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Chair

The Honourable Peter Kent

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC)) Colleagues, welcome to this meeting. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), today's business before the committee is a briefing on Canada's role in NATO Operation Reassurance.

Just as a heads-up to all, we do have some committee business to see to in camera at the end of the meeting. With that in mind, we will adjourn some 15 minutes or so before the scheduled end of the committee meeting to discuss that committee business.

For now, welcome to our witnesses. We have Major General Michael Hood, the director of staff, strategic joint staff, and Rear Admiral Gilles Couturier, director general, international security policy.

Gentlemen, welcome to this committee, and please give your opening statements.

MGen Michael Hood (Director of Staff, Strategic Joint Staff, Department of National Defence): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to brief you on Operation Reassurance.

Operation Reassurance refers to the military activities undertaken by the Canadian Armed Forces to support NATO through the provision of military capabilities for training, exercises, and assigned NATO tasks in the context of the challenge presented by an increasingly belligerent Russia and, in particular, its aggression against Ukraine earlier this year.

[Translation]

Before you is a map that outlines the Canadian Armed Forces' involvement in NATO assurance measures. I would like to walk you through our present contributions to the mission.

I would be pleased to answer your questions after the presentation.

[English]

The map is actually located in the back of my remarks, which you have.

On April 16, 2014, NATO allies agreed upon and began to implement a series of military measures to reinforce NATO's collective defence, demonstrating the strength of allied solidarity in response to Russian aggression and provocation in eastern Europe. The next day, at the request of our allies, the Government of Canada offered Canadian armed forces assets to NATO as part of allied

assurance measures to promote security in central and eastern Europe.

On April 29, the Royal Canadian Air Force deployed six CF-18 Hornets from 425 Tactical Fighter Squadron, based at 3 Wing Bagotville. From May to August our fighters conducted interoperability training with NATO allies in Câmpia Turzii, Romania, and then from September through to December this year re-based to Siauliai, Lithuania to contribute to NATO's Baltic air policing alongside other allies. Four fighters and about 130 personnel are currently based in Lithuania with a mission to preserve the integrity of the airspace of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and to react to any intrusions. They are expected to return to Canada at the beginning of January.

On April 30, HMCS *Regina*, with an embarked Sea King helicopter, was transferred to NATO control as part of Standing NATO Maritime Group Two, conducting exercises and patrols in the Mediterranean until she was relieved by HMCS *Toronto* on August 3. While serving with the standing NATO maritime group and ensuring a NATO presence in the eastern Mediterranean, our ships are tasked with locating, tracking, reporting, and boarding suspicious vessels.

At sea, from September 6 to 27, HMCS *Toronto* completed participation in joint NATO training exercises and maritime situational awareness operations in the Black Sea. The first exercise, Exercise Sea Breeze, took place from September 8 to 10 and involved naval vessels from Canada, Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, and the United States.

Further interoperability exercises involved *Toronto* training with Bulgarian, Romanian, and Turkish ships from September 13 to 24. While operating in the Black Sea, HMCS *Toronto* also conducted port visits to enhance diplomatic and defence relations with allies and partners. Of note, this is the first time that a Canadian warship has operated in the Black Sea since HMCS *Gatineau* did in 1992. Now back in the Mediterranean, HMCS *Toronto* is scheduled to be relieved by HMCS *Fredericton* in January 2015.

On May 3, the first of about 120 soldiers from the 3rd Battalion of Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry arrived in Poland to participate in a series of training events conducted across Eastern Europe. They exercised airborne operations and infantry skills alongside Polish, American, and other NATO allies with a view to enhancing alliance interoperability and readiness. In July the Patricias were replaced by soldiers from the 3rd Battalion of The Royal Canadian Regiment who are there now. As we speak they are beginning Exercise Combined Resolve III, which will involve some 4,000 troops from 15 nations training in Germany and Poland until the end of November.

● (1540)

[Translation]

Finally, 23 Canadian Armed Forces operational planners were sent, at the request of NATO, to Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Belgium and to Headquarters Joint Task Force Naples in Italy.

While there, they reinforced NATO planners working on developments in Europe and monitoring events in the region. Having completed their tasks, those personnel have recently returned to Canada.

[English]

At the Wales Summit held on the 4th and 5th of September, NATO allies agreed on a readiness action plan that will strengthen NATO's collective defence and ensure that the alliance is ready to respond to any future security challenge. The elements of the plan include measures that address both the continuing need for assurance of allies and the adaptation of the alliance's military strategic posture. The assurance measures include continuous air, land, and maritime presence and meaningful military activity in the eastern part of the alliance on a rotational basis, such as those to which Canada has contributed under Op Reassurance.

These continuing events will provide the fundamental baseline requirement for assurance and deterrence, adapted as may be needed in response to the evolving security situation. In this context, DND is examining options for a renewal in 2015 of the measures we have taken under Op Reassurance as well as those we have contributed to in the past, such as NATO air policing of its northern flank and Iceland.

In the medium term, NATO adaptation measures will include the components required to ensure that the alliance can fully address the security challenges it might face. In the next year, NATO will develop plans to significantly enhance the responsiveness of our NATO response forces by developing force packages that are able to move rapidly and respond to potential challenges and threats.

As part of it, NATO will establish a very high readiness joint task force that will be able to respond quickly to challenges that arise, particularly at the periphery of NATO's territory. NATO will also establish an appropriate command and control presence and infrastructure on the territories of eastern allies at all times, with contributions from allies on a rotational basis, focusing on planning and exercising collective defence scenarios.

Canada will be fully engaged with our allies in the development of these measures and in carrying its share of the burden of collective defence.

[Translation]

As you can see, along with our allies, Canada has contributed to a number of military measures designed to reinforce our collective defence and demonstrate the strength of allied solidarity in NATO states in eastern and central Europe.

● (1545)

[English]

The participation of Canadian Armed Forces personnel in NATO exercises and training activities provides them with an excellent opportunity to exercise their skills and reinforce their ability to operate with our NATO allies while building cohesion within the alliance.

Thank you very much for your time. We're certainly ready to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, General.

We will proceed now to our opening round of questions, seven minutes each.

Mr. Chisu, please.

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

I have a couple of questions for you, if you don't mind. In your view, what are the most serious threats and security challenges for Canada and NATO resulting from Russia's aggression in the Ukraine in recent months?

MGen Michael Hood: That's an excellent question, sir. I think that if we look at Europe since the end of the Cold War, a certain stability had arisen whereby there was excellent cooperation amongst all parties, both within NATO and the former Eastern Bloc.

I think anytime you have an aggression that we've seen in Crimea and in eastern Ukraine, it has a very destabilizing effect. Certainly for our good NATO allies that are in the Baltics and on, essentially, the eastern flank of NATO, those concerns are seen in a historical context that certainly provides them pause to consider next steps. So, I would certainly say that we've seen a fundamental shift in the geostrategic security construct that Europe has enjoyed for some time.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: How concerned should Canada and NATO be with Russia at this point? Russia is continuing aggression and flexing muscles, both a little bit in the Arctic and the eastern part of Russia. I am also going to Kaliningrad in a bit because my next question will be related to the CF-18s policing approach.

MGen Michael Hood: I think, as we've reported in the department, we've seen increased Russian aviation activity off NORAD's northern flank, both Alaska and the approaches to Canada. Taken in concert with what we just spoke about in eastern Europe, it certainly speaks to a change in approach, or a change in strategy, by Russia that is of concern to not only the Department of National Defence Canada but allies as well. I think this is something that needs to be closely monitored and considered carefully as we think about Canadian military strategy moving forward.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: So, as has been reported, the CF-18s are part of the air policing mission in the Baltics, and they have recently intercepted some Russian aircraft, which have flown over the Baltic Sea. What sort of aircraft do the Russians have, which usually fly over the Arctic—the MiG-29 or MiG-31 or something like that?

MGen Michael Hood: With respect to the Baltic air policing, I think it's important to recognize that the territory of Russia is not contiguous, but that there is a small island of territory called Kaliningrad, located astride the Baltic states. In flying between its territory Russia flies along the boundaries within the Baltic and does so quite regularly. So the interception of Russian aircraft in the Baltic context is quite normal activity that NATO has seen and, I think, and is treated as such when Russian aircraft travel between two different areas that aren't contiguous. We see mostly transport aircraft.

If you were asking about NORAD's concern, we've seen a mixture. But those are typically Bear-H aircraft, their front-line bomber aircraft, that have traditionally approached Canada's northern area and NORAD. That's the main concern.

• (1550)

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Did they discern any fighter jets in the Baltic from Russia or elsewhere?

MGen Michael Hood: We have not intercepted any fighter aircraft in the Baltic up to this point, sir.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Going on to the fighter jets, I understand that HMCS *Toronto* was buzzed over by Russian aircraft. What kind of aircraft was it, in the Black Sea?

MGen Michael Hood: That's right. As was reported in the press, HMCS *Toronto* was overflown by two MiG-31s, I would say. I'd have to refer to my notes, but it was a Russian fighter aircraft. It was not seen as a threatening posture. The aircraft wasn't armed. It's not unusual to investigate when in close proximity to someone's shores. It was reported as a provocative step. From a military perspective I think the CO of the HMCS *Toronto* never felt under any threat. There was no targeting of his ship with radars or anything like that. It was a gentle reminder that we're in close proximity to Russian territory.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Do you feel that our eastern European allies in NATO whose air space we are policing are concerned about Russian intrusions or Russia's intent? I'm speaking also about Romania. I think that Canada was doing some joint exercises with the Romanian air force, which has Russian aircraft, I think.

MGen Michael Hood: That's right. Romania does fly former Russian aircraft as their front-line fighter.

Undoubtedly, if you're on the borders of Russia, our new NATO allies—Romania, Hungary, Poland, the Baltic states—have very long memories of history. So there are traditional existential

concerns within those countries. As you might expect at NATO tables, they're rightly seeing this as their central concern and, certainly, the alliance accepts this, that all NATO members are equal and that we take that threat—certainly that's their view of it—very seriously.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chisu.

Mr. Harris, please.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you for coming today, and thank you for your presentation.

I wonder if I could just refer to the remarks of the American ambassador to NATO, Mr. Douglas Lute, who gave a press briefing in June where he talked about what he had seen of the international reaction to the events in Crimea and Ukraine. He talked about the international support for the government in Ukraine as one aspect of it. The second was the condemnation of, and imposition of costs on, Russia for its actions. The third was the reassurance of NATO allies. He summarized some of the things that we're talking about here today. He said that in an effort to reassure allies who might feel threatened by the instability in the east, these reassurance measures had been taken. He used the same words as we have in Operation Reassurance, and the same things that have been used by Anders Fogh Rasmussen on behalf of NATO, that the actions were about defence, deterrence, and de-escalation.

Are you satisfied that those three measures are the ones, and the ones that we were involved in in Operation Reassurance was the NATO-led mission?

MGen Michael Hood: Yes, sir, absolutely.

Mr. Jack Harris: I get the deterrence, I get the presence and all of that, and the reassurance of particularly the close neighbours. I was in Riga in the last year and visited the museum on the occupation of Latvia by Germany and the Soviet Union, which only ended in 1991, so we can understand how they feel. We talked to officials there.

But where does the de-escalation come in? How would that have been part of this mission? I hadn't heard much about that in terms of what NATO is doing.

MGen Michael Hood: Certainly from my perspective there's a fine line between deterrence and de-escalation.

NATO had a couple of objectives. One was to reassure those Central European members of NATO that we've been discussing, but the second part was actually to also show the agility and flexibility of NATO across a wide spectrum. That's why you've seen responses in increased numbers in the air policing missions, our deployment to Romania, and the *Toronto* and the increase in the Standing NATO Maritime Group. In showing that agility, it would certainly hope to offer food for thought to belligerent nations within there that NATO retains the capability. That's where I draw the line: to a de-escalation theme within that.

• (1555)

Mr. Jack Harris: And the hope that would occur as de-escalation on the other side?

MGen Michael Hood: Yes.

Mr. Jack Harris: You have talked about, and I know the government has talked about, the presence of the *Toronto* in the Black Sea. I note you say that it's a 21-day mission that coincides with the Montreux convention going back to 1936. In terms of participation and military activities in the Black Sea by Canada, there was nothing going beyond what was agreed to in this convention. You're only allowed in there for 21 days if you are not a littoral state, which is part of the normal rules. We weren't going beyond any of that by being provocative towards them.

MGen Michael Hood: No, absolutely. It all respected the terms of the Montreux convention, which speaks to the tonnage of a ship allowed into the Black Sea and the length of time and all of that.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chisu asked about an incident involving the Russian plane. You used the word "overflowed". The press from time to time is using the word "buzz". The notion of "buzz" has connotations of flying down very close to a ship and threatening the ship itself. Is "buzz" an appropriate word for what happened there?

MGen Michael Hood: As an airman, in the vernacular, I'm familiar with the term. It would speak to flying close enough to someone that you would certainly give them cause to recognize your presence, so they're probably synonymous, sir.

Again, I think what's more important to note on this is that the aircraft they were approaching had no hostile indications. There were no radars locked on. There were no visible armaments. The airplanes were unarmed, so for the ship itself, the captain reported that at no time did he feel under threat. I think it was just a bit of a sensational moment that caught the eye of the press here.

Mr. Jack Harris: How far away?

MGen Michael Hood: I don't have the exact details, sir.

Mr. Jack Harris: So any overflight is a "buzz" in air force parlance?

Voices: Oh, oh!

RAdm Gilles Couturier (Director General, International Security Policy, Department of National Defence): The sailor side of me says that here are some measures the captain takes to identify a threat or non-threatening aircraft, and based on the flight pattern and everything else that the captain was seeing, there was no threat to the ship. If it is a buzz or an overflight, depending on where you come from, it makes a difference.

Mr. Jack Harris: General, you've told us that the Baltic air policing has been going on for a while—since 2004, I understand—and this is to provide air support and patrolling, particularly with Romania, Estonia, and Latvia, which don't have an air force. There have been regular rotations. Canada has not participated to date. Is Canada going to sign up for this now? Was this about additional flights, additional numbers of sorties? Or was this just about taking a place in the rotation?

MGen Michael Hood: There are two air policing missions in NATO: the Icelandic air policing and the Baltic air policing. Those are the two active air policing missions, and you've described them accurately. They're from NATO allies that don't have a fighter capability, and it has helped to promote the expression of their sovereignty.

We previously have done Icelandic air policing and in fact would likely contribute again to a policing mission in the future. As part of the NATO reassurance measures, though, NATO undertook to expand the size of the Baltic air policing mission, which essentially doubled it in size. A number of nations came in, and we're participating right now with Portugal in that. Within that expansion of the Baltic air policing mission, other NATO countries were invited, and Canada answered that call.

The Chair: Mr. Harris, your time—

Mr. Jack Harris: Are you satisfied that there was reassurance given to those countries, that they did feel that reassurance?

MGen Michael Hood: Absolutely, sir.

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

Mr. Norlock, please.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Through you, to the witnesses, thank you for attending today.

I'd like to go back to one of the questions that Mr. Chisu asked. It's one of my stealth and non-stealth questions. You answered most of the question with regard to the type of aircraft the Russians were using. It was a Bear-H bomber type aircraft, and then two MiG fighters. None of these would have been stealth-capable aircraft, would they?

• (1600)

MGen Michael Hood: If we talk about fourth and fifth generation, no, they're not stealth.

Mr. Rick Norlock: The Russians do have those kinds of aircraft, I believe.

MGen Michael Hood: Stealth—

Mr. Rick Norlock: To our knowledge, do the Russians have that fourth-generation and fifth-generation type aircraft?

MGen Michael Hood: Fourth generation I'm aware of, but beyond that I don't have any independent knowledge.

Mr. Rick Norlock: I submit they wouldn't have.

Fourth-generation, then, would pose a significant challenge to NATO.

MGen Michael Hood: Well, it's akin to a modern fighter, as we're flying, so I think NATO is well versed and prepared to respond to that threat.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Great. Good news, because I think a lot of people want to make sure we go to the fight with the same kind of calibre weapons.

Mr. Harris was talking about our perception of the comfortableness Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and others have with the increased assistance we've been giving them. How close would Russian aircraft be coming to those three countries, as well as Iceland? Do they do frequent flyovers, etc., and sort of test us?

MGen Michael Hood: With respect to Baltic air policing, I was trying to highlight to you that to get from Russia proper to Kaliningrad, as an aviator, if I were flying a flight plan and I had overflight clearance of the Baltics, I could go in a straight line. But they don't do that because, certainly, I don't think the Baltics would necessarily give them overflight rights for military aircraft. Instead, they run astride the boundaries between the airspace, which many countries do when you choose not to have overflights. I'd simply like to characterize it that this is routine Russian activity. It's not seen as out of the ordinary.

Mr. Rick Norlock: So it's not confrontational, in your view.

MGen Michael Hood: It has not been to date, sir.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you.

I guess the simple question is: do you feel our aircraft are providing a real deterrent against the Russians? When I say "our" I'm referring of course to our NATO allies. Do we appear to be dissuading them from any additional overtures, shall we say?

MGen Michael Hood: I don't think I can really comment on how Russia may or may not see this activity. In an assurance piece, it is assuring our NATO allies. I suspect it may be affecting the calculus of Russia in this case, but that would simply be pure speculation on my part.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you. They sure have indicated that in the news. But when Mr. Putin talks about, "Well, you guys shouldn't really be doing that", in my view, whatever he says in public he takes the opposite actions. But that's only a comment on my part.

One of the key missions of the Standing Maritime NATO Group is to establish a NATO presence. Of course, in light of what has occurred in the Ukraine, how important is it to show that NATO has a presence in Eastern Europe and the Baltic Sea? And do you feel that demonstrating a presence can deter further aggression?

RAdm Gilles Couturier: Absolutely. The importance of having a NATO group is not only to show the ships, but show the capability of the ships to work together. That's creating an opportunity for us to display that skill through all the training that's ongoing, while we're deploying in their region. I think that is achieving the union we're looking for.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much.

I think the words "Operation Reassurance" basically say everything about what the operation is intended to do, namely two things: to reassure our NATO allies, especially those smaller countries that don't have many of the capabilities that, perhaps, Canada does; and also to reassure our perceived adversary, or someone who's flexing their muscles unnecessarily, that we do have the capability of reining them in.

The other thing I believe we're doing—and perhaps you can make a comment—is strengthening some form of diplomatic ties with our NATO partners in the area. Are we doing anything in that regard, either naval-wise or air-wise?

• (1605)

RAdm Gilles Couturier: Just from a naval perspective, while the ship was in the Black Sea program, for example, we did some port visits. Doing that creates two messages: one is the closeness we're displaying with the country we are visiting; the other is to show

some Canadian resolve in the region. We are able to meet some of the senior folks while we're there. The ambassador uses that platform to send some message at the same time about the capability that Canadians are bringing to the region.

We're quite proud of the ships we have out there, absolutely.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you very much.

One other thing we're doing there, with regard to the army part of our armed forces is of course that we're training and learning lessons with our NATO allies. What important skills, lessons, and training techniques have our forces taken away from the training missions they have participated in, and particularly in Poland, to your knowledge?

MGen Michael Hood: Central to the success of NATO is the ability of the countries to work together—the interoperability that we speak about quite often. Any opportunity that you have to exercise together is particularly useful.

In a NATO context, while we exercise frequently with them, we haven't had many opportunities to operate with Poland, for example. At the very tactical level, the skills of the various countries would provide something for our soldiers to take away. As to the opportunity to exercise with them, we have done air drops together in formation. I think a lot of useful interoperability-building has been going on.

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

Ms. Murray, please.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you very much for being here to brief us. I appreciate it.

I have two different lines of questions that I'm interested in. One is about how many Canadian armed forces personnel are in that area on this NATO mission for Operation Reassurance and its various components.

MGen Michael Hood: Presently, we have 140 RCAF personnel in Lithuania, and that number includes the air crews and the ground crew and support personnel; there are approximately 240 people on board the ship; and the land element is a company-sized element of approximately 140 personnel. There are also a number of liaison officers, a handful at various operational headquarters in NATO. That, by and large, captures the present strength of the mission.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay. So of the 4,000 in combined, resolved three.... Those 4,000 would be Canada's contingent for this?

MGen Michael Hood: It is 140 of the 4,000 who are Canadian.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Well, 140—and that's just the land side.

MGen Michael Hood: Yes.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay.

Help me understand what kind of support those armed forces members have. We know that sometimes another deployment triggers operational injuries from previous deployments—from Afghanistan, for example—and so having medical professionals to support armed forces members can be helpful, should they need that support.

Are there any medical support personnel with the group?

MGen Michael Hood: We'd certainly rely, in a NATO context.... If you're talking about medical help for injuries in training, that backbone is there, as every exercise would have it.

I would just comment, though, that we're there exercising, doing things similar to what we'd be doing in Petawawa or elsewhere. The chief was relaying to me that when he visited the land element in the last month, some of the soldiers were saying that one of the greatest experiences they have had in their careers is the ability to exercise in a very peaceful sense with close allies.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay. So there are not necessarily uniformed psychologists in case they're—

MGen Michael Hood: I don't think we're anticipating operational stress injuries from this type of exercise. But certainly, when people come back from this deployment, they will be screened as if they had come back from an operational deployment.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay, thank you.

I want to find out about the whole cyber issue. We've been talking about ships and planes and land exercises. My understanding is that cyber-attacks were a big part of the Russians' approach for annexing Crimea and that disconnecting the Ukrainian forces in the region from the government forces was one of their approaches.

To what degree in Operation Reassurance are we following up on NATO's recognition that the alliance needs to address cyber-security issues and the ability of our partners to work together on them, with different members able to have their own cyber-security capability raised, but also their capability of working together?

• (1610)

MGen Michael Hood: You hit on an area and question that I'm going to have to take under advisement. With respect to cyber-threats, NATO recognizes, as you pointed out, that this is an area that we need focus on more. Certain NATO allies have quite advanced capabilities—there's a varying level. But in the context of Russian activity in Crimea and elsewhere, I'm not familiar enough with it to really give you a proper answer.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay, so another challenge at the time this was first unfolding was the lack of intelligence as to what was going on on the ground. I think it would probably be generally agreed that intelligence, whether it's human or signals or image intelligence, is a very important part of effective defence, deterrence, and reassurance.

So what kind of capability has Canada offered on that front? Then I have another more specific question about that.

MGen Michael Hood: If I may turn your question, because I think you were framing it as a challenge, I'd say that we actually had quite good intelligence on exactly what was going on in the region. More specifically, with certain allies and with the sharing of information, I was able to see on a day-by-day basis the evolving

nature of Russian advances in Crimea, and also what was happening in Luhansk and Donetsk. So in that context I would just offer to you that we do have that view.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Can I just ask a question and get some clarification on the following? Did the Ukrainian forces have the intelligence they needed to be effective and were there ways in which NATO is addressing...? If the answer is no, are there ways in which NATO is addressing that gap for potential future conflicts?

MGen Michael Hood: If we're talking about sharing intelligence information outside of NATO members, I can't specifically comment on that. I know that various countries....

I am not familiar enough with Ukraine's integral intelligence capability to offer whether they were challenged in that area or not, but I would suggest that they are probably reaching out to NATO and looking for some mentoring, certainly, and some help along those lines, which is not unusual for many countries in that area.

The Chair: A very brief question....

Ms. Joyce Murray: My question relates to an account in the media recently that the number of CF-18s now being deployed both in this area and in Iraq reduces the functional availability of CF-18s for every other purpose that we might need for our national security to about 22 aircraft.

Do you have a concern about the extension of CF-18s outside of Canada's borders in terms of what's available here? Secondly, what is the projected time of return of the CF-18s from eastern Europe, or are they there until further notice?

MGen Michael Hood: In answer to your first question, there's no impact to the standing roles and missions of the F-18 in the Royal Canadian Air Force. Our NORAD commitments are met and both of these deployments fall within our expeditionary capability with redundancy. That's actually an area that I'm responsible for day-to-day, so I can say that quite confidently.

With respect to the length of time of this Baltic air policing mission, our block that we signed up for finishes at the end of this year, and the plan right now is that our F-18s will return shortly thereafter.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Murray.

We'll move on now to our second round of questions, five minutes each, beginning with Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses.

Mr. Harris and I had the opportunity to be in Vilnius this spring for the NATO PA conference. At that conference they told us that every time they heard a fighter jet go overhead, it reminded them of how vulnerable they were. Indeed, just by virtue of our having the conference in Vilnius they felt more secure. One of the three things they asked us for was joint exercises. The feedback that we are receiving from our colleagues, MPs in other NATO countries, especially the Baltics, is that they are extremely grateful for being heard and for the cooperation.

Now, part of the NATO strategic concept asks emphasizes a new cooperation in cyber-defence. Indeed, we see that the Prime Minister, in Wales, for the NATO centres of excellence, one of them being cyber-defence, has committed an extra \$1 million to the centre of strategic communications, as well as energy security as a third pillar. So all those combinations of things are helping in these exercises that we've been discussing. Mr. Harris and I were at that NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence, and they asked for Canada to be on their map and be a part of this organization, so we're very pleased that we're working there.

My question has to do with cyber-defence. Now that we have an element of participation in the centre of excellence, with respect to operation reassurance, do we have any more involvement in that particular organization than we had previously?

RAdm Gilles Couturier: At this stage we're quite pleased to see the investment and be able to share some of our own experience in that field. But that's pretty well the main area. There is no other element associated to the work that we're doing.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Right.

I was pleased to welcome home the soldiers from 3 RCR in Petawawa after Exercise Orzel Alert. We know collectively here what a difference that makes, but can you tell us what message it sends to the Russians when we have these joint exercises?

MGen Michael Hood: I would reiterate that I think the goal of our efforts and NATO efforts was twofold...to reassure our partners. From every report that we've had, whether it's from the Romanian CHOD or others, I think they very much appreciated the opportunity to operate with us. There was a lot of great learning that was going on, on both sides, from many of these countries. They don't have all that many opportunities to exercise high end with F-18s, for example.

But again, to your latter points, the reassurance efforts and the deterrence and de-escalation, I would have to leave that for a NATO senior to offer a commentary. I'm not really in a position to comment.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: So Exercise Gniezno was a Canadian-led exercise partnered with the Polish troops aimed at conducting a parachute insertion, followed by a reserve demolition guard at secured bridge sites. What does this say about Canada's role in NATO and our role in the reassurance measures that we are asked to lead in this operation?

MGen Michael Hood: I think we're recognized, certainly, for the skill and acumen of our soldiers, sailors, and aviators at every account. We would look for leadership opportunities because I think we have a lot to offer, and the fact that we were able to seamlessly do that on very short notice in this particular exercise speaks highly of

the army element that we sent there, and their professionalism was acknowledged at very high levels.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: As you mentioned, the exercise that was done in Poland was very similar to what would have been done at a regular base. But what additional skills, training, and lessons would have been learned as a consequence of interacting with the Polish military?

•(1620)

MGen Michael Hood: Well, when we speak to interoperability, certainly Poland has their own unique procedures, different weaponry, and the rest, so the opportunity to work with a NATO ally that's not manned and equipped to same level as us is, I think, a useful experience such that if we were to operate with Poland in the future in any NATO mission, we would actually be that much further ahead by virtue of the confidence that comes from working at the tactical level like that.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you very much.

In terms of our allies in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia being appreciative of our efforts, at your level do you hear that as well, as we hear it at the parliamentary level?

MGen Michael Hood: I would have to turn to my colleague on that. As I say, I don't have a chance personally to interact with them.

RAdm Gilles Couturier: Neither do I; I have to admit that we don't have that opportunity regularly.

MGen Michael Hood: I think if you had General Lawson here, who sits at the NATO table, you would probably be getting congratulatory comments.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gallant.

Ms. Michaud, please.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for their presentation.

The details you are sharing with us about the mission, which the NDP has supported from the outset, are particularly useful.

It seems that one of the key objectives is interoperability. That is what appears to guide most of the operations and training exercises. In terms of air training, a wide range of aircraft are participating, including the Boeing F-15 Eagle for the United States and the F-16 fighter for Denmark. You have a good idea of the list. It also includes the CF-18s.

Can you tell us what you have noticed after the exercise in terms of NATO's current interoperability capabilities?

[*English*]

MGen Michael Hood: Absolutely. In fact, what I would offer is that with many of our closer NATO allies, if I would speak of the U. S., the United Kingdom, and France, we have many opportunities to work together. We're very seamless in operations. This has come through years and years of working together.

To comment on some of the newer NATO members, certainly the Romanians in this case operating former Soviet equipment I think was a great learning opportunity. In fact, the Romanian CHOD offered that the Romanians themselves had learned more about working with NATO from three months with Canada than they had in the previous times since they had joined NATO; it's that close in operations.

We spent a lot of time having our F-18 pilots work very closely with the Romanian pilots, for example, in skills that they don't get to exercise regularly by virtue of the missions they do. I think undoubtedly the level of interoperability has increased as a result of our interventions.

[Translation]

RAdm Gilles Couturier: If I may, I will say that there is also a naval presence in addition to the air presence.

We have gone to the Black Sea for the first time since 1992 and have worked with countries such as Turkey. In addition, we have entrusted the Canadian vessel with the responsibility for the group during a part of the exercise.

That enables us to achieve interoperability among vessels. We are also looking at communication activities and exercises that we are not able to conduct regularly with the NATO forces with which we are more used to working.

In the forces, whether in the air force or the navy, that is key in the training of our teams.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you very much.

My understanding is that the learning that took place through these joint exercises is one of the tangible results of Operation Reassurance. It also seems that the Baltic states in the region are reassured by NATO's presence.

Could you give us other examples of tangible results produced on the ground by this operation in eastern Europe?

RAdm Gilles Couturier: Trust is also being built between sailors, pilots and ground crews. The opportunity to work together and to discuss what in technical terms we call tactics, techniques and procedures, makes the groups more cohesive when the time for operations comes, whether for exercises or humanitarian purposes, anywhere in the world.

This key aspect is a direct benefit of Operation Reassurance.

• (1625)

Ms. Éline Michaud: Do you have anything to add?

MGen Michael Hood: No, I think the answers were quite thorough.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Very well.

Could you tell us how much Canada's participation in Operation Reassurance is estimated to cost?

MGen Michael Hood: We usually make an estimate before missions, but we identify the specific costs at the end of operations.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Could you provide us with the estimate made before the mission began?

MGen Michael Hood: No, the chief financial officer is responsible for that, not me.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Michaud.

Mr. Williamson, go ahead, please.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, it's good to see you both here today. Thank you for joining us.

Today it seems there's been, at least from my reading and what I've been following, a lot of information on the army side and that of the air force. While I'm well aware, and I think Canadians are, of the contribution of the Royal Canadian Navy, I'm curious to know what other ally naval ships are in the region as well. Are we coordinating with them? Or is the water area sufficiently large that we're all just doing our own thing.

MGen Michael Hood: There are a number of standing NATO groups: there are some in mine countermeasures, and there's the one that we're in. The ships that are within it vary from time to time. We've been operating very closely with a Spanish ship, for example, which came under Canadian command while we were in the Black Sea. But on any given day those ships quite accurately represent the makeup of NATO, more or less, in and among the four groups. So it depends on the given day. They're able to flow in and out of the group as a national contribution as they see fit.

Mr. John Williamson: But can you ballpark it? What kind of numbers are you looking at? Is it a dozen at the low end and two dozen at the high end? What's the sense? You're able to give specifics in terms of troops, but what is it in terms of ships and the assets we're seeing there?

MGen Michael Hood: If I look at the four standing groups, at one point I would have counted roughly 30 ships in total. But they vary. When you talk about mine countermeasures, there are quite smaller platforms up to larger frigates that we have. In the standing group that we've been in, it has varied from two to three ships over the length of our contribution.

Mr. John Williamson: Okay, thank you.

On the flip side, what's the capability of the Russian fleet in the area, and how active is it?

RAdm Gilles Couturier: The Russia fleet has some ships that are capable. We've seen them in operation and we've watched them from the result of their various missile shoot exercises. They are used to operating on their own, so if you compare that to what we're doing in NATO...and that's again one of the strengths. We've operated with the Brits, the Spanish, as you just heard, and even operated sometimes with the French and the Portuguese. We have an ability there to act in a different way based on the interoperability that we develop. But basically on the Russian ships, they have capable ships around and we are certainly capable of handling our own part in the region.

Mr. John Williamson: Very good, thank you.

Look, often in this kind of coordination we focus on the big assets, but one of the questions I have is about communications just between the various coordinating parties in terms of not just language but the various nets. How are we communicating with our allies in a way that there's confidence that their communication isn't being picked up by the Russians, or by other entities? Are you satisfied that the level of communication has been adequate and things are running smoothly at that level?

• (1630)

MGen Michael Hood: NATO works under some principles of common capability and common operating procedures, but you need to recognize that for some of the newer NATO countries certainly, they're in transition from primarily Soviet Bloc infrastructure and slowly making the investments to come up to a NATO standard. That's why we talked about Romanian fighter aircraft, for example, as one indication.

But with respect to command and control and the operational backbone of NATO, we don't see any shortcomings, if I understand the intent of your question. We think it's quite effective and certainly would hold us up in peacetime as well as wartime.

Mr. John Williamson: Right. But on that, what have been some of the challenges when you're dealing with some of these former Soviet Bloc countries? That's whom we're operating out of right now. Has that been a challenge? Are we recognizing deficiencies that have to be addressed, or...?

MGen Michael Hood: Certainly one of the areas that Canada offers a lot of training in is languages, through our military training cooperation program. At senior levels in many of the new NATO countries, English is spoken quite well and widely, but sometimes if you had been down at the tactical level, I would expect some of our soldiers would have been interacting with Polish soldiers, some of whom would not have spoken a lot of English.

There are some practical challenges with that, but these are starting to reduce over time as the capability of those nations increases, and the operating language of NATO certainly is English.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I want to reiterate for the record what my colleague Madame Michaud just said, that the official opposition fully supports Operation Reassurance as part of our commitment to our NATO allies, and we're very happy to report here today.

Does Operation Reassurance end when the aircraft return home after the Baltic air policing? Is that the timeline we're dealing with, General Hood?

MGen Michael Hood: There are a couple of facets there, sir. One is that I spoke of the readiness action plan and the subsequent steps that NATO is initiating, as agreed to at the Wales Summit. This speaks to an enduring presence both from a command and control capacity—so involving some headquarters input, as well as elements that are going to continue this training mission.

With respect to Canada's contributions, we're in the process right now of offering recommendations of a possible continuation of that. The F-18 mission, however, will end at the end of the Baltic air policing.

Mr. Jack Harris: I'm referring to the so-called Operation Reassurance, that mission. Will that end? I ask because those elements would include, I presume, the various training activities, the military, the vessel in the Baltic, and I suppose the planners who were sent initially. As I remember, some planners were sent to Brussels. Is all that part of Operation Reassurance and will all that come to an end at the end of the year?

MGen Michael Hood: As I mentioned, certainly the operational planners have returned home. They had gone and helped NATO with a lot of this readiness action plan work that has been going on, and working on a number of contingency plans. So that work has ceased.

The Baltic air policing mission will cease. The ship is forecast to continue to stay beyond the end of the year. And on the army element, we're looking at an exercise schedule and offering options for the minister to continue. So I can't speak much beyond December 31 at this point.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

You told us that the CFO is in charge of all the money, but I have to raise the point of the budgetary implications of this. I have to assume that being in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean and in Europe for this length of time has cost a significant amount of money over and above the normal NATO participation costs. You're talking here about, as you say, evaluating what we might contribute in the future.

With all of the concern that we hear from time to time from your various colleagues about the ability to maintain readiness in the current budget circumstances, is there going to be a need for additional moneys in your defence budget to look after the cost of this particular mission and the cost of our mission in Iraq, and the other activities that might be contemplated here?

MGen Michael Hood: Sir, much like the time we were talking about the Philippines, as you'll recall, I'd have to defer the discussion around that to colleagues from the ADM Fin CS, and the CFO. Quite frankly, it's not part of my portfolio to manage the resources of the department, and I certainly have not been constrained in the types of elements that we bring forward to this point.

• (1635)

Mr. Jack Harris: We'll have to maybe get somebody else to come to tell us about that.

Thank you, General.

I have one other question. Interoperability is an interesting matter that we talk about that from time to time here at this committee. One of the groups you worked with was the Romanian air force, which operates, I think, the MiG-21, and you've operated with all these other aircraft as well.

Interoperability, I guess, is more than having the same aircraft as the others; it's about being able to work together. Did you find that's something you could do? Obviously, they learned from you and you learned from them about how they operate and how those planes work. Was that a success with all these groups?

MGen Michael Hood: I'll talk to the Romanian piece right now specifically. Having spent almost four months operating with them and having the opportunity to do everything from basic fighter manoeuvres through different scenarios, we certainly found a very willing NATO partner in this.

There are varying capabilities in aircraft. There is always a certain amount of asymmetry as it relates to aircraft capability, but certainly Romania was proving itself to be a very capable partner, and I think we both benefited from that experience.

On the Baltic air policing mission, working with the Portuguese, which we have done for a number of years as part of NATO, it's quite a bit more seamless with the traditional NATO allies like them.

The Chair: The time is up, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Bezan, please.

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

Thank you, General Hood and Admiral Couturier, for being with us today.

It is good to be able to hear of all the things that the Canadian Forces are doing as part of a NATO mission.

Following up on some of the comments that my colleagues have made, this does play into the greater context of the interoperability and readiness of the Canadian Forces with our NATO allies. All the training opportunities that we have right now, the number of service men and women able to go over there along with the air force, along with our sailors, have provided an amazing chance to work alongside NATO and to always be at the highest level of readiness.

Can you speak to the overall context of lessons learned from Operation Reassurance so far? You've mentioned Romania as an example of a country not having that previous experience. I understand there was an opportunity in Exercise Sea Breeze when were in the Black Sea to participate with other countries that are in the region but not necessarily NATO allies. How did that all play out? How did you feel about the overall exercise?

MGen Michael Hood: From a macro sense, I would certainly mirror a lot of the comments you made, in saying that we've seen this to be very worthwhile as a military capability piece, a very worthwhile experience in working with some allies with whom we don't spend a lot of time.

With respect to lessons learned, right now I'd say there are lessons observed. We capture them and once we've taken them back and considered how we would improve subsequent deployments, then

we would call them lessons learned. We're in that loop right now, and I'm not really tracking—other than the very high strategic ones—a lot of the tactical lessons learned. But we have a pretty good system where we would roll those back into our training plans to get ready for the next evolution.

RAdm Gilles Couturier: Each service has a warfare centre and each unit that is being deployed is sending their information, their lessons learned, back there. We roll that back up so the next unit deploying has an opportunity to get some of those lessons and some recommendations on how to fix some of those issues that we observed.

Mr. James Bezan: One thing that I'm interested in—because NATO Operation Reassurance is about showing Russia that we aren't going to stand in face of their aggression—is the following.

Have there also been opportunities for the Ukrainian military to participate in some of these training missions? When you look at Ukraine especially right now, with the fighting that's been taking place, the aggression they are experiencing in the east, the occupation and the illegal annexation of Crimea, there is a standing up of a whole new army that has taken place in Ukraine. So a lot of people are not necessarily experienced or exposed to military doctrine. Have there been some opportunities for them?

Ted and I were just speaking at the Canadian Forces College. There was a Ukrainian colonel who was part of the delegation in town today. He was over here to upgrade his skills and abilities and to take that back and spread that knowledge within Ukraine.

What other opportunities exist through Operation Reassurance?

• (1640)

MGen Michael Hood: The only interaction with Ukraine in the operations that we're talking about was in Operation Sea Breeze, where there was a Ukrainian naval vessel—although we've had a longstanding training program.

Perhaps I had best turn to my colleague on that. It's run out of policy. We have a longer term relationship with Ukraine that we have provided training to.

If you want to comment....

RAdm Gilles Couturier: The military training and cooperation program has been running since 1993, and we have about 1,100 Ukrainian officers go through our system. A lot of it is associated with language training. You understand that is certainly an important part, but we do have some courses we run with the Canadian academy, giving us an opportunity to train at a little bit higher level than that aspect.

There's also an element that we've been training for over the last few years. As they were getting their peacekeeping battalion ready to go out, we conducted some training with them and continue to do some of that work.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds for a short question.

Mr. James Bezan: Okay, a short question.

The final comment I have is about the issue of interoperability and technology.

He was talking about Romanians, for example, flying in these old MiGs, and then you go into a country like Lithuania and the other Baltic nations, such as Latvia, that don't have any air force capability at all. Is their technology able to communicate with the Canadian hardware that we've taken over there?

MGen Michael Hood: Amongst NATO allies there is sufficient interoperability, and certainly amongst the higher-tier NATO nations. There is a lot more commonality and interoperability from a technical sense, if I understood your question.

For instance, when we were flying with the Romanians and there was a NATO AWACS there, all of that operation is in effect seamless. The technology for speaking with one another isn't necessarily always there; it depends on each nation's sovereign decision with respect to equipment. But the tactics, techniques, and procedures to operate within that alliance are pretty solid.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

Monsieur Brahmi, s'il vous plaît.

[Translation]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm always pleased to be back in committee.

Major-General Hood, you talked about the opportunity to work with what you referred to as non-traditional allies or countries that we do not usually work with in NATO. It is really an opportunity to get to know other alliance partners.

I see three aspects: information sharing, interoperability and smart defence, which we have been discussing at great length in this committee for a number of years. We are talking about the possibility of providing each country with a specialty based on its resources.

Let's start with the first aspect, information sharing. You have just mentioned the airborne warning and control system, AWACS. I will take advantage of the fact that you are a pilot and ask you this question. Under Operation Reassurance specifically, have you noticed any negative consequences because Canada withdrew from AWACS, or at least from funding the system, in 2012?

MGen Michael Hood: I have not noticed any negative consequences. We continue to work with AWACS. In NATO missions, staff members use the system jointly with the United States. Our routine operations include aircraft capabilities. There are no negative consequences because Canada withdrew from the system.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Are you telling me that Canada was paying \$90 million for nothing?

MGen Michael Hood: No. I think NATO has found other member states to replace Canada.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Okay.

In terms of interoperability, do you think some countries might be facing insurmountable technical difficulties, which cannot be overcome anyway?

• (1645)

MGen Michael Hood: The difficulties are not insurmountable.

Romania has the MiG-21s. The country has made investments over the past 10 years and it now has more modern aircraft. These planes are not at the same level as our F-18s yet, but they are sufficient to meet a minimal level of interoperability. I don't know what the naval situation is, but I can ask my colleague.

RAdm Gilles Couturier: The opportunity is there. The NATO standard is well recognized by countries in the region. That gives us a basis for communication. It might not be at the same classification level as when there is only one NATO group, but we have the opportunity to exchange information with those other countries.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Okay.

I will now go to the third aspect, smart defence. The concept of smart defence relies on the idea that each partner has an expertise and better skills in a specific area. Do new or non-traditional partners make it harder to determine the areas in which some countries might have special skills to complement those of Canada?

RAdm Gilles Couturier: One of the basic principles of smart defence is that the integration level of participating countries is quite high. Sometimes, new countries working with us or joining our operations do not have the same level of expertise. Therefore, we have not been able to really test the concept of smart defence with those countries.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Major-General Hood, since you are the air force expert, is that true for both the air force and the navy?

MGen Michael Hood: When we talk about smart defence in the air force, we talk about the countries' potential investments rather than about buying a fighter, for instance.

Smart defence applies to all NATO affairs, and countries make sovereign choices. The goal is not for everyone to have the same level of naval, air and military expertise. Smart defence is about determining how we can have a system that capitalizes on countries' investments.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brahmi.

Mr. Opitz, please.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and through you to our witnesses. Gentlemen, thank you very much for appearing.

I want to explore interoperability a little bit, because sometimes one thinks that it's just simply a platform and that they all work together very nicely. A MiG-21 is sort of the Starfighter of its day. It's a 50-year-old aircraft and very fast, but don't try to turn too much.

How do you take some of those capabilities and work it in with CF-18s and other platforms we use? How do you assess the capabilities of some of those aircraft?

MGen Michael Hood: I said to you previously that there's a certain asymmetry in aviation assets. You just pointed out one thing: the turn radius of a MiG-21 versus an F-18. When we're operating with them—and imagine we're doing basic fighter manoeuvres—there's a good understanding among the pilots of the capabilities of those aircraft. We evolve how we're going to train to account for that. That's at the real basic level.

When it comes to the types of missions we do in NATO, whether those would be aircraft intercepts or air-to-ground missions, every country has a certain level of capability. Some can't drop the most modern ordinance, for example, while others can and that's all captured. When you're working together in an alliance you cater to the strengths of some to the benefit of all.

Mr. Ted Opitz: In Poland for example, where we have roughly a company deployed there, how do you find that mission is going? They are ground forces and infantry-to-infantry, and I know they are doing common jumps, learning the Canadian platform, learning the Polish platform, and so forth. They are doing a lot of other training as they have done in other Baltic states and Germany.

MGen Michael Hood: In Germany right now. Yes.

• (1650)

Mr. Ted Opitz: How are you finding that is working out? What is the impact on our troops from a training perspective?

MGen Michael Hood: I think I was relaying to you that the feedback from the troops is exceptionally positive. Getting to operate in a training environment with close allies, getting to do a lot of those types of activities, jumping out of aircraft, working in close concert, working in Germany and Poland and in the Baltic sets that level of activity. It is certainly what many young men and women join the Canadian Forces to experience.

From a pure experience level and the training value of them it's been very useful.

RAdm Gilles Couturier: Some of these young soldiers have not experienced Afghanistan for example. For them it's a very good opportunity to test those skills and increase their level of readiness operating with other countries. So they are very enthusiastic about what they are doing right now.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Absolutely, and hopefully that aids to retention as well down the road.

What are some of the problems you have found in particular there? It did take a little effort to set up the mission. Were there any issues with contracts, transport, or administrative issues in the front end that have all been resolved?

MGen Michael Hood: There was nothing in particular. I'm thinking that where we were operating in Romania was a very austere place. We had set up a camp of sorts and then we had to put a cement platform in when it flooded because of the local weather. When you talk about the normal type of friction that you would have

on any deployment, it's not anything I'd remark upon here. It actually went very well and there was nothing I would take note of as a concern at this point.

Mr. Ted Opitz: How would you assess the impact of Canadian involvement in this operation in the Baltics in particular, given that Russia is increasingly aggressive, not just against Ukraine of course but also by pushing the boundaries with Latvia? I was at the NATO conference and at the time they blockaded their own navy, their own water, and so forth. What's the impact of Canadian participation with both the CF-18s and on the ground in terms of the morale of our allies?

MGen Michael Hood: Certainly, the NATO expansion of the Baltic air policing I think is a strong indicator of NATO's resolve in the face of that aggression, with the enviable byproduct of certainly reassuring the countries that we're flying over. I know, irrespective of the element that we're talking about—the land, sea, or air—that NATO is getting stronger as a result of increased training, cooperation, and interoperability.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Okay.

The Chair: A very short question, Mr. Opitz.

Mr. Ted Opitz: In terms of the reservists, do you see any role for reservists in Operation Reassurance right now just to keep up their skill sets and to be able to deploy with the troops and practice some of the skills they developed in Afghanistan and other places?

MGen Michael Hood: Absolutely. Our reservists are by and large interchangeable with our regular force, at varying levels of readiness. I couldn't actually tell you how many reservists are on the mission. It's not something that we actually think of all that much because we see them as the one Canadian Forces and they're well trained and able to do this mission, if that answers your question.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Opitz.

Thank you, gentlemen, General and Admiral, for your time with us today. I'm sure all of us on the committee wish you good fortune in the continuance and completion of Operation Reassurance.

Thank you very much. We'll stand adjourned for 10 minutes and then return in camera for committee business.

We will suspend.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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