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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Ahmed Hussien (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.)): Hello, everyone.

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number four of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room, as well as remotely using the Zoom application.

Before we continue, I would like to ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to prevent audio and feedback incidents, and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our interpreters.

You will also notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and the members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: French, English or floor. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 23, the committee is meeting on the study of Canada's Arctic strategy.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour.

From the Inuit Circumpolar Council of Canada, we have Mr. Herb Nakimayak, president.

From Oceans North, we have Dr. Sheena Kennedy, executive director.

Welcome to the committee. Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed to rounds of questions from the members.

[Translation]

Mr. Nakimayak, you have the floor.

[English]

Herb Nakimayak (President, Inuit Circumpolar Council (Canada)): *Quyanninni*, Mr. Chair. I thank you and the committee for having us here today.

My name is Herb Nakimayak. I'm from Paulatuk, Northwest Territories, which is in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region.

I'm the newly appointed interim president of the Inuit Circumpolar Council of Canada. ICC Canada advocates on behalf of Inuit from the four Inuit regions in Canada: the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut, collectively termed Inuit Nunangat. We are taxpayers and rights holders within Inuit Nunangat, protecting, stewarding and preserving the lands, coasts, waters and ice that make up our home. We are the sister organization of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national organization representing the rights and interests of Inuit in Canada.

We have lived in our circumpolar homeland since time immemorial. As such, our indigenous knowledge is essential to who we are and the regions in which we live.

Internationally, ICC is an indigenous peoples' organization that represents Inuit in our circumpolar homeland, inclusive of Canada, Alaska, Greenland and Chukotka, which is part of the Russian Federation. We do so at the United Nations as permanent participants to the Arctic Council, and we are permanent consultative status members at the International Maritime Organization, among many other fora.

Mr. Chair, the 2024 Arctic foreign policy must be implemented with regular and ongoing engagement with Inuit. This work is most effectively managed through engagement at the Inuit-Crown partnership committee and with regional Inuit treaty organizations, which include the leaders from the four Inuit treaty organizations.

There is no sovereignty or security in the Arctic without engaging and first protecting its people. Canada's Arctic sovereignty depends on Inuit use and occupancy across our lands, sea ice, airspace and waters. I would like to highlight a couple of key areas to focus on.

First, for Inuit in Canada, mixed or dual-use infrastructure is critically important. Canada has committed to a year-round military presence in the Arctic, along with identification of major projects that include the revitalization of the port of Churchill, Manitoba, and the early-stage Arctic economic and security corridor strategy. There are many opportunities for investment in Inuit communities that also represent investment in Arctic security and sovereignty.

Second, Inuit also recognize the changing geopolitical landscape, which has increased interest in our lands, waters and ice. With Inuit having long advocated for the peaceful use and preservation of the Arctic, it is pivotal that Canada continue to recognize the ongoing commitments to multilateralism, diplomacy and good governance in support of a safe and governed Arctic.

To note, ICC Canada will be assuming the four-year ICC chairship next summer at the quadrennial ICC general assembly in Iqaluit, Nunavut, convening Inuit from Canada, Alaska, Greenland and Chukotka. We call upon Canada to ensure its commitments to Arctic collaboration and diplomacy. As ICC Canada's chairship of the ICC will overlap with Canada's next chairship of the Arctic Council, we look forward to collaborative opportunities for stewarding shared goals and Arctic multilateralism.

To be sure, Canada's continued support allows us to voice and gain support for a secure Canadian Arctic. Inuit work closely with many Arctic and non-Arctic states and other Arctic and northern indigenous peoples as part of Canada's delegation for many agreements in international fora. I would remind the committee that the work to implement the goals for the Arctic foreign policy need to be based on the work that Inuit have been and are already doing to leverage existing relationships, capacities and knowledge systems.

Engagement through the Inuit-Crown partnership committee, along with engagement with states in the Arctic Council and the United Nations, allows us to represent Inuit rights and priorities right here at home and around the world. We look forward to building on this work with Her Excellency Virginia Mearns, Canada's newly appointed Arctic ambassador.

Mr. Chair, I'm reminded every day that the pace of change in our homeland is gaining momentum. The opportunity that Canada has to work in tandem with Inuit to secure our Arctic is unique. It is achieved by involving Inuit in the decision-making process and securing long-term, sustainable funding enabling Inuit communities to build strong economies. In addition, by learning about our realities as rights holders, hunters, boat owners, guardians and experts in our regions, the Government of Canada can implement an Arctic foreign policy that serves the needs of the nation and keeps us strong in the face of adversity.

Quyanainni, Mr. Chair.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much, President Nakimayak.

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Chair, I would like to make a friendly reminder. The pace should be a bit slower. I think that the interpreter is having difficulty breathing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simard.

[*English*]

I now invite Dr. Kennedy to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Sheena Kennedy (Executive Director, Oceans North): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Honourable members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today. I am Dr. Sheena Kennedy, and I am here on behalf of Oceans North, where I serve as executive director.

I'd like to acknowledge my friend, Mr. Herb Nakimayak, and congratulate him on his recent appointment as interim president of ICC Canada.

Oceans North supports marine conservation and climate action in partnership with indigenous and coastal communities. Over the last 15 years, our collaborative and science-based approach has led to tangible outcomes for Arctic communities, including contributing to the protection of over 650,000 square kilometres of marine area; the establishment of the Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area; the successful conclusion of the SINAA agreement between the Qikiqtani Inuit Association and the Government of Canada; and a network of indigenous-led science, monitoring and other research projects that support the well-being of Arctic communities across the Canadian north and in Greenland.

Canada demonstrated leadership in releasing a new Arctic foreign policy in 2024, and I'd like to commend this committee on its decision to review it now. In this period of transformative, unparalleled change, the regular study of our approach to the opportunities and challenges facing the Arctic is both urgent and necessary. I would also be remiss if I did not acknowledge the essential role that Canada's new Arctic ambassador will play as the Arctic becomes an even greater theatre of geopolitical interest.

At this time, when global powers are showing renewed interest in the Arctic, Canada's approach to policy in this region must underscore that diplomacy is our first line of defence. Canada should remain committed to the principles of peace, stability and rules-based international order.

Canada and its Arctic allies have always found ways to co-operate on matters of mutual interest. For example, the unprecedented precautionary agreement to regulate fishing in the central Arctic Ocean is an example of this exceptional multilateralism. Building on the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement to address emerging industrial activities such as transpolar shipping and deep-sea mining in the central Arctic Ocean would strengthen multilateral co-operation in this highly sensitive and globally significant region.

Canada should also continue to strengthen its relationships across the circumpolar world. With Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark, Canada could establish bilateral agreements on matters of trade, environmental protection, defence, science and monitoring. The rapid establishment of the bilateral Pikialasorsuaq protected area, also known as the North Water Polynya, which is located between northern Baffin Island and northwest Greenland, would strengthen communication, data and knowledge sharing and monitoring capabilities between both regions.

To support this process, we recommend that Canada expedite the establishment of an Arctic consulate in Nuuk and work with the newly appointed Canadian and Greenlandic Arctic ambassadors, as well as ITK and ICC, to identify a shared set of priorities for Arctic diplomacy and co-operation.

As you heard from Herb, Arctic peoples have always lived in deep connection with the marine environment and are on the forefront of climate change and biodiversity loss. Their knowledge and experience must inform all policies and decisions the Government of Canada undertakes with regard to the Arctic, their homeland.

Arctic waters are seeing exponential increases in vessel traffic as climate change drives sea ice retreat. Robust management of shipping in Canada's EEZ is essential to avoid accidents, such as the recent grounding of the MV *Thamesborg*, and deleterious impacts to the marine environment, but most relevant to this discussion today, a more robust system for managing Arctic shipping would enhance Canada's domain awareness in the Northwest Passage at this critical time.

In the Arctic, the Canadian Coast Guard and Canadian Rangers play an essential role in monitoring and contributing to the federal government's awareness and surveillance of the region. To perform this function at a calibre sufficient to meet this moment, both programs require adequate and scaled resourcing.

The existing network within Arctic communities already contributes greatly to our domain awareness in the Arctic, but for deeper knowledge, expertise, on-the-ground capacity and durability, the federal government must invest in best-in-class infrastructure, equipment and training to fully realize the potential of these important programs. All of these efforts would serve multiple purposes and contribute to meeting many federal priorities while supporting Inuit sovereignty.

I will close by saying that I'm deeply appreciative of the opportunity to be here today, and I look forward to our discussion.

Thank you.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Kennedy, for your opening statement and your remarks.

I will now open the floor for questions.

MP Hoback, you have six minutes.

Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses. It was nice to visit with you before the committee. I have a few questions for you.

I'm curious to know how Inuits' vision of the north aligns with the Arctic policy. Are there things you would look at and say that this isn't aligning? Are there areas that need more construction or more work?

Herb Nakimayak: I would say that Inuit definitely played a role in the development of Canada's Arctic foreign policy. We want to ensure that as we move ahead, what is happening in the Arctic is reflective of our way of life, and ensure that there is security amongst Inuit in our homes, so that we feel safe living in the place we live. As you know, there has been a lot of pressure this year and attention in the Arctic. We want to make sure that we are not left behind, that there's no gap between Canada and Inuit, and that as we further develop policy and implement policy, we are at the table too. That way, we ensure that the decisions that are made are reflective of the region in which we're actually making those decisions. We see it as a win-win for Canada and Inuit when we implement policy together.

In fact, as with any organization or any government, we want to ensure that we are there in peace, and we want it to remain that way. We feel that right now we are aligned. We want to continue that alignment to ensure that we are making the right decisions.

• (1550)

Randy Hoback: You deal with Inuit from other countries—Russia, for example. When you see the development that's happening on the Russian side, would you say they are aligned with what you see with regard to a vision for the polar region?

Herb Nakimayak: I can speak only for Canada. I would say that Inuit in the four regions are certainly working with their states. I feel that in Canada we are certainly leading the way, as there is a lot of engagement between the government and Canada. We can only advocate so much for another country, but when we do advocate, we ensure that there is also peace on that side as best we can, without putting any of the ICCs or the people in a place where they do not want to be.

Randy Hoback: Ms. Kennedy, you talked about making sure we have the proper infrastructure when it comes to the ability to properly monitor the region as you see more ships going through, and to do mining mapping and stuff like that. Do you think Canada will need to have a role somewhere down the road such that they will enforce that territory and enforce that bad actors won't be participating in illegal mining or illegal activity in the region? How do you see that unfolding?

Sheena Kennedy: To start, investments in a lot of communities through the Arctic—Herb can speak to this from his region—are actively doing a lot of the monitoring and search and rescue and emergency preparedness through that region. I think investments in new vessels and perhaps docks and other infrastructure would really allow for an expansion of people who have local knowledge and local experience to play that role, but I do think leadership from Canada will also be required to meet the moment.

Randy Hoback: You made the comment about dual-use ports—Churchill, for example. I agree with you 100%. If you are going to spend the money, it has to have both a civilian aspect and a military aspect to it somewhere down the road. That is something that I think everybody around this room would probably agree with.

As we look at more players in the north, though, and the military aspect, I know that the Americans have a lot of interest. In fact, I would almost say that they are paranoid about the activity going on in the north. What role do you see us playing in that environment?

Herb Nakimayak: I see Canada's role, especially for Inuit... This year has likely seen a record number of icebreaking vessels from other countries. They have shown an interest and are patrolling outside international waters. For us to play a role when it comes to dual use, we need to ensure that we add the civilian aspect to this.

When you look at any airport in the country, there's a secure side and perhaps a detached side. For us, we need to ensure we're developing policies and regulations, so that they are feasible for both sides, for national defence use and civilian use. Breaking down both of those aspects is really key to ensuring the right policy is developed. When it comes to other councils, I see us playing a role together, so we are involved with search and rescue. By giving advice to countries, we can ensure we are looking at these areas.

For example, in Canada, sometimes there is such a lack of response in any part of the Arctic. To do that, we have to ensure we're looking at the Polar Code, the types of vessels that are coming through our regions, and how best to accommodate those. There may be a spill, or as Sheena mentioned earlier, a ship going aground. How are we going to react to those, and how are we going to react to safety, so we can ensure the environment is protected?

It's not just people, as we also rely on migratory species, such as beluga whales, charrs and seals. We want to make sure that one spill doesn't create a massive impact on a species, whereby it might change its migration route for a long time until that site is cleaned up. When it comes to shipping, we're thinking about all of those things by developing sound policies and regulations together. It is very important, especially for us, in our region.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

I'll now go to MP Fortier.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since I'll be speaking in French, I'll give the witness time to put on his earpiece so that he can clearly understand me. In the meantime, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the interpreters for their support. It makes today's discussion much easier.

Mr. Nakimayak, *nakurmiik*. Thank you for joining us today to share your expertise. As a committee, we have the opportunity to look closely at this issue and make concrete recommendations that can guide the government or other partners in their efforts to protect the Arctic and expand its role.

I have an open-ended question to help set the stage. Which countries currently pose the greatest threats to Canada in the Arctic region, and which countries are its closest allies?

● (1555)

[*English*]

Herb Nakimayak: When it comes to allies, certainly our partnership with the U.S.A. has been one through time that we've always relied on as Canadians. It's become sort of a brand through our lifetime until recently, when now, with the geopolitical state of this world, we need to ensure, even though there may be disagreements at certain levels of government, that there are also levels where they're actually working quite well. Those are the ones that we need to look at and ask, how do we continue that? Through time we're going to need to work together at one time or another, or continue working, regardless of what our relationship is between states. We look at countries like that, which certainly are our neighbours. For us, for myself, my family migrated from Alaska and ended up in Canada as Inuit. Certainly there are ties when it comes to indigenous peoples.

For myself, I can speak for ICC. Across the Inuit Circumpolar Council, we advocate for the 180,000 Inuit in the circumpolar world. We have relations with Inuit in Russia, Alaska, Greenland and other places, so our dialogue has continued with them regardless. When it comes to state-to-state, when we attend Arctic Council central Arctic Ocean fisheries negotiations, plastics negotiations, treaties and forums like that, we come as a state with Canada. Our message is always aligned with Canada, so that we ensure that we're in this together. We need to be strong. If we're going to work with our allies, we need to ensure that we have a strong foundation here at home so we can provide that support to each other, so we are, in fact, there to implement our mandate.

When it comes to threats, certainly there were quite a number of icebreakers out from certain countries. It was like, wow, there's a very big interest. When it comes to research on the Arctic, it's a new race for a lot of countries that want to see what's there. When it comes to the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement, there are 10 countries. As well, there are countries that include the European Union, so there is a lot of interest, a lot at stake. For us, it is our... We could define a threat. Sometimes we see a threat as a vessel. Most recently, there was a ship aground. That is for sure.

For us, we want to ensure that our rights.... We believe that we are part of the ecosystem, and we want to ensure that when there's research being conducted, they're following guidelines that are put out in front. We do our best to remind countries and states that there are some regulations in place. For the CAO, we're definitely developing that platform, and we want that as the best representative. For us in Canada, we want to.... In my day job, we manage a marine environment that is in the Inuvialuit region, and we want our national programs to be recognized and mirrored on the offshore, so there is in fact proven collaboration, coordination, comanagement and co-leading research. If we can do that here in our own country, then we can actually do that on the offshore as well.

As I said, a threat could be anything or anyone—

Hon. Mona Fortier: I really appreciate your response. Unfortunately, I only have six minutes, but I understand that what you're sharing is really important for us to hear.

I might just give a chance to Dr. Kennedy to also answer or try to answer that question.

• (1600)

Sheena Kennedy: Sure. In addition to what Herb has just said, I do really think that climate change is a major threat to the Arctic, and it's one that Inuit understand deeply and live every day. I think that the changing climate is allowing for the recession of ice, and that creates opportunities for increased shipping through the Northwest Passage. I do think that environmental protection is akin to security, in that if we don't have healthy communities and a healthy environment, and we don't have pathways for the movement of vessels through the Arctic, for example, we are increasing our risks, both as a region and as a country.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Simard, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mario Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Kennedy and Mr. Nakimayak.

You probably know that the government hopes to increase its defence spending, perhaps even up to 5% of the gross domestic product. To achieve this, it wants to set up infrastructure for strategic critical minerals. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization wants to establish a list of critical minerals subject to a type of floor price. In short, all this requires investment in infrastructure for critical minerals. As you know, a significant portion of the valuable critical minerals are found in the north.

I would like to know whether the Inuit are participating in discussions with the government regarding both this infrastructure and certain strategic critical minerals mining projects.

You spoke earlier about foreign threats. I want to ask whether this whole situation involves new foreign threats that could, on some level, undermine respect for sovereignty in the Arctic.

I would like to hear your opinion on this matter, particularly regarding the strategic critical minerals situation.

[English]

Herb Nakimayak: As you know, we represent the Inuit internationally, and we have four new treaty organizations that are in fact working with the government. In the Grays Bay area and the Slave geological province, which is just north of the capital of the Northwest Territories and goes into Nunavut, there is great interest there, and there is also shipping from the Mary River mine.

With any development, when it comes to critical minerals and developing that infrastructure, we know there is a lack of such infrastructure in the Arctic, but in being strategic not just for Canada but also for Inuit, working closely with the Inuit treaty organizations will really enhance the ability to become more successful in finding a good logistical point for it. We know critical minerals play a big role right now all around this world, and we are going in that direction.

We want to ensure there are proper environmental reviews and a proper process to ensure that consultation is at the forefront of any type of development and planning. Having Inuit involved is key to ensuring success both for Canada and for the people, such as Inuit, who reside along those shipping lanes and ports. Port-to-port infrastructure is important. We want to ensure we have that ability here in Canada, and also that Inuit have a major role in developing that.

When it comes to the foreign threats backdrop, of course, when any type of infrastructure is developed, there is going to be interest, and there will be for sure. We are seeing that through time. For us to feel safe and secure, we need to ensure we are playing this role with Canada, and any type of threat would certainly jeopardize any type of operation. It is not a life-or-death thing, but we want to ensure there is health and safety along the way, as I said, not just for the people but also for the environment, which is really key.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Mario Simard: Ms. Kennedy, would you like to answer this question as well?

[English]

Sheena Kennedy: The only thing I would add is that when you speak about the threat to sovereignty and the relationship with critical minerals, that is something Canada and Greenland share. If, through your consideration of this policy, you chose to engage more with Greenland on some of these shared priorities, that would be of interest on the other side of Baffin Bay as well as on this side.

I would echo that the creation of the enabling infrastructure to allow for the development of mining in the Arctic is also a shipping issue, because everything that goes out from the Arctic requires trans-Arctic shipping. That is something to take quite seriously as we imagine what the impacts of mining development will be through the Arctic.

[Translation]

Mario Simard: Mr. Nakimayak, do you know of any current strategic critical minerals projects involving Inuit communities?

[English]

Herb Nakimayak: As of now, there are certainly talks of that in our regions, not with the Inuit but in the southern part of the Northwest Territories. Development of ports would sort of fall in line with that. I'm sure that there are initial conversations that are happening and that need to occur to ensure that, first and foremost, sovereignty is also a part of it.

[Translation]

Mario Simard: Since I don't have much time left, I'll finish with this.

We often hear that, to ensure sovereignty over the northern territory, we must occupy the territory. Aren't natural resource development projects a way to occupy the territory?

[English]

Herb Nakimayak: Yes, I agree with you. We have the Canadian Rangers, and we have Inuit, and we need to ensure that we are all

part of it when it comes to it, but occupying would certainly enhance security in our country.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We will now move to MP Abouttaif.

You have five minutes.

Ziad Abouttaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing before the committee.

You must have already read the Arctic foreign policy. In December 2024, it was introduced by the then minister of foreign affairs. The obvious question is this: Was there anything that you think was missing from the policy? Was there anything that you wish had been included in that policy?

I'll start with Dr. Kennedy and move to Mr. Nakimayak after that.

Sheena Kennedy: I believe that the policy is very comprehensive. I was very pleased to see the consideration of the environment directly in the policy. I think there is a lot more we can do together to inform how the policy is implemented, the role of science and monitoring and the inclusion of Inuit in the implementation of the policy.

As I have said, I think there's a lot of opportunity in there for multilateralism and connecting that to environmental protection and security. That could be done through Canada's support for a new central Arctic Ocean agreement.

Ziad Abouttaif: Go ahead, Mr. Nakimayak.

Herb Nakimayak: I think that the naming of the consulates in Nuuk and Anchorage has been great.

When it comes to funding, that's always an issue for Inuit organizations, and the cost of living is certainly being reflected. I think that, when it comes to our knowledge systems, they're basically the vein of our existence. We call our traditional knowledge "indigenous knowledge", "Inuit knowledge" or "Inuvialuit knowledge". We've been negotiating a lot with Canada and other states to ensure that our knowledge systems are intact.

Also, I think sometimes that we need a better understanding of our knowledge systems with committees such as this and others. That could really benefit the decisions that are made or recommendations for developing policy and regulations, especially in the Arctic. That's where, for us, the marine environment could improve, by ensuring that our regulations are strong, sound and reflective of areas of importance for Inuit.

When we start to see ships dumping in our waters before they go to Alaska, Nunavut or another country, then, of course, that's a sign. Looking at signs like those that are happening in real life are really important to understand and maybe break that down. How do we improve this, and what approach do we take? Usually we want Canada to take this approach with Inuit to ensure that it is, in fact, sound.

• (1610)

Ziad Aboultaif: Banking on the Inuit community and the indigenous communities in the north is very critical, and you've mentioned diplomacy as a best way to approach that, which, on the political side, could be very difficult, especially with the practices of Russia these days and the relationship with Russia.

On the other side, we see the community expand beyond Canada's borders to the other partners in the Arctic. That level of co-operation you mention could have a positive impact and a negative impact. Would you be able to clarify for us the positives in that co-operation and what could be the potential negatives?

Again, the question is for both of you. I'll start with Dr. Kennedy.

Sheena Kennedy: Thank you. I think that's a great question.

I think that the lessons of the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement are important here, because very unlikely allies were able to come together to agree on an area of mutual strategic interest. It's not often that you get the U.S. and Russia signing on to the same agreements. I think this is an example of when everyone has collective interest and also collective risk, and you can then come to an agreement to proceed with caution, which is really what the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement is.

I would say that a new agreement basically sets out the rules for what people can do and what they can't do in a space. Then it sets out a process for determining when we might decide and what the rules are that would determine how we might ship through that region or not.

I think that creates a type of agreement that is different from a more political one.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will go next to MP Vandenberg.

Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for being here today.

I would like to start with you, Mr. Nakimayak.

I was on this committee six years ago, when you testified for our last study on the Arctic. Of course, a lot has changed in six years.

First of all, I appreciate what you said about the sovereignty and the people. I think this was a point that you and others made last time. If people are receiving Canadian health care, Canadian EI and Canadian social insurance numbers, then this is Canadian territory, and the people are really core to that.

I wonder if you could reflect a bit on what may have changed in the interim of the last six years. Particularly, I know that the Inuit

people who live in the Russian Federation territory are part of your council.

Has there been any political pressure, or has there been any shift that would reflect the geopolitical shifts that have happened since our last study?

Herb Nakimayak: Thank you for that question. It's nice to see you again.

I think a lot has changed. For Inuit, the interest and attention in our regions and in the Arctic is tenfold, because we are the western gate of the Northwest Passage. We're seeing all of these pleasure crafts coming through. Of course that has changed a lot, and it has brought about some thinking about what kind of environmental impact this is going to have on our communities.

For us, we're talking about environmental impacts as well as the eroding shoreline. I mentioned to one of your colleagues that we've certainly found artifacts in our region that go back about 700 years. This is from whaling.

Through time, we want to ensure that our homelands are protected and ensure that, whether it's cruise ship operators or navies from wherever they may be, they are certainly consulting with us. If they're going to be in our region, let's have that dialogue.

I may be speaking to other departments, saying that if that's the case, certainly we can contribute to whether these patrols, or whatever it may be, could be more impactful for Canada and the partnerships you have.

There has been a lot of joint research planning. That's what we are seeing, and that's the avenue they're taking to show interest in our regions, for sure.

• (1615)

Anita Vandenberg: Has the changing relationship with Russia had an impact on your council?

Herb Nakimayak: Yes, it certainly has. Most recently, we were granted permanent consultative status at the International Maritime Organization, which is for shipping. Certainly countries like Russia have put pressure on us, and it's why we are there, but we want to ensure that the Inuit in Russia are safe as well, so we do our best to work diplomatically to ensure that their lives are protected and that the health, well-being and safety of all Inuit are equal. There is no one who is less or otherwise. That's how we look at it.

Thank you.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you very much.

I have a short time, and I'd like to go to you, Dr. Kennedy.

I'm glad you mentioned the link between environment, climate change and security. Canada has recognized that climate change is a national security issue.

I wonder if you could elaborate a little about the way the changes happening in the oceans and in the climate are impacting Canada's national security interests.

Sheena Kennedy: I think we are facing the relationship between our collective well-being and the environment. We also work with a lot of coastal communities in Atlantic Canada. They are seeing a lot of changes in their livelihoods and in their communities. Herb spoke about coastal erosion. That's happening all over.

When you have environmental protections in place, you have eyes and ears on the water. You have monitoring. You have science. You have management. That creates a greater sense of security for people. We can't really feel secure without the right information. We have a lot of science, but there's a lot we don't know. Particularly in the north, there is information that we really need to be able to understand what the impacts are.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

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

Mario Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Kennedy, I gather from your comments that you're most concerned about climate change and, perhaps, the geopolitical issues with Russia. Since the committee will be preparing a report, I'm wondering about your short-term recommendations for greater climate change resilience or for measures that should be put in place. I'm asking this question because the geopolitical situation over the past five or six years is different from the situation in the past.

Do you have any recommendations for the committee, both in terms of geopolitics and climate change?

[*English*]

Sheena Kennedy: It's a light question.

On climate change, I would start with the rapid decarbonization of the maritime industry. That is a huge one. Maintaining Canada's commitments to our climate targets and looking to our partners in the European Union to see how they are decarbonizing their shipping would be worthwhile for this committee to consider. I have a deep bench on this in my organization, so we'd be happy to provide insights if that's helpful.

On this notion of Arctic exceptionalism, which I know some people are questioning in our new environment, we need to hold on to that. This is a strategically important place where parties have come together in the past, and we should take that very seriously.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard: Since I still have some time left, I would like to ask Mr. Nakimayak the same question.

Do you have any recommendations that should be included in our committee's report?

[*English*]

Herb Nakimayak: In short, it's nice that we're sitting here at committee, but having advisers from Inuit regions involved in this

would be really helpful to ensure that you are, in fact, doing the right thing as you move ahead.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is MP Michael Chong. You have five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills North, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today. It's good to see you.

I haven't been up in the north for a few years, but I look forward to going back at some point. I had a memorable trip hiking up the Weasel River across Baffin Island several years ago. Never did I think it would take that long to climb up and down moraines and across glacial rivers, but we got it done. We got back to Pangnirtung, and a good, warm meal was never more welcome.

I'm not sure if you can answer the following question. If you can't, that's fine. I just want to ask it. Are you familiar with some of the race that's on to lay underwater sea cables between Europe and Asia and between Europe and North America, as well as in the Russian sphere of the Arctic?

Herb Nakimayak: I can probably tell you some stories about hiking that are really entertaining as well. I have a partner who forgot a few things. It's good to see that you're there and that you see the landscape. You see the vastness of it.

When it comes to underwater cabling, in our region, because we're right at the mouth of the Mackenzie River, which is one of the biggest rivers in the world, there's a changing permafrost. There's such a changing environment down below there, in the seabed, that it's insecure to actually run a line across it. We know that it's a risk. When it comes to others, I'm sure that the need to connect is important also.

That leaves the question: Do we have the technology, as Canada, to monitor those lines that are put down? Other countries may have submarines and other types of surveillance that could certainly have that impact.

I think that we need to ensure....

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes. I'm referencing that there's a Russian project called the Polar Express, and it's to lay cable across the Russian sphere of the Arctic. There are two proposals to run cables—one of which would go through the Canadian Arctic—from European-led consortiums.

One is the Far North Fiber project, which is a consortium of companies in Finland, the United States and Japan that would lay a cable between Europe and Asia. The other is a cable that would run through the Canadian Arctic, called Polar Connect, which would run between Europe and North America.

I am wondering if you are at all aware of those projects that are being proposed.

Herb Nakimayak: We certainly hear a bit of the wording, but we're not fully aware or involved at this time.

Hon. Michael Chong: I have a different question to ask.

In the government's Arctic and northern policy framework statement, one of the three priorities was to come to some finality on Canada's international border. We've had disputes with the United States in the Beaufort Sea. We've long had a dispute with the Kingdom of Denmark about Hans Island and the waters surrounding that island. The government committed, in its most recent Arctic foreign policy, to begin negotiations with the United States on the Beaufort Sea boundary and then to finalize the boundary between Canada and Denmark around Hans Island. Could you comment on either one of those two boundary disputes?

• (1625)

Herb Nakimayak: In all fairness, in this instance, at this moment in time, I would encourage you to work with the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, which is leading those investigations. We certainly want to support that however we can, but you would have to take that up with the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation.

Hon. Michael Chong: In other words, you haven't heard anything about the launch of negotiations with the United States over the Beaufort Sea boundary or about where we are with finalizing the boundary with Denmark. Is that...?

Herb Nakimayak: I haven't really, as of late.

Hon. Michael Chong: What about you, Dr. Kennedy? You have nothing either. Okay.

I don't have any further questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, MP Chong.

We will now go to MP Rob Oliphant.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To the witnesses, I apologize for not being present. Some family obligations kept me working from home today.

I am really glad—I don't know that you're really aware—that this is the start of our Arctic foreign policy study. I think it's really quite wonderful that we are starting the policy with the Inuit Nunangat. I think that is very important. It is also key that you're an international organization. The ICC is an international organization representing Inuit peoples from Alaska through to Russia.

As an Inuit international organization, as opposed to ITK or others that are national organizations, what do you see as your role in fostering dialogue among Inuit people in different countries? How does that work, and what could Canada learn from it?

Herb Nakimayak: Since you can't be here, maybe you can meet us in Reykjavik for the Arctic Circle Assembly, where we're going to meet with other Arctic ambassadors.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I was just talking about that today, as a matter of fact. In October, it is a possibility.

Herb Nakimayak: We hope that you can make it.

Getting back to your question, we know that our role here at ICC is to collaborate with other Inuit in other countries, which we do regularly. We have quarterly meetings. Also, we seem to be the

connector between Inuit and other indigenous peoples around the world, and other Arctic indigenous peoples as well.

We find that we've become a conduit—actually a very useful one—to ensure that when it comes to Arctic issues, the protection and the safety of our fellow Canadians is first and foremost everywhere we go. In a way, that's sovereignty working at its best to ensure that we can collaborate and coordinate together with other Arctic states, other Arctic countries and other indigenous peoples around the world who have an interest in the Arctic.

I hope that helps, but I can continue.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: On that, I want to look at the connection or nexus among sovereignty, prosperity, economic development and the environment, and how you are seeing the ICC, in particular, taking on those questions of economic development for the peoples of the four countries.

Herb Nakimayak: Sometimes we have forums and gatherings, and a lot of times we bring....

First and foremost, even the policies within Canada itself are difficult or almost impossible to work with. I think COVID and the geopolitical state of this world showed us that first, right up front. However, we find that utilizing the Inuit treaty organizations—for them to work collaboratively together to ensure that they are the business people—for what we can do to support them and bring them to where we need them to be, is really important. As I mentioned earlier, we are a conduit, one who can give a safe place, in the right moment, and an opportunity to bring together everybody who needs to be there. Having the right people at the table is very key. First and foremost, that is the most important thing in developing sound policy, especially when it comes to the economic world.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I'm quite proud of the 2019 strategy as the first codeveloped strategy, really, in Canada, which was integrally codeveloped with indigenous peoples and the Government of Canada. When we brought out the foreign policy review last year, 2024, it had become sacred to not change anything that had been codeveloped, and, as I had consultations in the north, I saw a difference in six years. Have you seen a difference in six years in the way the respect is happening? I know there's more to be done. I'm not looking for a pat on the back. I'm just looking.... Is it effective? Has something attitudinal changed in the way we're doing things?

• (1630)

Herb Nakimayak: I think, if anything, it has likely improved for us. We noticed a difference. When we see the services in the communities, business happening in the regions and also the planning together, it is a big difference. Yes...you get a pat on the back right now: For sure, you've done a good job. I would have to say that we are in the best place right now that we possibly could be. Consultation is quite key for us, ensuring that anything that is developed or codeveloped....

When it comes to codevelopment—I come from a comanagement world in the marine environment, and the work we have done with Canada is actually quite amazing and leading around this world—Canada has come a long way in ensuring that comanagement and codevelopment are sound and key. Not changing what you have created with indigenous people is actually quite a respectful way of doing business, in itself, so I think it has been good.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you. I hope to get to Reykjavik.

The Chair: Thank you, MP Oliphant.

Thank you to our witnesses, President Nakimayak and Dr. Kennedy, for their testimony and for appearing for this study.

This concludes this portion of the meeting. We will suspend briefly, so that we can welcome the next set of witnesses. Thank you very much.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the second hour. They are appearing by video conference.

We have Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer, professor, Canada research chair in the study of the Canadian north, Trent University; and Dr. Christian Leuprecht, professor, Royal Military College of Canada and Queen's University.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

I now invite Dr. Lackenbauer to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Professor, Canada Research Chair in the Study of the Canadian North, Trent University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the chance to appear before the committee today.

We find ourselves in a world of intensifying geostrategic competition. Certainly, Arctic affairs have felt the effects of this over the last few years. Today, the prospects for truly circumpolar co-operation are constrained by geopolitical realities.

We think back to 2019. In the Arctic northern policy framework, Russia was framed as a potential Arctic partner. Now it is clearly acknowledged as an adversary with whom there can be no business as usual, given its brutal full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It has actively disregarded sovereignty, territorial integrity and international law in what we've seen in the war in Europe, and—

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. The pace is too fast and the interpreters are having difficulty keeping up. Would it be possible to slow down?

[*English*]

The Chair: For the benefit of our interpreters, please slow down.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: Very happily.

Any lingering ideas about Arctic exceptionalism and the region being inherently insulated from global geopolitical dynamics are now very out of date in my view, so I disagree fundamentally with Dr. Kennedy, who appeared earlier, on this particular point.

“Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy”, released last December, has three general intentions: asserting Canada's sovereignty, advancing our interests in the region and promoting a stable, prosperous and secure north. These are long-standing priorities, but how we are advancing our interests and promoting stability and security are what's changing.

Flowing from this, I want to take a few minutes to lay out what I see as the key elements of Canada's Arctic foreign policy that are the same as before, along with what has changed and what is new.

What's the same? The desire for Arctic state primacy is a long-standing priority that insists that the Arctic states are best positioned and equipped to understand the region and its peoples.

Reiterating that Canada remains committed to upholding the rules-based international order in the Arctic and that maritime claims are addressed in a manner consistent with international law gestures to the legality of our long-standing position on the Northwest Passage as historic internal waters. It also speaks to our submission in support of our extended continental shelf.

We can talk more about sovereignty later, but Canada's position is strong and long-standing, and I see no need for or benefit to revisiting or revising it substantively. Let's show some confidence.

There is the promise to secure Canada's national interests and ensure stability and prosperity for indigenous people who live in the Arctic. All recent governments have had a similar strategic intent, going back to Jean Chrétien and even before.

We see the United States framed as Canada's “greatest ally” and our “closest partner and ally in the Arctic”. Our foreign policy reinforces how close partnership with the Americans is essential to maintaining a secure, strong and well-defended North American homeland on which our mutual prosperity depends. Obviously, the re-election of Donald Trump has injected uncertainty into the mix, which we'll discuss later.

We also retain language designating the Arctic Council as the pre-eminent forum for Arctic co-operation while explaining that some of the high politics in the meetings remain on pause. We heard in the last session that climate change is a central theme characterized as both the most pressing and the most proximate threat to Canada's security in the Arctic, but I think the leakages between climate change and national security remain vague, and we might talk about that.

Furthermore, the policy adopts a whole-of-government or a whole-of-society framework, acknowledging that if we're going to address the complex range of threats facing the Arctic, we can't conceptualize security only in military terms. This entails working with Public Safety Canada—Mr. Blair, that is your former portfolio, of course—to support efforts to strengthen Canadian national resilience, to counter the malign influence and activities of foreign powers, to strengthen defence of critical infrastructure and to protect northern communities against foreign interference. All of this is very important. To me, these are the kinds of issues that are the clear and present danger we're facing as Canadians.

What has changed? We are now explicit in acknowledging the relevance and importance of NATO in the Arctic region, and talk of protecting the alliance's northern and western flanks opens up some new areas for thinking about the Arctic in securing alliance territory more generally. Russia, as I said, is now a competitor that we're stating seeks to undermine the rules-based international order.

China is now positioned as a non-Arctic state competitor and a challenger to Arctic state supremacy that we can expect will use all the tools at its disposal to advance its geopolitical interests, including in the Arctic. There is a lot of concern about China deploying dual-use research vessels and surveillance platforms to collect data, as well as actions that represent malign economic influence. At the same time, our policy is mature in leaving space for pragmatic diplomacy, where we're challenging China where we ought to, and also in being able to co-operate where interests align, such as in addressing pressing global issues like climate change, which have impacts on the Arctic.

- (1645)

We also astutely note, “While the risk of military attack [is] low, the region represents a geographic vector for traditional and emerging weapons systems”. This is not new, but we're now much more attentive to the fact that adversaries and competitors are employing “disinformation and influence campaigns, malicious cyber operations and espionage and foreign interference [that] target Canadians, including northerners.” This cannot be ignored.

I love that we include the Coast Guard as a partner in defence and security and its important role in maintaining awareness.

I'll have to save for questions and answers what I see as new in this, but that'll get us started.

I'll pass it over to you, Dr. Leuprecht.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor.

I now invite Dr. Leuprecht to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

[Translation]

Christian Leuprecht (Professor, Royal Military College of Canada and Queen's University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to acknowledge all the committee members, including the members who served the country. I have enormous respect for them. In fact, I know a number of them quite well.

I'll be giving my remarks in English. However, I encourage the members to speak in the official language of their choice.

[English]

I just returned from the NATO in the Nordics conference, which is organized biannually by the Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies on behalf of the military universities in Norway, Sweden and Denmark. I also bring extensive comparative expertise on matters of the Arctic and of Arctic foreign policy among allied and partner countries, including my book, entitled *Polar Cousins: Comparing Antarctic and Arctic Geostrategic Futures*.

February 2026: Russia has landed troops on Svalbard. At the same time, Russia is dropping platoons of soldiers near CFS Alert, while a Chinese supposed “research” vessel is providing logistics and drone coverage. Is Canada ready for a provocation?

The Canadian Armed Forces has been tasked with being “ready, resilient and relevant” to detect, deter, defend and defeat accelerating threats to Canada and Canada's national interests. At the same time, the “Inflection Point 2025” document by the Canadian Army observes:

Our stretched force, purpose built for employment on “contribution warfare” missions for the last several decades, has resulted in an Army that is currently postured for presence in competition, but challenged for crisis and unprepared for conflict due to the lack of critical enablers, sustainment, depth, and focus.

Why is this a problem for Arctic sovereignty?

First, countries need policy enablers. Earlier this year, Canada released a robust and timely Arctic foreign policy, but the fundamental problem with the policy is that it reflects a broader challenge: that in this country we build policy backward. If Canada had a national security strategy, then other relevant policies would flow from the national security strategy. However, without a national security strategy, there is no shared understanding, no unity of purpose and effort, and no coherence within and across government and its departments. That reflects the broader failure of Canada and allies over the past 25 years. We had no vision. We left international security up to the Americans, and now we're surprised and complaining about the world we live in.

Canada's Arctic foreign policy reflects the same problem that Canada is facing in so many other areas of foreign policy: We do not have the initiative. The Arctic foreign policy is an acknowledgement that Canada must regain the initiative. Canada's sovereignty is measured by Canada's ability and capability to shape the environment rather than simply having to react to it.

The government likes to tout investments that it is making in Arctic security, defence and foreign policy. However, the problem is that the threat vectors across the Arctic are accelerating while the rules-based international order is atrophying; infrastructure investments in the Arctic cost about 10 times what they cost in southern Canada; models from the south don't apply in the north, which means the closest comparators are not found in Canada but among other Arctic allies; and, with respect to the United States, the Arctic has always been an area of contestation, going back to at least the Alaska boundary dispute. The best return on those investments that we can hope for is to preserve the status quo, but given the changing character of the Arctic, preserving the status quo is not an option.

In having to invest more for a lower rate of return, the Arctic is a laboratory for Canadian foreign policy more broadly. On the one hand, due to structural domestic and geopolitical changes, Canada's interests are increasingly diverging from those of the United States. On the other hand, the European Union, and Europe, is becoming a more autarkic actor.

Canada is left with two stark choices: draw even closer to the United States by default or invest more in Canadian foreign policy and foreign policy instruments in the hopes of continuing to assert Canada's interests as a middle power by partnering with Europe in counterbalancing the vagaries of U.S. unilateralism and global headwinds.

• (1650)

Security is job number one for any government, and the Arctic is Canada's top-priority theatre, before the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions. It is not just about protecting Canadian sovereignty but for Canadians to realize that if North America is not safe and secure, then Canada's ability to make sovereign decisions that best reflect Canadian interests will be compromised, as will the ability of the United States to provide extended nuclear deterrence, which would result in global nuclear proliferation. As a result, the Arctic foreign policy is about investing not just in Canadian sovereignty but in continental security and global stability and therefore in NATO.

Canadian politicians have traditionally done a poor job of explaining to our European allies the value of Canada's investments in NATO's North American pillar. The government also needs to explain to Canadians that the Arctic is no longer a zone of perennial peace. The Arctic is now in play as a zone of adversarial competition and rivalry. What Canada does or does not do in the Arctic has national, continental, allied and global ramifications. Arctic foreign policy and related efforts to secure Canada's Arctic sovereignty are not discretionary. If it fails, so will Canada.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Leuprecht, for your opening statement.

I now turn to my colleagues for the questions, beginning with MP Michael Chong.

You have six minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Chair. Thank you to our witnesses for appearing.

I asked the previous panellists the same question.

Are you familiar at all with some of the proposals to build high-speed Internet submarine cables between Europe and North America and Europe and Asia through the Canadian Arctic? In particular, I'm thinking about a project that I understand that is being proposed by a group of companies from Finland, the United States and Japan that would go through parts of the Canadian Arctic. I believe that project is called the Far North Fiber project.

Are either of you familiar with this?

Okay, maybe you could speak to it.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: Yes, happily.

Certainly there's a suite of fibre projects. We see a lot of fibre already existing in the European high north and Arctic. In the Baltic region you see many of those strands already strung across. We've seen proposals on the Canadian side or running through and connecting Europe to Asia. These have been on the books for quite some time. We see on the Russian side—I think you mentioned this one in the last panel—the Polar Express project, for example, proposing to connect Murmansk to Vladivostok.

What I think is interesting is that in these different scenarios, single strands of fibre are things that can be disrupted by a deliberate anchor dragging or an inadvertent anchor dragging, or other kinds of disruption.

• (1655)

Hon. Michael Chong: That was going to be my next question.

We've seen disruptions in the Baltic Sea and elsewhere of submarine Internet cables that carry these. The submarine cables, I understand, carry a majority of the world's global Internet traffic.

What capacity do we have or do we need if we don't have it, to monitor subsurface movements of nefarious actors who would drag an anchor or otherwise to cut these cables?

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: Right now these are difficult. I will turn it over to Dr. Leuprecht in just a second.

They are difficult, because they are often low-signature and very difficult to attribute. The benefit is that if we see these as part of a suite of different communications systems from seabed to outer space, they are adding redundancy to satellites. We also need to be thinking about redundancy and duplication that is strategic and deliberate when we're deploying these systems. I think the question is very much directed in the right direction. That is, if we're building infrastructure, if we're making these investments, we also need to think about how we're defending this infrastructure and making sure that it's built right into the plans from the onset.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm sorry, I have a second quick question. I don't have unlimited time.

Part of the government's Arctic foreign policy is to assert Canada's sovereignty. The defence policy also has made the Arctic a big focus. In early 2022, just three years ago, Canada and Finland announced the purchase of F-35 jets. For Finland I believe it's about 64 jets, and Canada indicated its intention to purchase 88. To that end, both the Finns and the Canadians are preparing training and facilities in the Far North to welcome the arrival of those jets.

The Auditor General has indicated that Canada is years behind schedule and won't be operational with the F-35s until at least 2033-2034. Finland, a much smaller country purchasing almost the same number of jets, is going to be fully operational with these jets in the Far North in 2030. I'm just wondering what the Finns are doing that allows them to purchase almost the same number of jets with a fraction of the resources that we have—I think they are a country of some four million people—and get them operational by 2030, where we are years behind schedule in a country with 10 times the resources, people and economy that the Finns have.

What are they doing that we are not doing to make this happen?

Christian Leuprecht: In Finland, there's a broad consensus in terms of the need to defend the country. This is a country that can surge to 400,000 soldiers in a matter of weeks. It has 4,000 artillery pieces that it can marshal, and this is a country where there's a broad bipartisan consensus in the way you conduct security, defence and foreign policy in ways that do not politicize them for partisan gain.

Other than the United States, it is also the country that probably has the most advanced ways of trying to protect its underwater critical infrastructure. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs has done exceptional work, and the former president, who's now the chair of the European hybrid threat centre, is, in my view, one of the absolute best people in the world on this.

You know, if you are living next to Russia, and you've had the experience that Finland has had, you take your security and your defence seriously. It has the political cover, the will and the strategy, as I pointed out in my opening remarks, which is what we're missing. We're just doing it piecemeal, here and there.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: I'm happy to jump in on this as well.

I think, looking at the F-35, it is incumbent upon Canada to make a decision and stick by the decision it has made. It's important right now to have transparency and certainty within an alliance construct, and these are obviously going to be pretty serious investments in creating and laying out the enabling infrastructure in the north. This is going to be different from the forward-operating locations that we had for CF-18s.

If we look across to Eielson Air Force Base and the infrastructure housing F-35s in the United States, these are ultra-secure facilities. These are absolutely the most advanced airframes and sensor suits that you can imagine. These are not going to be dual use-type facilities that we're building. This is going to be dedicated military infrastructure.

In order to have that in place in time for when we actually receive these airframes, we need to start now in working out the relationships and getting that infrastructure built. We need to get the right sorts of relationships in place to make sure they're secured and

that we're able to make the most of this very important investment that we're making.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before I proceed to MP Blair, I just want to remind the members and the witnesses to speak a little more slowly for the benefit of the interpreters.

Next, we will go to MP Bill Blair.

Hon. Bill Blair (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Welcome to both of our guests, Dr. Lackenbauer and Dr. Leuprecht.

It's good to see you again, Christian. We've had many opportunities to have conversations in the past, and it's nice in this format.

If I may, I wanted to comment. First of all, we haven't spoken very much about the defence policy update that was released in April 2024. It was entitled, "Our North, Strong and Free", and it focused on a number of things.

I will share with you as well, Dr. Leuprecht, that our policy work on that was informed, in part, by your own work in "Making Canada's Arctic security paradigm fit for purpose".

We talked a lot about the impact of climate change and the new technologies that were making our north far more accessible, but we also talked about the activities of our adversaries, in particular China and Russia, and some of the things that we were doing. I think it was really important to acknowledge those challenges.

One of the things that I have also learned in my fairly extensive work on defence in the Arctic is, you know, when I've gone to the Arctic, to people who live in those communities, particularly the Inuit, we talk about defending sovereignty and what that means to them. They say that it does not mean a fighter jet occasionally flying by. It does not mean a ship once in a while sailing through when the ice is out. What it actually means for them is infrastructure, significant investment in infrastructure. They talk about airport runways, highways, fibre optics, water treatment plants, power generation plants, and significant investments that could be multi-use to those communities. Of course, that presents a fairly significant challenge for us as well.

I would like your take on where we should be spending our money first. As you've seen, the Prime Minister, quite recently, in June of this year, made a commitment at the NATO summit in the Hague to significantly expand our defence expenditure. Additionally, there was a commitment to raise it over the next several years to as much as 5%, and 1.5% of that is an investment primarily in nation-building infrastructure, which has a security component.

Let me also agree with you that we've gone through decades of underinvestment in our national security, and I think that was born, in large part, of complacency. We were surrounded by three oceans, one of which was mostly frozen most of the time. We also shared our only land border with a benign superpower. Our complacency, I think, was based on a pretty fair expectation of how things would continue, but they've clearly changed.

I'd like your input on how we might best use our significant investments of \$9 billion extra this year. In every subsequent year, defence spending will actually increase. What's the best way to invest that money?

Christian Leuprecht: Mr. Blair, as you know, I have great respect for the work you did in that department. It's a very unwieldy department that I have lots of experience in myself.

The first thing is that we need to think about the effects we want to achieve. This is always a challenge in trying to make sure we are targeting the payoffs and are able to explain them to our allies. As you know, I spend lots of time in Europe, and nobody counts what Canada does in the north as an investment in NATO.

On the importance of infrastructure, I share your view on critical infrastructure. The first point I always make when I'm talking about Arctic security is that when you talk to the locals in the north, they'll tell you the first priority isn't the Russians showing up; it's food security and other elements of human security, and how we can both use infrastructure to improve the lives of our Canadian citizens who share that territory and leverage that at the same time for our purpose of sovereignty.

One of the challenges we're going to have is that we're sitting on a ticking time bomb. With the amount of money we're spending on infrastructure and defence and so forth, if we do not spend it well and we do not spend it to considerable effect for national sovereignty and the benefit of Canadian society and Canadians, there will be a reckoning from the Canadian electorate. If we're going to spend these amounts of money, these are exactly the questions we need to ask.

I worry that we might be spending too much money too quickly with too little a concrete plan of what we're actually looking to get for that money in the medium and the long term.

• (1705)

Hon. Bill Blair: First of all, I agree that we talked a lot about spending, but we need to talk about investing and think about what the return is on that investment.

Go ahead, Dr. Lackenbauer.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: First of all, we need to get clarity on what we're discussing when we're talking about Arctic sovereignty and security. We have sovereignty. No one has a better claim to ownership over Canada than Canadians. Our sovereignty is nested with indigenous sovereignties intermingling with those of our state through our land claim agreements and so on. I think we create more uncertainty about our sovereignty than many external actors do.

Disentangle that from security and ask what type of security threat we are focusing on. We have threats through the Arctic and

threats that would emanate from outside of our Arctic and pass over or through to strike at targets outside of the region. This is investment in domain awareness. This is NORAD modernization. Much of this is dedicated, critical military infrastructure, much of which will not have dual use.

When it comes to threats to the Arctic, I disagree with Dr. Leuprecht. It is not Russian Spetsnaz units landing outside of CFS Alert. I spent almost the entire month of July on an operation with the Canadian Rangers, Operation Nanook-Takuniq, on northern Ellesmere Island. I'm not worried about an invasion of land forces on northern Ellesmere. What I am worried about is a whole bunch of interference activities and other ways that nefarious foreign actors may seek to influence or undermine Canadians' abilities, including northern rights holders' abilities, to influence and chart our desired future direction.

Here's where I think investments in other security departments and agencies are absolutely essential, as much as coordinating with defence is. When it comes to the "in" threats, NATO's seven baseline requirements for national resilience give us a really nice hook for how we can make smart, strategic investments with that 1.5% of GDP. That's helping us meet our obligations.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor. We're over the time, so I will go next to MP Simard.

[Translation]

Mr. Simard, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mario Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, thank you for your remarks. I can see from your body language that you're also passionate about this topic.

I have a question that may take you in a different direction. Given my area of interest, I usually sit on the Standing Committee on Natural Resources. Did you know that the federal government wants to contribute to a critical minerals bank that would serve NATO countries, given that northern Canada has a wealth of critical minerals?

Russia and China are the main producers of rare earths, for example. They carry out a great deal of dumping, which makes it difficult to develop mining projects. In a way, they're driving prices down. Within NATO, people are talking about setting a floor price for certain critical minerals in order to successfully develop these industries. I would like to hear your thoughts on this.

I would also like to hear your opinion on another topic. You spoke earlier about interference. Isn't there a risk that Russian or Chinese entrepreneurs could provide funding for some of these projects, even here in Canada? I would like to hear your thoughts on the whole concept of critical minerals and rare earths and their strategic implications.

Christian Leuprecht: The issue with critical minerals in the Far North is that the costs often exceed the profitability of mines in this region. In terms of infrastructure, it often isn't cost-effective to pursue this path. You probably know this, since you sit on the Standing Committee on Natural Resources. In principle, Canada could make a contribution. However, it must develop a national strategy that makes these types of investments profitable for the private sector, which ties in with Mr. Blair's comment. It would then be necessary to provide the infrastructure for these critical resources. This infrastructure could contribute to the well-being of local communities and our allies and would support our defence and national security. As you noted during my remarks, I doubt that the comprehensive strategy needed to properly align all these factors is in place.

• (1710)

Mario Simard: Thank you, Mr. Leuprecht.

Mr. Lackenbauer, what do you think?

[*English*]

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: Yes, thank you. That's an excellent question.

I think that critical minerals are one of those sectors that we should be focusing on, because these are risks that are not just hypothetical; they're very real.

I think a lot of our attention for the last few years has been looking at foreign-owned entities purchasing outright entire mining operations and then controlling and dictating flows. I think what we've seen play out in one case in particular, about 100 kilometres east of Yellowknife, was about controlling supply chains and value chains, as you mentioned, Mr. Simard. It's sometimes as advantageous for China, with its monopoly, to keep those critical minerals in the ground as it is to extract them. It's having that offtake in making sure that we do not have the refining and processing capabilities in Canada or friendly countries to control that value chain.

Here's where I think it's both looking collectively with allies to invest and share the risk associated with the costs of extracting these minerals and refining them but also leveraging tools like the Investment Canada Act. In my mind, it's one of the primary instruments of asserting Canada's sovereignty. It's a different way. It's not an icebreaker hull in the water or a CF-18 flying in the skies, but it's still a way of asserting our right to control activities in our jurisdiction.

Here, if we are serious about a green transition, accessing the latest defence technologies and contributing to those supply chains, it's incumbent upon us to really move in terms of critical minerals and act upon that strategy that's been articulated.

[*Translation*]

Mario Simard: Thank you.

Gentlemen, if you have any recommendations or documents to submit to the committee on this matter, it would be beneficial both for us and for the studies carried out by the Standing Committee on Natural Resources.

In your opinion, is it wishful thinking to believe that NATO could agree to set a floor price for certain critical minerals in order

to launch this type of project? I've heard this idea. However, I wonder whether NATO member countries have actually launched a structured initiative for rare earths, for example.

[*English*]

The Chair: Give a brief response, please.

Christian Leuprecht: I just have a quick comment.

[*Translation*]

In my opinion, the challenges that we face in the Far North are similar to the challenges encountered in the rest of Canada. Too much regulation makes it difficult to invest and to carry out projects in Canada.

I just spent six months in Brussels, where I had discussions with officials from a number of European Union member countries. According to the European Union and the European perspective in general, Canada remains an extremely difficult economic and political player to do business with.

[*English*]

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: I think it's also fair to say that some of these initiatives have certainly been under discussion at NATO. One of the challenges is that right now we've had—let's call it what it is—a rogue actor in Washington who has disrupted a lot of the opportunity space to be able to focus on and channel what these strategic priorities are. Perhaps putting in that guaranteed floor price is one mechanism.

I just hope that we return to a situation where we are working together collectively to make sure that we are protecting these supply chains, recognizing that it's key to our self-determining future.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go next to MP Ziad Aboultaif for five minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thanks to the witnesses.

Dr. Lackenbauer, you just gave me my first question.

We were told and we were convinced that we needed to work with our allies as far as the Arctic goes. The closest ally at this point is the United States. The Alaska summit between President Putin and President Trump—without knowing any details and I'm not sure if you have any details or any reading on that—has become a concern over what the relationship and the policy over the Arctic is going to be. Our policy was introduced in December 2024. The summit happened last month.

I would like to know from you and Dr. Leuprecht what you think of the position of the United States. How is that strategy going to make it difficult for Canada to continue implementing and protecting Canada's interests in the north?

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: Thank you. I think that's an excellent question.

First of all, to be clear, our desired end state is for some of the craziness in Washington to calm down, so we can get back to our core relationship with the United States, which serves both of our national interests. What is going on and the signals that we have been receiving from Washington make no sense from an interest-based approach to the world.

My first suggestion is that we need to demonstrate strategic patience. It's hard, but in the short term, we need to put our well-warranted emotional frustrations aside and recognize that what we actually desire is building forward so that we get back to stability, more certainty and respect. I believe that will come, but belief can be a dangerous thing in a world of interests and some of the actors we're dealing with.

The key thing is that it's essential that we look at and articulate what we bring to the table in the continental defence equation, so that we start to speak with more confidence about what we contribute to NORAD. We are not simply a passive recipient of American security guarantees. The commitments that we've made with Arctic over-the-horizon radar, polar over-the-horizon radar and different sensor systems that we're deploying are going to be integral to North American defence. If we cover off what's often described as "10 to 2", it allows the Americans to focus on the Atlantic and Pacific directions or vectors of attack to North America.

Still, when sober minds prevail in all of this, I think everything points toward our being good, reliable allies working together. We want to make sure that we're preserving NORAD as a binational command, but we also need to realize that some issues of trust have arisen. We also need to be quietly, in safe spaces, considering and contemplating scenarios that we probably wouldn't have talked about in polite company a couple of years ago. Namely, how are we prepared to defend ourselves if our key guarantor is interested in protecting itself but maybe not us?

Christian Leuprecht: Look, I have a slightly different take on this.

We have not been very good at following 100 years of precedent of making sure we counterbalance against the vagaries of U.S. unilateralism that come and go. This is why the question by Monsieur Simard is so important. Canada needs to add value to Europe to ensure that Europe remains a key partner for Canada going into the future.

A more autarkic Europe means Canada has no choice but to draw closer to the United States, and in light of what we're observing, it needs to be an urgent reminder that doing things that might be interesting ideologically, or in term of the ideas of some electoral groups in the country, ultimately does not serve the national interest. Governing by polls means we are not actually governing by the national need of this country.

The national need of this country is to make sure that we have in Europe a reliable partner with whom we can govern the Arctic and with whom we can counterbalance on the North American continent, precisely because the phenomena Dr. Lackenbauer talks about come and go and we were not ready. We had it. We saw it coming. My colleague, Kim Nossal, wrote an entire book about it, which was published in 2023. It laid out line by line what the Trump ad-

ministration was going to do, yet we decided in this country that we were instead going to be caught with our pants down.

Ziad Aboultaif: Do you believe that the current policy reflects the United States position or the United States strategy?

• (1720)

Christian Leuprecht: Can you repeat the question? I'm sorry.

Ziad Aboultaif: The question is, do you believe that the current policy of Canada from December 2024 reflects the strategic position of the United States and what we've seen from the administration there?

Christian Leuprecht: I would have lobbied for a much more aggressive policy when it comes to the Arctic. I think we're still in a moment where we think we have five or 10 years to build out greater Canadian sovereignty. We need a much more rapid accelerant, especially when it comes to the Arctic.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: I think it largely gets it right. I think we need to be instilled with a sense of urgency rather than one of crisis, which can lead us to override democratic processes and things that are core to our values as Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We will next go to MP Vandenberg.

You have five minutes.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for this really important testimony that you've both given today.

I'd like to start my questions with Professor Lackenbauer.

I noted that in your opening remarks, when you were talking about the whole of government, you had just started to talk about the Coast Guard and bringing the Coast Guard into the defence team. I wonder if you could say what you were planning to say about that. I'm quite curious.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: Sure. I'll keep this nice and succinct.

I think this is welcome. I think it allows us to signal outward that this is part of our broader security equities as a country. I think we sometimes forget that we do have a highly capable Coast Guard, which, in a global context, is not on par with the Russians because we're not asking our Coast Guard to do things comparable to what the Russians ask their Coast Guard to do.

Having it assume more of a constabulary role, which is a shift in culture and will take adjustments in the Coast Guard, is something that fits with the tenor of the times. I think we'll need to have sensitivity as a country to make sure that as that agency is adjusting, it's able to retain the culture that's made it so effective in the past, but that in moving forward we now bundle that together, and our mental way of conceptualizing security will also include that in all this suite of different platforms and sensors we have out there. The Coast Guard are also our eyes and ears within Canadian territory, just as our Canadian Rangers are.

Anita Vandenberg: That leads perfectly to my next question.

I know that you are quite the expert when it comes to the Canadian Rangers. Are we using them to the maximum potential that we could be? Is there anything more we should be doing with the Canadian Rangers in this current environment?

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: Thanks.

Yes. I think it was laid out in “Strong, Secure, Engaged” in 2017, in the defence policy that said we should be investing resources in improving the training and effectiveness of the rangers.

That means—and this isn't very exciting on a strategic level—making sure there are the right pay clerks in place at their different headquarters to make sure they're paid on time, and making sure they have training opportunities and abilities to get out on the land. It does not require a fundamental retooling of the Canadian Rangers. They serve as really key force enablers and force multipliers if we need to send kinetic forces—combat forces—up to the north but enable them to be those eyes and ears and those voices of the north, in the military and of the military in the north.

Anita Vandenbeld: You also spent a lot of time talking about different kinds of hybrid threats. We know what those threats are to all of Canada, but what is peculiar and special about the threats that particularly impact the north and the Arctic?

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: Christian, I will go quickly on this one and hand it over to you.

I think it is that there are so many single points of failure. Without a lot of redundancy in terms of infrastructure, it means that whether it is a deliberate act of espionage or interference or a natural disaster, disruptions down south can happen in ways such that we would have alternate routes or alternate mechanisms for mitigating the associated risks.

We also need to think about extremes of weather and the winter and how, if an electric generator goes down, as it did in Puvirnituq and Pangnirtung a little more than a decade ago, that represents a very acute human security crisis. It is different; we have had ice storms in southern Canada, so I will not dismiss that either, but when you're dealing with -40°C and -50°C conditions, this takes on a whole different imperative, so I think that's partly it.

It's also thinking about what vulnerabilities exist in terms of polarization. What are the friction points within our democratic systems that adversaries may want to exploit? We want to make sure Canadians are protected so we can have those difficult democratic discussions among ourselves and know that they are not being influenced or manipulated by outsiders.

• (1725)

Christian Leuprecht: What I take away from Dr. Lackenbauer is that hybrid threats are a means to an end, and the end for our adversaries is to impose strategic dilemmas on us. What we are seeing from Russia is the ability to impose multiple strategic dilemmas in multiple domains at the same time: land, air, maritime, subsurface, cyber, space and aerospace. Are we prepared? Are we posturing ourselves in a way to be able to be resilient, to detect, to deter and, if necessary, to defend against these multiple strategic dilemmas? That is more how I would be thinking about that hybrid environment and our ability to contain it.

With regard to the Coast Guard, there is one minor amendment. The opportunity space here, of course, is that if we are going to change the mandate and the posture of the Coast Guard, we also effectively need to retrain much of the senior leadership core. Bringing it into National Defence provides an opportunity for professional development, because it is nice to have some equipment that can do some of the constabulary job, but if you don't have people who understand what the constabulary mission is and how to execute it, we are not going to be able to achieve the effects that the government is looking for.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor.

Next we will go to MP Simard.

[*Translation*]

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

Mario Simard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, your comments are quite compelling, but also concerning. You just spoke about multi-faceted strategic dilemmas involving Russia, China and the United States, which have far greater resources than Canada.

With the advent of artificial intelligence, how can Canada take concrete action, within the means at its disposal, to partially address these different strategic dilemmas? I know that this may be a difficult question, but I would appreciate a brief answer.

Christian Leuprecht: Canada will continue to have limited capabilities, hence the need for partnerships with European Union member countries and other European countries. We should also consider the Indo-Pacific region and close partners such as Australia, Japan and Korea. These countries are often overlooked in our overall understanding of the situation. Each country already has capabilities. We spoke earlier about Finland. This small country has a tremendous capacity to deal with hybrid attacks and threats. The key is collaboration.

[*English*]

What the United States understood 20 years ago is that Russia and China were developing very sophisticated escalation ladders, and what much of the rest of NATO missed is the ability to respond to those escalation ladders, so now that we need to build out these capabilities, we can do it only together with our partners.

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: I'll be very quick here—not too quick for the interpreters, but just with short, succinct statements.

First of all, I think we need to realize that preparing populations for the world we face, not the world we wish we faced, requires investments in building up societal resilience. Here's where we can learn from our Nordic partners, and I very much echo Dr. Leuprecht's spirit of reaching out to like-minded nations in Europe and leveraging more of those relationships.

Second, we need to get ahead of our adversaries, stop talking about every deficit and shortcoming that we have in Canada, and project a message of strength as well.

Believe it or not, we do a lot of things very well in Canada. We have industry that is very capable and contributes to high-tech supply chains. I think we need to do a job of realizing that the world has shifted. We Canadians love to beat ourselves up and downplay ourselves, and we do it in the Arctic space to try to embarrass the sitting government into spending more resources in the north. I think the time has come for us to go through a bit of a culture shift and realize that what we need to do now is up our game for strategic messaging and operate from a position of strength.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor.

We will go next to MP Helena Konanz.

You have five minutes.

• (1730)

Helena Konanz (Similkameen—South Okanagan—West Kootenay, CPC): Thank you.

I know we don't have a lot of time left, but I have a question about technology and the use of, for example, drones in the Arctic. Are they being used now? Is that something that we need to invest in more or at all?

P. Whitney Lackenbauer: Yes and yes. That's the short answer. It is definitely being trialled. I think there's still a lot of experimentation going on. Obviously, a big challenge in the north relates to power generation, cold temperatures and batteries deteriorating in terms of power. Some of that affects the distances that drones can operate over. There are other anomalies associated with the electromagnetic spectrum in very high latitudes. I think this is an area in which Canada is well positioned with drones that are both in the air and under water. We really have been world leaders for quite a long time in underwater autonomous vehicles.

I think as well that we need to look at opportunities that Canadian space and Canadian geography afford as an area for experimentation, testing and trialling of some of some of these new technologies.

Some of our European allies, by virtue of geography, are very proximate to key competitors and adversaries. I think we can also sell ourselves as a place where the world should want to come to test out some of their emerging technologies in our very diversified northern and Arctic environments, to see what those capabilities look like.

Christian Leuprecht: It reminds us that an investment in defence is an investment in innovation in research and technology in the 21st century. I do not have a dog in this race, but look at a company in Europe called Helsing, for instance, that has understood that it's not just about the drones; it's about the algorithms behind those drones.

For Canada to invest in algorithms for democracy and how we harness our high-tech skills, we have universities that produce fantastically cutting-edge work, but we've done a very poor job at integrating them with our national security and defence enterprise.

Helena Konanz: That's all. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Thank you to the witnesses for your testimony and for appearing for this study.

That concludes this meeting.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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