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• (0815)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): It's 8:15, and I see that we have a quorum.

On behalf of the committee, I want to welcome our witnesses this morning. From the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, Jess Agustin is the former program manager. He will open, and I understand that Cristina Palabay, secretary general, Karapatan, will be joining us by video conference. They have the first five minutes. Then we have, also by video conference, from Project Ploughshares, Dr. Branka Marijan.

Welcome to everyone.

I call on Mr. Agustin for the opening five minutes between you and Ms. Palabay. Thank you.

Mr. Jess Agustin (Former Program Manager, International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of this committee, and thank you for giving us this opportunity to share some of our critical concerns, particularly on the human rights situation in the Philippines. After my introductory remarks, Cristina will follow me and share her concerns.

In recent years, Canada has shifted its approach toward strengthening economic security and trade ties with the Philippines through its Indo-Pacific strategy, which emphasizes commercial growth and regional security. However, this increased defence collaboration raises critical concerns. Given Canada's strong stance on human rights, it is concerning that human rights are not made a precondition for trade and security co-operation with the Philippines.

The ethical issues surrounding intensified defence co-operation with a country facing significant human rights abuses cannot be ignored. To maintain the integrity of its foreign policy, Canada must prioritize human rights alongside its economic security and trade interests. Canada should demand that the Philippine government address these ongoing violations. Anything less risks severely damaging Canada's global reputation. It is essential for Canada to carefully reassess its defence co-operation to ensure that its action aligns with the values it consistently advocates for on the world stage.

Cristina.

The Chair: You have about three minutes left, please.

Ms. Cristina Palabay (Secretary General, Karapatan, International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines): Good day, esteemed members of the national defence committee.

Last week, we were with the relatives of victims of human rights violations. Without graves to go to, families of the disappeared offered flowers for their loved ones. Since Marcos Sr., nearly 2,000 people have been documented to have been abducted by state forces, and have remained missing, while 14 of them have been rendered *desaparecidos* under Marcos Jr.

We cried with families of drug war victims, as well as hundreds of those extrajudicially killed in the government's counter-insurgency campaigns. In the past two years, 105 farmers and indigenous people have been killed in this counter-insurgency war that the Philippine armed forces wage, through combat means, to end the communist movement. These gatherings reflect a disturbing continuum of the dire situation of human rights and international humanitarian law in the Philippines.

We receive reports on the military operations and bombings in rural and indigenous communities. Arms, weapons and helicopters—most bought and acquired outside the Philippines—are used in such operations in hamlet communities in order to force them to evacuate, or used to destroy farms, homes, schools and livelihood.

We fear that with the SoVFA being negotiated between our countries, Canadian troops and assets may be directly involved in these counter-insurgency campaigns that cause these violations.

As Canada develops its security agreements with the Philippine government, we believe that it is critical to put human rights and IHL at the front and centre of the discussions. There must be coherence of policy and practice, as expounded on by your “Voices at Risk” guidelines, as well as human rights initiatives in the Summit for Democracy.

We sincerely believe that the SoVFA will encourage, if not worsen, the climate of impunity in the Philippines and place Canadian troops in the context of the counter-insurgency war, making Canada complicit in the violations committed in it.

We advocate for peaceful political and diplomatic solutions in Asia, particularly in Southeast Asia. We believe that we need to demilitarize, and not escalate military tensions and increase a military presence in the West Philippine Sea. We need to try our very best, so as not to worsen the already difficult rights landscape in the country.

Thank you.

- (0820)

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we have Dr. Marijan for five minutes, please.

Dr. Branka Marijan (Senior Researcher, Project Ploughshares): Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to speak on the defence policy update.

This update is a welcome step, particularly as it offers increased transparency into Canadian defence policy at a time of unparalleled global uncertainty. Canada, as a middle power with a strong multilateral tradition, is uniquely positioned to influence how we collectively address pressing security challenges.

Today, I'd like to highlight three key areas of concern and follow them with three recommendations.

The three key areas of concern are multiple and overlapping crises, climate change in the Arctic, and the transformative role of technology in warfare.

First, the global community, including Canada, is facing a multitude of overlapping crises. The global security environment is increasingly volatile and marked by great power competition and its ramifications. Conflicts such as those in Ukraine, the Middle East and Sudan demonstrate that threats are rarely contained within boundaries of states or one region. They transcend borders and are more complex than ever before. We face the risk of nuclear weapons use in multiple contexts, and we're witnessing the decay of international arms control frameworks. International law, including international humanitarian law, is routinely violated. At the same time, climate-related disasters are affecting every nation, and new technologies like artificial intelligence are amplifying existing threats and creating new ones.

We must recognize and acknowledge that none of these challenges can be resolved by military means alone. Rather, they require global dialogue and co-operation. Disappointingly, the concept of interdependence is not mentioned in this policy update, despite its relevance in addressing these crises effectively.

As calls for increased defence spending grow louder in Canada and around the world, there's a tendency to label Canada a military "laggard", yet as Ernie Regehr, co-founder of Project Ploughshares, points out, Canada ranks among the top 10% of the world's military spenders. Focusing on military spending as a percentage of GDP obscures this reality.

Furthermore, the interconnected crises we face require more than military solutions. They demand investment in non-military security measures such as peacebuilding and diplomacy, which remain significantly underfunded. While defence spending garners much

attention, our diplomatic resources and capabilities have not received adequate investment or priority.

Second, while the policy update identifies climate change and Arctic security as key concerns, it doesn't fully address the broader implications for global security and the well-being of Canadians. The Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence are being called upon more often to respond to climate-related disasters within Canada. With their capacity and resources, they are often the best equipped to handle such emergencies. However, CAF leadership has recently indicated that their ability to respond to natural disasters may be strained due to other commitments.

If the CAF lacks the capacity to respond to large-scale climate crises, which department will? We need a clear, detailed vision that outlines how the CAF and DND will adapt to climate-related challenges and support domestic disaster response. Moreover, an inter-agency protocol for disaster response is sorely needed, one that includes designated funding and resources for climate-related emergencies, ensuring that the CAF is not overstretched by this evolving role.

The Arctic's changing security dynamics, particularly with heightened interest from major powers, elevate the urgency of a clear Canadian strategy to address both climate and security implications.

Third, the policy update acknowledges the transformative impact of new technologies on warfare. However, terms like "AI" and "machine learning" appear with little substantive detail on how Canada plans to address technological threats or even leverage these advancements.

Canada's stand on interoperability with allies, particularly around the deployment of potentially autonomous weapons systems, requires more precise articulation, especially on commitments to human oversight. Greater transparency and strategic planning in this area are critical to ensure that Canada's technological advancements meet ethical and legal standards. It is critical that Canada prioritize the development of a comprehensive framework for AI and defence, detailing its commitment to human control and legal accountability, and play a leading role in global discussions on autonomous weapons systems.

In response to these concerns, I propose the following three recommendations: one, strengthen interdepartmental collaboration and diplomatic capacity; two, use a broader lens in security when examining climate change; and three, provide more guidance on the deployment of new technologies in defence.

Mr. Chair, those of us in arms control and disarmament bear witness to the humanitarian cost of conflict and see first-hand how forward-thinking policies can save lives. Civil society's perspective is not one of naive optimism but of informed realism, built on the grim realities we encounter and on the conviction that prevention is both possible and necessary.

Thank you for your attention in considering these points.

● (0825)

The Chair: Thank you to both witnesses, not only for your presentations but for the timeliness of your presentations.

With that, we'll go to the six-minute round.

Mr. Bezan, you have six minutes.

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

I thank all of our witnesses for joining us this morning.

Dr. Marijan, you were talking about the advancements in AI. I know that over at the ethics and privacy committee we did a study a couple of years ago on the problems in facial recognition technology and artificial intelligence, and the biases that are often built into the algorithms that form the basis of things like machine learning, especially racial and gender biases.

What types of guardrails should the Department of National Defence be looking at to ensure that the technology they develop and/or procure is not building in these prejudices?

Dr. Branka Marijan: Thank you so much for the question. I think it's an excellent one. It's certainly an issue we're aware of at the national level, and the Department of National Defence has been considering this issue.

I think there are an incredible number of guardrails to put into considering which systems are used and for what purposes. AI systems will hallucinate. They will make mistakes. They have built-in biases. The Department of National Defence needs to have a comprehensive strategy.

I was consulted on the AI strategy the Department of National Defence put out. However, it needs more substance to it. We need clarity on which systems, for which purposes and in which applications. Are we using them for back-end office things like recruiting individuals? Are we using them for targeting? There are a vast number of concerns, of course, as we go down the spectrum of use. There need to be clear policies and guidance for the Department of National Defence. These currently do not exist regarding which systems are permissible and which are not.

You pointed to the issue of bias. That is incredibly important for this committee to consider as you think about the application of new and emerging technologies. There will be biases built into the systems, and technological efforts to address them won't be sufficient. There needs to be clarity in who is making decisions and in who is held accountable for those decisions when these systems are applied.

Mr. James Bezan: I want to continue down that path with you, Doctor.

As you're aware, AUKUS—Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States—has pillar II, which is dedicated to doing more in the areas of quantum computing, machine learning, AI and cybersecurity.

Do you believe Canada should strive to be part of pillar II, in order to work with our Five Eyes partners to develop that technology and ensure we're best prepared to deal with future challenges from our adversaries?

● (0830)

Dr. Branka Marijan: AUKUS has a particular set of commitments, but I'm not sure Canada needs to join this agreement. Through partnership with the Five Eyes, and through other international commitments and summits, we're already engaging on these issues, particularly through the summits on responsible military AI that happened in the Netherlands and Korea. I'm not sure that joining this initiative is necessary for the further clarification that needs to happen on military applications of artificial intelligence and, indeed, other emerging technologies, such as quantum computing.

This is something that should be considered and debated at the political level. However, I think there are plenty of other opportunities to engage with allies and like-minded states on these issues.

Mr. James Bezan: If you look at the cybersecurity threats coming from the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, Iran and North Korea, do you think our adversaries have any ethical concerns about the development of this new technology and how it could impact Canadians?

Dr. Branka Marijan: If we position ourselves against those states, one of the challenges is that it becomes a race to the bottom, because there are a lot of things that are acceptable in the People's Republic of China, Russia and North Korea that I don't think we would ever want in a Canadian democracy. There are considerations for democracies about the ethical application of technologies.

The best approach we have is diplomacy. We have to work with those adversarial states. Unfortunately, our discussions at the international level have largely focused on like-minded states. We don't engage often enough with adversaries. There are some instances of bilateral discussions, particularly between the United States and China, on some of these emerging technologies. However, there is also an enormous race, whether it's for semiconductors or other aspects of emerging technology, which is hampering what's possible in the diplomatic domain.

In Canada, I am aware that there are, of course, concerns regarding these adversarial states. I don't want to undermine them or somehow downplay them. I think they are quite an issue for us to address. However, we don't want to go down the route of a race to the bottom and say, "If it's acceptable for China, it should be acceptable for us." I think we have better values than that.

Mr. James Bezan: In the 20 seconds that are left, would you be able to tell the committee what you think the best expertise is that Canada can bring to the table in terms of advancing new technologies in the interest of national security?

Dr. Branka Marijan: We have enormous technical talent. We have enormous legal and policy expertise. We just don't have the resources or capacity at Global Affairs or even the Department of National Defence. We need to dedicate more resources to these issues and files, since they will become more prominent on the international stage. Indeed, we're already seeing their impacts on battlefields.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bezan.

Ms. Lapointe, you have six minutes.

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Agustin, Canada's new defence policy emphasizes the importance of protecting human rights and promoting global security. Given the human rights concerns you've raised and the comments that you made in your opening statement, where you said that Canada needs to ensure that this new policy aligns with the values it states it has on the world stage, how do you see Canada balancing its defence commitments with a strong commitment to human rights? What specific actions would you suggest to ensure Canada's defence policy supports human rights globally?

Mr. Jess Agustin: There are a number of actions and possibilities.

One is, knowing that the status of visiting forces agreement is being negotiated, to ensure that human rights are a precondition for any agreement to be finalized.

Second, it's important that we support grassroots organizations, like Karapatan, in documenting human rights abuses because the world is actually not aware that there is a war going on in the Philippines. Bombings are taking place. Extrajudicial killings are happening. Journalists are being suppressed. Most recently, a group that is promoting a peace negotiation or asking the government to resume the peace agreement that was negotiated years ago was arrested.

I think it's imperative for Canada that in any of these negotiations with the military or with the Philippine government human rights are part of the deal.

• (0835)

Ms. Viviane Lapointe: Are there specific safeguards you would recommend to ensure that defence initiatives don't inadvertently contribute to the risks faced by activists, journalists and human rights defenders?

Mr. Jess Agustin: Are you asking whether there are cases where Canada was directly involved?

Ms. Viviane Lapointe: Are there things that we should be aware of so we won't contribute to the plight of these activists and defenders?

Mr. Jess Agustin: Yes, I think the visiting forces agreement that is being negotiated, which will put Canada's soldiers on the ground, is already a danger sign that Canada will be involved in the counter-insurgency campaign of the government.

The whole-nation approach of the government is the driving cause of human rights violation in the Philippines. They have the task force to end local communism. That's very dangerous, because a lot of us, including people here in Canada, are being red-tagged just because we're promoting peace and because we're promoting human rights. The moment you say that, the government and the military tell you that you are part of this insurgency.

I think it's important that Canada doesn't get embroiled in those kinds of dynamics that are happening in the Philippines. By directly supporting a military with a history of human rights violations and abuses for decades, I think Canada is becoming directly complicit in what is happening now in the Philippines.

People are saying that there is a big improvement between Duterte's government and the Marcos government. It is not true. In fact, the drug war continues. It's now the biggest topic in the senate of the Philippines, but the killing continues—particularly extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrests and so on.

Ms. Viviane Lapointe: Thank you.

Dr. Marijan, given the increasing militarization of the Arctic by other powers, particularly Russia, how do you assess Canada's current capacity to defend its Arctic region? How can this policy help to address those emerging security challenges in the north?

The Chair: You have about a minute.

Dr. Branka Marijan: Thank you so much for that question.

I think a great deal of co-operation still happens in the Arctic. There are aspects of Arctic security that are not necessarily militarized yet, but I do think we see this trend from other great powers as well. There are rights of passage through that area that I think are of concern to Canada, and we certainly need to be prepared for that reality. Again, with climate change, I think there will be greater issues in terms of the capacity and ability to really patrol and control that region.

I do think there's still a lot that we need to consider in terms of non-security aspects of this issue. There will be a need for greater co-operation among Canada and these more adversarial states, particularly Russia. I think we are very much concerned about this. I think the defence policy update is gearing toward sort of a more military response. I don't see, however, the same level of thinking about non-military responses and the communities in that region, and indeed the indigenous communities in that region and their knowledge and their contributions. I think we risk overly militarizing this region at the cost of effective responses that will be necessary because of climate change.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, welcome to the committee.

You have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Agustin, you mentioned something very interesting, that Canada should put international human rights at the centre of all its policies.

We can all agree that Canada is neither a trade power nor a military power. This is coming from a Quebec sovereignist. However, Canada has a history of defending human rights.

Now, we've talked about Canada's direct or indirect involvement in human rights violations in the Philippines. There are allegations against Canadian mining companies operating on Philippine soil that are allegedly violating human rights.

Are you aware of those allegations? I'd like the committee to hear your comments on that.

• (0840)

[*English*]

Mr. Jess Agustin: Are we aware of human rights violations that...?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm talking about allegations against Canadian mining companies operating in the Philippines.

[*English*]

Mr. Jess Agustin: Well, there is indeed a direct connection between the displacement of indigenous people and the mining operation. It's already well documented that Canadian mining is involved in human rights violations. Particularly the indigenous people are being affected, but not only that; those who are helping them, the environmentalists opposing this, are also being red-tagged and not only arrested, but murdered. If you look at the map in the Philippines and the data on where the human rights violations are happening, you see the direct correlation where the mining operation is happening and where arrests and killings and even massacres are happening.

There is definitely a big connection.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If I understand what you're telling me, Mr. Agustin, not only is Canada supporting a government that is committing human rights abuses, but it's also unable to control its own mining companies that operate on Philippine soil and are violating human rights. It's quite ironic and it sends a mixed message.

You also talked about people from the Philippines who are facing transnational repression by the Philippine government abroad. Once again, isn't there a huge irony there?

In most forums, Canada says that China interfered in our electoral system, among other things, and that it committed cyber-attacks against Canada. Canada denounces the fact that China is en-

gaging in transnational repression, but at the same time, it supports a government that is acting exactly the same way as Beijing.

Don't you think that this is a huge contradiction, a huge irony when it comes to Canada's position?

[*English*]

Mr. Jess Agustin: Well, the good thing about Canada is that it has this human rights policy in place. There is "Voices at Risk", which we should be following. Part of our recommendation is that Canada should reassess its involvement in the Philippines, particularly related to the military, and use the existing policy that's already in place. "Voices at Risk" is a very good policy that would protect human rights defenders, and human rights defenders include those who are concerned about the mining operations in the Philippines.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

Ms. Marijan, you said that we have to use diplomacy to achieve our ends. In fact, you talked a lot about diplomacy.

How can we honestly think that a diplomatic policy could be established with China, which has clearly interfered in Canadian elections and carried out cyber-attacks against Canada? How can we consider it possible to use diplomacy to advance our positions in South Asia?

I don't see how we could convince Beijing through diplomacy. That is what I'm wondering today.

[*English*]

Dr. Branka Marijan: Thank you.

I think it's fair to assess China's policies, movements in these areas, as being of concern. I think the challenge for Canada and other middle powers is to figure out a way to work diplomatically, because there are no military solutions to those issues.

One area where Canada could perhaps spend more diplomatic heft is working with other middle powers to consider ways to engage China when we're concerned and to work with the United States. I know there's a new administration coming in. There will be challenges for engagement, but there are also opportunities.

I don't know what the other solution would be if we don't engage diplomatically. As you noted, we're not a military power. We're not going to be able to make much of a change. We work best when we work with allies and through alliances. That's the reality that we have to face here.

That does not mean that we're not concerned and that we shouldn't be looking at our own national security and defence. Indeed, we are. We're quite good at cybersecurity in particular and staying on top of the threat that is coming from the People's Republic of China; however, diplomacy is not easy. We have to figure out ways we can work with our allies to best respond to China's movements and to consider in what ways we could do that, whether it's multilaterally or bilaterally, with allies.

I think there are opportunities.

• (0845)

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it there. Thank you very much.

Ms. Mathysen, you have six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you to the witnesses for appearing today.

Mr. Agustin and Ms. Palabay, you mentioned Canada's potential agreements, like the visiting forces agreement, several times. Can you expand on how that worsens the culture of impunity that currently exists in the Philippines?

In addition, you mentioned both the increasing trade of weapons and the drug trade. What are the countries that are mainly involved in that, and how can Canada better help in those instances?

Mr. Jess Agustin: Could we ask Cristina?

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Yes, of course.

Go ahead, Ms. Palabay.

Ms. Cristina Palabay: Thank you.

We have a history of abuses committed through visiting forces agreements by another country. There are rapes and other forms of violence. The question is about jurisdiction most of the time. At the same time, this brings to the fore the concerns about the SoVFA between our two countries and its implications. When Canada's soldiers on the ground have a presence here, then it may play into how the Philippine armed forces would use your presence here in conducting counter-insurgency operations.

Second is how it is perceived. In the Philippines, there was a poll in the middle of this year on the role of the U.S. in the tensions with China. There's very little support. I think only 8% of those polled are supportive of such actions. I think it comes from that very history of abuses by foreign troops that come into the country and are perceived to have conducted themselves in a way that is not in alignment with international human rights law and IHL.

Go ahead, Jess.

Mr. Jess Agustin: I think you answered the question.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Right, and then in terms of arms trade and drug trade, who are the main...?

Mr. Jess Agustin: In terms of military hardware, the U.S. is the number one supporter. They just gave \$500 million to the Philippines in terms of arms, and they have also increased their military presence. That started from five locations, bases, to about nine now. That includes a lot of military equipment, training, logistical support, operations and so on.

• (0850)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Dr. Marijan, I'll switch over to you.

You discussed the issues in terms of the focus on 2% defence spending as obscuring the issue. I know that Project Ploughshares has often talked about the five Ds of defence, diplomacy, development, disarmament and democracy. Can you talk further about that obscurity on that 2% and our seeming focus on what others have often called problematic?

Dr. Branka Marijan: Absolutely. I think the 2% is really an arbitrary number. It's not based on evidence. It's not evidence-based policy-making. It does not tell us the specifics of each context of national security, the defence context for each state. I think we need to be much more clear about what we're demanding from the CAF and DND and why this increase in defence spending is necessary and what division there is.

There's a bit of a one-size-fits-all approach with this number. We've said in the past that this is such a nice round number for political reasons, but it doesn't really speak to the actuality of defence needs. I think we need to stop looking at this number as an answer, when a really deep study is needed on what's actually needed for Canadian defence and how we contribute globally.

I think it also undermines how much Canada contributes in other ways that are not purely military, like when we work with NATO allies in other contexts and how much we contribute towards development and diplomacy.

I think a focus on that number alone has obscured the reality of Canada's contributions on many other levels as well.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I guess, ultimately, it's this idea that we have to move away from the idea that defence is first and humanitarianism or that aid is second, and that's how we do it, how we spend our money, as opposed to the other way around.

Dr. Branka Marijan: Yes. I think we have really underinvested in diplomacy and are not aware of the costs of that even for defence. I think we are seeing more and more conflicts that need to be resolved with diplomatic solutions, but if we don't have the capacity to do that, then we are not contributing to global peace and security, and we're certainly not contributing to working with our allies. They go hand in hand. We cannot have humanitarianism come second and investment into diplomacy and development and peace-building come second, because those are really the root causes of these conflicts. Prevention is always better than having to deal with the full fallout, which I will say—

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're going to have to leave it there.

Mr. Allison, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and to our witnesses, thank you for being here today.

Dr. Marijan, we've been talking about AI, and you've talked about AI. Certainly, as we look at the DPU and issues around defence and security challenges, we know that new and disruptive technology is going to be an issue as we move forward. That's one of the things that have been highlighted.

Minister Blair made an announcement last week on AI. Can you give us your thoughts on how our government's doing in order to harness the power of AI and whether or not we're reaching our potential in the defence sector?

Dr. Branka Marijan: Yes, absolutely.

There's been a lot of discussion and movement on understanding the implications of artificial intelligence for the military and the Department of National Defence. However, much more needs to be done. I think we are one of the first countries to have an AI strategy, but the strategy is more of a guidance or vision document. It's not really telling us what the policies are. I think the hard work that needs to come now is really developing those policies.

We have the AI talent, as I said earlier, and we have the legal and technical expertise. I think we can be a leader in this sphere. We've generally been a leader in broader discussions on AI, but on military discussions of AI, again, because of capacity issues at both GAC and DND, we have not had the role I think we could be playing, because there is simply an issue of capacity. We need to address that.

It's both to leverage AI for defence, but also to consider the ethical and legal implications that our other allies are concerned with. Even in UN discussions, we're not at the forefront highlighting ethical and legal concerns, simply because we do not seem to have political vision on how we wish to proceed with the technology. Political vision has to come on this file. It's not a matter of a lack of legal or technical expertise.

● (0855)

Mr. Dean Allison: Thank you.

As I continue on the thought of AI, to your knowledge, do you think the government is doing enough to try to integrate this AI technology? How would you compare us when we're looking at our allies? Is there anything that you understand to be...or that you could compare us to in terms of where we are? You mentioned we have the capability and the ability, but how do we fare against our neighbours south of the border?

Dr. Branka Marijan: I think if we compare it to the United States, the United States is an absolute leader in defence applications of AI. I don't think we have the budget or the capacity to compare ourselves to the United States, because they far outpace every other nation.

However, if we compare ourselves to similar states, I would say that we're generally in the range. We haven't fallen behind. I think that's one of the misperceptions. We have a lot of investment into AI research, both for civilian and for military purposes. A lot of this technology is dual-use, so it's coming from the civilian sector into the military sector. I think later witnesses will talk about procurement and what that means. That's not an issue that I focus on, but I

will tell you that I don't think we have fallen behind. I think we're quite concerned and at the forefront of thinking about the integration of these systems.

Again, what we're seeing, though, is that there are countries like the Netherlands and the Republic of Korea that are leading in these international discussions. I think we could model ourselves on them a bit more to see how we can contribute more, because that's where the lag really is. It's not on the technical side; it's more on the regulatory side.

Mr. Dean Allison: Thank you.

I have one last question around the same issue.

You talked about some of our allies and the U.S. I have a minute left. I would like to get your thoughts on how we would maybe compare to places like China and Russia. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Dr. Branka Marijan: Yes, I think it's much more interdependent than people think. There's a perception that China and Russia can outpace the U.S. and its allies; that's not accurate. The United States still controls a lot of the hardware and the technical know-how in terms of the most advanced AI systems. I think what we see when we see Russia and China deploying certain systems is that they're still dependent on western components and on western technologies, so that relationship is much more interdependent than we are often led to believe. That means there are critical minerals that come from China and Russia for some of this technological development that we need to be aware of.

I think focusing on interdependence would be much more helpful than on a race between the great powers.

Mr. Dean Allison: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allison.

Mr. Powlowski, you have five minutes.

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Agustin, *mabuhay*.

I was interested in what you had to say about human rights abuses in the Philippines. Certainly, under Duterte, the "shoot first, ask questions later" policy was rampant, which he seemed proud of.

My wife is from Davao, so I follow things. I thought things had improved quite a bit under Marcos. You certainly don't hear nearly as much about killings related to drug abuse. In the killings in the drug war, as you know, they weren't just going after drug traffickers, but it was people who used drugs, or even people who were suspected of using drugs, or people who were accused of using drugs who were routinely killed.

You are saying that things haven't improved under Marcos. Or have they improved somewhat? How does it compare now under Marcos as opposed to Duterte?

Mr. Jess Agustin: Cristina could also answer that.

Definitely, the drug war and the killings kind of eased a bit, but they still continue, and we have all the data to prove that. The extrajudicial killings, the arbitrary arrests and the targeting of journalists continue, and there has been no real marked improvement.

The focus now.... The senate is unravelling. The brutality of the drug war.... The problem is that it overshadows the current situation in the Philippines, where Marcos Jr., the administration, continues with human rights violations under this whole national security approach. This approach targets people who oppose, for example, the question of mining and the way they look at the economy of the country, which is not improving. Anyone who opposes that and criticizes the government gets arrested.

• (0900)

Mr. Marcus Powlowski: You also talked about people being killed in the counter-insurgency movement. Is that against the NPA, the New People's Army? Is that Abu Sayyaf, or is it a combination?

You also talked about what would seemingly be politically motivated killings because people opposed the government. Certainly, drug-related killings were prominent under Duterte. Has the nature of the human rights abuses shifted so that it's not so much related to drugs now? Is it more related to political suppression and counter-insurgency? How has it changed under Marcos?

Mr. Jess Agustin: Cristina.

Ms. Cristina Palabay: I think, qualitatively, there has been a shift in terms of, one, the bodies in the drug war; there are definitely not as many as before. There's no rhetoric, just like the previous administration, but indeed, the drug war continues because the policies have not been rescinded, and the memorandum circulars of the police have not been rescinded, so we think that's the reason the killings continue.

In the counter-insurgency campaigns, we think there was no let-up from Duterte to Marcos, precisely because the approach remains the same. The blueprint and the national security policy remain the same. The funds and the prioritization of resources have been much more under the current administration. There are what are called confidential and intelligence funds, and these funds are all across government agencies' budgets, including the office of the president. That is also one of the things being investigated now in our congress—the use of such funds in committing human rights abuses.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Powlowski.

[Translation]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We talked about human rights, but we also talked about trade between Canada and the Philippines. We're facing somewhat of a

dilemma: Should we continue to trade with a country where there are human rights violations? However, if we stop trading with that country, we stop creating wealth there. We think that, in the long term, if we create wealth, more liberal policies will probably be put in place by a government. Some observers will say that.

How important is it to put human rights at the centre of our defence policies? At what point do we do that when we're trading with those same countries?

[English]

Mr. Jess Agustin: We're not asking Canada to stop trading with the Philippines; in fact, we encourage Canada. However, there have to be human rights guidelines, and it also cannot militarize its relationship.

We're so proud of Canada. I work for a humanitarian organization. We are very impressed with Canada's DART program on disaster response during super typhoon Haiyan. When Marcos was overthrown, we actually encouraged Canada to start supporting the Philippines to rehabilitate its bankrupt economy. Canada is also well known for its contribution to development aid and to promoting small businesses and so on.

The Indo-Pacific strategy created a tension where support to the military—and the excuse is China—becomes the predominant concern in dealing with the Philippines.

When you look at our Canadian embassy talking about how great the government is and emphasizing the trade relationship without even mentioning—as Cristina was saying—the human rights violations that are continuing.... Corruption continues. You cannot have trade when the institution, the structure of the country, remains the same all the way from the time when the father of Marcos—

• (0905)

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're going to have to leave it there.

This has been a pretty wide-ranging discussion, and I've sat here and let it range. We are studying the defence policy update, so if you could, by some means or another, tie it back into Canada's defence policy update—the Indo-Pacific, the presence of our troops on Philippine soil and the interaction of our military relationships—that would be helpful. It's not as if what's being talked about isn't critical in the overall bigger policy, but this is a subset of a policy—namely, the defence policy update.

Ms. McPherson, welcome to the committee. You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I note that you gave that warning before I spoke, which I think makes it seem like there may be a rationale for that.

It's wonderful to have you here today. Thank you very much for being here.

We were talking about human rights, and I know that's perhaps not something that has to do with defence, but it is an issue for me. I've worked with Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe a lot on Canadian mining companies and the impacts they have had on human rights in the Philippines and in other areas. However, let's keep this to defence.

Could you talk a little bit about how Canada could assist in terms of de-escalating the conflict in the South China Sea, please?

Mr. Jess Agustin: I think it's important that the whole South China Sea be demilitarized. I think the presence of the U.S. and other allies in the South China Sea only escalates the tension. It provokes China, and that puts the Philippines in a situation where it has to defend itself.

What we are discussing with our partners is to let the ASEAN countries deal with the problem of China and not other countries, like the U.S. If you look at the U.S. involvement in the Chinese intervention, you will see that the U.S. presence is all over the Philippines.

Ms. Heather McPherson: That's for historical reasons, and for many reasons.

Can you comment very quickly on what change you expect, knowing the election results in the U.S.?

Mr. Jess Agustin: I think it will remain the same, but most likely Canada will be asked to pay more, given the current administration. Is that what Canada wants? No.

With regard to paying more, I think that Canada should put more investment in diplomacy, in peacebuilding, in humanitarian...with all the typhoons that are happening. Canada should do more.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

I couldn't agree with you more.

The Chair: Mr. Stewart, go ahead for five minutes, please.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Dr. Marijan, I want to ask you about, first, applications of technology in our Arctic. With the defence policy update, do you think the government is providing adequate resources, from a technology standpoint, to our Canadian Rangers in the north, who are up there as our first line of defence?

Dr. Branka Marijan: Yes, I think there's a certain awareness about the need to provide technology. There are environmental conditions that are still a challenge for some of the technologies we're discussing, or for some of those that are still emerging. There's a need to further study how best to do it and what technology to provide.

It's something that should be further examined, and I think that's been pointed out in the defence policy itself. There's a whole lot of need to further look and understand. There are certainly technologies that will be very helpful for search and rescue, as well, so I think—

• (0910)

Mr. Don Stewart: I'm thinking specifically of the Canadian Rangers and whether you see any evidence of providing those personnel with better technology or more technology.

Dr. Branka Marijan: I think we're still, probably, in the early days of that, and—

Mr. Don Stewart: I'm sorry. We are time-limited here.

You mentioned earlier that Canada is in the top 10% of military spending. Is that globally, or within NATO? Where is that top 10%?

Dr. Branka Marijan: It's globally.

Mr. Don Stewart: Okay.

How big is the gap between the top of that 10% and the bottom of that 10%?

Dr. Branka Marijan: There is a significant gap. I think we tend to compare ourselves with the United States. However, if you look at the U.S. budget, it still outpaces any other collection of states.

Mr. Don Stewart: Of course. However, let's compare ourselves with other middle powers in NATO. Earlier, you talked about our need to do more work with them to advance diplomacy. How do we compare with some of those other countries? Where are we in that 10%? Are we at the bottom of that 10%, or in the middle of it?

Dr. Branka Marijan: We are squarely in the middle on a lot of these things.

We tend to think of ourselves as being much less significant, militarily, than we actually are compared with other middle powers. Of course, there has been a spending spree by other middle powers, some of it due to geographic reasons and recent developments.

I don't think we're a laggard, by any means.

Mr. Don Stewart: If we look at our defence spending and don't measure up on GDP... Maybe one factor is GDP. Other ones might be things like land size or the number of resources we're trying to protect. We may arrive at a number much bigger than 2% if we did that exercise.

Can you comment on that?

Dr. Branka Marijan: I can certainly see that being one perspective. The challenge we have is a vast territory that is underpopulated. It's a unique challenge.

We also, I think, have to consider the broader defence context. Geography is destiny, in many ways. We have a strong ally to the south, still, despite whatever administration comes in. We tend to overplay some of our defence concerns. We never work alone. We're always working with allies. I think the other factor that should be put in there, as well, is collaborating and working with allies.

Mr. Don Stewart: Thank you.

I will take another change of direction here.

You mentioned earlier that we should be co-operating with Russia. Where can we co-operate with Russia?

Dr. Branka Marijan: There are multilateral institutions. I'm not saying we co-operate with Russia. We should have a very realistic diplomatic engagement—again, working with our allies—because that relationship is quite fractured. We have to engage with these adversaries. We don't live in a world where we cannot engage with them.

I can understand how, for many communities in Canada, that's not something that's very palpable, but I think the reality of diplomacy is precisely that: We need to talk with adversaries, not just like-minded states.

Mr. Don Stewart: When we think about some of the excellent technology companies we have in Canada.... We have quantum computing, for example. Are we using those civilian technological advantages to help prepare ourselves for the military application of those technologies so that we can punch above our weight?

Dr. Branka Marijan: One challenge we have is that we're not using those companies to the extent we should be for our economic gain. When we look at military applications, there is a gap in terms of understanding how these technologies could be applied, and also how they could be misused. There's an enormous opportunity here, if there is political will to understand these economic advantages.

We have an enormous intellectual property issue, however. We're losing a lot of intellectual property, including to our allies. We have a lot more work that needs to be done on that front.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stewart.

The final five minutes go to Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you very much to all our witnesses this morning.

I'll start my questioning with Ms. Marijan.

As we are talking within this committee, I would like to hear a little bit more about the research projects that you and Project Ploughshares are currently undertaking. How do they relate to the Canada defence policy update?

• (0915)

Dr. Branka Marijan: We have one broad project on understanding climate impacts and understanding how Canada can best respond to coming climate emergencies and what the role or the vision is for the CAF in responding to these emergencies.

My own project is examining responsible military AI regulation, where Canada fits in the broader international framework and how we're contributing to those discussions, including the U.S.-led political declaration on responsible military use of AI and autonomy. Canada is co-chairing a working group there on accountability, so we're examining issues of accountability and transparency in military applications of artificial intelligence.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you.

On that note, what would you recommend to this committee from your current research?

Dr. Branka Marijan: I think that Canada could play a much more significant role in the discussions on autonomous weapons at

the international level. We've sat on the sidelines of that discussion. We haven't really contributed much. Again, I think there's an issue of resources and capacity there, at both Global Affairs and DND. I think we could play a much more significant role in the broader discussion on responsible military AI and autonomy that is happening as part of these summits. Canada could certainly be a leader in that sphere working with our allies. That discussion is a multi-stakeholder discussion, so it brings together academics and industry, and it also has a diplomatic component to it.

I think that being more engaged in these two discussions at the international level would benefit us as we consider how best to craft our defence policy.

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

I know that you mentioned the war. It's challenging, I think, for all of us to consider that aspect, the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine. You did mention Russia and China. I had the pleasure of sitting on the Canada-China committee. It is, for me, I have to say, a little bit difficult to think that.... Wanting to engage with those adversaries is counterintuitive to what we're trying to do, which is for Ukraine to win.

Can you share with us a little bit more in depth about how that works in the big spectrum? Like you said, it's a very sensitive subject here in Canada.

Dr. Branka Marijan: I really empathize with the Ukrainian community and what Ukraine is going through. One thing we have said from the outset of this conflict is that there is going to be some sort of diplomatic solution. Military victory, at the moment at least, seems elusive. We're seeing Ukrainian lives being lost, and Ukraine is suffering a great deal. I think there is going to be a push, certainly with the new U.S. administration, toward some sort of diplomatic agreement.

Canada needs to consider all our options and consider how that will move forward. Again, as you said, this is a politically sensitive issue. No one wants to undermine Ukraine's need to defend itself. We have to, though, consider what things might happen, including with our ally to the south and what their position on this conflict will be. We have to prepare for that. We don't live in a world of ideals; we have to take the world as it is.

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

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That brings our questioning to a close.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank all three of you for your patience and for getting up early in the morning and being ready to talk. It is very helpful to our study on the defence policy update.

With that, I'll suspend, and we'll get our new panel in as quickly as we can.

• (0920) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1920)

The Chair: We're ready to resume.

We have, as our second panel, two witnesses who are quite familiar with this committee. We appreciate their appearance. They need no introduction.

With that, I will first call upon Dr. Lagassé, associate professor at Carleton, and then we have a person who needs absolutely no introduction, retired general Andy Leslie, for the second five minutes.

Sir, you have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Philippe Lagassé (Associate Professor, Carleton University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with the committee about the defence policy update.

I will be focusing my comments on three commitments that have taken place since “Our North, Strong and Free: A Renewed Vision for Canada's Defence” was released in April 2024. This committee can closely follow these three commitments and make sure that the executive, regardless of which party is in power, follows through on them.

[*English*]

These three commitments are the following: a military off-the-shelf procurement strategy for the Canadian patrol submarine project, defence digitization, and reaching the goal of 2% of GDP for defence spending by 2032.

This past summer, the government announced that Canada would be moving ahead with the acquisition of new submarines. A request for information was then released to potential bidders. The RFI indicates that the government is aiming to procure a military off-the-shelf design with minimal modifications. The current strategy is squarely focused on acquiring the boats, and then managing the integration of specialized weapons systems or the onboarding of new systems after they are delivered. Although this strategy comes with notable risks around future integration and adaptation costs, it is the right approach. The fact is that having imperfect boats is better than having no boats at all.

I therefore recommend that this committee keep a close eye on the CPSP with a view to guarding against efforts to Canadianize or otherwise modify the boats before they are delivered.

[*Translation*]

The Department of Defence and the Armed Forces are also moving ahead with defence digitization, at least in theory. This effort must become a priority, otherwise the Canadian Armed Forces will not be able to fully exploit its new fleets and Canada will fall behind its key allies.

Indeed, this committee should push the government to move forward with a comprehensive digitization strategy for the entire Canadian national security community, which may necessitate a re-thinking of existing data sovereignty policies.

Unless Canada accelerates its digitization efforts, we will be unable to remain fully interoperable with our allies and our case for joining Pillar II of the AUKUS agreement will be weakened.

[*English*]

Finally, this committee has an important role to play in ensuring that Canada reaches the 2% of GDP target for defence spending. Canada will only reach this target if there is a cross-party consensus. Having this committee speak with a single voice about the need to reach the target and holding all governments to account when they fall short is essential.

Suffice it to say, the results of Tuesday's presidential election in the United States reinforce the importance of reaching this target, lest Canada suffer the economic consequences of being seen as a defence laggard.

I look forward to your questions.

• (0925)

The Chair: General Leslie, you have five minutes.

Hon. Andrew Leslie (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My intent is to offer some criticism of the status quo, so that we can learn and then perhaps, in question period, get into some solutions.

Essentially, in my opinion, “Strong, Secure, Engaged”, which was the precursor to the current defence policy, delivered nothing substantive in terms of modern military equipment. It saw Canada, in fact, become weaker, more insecure and essentially absent from the deployable stables of troops required for either United Nations missions or, of course, NATO.

The 2024 defence policy update of “Our North, Strong and Free” is no better, unfortunately, in that it promises some urgently needed equipment years from now, but nothing today. Indeed, the 2024 defence spend will be less than that of 2023.

Of course, we're well aware of what just happened down in the United States. Both Republicans and Democrats are united and increasingly vocal about telling Canada how disappointed, frustrated and fed up they are with Canada's failure to defend itself and its allies, with a special mention of the Arctic.

Meanwhile, as we know—and I was involved in the last NAFTA renegotiations—that's coming due at a time when a variety of key players down south have articulated clearly that a base of 3% perhaps looms on the horizon and that defence, security, trade and border security are all intertwined.

At this time of crisis internationally, with what's happening in the Middle East and in Ukraine, Canada's military readiness is at its lowest level in 50 years. Canada spent, last year, in 2023, more money on consultants and professional services than it did on the army, navy and air force combined, which, quite frankly, is madness.

The army has over 50% of its vehicle fleets awaiting spare parts and technicians. The navy is struggling mightily to keep a handful of elderly warships at sea, specifically in the Indo-Pacific, and they're desperately short of trained sailors. The air force has been unable to participate in significant NATO deterrent exercises, either up north or out over the oceans, in conjunction with our friends and allies because they don't have the pilots, the spare parts or the money to fly the aircraft.

In the Arctic, which is many times larger than Europe, Canada has fewer than 300 military support staff, who are not a deterrent. They're essentially unarmed. Some of them are part-time, bless them. There are about 1,600 Canadian Rangers equipped with Ski-Dos and rifles, who are not combatants. Their role is to observe and report.

The bottom line is that Canada has no permanently assigned combat elements to deter potential presence by the Russians or the Chinese, who are showing up in our waters with increasing frequency, but other people do. Russia, specifically, has between 25,000 to 35,000 combat troops deployed in its Arctic, with huge amounts of operational equipment—air, land and sea.

The United States, bless them, has 22,000 full-time and part-time military professionals with more equipment than the entirety of the Canadian Forces in terms of combat delivery. Thank you, America, for defending our Arctic.

We are facing unprecedented dangers and challenges and, quite frankly, I see no sense of urgency to change, modify or re-guide the efforts of the government toward supporting and assisting the Canadian Forces.

Here are some facts.

We have fewer than 35 military personnel deployed on UN missions. In 2003, we had close to 2,500. We are the only NATO nation whose level of military operational readiness is going down when everyone else's is skyrocketing up.

We have the longest and the least efficient procurement system in NATO—indeed, in any nation that I can find. We are the only nation in NATO that does not have a costed plan to get to 2% of GDP, which was first agreed to by the Minister of Defence in 2008 and reiterated in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017.... I could go on.

We are the only NATO nation whose defence minister has publicly admitted that he could not convince his fellow cabinet members of the importance of NATO defence spending and the 2% of GDP. As mentioned already, we're the only NATO nation whose defence budget decreased this year.

• (0930)

Mr. Chair, I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we turn to Mrs. Gallant for six minutes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): General Leslie, under the most severe circumstances, if Canada does not fill the blind spot with our satellites, install air defence in the far north or patrol the Arctic waterways, and if the U.S.

feels threatened and exposed, what will the Americans do to protect our continent's northern flank?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: There's an old saying, which is sometimes true, that sovereignty has to be seen to be effective. In our case, with our sovereign troops deployed in the Arctic, through no fault of their own, due to lack of equipment, lack of numbers, lack of training and lack of resources, which boils down to taxpayer money, it has resulted in, from a Canadian perspective, our Arctic being undefended.

The more the Americans get used to the idea that they have to secure and defend it for us, the more it's logical to assume that they may well look to some sort of economic compensation from the resources in the Arctic, which Canadians.... It's hard to find any Canadian who doesn't admire the beauty and the pristine nature of our Arctic, but we have to spend time, money and effort to make sure it remains ours, with our friends and allies.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Former NATO Parliamentary Assembly president and senior member of the armed services committee, now chair of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Congressman Mike Turner recently wrote an op-ed in Newsweek entitled "Trudeau—Not Trump—Is the Greatest Threat to NATO".

Why does the DPU evoke such a sense of non-confidence from our greatest ally?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Canada spends a considerable amount on the bigger-picture defence issues. As you're well aware, in 2017, NATO changed the rules wherein a whole host of issues ancillary to the business of fighting and winning the nation's wars were counted as defence spending: veterans' pensions, some of the support agencies, and the list goes on.

What we have to do is question the output of the Canadian investment in defence. Output is a variety of many factors. It includes well-trained, fit, capable men and women who are willing to go overseas and do dangerous things on our behalf. They have to have the right equipment, the right facilities, the right training, infrastructure and the money to buy ammo.

By the way, how's that ammo contract going? I'm sorry. I'm asking you a question. That's unfair.

We are not getting the bang for our buck. Why is that? If you have a nation that spends more on professional services and consultants than it does on the army, navy and air force combined, if you have a nation that has increased its public servants by over 40% since 2015 at a now staggering cost, and if you have essentially a defence procurement system that is arguably among the very worst in the world for the purchase of big stuff like combat equipment, aircraft, ships and submarines.... By the way, the evidence is irrefutable. There is no evidence of the current government actually buying a large, complex modern weapons system in the last decade.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: On what programs and initiatives is the Liberal government trying to nickel-and-dime our CAF that are limiting its operational capability and effectiveness? I believe you referred to that in the National Post.

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Essentially, the armed forces are short anywhere between 13,000 and 16,000 people. To address that shortfall, it would be at least an additional billion dollars per year just for the personnel costs.

On top of that, you have the basic and advanced training requirements. Due to the lack of progress on any of the major weapons systems needed to allow our people to survive contemporary warfare—especially since the warfare examples we have in Ukraine are showing that new technologies are required, plus a whole bunch of the older ones—our armed forces are woefully ill-equipped. That bow wave of equipment acquisition is what's causing the government to step back from announcing, for example, a contract for the ammunition systems for the ships, for the planes, for the tanks, and it goes on.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: You also said that about 72% of the army's vehicles and trailers are off-line. Do most of these vehicles need maintenance, or do they need to be replaced entirely?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: It's both. A whole bunch of this stuff is old. That which is not necessarily old doesn't have the spare parts to make sure that it can run adequately, especially when you use it for advanced training, where vehicles tend to get beaten up a bit.

What is needed in this particular instance is a threefold increase. One is for additional mechanics and for people who can service those vehicles. The second is for the ammunition to actually allow the systems to train, and for the gas and the spare parts. The third is the people to actually man the equipment, because with more people, you reduce the individual stresses and workloads, which have contributed to a higher attrition rate.

• (0935)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Are the troops we have in Latvia properly equipped, with proper vehicles should that become a hot zone?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: No, they're not properly equipped. They are doing the best with what they have. They have Leopard 2 tanks. They now have a nascent air defence system for short range, but none for medium or long. They don't have an exhaustive drone suite. They don't have the articulated and dispersed command and control architectures that a modern soldier needs to survive in the battlefield. I could go on.

The armed forces are doing the best with what they have, but there's a lack of defence acquisition or willingness of this government to spend money on the troops.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Of the 72 vehicles that are off-line, can you break down which vehicle types are the most prevalent to be inoperable?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Currently, the vehicle types that are mostly broken are the ones you need the most when you go to war or when you want to deter Russians from advancing into Latvia. That's tanks, armoured personnel carriers, light armoured vehicles, artillery systems, mortar and target acquisition radars. Also, the command and control architecture is 25 years old.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gallant.

Mr. Collins, you have six minutes.

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

Welcome to our witnesses.

General Leslie, I had the opportunity during the summer to visit the recruitment centre here in Ottawa. The staff there in the offices are doing a terrific job. The recruiters seem to be doing an amazing job as it relates to encouraging people to apply. It's been reported several times that we had nearly 70,000 applications in a calendar year, but only 5,000 people were making it through the process.

Can I get your thoughts in terms of how we break it down? I don't want to call it bureaucratic barriers, but how do we fix that problem, knowing that it's not for a lack of people showing interest?

There seem to be some internal issues related to processing those applications. The DPU speaks to that and highlights changes and recommendations that it is hoped will solve that in whole or in part. Can I get your thoughts on that issue, in particular?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Essentially, the recruiting issue.... It's a crisis, as has been well articulated by the chief of the defence staff. Your numbers are quite right: 70,000 showed up, and only 5,000 got through.

Let's not forget the issue of the increase in bureaucracy. Very often, when organizations are under stress, they try to centralize management. When they're under stress and try to get complicated things done to have an output, therein lie problems, because that massive degree of centralization stifles initiative and stifles the ability to move quickly. What we have here is a failure in process and a failure in management.

I would like to remind all of us that, according to the National Defence Act, the Minister of National Defence “holds office during pleasure” and has as a responsibility “the management and direction of the Canadian Forces”. This is a ministerial issue, and he should be personally accountable to Canada and to Canadians for its resolution in the immediate sense because of the looming threat and because our friend and ally down south is getting really tired of covering for us.

Mr. Chad Collins: I had the opportunity to look at a couple of historical audits, and this issue goes back a number of years. Can I ask what steps were taken 10, 15, 20 years ago to resolve this issue? It's not a new issue, so do you have any experience in that regard in terms of some of the issues that you just raised?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: I do, and I'd be willing to offer it. I may sound a bit old-fashioned when I do so, but when I first joined the Canadian Armed Forces, a long time ago, it took me about four to five days to do the paperwork. There were no hand-held social media devices then.

At the height of the Afghan war, we had, at peak, close to 5,000 troops deployed, with less money and a smaller force. We were buying new equipment left, right and centre. We decentralized recruiting essentially down to the reserve units so that they could do it themselves, because they live in the local environs much more so than the regular force. For the regular force, we got the battalions and regiments actively involved, and we were ruthless about accepting risk.

Do you have to be perfectly healthy to join the Canadian Armed Forces? The answer is no, but there are certain things that are showstoppers. What are they? Perhaps you can do a bit of training concurrently, accept the risk that you may have duplication, make sure no one's injured prior to graduation, and carry on. Background security checks are taking way too long. How much risk is there actually in terms of a private knowing x, y or z about a weapons system that is readily available in a variety of international bazaars?

• (0940)

Mr. Chad Collins: I'll switch very quickly to Russia. Ukrainian Canadians, in particular those in my riding, are very nervous about what comes next with the U.S.'s support, or lack thereof, for the war in Ukraine.

I'm looking for your advice as it relates to how we deal with a person like Donald Trump, knowing that his goals and objectives related to the situation and the war in Ukraine are different from our own. I want to get your thoughts on how likely it is for Canada and its allies to succeed in assisting Ukraine in its efforts against Russia without support, in whole or in part, from the United States.

Hon. Andrew Leslie: It's not my place to comment on the president-elect of the United States. That's his business, but I can give you lots of commentary about what Canada might and should consider in terms of the looming issues surrounding Russia's war in Ukraine.

Let's take a look at just Canada. We have 41 million people and a \$2.4-trillion economy, and we've managed to scrape together four guns, eight tanks, a couple thousand rifles and a couple thousand rounds of ammunition. That is nothing to be proud of. It is abhorrent.

Where is that ammunition contract for the production of the 155-millimetre war shots that Ukraine has been desperately asking for, which some ill-advised people—I was going to use a much harsher word—cancelled a few short years ago? Why hasn't that been signed?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Collins.

Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe, I look forward to your six minutes on the DPU.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to the witnesses.

Dr. Lagassé, in 2023, you wrote an article entitled “Defence Policy and Procurement Costs: The Case for Pessimism Bias”.

That was a few months before the defence policy was released. You said that the department was rather optimistic when it prepared a budget, but that it perhaps had to, if you'll pardon the expression, set its sights on being more pessimistic.

When you saw the new policy, did you feel that the department had taken into account the article you had written a few months earlier?

Dr. Philippe Lagassé: I don't think so, and I'll give you an example.

We just learned from one of the officers of Parliament that even the projections for reaching the 2% of GDP goal for defence spending by 2032 are based on analyses that the Canadian economy will be in recession. That's another way of interpreting it. We're going to meet the target because we take certain things for granted economically and we don't take different scenarios into account. Unfortunately, I have to answer no to your question. We'll see what happens with the budget, for example, with respect to submarines, but I also think they will be quite optimistic.

This is part of a culture in which they always want to move forward and don't want to give direct and honest answers, especially at the Department of Finance. Finance always wants people to spend less, and the Department of National Defence always wants the government's approval and permission to initiate projects. This creates a scenario in which National Defence indicates that a project costs much less in order to get approval from the Department of Finance for a budget line. That creates scenarios, as the general was saying, where you end up with several projects when you simply don't have the budget to initiate them. In other words, there's a lack of funds. Even if the project is well designed and ready to go, they decide not to move forward, because they simply don't have the funds required to meet the needs.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you have a concrete example of a project that was recently budgeted with too much optimism?

Dr. Philippe Lagassé: There's been a lot of talk about air defence for the land force. This project suffered an extraordinary delay because it was poorly funded. I don't want to give too much information about my role as an acquisitions adviser, but I can say that, when I reviewed this project within the department, it was extremely frustrating, because it was needed, but there was a lack of funding to move forward. That's one example.

Then there are trucks, which are a basic component. You've seen that a truck project is now being split in two, simply to make sure they move forward with the budget they have. They're setting aside the other part, which involves armoured vehicles, because they're still waiting for other funding before they move forward. Unfortunately, this is very common.

• (0945)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: As a result, either the projects are not completed or they cost a lot more than anticipated. Doesn't that feed a certain cynicism toward the Department of National Defence, not only among some observers, but also among our allies and Canadians in general?

Dr. Philippe Lagassé: Yes, and that's especially true when it comes to ships.

Honestly, I don't know who came up with the idea that 15 modern warships were going to cost \$26 billion. Now we're being told that they're going to cost \$100 billion, and once again we're wondering where these projections come from. The government is currently insisting that the budget for the 15 ships is still \$60 billion, even though we know that all other analyses say that they will cost \$100 billion.

When will the government be honest with Canadians? When will they be honest with you, the parliamentarians, about costs? There's no point in always being optimistic and hoping that people won't notice that the cost has simply doubled or even tripled. That's not the way to do it.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

General Leslie, you seem very critical of the latest federal defence policy, and rightly so, I'm sure.

What do you think of the Canadian government's current defence procurement policy?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: I think our procurement system is indeed the worst in the world, frankly. We can see the results. In the past 10 years, the Canadian Forces have not received a single advanced, modern and complex system that's been put into service. In addition, there's a cost associated with every year of delay.

[English]

The cost of delay is the price of failure. As a result of 10 years of procrastination and dithering on defence acquisition, with, quite frankly, an enormous bureaucracy that has grown even bigger, which doesn't necessarily make for efficiency, the cost of buying complicated defence equipment is probably three times what it was in 2015. It's kind of like the housing issue. The more you let the problem fester, the more expensive the equipment gets, which then blows to smithereens your cost estimates.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen, you have six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, both, for appearing today.

I'm always interested in talking more about that illustrious or arbitrary 2%—however you may want to deem it. There's been a lot of pressure on Canada to reach it, for obvious reasons, and we could do so, I think, with the spending that may come forward, certainly, in terms of the F-35s, submarines and what have you.

We've talked a great deal in this committee about the fact that we have such an incredible recruitment and retention crisis. We have a military housing crisis. There's a lot lacking in terms of what the rank and file need on the ground to have the kind of life to be able to do the job we're asking of them. There's a great reliance on outsourcing and consulting. I think this is part of what you were getting at, General. There have been cuts, and then there's been a backfill, and yet that backfill isn't actually meeting what's necessary. I certainly think it's because of this outside consulting; that's my opinion.

Do you agree that reaching the 2% through those major procurement projects isn't enough? What do we have to do to focus and ensure that we're doing what people on the ground actually need?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: I deeply and sincerely appreciate the work of this committee in trying to bring to light some issues that are of ever-increasing importance to the average, everyday Canadian. Unfortunately, it's a tough job, because most Canadians, deep down, know nothing about defence. Quite frankly, I don't think the government has done a lot to lead the people of Canada into exposing to them the consequences of failing to meet obligations that we promised.

Let's not forget that. We promised in 2008, at the Minister of Defence level, and we promised in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022 that we'd meet it. Oops, in 2023, we said we're not going to meet it until 2032, which is an arbitrary number chosen by the Prime Minister to get him out of a really tight jam in his visit down to Washington.

There's nothing in the fiscal framework that indicates the Government of Canada is serious about meeting that 2%. It doesn't count unless it's in the fiscal framework. Where's that ammunition contract? Talk about an easy sell. That's representative. That's typical. People have lost sight of the actual output required by the Canadian Forces. That's what we should be measured on. Quite frankly, that's what our allies are measuring us on.

When we whine that we can't meet 2% by 2024, the rest of NATO doesn't care, because we promised that we could and we would, and here we are. I think it's going to get surprisingly tough for us over the next couple of months as we get asked a lot of really hard questions in the context of North American defence, NATO contributions and North American free trade—all of which are linked, but a lot of Canadians don't see it that way.

• (0950)

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: It's not entirely what I asked, though, sir.

Do you just do it through large procurement contracts? How do you balance it with what the needs of the forces are on the ground?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: It's an excellent question. I apologize. My political skills rose to the fore. I answered the question I hoped you were going to ask and not the one you actually asked. I've been caught flat out. Well done.

The armed forces have a plan. The government has a plan. You just have to fund it now, and you have to take the timelines and compress them. Whereas in the past you could live with a decade, now you're talking about a matter of months.

"That's impossible," you'll say. We did it during the Afghan war. We bought tanks in less than six months and C-17s in four. We bought the 777s in the space of five or six months. We had troops training on those new tanks while they were rumbling forward into the battle area. I could go on, because there's a long list that demonstrates—

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: What if you don't have pilots to fly the F-35s or you don't have enough navy personnel to man a sub?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: The two are matched. You have to do one commensurate with the other, keeping in mind that it takes about a decade to produce a pilot. It takes about a decade to buy an F-35. There should be a match when they first enter service, but there's not, because the attrition rate was so high, in part because no one was willing to dedicate the energy and the time. No one outside of the uniformed component was willing to dedicate the energy and the time to fixing it.

Now, perhaps, it's going to get more attention, keeping in mind that the minister is responsible for this.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: As a New Democrat.... One of the foundations, which we didn't see at all in the defence update, is about peacekeeping. It makes zero mention of peacekeeping initiatives, yet Canadians were foundational in the creation of that.

The government promised the international community, and maybe this falls into what you were talking about in terms of those promises and obligations that have not been fulfilled.... Do you think Canada needs to do more to honour that commitment? Should it have been included in the DPU?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Absolutely. I think I mentioned in my prepared remarks that Canada currently has 35, or slightly fewer, military peacekeepers deployed.

I'd like to point out that Ukraine, which is fighting a savage war in Russia and literally having to trade its soldiers' lives for ground held because it doesn't have the ammunition needed—which

Canada could have been providing if we hadn't cancelled that contract—has more peacekeepers deployed than we do.

The Chair: Colleagues, we have 25 minutes' worth of questions, and we only have about 20 minutes, so we'll chop off a minute.

You have four minutes, Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Don Stewart: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

General Leslie, how are we doing? We know how we're doing at the macro level on recruiting and retention. How are we doing with our pay and benefits for soldiers? Should we be taking a hard look at that as part of our increase in spend?

• (0955)

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Yes, we should be. They just got a recent pay raise, which was modest, but when you consider the stress they've had to go through—especially those stalwarts who have stuck it out over the last five or six years, the middle managers, the supervisors, the sergeants major, the warrant officers and the captains, and the list goes on—a pay raise, but a significant one, would certainly do wonders, especially for the cost of living increases that have happened elsewhere.

Yes, it's long overdue.

Mr. Don Stewart: It is, particularly in the communities we're trying to recruit from. Toronto is a very expensive place to live. On the reserve side, getting those soldiers out has become increasingly difficult, given the lack of incentive from a salary standpoint.

I wanted to ask you about the conflict in the Middle East, the war in Ukraine and the general hostilities globally. How concerning is it for you, the lack of readiness in our armed forces to participate in and contribute to these global conflicts?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Canada, as was articulated earlier, is roughly within the top 10 or 12 defence spenders, according to the way we count it. However, I think it's been quite clear, through my testimony and that of others, that our output is not commensurate with the amount of money we spend. The first issue is to try to figure out what we have to do, what we're willing to spend to get it done and how quickly we can get it done.

Suddenly, we're faced with three demanding scenarios. There's one in the Indo-Pacific with China and its expansionist tendencies. The second one is the unfolding, continuing tragedies in the Middle East, egged on by Iran and Russia. Finally, of course, there is the looming spectre of the potential of further vast amounts of bloodshed in Ukraine, depending on what happens over the next couple of months with senior decision-makers elsewhere.

Is Canada prepared to fill some of the holes that could result from a more centralist view of the United States, and how much is it willing to contribute to the defence of others? We'd better be able to step up to the plate.

Mr. Don Stewart: How do you feel about the risk in the Arctic? You mentioned earlier that sovereignty is about being seen. Maybe there's an economic price that we're going to have to pay should we want this defended by one of our allies. To the extent that we're not in the Arctic, can we really claim sovereignty there, if we're outsourcing that to the United States?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: That's an excellent point, sir. Russia and China have both been engaged, since 2007, in a court case before the United Nations, in which they do not recognize a significant portion of Canada's claims to the Arctic seabed. If they don't recognize it, then they could challenge us, just by having their exploration vessels show up in our waters. We have no permanently deployed naval forces to challenge them. That, in itself, is a huge risk.

By the way, Russia and China have recently formed an entente on Arctic exploitation, and China has articulated its vision for including an Arctic passage in its belt and road initiative.

Mr. Don Stewart: Do we have a strategy to counter that?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Does Canada have a strategy? No.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Stewart.

Ms. Lambropoulos, go ahead.

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

Thanks to both of our witnesses. Thank you for being here to answer some of our questions.

There's a huge amount of spending and dollars that would come if we were to meet our 2% target much sooner. I agree that we need to work on that, and we need to get to a level of readiness, considering the situation in the world and the results of the elections the other day.

Of course, in order to be able to do this, the population does, to some extent, need to support this spending. I'm wondering what messages you think our government should start sharing to the general public. I don't think everybody follows these meetings, and this is pretty much the only public space where these conversations are had and people can actually get this information.

What messages should we be sharing to the population to get them on board with this kind of change and shift?

You can both respond.

Dr. Philippe Lagassé: The first one I would point to is the fact that there's actually been quite a bit of movement, and it's not well

understood. This is where, I think, I disagree a little bit with the general.

New capabilities have yet to come online, but in the past few years we have bought new air-to-air refuelling aircraft. We have bought maritime patrol aircraft. We are buying 88 F-35s. We have drones for the Arctic. We have MRZR for the special forces. We are buying polar icebreakers. We are buying program icebreakers. We are buying a polar epsilon satellite system. The list goes on and on.

It's striking to me that there remains a view—a lagging indicator, as it were, which we all remember from COVID—that the Canadian Armed Forces are simply unequipped, will never be equipped and everything is falling apart. That's true today, because we are dealing with a decade-long, or generational, gap in the capabilities we require. In the next 10 to 15 years, vast numbers of new capabilities will be coming on board.

There has to be at least some effort to put a positive spin on the story. Otherwise, if it is so negative, you simply put your hands up and you give up. We have to, at one point, acknowledge that there is an effort to re-equip the forces. If we want Canadians to join the armed forces and contribute, you have to tell them we are acquiring new equipment. Otherwise, why would you join a force that is never going to be equipped? Why would you join a force when the message, continuously, is that it's falling apart?

I agree that we need to point to the problems. We also have to at least acknowledge that we are making progress. This does span two governments. Various people can take credit for this. If we solely focus on the negative and are never trying to actually demonstrate that we are making progress.... It's not enough, but we are making progress. That is a necessary part of the story that we have to tell if we want Canadians to be part of this institution.

I'm usually a pessimistic guy, so this is surprising coming out of me.

• (1000)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you. You're absolutely right. I think we have made great strides, and I think we're on the right path.

However, given the testimony we've heard from many witnesses, there is still a lot to be done and there are lots of improvements that could be made. I think that our government might be willing to go there in the next budget and, perhaps, in subsequent budgets. I'm wondering what messages we should share to the public to get them on board with this major increase in defence spending. That's where I was going with that question.

Hon. Andrew Leslie: I would say that leadership is required from the federal government. Prime ministers and cabinet can't always be expected to figure out which way the parade is going and get behind it. They actually have to get in front of this issue.

It's quite true that, in years to come, the Canadian Forces will get better in terms of equipment, but in my opinion NATO doesn't care. We said we'd get to 2% by 2024. We are a long way from that right now. I don't think senior leadership in the United States, both existing and about to be, really cares at all what our excuses might be. They're fairly transactional, and I think they're looking for quick results. That has an impact on trade, and our trade negotiations are coming due now. If you put it in that context, there's a pretty clear message.

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

[Translation]

You have a minute and a half, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Lagassé, you heard General Leslie's comments in my last intervention. The procurement system at Canada's Department of National Defence is the worst in the world. That's more or less what we've been told.

First, do you share the general's opinion? Second, if you were to make one key recommendation, what would it be? We're no longer just talking about a change in direction; the entire model needs to change, if we're truly in that situation.

Dr. Philippe Lagassé: The problem isn't unique to the Department of National Defence. This is a generalized problem in the Canadian government. The government doesn't like risk, and it avoids it at all costs. Why? When mistakes are made, as was the case with ArriveCAN, the entire system blows up. Then they say that we need more regulations, more procedures and more officials to oversee everything.

There's a culture in the Canadian government that leads people to avoid risk at all costs. As the general said, if you want to buy equipment quickly and have capabilities quickly, you have to accept a certain level of risk.

There's a notion that when you fail very quickly, you can fix things right away. That culture doesn't exist in the Canadian government, since they want to avoid risk at all costs, even if they're able to rectify the situation.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: According to one of your recommendations, the government should therefore accept a certain level of risk when it comes to procurement.

• (1005)

Dr. Philippe Lagassé: When it comes to military procurement, sir, risk is the only way to survive in today's world.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

You have a minute and a half, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Dr. Lagassé, when you came before the committee last, we were talking about procurement. We talked about sole-sourced contracts and the problems that may exist. During the study, there were many who were concerned about transparency and accountability, so much in that sort of [*Inaudible—Editor*] about taking risks.

The United States has an accountability office specifically on that. Is that something that Canada needs to do? How does the government reach that accountability level in terms of those big-ticket items?

Dr. Philippe Lagassé: In Canada, the accountability problem is not one of more oversight, more bodies that are checking the government. It's one of fundamental transparency. If you want greater accountability in this country, you need greater transparency. As I said the last time I was here, this committee should have clearances to be able to examine all sorts of acquisition requirements—things that are moving forward—in order to be able to do its work.

This is fundamentally the issue. If you want to have greater accountability from government, you have to have greater transparency from government. We not only have the slowest procurement system; we are also one of the least transparent countries out there, particularly among the Five Eyes. The amount of information withheld from you that prevents you from doing your job, from holding the government to account, is astounding.

If we want greater accountability, step one is not more oversight; step one is greater transparency.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Mr. Bezan, you have four minutes.

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

Thank you, General and Professor, for joining us here today.

General Leslie, you were a Liberal member of Parliament. Did Prime Minister Trudeau or Minister Sajjan ever come to you for advice on developing things like defence policy?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: I'll answer the question and put it in context. Prior to the 2015 election, I was the co-chair, along with Marc Garneau, of the Liberal policy platform sessions that focused on defence, security and borders. In that context, I was very pleased to have quite a say and influence on the Liberal defence platform of 2015 and also on veterans policy.

Mr. James Bezan: How much did they consult you on “Strong, Secure, Engaged”?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: There was some, but a lot of it was based on the work that had gone into defence policy platforms. The tragedy is—

Mr. James Bezan: When it comes down to delivery of what was in there, did they talk to you about how to get things done, how to buy the kit that we need?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: No, I tried several times, although not necessarily with the Prime Minister, because his interest in defence, as we all know, is not terribly high.

Mr. James Bezan: When we talk about the Prime Minister... You mentioned the National Defence Act and how the minister is responsible for the leadership and operational direction of the Canadian Armed Forces and serves, at will, the Prime Minister. Was that lack of accountability, that lack of oversight and responsibility, due to the lack of interest by Prime Minister Trudeau?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: I think it's fairly clear that the willingness of cabinet, until quite recently, to pay attention to the details of defence and to do what the professor suggests—which is to try to reduce the levels of bureaucracy while increasing accountability—essentially has gone nowhere for the last 10 years because of their level of interest in defence and security issues. This is why we're in such... We're not in big trouble, but it's why we're in such disrepute with our friends and allies in NATO and have increasing disrepute down south. We promised to do something that would involve a commitment of finances, and we have not followed through on that promise, so we're being held to account now.

Mr. James Bezan: Professor Lagassé clearly laid out what the government has purchased, which we, as the official opposition, have supported.

With the procurements that have taken place, has there been enough kinetic equipment purchased to ensure we can defend Canada and participate in allied missions as required?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Absolutely, categorically no.

The focus has not been on kinetic equipment—things that harm people. Keep in mind that the ultimate role of the Canadian Forces, and the one they prepare for, is engaging in combat and fighting and winning the nation's wars alongside our friends and allies.

Mr. James Bezan: What do we need to buy to ensure we're providing the equipment to protect Canada, as in air defence? What do we need to further complement our efforts in places like Latvia and elsewhere in NATO missions?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: There is a list longer than my leg—my arm is a bit gibbled right now—that I could easily rattle off.

Simply put, the short-term things that are readily achievable within a matter of months, if we have the will, include long-range precision strike rocket systems for the army, new self-propelled guns, a real air defence system that can reach out and touch past the short-range system we've currently acquired—you need short-range, medium-range and farther-range—more drone capability, command and control architectures, and new naval vessels. A ship contract would be nice. Ammunition for the army would be very nice. Have I mentioned ammunition?

• (1010)

Mr. James Bezan: I think I'm running out of time here.

Professor Lagassé, I'm not asking you to respond but rather to provide to the committee in writing how we bring about accountability while speeding up procurement. Transparency comes into that. We need some direction on how to fix a system that's clearly broken and not working.

The Chair: If you can answer that, we'll monetize it.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: You have four minutes, Ms. Lapointe.

Ms. Viviane Lapointe: Thank you both for being here.

Dr. Lagassé, one of the things we haven't talked about yet today is cyber-threat security. We've had other witnesses before this committee talking about how this is a growing threat.

Can you tell us how governments can collaborate to develop stronger cybersecurity measures for countries?

Dr. Philippe Lagassé: I think the first thing Canada needs to realize is that this is not something that will be solved within government. It has to be a partnership with the private sector. I can't emphasize this enough. If we rely on government procedures and IT policies to ensure cybersecurity in this country, we will fall short.

If you look at our largest allies, they rely on and are working closely with all the big IT firms. In the United States, it's Google, Microsoft, AWS and Oracle. In the United Kingdom and Australia, it's AWS. That's simply because of the level of expertise and know-how. Keeping pace with that threat is not something the public sector can do adequately, given the systems we have.

In a Canadian context, this extends beyond simply working with these large firms in the national security community. It also means working with the banking sector and other vulnerable sectors, because it isn't so much an attack on national defence and the national security community that will make us vulnerable; it is an attack on the civilian, private sector banking sector that will leave us hobbled. That level of co-operation is not adequate yet.

Ms. Viviane Lapointe: Lieutenant-General Leslie, would you like to add to that?

Hon. Andrew Leslie: I'm going to defer to the professor, mainly because it's not my area of expertise.

Thank you.

Ms. Viviane Lapointe: We're certainly seeing times of uncertainty at home and abroad.

Dr. Lagassé, how does Canada best position itself as a strong country, partner and ally, and what investments do you think we need to make?

Dr. Philippe Lagassé: I suggest that one of the chief problems we have is trying to be all things to all people—and we try to do that on a very small budget.

As I've said in many other fora, we like to think of ourselves as the Australia of North America, when in reality we are the New Zealand of North America. That's simply to say that it's better to recognize that if we are only willing to spend 1.5% of GDP on defence—which has historically been the case—perhaps we should focus on specific areas and contributions we can make and do them the best we can. It may be the Arctic, which the United States has increasingly been asking us to do. It may be other specific types of roles. I simply don't know how we can keep going, spending less than what we say we're going to spend and trying to have a 2.5% of GDP defence policy on a 1.5% of GDP spend.

I would argue that we need to pick specific roles and contributions and do them the best we can, as opposed to trying to do all things.

Ms. Viviane Lapointe: Lieutenant-General, go ahead.

Hon. Andrew Leslie: I understand where the professor is coming from, and it's very logical. Having said that, it's really tough to predict what the future might bring, so you have to have a certain amount of flexibility in the suite of cards that you can play.

Of course, let's not forget the value of diplomacy, a comprehensively staffed and engaged diplomatic corps, and international assistance. That other leg of the stool, if you will, is the defence or deterrence capability. There may come a time, five or 10 years from now, when you want to focus on the UN, which means, more often than not, land-centric. Maybe you want to contribute to a force in NATO, which is usually land-centric, with some air and some sea.

Sovereignty demands a much greater focus on surveillance, which is satellites—which is air force—and then, of course, things that are on the surface of the water and underneath, which is essentially navy. You still have to have soldiers there, but in vastly smaller numbers than you might need for other operations.

You have to have flexibility when you build your force to cater to differing missions. It's a balance that you strike. Right now, I would submit, like the professor said, we're not doing anything terribly well.

• (1015)

The Chair: It's a terrible note to end a committee on: We're not doing anything very well. It sounds like Mrs. Gallant will jump on that as a title for our study.

I want to thank both of you on behalf of the committee for joining the issue. This is a real live issue.

I think it was Ms. Lapointe or Ms. Lambropoulos who said that, to everyone's great surprise here, not everybody in Canada follows the proceedings of this committee. I know they should, and it's shocking that they don't. Getting the message out there is the issue. I particularly appreciate Professor Lagassé's sobering reminder that there have been a number of things that we got out the door.

It reminds me of an experience I had in the United States. I was leading a delegation of parliamentarians there. My co-chair was before the foreign affairs committee and said, "Those darn Canadians, they're falling short of their 2%. I'm going to see them this afternoon and I'm going to tell them so." That afternoon, we all troop into his office and, sure enough, Bill says, "I guess you're here because of what I said." Well, it was for other reasons as well, but after he beat us up, I used Professor Lagassé's shopping list of things that we've actually done. I made the point that we had bought almost all that stuff from him.

I don't think it's entirely a dismal failure, but both of you have joined the issue brilliantly and I think it's a real contribution to our study.

With that, we're adjourned.

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