



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on National Defence

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 010

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

Chair: The Honourable John McKay



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• (1430)

[*English*]

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

This is the 10th meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence.

I am pleased to see that Major-General Prévost is back with us. Thank you, sir, for your reattendance here. I am sure members will have questions for you.

I understand that Mr. Hamilton and Madam Kutz are here to provide support on this very timely topic.

Colleagues, my intention today is to ask our witnesses to speak first and then for us to go to the rounds of questions. Once we've finished the rounds of questions, I'll ask you to stay on and approve the rather modest budget, as well as the subcommittee report. The members of the subcommittee met on Monday and we have a report for you that we hope you'll approve.

With that, I'll ask Major-General Prévost to introduce himself and his colleagues and to make whatever remarks he wishes to make.

Go ahead, Major-General Prévost.

Major-General Paul Prévost (Director of Staff, Strategic Joint Staff, Department of National Defence): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. Good afternoon.

[*Translation*]

I am Major General Paul Prévost. I am director of the strategic joint staff at National Defence headquarters, located here in Ottawa.

My role is to advise the chief of the defence staff on the Canadian Forces operations plan, both current and future operations, as well as operational planning, strategies and logistical support.

I will now let my colleagues introduce themselves and then I will deliver my opening remarks.

[*English*]

Kevin, do you want to introduce yourself?

Mr. Kevin Hamilton (Director General, International Security Policy, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Mr. Chair, and members of the committee, my name is Kevin Hamilton. I'm the director general for international security policy at Global Affairs Canada.

MGen Paul Prévost: Go ahead, Heidi.

Ms. Heidi Kutz (Senior Arctic Official and Director General, Arctic, Eurasian, and European Affairs, Global Affairs Canada): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. My name is Heidi Kutz. I'm the director general responsible for the Arctic, Eurasian and European affairs at Global Affairs Canada.

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, if you will allow me, I have a few minutes of introductory remarks.

The Chair: Please, go ahead.

MGen Paul Prévost: Once again, thank you for having us to discuss this very important matter.

I am here today with my colleagues to focus on an update on the situation in Ukraine and what the Canadian Forces and Global Affairs are doing in support of Ukraine but also in NATO and in support of our allies as well.

We are on day 13 of this crisis. The recent days have been devastating for the Ukrainian people and for their armed forces. They've also been quite concerning for all democracies, obviously. Since 2015 under Operation Unifier, our members of the Canadian Armed Forces have worked closely, side by side, with our Ukrainian counterparts. We've trained 30,000 of them to defend themselves in situations like the one they are living today.

Given the increasingly volatile situation in Ukraine, we have removed all of the Canadian Armed Forces personnel who were in Ukraine. We had about 240 personnel there not too long ago. They are now safe and sound outside of Ukraine. We will remain poised to go back to Ukraine to continue our training once the situation allows.

In support of Ukraine, the government has also announced a series of donations of military aid—you'll recall that four flights' worth were delivered before the crisis started—in addition to the \$23 million in aid we've provided since 2015. Since the crisis started, we lately have started to resume our delivery of additional military equipment. Over the next few days, we are planning to deliver up to \$75 million of new equipment. This will be in addition to some announcements you may have heard in recent days on additional military equipment that the CAF will be providing from our in-service inventory and for some equipment that had been declared surplus.

We also lately announced that we sent two military transport aircraft to Europe in order to help NATO and our allies move personnel and equipment around Europe, to reorganize the theatre in order to augment the deterrence of NATO, but also to help our allies move some military aid that is destined for Ukraine. So far, since last week, we've delivered five planeloads of military aid in support of other countries.

In addition to our support to Ukraine, we're also bolstering NATO's eastern flank to deter Russia against further aggression. Operation Reassurance is the Canadian Armed Forces operation in Europe in support of NATO and our allies. Under Op Reassurance, we are bolstering the NATO eastern flank by sending additional troops to Latvia, an additional frigate, and an additional maritime patrol aircraft in addition to the 800 CAF personnel who are already deployed in theatre.

The maritime patrol aircraft has already arrived in Europe and will be patrolling the Mediterranean waters to monitor the threats in that region. We have also started the deployment of our additional troops into Latvia. That deployment will occur over the next few weeks.

Finally, our additional frigate will be sailing out of the west coast in the next few weeks to rejoin the standing NATO maritime group in the weeks to come. That will be an additional frigate. This one will be the HMCS *Halifax*. That will be in addition to the HMCS *Montreal*, which is already in the Mediterranean Sea patrolling with the allied navies.

[Translation]

Finally, we have also put 3,400 CAF troops on high readiness to reinforce NATO, as needed. NATO is engaged in planning right now to increase deterrence and to defend against any aggression, if necessary.

• (1435)

[English]

We are in the early days of this crisis. We'll try to answer your questions as best we can, while understanding the evolving situation.

[Translation]

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

With that, we'll commence our six-minute round.

Ms. Gallant, you have six minutes, please.

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

You mentioned that some shipments had been sent over. Have Canada's shipments of lethal aid, namely rifles, sniper rifles, ammunition, anti-tank missiles and grenades, arrived in Ukraine?

MGen Paul Prévost: Ms. Gallant, I can confirm that, other than the four flights we sent before the crisis started, some of this additional aid that we lately announced has started to flow, starting yesterday. It's in the process of being delivered.

I cannot confirm if it has been delivered yet: I could, but I will not confirm if it has been delivered yet to Ukraine.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Could you give us some indication if Canadian troops in Latvia have been subjected to psychological/information warfare, or cyber warfare by groups attributed to Russia and/or the Russian state?

MGen Paul Prévost: It's fair to say that the information and misinformation campaign that Russia is conducting right now started years ago. We've been monitoring this. Our troops in Latvia can see it. They're not subject to it, but we can clearly see it and we're making every attempt to correct the record when possible.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Have any Canadian Forces reinforcements arrived in Latvia yet?

MGen Paul Prévost: Yes. We declared last week that we were deploying an electronic warfare capability to Latvia, so there are additional troops in theatre. We started the deployment of our additional gun battery. The reconnaissance element is deploying right now, and you will see the arrival of the battery over the next few weeks, which will comprise four guns and an additional 130 personnel.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: There will be 130.... Which units are they being drawn from?

MGen Paul Prévost: The gun battery will be coming from the 5^e Régiment d'artillerie légère du Canada from Valcartier.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: There are 3,400 Canadian troops on notice to reinforce our NATO allies. When is the next tranche of reinforcements going overseas?

MGen Paul Prévost: The additional 3,400 troops are on high alert in what we call the "NATO Response Force". That's a force that's available to NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, the highest commander in NATO, to draw from when he activates new plans. No decision has been made on activating these plans. What you see now deploying into the NATO area of responsibility are additional troops that are voluntary contributions from the country.

To quickly answer the question, no additional troops have been deployed as part of those 3,400, and there's been no request from NATO at this point to dispatch any additional troops.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We don't know when they're going.

What number of people are involved? What pieces of equipment are set to go with the 3,400?

MGen Paul Prévost: Of the 3,400, they're from the army, navy, air force and special forces. The capabilities are pretty much what we see every day in the Canadian Armed Forces. You have airplanes, ships and land troops. It's a very long list.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: For how long are planned reinforcements in Europe set? Can they be sustained in theatre, or is this a one-shot deal?

MGen Paul Prévost: Many of the capabilities we have on hand to deploy.... I would say that everything we're going to send to Europe, if necessary to defend it, will stay in theatre as long as it's required for NATO to defend.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are we talking long-term sustainable operations, such as two or three rotations?

• (1440)

MGen Paul Prévost: Absolutely. What we will do is send our high-readiness forces. As those high-readiness forces are being deployed in theatre, we will start mounting the reinforcements behind that with what we call the follow-on forces to go and take over after the necessary time period.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are there plans to increase the available reserve forces for operations in Europe, should that become necessary to support the current troop deployment?

MGen Paul Prévost: That is a possibility. We are not there yet. We will adjust as the crisis develops.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Canada's CF-18s are rapidly deployable to Europe in times of crisis, so why haven't they been sent to Romania, Poland or Latvia? Why won't we be sending anything until July, according to the reports?

MGen Paul Prévost: As part of Operation Reassurance, we have a commitment to the eFP battle group in Latvia. That's their permanent presence in Latvia. Part of that commitment from the government, which stems from before the crisis, was to sustain that battle group in Latvia. Another part of that commitment is a frigate in either the Mediterranean or the Baltic Sea. That frigate has been rotated every six months, but it has been a persistent presence since 2014.

Also part of that commitment is the air task force, comprised of the six CF-18s. Every year, we use the six CF-18s to rotate into Europe to do the air policing missions in Romania. That normally happens in the fall. What was announced this week is that this deployment will again occur this fall, but it could be brought in earlier if NATO requires it.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gallant.

Mr. Fisher, you have six minutes.

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

Welcome back, Major-General, to you and your officials.

We've seen reports of significant losses by the Russian military in a very short period of time at the outset of this conflict. We've also seen reports of vehicles breaking down, tanks running out of fuel and Russian soldiers having expired rations.

Major-General, what are your thoughts on how this military operation by Russia has progressed?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, our assessment is that Mr. Putin's campaign is not going the way he had envisioned. We see

the same as you see in the media. We see the same on the intelligence side. They're running into logistics problems. They're running into military issues. They were probably expecting to have a bit more control of the airspace. Their equipment is failing. That campaign is not going as anticipated for Mr. Putin.

I think there may be some miscalculation on his part as well in the fact that Ukrainians would be really ready for a battle and determined, like we've seen lately. I think Mr. Putin also may have underestimated the resolve of the allies to come in support of Ukraine by providing military aid.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Does this surprise you, Major-General? Are you surprised by what looks like a bit of a lack of readiness and equally by the apparent readiness of the Canadian-trained Ukrainian soldiers?

MGen Paul Prévost: To answer that question, Mr. Chair, I'm not surprised on either front. With regard to the Ukrainians, we've been training with them since 2015. Let's not forget that they've been in a crisis since 2014, since the invasion of Crimea. They've been doing a good fight in the Donbass. They've learned a lot. We've trained them. We know how hardened they are. That's on the one front.

On the other front, like we see in information and disinformation in Russia, we have to be careful here. I would say that Mr. Putin may not be 10 feet tall like he is.... There's always been the recognition that they might have a large force that is not really modern and maybe a modern force that is not very large.

I'm not surprised on either front.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you for that, Major-General.

As we are meeting today, there are protests occurring across Russia against Putin's unprovoked and unjustified war on Ukraine. These protests are in defiance of the Putin regime. Currently, hundreds of protesters are being arrested daily.

What do you see right now as the mood and consensus of the Russian people? Did this happen in 2014 or 2008 towards Putin? I'm curious to see if you see any parallels.

• (1445)

MGen Paul Prévost: Actually, if you don't mind, on this one, I'll refer this to my colleagues, either Heidi or Kevin, as they have a bit more insight. Obviously, we have some intelligence on what we see, but they have a bit more insight from their missions on what we see there. I think it would probably be Heidi on this one.

Ms. Heidi Kutz: Thank you very much.

Good afternoon.

What I would say is that our mission in Moscow is watching closely the situation, and certainly the measures that Canada, along with partners and allies, has undertaken with respect to economic sanctions, and other measures, are causing strain and pressure on the Russian economy. We are watching those protests that are taking place to understand the impacts on Russian society.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you for that.

I'm going to go back to my earlier line of questioning that the major-general and I were talking about: Russia's readiness. We talked about misinformation and information. There was a university professor in a bunker, a Ukrainian professor, who said something along the lines of how he had heard that 3,000 Russians—and this was in the first two or three days—had been killed. The CBC reporter quite smartly said, "Well, we don't have verified numbers there."

How confident are we that what we're seeing with some of these Russian problems they're having there are all accurate?

MGen Paul Prévost: That's actually a very good question, Mr. Chair.

I would say that the allies, as we're all following this, are trying to assess what the battle damage is. I would say that these reports are pretty much in line with what we observe. It's very difficult to pinpoint a number, obviously, with the intelligence means that we do have, but clearly, the Russian advance is not moving the way it was anticipated. We're trying to understand exactly what damage has been done.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you, Major-General, to you and your team.

I will cede the last 30 seconds, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Major General Prévost, thank you for being available; you have come to testify on short notice.

I'd also like to thank Ms. Kutz and Mr. Hamilton.

My first question is related to NATO's Exercise Cold Response 2022. Today, we heard in the media that within the NATO countries, 30,000 people are participating. Canada will only be sending about 10 people, whereas in the past we have sent 400, 500, up to 2,000 people.

Could the fact that we're not providing many troops be perceived as Canada abdicating its Arctic sovereignty, of sorts?

MGen Paul Prévost: Thank you for your question, Ms. Normandin.

Decisions on Canada's participation in the exercises are not my headquarters' responsibility. Therefore, decisions about Canada's

participation in Exercise Cold Response 2022 are also not under my control.

However, as Canada is part of NATO, until recently, one of our marine patrol aircraft monitored Russian marine activities on a daily basis near Norway, where Exercise Cold Response will take place. In addition, we are increasing the number of personnel in nearby Latvia to 540.

Canada's participation in NATO is important. The decision to have 10 personnel participate in Exercise Cold Response is consistent with our training objective in littoral operations, which will take place during the exercise.

Ms. Christine Normandin: According to media reports, sending 10 people was unrelated to the current situation in Ukraine, because the decision was made long before the conflict broke out. There is speculation that it was related to the recruitment and retention issues the military is currently experiencing.

Is this an indicator of how critical the level of recruitment and retention are, along with our readiness for potential missions in the Arctic?

MGen Paul Prévost: That's a very good question.

You're right, Ms. Normandin.

Currently in the Canadian Forces, some of the threats to our operational readiness are related to the number of people we have. Everyone in the department is working hard to increase recruitment efforts, to change our policies and to effect a culture change, all of which are contributing to our smaller force size.

The smaller force we are sending for the exercise is offset by the efforts of Canada, which has deployed 2,000 personnel around the world to participate in about 20 missions. That has to be weighed against our strong NATO presence. As you said, the decision to minimize our contribution to Exercise Cold Response was made several months in advance.

● (1450)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I'm going to continue to talk about the Arctic exercise, but I will focus on material rather than human resources. As we know, Canada does not necessarily have a response force. Indeed, radar is relatively obsolete and we have no major military vessels such as nuclear powered icebreakers or the like to conduct patrols.

In the past, Canada has repeatedly refused to work with the United States on a missile defence system. In the current environment, I wonder whether Canada been approached by the United States to restart discussions about its participation in a missile defence system?

MGen Paul Prévost: Ms. Normandin, we're working closely on the modernization of the North American Aerospace Defence Command, or NORAD, and have been for several years.

The discussions were announced a few years ago. We're working hard on this right now. Discussions are going on between Canada and the United States, but also between the Canadian Armed Forces and the government. This was also announced when the defence policy was implemented in 2017.

The discussions are well under way. The intention is really to modernize continental defence, North American defence and air defence through NORAD.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

One of the scenarios that unfortunately seems to be likely in Ukraine unless NATO members intervene, which I think is unlikely—we may have to accept a scenario in which Ukraine is going to surrender.

Has this scenario been analyzed by the CAF? What would the implications be? If Ukraine were to fall, one might expect that this would not stop there.

MGen Paul Prévost: There are several aspects to this question. I will start to answer it, but then I will likely turn it over to Mr. Hamilton from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development.

We are looking at all possible short-term scenarios in Ukraine right now. Of course we're concerned about the escalation by Putin, but we're also looking at what goals he can really achieve given the problems he has had in the last few days of his campaign. We're looking at short-term scenarios and we have begun to look at long-term scenarios as well.

I will turn it over to Mr. Hamilton to complete my response, because this is not simply a military campaign.

[English]

The Chair: I will just point out that she has about 15 seconds left in her response. Madame Normandin has two more rounds available to her, so I would suggest that if you could respond during that period of time, it would be good. That way, we can stay on time.

With that, Madam Mathysen, you have six minutes. Go ahead, please.

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

There have been a lot of conversations about Putin being held to account for these activities as war crimes. How can we help in accounting for or surveilling that and the war crimes being committed against Ukrainian people?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, perhaps I'll take the first shot at this again, and then turn it over to my colleagues from Global Affairs if they have anything to add.

We're obviously aware of this. We're concerned about this. We're reading it, as you are, in open sources. We are using our intelligence centres to try to gather a bit more evidence about this, obviously, as it could be used later on in the process here.

I don't know if it's going to go to Kevin or to Heidi.

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: Certainly I'm happy to take on the rest of that question, General.

As the general said, we're monitoring the situation with every capacity that we have in order to detect instances of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Already Canada has been a leading state in referring this conflict by Russia to the International Criminal

Court. An investigation will be opened by the prosecutor of that court, and all evidence that we collect as well as evidence from civil society and from our allies will be put at the disposal of that court.

Separately, in The Hague, the International Court of Justice has opened an investigation against Russia for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Finally, at the OSCE, Canada, along with many of our partners in that body, has invoked what's called the "Moscow Mechanism". It is a process whereby the OSCE sends in monitors, at a time when it can do so safely, to collect information about abuses against human rights and not war crimes as such but impediments on the humanitarian situation.

● (1455)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: We've also seen several attempts to hold peace talks. Yet during those peace talks, during the creation of the—I forget exactly the term—corridors where people could move through, there have been attacks on those. There have been attacks on Ukrainians in order to influence Ukraine in those those talks, to have them concede more. Could you give your feedback or your commentary on that? Will the Russians continue to do that? Are these corridors...? Will we see them consistently in the future?

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: General, would you like me to take that one again?

MGen Paul Prévost: Yes, sure, Kevin. I actually thought it was for you from the get-go.

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: Mr. Chair, yes, we've seen a number of attempts at ceasefires to open up the humanitarian corridors, and each time there has been a violation of those ceasefires by the Russian side. That's obviously a very cynical and cruel act. But of course, we continue to call on both parties to create those humanitarian ceasefires, to create those corridors and to sustain them.

I know that talks are continuing between the Russians and the Ukrainians. I believe there will be talks in Turkey between those two parties as early as tomorrow. One of the objectives that we've been calling for is to create sustainable ceasefires.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: General, do you have anything to add on that?

MGen Paul Prévost: I don't, ma'am, unless you have a specific question on it.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Okay.

I will move on a little bit to China. Obviously everyone watches China as well. They have sent out mixed signals about the Russian conflict. It seems that they are being a bit coy and are hedging their bets on this.

What involvement or support has China given to Russia that we know of and that we're watching? Again, I'd like your opinions on that. The question is for both GAC and General Prévost.

MGen Paul Prévost: Maybe I will offer Kevin the first cut at it and I will come in with something additional if required.

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: I can't say that we have seen any explicit support by China for Russia in this. In fact, we took note of the Chinese foreign minister's recent statement that the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of any country should be respected and safeguarded, and that Ukraine is no exception.

China has also called on all sides to exercise restraint, avoid escalation and ensure the safety of Ukraine's nuclear facilities.

Canada will continue to call on China to act in accordance with these principles. Something we're trying to convey to the Chinese is that they face a momentous choice here as to how they will exercise their global influence and that they can support efforts to bring an end to this conflict as soon as possible.

The Chair: Be very brief, General.

MGen Paul Prévost: Maybe I will add one piece here. I think as the alliance, as the west, we're demonstrating our unity here. I think China is probably noting this.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Mathysen.

That completes our first round.

Before we go to the second round, I want a point of clarification, Mr. Hamilton. You said that Canada has already started to refer cases of gross breaches of human rights to the International Criminal Court.

As I understood it—and you can correct me if I'm wrong—Americans are not signatories to that treaty. Are they able, therefore, to refer cases to the court?

• (1500)

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: I believe they are not, Mr. Chair. I believe only parties to the Rome Statute, which created the International Court, can make those referrals. That's one of the reasons Canada, as opposed to any number of other countries, led in that process.

The Chair: Thank you.

That takes us to the next round, which begins with Mr. Ruff.

Mr. Ruff, welcome back to the committee. You have five minutes. Go ahead, please.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

It's always good to see you, General Prévost.

I think I know the answer, but I would like your take on it. Why did we, as well as the other western forces, pull our troops out of Ukraine? Hindsight being what it is, had we left them in, they could potentially have contained Putin's advance to just the eastern oblast, the eastern provinces.

MGen Paul Prévost: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's good to see you again, Mr. Ruff. We worked together not too long ago.

To answer the question, the Unifier mission was a training mission. It was a training mission that started in 2015, as you are well aware, to train Ukrainians to prepare for such an eventuality. It not being a combat mission, there was a certain level of risk that we were prepared to take with our troops, based on the intelligence we

had at the time. We have to really thank the intelligence community for its effort over the last three months, for the cueing we had, for the intelligence we had, and for what we understood Putin's plans to be, including some intelligence that air attacks were imminent.

It was prudent to return our troops, initially to Western Ukraine to stay in country as long as they could. The last few elements of our troops left the morning of the attack. So we had great intelligence throughout, and it was a calculated decision.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Thanks for that. We can maybe get into that more deeply.

What would you say is the biggest risk militarily to both Ukrainians and our troops under Operation Reassurance in Latvia shy of a Russian nuclear strike?

MGen Paul Prévost: Shy of a nuclear strike—but I would say “shy of any attacks”—I think that would be a big decision by Mr. Putin to step any way outside the borders of Ukraine.

I think the biggest threat right now to our democracies and to Canadians and everybody else is the information and misinformation campaign that's going on. I think this is the highest stress at this time. I think people need to be informed properly. I think at the next round we will be ready for it. The alliance's efforts right now are focused on deterrence to make sure Putin understands what not to do. If required, we will be ready to defend.

Mr. Alex Ruff: But I want to get there too, General: What is the military risk? What is the next step if he does escalate, and in Ukraine as well? I'm not talking about just our troops. What's the real risk?

MGen Paul Prévost: I think the real risk will be on him. The alliance is unified. The alliance is prepared. We bring a lot of capabilities together. I think it would be a miscalculation from Mr. Putin at this point.

Mr. Alex Ruff: All right. I guess you're not quite going the line that I'm thinking. I'm thinking that the continuation of the air strikes in Ukraine, and potentially an incursion into NATO countries, is the preliminary risk we'd see before we'd have to worry about a Russian ground strike of any type—again, avoiding the nuclear side. Would you agree with that statement?

MGen Paul Prévost: I would agree that any attacks on the alliance would pose a risk. We'll be ready to defend against that. I think the greater risk would be to Putin himself.

Mr. Alex Ruff: On that line, though, if the air risk is the biggest thing, would you agree that ground-based air defence and air defence in general is a crucial military capacity and capability, needed not only for NATO but for the Ukrainians themselves?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, I'll clarify here. An air attack would be one risk. There are other risks out there. I think you heard Major-General Wright talk about those risks earlier this week or last. Cyber is a risk. Space is a risk. A lot of new capabilities other than kinetic capabilities are risks.

Any of those would be a risk to the alliance but would be a greater risk for Putin himself.

Mr. Alex Ruff: All right. I still want to think...because, considering air strikes is what he's using a lot of, and I think that's the biggest risk to the humanitarian efforts as well in-country, is the ground-based air defence.

The Prime Minister was just asked earlier today about replacing our ground-based air defence within the Canadian Forces and speeding up the procurement process. He said it would be done rapidly. Considering that the slated first early delivery is 2026, how much faster could we speed up the procurement of air defence capability for the Canadian Armed Forces?

• (1505)

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, please.

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, we're obviously looking at that right now. We're looking at the current project that we have, how fast we can accelerate and what other mitigation we can put in place in the meantime. Let's not forget that there are 30 countries in the NATO alliance. A lot of our allies are helping where we have gaps.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ruff.

Mr. Gaheer, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's great to be back.

Thank you to the witnesses for making time.

On February 25, 2022, the Prime Minister stated that Canada would impose sanctions directly on Russian President Vladimir Putin and his inner circle of advisers. The new sanctions were in addition, obviously, to previous sanctions that were announced that targeted Russian oligarchs, their families, Russian banks, Russian financial entities and members of Putin's inner circle. How do these sanctions align with and complement those of our allies?

MGen Paul Prévost: I think this question could go to Heidi, potentially.

Ms. Heidi Kutz: Chair, I'd be happy to take this question.

Since the beginning, Canada has worked very closely indeed with our partners, with the United States, the U.K., Australia and in close collaboration with the European Union, in order to discuss and align our sanctions measures for maximum impact, immediate impact, on Russia for its actions.

In that spirit, you will see symmetry from Canada and our allies in our efforts on the sanctioning of individuals, entities, financial institutions and members of the Russian State Duma who voted to recognize the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk. As well, a number of measures have come forward in recent weeks, including support from Canada to partners to connect key Russian banks from SWIFT global interbank payments system and other measures.

Canada continues to work with our partners and like-minded to align our economic measures for maximum impact and influence to try to get President Putin to desist from his current activities.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Great. Thank you.

Could you explain why it's important to move in lockstep? How does that generate a greater impact?

Ms. Heidi Kutz: The reason it's important to move in lockstep is simply critical mass. Canada's economic relationship with Russia is different from other countries', and therefore, if it's possible to work in lockstep to limit trade and opportunities to a number of countries and through a number of supply systems, it increases pressure on the Russian economy, with a view to stronger pressure to change the direction of the Putin regime.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Great, and is the government currently working on further sanctions packages?

Ms. Heidi Kutz: Absolutely: We continue to work closely with the like-minded in terms of additional measures should the situation continue.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: I want to touch on another point that you just mentioned. On February 25, the Prime Minister also called for Russia's removal from SWIFT, the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications.

According to the Russian national SWIFT association, there are around 300 banks and organizations in Russia that use SWIFT, and more than half of the Russian credit organizations are represented in SWIFT.

What impact is Russia's removal from SWIFT having?

Ms. Heidi Kutz: Essentially the impact of its removal will be significant restrictions on their ability to send money in and out of the country, effectively pausing Russia's major imports and exports.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Currency-wise, is it Russian currency? Is it all currencies?

Ms. Heidi Kutz: On that precisely, I wouldn't be able to give you an adequate response right now.

• (1510)

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Sure.

Could you elaborate on what impact this will have on the Russian economy? Is it crippling? Where is that on the spectrum?

Ms. Heidi Kutz: Well, I would certainly say that it's grave, including that we also have seen, in addition to those economic measures that nations have put in place, the activity of private enterprises in reaction also withdrawing from the Russian market, so that what we are seeing is that this is having a significant impact on Russian banks, their financial system and their ability to transact.

The Chair: You have about 15 seconds.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: I do have a bit of sympathy for the Russian people. What's the long-term impact? The ruble is in free fall and the Russian stock exchange still hasn't opened. What's the long-term impact of this?

The Chair: Briefly, please....

Ms. Heidi Kutz: That is a matter that will have to be monitored as the sanctions continue to have impacts, and we would certainly hope that the Putin administration would roll back its efforts in order to roll back the current situation.

Mr. Iqwinder Gaheer: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gaheer.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

This morning, the Prime Minister stated that he believes that Ukraine can win, but perhaps not everyone shares his optimism.

Personally, I feel there are two other possible outcomes. The first scenario is a peace treaty, but Russia could be prosecuted for war crimes. The second scenario is not much better, as it involves Ukraine being defeated. In this context, I imagine that Canada cannot return to its original position of being a soft power.

Major General, how will this affect our military readiness in the future, particularly with respect to the Arctic? Is it a game changer?

MGen Paul Prévost: Thank you for your question, Ms. Normandin.

It's not a game changer. As I explained, we are currently assessing the different possible scenarios in terms of what is happening in Ukraine. We're also assessing when Canada can return to Ukraine to continue training Ukrainian forces.

We're also looking at what this means for NATO. We're assessing potential scenarios with respect to the conflict in Ukraine, that is, what this means for NATO in the short, medium and long term.

This doesn't change what we were already doing. In terms of operational readiness, the Canadian Armed Forces will continue to recruit people and modernize the forces to be ready for future conflicts.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Along the same lines, we often hear that Canada is at risk. Canada and its allies are part of NATO. As an individual country, what is Canada prepared to do? This raises more questions.

Shouldn't this send a message about what questions we should be asking and what the situation involves? Shouldn't Canada be more prepared as an individual country and not as an ally?

MGen Paul Prévost: Once again, I thank you for your question, Ms. Normandin.

I believe the approach is going to remain the same. Canada has always been able to rely on its allies. In addition, it has contributed to the NATO alliance, along with 30 of its partners, but most importantly, it has contributed, along with its American allies, to defending North America. We have complementary capabilities, in both the European and North American alliances. We're committed to continuing this modernization and contributing as best we can to this alliance.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Normandin.

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

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

Both Finland and Sweden are now talking about joining NATO. I want to focus on that side of Arctic sovereignty, which Ms. Normandin was talking about in a previous round.

This would actually leave Russia as the only Arctic Council member within that seven-country or eight-country council that isn't a NATO member. What kind of impact does that have on the council, on the Arctic, on those activities, on the department's view point of going forward and on Arctic sovereignty?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, if you allow, I will ask Heidi to take this one.

Ms. Heidi Kutz: The foundation of the Arctic Council is co-operation in the area of environmental and sustainable development. Military co-operation is deliberately excluded from the work of the Arctic Council. There would not be any military or security activity within that body.

● (1515)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: With everything that's happening now, the majority of the countries have removed themselves from meeting. Russia is the chair currently. Doesn't the entirety of this issue have an impact on that council?

Ms. Heidi Kutz: Certainly and absolutely it does. You noted in your remarks that last week Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway and the United States together condemned Russia's unprovoked and unjustifiable actions in Ukraine. That was seven of the eight members of the Arctic Council. At the same time they upheld the importance of the council's work in the area of co-operation, but were very clear that, at the moment and given that Russia is currently the chair of the council, members would not be able to travel to Russia. In fact, activity within the council is temporarily paused until there is an opportunity to work together to determine the modalities under which the council could work in light of Russia being the chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Before I call on Ms. Gallant and Ms. O'Connell, I will ask the Conservative Party to indicate to me who their next questioners will be in the third round.

You have five minutes, Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: It will be me.

Russia appears to be engaged in a strategic pause on the ground in Ukraine. Can you give us your read of the next moves by Russia?

That's for Major-General Prévost.

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, we can see that there's a pause by Mr. Putin. He is probably reassessing his campaign and his objectives. We would be speculating as to his next move. We're obviously looking at scenarios here, but what his next move will be we don't know at this time.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are there any conditions under which NATO would consider a no-fly zone over part of Ukraine? Are there options?

MGen Paul Prévost: Right now, Ms. Gallant, there are no options. It's off the table. I think everybody can understand. It's fairly well discussed. I think the Secretary General himself has discussed this. This would mean something else. There is no option of having a no-fly zone in any way.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We've seen from Russia that its military is out of character with Russian operational [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. Have you been able to draw any conclusions as to why Russia still does not have air superiority over Ukraine?

MGen Paul Prévost: We do have a sense of this. Unfortunately, some of it is classified. What I offered initially is the fact that they have a large force but not necessarily one that is modern, and their modern force is not large enough to do this. I think that's probably the best answer I can give you at this time.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Is Canada now sharing intelligence directly with Ukraine from Canadian Forces Intelligence Command, CSE or RADARSAT?

MGen Paul Prévost: On the issue of information sharing and intelligence sharing with Ukraine, Mr. Chair, this is done through our allies, through our arrangements that we already have, so some of that Canadian information/intelligence is getting to Ukraine.

In terms of the imagery, we're also providing, through our allies, imagery. It has been announced that we're providing \$1 million in imagery at this time, which will provide Ukraine very high-quality imagery for the next three months, and we'll continue to reassess that need as the crisis develops.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Has there been any consideration in NATO of sending more TB2 Turkish drones to Ukraine?

• (1520)

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, I'm not in a position to know this. That would be a question that should be directed to NATO or, actually, the manufacturer or the country for which they are built.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Have we given any rules of engagement to Canadian Forces personnel in Latvia, or perhaps in Poland, regarding an accidental Russian attack or otherwise?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, the Canadian Forces have the authorities and the rules of engagement they need right now to operate in the context in which we're operating. If the situation changes, we will ensure that the Canadian Armed Forces members have the rules of engagement they require. I think we have to remind ourselves that, at any time, any member of the Canadian Forces, any unit of the Canadian Forces, any allies, have always had the right to self-defence.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Have we any indication that Russia is purposely targeting humanitarian convoys or evacuation convoys out of Ukraine?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, and Madam Gallant, I don't have that information right now. I'm not too sure if Kevin has some information to that effect.

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: Mr. Chair, this speaks to intent, of course. What we have seen is that humanitarian corridors have been target-

ed. Whether that is intentional or not isn't something we know. It's where we have a gap in intelligence.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Gallant.

Ms. O'Connell, you have five minutes, please.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

Major-General—or you can direct this to who's best to answer—I read in open-source reporting that the U.S. is reporting from their intel that “Putin is angry” and is going to “double down”. I'm curious as to what the doubling down might look like if so far some of their efforts.... Again, I recognize that this could be speculation, but based on what the U.S. intel has put out there, and based on the fact that Russia's attempts so far have probably not gone according to plan, what does that look like in terms of escalation?

Then I have a second question.

MGen Paul Prévost: Maybe I'll take care of the first part of the question and offer this to my colleagues at Global Affairs if they want to add more to it.

Obviously, it's something that we are all concerned about. This is something that we monitor as best we can. I think Russia has been very good at rhetoric in the past. On the declarations of Putin of last week, we took note just to monitor what he's doing from a strategic and operational perspective.

It's something that we're concerned about. At the same time, I don't think we need to overplay this. There could be some rhetoric there, for sure, and we clearly have an eye on that concern about Putin's behaviour, for sure, but I think there's the whole-of-government effort and the whole-of-alliance effort taken, and the diplomatic information and the economic and military show of strength that Mr. Putin has to take note of.

Kevin, have you anything to add?

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: Mr. Chair, it is speculative, naturally, but it's part of our job to speculate and to foresee different scenarios. One of the scenarios that is out there and relates to the question is the fact that because the campaign is not going as well as Putin had expected, there is a risk that, as egregious as this war has been to date, he could resort to options that are even more lethal. That's something that we're alive to and we're looking at.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Just following up on that, we heard from other witnesses previously, witnesses from academia, who study this and are obviously watching this very closely and the question is always, well, how does this end? Some of their testimony, which I'm completely paraphrasing here, was suggesting that once the oligarchs realize that this is untenable and financially....

But if Putin does not back down—I don't see him just walking away and going, saying, okay, you've got us—what types of pressure will continue to put that domestic pressure on him to retreat in some fashion?

• (1525)

MGen Paul Prévost: Kevin, do you want to start?

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: Yes.

One has to believe that the domestic pressure and the pressure around his inner circle and the oligarchs is a factor and an issue. As to exactly how we measure that and are able to predict what an end state might be, I think we're a long ways away from that, at the moment.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Fair enough.

I forget who said this, but approximately 2,000 Canadian Armed Forces members are currently deployed across the world. Is the 3,400 number committed to be ready for NATO in addition to the 2,000, or would you be pulling from other missions around the world?

MGen Paul Prévost: The answer is that it will be in addition to the 2,000 members we have deployed across the world right now. We have 3,400 on high alert here in Canada, ready to go.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Do I have more time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have half a minute.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Perfect.

In terms of airlift capabilities, I recognize that the alliance is utilizing resources from different alliance members. Is Canada being relied on for air support, whether it's delivery of equipment or personnel? Is that an area that Canada is assisting with or is capable and ready for should the alliance ask for it?

The Chair: Be very brief, please.

MGen Paul Prévost: I will. I did cover it in my opening remarks, Mr. Chair.

We do have two CC-130 Hercules deployed in Europe right now to help the NATO countries move their personnel and equipment about the alliance and to help those countries deliver military aid on the borders of Ukraine.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. O'Connell.

That completes our second round. We will move to our third and final round.

Mr. Ruff, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Thanks again, Chair.

I have a quick question for General Prévost on strategic lift again. I have been talking to former colleagues who are on the ground in Ukraine helping with the evacuation mission in getting Ukrainians out. There's an extreme shortage in the supply of transport, i.e., buses.

Is there any capacity for the Canadian Armed Forces to lift small buses into eastern Europe to help with the evacuation?

MGen Paul Prévost: The answer is that we have a long list of what Ukraine is asking for. I can go through the list to make sure; if buses were on there, I don't recall.

We can look into this issue for sure. I will take that with me. Thank you.

Mr. Alex Ruff: It's not so much Ukraine that's asking. I know that this is coming from NGOs and people who are helping with the evacuation. There's a huge challenge there. Refugees are walking for days to get across the country to try to get to safety.

I'll go back a little bit to my previous line of questioning on capacity for what comes next. It builds on Ms. O'Connell's questioning. When this is all said and done, the world is going to be in a different position. What does the Canadian Armed Forces need to do, moving forward, from a capacity and capability standpoint?

MGen Paul Prévost: For sure, the situation may be quite different when this is all said and done; to what extent, we don't know. What we're doing is based on the 2017 defence policy. There are 111 initiatives in there to continue to modernize the force. We're going to continue to also modernize the force in accordance with the NORAD modernization plans that we have in conjunction with the U.S.

As I mentioned already, there are also internal things we need to do in terms of personnel. We need to recruit more. We need to rebuild the force. Right now our force has some gaps in personnel. We have to look at our personnel policies. We have to look at our culture change. All of that together is what CAF needs to do over the next coming years to tackle the challenges of the future.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Would you agree that some of the challenges to attracting those new Canadians to join up and serve in the Canadian Armed Forces are making sure they have the best equipment and that the equipment is ready? Considering that the threat situation now has fundamentally changed things, we need a quick decision, something I know you're familiar with, on the fighter project and the fighter replacement. We need a decision on that sooner than later.

• (1530)

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, for sure having the best equipment is helping us to recruit people. What we're doing in the CAF also helps us to recruit our people. We have the plans. I think the fighter replacement is on track. There are plans for the ships. There are multiple capabilities being brought into the force based on our previous defence policy and NORAD modernization. The whole of that will help us rebuild the force.

Mr. Alex Ruff: I agree with that.

I guess my question, though, is how soon do we need a decision on this fighter replacement thing? Going back to my time in uniform and even before that, this is something that's been banded about and discussed, and I'd argue even more so in your environment in the air force. There's very much a desire for a decision sooner than later, whatever that decision may be. When do you think that decision will be reached?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, I'm not at liberty to answer that question, because I'm not involved at all in procurement in the CAF. I manage operations from a strategic perspective.

I think the project is on track. In the coming months, we should see something new.

Thank you.

The Chair: You have a minute left, Mr. Ruff.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

To go back to the ground-based air defence, we saw during our time in Afghanistan—and I know you're very familiar with it, having commanded the task force there—that we were able to procure strategic airlift in a very rapid fashion, considering the threat in the situation. Is it a fair assessment that we could procure something as simple as ground-based air defence within a year, if the political will were there?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, to answer that question, which I think I've answered before, we have a project in development right now to have ground-based air defence in the CAF. It's part of our defence policy from 2017. At the same time, we're operating right now in Europe as part of an alliance, part of the battle group that we command in Latvia. There is an air defence capability, and we're looking at other capabilities that will be coming on board in the eastern flank at this time. So there's no gap, from that perspective, and there is a procurement plan to look after that gap over the long term.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ruff.

I'll take the next five minutes.

I want to direct the first question to General Prévost.

The general consensus seems to be that President Putin is stalled. It follows from this that people are surprised. People who look at this are surprised that this has not been a very successful campaign. Yet, surely to goodness, there is a pattern in President Putin's behaviour. If you look back to Chechnya, he had initial success, and then it was really a brutal campaign. It was similar in Syria—initial success and then really a brutal campaign.

We appear to be in a similar pattern. I'd be interested in your thoughts on this. There was some initial success. When you look at a map of Ukraine, there has been some significant penetration into the country by Russian forces. But now they're either stalled or prepared to shell civilians and non-military targets, which is very similar to what Chechnya looked like and very similar to what Syria looked like. The real question is this: For how long are we prepared to let this pattern continue?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, this is something we're very concerned about. We're trying to better understand the indicators, what Mr. Putin is doing or is going to do. We're looking at different scenarios here of what he could do.

Obviously, there's a pause there. On the military side, it's not going as he wanted. There is also, I think, a reassessment on his part of what the whole of government, the whole of the alliance, is do-

ing right now. We've talked about the impacts of the sanctions on this. I think he's reassessing.

Perhaps I'll also turn to Kevin.

At the same time, there are more and more talks happening between Russia and Ukraine on avenues for peace.

• (1535)

The Chair: Before you turn it over to Mr. Hamilton, I will just say that there is a pause, but it's a vulnerability on the part of Mr. Putin that he'll close sooner rather than later. Are we not giving up military opportunities while we try to figure out what we should do next or we hold ourselves back from doing what, in military terms, we would actually do without hesitation?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, that is not for us to do. At this point we're obviously watching what's going on, what could be the next step for Mr. Putin against Ukraine but also for the alliance. It is not for us right now to make a decision on what we should do next in Ukraine.

Kevin.

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: I would say that everything we're trying to do nationally and as part of an alliance is to forestall the worsening of the military situation on the ground for the Ukrainians. All of our sanctions, the lethal aid to the Ukrainian armed forces, the non-lethal aid, the humanitarian assistance and the diplomatic work we're doing to rally not just western countries but the entire global community to condemn Russia for what it's doing are focused on trying to get Mr. Putin to have a second thought about what he's trying to do militarily.

The Chair: I would dearly love to challenge that question, but I have one last question.

It's clear that there is a misinformation or disinformation campaign, which President Putin is immensely skilled at, going on in Ukraine. It's clear that it's going on in eastern Europe. What's less clear is what might be going on in Canada.

Has there been any strategy on the part of GAC or anyone else to deal with the misinformation or disinformation campaigns that are going on in Canada?

MGen Paul Prévost: I can start, Mr. Chair, and then offer to Kevin or Heidi to supplement.

In the CAF what we're doing about misinformation or disinformation is to make sure that if there is disinformation out there about what the Canadian Armed Forces are doing, we correct the record. That is true here in Canada, but it's also true internationally.

There are greater efforts being made by the whole of government on this, in which Global Affairs has a great role to play.

I'll turn it over to either Heidi or Kevin to comment.

The Chair: Please do so very briefly or my colleagues will get very upset with me.

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: I can jump in here. Specifically in Canada, we're taking steps to counter Russia's disinformation campaign. As part of that, the government had asked the CRTC to review the presence of the news channel *Russia Today* on Canadian airwaves. We understand the CRTC as an independent body is looking at that and will make their decision.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Normandin, you have two and a half minutes. Go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I will only ask one question about the no-fly zone, but I will start with a fairly long introduction.

We understand that the idea behind President Zelenskyy's request for a no-fly zone is to protect civilians. We also agree that it's not enough to declare a no-fly zone, and getting it to work would involve a NATO military response to wipe out Russia's air force, if necessary.

However, it seems we're seeing more and more direct attacks on civilians, such as this morning's attack on a maternity hospital in Mariupol.

Could this be part of a strategy to push the envelope a little further and see how far they can push the red line, which they can't cross, before they trigger a NATO response? Otherwise, isn't this a way to pressure NATO and bring about internal dissent, since it's very likely we will see increasing public pressure for NATO intervention in this context?

Is a strategy like this being used by intensifying attacks on civilians?

MGen Paul Prévost: Ms. Normandin, I'm going to answer the first part of the question. I will then turn it over to Mr. Hamilton, who can add to my response if he wishes.

Of course we're concerned about all Russian military action against Ukrainian forces, but also against civilians.

With respect to the no-fly zone, we don't know what Putin's strategy or thinking is on that. At the moment, NATO isn't planning to institute a no-fly zone, but we're extremely concerned about military action targeting civilians.

• (1540)

[*English*]

Kevin, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: Actually, I don't. That would be my response as well.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: In that case, I will say this: One day, it may not be ruled out. Maybe they are trying to figure out how far President Putin can go.

Is this one possible scenario, Major General Prévost?

MGen Paul Prévost: Ms. Normandin, we're assessing all scenarios. However, we believe that Putin is taking note of the alliance's position and the measures being taken, not only in terms of NATO's military action but also in terms of military support for Ukraine. Major efforts are being made in that regard, and it certainly is having a deterrent effect. In addition, we have the diplomatic and economic measures. These are important efforts that hopefully will convince Putin to be careful.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Normandin.

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

I'll just say to my colleagues in the Conservative Party that I don't know who is going to be the next questioner.

Madam Mathysen, go ahead.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: To follow up a bit on what the chair was asking about, I think, Mr. Hamilton, you mentioned that now the CRTC is looking into *Russia Today* and stopping their misinformation campaign in Canada. It is investigating it at the very least. We know, and we've certainly heard on this committee, that this has been an issue for quite some time, so why is it only now that this is happening?

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: My understanding is that it's because of the independent nature of the CRTC. They have looked at this issue before. I'm not privy to exactly through what mechanisms or how, but what I do know is that in the current context, the government itself has requested that the CRTC look into this and they are.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Okay.

I'll return to the question I had before about Finland and Sweden talking about joining NATO. From a strategic military point of view, how does this change how Canada defends its Arctic sovereignty as well as the greater NATO presence?

MGen Paul Prévost: Heidi can maybe start on the policy side, and I can complement that.

The Chair: Ms. Kutz, can you just move your mike up just slightly? That's it. I think that should be much better.

Mrs. Heidi Kutz: I can, but I'm going to be quite brief because I'll just convey to Mr. Hamilton that he might want to respond to this from his perspective.

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: Certainly.

Already NATO has a very strong relationship with both Sweden and Finland even though they're not allies. There's a close relationship, and one would argue that it's gotten closer in the current context, but although there is talk out there in the ether of Sweden and Finland joining NATO, that's a decision for those governments to make. My understanding is that it's not a decision they are close to making. NATO has an open-door policy. The alliance will look at any and all applications from European states to join the alliance, but that's not something that's happening right now. Anything beyond that in terms of the defence of the high north and defence of the Arctic would be speculative.

The Chair: Madam Gallant, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like Major-General Prévost to be more specific with respect to our original question on shipments of lethal aid. What is it that the Ukrainians now have in hand? Is it our rifles, sniper rifles or anti-tank missiles? What has actually arrived in Ukraine?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, in response to Madam Gallant's question, the four flights with lethal aid, including pistols, sniper rifles and ammunition, and non-lethal aid such as protective equipment, which was shipped before the crisis, have arrived in Ukraine. These are already with the units they were destined for.

Since the crisis started, yesterday we've made a shipment of new material—not into Ukraine, but to the borders of Ukraine. That shipment is arriving today in theatre and will be with the Ukrainians over the next few days.

● (1545)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I understand that the TB2 Turkish drones to Ukraine have been okayed by NATO. Why is it that Canada won't send some of our drone equipment, detection equipment, to Turkey, but they would be willing to consider sending it to Ukraine?

MGen Paul Prévost: Madam Gallant, I think you've seen that last night the Prime Minister announced \$50 million in additional new equipment in there. Part of that was an announcement that cameras will be shipped to Ukraine. This is what we're focused on right now. We're putting the final touches to this offer that has been a response to a request from the Ukrainian government. As far as the policy aspect to it goes, I maybe would turn to Global Affairs if they have an answer to that.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay.

Do they have an answer?

If not, then—

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: I don't have any further information.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We learned several days ago that there was an increased level of radiation after the Russian equipment had plowed through Chernobyl—20 times the level of radiation. Granted that the closest reactor set is in western Ukraine, next to Poland, our closest NATO ally, and we may have troops there, what do we have in the way of hazmat—in particular, the CBRN that refers to nuclear—on hand for troops that we have deployed to that part of Europe? Do we have mitigation medicine like potassium iodide? Are they ready for being exposed to radiation? What provisions have we made for them?

MGen Paul Prévost: To answer the first question, Mr. Chair, we have a very small number of troops in the region. We have no troops in Ukraine, first of all; we have no troops in western Ukraine. We have some troops in Poland, a fair ways from the border at this time. We're also not monitoring any threat at this time in western Ukraine, but to answer your question, there is no CBRN capability deployed in Europe at this time.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: With the psychological warfare in particular—I'm going back to a question we asked earlier—you talked about information warfare, but what about the psychological warfare being communicated, which our troops may be intercepting and subjected to? How is that being countered by our command?

MGen Paul Prévost: Mr. Chair, I'll answer the same thing here. We can see the disinformation campaign that Russia is doing. We're not subject to the psychological warfare. We see the disinformation and, where and when we can, we correct the record on the disinformation.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: In terms of humanitarian convoys, you weren't—through you, Mr. Chair—very clear on—

The Chair: I'm always very clear.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: —the gap in information on Russia and whether it was purposely targeting humanitarian convoys. Is that gap in our intelligence or is it a gap on the part of the Russian communications intelligence?

The Chair: I thought the response was that it was attribution of intent. That was the issue. They couldn't actually say that. I think Mr. Hamilton tried to answer that question before.

Mr. Kevin Hamilton: Yes, it was simply to say that we don't know whether there is Russian intent to hit those convoys or if hitting them is the result of what they would term “collateral damage”.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Mr. May for the final five minutes, please.

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

Thank you to our witnesses today.

Following recent announcements of the deployment of up to 460 additional Canadian Armed Forces personnel to reinforce Operation Reassurance, including in Latvia, and the approximately 3,400 Canadian Armed Forces personnel that have been placed at a higher state of readiness to deploy to the NATO Response Force should they be required, the Prime Minister announced yesterday that Canada intends to extend Operation Reassurance. How might Canada's support via this mission evolve?

● (1550)

MGen Paul Prévost: I will take this one, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the question, Mr. May.

This operation was due to be renewed a year from now. That operation is all about reassurance for our allies and our presence in NATO. Right now as part of that operation, as I explained initially, we have 540 troops that we've been commanding, the battle group in Latvia, for the last five years. There are 13 nations involved here. We're quite proud of that achievement. We also have a ship and air presence in the form of CF-18s, and now also the maritime patrol aircraft, which we added lately.

Obviously, with the crisis in front of us, the way in which the crisis evolves will inform how we review this mission over the next few months. Our intent is to review this commitment for multiple years, as the Prime Minister announced yesterday. The final set-up of that mission will be based on where we are in the campaign and how we can sustain our presence over the long term in Europe.

Mr. Bryan May: How does Canada's role in NATO's operations in central and eastern Europe under Operation Reassurance compare with those of other NATO member states?

MGen Paul Prévost: It's at par, for sure; it's even more than at par. As I just mentioned, we are the lead in the Latvia battle group right now. There are three battle groups established under the old construct. NATO is in the process of adding battle groups along the eastern front, but on the three battle groups that were already established, Canada is the lead of many nations in there. Actually, the battle group we command in Riga, Latvia, is the most multinational of all the battle groups deployed along the eastern front.

Mr. Bryan May: Thank you, General.

For the first time in its history, the NATO Response Force has been activated as a defensive measure in response to Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine. As I said, Canada has earmarked up to 3,400 Canadian Armed Forces personnel—land, sea and air—to join NATO's main response force. What exactly does this historic moment signify? What role will the high-readiness forces play within a deterrence and defence role?

MGen Paul Prévost: I think there are a few aspects to this one, for sure. One, it proves that there's a crisis that we have to be concerned about. That would be number one. At the same time, it proves that NATO is relevant. The fact that SACEUR came to the NAC and asked for the high-readiness forces to be put on standby, and the NATO alliance agreed to that, shows our alliance.

Then there are the next steps for this. As I mentioned initially, the concept here is that all nations have been asked to contribute [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] voluntary contribution, because there obviously are a lot of forces already available in Europe who are mounting a new force in accordance with the graduated response plans. That high-readiness force will be used at the right time to reinforce, should it be necessary.

Mr. Bryan May: Just quickly, because I know my time is running out, you mentioned Canada's strong participation. What factors would you attribute to that participation?

MGen Paul Prévost: I think it's our commitment to our alliance. Canada has always been about alliances and multilateralism. NATO is now calling upon us to help. We have to answer that call.

Mr. Bryan May: Excellent.

I will use my last 10 seconds to say thank you very much for being here on such short notice and for helping contribute to this study.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. May.

On behalf of the committee, I too would like to thank all three of you for your time. We have talked a bit about misinformation and disinformation. The best antidote to misinformation and disinformation

is truth. You have shared truth with us within security boundaries. I think it's very important to have a continuation of these kinds of meetings as we get deeper and deeper involved in this conflict, because we need to continue to counter the misinformation and disinformation campaigns with factual truth, such as you have shared with us today.

So thank you for doing that. We appreciate your ongoing willingness to appear before this committee. Stand by your phones. You might be asked again. In fact, I can pretty well assure you that you'll be asked again.

• (1555)

MGen Paul Prévost: Thank you. It's always a pleasure.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Hamilton, and Ms. Kutz.

I'll let them go, and then we have two things to deal with. I hope it is routine in nature, unless people want to enter into some grand debate about a budget of \$4,625-plus cookies.

I'll ask somebody to move it.

I see Jennifer is chewing on her cookies as we speak, in anticipation that this budget will pass.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I so move.

The Chair: Ms. O'Connell has moved it.

Is there any discussion? Seeing no discussion, we will vote.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The second item is the report of the subcommittee. I appreciate the work of the members of Monday. We've arrived at two elements from the subcommittee. I'm assuming that everyone has received a copy of the draft report.

I will ask somebody to move—I see Mr. May.

Is there any debate?

I see none. Those in favour?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Pardon me. I did not see a draft report. What is this the draft report of?

The Chair: It is of the subcommittee that met on Monday.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: We're approving the report of what they met on. It's not the report we are working on right now.

The Chair: No.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay.

The Chair: It's just the way forward.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Again, thanks to the subcommittee for their work on Monday.

Go ahead, Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: On a point of clarification, Mr. Chair, we have this very fluid situation with Ukraine and we're going to be tidying up our work on this study. What if new threats surface? How will they be incorporated into the study? Will we have the flexibility, given what was passed, to have a special or even an additional meeting, should it become necessary during this time?

The Chair: I would anticipate that any one of the members could move, with 48 hours' notice, a motion to study whatever it is that's related to this study. In fact, as you well know, if it's related to the subject matter at hand, you can move it without the 48 hours' notice. Failing that, you can persuade the chair, with its usual level of charm, that a meeting should be called. There are at least three ways I can think of right off the top of my head to set aside additional time.

I will just make the comment though that because we're in a hybrid format, it's extremely difficult to get up and get meetings organized outside of our time slots, a situation that I hope over time will be rectified, but we'll see.

You're absolutely right to point out what a fluid situation this is. I don't know whether it's a conflict or a war, but, regardless, I think General Prévost, in response to Mr. May's question, said that things

are dramatically changing and that Canada's threat posture is going to have to change with them.

That brings me to just a brief summary of what we passed, which is that March 11 is the deadline for updated threat analysis witness lists. March 18 is the deadline for recruitment and retention witness lists. March 21 will be for supplementary estimates, assuming the minister is available, which we have some assurance she might be. March 23 we will continue with threat analysis and potentially have Latvian government officials. The deputy prime minister and defence minister of Latvia has asked to meet with us. We will try to accommodate his request, but again we have limitations, and I'm not quite sure how this will work out. March 28, we will continue on threat analysis. March 30 will be on threat analysis and/or drafting instructions. April 4 and 6 will be on recruitment and retention and the commencement of that study.

That's kind of the outline for us as far as we can take it at this point. Again, I appreciate all of your co-operation in making this meeting happen. We're all glued to our televisions and/or media watching the events unfolding in Ukraine, and it's good for all of us and good for the people of Canada to have this medium that allows for a fulsome discussion with officials in a format that is informational as opposed to confrontational.

With that, seeing no objections, I will adjourn this meeting.

Thank you.

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