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Chair: The Honourable John McKay



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• (1535)

[English]

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

I see that it's after 3:30 p.m. I see that our witnesses are in place. I see that we have quorum.

We thank the minister for appearing. The minister and her colleagues are appearing pursuant to a motion adopted by this committee, which reads in part:

That the Standing Committee on National Defence invite the Minister of National Defence...to appear as soon as possible [along with various other named people in the Defence Department] and all other relevant officials from the Canadian Armed Forces [to] appear within the next week, to provide a briefing of no fewer than two hours concerning the high-altitude surveillance balloon from the People's Republic of China that recently violated Canadian airspace, and that the briefing be held in public.

With that, I call upon the minister for her opening statement. Then, we will proceed to questions.

Thank you, Minister, and welcome.

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair and members of the Standing Committee on National Defence.

Good afternoon, everyone. *Bonjour:*

Last month the North American Aerospace Defence Command—NORAD—detected, identified and tracked a high-altitude surveillance balloon from the People's Republic of China, along with three subsequent objects over North America. Fighter aircraft took down the four unauthorized airborne objects in Canadian and American airspace.

[Translation]

Any unauthorized entry into our airspace is deeply troubling.

Such actions underscore the evolving threats Canada faces here at home in a world defined by strategic competition and uncertainty.

[English]

However, they also highlight the efficacy and continued importance of our binational military command with the United States through NORAD.

Canada and the U.S. share a unique military bond through NORAD.

[Translation]

Canadian and American personnel from the Canadian, Alaskan and Continental U.S. NORAD regions prevent air attacks against North America, and safeguard the sovereign airspaces of Canada and the United States by responding to unknown, unwanted, and unauthorized activities near or within our airspace. This agreement has kept us safe for 65 years.

[English]

The downing of these objects clearly demonstrates the efficacy of NORAD. In Yukon, for example, NORAD detected this object and launched Canadian and U.S. fighter aircraft to investigate. At the direction of the Prime Minister, aircraft assigned to NORAD successfully took down the object. This was the first time that a NORAD operation had downed an aerial object in Canada.

Clearly, NORAD remains a powerful and effective command. Still, we know that it needs to be modernized to meet current and future threats as well as technological developments, and that is why last year our government committed almost \$40 billion in funding for the modernization of Canadian NORAD capabilities over the next 20 years, in close collaboration with the United States.

Through a broad spectrum of investments, we are going to be improving our ability to detect and deter evolving threats and future-proof our continental defences for decades to come.

Those recent events in our airspace are a stark reminder of NORAD's renewed importance and why these detection capabilities are necessary for our safety.

I'll now turn back to the recent incidents.

[Translation]

In early February, we first analyzed the situation regarding the Chinese surveillance balloon to determine whether the object posed an imminent threat to Canadians. We then took additional steps to safeguard sensitive information from potential surveillance.

When it was determined that the balloon did not pose an imminent threat, we worked with our U.S. counterparts to conduct further analysis and determine our next steps.

[English]

Finally, as with each subsequent aerial object, it was taken down in a way that ensured no civilians were harmed and with consideration for potential damage to infrastructure, on February 6. Debris was recovered by the United States Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard and transferred to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for further analysis.

Throughout this process and with each subsequent aerial object, we remained committed to keeping Canadians and Americans well informed of our activities and continued that ongoing effort. As soon as it was deemed appropriate, we shared information about each balloon's whereabouts publicly and regularly updated our citizens about our efforts across a variety of channels.

[Translation]

While we do not assess that these other aerial objects pose a similar threat to China's high-altitude surveillance balloon, we know we must remain vigilant. And we must keep our citizens well informed and aware of any potential risks.

The surveillance balloon episode underscores the fact that there are state actors willing to violate our sovereignty and territorial integrity for their own aims.

And we, along with our U.S. counterparts, are ready to act against shared threats.

• (1540)

[English]

Mr. Chair, our joint response to these unauthorized aerial objects is a strong example of NORAD in action: bilateral decision-making, close coordination and decisive action in response to common threats.

[Translation]

These actions show the continued value and relevance of our binational command and its missions. And, in a world in which Canada faces new threats from authoritarian regimes, we must do everything we can to protect our people, our country, and our continent.

[English]

I thank you for having me here today, and I look forward to taking your questions.

Finally, in terms of my remarks, I'd like to thank the Canadian Armed Forces and NORAD command for having the watch.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Before I open up to the first round, I remind colleagues that the minister is here pursuant to the motion I read into the record earlier today. While there may be an almost irresistible temptation to stray from the motion, I will encourage members to ask questions relevant to the motion.

Mr. Bezan for six minutes, please.

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

I want to thank the minister for being here. I also want to reiterate her comments that we thank the Canadian Armed Forces and NORAD for their diligence in making sure we stay safe here at home and deal with something that was rather peculiar and that we've never had to deal with in the past.

Minister, I know we talk about the first surveillance balloon that was shot down off the coast of the Atlantic seaboard of the United States as originating from the communist regime in Beijing. Can you confirm whether or not that was being operated by the People's Liberation Army?

Hon. Anita Anand: I can simply confirm that it was a surveillance balloon that originated in China. That is what I am tracking; that is what Canada is tracking, and—

Mr. James Bezan: You won't disclose what the surveillance equipment was for, what it was being used for—the nefarious purpose that we all assume has to be military in nature and has to be related back to the People's Liberation Army.

Hon. Anita Anand: I actually would be very careful about making assumptions at this point. The debris that was shot down and retrieved off the coast of the United States near Myrtle Beach is still being analyzed. We will be ensuring that we work with NORAD and the United States in this process, and at the appropriate time we will provide information as it becomes available.

Mr. James Bezan: Okay, and I assume that would be from the U.S., since it's in U.S. waters that the debris was recovered.

When we look at the other three balloons, have you been able to determine the origin of those aircraft?

Hon. Anita Anand: As you know, the recovery efforts were curtailed because of remote and rugged terrain. There is no indication that they are state-affiliated, but the recovery efforts were curtailed and any other available information that is obtained will be shared, of course, and—

Mr. James Bezan: The debris that's in Yukon, Minister, the search for that debris will be resumed in the spring, after the spring thaw and when things are safe enough to go back up into the mountainous areas.

Hon. Anita Anand: To begin, it was Public Safety, not DND, that had jurisdiction over that search and recovery. DND, including special forces, including multiple aircraft and including the FBI, was participating, but the search was being led by Public Safety, so the decision—

Mr. James Bezan: At the same time, 130 members of the Canadian Armed Forces were on the ground. I would assume that in the spring there would be either reserve troops or rangers or full-time members of the Canadian Armed Forces made available for that recovery effort.

Hon. Anita Anand: Again, I would be careful about making assumptions. The importance of the safety and security of the Canadian Armed Forces and all people on the ground was extremely important. At this point, as I said, there is no indication that these objects were state-affiliated. At this point, the search was called off by Public Safety.

• (1545)

Mr. James Bezan: Minister, I wanted to get a clarification. Under NORAD we had scrambled some CF-18s. According to Major-General Prévost, who appeared here on February 17, it was only a matter of minutes before Canadian CF-18s would have intercepted the balloon in Yukon. However, the F-22s were there ahead of us, and the U.S. fighter jets took it down.

However, if you look at some of the other information that came out here from the Department of Defense in the United States, they also said that when the balloon entered Canadian airspace it was Canadian CF-18 fighter jets and CP-140 Aurora aircraft that did a closer examination of that asset.

Why wasn't it shot down at that point in time, rather than bringing those fighter jets home and then scrambling F-22s to take it out?

Was it a capability issue?

Hon. Anita Anand: I'm going to ask my chief of defence staff—

Mr. James Bezan: I can have General Eyre answer that in the second hour if you're unable to.

Hon. Anita Anand: It's not that I'm unable to, but there is an operational component to the decisions that were being made. I will say, at a broad level, that both countries' aircraft under NORAD were being scrambled. The decision to take down the suspected balloon was made by the Prime Minister, using NORAD assets, after phone calls with President Biden and with the Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin.

I just want to clarify your question, because I'm wondering if you were mixing up two incidents in your question.

Mr. James Bezan: No. Based upon the testimony we received and also on what's been coming out of the White House and the Department of Defense, there seems to be a disconnect there. I just want to get clarification on that. We'll do that in the second hour.

John Kirby, from the U.S. White House's national security advisory committee, actually mentioned that there have been five previous instances of balloons that have travelled across North America. Three of them were under the Trump administration and two were under the Biden administration. He said that the previous incursions were just for brief periods of time.

I'm assuming that they briefly entered Alaska and then they were over Canadian airspace.

I just wanted to get confirmation on whether or not that happened.

Hon. Anita Anand: I am tracking four incidents that I have indicated to you thus far of suspected Chinese balloons: February 4, Alaska; February 10, central Yukon; February 11, Lake Huron; and February 12—

Mr. James Bezan: You don't know anything about previous incidents or up to 2017.

Hon. Anita Anand: If I could just get to that, none of those previous incidents that you referred to, to my knowledge, entered Canadian airspace.

Mr. James Bezan: Do you know whether or not NORAD detected those balloons and aircraft at that time, between 2017 and 2022?

Hon. Anita Anand: Not to my knowledge.

Mr. James Bezan: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

Ms. O'Connell is next for six minutes, please.

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

Minister, officials, thank you all for being here.

I want to start off, and we talked about this in previous meetings as well, by noting that because it was a U.S. fighter jet that actually shot down or took the shot, there was an insinuation that Canada did not have the capability. Now we have heard testimony that this was not the case, and that there was a decision made on who might be best or why a particular aircraft was sought.

Could we just get some further clarification on how that NORAD process works in determining capabilities?

Is Canada capable, in the event that another balloon or object of this nature were to enter Canadian airspace and the decision were made for Canada to shoot it down?

Could you maybe walk us through that process?

Hon. Anita Anand: Definitely.

First of all, NORAD has a binational structure, which means it is equally responsible to and made up of personnel from the United States and Canada. In fact, it's the world's only binational command structure. It employs a layered defence network of satellites, ground-based radars, airborne radar and fighter aircraft to track and identify aircraft and inform appropriate actions.

In Yukon, for example, NORAD detected the object and launched Canadian and U.S. fighter aircraft to investigate. At the direction of the Prime Minister, as I mentioned, the decision was made to take down the object. This was the first time NORAD had ever downed an aerial object in Canada.

We recognize the need to continue to improve in this area in terms of decision-making. That's why we're putting on the table almost \$40 billion to modernize NORAD and continental defence. Going forward, NORAD will continue to exercise its mission exactly as it has done in the past. If an unknown object enters U.S. or Canadian airspace, it will be assessed; it will be identified as to whether it's a threat. If it's not a kinetic military threat, further discussion across government will occur to determine whether it poses a risk to national security, safety of flight, or people on the ground.

I will say that there are additional actions that we are going to be taking. NORAD will continue to have battle rhythm drills, but it will refine these battle rhythm drills to include streamlining the reporting of unidentified objects to improve timely communication on such objects. There will be further efficiencies—

• (1550)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'm sorry, Minister—

Hon. Anita Anand: —in reporting and inter-agency cooperation.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you. I'm sorry. I didn't want to interrupt, Minister, but I am limited on time.

I just wanted to also ask a question in regard to reporting. I know there are different instances, but with the first balloon we heard testimony about scaffolding inside, and clearly it seemed to be fairly significant. That's where my questions are leaning.

I want to understand if this is true or if it affected CAF in any way. We heard reporting that it could interrupt aircraft and signalling. I'm just curious as to whether that was a commercial issue or if there were actually interruptions to military capabilities? In addition to that, how will we ensure that we'd be ready and capable in the event that another object like this were to fly into Canadian airspace, and that it wouldn't interrupt military capabilities?

Hon. Anita Anand: I'm going to ask the chief of the defence staff to take the first question, but before I do, I'm just going to answer the second question.

It's essentially a continuation of what I was saying in terms of further making sure our processes are efficient and effective at a NORAD level. We'll continue to assess threats—kinetic threats, etc.—and identify those threats. We're undertaking drills that are focused on streamlining the reporting of any unidentified objects. We're making sure we have a very succinct reporting structure so that we can communicate effectively among decision-makers. We're also making sure we're coordinating across geographic regions.

I'm going to now ask the chief of the defence staff if he has anything to add, especially on the first part.

General Wayne D. Eyre (Chief of the Defence Staff, Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence): On the first part, any electromagnetic emissions are currently part of the exploitation and analysis that are ongoing, along with the debris that was recovered. The public sharing of that will depend upon the intelligence value that it has in terms of keeping it versus letting the adversaries know what success they had.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Have we been concerned in the past...? I recognize you said that to our knowledge they have not flown in Canadian airspace. Have any of our allies raised issues or concerns that balloons of this nature have been floating into various airspaces around the world?

The Chair: Answer very briefly, please.

Hon. Anita Anand: Can I just take you to the specific objectives of NORAD, the raison d'être of NORAD, which is to surveil the skies, monitor and control? That's what NORAD has done for 65 years. It is constantly monitoring the skies for any of these types of objects. It just so happened that in the month of February there were four.

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

[Translation]

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

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

I also thank Madam Minister and all the witnesses for their presence. In addition, on behalf of my colleagues and I, I would like to thank the members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are participating in the debris search operation.

Major-General Prévost mentioned that, at one point, the search and scanning criteria were changed—they were talking about a filter, or a door—which allowed the first balloon to be found and then, quite quickly, other objects.

Was it because of information that there could possibly be balloons in the air that the search criteria were changed, or was it because the criteria were changed that the balloons were discovered by chance?

• (1555)

Hon. Anita Anand: As I said earlier, NORAD's objective is to continue to monitor the airspace. There are many methods used to achieve this objective and there are many factors to consider when a balloon or presumed balloon is discovered.

I will turn the floor over to the Chief of the Defence Staff.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: After the first incident, radar operators updated their situational awareness and changed the level of search for objects by focusing more on smaller objects.

Ms. Christine Normandin: If I understood correctly, it was the discovery of the first balloon that led to changes in criteria.

What led to the discovery of the first balloon?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Because the first balloon was so big, it was easier to spot.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, General Eyre.

Madam Minister, communication also falls under the government's purview. Now, it seems to me that there was a bit of confusion as to how the message about the presence of the balloons was conveyed, which led to a number of rather far-fetched assumptions on the part of the population.

Are you reviewing the communication plans regarding other possible events? How can we align these plans with those of our American partners? We want to ensure that the public understands, and we want to send good messages about how these events will be managed from now on.

Hon. Anita Anand: After each operation, we take stock of the situation to see how we can improve the process. This is what we did with regard to the event we are talking about today.

We believe that we need to do everything we can to convey the details of the situation, whether it's to the people on the ground or in the airspace.

Ms. Christine Normandin: People have been watching Canada's response on the ground, and our communications.

One hypothesis is that China used this kind of balloon to study the reaction of Canada, the U.S. and NORAD and to discover flaws in our system. How plausible is this hypothesis?

[*English*]

Hon. Anita Anand: I am not in the business of hypothesizing prior to having data.

The reality is that we don't have the data from the downed balloon off the coast of the United States, and we don't have data from the other three incidents.

At this point, it would be imprudent for me to speculate on the purpose and the origins of those other three balloons.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: The origin of the other three balloons is uncertain, but from what we have heard it is possible that they are of civilian origin.

What measures have been put in place to ensure that if civilian balloons are spotted by NORAD in the future, it does not trigger the same kind of situation or panic among the public?

Hon. Anita Anand: That is a good question and you are right. These are things that I think about too. Of course, it is very important to bolster the population's confidence. On the other hand, the purpose of NORAD is to monitor our airspace.

We are very proud of this process. Of course, we can improve it, and that's what we're doing now. We are thinking about what we can do in the future to communicate better.

General Eyre, do you have anything to add?

• (1600)

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Thank you, Madam Minister.

I want to reiterate that the Department of Transport is responsible for overseeing our airspace and establishing the laws and policies necessary to control and monitor civilian objects and aircraft.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

[*English*]

Madam Mathysen, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Minister, for appearing today. I'd like to echo all of my colleagues and say thank you so much for all your involvement in the CAF's efforts on this as well.

I would like to follow up a bit on what General Eyre just said. On the 31st, Transport Canada wasn't made aware of that first balloon, but it's my understanding that it was in the media. In fact, it was an Air Canada flight that encountered the balloon first and then reported it to NORAD. Just for clarification, was it NORAD that knew about it first, or was it in fact Air Canada?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, for clarification, it was NORAD that knew about it first. I'm not aware of the timeline of Air Canada, but NORAD was tracking it before it entered U.S. airspace off the coast of Alaska.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Okay.

It was determined that this unidentified aerial balloon posed enough danger that it was warranted that we shoot it down, but we didn't close Canadian airspace. Is that correct? Could you explain the process for that and why we didn't close down Canadian airspace?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Are you talking specifically about the one that was shot down in Yukon?

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I believe that it was the first incident.... No, I'm sorry. It was the Yukon one. There are so many.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, I would have to go back and talk to our experts about what control measures were put in place from a NavCan-Transport Canada perspective to ensure that airspace was shut off. I'm not sure if that came up in the February 17 session.

General Molstad, do you have an answer on that one?

Major-General Darcy Molstad (Deputy Commander, Canadian Joint Operations Command, Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence): Essentially, for the Yukon balloon, there was a restricted operating zone that was established, which is normal operating procedure for NORAD whenever there is an incident like this, where an investigation has to occur.

For the first event, which I think you referred to as well, airspace would not have been shut down because the reported altitude of that first surveillance balloon, which we know came from China, was at 60,000 feet approximately, well above civilian traffic, therefore traffic would not have to be curtailed. The one in Yukon did pose a reasonable risk to civil aviation. Restricted areas were established in order to ensure that people stayed away from that.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you for that clarification.

You mentioned, Minister, that it is deeply troubling that these incidents all happened in February. However, there's a 2022 annual report from the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, which states that in that year, 336 unidentified aerial phenomena were reported. Of course, by those numbers, that contradicts that all of a sudden we found these four. I'd just like to ask for that clarification.

It was, I think, mentioned by General Prévost that these specific phenomena weren't "squawking" correctly, so that's why they were downed. However, there's a bit of a contradiction, I think, which needs to be clarified, in that if you're talking about 336 over the year and all of a sudden in February there were four, our reaction level seems so high. Can you provide clarification on that and why those numbers don't seem to add up?

• (1605)

Hon. Anita Anand: Well, to begin, I have not reviewed the report that you're referring to, so I can't verify the information that you're elucidating, but I will say that my responsibility as Minister of National Defence is to ensure that the operational effectiveness of institutions like NORAD continues unimpeded. What NORAD has identified, as mentioned, are four suspected objects that I have outlined already today. To my knowledge, there have not been others in Canadian airspace.

NORAD continues to do what NORAD does best, which is to monitor our skies and to control the skies if there are objects that are posing a risk to public safety and to our population, and that's exactly what NORAD did on February 11.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I'm certainly happy to get you the report if that is what is needed, but if there were 336 identified in one year and there were four in February, do we know how many have been reported since the time of those four, considering that there seems to be a general average over the course of one year?

Hon. Anita Anand: Again, I'm not going to take a number from another country based on a report that I have not reviewed and extrapolate to what we are doing in Canada.

Reports about aerial phenomena come from many sources. This is not the same as NORAD detection. As I said, NORAD continues to do what NORAD does best, which is to monitor and control our skies.

I'm not sure, Chief, if you have anything you want to add to that.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: I will just add that with these four you had a positive radar track and positive visual confirmation by NORAD aircraft, with sufficient detail to recommend actions. I can't speak to the other 200 plus that we talked about.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen and colleagues, we have 30 minutes of questions and 20 minutes of time to complete a second round. To try to manage this, I think we'll take a minute from everybody, and that should do the trick.

You have four minutes instead of five minutes, Ms. Kramp-Neuman.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you for being here today.

I'll start by suggesting that I see that the lack of transparency and efficiency in dealing with the surveillance balloons has been concerning across the country. Further, whether Canada is well situated for future incidents of this nature is something that is definitely coming up with regard to the increasing frequency.

For today's purposes, I'd like to narrow down on the chain of command surrounding the third incident in the Yukon. The process of succinct decision-making is an absolute must, and I am fearful that this is where there are some gaps.

My first question is, what kind of process was followed in order to shoot down the balloon flying over the Yukon, and could you possibly try to walk us through the necessary chain of command needed to mobilize this?

Hon. Anita Anand: I was actually in Washington, at the Pentagon, as we were tracking this suspected object.

It is extremely important to know that the efficacy of NORAD is based on the mutual co-operation that we share with the United States and have shared for the last 65 years, so I thank you for asking the question.

It is part of NORAD's process to track objects, including tracking the height of the object. As mentioned, when you have an object at 60,000 feet, it is less of a concern from a population standpoint and from a skies standpoint than an object at 40,000 feet. The object over the Yukon was at about 38,000 feet, which did then pose a risk to the skies. That occasioned the need to shoot it down, which NORAD effectively did.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: On what date was that, when you were first made aware of the CCP's balloon?

Hon. Anita Anand: The suspected object was shot down on February 11. I will turn it to the chief of the defence staff for further—

• (1610)

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Do we know when you were made first aware of it—on what date?

Hon. Anita Anand: I would have to go back and review my notes. There were, as I mentioned, four incidents during a very short time period. We were tracking many of these objects at the same time, so—

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Perhaps, given the nature of the time, you could respond in writing to the committee. That would be helpful. Or we can do it in the second hour, just because of the time, so I can get on to the next question.

Hon. Anita Anand: Sure. That's no problem.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: When did you speak to the Prime Minister regarding the detection of the balloon in Canadian airspace, and were you responsible for notifying him?

Hon. Anita Anand: I am frequently in touch with the Prime Minister on a number of items relating to the defence file, and I spoke with him at length on February 11 and communicated with him on February 10.

I will say, again, that I speak with him frequently.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: That's fair enough. Thank you.

Who was responsible for making the final decision to shoot down the object over Yukon? What bodies were consulted and who was informed of this prior to its occurring?

Hon. Anita Anand: Ultimately, the Prime Minister of Canada made the decision to shoot down the suspect object over Yukon, through the facility and the organization of NORAD, after consultation with President Biden and my discussion with the Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin. Again, the decision was made by the Prime Minister of Canada and involved using aircraft that is part of NORAD.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

I'm going to leave the rest of my time to James.

Mr. James Bezan: NORAD has responsibility both for airspace and for maritime domains. The Canadian Armed Forces, in a statement to The Globe and Mail at the end of February, said, “The Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces...are fully aware of recent efforts by China to conduct surveillance operations in Canadian airspace and maritime approaches utilizing dual-purpose technologies,” referring to Chinese monitoring buoys in the Arctic that were retrieved by the Canadian Armed Forces.

How many buoys were recovered, and what was the purpose of those buoys in our Arctic?

The Chair: Technically that's out of the range of the motion, but—

Mr. James Bezan: She talked about NORAD, and we're talking about Chinese surveillance, and they attribute it to China—

The Chair: Technically I think it's outside of the realm of the—

Mr. James Bezan: Let the minister answer, if she prefers.

The Chair: Technically, it is outside of the realm of the motion, but it is relevant to the larger issue at play here. If the minister wishes to respond, she's free to do so.

Hon. Anita Anand: The buoys in Canadian waters were interdicted and retrieved. For operational security reasons and in an effort not to provide an adversarial advantage, I will say no more.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

Madam Lambropoulos, you have four minutes. Go ahead, please.

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

Thank you, Minister, for being here to answer some of our questions and for the clarity you're providing our committee.

In your opening statements, you spoke about the balloons and how the balloons entering Canadian and American airspace really allowed us to see NORAD in action.

As it was, very understandably, concerning to Canadians, it was quite public, so people were made to feel that our two countries were working together well in order to figure out what was going on and to take care of the situation.

You also spoke about major investments that the government is putting into NORAD over the next 20 years. I'm wondering if you and your team have begun working towards a more concrete plan on what types of investments will be made and how we will improve our capability as a military, as well as our combined capabilities alongside our partner, the United States. Was any light shed on the situation because of the incidents with the balloons? Is there anything that may have changed in the plan because of the incidents that occurred in February?

Hon. Anita Anand: I'll say first and foremost that the incidents that are the subject of this meeting highlight the importance and efficacy of NORAD, but they also highlight the importance of continuing to modernize our continental defence and to improve the processes on which NORAD activities are based.

As I mentioned in my introductory remarks, NORAD is the aerospace command that has been in place for 65 years. Last year, we made a commitment to upgrade our continental defence, to im-

prove and modernize NORAD together with the United States, and what Canadians are going to see over the next number of years are continued investments in NORAD modernization that are going to support integrated systems that can defend against a broad range of air and missile threats. Let me give you some examples.

Investments in over-the-horizon radar layered with space-based surveillance will ensure that Canada and NORAD can detect and track modern threats. Modernizing command and control systems will enable senior leaders to make faster decisions more effectively in order to maximize deterrence and defence options. Advanced air-to-air missiles are capable of engaging threats from short-, medium- and long-distance ranges and are compatible with F-35s, which, as you know, we are procuring.

Augmenting key defence and logistics capabilities will extend the Canadian Armed Forces' range and mobility to respond to defence, security and safety concerns throughout Canada, including in the aerospace domain through NORAD.

• (1615)

[Translation]

That is what Ms. Normandin's question was about earlier.

[English]

Also, we are enhancing existing infrastructure in the north, which will ensure that Canada can safeguard its sovereignty by supporting new aircraft, enhancing more sustainable operations and presence in Canada's northern and remote regions, and pursuing ongoing research and development to better understand emerging technologies. What we are doing is not only in conjunction with the United States but also making sure that we are consulting indigenous and northern peoples in an effort to be true to reconciliation.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Lambropoulos.

Madam Normandin, you have a minute and a half.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

With the little time I have, I'm going to ask a two-part question.

Since you changed the filters, we are able to detect small objects. Can we do this while continuing to detect larger objects as before? Or do we do it alternately because we don't have enough resources?

If we have the resources to do both at the same time, why didn't we do it earlier, since we already knew that China was developing some expertise, especially in balloons and smaller objects?

Hon. Anita Anand: It is important to remember that we have the ability to see all the things we need to see thanks to NORAD.

The Chief of the Defence Staff may have something else to add.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: It does take more effort and work to find the small items. That's why we focused on the bigger and faster objects. During the next meeting, I will be able to talk about some projects to improve our capabilities.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen, you have a minute and a half, please.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: In terms of some of the things that have been talked about, obviously the importance of NORAD and that relationship and the sharing of information are all very clear, and certainly I agree with that. However, President Biden held a press conference on February 16 and was talking about how his administration was going to change its internal policies when it came to shooting down these UAPs. They put forward the national security adviser, Mr. Sullivan, who was talking about creating an inter-agency group to decide that policy specifically.

NORAD obviously is a binational organization. It is separate from that leadership. However, this inter-agency group will be making some key policy changes and decisions on how they deal with these UAPs. How will Canada be involved in that? How will we ensure that NORAD is kept at that higher level? Also, is Canada doing the same thing in terms of developing inter-agency policy changes?

• (1620)

Hon. Anita Anand: The United States' shooting down of the objects on February 10 and February 12 was done under the aegis of USNORTHCOM, whereas the shooting down over Yukon was done under the aegis of NORAD. Some of the initiatives the United States are taking relate to their internal processes within USNORTHCOM and those organizations.

In terms of what we are doing here in Canada to improve our processes, as I said, we are continually looking to improve. We are coordinating across the NORAD region to amass lessons observed during the event, to determine if any seams in reporting exist and to address them right away. We are also having a multidepartmental after-action debrief to review how the Canadian Armed Forces and other involved departments feed information and contribute to air security processes such as this one.

The Chair: We are going to have to leave the response there. Thank you.

Mr. Kelly, go ahead for four minutes, please.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Minister, the PRC has in recent weeks violated Canadian airspace and our territorial waters, interfered with elections, intimidated Canadian citizens and operated illegal police stations. As the Minister of Defence, in light of this, in particular the airspace violation, can you tell us if there

have been any repercussions for or reprimand of any of the PRC's diplomats?

Hon. Anita Anand: I believe that Global Affairs Canada did indeed take some actions relating to these incidents.

Mr. Pat Kelly: You're not involved in that. Is that something that you—

Hon. Anita Anand: There were reprimands, but they do not occur under the jurisdiction of the Department of National Defence.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Has your government declared anybody *persona non grata* as a result of these illegal acts?

Hon. Anita Anand: As I said, Global Affairs Canada took action.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Okay.

There have been billions of dollars in lapsed funding for defence. We now know about the urgent need for NORAD modernization. Have any funds lapsed that were intended for NORAD modernization?

Hon. Anita Anand: No. NORAD modernization was just announced about eight months ago, and it is a 20-year project that will see about \$38 billion spent over those 20 years. We will continue to make plans relating to the upgrades to continental defence.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Has any procurement already begun, and has anything actually been taken forward and actioned in terms of NORAD modernization so far?

Hon. Anita Anand: There are a number of items on the agenda in the short term, one of which is over-the-horizon radar. We are working very closely with the United States through NORAD and bilaterally to ensure that over-the-horizon radar, which is so important to move our surveillance further and further north, is well in hand.

Mr. Pat Kelly: In earlier testimony we heard about a delay. Actually, perhaps you can walk us through the timing for when the balloon was shot down over Yukon. Can you tell us when it first entered North American airspace and then Canadian airspace?

Hon. Anita Anand: The suspect balloon was shot down at 3:42 p.m. on February 11. We had been tracking it for hours before it was shot down. Of course a decision needed to be made, and we needed to make sure we could get infrared sighting or a radar lock on the object in order to shoot it down.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I'm sorry, but I'm speaking about the one that was shot down over Yukon.

Hon. Anita Anand: That is the one that I was referring to in my response. It was on February 11, at 3:42 p.m.

• (1625)

Mr. Pat Kelly: Okay. In earlier testimony we were told that it was a question of daylight and being able to identify.... It was at 3 p.m.

Hon. Anita Anand: It was a question of daylight there. It's in Yukon, and the daylight hours are much different from what they are here.

Mr. Pat Kelly: The point, then, is to what extent darkness represents a gap in domain awareness.

Hon. Anita Anand: I'm going to ask my chief of the defence staff to—

Mr. Pat Kelly: We have him for the next hour, so if not—

The Chair: You're out of time. It is a good question.

The final question goes to Mr. Fisher. Go ahead for four minutes, please.

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

I want to thank you and your team, Minister, for being here.

Gentlemen, thank you for joining the minister here today.

Minister, I want to thank you for the level of transparency you've shown in this. You and your team of officials have offered numerous briefings on this topic, over and over again. Canadians have had every opportunity to hear everything that we needed to know as we learned each individual snippet.

At this committee we hear an awful lot that states like China and Russia are destabilizing the rules-based international order. With incidents like the one involving this surveillance balloon, we're seeing China act more aggressively and in a more open and adversarial manner towards western nations. Can you tell us a little about what this means for Canada and how we are adapting to meet the challenge that China poses? Also, what do we need to do going forward?

Hon. Anita Anand: With respect to the surveillance balloon, the United States took definitive action to bring down China's high-altitude surveillance balloon, one that violated Canadian and U.S. airspace and international law.

You're correct that it is extremely concerning, especially as we see China being more and more aggressive. This is a space that we are watching very closely. It underpins our view in the Indo-Pacific strategy, that we need to have eyes wide open on China and that we must challenge China where we need to.

Emboldened authoritarian regimes like China and Russia are displaying unacceptable aggression. What we need to do is to be cognizant of a more assertive authoritarian regime in each of these countries.

In particular, your question dealt with China. China is an increasingly disruptive global power. It increasingly disregards international rules and norms. As China disregards UN rulings in the South China Sea and militarizes that region, for example, it is also creating challenges to navigation and over-flight rights, and it has engaged in coercive diplomacy.

Canada will and must unapologetically defend its national interests, as we have set out to do in our Indo-Pacific strategy. As you may know, that Indo-Pacific strategy will be making several invest-

ments in defence over the next five years, which I can go into if you like.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I have a little over a minute. Thank you, Chair.

This incident has really publicly shone a light on NORAD's capability. I think Ms. O'Connell maybe touched on this a little, but can you walk us through how Canada and the U.S. work together through NORAD, and how our massive investments are going to improve our capabilities as a military?

Hon. Anita Anand: Approximately 1,000 Canadian Armed Forces members support NORAD in fulfilling its missions of aerospace warning, aerospace control and maritime warning for the defence of North America.

As a country, Canada also contributes fighter aircraft, command communications and control nodes, bases and forward-operating locations across the country. What we are doing in NORAD modernization is we are upgrading our contributions to NORAD. We're investing in new technological solutions, such as over-the-horizon radar, which will greatly enhance early warning and tracking of potential threats to North America. These investments are going to help protect Canadians from new and emerging aerospace threats in an era in which technological development is continuing to occur and in an era where command and control are absolutely essential.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

With that, I am going to suspend, but before I do I want to thank the minister for her appearance here today.

We appreciate your making yourself available, particularly on this day, which is going to include an interesting evening with the President of the European Union.

With that, we'll suspend to allow the minister to leave, and we'll reconvene in a moment.

• (1625) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1630)

The Chair: Okay, colleagues. Let's reconvene.

I'm assuming, General Eyre, that you have no opening statement, but correct me if I'm wrong.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: No, Mr. Chair. I have no opening statement. I'm happy to be back here.

I will say that this is General Molstad's first committee appearance in his career. General Molstad is the deputy commander of Canadian Joint Operations Command, and during the time of these incidents he was the acting commander of CJOC. He is also an F-18 pilot with more than 2,200 hours of flight time, so for any technical questions I will be leaning on him.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Welcome to the committee, General Molstad. We hope it's not too painful for you.

We're going to see how painful it might be by opening the floor to Mr. Bezan for six minutes.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General Molstad, welcome to committee. We'll probably get to see you many times going forward, and I'm sure that if you follow the lead of General Eyre, you'll be doing just fine and dandy. He has always been very forthright with us, and I always appreciate his candour.

It's good to see Deputy Minister Matthews and Mr. Quinn here again. They're regular features. We saw each other just yesterday at PROC. It's always good to have everyone here.

I'm still trying to connect the dots. When we look at the incident in Yukon and you talk about what the U.S. Department of Defense says versus what we heard here in committee from Major-General Prévost, we find out now that the shoot-down actually happened in the afternoon, at 3:30. I think everybody made the assumption the balloon had transited Alaska through the night, yet we had CF-18 fighter jets and CP-140 Aurora doing surveillance on the balloon and trying to make a determination on what the object was and what type of risk it posed.

We had CF-18s in the area. I'm just wondering if those were being refuelled in air, or whether they had done their flybys and then were put at our forward-operating location in Whitehorse, or whether they were up at Inuvik or had returned to Cold Lake. What's the reasoning the CF-18s didn't shoot down the aircraft after observing it in Canadian airspace? Can you tell me how many hours the balloon was in Canadian airspace before we made the decision that it had to be shot down?

• (1635)

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, there's a lot there, so it may take a few minutes to explain the details.

Let me say up front that the shoot-down occurred in exactly the way we practise, exactly the way we train. We train all the time in cross-border operations using other nations' assets—Canadian aircraft in U.S. airspace and U.S. aircraft in Canadian airspace—so this worked. The communication worked. My discussions with the commander of NORAD, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the briefings up to the Prime Minister were almost textbook.

That being said, there are some lessons that we are garnering from this, but going to the exact specifics of your question, I was informed the night before, February 3, that there was an object that had been picked up transiting Alaskan airspace. It was night. They had a radar lock. It was slow. There was no indication that it was a kinetic threat, but they wanted to confirm in daylight what it actually was. It just so happened that as it transited Alaskan airspace, it entered Canadian airspace right at daybreak. Two American F-22s were on station to be able to characterize that object as it entered Canadian airspace.

Mr. James Bezan: You're talking about the one that came into Yukon. Is that right?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Yes, that was the one that was shot down in the Yukon.

Mr. James Bezan: Is this number three?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Number three, that's correct.

Mr. Bill Matthews (Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): Chief, I believe you said "February 3", the night before...?

A voice: It's February 11.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Oh, that's correct. Yes. That was February 10.

Thank you, DM.

Mr. James Bezan: I'm confused enough as it is.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: I gave direction that it would be preferable for the Canadian F-18s to do the shoot-down, but that whoever had the first best shot should ensure that we had it.... It was under the command of the Canadian NORAD region, so a Canadian officer made the final decision. Our F-18s were very close—

Mr. James Bezan: Was that General Huddleston?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Yes, but I will say that they were delayed in departing Cold Lake because of freezing rain. I understand that the airstrip was a bit of skating rink, as happens in northern Alberta. In all operations, there is some friction. That's why they were somewhat delayed.

The shoot-down occurred, as you mentioned, at 15:41 hours, so that's 3:41 p.m. eastern time, Ottawa time.

Mr. James Bezan: It was mid-afternoon.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: It was mid-afternoon here in Ottawa but morning in Yukon.

Our F-18s were on station shortly afterward, so hopefully this clarifies that process.

Mr. James Bezan: Okay. It was shot down around 11:41 a.m. Yukon time, because it's on Pacific time.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Yes.

Mr. James Bezan: Okay, but still it was daylight, and the first ones on the scene.... Had the CP Auroras arrived to do an assessment, as was stated by the Department of Defense?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Yes.

Mr. James Bezan: They had come, I assume, out of Comox.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Yes.

Mr. James Bezan: As we talk about NORAD modernization and we talk about NORAD also having maritime domain awareness, and as the minister already talked about these buoys that were picked up in the Arctic, can you confirm, as was in the media, that the origin of the buoys that the Canadian Armed Forces picked up in our Arctic waters was the regime in Beijing?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Let me just say that we are seeing an increasingly assertive China in the Arctic. They have designs on the Arctic.

If you take a look at their icebreaker program or at their—

Mr. James Bezan: Do you suspect that's how they were delivered?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: As they are a near-Arctic nation and given the research they're doing and the research vessels that have transited through the Arctic, which we suspect are for dual use, yes, we are concerned about China and its designs and activities in the Arctic.

I'm not going to get into operational details, because doing that could compromise some sensitive operations, but we are very concerned.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

Mr. Sousa.

Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Generals.

Welcome, General Molstad.

There's been a lot of discussion today, a lot of talk about balloons over the last number of weeks, and we're still struggling to determine what they were and why. It begs the question: Given all the modernization and all the investments that have been made and the improvements and effectiveness of NORAD over the last 60 years in controlling and defending our airspace, why would China throw in a slow-moving balloon?

Of course you've been monitoring it and you've been assessing it. You saw it coming and you made a determined decision to bring it down at a certain point in time, because you wanted to see it. In your opinion, why would China do that this way?

• (1640)

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, the bottom line, from my perspective, is that we don't know. A surveillance balloon does perhaps provide some advantages in terms of its persistence over an area, but there are other capabilities—satellite capabilities as well—that could provide almost the same, if not better, collection capabilities, so we don't know.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Going forward, a lot of investments are being made in modernization. We have a number of Canadians up in the far north, indigenous especially.

With respect, General Molstad, you're a fighter pilot. These exercises.... I guess part of the question is with respect to Canadians and to the indigenous people specifically. How are we addressing that?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, our joint task force north, which is located in Yellowknife, does extensive community engagement with the various communities up there.

In this case in particular, on the shoot-down of the object in the Yukon, I'm going to turn it over to General Molstad to give you a rundown of the extensive engagement that's been done.

MGen Darcy Molstad: Mr. Chair, absolutely, joint task force north—and this is a characteristic of the regional joint task force structure we have within Canada—has great links with the local community, so they were engaged on a daily basis with a couple of first nations within the north, particularly the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun first nations, whose territories were as-

essed as being underneath the area of the shoot-down. Furthermore, they continue to engage with municipal and territorial authorities.

On February 21, we had an engagement, through our JTF north team, with the Arctic and northern policy framework and the all-partners working group as well, which included provincial, territorial and indigenous officials. We tried as much as possible to keep them informed throughout, and we also spoke with the Yukon representative of the Assembly of First Nations, so extensive consultations and communications occurred.

Mr. Charles Sousa: That's excellent.

There have been some insinuations that the capabilities of the Canadian Air Force were not there in order to bring down that balloon. Can you clarify that indeed that was not the case?

MGen Darcy Molstad: Mr. Chair, our CF-18s are more than capable of shooting down some of these high-altitude objects that we have detected. It was simply, as the chief of the defence staff stated, a matter of the "best sensor, best shooter" for the particular objective of the day.

Really, that is what we are driving toward with our allies and partners. In a conflict situation, we want the best sensor and the best shooter to be able to take action for best effect.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Gentlemen, when I look at the north and the strategic importance of the area and the sensitivities of China and Russia to that extent, I am wondering this. How effective are we at monitoring their airspace, relative to what's happening now to us?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, without getting into the classified realm, I would say that we have work to do. That speaks to the importance of the capability that the minister spoke about, the over-the-horizon radar, to provide us with that greater domain awareness.

We have gaps in the north in our radar coverage that we urgently have to address, and that is why this OTHR system is of such importance.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Is this Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy, as well, that we're talking about?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: No, this is—

Mr. Charles Sousa: Can you explain a bit about that: the Indo-Pacific strategy, how we are operating and the exercise that we are doing relative to that initiative?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Do you mean relative to the Arctic?

Mr. Charles Sousa: We're building friends and allies. We're deepening our defence relationships with other regions. They're all paying attention to what we're doing in NORAD and up here in the north, specifically around this area. Those in the Asia-Pacific region are also sensitive about what we're doing. Is that right?

• (1645)

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, our friends, partners and allies in the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific region are certainly interested in what is happening in the north, particularly those in the North Pacific, Japan and, to a certain extent, Korea.

I am happy to say we have excellent relations with those two countries. I spent a year plus serving in Korea, and I recently hosted my Japanese counterpart for a visit to Canada.

Japan's most recently released national security strategy and national defence strategy mentions Canada as a partner. In terms of those allies, those friends, those partners, it is very, very important that we maintain and further develop that relationship.

The Chair: I said to colleagues that I have been fairly restrictive on the motion that was in front of us in the first hour, just to stay on the topic, but we are starting to wander from the actual motion. I am happy to let that wandering carry on, especially given the quality of the witnesses who are in front of us. Having said that, it would greatly encourage the chair if you stayed somewhere close to the motion that is in front of us.

Madame Normandin, you have six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I'd like to go back to NORAD's current ability to detect larger objects, what I would call conventional objects, and its ability to detect smaller objects. Quite quickly, it was able to make the transition to detecting smaller objects. Obviously, it wasn't a matter of hardware or capability.

What has prevented it from doing both at the same time so far? Was it because it lacked human resources or financial resources?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: It's about the effort required. It takes a lot of effort to detect smaller, slower objects. I'm very happy that there's a new project, Pathfinder, that combines cloud computing and artificial intelligence to detect threats with lots of data.

My colleague has something to add.

MGen Darcy Molstad: I would add that we can see the small objects and the big ones at the same time. As the Chief of Staff said, it's a lot of work for people to analyze what they see on their screens or in their surveillance systems. Technology, such as artificial intelligence, which is advancing very rapidly, allows for the automatic detection of small and large objects at the same time.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much. That's exactly what I wanted to know about the effort involved.

That said, we know that China has been working hard since about 2018 to gain expertise in surveillance balloons. I would imagine that the folks at NORAD were aware of these efforts by China.

Couldn't these developments have been done earlier? Was it because it wasn't perceived as a threat that we didn't develop this ability to detect both large objects and smaller ones more quickly?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: You must remember that NORAD was set up to detect threats posed by aircraft and that aircraft are faster and

larger than balloons. We now have to change what we focus on, and NORAD is looking at its role regarding surveillance balloons.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

I'm going to change my focus for my next question, which is about NORAD's changing role to adapt to new technologies.

How up to date are we with all things "cyber"? Balloons and space surveillance, for example, raise cyber considerations, and everything should be integrated. But I feel that we are still looking at each of these aspects in isolation. I'd like you to update us on that.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: That is an excellent question. Indeed, the cyber threats to NORAD networks are real. So we need to protect them and make sure the information is accurate.

• (1650)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

When the first group of witnesses were here, someone mentioned—and you reiterated it—that we were not able to cover the entire territory, and that when we started to follow the various objects, we lost track of them in certain places.

As you try to track them, do you know, regarding objects of the size of the ones we're talking about, how much of the North American territory we are unable to cover?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: It's a challenge almost everywhere in the North. So the NORAD upgrade, especially with the new OTHR radar, is critical to our knowledge in this area.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Is it half or less than half of the territory that we are not able to cover for objects of this size? Can you give me an idea of that?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: It is more than half the territory.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I have already discussed this next topic with the minister, but I would like to know if there are any aspects of communication with the public that you think could have been improved, particularly on what was in the airspace. Perhaps there was a gap on the National Defence side.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: There is always room for improvement. That's why we have a process that allows us, after every incident or operation, to look at what was done, what happened and what needs to be improved.

In this case, in my opinion, we can improve our communications, but it must be said that this was the first time we faced such a situation. So we have a lot to learn.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Normandin. Your timing is amazing.

Ms. Mathysen, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

One of the questions that Mr. Sousa asked was, why these balloons? What's the purpose? With all the technology and advancements, why the balloons?

You have this slow-moving balloon. A later question was responded to by Major General Molstad that the CF-18s were more than capable of shooting this down, but I think you said, General Eyre, that there was freezing rain and there was a delay. It was the first best shot.

I refer back to what the minister said. I want clarification. When I was asking about the information that we share and the relationship in terms of NORAD, she said that when objects are in U.S. airspace, it's for them to determine how they deal with them. When objects are in Canadian airspace, it is for us to determine how we deal with them. However, we work with NORAD to take them down, as opposed to the U.S., which takes them down itself.

Am I understanding that correctly, or have I misunderstood?

If we are more than capable.... Yes, there's the first best shot, but if the Americans and all of that data.... We don't listen to it; we don't take their information; we don't allow their inter-agency processes and changes, if they're not being taken into account in terms of that NORAD relationship or if we are....

I want clarification on what was said in the previous panel in your calculation, because I ran out of time in my questions.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, I think these incidents have showcased the importance of NORAD for the defence of our continent.

The information that was going back and forth was just as we practised and just as we trained. There was the consultation going back and forth and the sharing of awareness as to where certain objects were. For us, it proved the criticality of NORAD in terms of understanding what was approaching our airspace.

In all cases, they went through American airspace first, so if we had not had those linkages—if we had not had those relationships and if we had not had this binational command—we could very easily have been surprised with something popping up in our airspace.

• (1655)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: If the first best shot had been that our Canadian air force could get to an American site first, would we have taken the first shot? Would that have happened?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: To be clear—and the minister alluded to this in her remarks—the engagement authority in Canada is the Prime Minister. The engagement authority in U.S. airspace is the President, regardless of whose aircraft are there. That's why we practise this. It's to be able to use another nation's aircraft in another country's airspace.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: That's not necessarily the question.

I'll move on.

You said “the first best shot”. Just out of curiosity, over Lake Huron, it was actually the second shot that hit. It wasn't the first best shot.

Could you explain that incident, why it was missed the first time and the considerations that were taken into account over Lake Huron?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, let me characterize that the first best shot direction I gave was related to who would take the shot. In terms of incident number four over Lake Huron and why it took two missiles...well, the first one missed.

I will ask General Molstad, from a fighter pilot perspective, if he'd like to add anything.

MGen Darcy Molstad: Mr. Chair, obviously I can't speculate on why it missed. There could be a multitude of reasons that I'm not privy to, based on what the pilot was seeing in the cockpit, the type of missile shot that he was taking and the quality of that missile shot.

That being said, missiles don't always hit their targets. That's why you always take a shot; you analyze, and then you take a shot again. However, clearly we're seeing that the infrared missiles that are being used have a high probability of success against these targets.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Mr. Chair, if I could jump in....

General Molstad, it's probably worth explaining that the first best shot is not just about whether you can successfully hit the target. It's about where the object is, where it would come down and what would happen if it missed.

MGen Darcy Molstad: Absolutely, Mr. Chair.

There are a number of factors that are considered. As the deputy minister mentioned, where it's located and whether there are any collateral risks on the ground.... Is it an area where you can engage with an air-to-air missile that is going to be safe if it doesn't hit the target?

All those factors are considered in the whole decision-making process.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I find it a bit concerning that we spend a great deal of money on very fancy equipment—maybe it's getting fancier as we procure more—and yet we missed the first time. That's concerning. It was a slow-moving balloon.

I'll move on. For this slow-moving balloon, it was stated that you weren't really sure why it was chosen. Now, is it possible that China would use this surveillance equipment because we would underestimate it and because there have been 336 similar aerial objects?

We discussed this in the last committee, and I think we actually discussed this with the minister earlier. There was an understanding that we didn't want to infer what China was watching and if they were watching our reaction to it and how they were monitoring that. They responded quite angrily when all four of those surveillance balloons were shot down, and there was an inference of some bad blood on our part, I guess you could say. Is that being considered as part of all this? Are we looking at why they chose those specific balloons?

The Chair: Unfortunately, Ms. Mathysen is out of time—way out of time—although I am sure that General Eyre and his colleagues would love to answer that speculative question.

With that, I am going to ask Mrs. Kramp-Neuman to go for the next five minutes.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you. I'll start with General Eyre.

On October 18, when you were here, I asked you if we should be experts in Arctic readiness. You indicated that readiness has four components: the people, the equipment, the training and the sustainment. We need to focus on all four of those to be able to conduct operations in the Arctic.

Here's my question. Is Canada currently holding up its end of the bargain with NORAD? We don't have enough people; we don't have enough modern equipment, and we have insufficient training. As a result, sustainability is in question, so where are we?

• (1700)

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, there's a lot to that question.

In terms of holding up our part of the bargain with NORAD, remember that the role of NORAD is airspace domain awareness and control. That's why NORAD modernization is so important, with the radar, with weapons systems for the fighters, with the tankers and with the infrastructure to be able to put our fighters further up in the north and have them pre-positioned. That group of projects is us holding up our end of the bargain.

Now, if we were to look at continental defence and Arctic security writ large, there are many other capabilities that we need to continue to develop to make sure that in the years and decades ahead we are in position.

That being said, we continue to exercise in the north and, as we speak, one of the subcomponents of exercise in Nunavut is ongoing. General Molstad can explain that in much more detail if you wish.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Perhaps General Molstad could also talk to us in his answer about how long it takes to train for new

fighter jets. Also, with regard to the Aussie F-18s, do we know how many are operational and how many F-18s were cannibalized for parts?

MGen Darcy Molstad: Obviously, as we are procuring the F-35s, the specifics of the course that will be required to train our pilots are going to be developed. We'll learn a lot from our allies and partners that have already trained their pilots on this platform, so we're not necessarily going to reinvent the wheel, but we don't expect it to take any longer than it takes to train a current CF-18 pilot. In fact, it'll probably take less, because the aircraft has so many more modern capabilities. Much of the training will be done in simulation, obviously, as there are no two-seat F-35s, so it's simulation and then you jump into the aircraft.

As for the number of F-18s from Australia that are being used, I can't give you the answer specifically right now, but we can take that question on notice and provide that to you.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Please do. Thank you.

Next, has the reconstitution affected our ability to react to threats in Canadian airspace? For example, did the shortage of personnel or equipment factor into the decision to allow the Americans the opportunity to shoot down the Lake Huron and Yukon objects over Canadian airspace?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: No, Mr. Chair, absolutely not. Our F-18s on standby remain on standby, and reconstitution has not affected our ability to continue to have those F-18s on alert.

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman: That's perfect.

At this point, I am going to pass it over to James Bezan.

Thank you.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks, Shelby, for sharing.

When we are doing aerospace domain awareness under NORAD, of course, there is constant communication between Canada and the United States through the embedded personnel in our operations right across North America. Maritime domain awareness now also falls under NORAD responsibility.

When the Chinese Communist Party's buoys were discovered in the Arctic, were they reported to NORAD as well?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, I do not have the answer for that.

Mr. James Bezan: We are definitely dealing with a more aggressive and provocative posture by the People's Liberation Army and the PRC. Have Canada and the United States made reports of these activities to other international organizations we belong to, in order to file complaints or provide military awareness briefings to other partners and allies?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, before I turn this over, perhaps, to the deputy minister or Mr. Quinn, I will say that we value our Five Eyes intelligence-sharing arrangement. We share intelligence back and forth all the time, and likewise with NATO. These relationships, from a defensive security perspective, are vital for Canada.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Mr. Chair, I will be very brief.

I echo the chief's comments, except to say that the relationship extends to the civilian side as well. We engage our civilian counterparts to talk about threat environments, various opportunities and what's changing. The dialogue is open, and we share the information we have with key allies.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

I'll note, colleagues, that we are wandering far away from the motion, but I concede that I opened that door. That's because we have such quality witnesses here. It's a privilege to ask them these questions, but it is also our responsibility.

Go ahead, Madam O'Connell, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you again, witnesses, for appearing.

In the earlier panel with the minister, I asked about the rationale, or the damage this capability could do. I asked whether there were specific commercial kinds of interruptions, or whether the balloons could actually interrupt military operations. I know we are limited on time, so I want to ask, additionally, for more information on that.

Why now? Was something triggered, in the sense that...? We saw media reporting that there were some.... The first balloon was quite large. We saw pictures on social media that regular people posted, asking, "What is this?" I can understand why that got attention, but it seemed that once some sensitivities were changed in terms of monitoring, that's when other objects were picked up.

Is that accurate? Can I get a little more detail in terms of the kinds of interruptions the technology could have impacted on military capabilities? I understand about commercial flights, but were there any impacts on military capabilities?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Mr. Chair, with respect to the first high-altitude balloon, we monitored it as it traversed Canadian airspace, in order to get an awareness of what infrastructure it went over. When it was first detected, intercepted and characterized by NORAD over Alaska, the assessment from the commander of NORAD was that it did not pose a kinetic threat to North America.

This is new territory for NORAD. You need to understand that NORAD was designed for fast-moving aircraft—for intercepting those. Slow-moving balloons that don't present a kinetic physical threat to North America, or more of a threat to our sovereignty and,

perhaps, intelligence gathering.... This is new space for us. Now, given that it was much slower, it gave us decision space to characterize it in more detail and deliberate about what to do with it. Those deliberations carried on as it crossed into American airspace. Ultimately, the President of the United States made the decision to take it down.

In terms of posing a military threat to us, as it transited Canadian airspace, no, it didn't. Could it have? Well, the exploitation of the debris will determine that.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Following up on—

Mr. Bill Matthews: Mr. Chair, I'd like to add one more quick comment.

Just to elaborate on the chief's comments about the speed of the balloon versus more traditional objects, it's easier, not with perfection, to forecast where it's going. From a monitoring perspective, it's not like a traditional airplane.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Even with some of the information that, again, was kind of determined at committee, and with subsequent reporting, the regular person watching and following this was kind of surprised, asking, "Why not just shoot it down the second you see it, or the second you're able to?"

It was that ability to understand. Like I said, I was kind of surprised to hear of the scaffolding. There were even photos to that effect, released by the U.S. That makes a lot of sense in terms of why you would be very precise on where you're going to shoot it down and where you would like to then collect that. That makes sense, and I'm also glad we've had some of that information shared with us.

This might be too hypothetical, but I'm going to ask it anyway, just because I'm curious. Some of it was also touched upon by my colleagues. With all the advanced technology, drones, the thing I would have been more worried about, especially when you can attach weapons to drones, etc.... It's kind of an interesting take to choose a balloon, of all the technology in the world.

Would it be a fair assumption, based on some of the commentary, that this might have been precisely why a balloon would be chosen, because we are watching for this new emerging technology, and something slow moving may not be picked up by regular radar, so to speak, or it could be confused with a weather balloon, which would be quite normal, or a regular research balloon?

Again, this might be hypothetical and trying to get into the mind of another nation, but are we now really thinking about how advancing technology also means a bit of reliance on old-school techniques to literally fly under the radar?

Sorry, if that's too long.

• (1710)

The Chair: The member has invited you into a highly speculative realm, and she has not given you any time to answer the question. In the event that you have an opportunity to go back into that highly speculative realm, you're more than welcome to do so.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Desilets, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Greetings to all of our guests.

General Eyre, you said that the percentage of coverage of Canadian territory is currently less than 50%. Am I mistaken?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Yes, that is my understanding of the situation.

Mr. Luc Desilets: I see.

What part is not currently covered and is most at risk?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: The Far North.

Mr. Luc Desilets: So, the Yukon and all the territories in the Far North. I see. Should we be worried in the short term?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Yes, that's why we're modernizing NORAD, including equipping it with OTHR radar. Of all the NORAD modernization projects, I think that one is the most important.

Mr. Luc Desilets: After the modernization you alluded to earlier, will 100% of the Canadian territory be covered?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: I don't know all the details of the project. Perhaps Mr. Quinn would have something to add.

Mr. Jonathan Quinn (Director General, Continental Defence Policy, Department of National Defence): Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

In this case, we're working closely with the United States to pull together a layered system of surveillance systems with over-the-horizon radar stationed in Canada and the U.S. I don't want to say with certainty that it would be 100% of our territory, but the combined effect would be a vast improvement over what we have today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: When can we expect this modernization to be completed?

[*English*]

Mr. Jonathan Quinn: As the minister said earlier today, it's a 20-year program of investments. We're moving as urgently as possible, as quickly as possible, sorting out details for the first highest-priority investments, as we speak, in close collaboration with the U.S.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Mathyssen, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: With my presumptive questions, Ms. O'Connell's presumptive questions and the long preamble.... I know you were about to answer, Mr. Matthews. Maybe we could go into what you were going to say to both, as they were related.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Certainly I'll start. If the chief wishes to add anything, he can do so.

I think it's important to draw a distinction between the first object that was shot down off the coast of the U.S. versus the others. The first one was bigger, but it was also confirmed that it came from China. On the other three, as the minister said, it's not yet known, or not known is a better way to say it.

When we think about the reaction of China, it was around the first one. Yes, absolutely there is lots of speculation on where the other three came from and what their purpose might be, but at this stage, it is speculation.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: The minister also said there's a process and the FBI is doing the analysis. Is there any sense of a timeline on when we're going to know that?

I know the Yukon retrieval was abandoned. The Lake Huron retrieval was also abandoned. Is there any chance of revisiting that, just so that we can be sure of what we're dealing with?

• (1715)

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: In terms of the exploitation of the first object, I'm not sure of the timelines. You are correct that it's being led by the FBI in the U.S. system.

In terms of restarting the search once the snow is gone, this is a Public Safety responsibility. If the decision is made to restart it, I expect we would be asked to support that, given our assets.

The Chair: Mrs. Gallant, you have five minutes.

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

Are there any procurement bottlenecks holding up NORAD modernization?

Mr. Bill Matthews: NORAD modernization was announced over the summer, so it's very much early days. No procurement updates—

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: There are no bottlenecks. Okay.

Given the overt aggression we've seen in the far north, is NORAD modernization being accelerated?

Mr. Bill Matthews: As was mentioned, there are multiple projects over 20 years. On some of the early ones, over-the-horizon radar is a key one to flag as an early project that we need to move out on quickly.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Is it being accelerated? Twenty years is a long time. We have incursions right now.

Mr. Bill Matthews: The projects themselves are being planned at an accelerated rate and, obviously, in collaboration with the U.S. I have mentioned over-the-horizon radar as one we want to move on as quickly as possible with our U.S. allies.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: That's less than 20 years.

General Eyre, did you have any direct communication with the Prime Minister?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Yes. In these cases, the Prime Minister is the engagement authority and I'm the one who briefs him on these incidents.

Specifically with the shoot-down in Yukon, I briefed him, gave him the engagement parameters and received his permission to go back to NORAD and give them the green light.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Does Canada currently possess the capacity to handle further airspace breaches independently?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: For clarification, is that independent from NORAD?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Yes.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: That's a question where we would have to look at the specifics of where it occurred and what the incursion was, so I cannot give a definitive answer.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Do we have the capacity to handle further airspace breaches independently?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Again, independently.... Where would it be occurring? What would the breach be? What would it consist of? Would we need advance warning coming from offshore?

There are many factors that would go into this question.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Why wasn't the Canadian public notified about these balloons until after they were shot down?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: As we went through the process of determining whether or not something would be shot down, time was moving fast. For that decision, as we look at the after-action review, we'll look at the communications aspect of this as well, to see what could be improved upon.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Earlier, it had already been detected and was being monitored. In a previous meeting, you told us that it had been assessed that there were no threats.

Even if there were no threats, why wasn't the Canadian public notified?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: What particular object are you talking about?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I mean number one and number four. The one over the Yukon that was shot down was number three. Pardon me.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: With regard to the first object, we need to realize that this was the first time that we had encountered an incident like this. The assessment was very important to get a better understanding, a better characterization, of what it was, what it was gathering and what threat it actually posed. Given that it was at 60,000 feet, above the flight patterns of commercial aircraft, it did

not pose a threat to the safety and security of commercial aircraft, so we had time to analyze it.

Mr. Bill Matthews: Mr. Chair, if I could add one thing.... The chief is quite right in terms of threat assessment, but also when you're dealing with objects and you're not exactly sure what they are or where they're from, you do not necessarily want your adversaries to know what you know.

Given that there was no threat, I would question the value of going public with information earlier.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay.

Given the radar gap that we have, General Eyre, would you consider airspace protection an area of consideration that Canada has shown it's not yet prepared to tackle?

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: We've had this challenge for a long time. NORAD modernization is going to plug that gap.

● (1720)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What does this mean for the growing risks in the Arctic? Gaps aren't plugged. We have aggressors in the area.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: That speaks to the necessity of ensuring that we have the capabilities and the readiness to deal with an increasingly dangerous world.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: What degree of resource investment would be required to ensure that Canada could adequately protect its citizens without the support of the United States? We're talking maritime, not just air.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: I think we need to take a look at our competitive advantage. We're going to be in an era of competition and confrontation, certainly for the rest of my career and probably for the rest of our lives.

For Canada, given our position in the world, it would be unrealistic for us to go it alone. Thus, our competitive advantage is the network of friends, partners and allies that we have around the world. Investing in those relationships, maintaining the engagements that we have, is so important for our ability to collectively deter imperialism, adventurism and expansionism by powers that don't respect the rules-based international order and would reform what the world looks like to be in their vision.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gallant.

The final question goes to Ms. Lambropoulos.

Ms. Emmanuela Lambropoulos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A lot of the questions have already been answered, so I'll ask something that I didn't get a chance to ask the minister in the last round.

Of course, NORAD investments and investments in infrastructure in the north mean that we're working a lot in areas that are controlled by first nations communities. I am wondering what is being planned in order to make sure these communities remain protected and have their rights respected throughout this process over the next 20 years, as we continue to build infrastructure in the area.

Mr. Bill Matthews: I have a couple of points. We've already detailed today how engagement works on a specific incident, but there is ongoing and regular engagement with indigenous peoples as we plan for NORAD modernization.

I would flag a couple of things. Indigenous people are actually quite involved in NORAD modernization already, including some contractual arrangements to maintain the existing North Warning System and contracts to support CFS Alert. As we go forward with future plans, we will continue to do that.

We are engaging, both from a procurement strategy perspective but also from an infrastructure perspective, to make sure they are well engaged along the way.

Jonathan, if you want to add anything, please do.

Mr. Jonathan Quinn: Thanks, Deputy.

The only thing I would add is that the specific infrastructure investments associated with the NORAD modernization plan are to be located at existing Canadian Armed Forces locations, the forward-operating locations that NORAD uses and also some existing fighter infrastructure in southern Canada.

Having said that, as we enhance those existing locations, build additional infrastructure and modernize our infrastructure, we absolutely intend to consult very closely with local first nations groups. Indeed, some of those early engagements for the northern NORAD infrastructure investments are already under way.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thanks.

The Chair: That brings our questioning to a close.

Before I bring the gavel down, I just want to thank General Eyre for his recent trip to Ukraine and give him an opportunity, if he wishes to take it, to comment on his trip to Ukraine and Poland and on the training that's going on by the Canadian Forces.

Gen Wayne D. Eyre: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As you mentioned, I was in Ukraine last Thursday and Friday, and in Poland on Saturday and Sunday, so I'm not sure which time zone I'm in. I will say the engagements that I had were illuminating.

I had the opportunity to sit down with my counterpart, the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, for a number of hours to talk about future plans, equipping and challenges that they are facing. We had detailed briefings from their general staff.

What Canada is doing is well appreciated. We need to maintain our resolve, because this is going to be a long, drawn-out conflict. For Ukraine to survive, it's going to be predicated on the west's collective resolve to continue to support Ukraine. The Ukrainians are deeply appreciative of Canada and what we've provided.

I went into Poland and I visited our troops. First of all, I met my Polish counterpart, who, again, was deeply appreciative of what Canada is doing to support Poland and the front line of freedom in eastern Europe. I visited our troops, who are training Ukrainians, and talked to them. The sense of motivation.... Young troops were telling me that this is the most meaningful thing they have done in their lives.

Mr. Chair, the Canadian Armed Forces are filled with great Canadians. They're people who want to make a difference. This is an organization that is making a difference in the world, and the world needs more of us.

The Ukrainians I talked to.... In Ukraine, I met a number of non-commissioned members who had undergone training under Operation Unifier. They were so thankful for what Canada has done.

We need to keep it up. We need to continue to support Ukraine in its battle for survival against brutal, naked aggression. It really drives home how much the world has changed.

Again, we're facing an era of confrontation for the rest of our lives. We're facing adversaries who respect only hard power. They view compromise as a weakness to be exploited, so the rules of the game have changed. If we want our national prosperity to continue, we have to be willing to defend our democracy, willing to defend the rules-based international order and willing to support friends like Ukraine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Voices: Hear, hear!

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

I think the round of applause from all sides of this chamber indicates that we are all behind you. We really appreciate your service.

With that, colleagues, before I bring this meeting to an end, I want to make sure, with my clerk, that we're going to present the travel budget on Friday. I'm hoping, colleagues, that we will, one way or another, have worked out our difficulties about travel.

With that, the meeting is adjourned. We'll see everybody on Friday.

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