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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

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

[Translation]

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

[English]

Before we continue, I'd like to ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. You will also notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

I'd 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—floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I'll 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. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

I'd like to go next to the committee's budgets.

The clerk distributed to members this morning three draft budgets for the studies currently being undertaken by this committee. They are Canada's Arctic strategy for \$27,300; Russian incursion into Polish and Romanian airspace for \$500; and the situation in Haiti and Canada's response for \$4,000.

Does it please the committee to adopt these budgets?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, September 23, 2025, the committee is meeting on the study of Canada's Arctic strategy.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for today's meeting.

From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have Robert Sinclair, director general, Arctic, Eurasian and European affairs. We also have Eric Laporte, executive director, regional security and defence relations division. From the Canadian Armed Forces, we have Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière, commander of Joint Task Force North.

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

I now invite Mr. Sinclair to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

[Translation]

Thank you.

[English]

Robert Sinclair (Director General, Arctic, Eurasian and European Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the invitation to appear with my colleagues, Eric Laporte and General Rivière. We are very pleased to brief you today on this very pertinent and topical issue.

In December 2024, after months of meaningful and distinctions-based engagement with indigenous partners and territorial and provincial governments, Canada launched the Arctic foreign policy in response to the evolving geopolitical context in the Arctic. Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine in 2022 shook the foundations of international co-operation in the Arctic and around the world. Canada has been clear there will be no business as usual with Russia, at the Arctic Council or elsewhere.

From a security perspective, the harsh Arctic environment and sea ice no longer offer the same level of natural protection they once did. As international maritime activity increases, more countries are turning their eyes to the Arctic as a region of opportunity to pursue their economic and geopolitical interests. There is a narrative among some non-Arctic states that because, as they say, what happens in the Arctic affects them, they should have a greater role in Arctic governance. Canada's position is that the Arctic should be governed by the Arctic states first and foremost, in collaboration with Arctic and northern indigenous peoples.

Canada's Arctic foreign policy, which builds on and complements the Arctic and northern policy framework, responds to these and other challenges. The policy consists of four pillars.

The first, asserting our sovereignty, recognizes that diplomacy and defence policy go hand in hand. It identifies areas where diplomacy can support Canada's Arctic security agenda, such as by holding an Arctic security dialogue with Arctic allies at the foreign minister level. It also recognizes the need for better information sharing with domestic partners on international security trends in the Arctic and supporting research security in the Arctic. It also calls for Canada to manage Arctic boundary disputes through a rules-based approach, including for Tartupaluk—also known as Hans Island—and the extended continental shelf.

The second pillar, advancing Canada's interests through pragmatic diplomacy, prioritizes co-operation with like-minded Arctic states, particularly in setting the rules that govern the region. It calls for Canada to enhance co-operation with our most important partners in the Arctic: the United States and the Nordic states. Recognizing the importance of the North American Arctic, the policy states that Canada will open new consulates in Nuuk, Greenland, and Anchorage, Alaska, to promote economic ties, security partnerships, environmental co-operation and people-to-people connections. Co-operation with non-Arctic states and actors is beneficial to address global challenges impacting the Arctic, such as climate change. The EU, the U.K., Japan and South Korea are priority partners in this regard, highlighted in the policy.

[*Translation*]

The third pillar concerns leadership in Arctic governance and multilateral issues. Canada reaffirms the need for Arctic states to continue to lead a well-governed, rules-based region. Canada will increase its financial contributions to the Arctic Council to support Canadian leadership and engagement.

The fourth pillar of the policy concerns adopting a more inclusive approach to Arctic diplomacy. Canada will strengthen its engagement with like-minded states, territorial and provincial governments, indigenous peoples and other domestic partners to develop a more inclusive and coherent approach to Arctic diplomacy. These partners must be active participants in international relations, beyond the Arctic Council.

Canada will also facilitate access to international markets for goods and products from indigenous and northern communities, in addition to attracting foreign direct investment to these communities to contribute to economic and infrastructure development.

Canada has also created the position of Arctic ambassador. Virginia Mearns was appointed to this position by the Prime Minister last July, and she officially began on September 15. The ambassador plays a key role in ensuring that Canada's foreign policy for the Arctic continues to be connected to Canadians living in the north, including by having an office based in northern Canada, in Iqaluit.

● (1110)

I will add that the ambassador is very disappointed that she isn't able to attend this meeting for technical reasons. She asked me to let you know that she wanted to join you as soon as possible.

In conclusion, Canada's Arctic foreign policy will strengthen Canada's position in the Arctic.

I want to thank the members of the committee for their attention and commitment to this important issue.

We look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I will now open the floor to questions from members, beginning with MP Kramp-Neuman.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington—Tyendinaga, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to all of you for being here today.

First, my high-level comment is that we're obviously looking at strengthening the diplomatic and security partnership in the Arctic and at wanting to address the geopolitical competition.

More specifically, with regard to the F-35s, Chinese and Russian interests in Canada's north have been hammering home the importance of Finland, an Arctic peer, which has placed an order for 64 F-35s and is slated to have their pilots trained, bases upgraded and airframes ready to fly by 2030. With a much larger population here in Canada, we're falling behind on all fronts. Our bases aren't ready, we don't have enough pilots and the government is now taking another look at the program.

I have two quick questions on this.

From a foreign affairs lens, is there any external reason that Canada is falling so far behind our peer nations in establishing our next-generation fighter capabilities? Second, what are the implications internationally with our NATO Arctic allies if we continue to delay acquiring the replacements and widening our capability gap?

Robert Sinclair: Thank you.

I'm well assisted by both Eric and the general, who are better placed than I am to respond to that question.

Eric Laporte (Executive Director, Regional Security and Defence Relations Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

If I could highlight, on the F-35s, the government has an ongoing review of that. That said, there are 16 aircraft, I think, that are on contract, four of them to be received as of next year. That is proceeding on course.

In terms of our engagement with NATO allies, I would point out that over the course of the past couple of weeks we've had a number of CF-18s deployed to Europe that are in operation and in training with European allies. At the moment, I don't see that as a limiting factor.

I'll stop there. I don't know if the general has any other elements to add.

[Translation]

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière (Commander of Joint Task Force (North), Canadian Armed Forces): Mr. Chair, I don't have any information to add at this time.

[English]

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: If I may, what do you need from us for you to best do your jobs?

Could you talk about the operational gaps that we currently have in the north?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: Mr. Chair, on the "operational gaps", if I may, is this specific to the last question on the F-35s?

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Yes, please, ideally.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: My mandate as commander, Joint Task Force North, excludes the NORAD mandate and the search and rescue and special forces types of operations. NORAD, F-35s and fighter force are not within my terms of reference.

• (1115)

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Could any of you speak to the Russian and Chinese Arctic operational capacities?

Eric Laporte: Mr. Chair, maybe I can start. I'd be happy to have colleagues join in.

Obviously, following its illegal invasion of Ukraine, Russia remains the most capable actor in the Arctic. Despite its engagement in Ukraine, it is continuing to invest heavily in defensive and military capabilities in the Arctic, essentially going back to Cold War tactics and mentality there. A lot of it is potentially for defensive purposes along the northern sea route, but there's nothing preventing them from using it for offensive purposes. We've seen Russian aircraft come close to NORAD air defence identification zones.

We're also seeing, as you point out, an increase in collaboration on the part of Russia and China. Particularly in the Arctic, there has been Chinese military engagement in joint maritime patrols off the Aleutians, whether warships or coast guards from Russia and China, and, again, we've seen Russian and Chinese aircraft off the

American air defence identification zone in July 2024. China is very much engaged in resource extraction in the Russian north and, I think, is leveraging Russia's need for resources and for sanctions evasion as a result of the Ukraine war. China is really profiting from LNG exploitation, etc.

I'm happy to turn to other colleagues for any other elements.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: Mr. Chair, we've observed joint air and maritime patrols between Russia and the PRC; however, never did they infringe on the interdiction zones or sovereign boundaries of any sort. That's what I can add to this.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Do we know if Moscow, Beijing or any other non-NATO states have changed their posturing related to the Arctic?

Robert Sinclair: Certainly China has included the Arctic as part of its polar silk road plans and has expressed a desire to be a polar great power. It has recently backed off from its narrative about being a near-Arctic state. I think China was realizing that it was not in an effective advocacy position. It still wants to be a global power, and to be a global power, the Arctic is part of its planning.

I can turn to my colleagues if they want to add anything else, but I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go next to MP Rob Oliphant.

You have six minutes.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here. I have four areas to cover in six minutes, so I'm going to try to get to them quickly.

The first one is the concept of co-development, which has been a principle of the government's Arctic strategy, and then the reformulation of the foreign policy.

Can you explain what co-development means to Global Affairs?

Robert Sinclair: Sure.

Co-development means engaging with those who are most impacted by efforts to develop policy. In the north, the ANPF was our starting point. That was the first time Arctic policy was not made in the south; it was made with northern and Arctic partners.

In developing the Arctic foreign policy, we were at pains to hold ourselves to that standard as well, so we had extensive consultations that underpinned the development of the policy with northern and Arctic partners, territorial governments and indigenous peoples.

You can see me leafing through my papers here. I'm looking for the four-page list of consultations, which you, sir, were also part of.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I trust you on them. I know they're in your head, actually.

Robert Sinclair: The point is that it's "nothing about us without us". That's how we developed the Arctic foreign policy.

• (1120)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Could it be a strategy that every department in this government actually learns from?

Robert Sinclair: I'm hesitant to speak for other governmental departments, but I'll say that in our case we developed, for Global Affairs, an immense amount of goodwill with Arctic and northern partners by how we went about this. I'm very proud of my team and the efforts they put into this. It's an important step on our journey towards reconciliation.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: It's a huge principle.

My second question is with respect to the Arctic Council and the chair going from Russia to Norway to Denmark.... What do you see as Canada's role in this upcoming period in the Arctic Council?

Robert Sinclair: Our role is really to support the chairship and ensure that the Arctic Council is seen to be as active and vibrant as possible as part of the Arctic foreign policy.

We make it clear that there can be no business as usual with Russia. Certainly with what's happening with airspace violations, etc., there is no prospect of meetings at the senior Arctic official or political level at the Arctic Council, but the working groups, which are the pistons of the Arctic Council and technical in nature, scientific, are meeting virtually with all eight participating as they might. That's important to keep the science moving forward.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Do you see Canada aligned with Denmark in terms of this—

Robert Sinclair: Absolutely. Their priorities are on oceans, climate and engaging indigenous voices. As for the Kingdom of Denmark, with Greenland in the chair, we're very closely aligned with their priorities.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: The third question is with respect to NATO and its area of responsibility. Is there a perception of any change with the accession of Finland and Sweden into NATO on engagement and convincing NATO partners that our spending in the north, our work in the north and our engagement in Arctic security is really part of NATO? Is there a conversation about that?

Eric Laporte: Certainly, you're correct in saying that with Finland and Sweden becoming members of the alliance, we see a bit of a shift north in terms of areas of interest on the part of European security. With Sweden and Finland joining the alliance, they have brought forward lots of real capabilities, so they're a very welcome addition to the alliance.

We've seen, since 2022, a real shift in European security with Russia's invasion in Ukraine. We have seen, obviously, drones and the like in the past few weeks, so the security situation in Europe has changed dramatically, so too has the security situation in North America. We talked about Russian and Chinese joint operations coming close to North America with hypersonic missiles, etc. We are, in fact, engaged in a conversation with European allies, with NATO allies, about getting more recognition for Canadian contributions to security in North America.

SACEUR's area of responsibility covers European territory. It does not cover NATO. That said, NATO's article 5 commitment does cover North America and does cover our territory, but historically Canada and the U.S. have said, "You know, North America is ours. We're taking care of it through NORAD binationally and nationally."

However, there are some investments we're going to be making that we want to be given more credit for in the NATO context.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Perfect.

I'm done. That's shocking.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we'll go to MP Patrick Bonin.

[*Translation*]

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

Patrick Bonin (Repentigny, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Greetings to the witnesses. Thank you for being here.

Mr. Rivière, I would like to come back to the issue of climate change that you talked about earlier.

Is there currently a specific strategy for National Defence related to climate change?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: Mr. Chair, I would have to consult with people, because that's not part of my mandate. So the answer on those details will follow.

• (1125)

Patrick Bonin: Okay. I would be grateful if you could send it to the committee.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: I certainly will.

Eric Laporte: I can answer part of that.

In Montreal, there is the NATO Centre of Excellence for Climate Change and Security. This centre of excellence, led by Canada with 11 other allies, is examining the issue of climate change and its implications on operational issues for allied forces. For example, it involves ensuring the ability to work in environments that are colder, hotter, wetter and so on. That's one of the aspects. Canada is a leader in the context of the Montreal-based centre of excellence.

Patrick Bonin: Okay.

To your knowledge, then, there is no specific climate change strategy. As such, I think the United States has a specific strategy on the Arctic and climate change.

So you're saying that Canada is part of a working group for the time being, but that there is no specific strategy on this issue.

Eric Laporte: I know that the Department of National Defence has a climate change and security strategy for the operationalization of its equipment, but I'm not aware of all the details.

Patrick Bonin: I'll continue on the subject of climate change, this time with the example of the melting ice in the Arctic. We're talking about the possibility of an ice-free sea in the summer as early as 2030. If I understand correctly, 12 submarines are being considered for patrol in that region.

Can you tell us when the process to purchase the submarines will be finalized and if they will be armed? Also, why do we need 12 submarines when, to my knowledge, there is already one?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: Mr. Chair, I would have to defer to my colleagues from the Royal Canadian Navy and the ADM of materiel to answer that question. That is outside of my mandate as commander of Joint Task Force North.

Eric Laporte: Let me partially answer that, as my team is involved in this process.

Indeed, the goal is to obtain up to 12 conventional propulsion submarines, in part to patrol our three maritime coasts, including the Arctic. Two companies are currently in the running, a German company and a South Korean company.

To answer your question, our goal is to have armed submarines. We have to make sure we have what we call "domain awareness". A submarine has a lot of capabilities to know what's going on in the field. It's also important to make sure that we can defend ourselves or repel adversaries, if necessary.

As for the timelines, I'm not in a position to tell you exactly when a contract will be signed or when a decision will be made by the government, but the goal is to have the first submarine delivered and operational by 2035.

Patrick Bonin: Okay.

I believe Quebec is currently the only province with part of its territory considered to be part of the Arctic. There are policy direction documents on international relations for Quebec.

What do you think is the added value of Quebec's presence in terms of Arctic work and international discussions, given the province's unique geography?

Robert Sinclair: Mr. Chair, we are currently working with all the provinces and territories that have a presence in the Arctic. That also includes Manitoba and Newfoundland and Labrador.

This collaboration with the provinces and territories helps us think about our Arctic foreign policy through the lens of national priorities. It is therefore essential to engage our foreign policy through the lens of national priorities.

• (1130)

Patrick Bonin: The chair has informed me that I have only a few seconds of speaking time left.

Thank you, gentlemen.

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

[English]

We'll proceed to the next round of questions, beginning with MP Rood.

You have five minutes.

Lianne Rood (Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, witnesses, for being here.

You mentioned drones, and I'm going to focus a bit more on drones right now. I'm curious what classes of drones—fixed-wing, rotary or vertical takeoff and landing—are currently certified and routinely deployed north of 60° for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, for search and rescue, for maritime domain awareness and for logistics.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: What I've seen, as part of my mandate and through Operation Nanook, which is our main operational activity in the north, is actual testing of some remote or uncrewed drones, but when it comes to major platform procurement projects, that's not something I can actually answer today.

Lianne Rood: Of the drones that are currently being used, do you have any idea what their endurance, range and payload specifications are? Do you know any of that, especially since it's -40°C? I guess that's what I'm getting at—the climate.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: As part of my mandate, we don't force employ these types of emerging capabilities. I know there's testing done as part of procurement, but when it comes to specific payloads and such, I'm not able to answer today. That's something I could look into and come back with.

Lianne Rood: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

For maritime Arctic operations, what is the status of Canadian uncrewed service vehicles and uncrewed underwater vehicles for ice-edge mapping, seabed sensing and choke point monitoring?

What is the target for taskable days per season by 2026-27?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: This is a very good question.

When it comes to procurement and development processes, I am an employer of these assets, so it is difficult for me to provide the details this morning.

Lianne Rood: Okay. I'll change the focus a little bit, then.

What are the rules of engagement for neutralizing hostile or unknown drones over Canadian territory and territorial waters, especially around critical infrastructure and North American aerospace defence command sites?

How are attribution and evidence handled for prosecutions and diplomatic action?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: This is an excellent question.

As part of my mandate, I have no rules of engagement assigned. They would be assigned upon need. NORAD is not part of the Joint Task Force North mandate. Although I'm pretty sure they do have rules of engagement, I am not knowledgeable of these. That is not part of my mandate. I'm sorry for that.

Lianne Rood: That's okay.

Changing gears, officials note Russia's intensified Arctic build-out and growing reliance on China. What is DFATD's current assessment of Russia-China strategic alignment in the Arctic?

Where do we see the greatest sanctions evasion risks? You mentioned earlier LNG. It could be financial channels. What are the three highest risks? What concrete countermeasures are in place?

Eric Laporte: Thank you for the question.

As I mentioned earlier, we are increasingly concerned by the increasing co-operation between China and Russia, particularly in the Arctic, and the fact that Chinese investments are effectively skirting sanctions. They are displacing what would have been western companies originally supplying and working on the extraction of LNG, for example. Now Chinese firms are there.

We're seeing increasing co-operation on the military front, as I mentioned. There are a number of sanctions, obviously, on Russian entities and that continues. Obviously, the greatest concern is for technology transfers that could be of dual use and immediately put into military capabilities.

Maybe I'll stop there, unless others have anything to add.

• (1135)

Robert Sinclair: Perhaps I would just add that we work very closely with partners in the G7 and beyond to coordinate on sanctions. Canada has sanctioned over 3,300 Russian entities and individuals. We will continue to identify areas where sanctions can help restrict Russia's war efforts.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to MP Bill Blair.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Bill Blair (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to our witnesses this morning.

I have a number of questions. If I may, I'd just like to begin with a bit of clarification. There was some suggestion earlier in a question that the F-35 review has resulted in certain delays on the delivery of the F-35s. My understanding right now is that there have been no delays, that the delivery of the first 16 is well on track with Lockheed Martin and that the review is simply focusing on making sure it's the best possible deal for Canada, our economy, our workers and our country. I just wanted to make sure that is clear.

The witness, Mr. Laporte, is nodding, so thank you. I'm glad to hear that.

For my first question, if I may, I will go back to General Rivière.

General Rivière, you're responsible for the entire north through JTF North, which is based in Yellowknife. You have responsibility as well for the Canadian Rangers. I am particularly interested in some of the investments we are making and need to make in the Canadian Rangers.

My questions really pertain to your experience with the ranger program, particularly in the delivery of Operation Nanook. I am aware, for example, that there is a fairly significant investment being made in Yellowknife. A 9,000-square-metre joint-purpose facility for JTF North and the rangers is being constructed there even as we speak, which will provide classrooms, training offices, drill halls and a place for vehicle maintenance right in Yellowknife. It's a fairly significant investment.

What effort are you able to make in incorporating indigenous knowledge into Operation Nanook?

Also, what advice might you provide to the Government of Canada on how we can continue to grow, expand and make optimal use of the Canadian Ranger program?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: Thank you so much for this great question.

I will start with the multi-purpose building that's being built in Yellowknife. It's a great facility. It will not only host the 1st Canadian Ranger Patrol Group, but it will also host other elements of what we call "team north", a unit based in Yellowknife. It's a great facility under construction. We should be finished construction by 2026, as per the plan, and actual use should begin some time in 2027. It will allow our rangers to access, as you mentioned, training, classrooms and office space, etc. That's a great investment.

Also, on the Canadian Rangers' increased capability, good investments have been made in expanding Operation Nanook. There's an actual line of effort for Operation Nanook that's dedicated to the Canadian Rangers and interoperability with our air force to actually project them and increase their capability to be the eyes and ears; they are really that. There's a lot of investment in the operational area as well through Operation Nanook.

On the incorporation of indigenous knowledge, I'll pick on Operation Nanook again every time. There is nothing we do for which we don't consult or have consent. Every piece of land that we manoeuvre on is owned by rights holders. We totally respect that. For us, it's important. There's a stewardship role for us as well, but every time we plan for Operation Nanook, we engage with the communities and we always incorporate their knowledge in the way we train so that we can survive. As you can imagine, it's pretty cold and harsh up there, and their knowledge is actually an operational enhancer to what we do.

That is a first round, Mr. Chair.

● (1140)

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much, Brigadier-General.

I'm also aware that, a little over a year and a half ago, you and Lieutenant-General Wright, who at the time was in charge of CFINTCOM, provided a fairly comprehensive briefing to northern territorial premiers and indigenous leadership on the threat environment and the changes to it as a result of climate change, technological advancements and the activities of our adversaries. I've heard very positive feedback from both the territorial leadership and the indigenous leadership about the briefing you provided and the fact that they really felt they were being engaged with in a responsible way and helped to get a better understanding.

Perhaps you could talk a little bit about how you engage with those indigenous and territorial governments in your important work as the commander of JTF North.

The Chair: Give us a very brief response, please, because we're running out of time.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: We initiated these regular and frequent threat briefings and operational updates to the territorial premiers a year and a half ago. We have continued these. Typically, there's an intelligence command presence that briefs on the emerging threat situation like CSIS or CSE. I had the opportunity to provide an update on Operation Nanook and other operational activities. These have continued, and the frequency has actually increased. It's important to us to be transparent and to share as much as we can, in a secure setting, of course. This has become practice.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go next to MP Bonin.

You have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Rivière, I would like to come back to one point. You mentioned earlier that you didn't know if there was an Arctic defence strategy.

Is that what you said, or is there one?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There was talk of a climate strategy related to defence in the Arctic.

Patrick Bonin: In the United States, they have an Arctic defence strategy. From what I've seen, it dates back to 2024, and it takes into account rapid climate change in particular.

Is there an Arctic defence strategy that takes climate change into account? If not, do you think we should draw inspiration from the United States in this regard?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: Mr. Chair, I know that when it comes to defence, we have a strategic campaign plan that covers a wide range of operational strategic issues. However, when it comes to climate in particular, I have a hard time naming anything concrete on the subject.

What I see in my mandate is efforts to adapt to climate change, but when it comes to a specific climate strategy, I find it hard to give you answers.

Patrick Bonin: Is there a specific strategy for the Arctic?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: Planning efforts are under way to improve Operation Nanook, which is our main operational activity in the Arctic. It's well under way—

Patrick Bonin: However, there's no specific strategy for the Arctic that you're aware of.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: Mr. Chair, we are developing a campaign plan for our operations in the Arctic.

Patrick Bonin: What's the difference between a campaign plan and a strategy?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: The campaign plan is about operations, and we comply with the strategy for everything related to the Arctic.

Patrick Bonin: Okay.

Mr. Sinclair, if I understood correctly, you said that climate change was one of the four pillars. Can you go back to what you said and how important it is, in terms of foreign policy, to—

[English]

The Chair: Give a brief response, please.

Robert Sinclair: In regard to climate change as part of the Arctic foreign policy, climate change is identified in Arctic foreign policy as a key threat for the Arctic. Certainly our increased support for the Arctic Council reflects that, and our efforts to incorporate indigenous knowledge about how climate change is impacting local ecosystems, environment, human health—

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll go to MP Ziad Aboultaif for five minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thanks to the witnesses.

Some countries are calling the Northwest Passage, the Arctic waters, international waterways. That brings to mind Canadian sovereignty in this field, and there could be a risk of confrontation with some of these vessels coming into our sovereign property and borders.

If this becomes an issue, what can we do? Are we ready to deal with that to preserve our sovereignty in the north?

Eric Laporte: That's a very good question.

From a Canadian perspective, we have put baselines around the entire Arctic archipelago, including the Northwest Passage, which we all consider to be internal waterways of Canada by virtue of historical title. That claim is long-standing and well-established on the part of Canada.

We do have foreign vessels that traverse through the area, and they do so provided that they comply with Canadian rules pertaining to safety, security, protection of the environment, etc. By them applying for a process to go through, that is, frankly, recognizing our sovereignty over those waterways.

I would also argue that the fact that every day there are a range of activities happening in Canada's Arctic whether it's government, whether it's JTFN's activities.... The indigenous peoples who are there in local communities, just being present by themselves, exercises their enduring sovereignty over the Arctic land and waterways.

You asked the question, are we ready, and I would point out, and this joins a bit with the previous line of questioning, the Department of National Defence issued a new defence policy in 2024, "Our North, Strong and Free", and a large portion of that is about getting the capabilities right to be able to defend the Arctic. It's about getting the sensors, getting the domain awareness and getting the capabilities to do so in due course.

Just again, on climate change, "Our North, Strong and Free", frankly, is a strategy about the Arctic, and there's an element in there about climate change and adaptability in terms of the capabilities the Canadian Forces will need.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you. It seems like you were prepared for my question. Thanks for answering.

I have a question for Brigadier-General Rivière.

What are the unique challenges in protecting sovereignty, and do you believe that the government is giving you what you need to be able to protect sovereignty? If not, what do you think you need in order to do that?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: The first challenge in anything "Arctic" and, I would say, in anything "defence" is to be aware of what's happening. It's a question of sensing your environment. Then, you can make sense.

The first challenge is that the Arctic is 40% of Canada's land mass. This is immense, yet you have 130,000 Canadians in 72 communities. For the forces, especially our size of forces, you can't be everywhere at once. The challenge is to be able to sense the environment by being there. What we're doing now by expanding Operation Nanook as a near year-round, near-persistent activity in focused areas is working on that gap of being able to be present in an immense territory, but this is based on information.

Ziad Aboultaif: Being on the front line, what are the main issues facing the military bases and troops out there? Do you have enough personnel to meet the needs? Do you have enough equipment to meet the needs, especially if we get surprised by a challenge? How ready are we?

• (1150)

The Chair: Give a brief response, please.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: We are addressing some of these gaps in staffing by undertaking a JTFN staffing and structural review. We are assessing our requirements to match the operational and defence needs of 2028. That's our very short-term horizon. There is work under way to improve our structure, and—in a mindset of growth—having the right ranks, trades and numbers to face the challenges of tomorrow, and there are challenges.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to MP Anita Vandenberg.

You have five minutes.

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

Thank you very much to our witnesses.

I would note that about six years ago, this committee did a study on the Arctic. I was part of that study. There were a number of recommendations at that time regarding security, infrastructure, local ownership and engagement, and multilateralism. I wonder if you could give us a very brief summary of, first of all, what's changed in the last six years, but also, what progress has been made on those recommendations.

Robert Sinclair: Thank you for the question.

Perhaps I'll start with what's changed: Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, accelerated climate change and increased interest of non-Arctic states in the Arctic, seeking to advance their own interests. Those are some of the drivers that led to our recalibrating our approach through the Arctic foreign policy.

In terms of what we've achieved, we've appointed an Arctic ambassador, with an office in Canada's north, Iqaluit. That is literally and figuratively groundbreaking for Global Affairs Canada. We're making good progress on opening consulates in Nuuk and Anchorage. We've initiated the dialogue among what we term "A7" or "Arctic Seven" foreign ministers to mirror the discussions and dialogue that happens on the defence side. We have provided additional funding for our global Arctic leadership initiative to advance our engagement internationally. We've created a new position in one of our Nordic embassies to help expand our reach.

I would say, most importantly, Global Affairs has changed the way it engages with indigenous peoples. We've expanded what we call the Arctic co-operation advisory committee. We codeveloped the Arctic foreign policy with indigenous, territorial and provincial partners. We've come a long way.

I know that doesn't address your specific ask on the last study, but it I think speaks to the progress.

Anita Vandenbeld: That's a very impressive list, indeed. Thank you.

One of the things that we heard quite a bit was about the extended continental shelf. In terms of Canadian sovereignty, the need at that time, the imperative, was to be mapping that continental shelf. I know that quite a bit has been done on that. I understand that it may be completed by 2026. I wonder if you could tell me how that will reinforce Canada's sovereignty but also create perhaps increased need for enforcement of those waters.

Robert Sinclair: One of the priorities under the Arctic and northern policy framework was to better define our Arctic boundaries. That work is progressing, as you said, and awareness of your environment, as the general has said, is the starting point.

In terms of the need to enforce our jurisdiction, the starting point is, I would say, awareness of what is under our jurisdiction. Progress is continuing. The adjudication of disputes in the Arctic is one that Canada is committed to doing through a rule of law approach. Concerning Tartupaluk or Hans Island, it's no coincidence that we negotiated that and created our second land border. It's through rule of law and not through force that we define our borders.

Perhaps I'll leave it at that for now, Mr. Chair.

• (1155)

Anita Vandenbeld: I wonder if the general might have something to add on enforcement.

The Chair: Give a brief response, please.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: At this point, I don't have a response to that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to the third round of questions, beginning with MP Michael Chong.

You have five minutes, sir.

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

I have a question on our Arctic archipelago waters. Canada has long claimed these waters as internal waters of Canada and not international waters. Many maritime states, if not more maritime states, including the United States, see these as international waters.

Can you tell me which maritime states see our claim as internal waters as the case?

Robert Sinclair: I do not have a list at hand of which states have recognized our internal waters.

Hon. Michael Chong: If you could come back to the committee with that, it would be appreciated.

As you know, the United States doesn't recognize these waters as internal waters to Canada. In 1985, an U.S. Coast Guard vessel, the *Polar Sea* transited these internal waters.

Did you read the piece by Franklyn Griffiths in *The Globe and Mail*? He is an esteemed professor emeritus at the University of Toronto who wrote a long-form piece in the *Globe and Mail* four days ago. He speculates that the United States may send a navy vessel through those straits imminently. What would Canada's response to that be?

Robert Sinclair: Perhaps I'll start the answer. Our view is that the dispute over the Northwest Passage is well managed, including through our 1988 Arctic co-operation agreement.

Perhaps I will turn to the general.

Eric Laporte: Yes, you are correct in saying that in the past, the U.S. has done so, and the possibility of it doing it again in the future is not something that could be excluded. We know that this spring the President issued an executive order on shipbuilding that also includes a tasking to the Department of Defense to secure Arctic waters without clarifying what the waters are.

In terms of the Canadian response to a U.S. sailing that is unauthorized, if I can put it that way, I'd rather not say what the position is or what the response would be at this time.

Hon. Michael Chong: What assets do we have in the north to prevent that from happening?

Eric Laporte: There—

Hon. Michael Chong: Maybe I could reference something earlier. My understanding is that, during the early days of the pandemic, there was a Canadian ban on ships transiting through the Arctic archipelago waters, but I heard that a boat did transit through those waters. Is that correct?

Eric Laporte: I'm not aware of the details of that. I can say that Canada does require ships that are transiting through that are over 300 tonnes or are conducting maritime scientific research to apply for permits to do so. We've done those permits in the past.

Hon. Michael Chong: What assets do we have to prevent that from happening? Do we have any assets up there—any naval assets or diplomatic assets? What would we do other than indicate our opposition to an unauthorized transit?

Eric Laporte: I'll leave it to the general to speak about assets that are there. Certainly, we have greater domain awareness, including from space, so we would be able to track potential surface vessels coming in. We also know very much the ice floe situations. I think there would be some early warning, perhaps, for a surface vessel.

There's always the possibility of sending aircraft to overfly to communicate with ships of whatever nationality that are transiting. Our presence could be felt.

• (1200)

Hon. Michael Chong: Based on the information that you'll provide to the committee, if our claim to these waters as internal to Canada is not widely recognized by other maritime states and vessels such that U.S. warships start transiting through that passage and we are unable to prevent that from happening, it seems like that weakens our claim.

The Chair: Give a brief response, please, if at all.

Robert Sinclair: Briefly, I'd also highlight that we do have Arctic and offshore patrol vessels, which is a capability that the United States does not have. We are partnering with the U.S. through the ICE pact on building icebreakers. It's a capability that the U.S. does not have compared to Canada. I would say that the premise of the question does not negate our legal standing vis-à-vis the Northwest Passage.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will next go to MP Rob Oliphant.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm following up a bit more on the continental shelf issue that Mr. Chong, as well as Ms. Vandenberg, raised. The areas under consideration are not limited to one side. We have issues on the east side and on the west side.

Are there different processes that we will be undertaking to map that, to negotiate it? What is the international law that we are going to be using to assert the internal-water nature of that in both the west and the east? We still haven't finished the Hans Island issue with respect to the continental shelf. We've done the island itself, but there's still negotiating to be done there, as well as in the Beaufort.

Robert Sinclair: I appreciate the question.

In terms of the Hans Island accord with Denmark, I would like to clarify that the agreement is very much in place and has established a boundary line on the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles in the Labrador Sea. That boundary is the longest continuous mar-

itime boundary in the world. Where we are now is working with Inuit and indigenous partners and with the Kingdom of Denmark on implementing the agreement—so, to take into account issues like indigenous mobility. I just wanted to clarify the situation on that.

In terms of the Northwest Passage, our position is that it is Canada's by dint of historical title. The waters of the Northwest Passage join Canada together; they don't divide Canada. Indigenous peoples have used these waters and territories since time immemorial. That's part of our shared sovereignty as well.

Eric Laporte: Thank you for the question, and thanks to Mr. Sinclair for explaining that.

I would also point out that the Beaufort Sea is an area of dispute that we have with the U.S. That one is also well managed. Canada and the U.S. have collaborated extensively in the preparation of our respective extended continental shelf submissions. In September 2024, we announced the creation of a joint Canada-U.S. task force to undertake negotiations on the maritime boundary in the Beaufort Sea. There was a first negotiating meeting held in November 2024. Changes in the U.S. administration, however, have paused all negotiations. It's not just Beaufort Sea-related but it's all international negotiations, pending a review of policies and positions.

Historically, we've managed that relationship well, and we're waiting for next steps.

• (1205)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: It seems we've managed it by accepting realities and acting as though we have it without having a declaration from the other partners. Am I right on that? We assume sovereignty. We assume the borders, but have others assumed the borders as well?

Eric Laporte: Perhaps I can start, and then leave it to others. In the case of Hans Island, there's a declaration. There was a negotiated settlement.

In the case of the Arctic archipelago, some states have indicated that they oppose our statement, but a number of states have not positioned themselves. Perhaps it's best we not ask them at the moment.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Could I just shift a little from the defence and sovereignty issues to culture, education and the interest that Canada has in circumpolar conversations and in Arctic conversations about the shared cultures of the Inuit people, the Greenlandic people and others, as well as non-indigenous peoples in the north. We still have many non-indigenous Canadians living in the north.

Do we have a policy on culture? Do we have a policy on education? I know that science and research are big issues at the Arctic Council, but what about the softer sides of engagement on that?

The Chair: Provide a very short response, please.

Robert Sinclair: An important part of our engagement with indigenous people.... At the Arctic Council, it's a priority for Canada to promote indigenous knowledge. Efforts are ongoing amongst others at the National Gallery, for instance, to promote circumpolar indigenous culture. We just had a delegation in town of curators. There were some Sami representatives as part of that visit.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to MP Patrick Bonin for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Patrick Bonin: My understanding is that Canada currently has a moratorium on oil and gas development in the Arctic. With regard to the Northwest Passage, is it possible for tankers to go through the Northwest Passage? Are there ways to intervene? Given the potential opening of this passage following the melting of the ice floes, does Canada have to give its authorization for oil tankers to pass through it?

Eric Laporte: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I said earlier, permits must be requested for vessels conducting scientific research. That's also the case for carriers. For the latter, it is the responsibility of Transport Canada, not Global Affairs Canada.

What I'm about to say may be wrong, but I'm not convinced that oil tankers could have used the Northwest Passage. Even though different routes may be open for a few weeks during the season, it's still a fairly difficult passage. Furthermore, there would certainly be major environmental risks in the event of an oil spill.

Patrick Bonin: Could you get back to the committee on oil tankers in the Northwest Passage, please? We'd be interested in that.

I would like to come back to the federal government's investment decisions. What is the process used to ensure that the various projects put forward truly meet the needs of local communities in terms of collaboration?

Eric Laporte: Can you better define the different projects you're talking about? Are these National Defence projects?

Patrick Bonin: Yes, I'm talking about the investments that are being made.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: Mr. Chair, what I've seen over the past year, especially with the announcement of these critical infrastructure investments, is a lot of consultation by the various organizations within National Defence that are responsible for carrying out these projects.

I certainly see it with respect to NORAD modernization, which includes a number of projects, not just infrastructure platforms. I see it in northern operational support hubs as well. A lot of consultations are done locally, in the north, in the various communities. I see it in the NORAD northern basing initiative as well.

So we've held numerous consultations, precisely to ensure that things are done respectfully. I've seen it.

• (1210)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we will go to MP Michael Chong.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

I would like to continue discussing our sovereignty in the north. I want to understand what the Government of Canada's position is on the foundation of our sovereignty in the north. Is it the 1670 Hudson's Bay charter in Rupert's Land and subsequently the transfer of that land to the Government of Canada in 1870, or is it something else?

Some argue that the Hudson's Bay charter only includes the lands that drain into Hudson's Bay and therefore excludes a significant part of the Arctic archipelago and that a stronger claim to our sovereignty is found when the Inuit affirmed Canada's claim to the lands of the Arctic in the 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement.

What is the Government of Canada's view?

Robert Sinclair: I'm not in a position to comment or reply in terms of the legal basis under the 1670 Hudson's Bay agreement.

Hon. Michael Chong: Could you perhaps come back to the committee with that? I think it's pretty important if we're trying to understand what the basis in law is, both internal law and international law, for our claim to the internal waters of the Arctic archipelago. I think it has to start with our sovereignty over the lands in the Arctic archipelago. That would be useful information for the chair to have.

Robert Sinclair: I would be happy to come back with that.

Hon. Michael Chong: I want to focus on these internal waters because we see what the U.S. Navy is doing to the south of us off the coast of the south of Florida and in the Caribbean. We know that they have interests in the Arctic. We know previously they've transited through our waters in 1985. There were reports that former secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, argued for a freedom of navigation operation through Canadian internal waters in 2019.

Has the Government of Canada gamed out a scenario where a U.S. warship transits through our internal waters in the coming months?

Eric Laporte: I can say that, yes, we have gamed it out, but I'm not in a position to provide the response here.

I would, however, also point out that beyond the transit that you mentioned in 1985, a U.S. warship did transit in 2023 but did so by asking for permission and with Royal Canadian Navy personnel on board.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm not talking about transits with permission. I'm talking about transits without permission under the assumption that these are international waters. That's really the concern that I and others have.

Eric Laporte: I can say we've gamed it out, and....

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay, but you can't tell us what the scenarios and the response would be from government.

Eric Laporte: It's best to leave a chance for the government of the day to respond.

Hon. Michael Chong: Has Canada thought about working with other states on our claims that these waters are internal waters to Canada? States like Panama, Egypt, states surrounding the Malacca strait in Asia—are we working with those states on getting their support for our claim?

• (1215)

Robert Sinclair: Those efforts are led by the legal bureau within Global Affairs Canada, and I don't have that information. I'm happy to come back.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, that would be helpful.

The Chair: You have time for a short question, please, and a short response.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm fine. I'll get the next round.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go next to MP Mona Fortier.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today, and I'd especially like to thank them for their service. I know they're working very hard on the Canadian Arctic strategy.

This committee is currently undertaking a study on Canada's Arctic foreign policy and related efforts to secure our Arctic sovereignty. In that context, as a committee, we are in the process of determining where we should focus our efforts. A lot of investments have been made. We listed them earlier, and I'm sure we could do more.

My question is open to all the witnesses.

If you had to recommend that we focus our efforts on three areas or three concrete measures for the findings of our study, what would they be? Based on your expertise, where should we be putting our efforts right now?

[*English*]

Robert Sinclair: Thank you for the question. Certainly, my recommendation would be, as you're doing, to engage with Arctic and northern partners and to hear their perspectives, first and foremost. As well, I think that getting perspectives from others, such as Greenland, would be of use to the committee.

Perhaps I can turn to my colleagues for other recommendations, following the effects of climate change, in particular, as well as the

impacts on ecosystems, livelihoods and, if I could term it this way, the human security of Arctic residents and northerners.

[*Translation*]

Eric Laporte: Mr. Chair, I really don't have much to add to what Mr. Sinclair said. My recommendation was to speak with our Arctic allies as well. There is Greenland, but there are also the other Arctic countries.

I don't know if the Brigadier General has any suggestions as well.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: That is certainly the case, Mr. Chair.

In my area, north of 60, in the three territories, the challenges we have are mostly power sustainment and mobility. Any investment in capabilities that will enable us to deploy our forces is therefore welcome. As I mentioned earlier, we can't be everywhere at the same time. The territory is immense. Investments in logistics for sustainment and military mobility would be at the top of my list.

There's everything related to climate adaptation and to what I mentioned. Investing in runways, for example, would be a great investment that would support logistics and our mobility.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Geopolitics is changing a lot. We know what's going on in Ukraine, and there's also pressure from China.

Are there concrete measures that we should implement with our allies to ensure that we have some sovereignty in the Arctic?

Eric Laporte: I thank the member for her question.

We see that within NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the allies have put in place a number of concrete measures to defend territory in Europe, and we are contributing to that defence with our brigade in Latvia.

As far as the Arctic is concerned, I would say that on the Canadian side, we are currently strengthening a dialogue and coordination between us and all our other Arctic allies: Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, among others.

In 2024, Canada launched a forum for discussion among foreign ministers to address security issues among committed allies. This forum reflects what is happening on the national defence side. There was a defence ministers' meeting, which Mr. Blair has attended in the past. Many meetings were also held with senior officers, as well as with representatives of the intelligence services. So there's much more collaboration in that context to better understand what's going on.

• (1220)

Robert Sinclair: I will add that Minister Joly hosted her counterparts and Premier Akecagok in Iqaluit about a year ago. It showed our allies the Canadian reality of the Arctic, which is very different from that of the Nordic Arctic.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Fortier.

[English]

We will go next to the fourth round of questioning, beginning with MP Kramp-Neuman.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

We've covered a lot today, so I'm going to change the direction a little bit.

Despite the broader tensions we're currently having with Canada-U.S. relations, are you able to give us a quick rundown regarding joint Canadian-U.S. partnerships in the north, anything from defence issues, resource development, transportation issues to joint agreements?

Robert Sinclair: In Arctic terms, there's the ICE pact, which is first and foremost front of mind. The ICE pact is not just about building ships and putting icebreakers in the water. It's also about what's behind the ships as well. The knowledge, the skills, the capacity, the capabilities that stand behind all of that speaks to the closeness of the relationship with Canada and the U.S.

I'll turn to Eric.

Eric Laporte: Thank you.

Despite the challenging relationship at the moment on the defence and security side of the equation, the relationship is still very strong and active every day through NORAD, for example, and the binational command. That co-operation remains unscathed from whatever we're hearing from the White House. We can also point to the fact that the defence production sharing agreement, the DPSA, that we have with the United States is still in full force, which allows Canadian firms to bid as equals to U.S. entities for Department of Defense contracts.

Robert Sinclair: I was remiss in not highlighting that when I was a senior Arctic official before the appointment of Ambassador Mearns, I spoke very frequently with my U.S. colleague about the Arctic Council and how our interests align.

I would note that our chairship is coming up in a little less than four years' time, and the U.S. follows us, so we certainly had discussions about how we could identify themes that could run through the Canadian chairship into the U.S. one, to bring a North American focus to the Arctic Council after 12 years of European chairship.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Next, are you aware if Arctic sovereignty has come up in any discussions with the U.S. in the context of the ongoing trade talks?

Robert Sinclair: I'm not in a position to comment on that, Mr. Chair.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: On the Beaufort Sea boundary, what is Canada's negotiating mandate with the United States, and what are the milestones for working toward a framework agreement?

Robert Sinclair: I can't speak to the specifics of our negotiating mandate. We had the first technical meeting last November, I believe. The Inuvialuit Regional Corporation was part of the delegation for that. The mandate was informed by consultations with indigenous and territorial partners.

• (1225)

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: Thank you.

Lastly, Canada has publicly stated that due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there will be no business as usual in Arctic diplomacy with Russia. Perhaps I could have you elaborate on that or speak a little bit to the fact that Russia is expected to continue low-level probes, such as submarine underwave transits and electronic interference, all ultimately calibrated to test Canada's surveillance without escalation.

If you could speak to that, I would appreciate it.

Eric Laporte: Thank you for the question.

As mentioned, it's not business as usual with Russia, given its illegal invasion of Ukraine. Historically, we've had relatively good co-operation with the Russians in the Arctic. As I mentioned at the beginning, they continue to be bolstering their defensive capabilities and their military capabilities in the Arctic. The purpose is really to reinforce a northern sea route, so the route that goes along its northern territory.

Russia is Russia. It continues to probe, as we've seen in Europe, and it does so everywhere else.

Shelby Kramp-Neuman: I'll circle back to one last question with regard to the U.S. Does the Government of Canada continue to assess the risk of military attack in North America, in the Arctic, as low? Do you believe the United States shares in that assessment?

The Chair: Give a very brief response, please.

Eric Laporte: I can say that from a Canada-U.S. perspective and NORAD perspective, the military command is always watching out for any potential invasion or attack.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will go next to MP Bill Blair.

You have five minutes.

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I also want to pivot, Mr. Sinclair, because one of the first things you said was that the first pillar of our Arctic strategy is "asserting our sovereignty". I think there's a tendency among many of us that when it comes to sovereignty, we think about fighter planes and submarines and military capabilities and our ability to defend the Arctic. However, when we travel to the north, what they talk about is infrastructure. Sovereignty is infrastructure. It's investment.

Although the general has kindly shared with us some of the investments in multi-use infrastructure at our northern operational support hubs and improved domain awareness with such things as the Arctic over-the-horizon radar, I think there also needs to be important discussions on the investment in infrastructure in the north. That includes things like deepwater ports. The Russians have 17 of them. We're still working on ours. We've heard that there's been discussion about a rail and road network most recently. Our critical minerals strategy would be facilitated by such an investment. It also includes investment in things like communication networks, power generation, water treatment plants and, as you've already mentioned, icebreaking capabilities.

You also mentioned, Mr. Sinclair, the importance of accessing international markets and attracting foreign international investment. I think there is opportunity in that, but perhaps you could share with us how we're going to pursue that international investment. As well, what precautions might we take to make sure that we are not in any way compromising our sovereignty as we attract other people's money?

Robert Sinclair: Thank you for the question.

Our trade commissioner service is very well positioned to assist Canada in its efforts to diversify our trade and economic relations. There's a big role for us to play in attracting the investments that could underpin major projects that would make a very real difference in Canada's Arctic. Whether it's the redevelopment of the Port of Churchill, Grays Bay port and road, and so forth, there's a big role for us to play.

There's interest and potential there. As the Prime Minister has noted, Canada has much of what the world wants and needs, critical minerals in particular. As to how we can help our Arctic territorial and northern governments—I include indigenous governments in that—sustainably develop those resources, Global Affairs Canada has a real role to play in highlighting the potential and the opportunities there. Whether it's the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund or elsewhere, there's lots of potential, all of which would be run through the Investment Canada Act as well to ensure that we protect our interests.

• (1230)

Hon. Bill Blair: Thank you, sir.

I'd also make the observation that the accession of Finland and Sweden into NATO created a real opportunity. It opened up a line of discussion at NATO and among our closest allies about the importance of Arctic security and the defence of the Arctic.

We know that the Russians have a significant capability, with over 50 icebreaking facilities and 17 deepwater ports, as I had mentioned, and they have a strong interest in the Arctic. We're also seeing China acting quite adversarially in the Arctic and considering themselves a near-Arctic nation. I think that's the terminology they use.

I believe the accession of Finland and Sweden, as well as that of Norway, Denmark, ourselves and the Americans, has created a real opportunity to even bring in additional partners like Iceland, the Faeroe Islands and Greenland for broader discussions.

You've already alluded to some of those discussions taking place. Perhaps you could expand on Finland and Sweden. I think Brigadier-General Rivière would also share with us that in Operation Nanook, we have a great deal to learn, particularly from our friends in Finland, who have been operating quite effectively in their Arctic for a considerable period of time. Could you speak about the opportunities that change has allowed?

The Chair: Give us a short response, please.

Robert Sinclair: Thank you for the question.

Briefly, our Nordic partners in particular, who are the most proximate to Russia and have the history of the Winter War, etc., understand the threat. There's a lot we could learn from our Nordic partners on how they engage their citizenry on the breadth and depth of that threat. It's not just a war against Ukraine. There's a broader threat there.

There's significant interest in the Canadian Rangers program amongst our Nordic partners. We recently brought some Sami representatives over to Canada to learn about the rangers model and how indigenous knowledge can be used to greater effect.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bonin, you have two and a half minutes.

Patrick Bonin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to go back to my honourable colleague's question about your recommendations for the committee's study.

Regarding the dynamic security situation and Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic, you said that climate change was a concern. Can you go back to that concern and its impacts? Do you have any recommendations for the committee?

Eric Laporte: I'd like to thank the member for his question.

I can start, and then I'll invite my colleagues to weigh in.

People's biggest climate-change concern is the ice that's melting and the release of water. However, that isn't actually the case yet. The shipping season is still quite limited, and shipping is more difficult when the waters are released, especially for vessels that aren't equipped to break ice, because there are many more pieces of ice. For that reason, it may be appropriate to consider the impact of climate change on northern shipping based on the timeline of forecasts.

We're also concerned about melting permafrost and the impact that could have on infrastructure.

I invite my colleagues to add their comments.

[*English*]

Robert Sinclair: Thank you.

[Translation]

I suggest that you base your recommendations on empirical data as much as possible. There is talk that the Arctic is open and that other countries, such as China, are moving in, but that isn't the case right now.

It's important to stay vigilant, but it's also important not to panic about this.

• (1235)

[English]

We've got it.

[Translation]

Patrick Bonin: The opening is scheduled for the summer of 2030, right?

[English]

The Chair: You can give a very brief response.

Robert Sinclair: I'll answer in English just to make sure I get it right. I apologize.

The waterways are opening and ice is melting. That doesn't mean it's safer. It's also more unpredictable. When you look at the draft of the ships that would look to transit through that area, they need deep water and those channels are the most fraught.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go next to MP Ziad Aboultaif.

You have five minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We know that vessels and icebreakers pass through, especially from non-Arctic states.

Do we receive requests for permission to access? If we do, how many in the matter of a year, for example?

Eric Laporte: I don't have the numbers. I'm also not aware of a whole lot of icebreakers from non-Arctic states transiting through.

Transport Canada would be the government entity that monitors that.

Ziad Aboultaif: Would General Rivière have any comment on the same question?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: I'm sorry. I don't have a comment at this point. I don't have that data, unfortunately.

Ziad Aboultaif: Mr. Sinclair, before the Arctic policy came out, we heard the term “pragmatic diplomacy”.

Is pragmatic diplomacy part of the new policy?

Robert Sinclair: Thank you for the question.

Yes, it is part of the policy. It's the second pillar. I would say it's based on an onion skin approach of working most closely with our closest allies—the U.S. and the Nordics—and then working outward from that with the EU, the U.K., Japan and the Republic of Korea to join the north Pacific to the Arctic.

Ziad Aboultaif: Russia is not on the same list.

Robert Sinclair: It is most definitely not. We have some very direct language in the Arctic foreign policy that, as we've noted, there's no return to “business as usual”. It's for Russia to create the conditions for a return to business as we used to know it. We're not bashful about that in any way, shape or form.

Ziad Aboultaif: Maybe it would be beneficial for the sake of this study to tell the audience what the percentage share is that we have as Canada in the Arctic and what the shares of others are—such as Russia, the United States and Denmark—as the main Arctic states.

Robert Sinclair: Russia has about 50% of the Arctic. I would add there that one of the impacts of “no business as usual” with Russia and the closing down of Russian society is an increased demand for access to the Canadian Arctic by researchers. That produces an impact on our Arctic, northern and indigenous partners in terms of the increased interest there.

We have 20-some-odd per cent of the Arctic. I couldn't give you figures about the U.S. and the Nordics.

Ziad Aboultaif: In light of what's going on with Russia in Ukraine and the overall policies and politics, Russia and China are co-operating a lot. They've become very strong allies—more than ever.

If they decide to do any military action or any move in the north, are we ready with our allies to defend that? To which level can that defence go in order to be able to not lose any sovereignty in the area?

Robert Sinclair: I think my colleague, Eric, is best placed for this one.

Eric Laporte: Thank you for the question.

Russia and China are working together in the north. That's a very big space. I could break it down.

In the North American space, we've seen, as mentioned before, Russian and Chinese joint maritime patrols of coast guard and naval ships. For joint long-range bomber flights, those instances were met by NORAD aircraft. Again, there is awareness and there is tracking. Those were turned around.

If we are talking about a Russian-Chinese conflict against NATO, first off, I don't see China being directly involved in a conflict against NATO, but certainly it could potentially be supporting Russia, as we've seen in Ukraine. There, the alliance is prepared. It has the plans, the authorities and the command structure in place to respond.

• (1240)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go next to MP Anita Vandenberg.

You have five minutes.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you very much.

Thank you for all of the testimony you've already given. It's very useful for our report.

When I asked you about the extended continental shelf, you said something along the lines of that we will be asserting our sovereignty primarily through diplomacy and the international rules-based order. I wonder if you could elaborate on that.

Also, you mentioned the 72 communities, 130,000 people, who are living in the Arctic who identify as Canadian—they go to Canadian schools, receive Canadian social insurance numbers and health care—and the historical presence of those people throughout millennia. Could you talk a little bit about how those things reinforce our sovereignty in that area?

Robert Sinclair: In terms of the extended continental shelf, we discussed mapping and knowing what we're talking about. There's the UN commission. We will work through that process, which is a very long-term endeavour. Again, it goes to our Canadian approach of rule of law, and it's important we walk the talk in that regard. I think there's important symbolic value in how we approached Taptaluk or Hans Island and how we're approaching the Beaufort Sea negotiations. We negotiate; we don't act to force.

In terms of indigenous peoples, it's very much a shared sovereignty in the Arctic. I've heard Premier Akeagok speak extremely eloquently about our very regrettable history of using Inuit as human flagpoles, but he turns it around and he says, first Canadians, Canadians first. That's the approach that informs our approach in terms of sovereignty and historical title. It's shared sovereignty.

Thank you.

Anita Vandenbeld: You mentioned also about Russia that, foremost, it is not business as usual. You just briefly mentioned some implications of that in terms of science. Could you maybe elaborate on other implications and how things are different now because of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine?

Robert Sinclair: First and foremost, in terms of the impact of the closing down of Russian space and limited engagement, we're missing huge chunks of data. It's 50% of the Arctic, and we're missing that data. That is a concern.

As well, there's increased pressure on Canadian communities that see researchers coming to them to try to undertake research and who are not necessarily always sensitive to capacities and how to meaningfully engage and consult with indigenous partners. When a project study is a twinkle in their eye, that's when they should be engaging to get local perspectives and seeing if they're going about this the right way. There's a bit of that impact as well.

• (1245)

Anita Vandenbeld: Do you have some recommendations about how we can ensure that does happen?

Robert Sinclair: That's a very good question. I would say be part of the advocacy in terms of your recommendations and put forward best practices about how to meaningfully engage with indigenous partners in the Arctic, whether it's on research, whether it's on infrastructure, whether it's on how to best utilize indigenous knowledge and get ground truth. That would be my recommendation.

Anita Vandenbeld: To be clear, you're talking about nationals of other countries on research vessels who are coming in and doing this with permission?

Robert Sinclair: No, I'm talking about research institutes, universities, coming to Canada and looking to do research. We have an extensive ecosystem. Polar Knowledge Canada are great partners as well, but there needs to be better awareness amongst some—not all—foreign researchers.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you very much, colleagues. We're about to go into our fifth round of questioning. We have less than 15 minutes, so if it's the will of the committee, I'd like to suggest that we do a quick round of three minutes each. That way, everybody gets a chance to speak.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We'll start with MP Aboultaif. You have three minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif: On investment in building communities in the north, we have only 130,000 people in 72 communities, if I heard that correctly earlier. Do we believe that just these communities will be enough for us to counter what Russia has been doing for years on the other side, building on those communities and that infrastructure?

It would be important to hear from the department and Mr. Sinclair about that comparison and what we should do more or better in order to see the future—we're running a race here—before we know we're not ready enough to do that.

Robert Sinclair: I'll start by saying that how we build in the north is probably quite different from how Russia builds.

I hope we've learned from our mistakes in the past. As you've heard me say, there's an emphasis and a premium put on engaging with local communities on how to best develop dual-use infrastructure. That wasn't there for us before. I do not think Russia takes the same approach to how it develops its Arctic and north, and I would say its respect for indigenous peoples is, at best, token.

I'll leave it at that on civilian and dual-use infrastructure. I'm not sure if my colleagues have anything to add.

Ziad Aboultaif: General Rivière, do you agree with that? What would your approach be?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: I go back to the essential need to focus on sustainment, mobility and logistics. The effort should be in allowing that type of development.

Ziad Aboultaif: What would you like to see happen, as the military guy here? What's on your wish list?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds for a response.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: I would like to have the northern operational support hub program implemented.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

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

We'll go to MP Mona Fortier next.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Along the same lines, we see that there are a lot of investment projects. Prime Minister Carney recently announced a \$6-billion investment in the Arctic over-the-horizon radar project in partnership with Australia. We know that the threat we're facing is time. We may not be moving fast enough.

Do you have any recommendations or ideas for speeding up our projects?

• (1250)

Eric Laporte: Thank you for your question.

Indeed, since the modernization of NORAD and the 2017 “Strong, Secure, Engaged” defence policy, there has been an upward trend in major military investments for the benefit of the Arctic.

As you said, there's the over-the-horizon radar. For his part, General Rivière talked about northern operational support hubs. There's also the issue of the 12 submarines and the Arctic and offshore patrol ships, as well as the acquisition of drones and maritime patrol aircraft. All this to say that there is an increased investment in the area. It's a lot.

National Defence, Public Services and Procurement Canada and the industry department are all involved in the development of these projects. Last week, the Defence Investment Agency was created. The main purpose of that agency is to speed up defence procurement and ensure that Canadian companies benefit.

A lot of things are being done right now. These are huge investments. All of this is to ensure that we meet the NATO targets, namely, from 2% of GDP for the current fiscal year to 5% in 2035.

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute left.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Rivière, do you want to add anything?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: Mr. Chair, I would encourage innovation and small-scale practical experimentation in the north through our operations like Operation Nanook. If we want to accelerate the acquisition of observation platforms in the north, why not encourage experimentation with certain existing platforms? That could be a way to accelerate that acquisition, not on a large scale, but on a small scale. That would be a start.

Let's also use indigenous knowledge. That's an area I think we could focus on.

Hon. Mona Fortier: That could be leveraged to speed up project implementation.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

We'll next go to MP Mario Simard.

[Translation]

You have the floor for three minutes.

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, I've been listening to you carefully, particularly regarding the NATO targets, the 2% that should perhaps rise to 5%. Like me, you may have heard about the government's intention to use critical minerals infrastructure to achieve that 5% target. I'm sure you know that a significant portion of critical minerals projects are located in the Far North. We need only think of rare earths, which are mainly produced in China, and on which NATO countries are highly dependent.

Could you tell me whether your end has had any thoughts or even studies on supporting the government's efforts to reach the 5% target? I'd like to focus not on defence infrastructure, but on infrastructure that can enable the deployment and development of critical minerals projects. Infrastructure is key when it comes to critical minerals.

Eric Laporte: Thank you for your question.

At the summit in The Hague this summer, the allies all agreed to work toward a 5% of GDP defence target. It's important to remember that 3.5% of that 5% is allocated to critical defence investments. Those are investments in military capabilities, among other things. The remaining 1.5% is allocated to capabilities that enable jurisdictions to build resilience to adversaries, support their economy and support the armed forces.

You're absolutely right that thought has been given to domestic investments in large-scale projects that could be included in the 1.5% that is part of the 5%.

Mario Simard: There has been talk about the willingness of certain NATO countries to set a floor price for critical minerals. It often takes some form of predictability for a mining project to get off the ground. When it comes to rare earths and lithium, the Chinese can engage in dumping and make Canadian projects less competitive.

I've heard talk of NATO countries wanting to set a floor price to create what would look like national reserves of critical minerals.

Is that part of what you've heard?

• (1255)

[English]

The Chair: Give a quick response, please.

[Translation]

Eric Laporte: I'm not aware of some of NATO's decisions, but I do know that there are discussions between certain countries. Our colleagues at the Department of Natural Resources are probably in a better position to discuss that issue.

Mario Simard: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

We'll go next to MP Rood.

You have three minutes.

Lianne Rood: Thank you, Chair.

Gentlemen, year-round armed forces presence depends on fuel, maintenance, medical, munitions, mobility and food security. What is the sustainment model, and where are the gaps today? Are you able to detail the plan to close these gaps?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: As I mentioned earlier, mobility is key. We have the northern operational support hubs that are coming online, which will add to the capacity. I'd say the principal gap is our ability to be.... We can't be everywhere at once. It's impossible, so we have to leverage military mobility for sustainment.

Again, I truly believe, as a logistician, that the best thing we can do to invest—which we're doing—is the northern operational support hubs. They will allow us to pre-position equipment, material and vehicles, and actually, it provides flexibility overall.

That would be my first round of answers, Mr. Chair.

Lianne Rood: Thank you very much for that.

Do the armed forces contribute to the food supply for northern communities?

Brigadier-général Daniel Rivière: No. We make sure that, anytime we deploy, we bring our own sustainment and facilities, and we will never impose any pressure on communities. That's basic. We will never apply pressure on Canadians and the communities in the north.

Lianne Rood: Along those lines, what benefits or advantages would the permanent Arctic base give the armed forces? Would it contribute anything to people living in the north?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: I believe that, as we make these investments, there's going to be a local workforce that will be part of the investments. That's a major benefit there. I think that it comes with increased supply chain activity as well, so it's good not only for the critical infrastructure development of the forces but also for business. Those are my thoughts.

Lianne Rood: I have a quick final question. Is there any vital equipment that you can identify that is in serious need of upgrade or repair right now?

The Chair: Please give a very quick response.

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: That's part of the series of platform projects. Again, mobility, including over land, is something we need that's being procured and looked at.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have MP Anita Vandenberg.

You have three minutes.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

Just following up on that, General Rivière, it's more than just being self-sustained in terms of food and supplies. My understanding is that when, for instance, we've expanded runways so that larger jets can land on those runways, local communities will then be able

to have larger aircraft that can come in with more food, thereby decreasing the food prices. Is that correct?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: This is correct. A case in point is the Inuvik runway extension project; that benefits all around.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

Are there other examples of infrastructure investments made by CAF having that sort of dual-purpose benefit in the north?

Brigadier-General Daniel Rivière: I'm not sure if we've started implementing it, but the air navigation system, AirNAS, is one area that would benefit not only our air force but airplanes and air people writ large.

• (1300)

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

I know we have a very short time, but I just want to go back to what you said, Mr. Sinclair, about our relationship with Denmark and, I would say, other Nordic countries. You said that their priorities are oceans, climate and indigenous relations, which are things that are also our priorities.

I wonder if you could very quickly elaborate on the ways in which we are using multilateralism with those countries to advance, particularly on climate and oceans.

Robert Sinclair: I'll cite one specific example that I think you heard about in last week's testimony. It's the permanent observer-ship status that has been granted to ICC at the IMO. Again, it imports indigenous knowledge into that forum, and having them at the table is key.

I would cite as well the general support that Canada has been playing a leading role on in terms of engaging indigenous peoples in the Arctic Council through the six permanent participants there. We were big supporters of the wildland fires initiative that the Norwegian chairship started and that the Kingdom of Denmark is rolling over and continuing.

These are just a couple of the very current examples.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you for your testimony and for appearing for this study.

That concludes this meeting. Is it the will of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: This meeting is adjourned.

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