagues and members.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Was there something further from the lieutenant-general?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: It would be only to add that it begins with the implementation of all 209 recommendations from the four external audits. As was mentioned, there are training and education, but we're trying to adapt behaviour and that can be done only if we are monitoring ourselves in a different way.

I think the most important undertaking by General Carignan is the selection of leaders and recognizing that there has been bias in the way we were doing that. We're getting external views and external looks at the individuals we are identifying for progression in a way that's completely different than we've done in the past, but this is going to be an ongoing endeavour to change culture—for a long time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

We might be able to do this if we run it tight: five-minute rounds in 25 minutes. We should be able to make it.

We'll start with Ms. Gallant for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: My questions are for CSE.

Other nations, like the U.S., have mandated critical security practices, like multifactor authentication in 2021, and they are actively adopting zero-trust architecture. Why is Canada lagging in implementing these fundamental safeguards across government agencies?

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: CSE, in our most recent annual report, published quite a lot of detail about the extent to which we are issuing advice and guidance, in lockstep with the Americans and our other Five Eyes allies, concerning cybersecurity best practices for industry and for government.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: The U.S. Cyber Incident Reporting for Critical Infrastructure Act of 2022 mandates that organizations in 16 critical infrastructure sectors report significant cyber-incidents to CISA within 72 hours and that they report ransomware payments within 24 hours.

What is Canada doing? What comparable legislation or regulations does Canada have in place for mandatory cyber-incident reporting across critical infrastructure sectors? What are the specific reporting timelines and requirements for organizations?

● (0950)

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: Mr. Chair, Bill C-26, an act respecting cybersecurity, is currently in the Senate awaiting second-reading. This will create mandatory reporting obligations for critical infrastructure, but only for those that are federally regulated—that's four sectors.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How are we effectively addressing the risk of insider threats within government agencies?

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: The security and intelligence community in the Government of Canada is taking a number of steps to address insider threat. Many of these have been reviewed recently by our review agencies. Some of those measures are concerning the security clearances that we ask employees to undertake. Other measures I can't talk about in this public environment.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How does our cybersecurity funding compare to other G7 nations, on a per capita basis?

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: I will look into the per capita funding. I don't have that breakdown exactly, but I can say that we are very competitive with, and comparable to, our G7 allies and Five Eyes partners.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What recent investments has Canada made in advanced cyber-defence technologies to counter state-sponsored cyber-threats?

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: The \$3 billion I referred to, from the defence policy update, is a significant investment in exactly that.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How is the government ensuring that cybersecurity considerations are integrated into all aspects of national policy-making?

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: Our colleagues in the Treasury Board Secretariat, the CSE and other relevant departments are working together to ensure the adoption of cybersecurity best practices and standards in all government operations and procurements.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How prepared are we to respond to a large-scale cyber-attack on national infrastructure or on government systems?

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: I'm not sure we can ever be prepared enough. That is to say, we are doing the best we can, and I hope that we don't find out.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How are we addressing the cybersecurity risks associated with emerging technologies like 5G, IoT and AI?

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: Bill C-26, an act respecting cybersecurity, addresses exactly the 5G opportunity.

In other avenues of advanced technology, such as artificial intelligence or the advent of quantum computing, there is a significant amount of research under way within research agencies. CSE recently published, with the National Research Council, a call for proposals concerning artificial intelligence security.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Yes, our recent Nobel Prize laureate is very concerned about how we're going to protect ourselves against AI, so I trust that you'll be looking into that.

How effective are our current measures in preventing and mitigating ransom software attacks on public institutions?

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: We have a track record of success in protecting government institutions. Of course, it goes without saying that we sometimes don't know what we don't know.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are there sufficient investments in securing Canada's electoral systems against cyber-interference?

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: The fact that there have been investments made was talked about in the public inquiry on foreign interference. I cannot comment on the sufficientness of them.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How is the government ensuring cybersecurity policies are effectively implemented across all departments?

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: Again, the CSE works closely with the Treasury Board Secretariat to make sure all government departments are adopting and implementing the measures we impose upon them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gallant.

Mr. Collins, you have five minutes.

● (0955)

Mr. Chad Collins: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to start with one of the questions I asked the minister when he was here.

In his parting remarks to CAF members, General Eyre urged members to “Inoculate yourself and those around you against the toxic disinformation in our society”, and that “We must stop it from seeping into our ranks.”

My question to the minister was around Russia and China's efforts, but you also struggle with what your members read and see in the news. There's a crazy theory being pushed right now by an alt-right American representative talking about the government controlling the weather. Here, during the COVID situation, we had the Ivermectin party of Canada pushing misinformation in the House and undermining the efforts of public health officials as they related to combatting the virus, and to the efficacy of the vaccine. The misinformation isn't just coming from Russia and China. It's all around us.

I'll go back to that inoculation reference from General Eyre. I'm hesitant to use the word, because it almost sounds like a conspiracy theory in the making.

Can you talk about your efforts, internally, as they relate to dealing with your members and the misinformation they might hear from our enemies abroad and domestically—even within this House?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: Thank you.

We spent a lot of time thinking about the four contested areas of war fighting. I'm happy to expand.

One of them is the information environment. We tend to think of this in terms of our adversaries—some of the threat actors are well known—and what they're doing to counter narratives or use information in a way counter to what we understand is the truth.

Where we need to work harder is on the prevalence of social media and the way young Canadians communicate, exchange and learn. We're not there yet. It begins with over-communicating among leaders and using all the tools we have available in order to ensure that our understanding of what's happening and our truthfulness get out first. It's a constant tension. In one way, we have young, educated men and women challenging us on “why” and “what”, and they're learning that through social media. The exchange is much healthier. It challenges us as leaders.

We have much more work to do in the information environment.

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: The CSE is also responsible for a public awareness campaign on behalf of the Government of Canada. It doesn't have a catchy title. It is disinformation.ca.

We believe there's a big opportunity to encourage Canadians in all parts of the country—in every place—to think skeptically about the information they receive.

Mr. Chad Collins: I'll switch gears now to recruitment. It's obviously top of mind for everyone around the table. Normally, some initiatives don't go forward because of a lack of funds, but this isn't one of those instances.

I had the opportunity in June to tour the recruitment centre right here in Ottawa. I spent a couple of hours with staff walking me through how someone makes an application and then gets the offer. Perhaps it is different across the country, but, there was that whole

internal...a number of issues then prevented the information and the applications from moving forward in a timely way. It's just so disheartening to see that for so many people, by the time they receive an offer, they've already made another life decision. They have to pay the bills, and they have to find other employment. They thought this process might be four to six weeks, and it ends up being 10 to 12 months. Something internally is broken.

You've received a lot of questions today, and we've talked about this at the committee in the past. We need to do a study on it. Can you give us some details in terms of how we fix that? The dominoes fall in a way that works against us. Knowing that we're turning so many people away is worse than disheartening. We've heard some generalities today, but can you provide specifics to the committee?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: I'll endeavour to do so. First, we recognize that we're in a competition for talent. I was recently at the Pentagon with my counterparts—from Australia, the U.K. and New Zealand, as well as the U.S.—and we all share the same concern. We're competing for talent.

Second, we recognize that our own processes are working against us. Although we've given some specific examples, business transformation is what we're looking at. We're looking at how security clearances are done and at how medical and aptitude testing is done. We are not compromising standards. We want to access Canadians faster. Then, instead of having front end and all that completed, we're doing smart risk-based decisions on entering folks in with reliability checks and completing that process while they're doing their basic training. That's one example of the business transformation.

However, it's absolutely true that we need to automate our system. This is the digital age, and we need to be digital in our approach. My own son is going through the recruiting process, so I'm learning without saying anything, and I can accept that there are significant frustrations. It's not a one-size-fits-all. We are not compromising standards. For some of our competitive trades for the men and women, we want to do the aptitude testing and the deep security clearances faster.

• (1000)

The Chair: As an aside, may I just say that this has been a pre-occupation of the committee. The last time the CDS was here, she undertook to provide more detail on the plan. She is about to receive a letter reminding her of her undertaking to provide more detail.

With that, Madam Normandin, you have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

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

I'd like to come back to CAF CYBERCOM, the Canadian Armed Forces Cyber Command.

You mentioned that its role was to emphasize the importance of Canada being more active in cybersecurity. Still, I get the impression that this is an entity that went and got people from elsewhere, who were given the same tasks, mainly the acquisition of cyber intelligence, without any additional funding.

How can this, for example, increase Canada's credibility internationally to eventually be part of AUKUS Pillar II? Is it enough?

[English]

Ms. Stefanie Beck: We all want to answer.

[Translation]

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: Thank you for your question.

With regard to CAF CYBERCOM and everything to do with cyber operations, in its annual report, the Communications Security Establishment mentions that we have already made progress in implementing several operations, but without giving further details. Rest assured that, since Bill C-26 was passed and provided us with the requisite powers, we have been exercising them.

You suggested that the newly announced CAF CYBERCOM was just a gathering of people taken from elsewhere, but I assure you that it's a very important gathering, because it puts us on a more equal footing with our allies.

I'll let my colleague tell you more about it. I can assure you that, from a Communications Security Establishment perspective, we are a very well-recognized ally of our Five Eyes partners for our capabilities in this area.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Does this involve adding positions? If so, how do we ensure that we remain competitive with the private sector?

By creating this organization, are we creating new trades for non-commissioned members and officers in particular?

[English]

The Chair: Unfortunately, Madam Normandin has left you five seconds to answer that question.

I'm going to just move on. If you can work your answer in some other way, that would be helpful.

Madam Mathysen, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

In terms of following up on some of the questions around recruitment, I'll say that there are significant changes that are happening. A lot of the time, it sounds great at the top, but a lot of these significant changes aren't going through in terms of the ranks of those who have to enforce them.

How are you communicating that with those people who have to actually enforce those changes?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: Do you mean the implementation of the changes we're making?

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Yes.

LGen Stephen Kelsey: I'll use an example related to security clearances.

Obviously, we're not going to compromise the standards, but we need to change when and with a threshold at what point. It demands a number of resources from the department and also from CSIS to allow that. That's an example of a change in process that's very centralized because of the assurance we need to give ourselves and our allies because some of the equipment that's being used is their intellectual property.

I will flip it now to the recruiter at the recruiting centre. The chief of the defence staff and our deputy have created a new form called the recruiting campaign board, where we look at specific issues along the path from interest all the way through to completion of training. The decisions that are made on a Thursday are transmitted directly through the recruiting centres immediately.

For example, the aptitude testing or the medical.... The medical will be the next topic. We're going to be continuing with the aptitude testing, but it's when it takes place. Is it before entry or after? That changes the threshold for some of the recruiters' work on which files get accepted faster.

● (1005)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: With my remaining time, Mr. Chair, I would like to put a motion on notice.

My apologies to the translators, as this is quite lengthy and I did not give it to them in advance. I'll read it into the record:

Given that: The International Court of Justice ordered Israel to change its actions to prevent the “real and imminent risk” of genocide; Given that the UN Human Rights Council called on all states to cease the sale and transfer of weapons to Israel immediately, or else risk complicity in war crimes or acts of genocide; Given that Parliament voted in March of 2024 in support of the NDP’s motion to end arms transfers to Israel; Given Canada’s clear legal obligations under the Arms Trade Treaty against transferring weapons to another country if there is a probable risk that they could be used in violations of international humanitarian law; Given that the government is refusing to close loopholes that allow military goods and technology to be shipped from Canada to Israel via the United States through the Canada-U.S. Defence Production Sharing Agreement; And given that the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of National Defence have refused to give clear answers regarding the potential use of Canadian exports of military goods and technology in Israel’s horrific siege on Gaza:

1. That the committee immediately order the production of:

(i) all relevant memoranda, briefing notes, e-mails, records of conversation and all other related records from the offices of the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister’s Office related to arms transfers to Israel;

(ii) all relevant memoranda, briefing notes, e-mails, records of conversation and all other related records from the offices of the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Privy Council Office, the Canadian Commercial Corporation and the Prime Minister’s Office related to the \$60-million deal to transfer Canadian-made M933A1 120mm High Explosive Mortar Cartridges and related equipment to the United States;

(iii) all relevant memoranda, briefing notes, e-mails, records of conversation, and all other related records from the offices of the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Privy Council Office, the Canadian Commercial Corporation and the Prime Minister’s Office related to analysis of Canada’s Arms Trade Treaty obligations;

(iv) all legal analysis conducted by the Department of National Defence, the Department of Justice, ISED, Global Affairs Canada and the Canadian Commercial Corporation on the impact of the U.S.-Canada Defence Production Sharing Agreement on our international law obligations;

(v) all relevant memoranda, briefing notes, e-mails, records of conversation and all other related records from the offices of the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister’s Office related to the Canada-Israel Strategic Partnership;

2. That these documents be provided to the committee within 60 days;

3. That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), upon receipt of these documents, the committee undertake a study of Canada’s defence industry and our Arms Trade Treaty obligations; that the committee hold a minimum of eight meetings for the duration of the study; and that the committee invite the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Industry, the CEO of the Canadian Commercial Corporation, along with relevant government officials, international law experts, researchers and civil society organizations; and that the committee report its findings to the House.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Mr. Bezan, you have five minutes.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you.

I’ll be looking forward to talking to GDLS in London, Ontario to talk about how this motion is going to hurt jobs in their plant.

ADM Hadwen, you mentioned a website. Did you say it was “disinformation.ca”?

• (1010)

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: I thought so.

Mr. James Bezan: Okay. I just bought it because it was available on GoDaddy.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. James Bezan: It’s not owned. I think you should get it bought up real quick.

Ms. Wendy Hadwen: Yes. I’ll get back to you with this.

Mr. James Bezan: If we’re going to be handling disinformation, let’s make sure that the Russians or the PRC don’t get hold of that before too long.

The Chair: It’s on the Conservative website.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. James Bezan: I also want to go back to a comment by General Kelsey in response to an earlier question from Mr. Stewart.

You said that the shortage of nine-millimetre munitions and the shortage of maintenance on vehicles in our reserve units are all because we’re essentially needing those dollars for the reg force.

LGen Stephen Kelsey: I was acknowledging—poorly—that in the past three decades we have optimized, in this case, the army, for contribution efforts. We did so with great efficiency, such that in many cases we didn’t have the people to equal our structure, nor the equipment. This was a choice, and it manifested most precisely in our reserve units, which we actually rely on heavily. This was to optimize our output. We made choices here in Canada across our units.

Mr. James Bezan: This is more of a function of the recent budget cuts that we see, that you’re not having the ability.... Almost a billion dollars per year is getting cut. The lapsed funding.... You can’t tap that to help our reserve units. We have a lot of our different units out there at the armoury level; they’re well staffed. They need the support to make sure that the equipment works and that they’re fully trained.

LGen Stephen Kelsey: It’s absolutely true that we want to invest in our reserves better. We need them. We need the people. We need their expertise.

Mr. James Bezan: It’s because, essentially, your surge capacity is your reserves.

LGen Stephen Kelsey: It is indeed. In fact, we have a number of them working full time right now. We can get the exact number, but it’s between 8,000 and 9,000 reservists working full time for us, filling key positions.

Mr. James Bezan: In the past, General Eyre has been here and has talked about the shortages that we face. We’re short almost 16,000 members of the Canadian Armed Forces. In addition, 10,000 of those who are already through basic training are still undertrained and undeployable. Do we have current numbers? Are we where we’re supposed to be as mandated strength? How short are we for the different divisions of the Canadian Armed Forces: army, navy, air force, special forces?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: We are well short. You deserve the precise answer. I don’t have it with me.

In terms of the recruiting and the folks coming through the door, we’re halfway through our intake plan. We’re better than 50%, but we have much work to be done.

As I alluded to, we use those shortfalls to access our reserve forces. We need to make smart choices because, with every reservert we take out of the units, they can't fulfill their own training obligations. We have a lot of work to be done.

Mr. James Bezan: Eighteen-plus months ago, Minister Anand made the announcement that we were buying NASAMS for Ukraine and then announced that it was en route over 14 months ago. It's still not been delivered. When is the NASAMS that we purchased with Canadian taxpayer dollars going to finally get delivered to Ukraine?

Ms. Nancy Tremblay (Assistant Deputy Minister, Materiel, Department of National Defence): Canada has invested to make sure that Ukraine is provided with NASAMS. We're working with the U.S. government in order to make sure that this is delivered. At this point in time, we're expecting delivery in 2025.

Mr. James Bezan: When in 2025?

Ms. Nancy Tremblay: We're expecting early in 2025.

Mr. James Bezan: They need that system now. They're getting bombed every day.

Also, there is a promise to send some renovated or improved-upon LAVs, the older Coyotes that were getting rearmoured and re-equipped at Armatec. Has that contract been signed for all those LAVs to also be sent to Ukraine?

Ms. Nancy Tremblay: The contract with Armatec is being worked on by Commercial Canadian Corporation, and that is in discussion at this point in time.

• (1015)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

Mrs. Lalonde, you have the final five minutes.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We are here to talk about the priority of the Minister of National Defence through maybe a mandate letter.

If I look at what's been happening in the Indo-Pacific region—and we have not really touched on this today—we've seen a regional tension in the South China Sea and more broadly in the Indo-Pacific. I also understand that in the region, we are talking with like-minded partners on some topics, from naval partnership to artificial intelligence. Can you speak on how, specifically, the CAF role in the Indo-Pacific region has changed over the past two years, and what this is intended to signal? I know there has been great initiative, so I would really like us to share this with the committee.

Ms. Stefanie Beck: I'll start, and then others can add.

We were really pleased to have been part of the Indo-Pacific strategy that was led by our colleagues at Global Affairs Canada and to be able to access some new funding that allows us to really ramp up our operations and exercises across the Indo-Pacific. This has meant, in practical terms, much more interaction and direct collaboration at all levels, both on the civilian side, including the CSE, as well as on the military side. In fact, our senior researchers and developers have just come back from discussions in Australia, where we were working very explicitly on issues that we all face right now, including, for instance, underwater drones and other

technologies that are being developed. AI would be another one of those. Working together, we can make a difference.

You will also have seen much mention of our sailing plans in Indo-Pacific; our work in Operation Neon, recognizing what is happening in North Korea and South Korea; and, of course, regular interactions with all of our other major trading partners there. The minister was recently in South Korea and in Japan as well. The Prime Minister is in ASEAN right now, in Vientiane, Laos.

Perhaps some more specifics on the military side....

LGen Stephen Kelsey: I recently was with my counterpart in the U.S. and he offered, unsolicited, his sincere thanks for what Canada is doing, which is showing a greater and more visible presence in the maritime and air domains.

Perhaps undervalued, but hugely important, is where Canada is actually leading in some defence research initiatives, which has caught the attention of certainly Australia and New Zealand.

All that to say, as we expand our presence there and re-foster our relationships with Japan, the Republic of Korea and others, it is noticed by our allies and is surely welcome.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

We only have a few minutes left. First, I want to say thank you to all of you and also to all our CAF and their families for their enormous contribution to Canada and the world.

Maybe I would just like to leave it open. This committee has been hard at work trying to bring partisan interests into this committee. Today with you here, it would be nice maybe to have a few thoughts, based on the priorities and the mandate letter, about what's next and what we need to focus on.

I know we talked about many initiatives. If there's something you would like to share with us, it would be greatly appreciated.

Ms. Stefanie Beck: Actually, what we would really welcome is a conversation with you, perhaps over in one of our buildings. We have some big plans we need discuss, including the defence industrial strategy, which we need to draft. We would really appreciate having input from all across the country, but particularly from this committee.

We're looking forward to your reporting on housing coming up.

We think we have lots of good ideas, but there are always more to come. In fact, the interactions directly with those affected are going to make the difference in what the outcome is and how successful we are on our Pathfinder initiative.

I know we didn't really talk about procurement reform today, but we're always happy to discuss it. This is very much on our minds. There are many things we can control internally so that we change our own processes to speed up. It does mean making choices that are difficult. In some cases, if we're doing more of what I would call "directed procurement", it means somebody doesn't get it. There is always a trade-off, but that does manage to then speed up the actual outcome at the end.

We've seen some instances of that being very successful recently. Actually, I would point to the RFI on submarines, which we're hoping will be a demonstration of how we can actually do procurement differently, with the success at the end being the capabilities we need in a timely manner.

• (1020)

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it there, Madam Lalonde.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you. I also want to thank you for the invitation to have further discussions in another setting. Partisanship aside, we're all going in the same direction here and we are in a threat environment that is ever accelerating and ever challenging.

On that point, colleagues, when we return from the Christmas—er, the Thanksgiving break—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Is that a hint?

The Chair: For the ever-alert Mrs. Gallant, that is not a hint. Besides which, that would be way above my pay grade.

For October 22, we have the Ukrainian MPs for the first hour and Mr. Fadden and Mr. Thibault for the second. Then we will do a briefing on the Middle East on the Thursday and continue with our space defence on the 29th. Then, on the 31st, we have the Finnish Speaker for the first hour and space defence for the second hour. Hopefully, we will—

Yes.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Very briefly, I know there was a conversation regarding our delegation of MPs from Ukraine.

Are we hosting them in this particular setting in a very open format or do they prefer a more in camera, personal interaction?

The Chair: We haven't heard, but I'm assured by the clerk that he'll cook a good breakfast for them.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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