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Chair: Charles Sousa





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• (1105)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome back. It's good to see everyone back at the table.

I appreciate the witnesses before us.

I also want to welcome our new clerk, Jean-Denis Kusion.

To all of you, welcome to meeting number 20 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on September 16, 2025, the committee is meeting to resume consideration of the North American Aerospace Defense Command, or NORAD, modernization.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person, and remotely using the Zoom application. I would ask participants to consult the guidelines on the table. These measures are to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of the interpreters.

I would like to remind witnesses and members to please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. 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.

For interpretation, use your earpiece and select the appropriate channel for floor, English or French. This is also available on Zoom. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

We have Lieutenant-General Jamie Speiser-Blanchet, commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force. We have Peter Hammer-schmidt, assistant deputy minister, infrastructure and environment, and Jonathan Quinn, director general, continental defence and advanced capabilities. We also have Neil O'Rourke, director general, fleet and maritime services, Canadian Coast Guard.

I will now invite Jonathan Quinn to make his opening statement of up to five minutes.

**Jonathan Quinn (Director General, Continental Defence Policy, Department of National Defence):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to speak with you today about NORAD modernization and continental defence.

My name is Jonathan Quinn, director general for continental defence policy at the Department of National Defence. I am responsible for several defence policy files, including continental defence, the Arctic, the Canada-U.S. defence relationship and the military use of such advanced capabilities as space and cyber.

It has been clear for some time that the world is becoming a more dangerous place and that Canada is not protected by its geography today in the same way it once was. In 1958, Canada and the United States created NORAD, which remains the only binational military command of its kind in the world, because our leaders at the time recognized that the best way to defend our shared continent from aerospace threats was to do it together. That remains the case today, especially as those threats become more and more sophisticated and the geopolitical environment more and more volatile and complex.

In Canada, we have been on a path for a number of years now to dramatically enhance our domestic and continental defence capabilities, including through NORAD. In 2017, the government released “Strong, Secure, Engaged”, a defence policy that committed to several major procurement investments, with many relevant to the defence of Canada and North America. This includes River-class destroyers, Arctic and offshore patrol ships, future fighters, maritime patrol aircraft and remotely piloted aircraft systems. Many of these projects are beginning to come online. Then, in 2022, the government announced a new package of investments specifically focused on modernizing Canada's contributions to NORAD.

[*Translation*]

The modernization of NORAD, the North American Aerospace Defence Command, is focused on delivering key capabilities to counter threats in North America, such as advanced cruise missiles and hypersonic weapons.

The Arctic Over the Horizon Radar is one of our flagship programs and will form the backbone of a new “system of systems” to detect and track threats in our northern approaches.

Alongside these investments in new sensors, NORAD modernization is delivering technology-enabled command and control systems to support timely and effective decision-making; air weapons; significant infrastructure investments and support capabilities, particularly in Canada's north; and dedicated science and technology funding for continental defence.

Here are some key upcoming project milestones: A first Arctic Over the Horizon Radar system is scheduled to be operational in 2029; and the delivery of the first fully converted multi-role tanker transport aircraft is scheduled for 2027.

While these NORAD modernization investments are quite targeted, they will support broader Canadian national defence objectives. This includes strengthening CAF capabilities in our northern and Arctic regions.

The release of the “Our North, Strong and Free” policy in 2024 built on these earlier defence policy announcements to provide funding for additional investments with a focus on the defence of Canada and the Arctic.

[English]

The northern operational support hubs, airborne early warning and control aircraft, tactical helicopters to replace our current fleet, and maritime sensors are capabilities that will expand the CAF's ability to operate our vast northern geography. “Our North, Strong and Free” also committed to acquiring new ice-capable patrol submarines to provide a strategic deterrent effect on all three coasts. This most recent defence policy also committed to strengthening our contribution to integrated air and missile defence.

In July 2025, the government announced that it had removed all restrictions on the air and missile defence of Canada, allowing us to consider the full range of capabilities Canada may need to effectively defend against rapidly evolving threats. Around the same time, at the last NATO summit, the Prime Minister announced that Canada would reach the NATO benchmark of spending 2% of GDP on defence this fiscal year, and committed to reaching the new 5% target by 2035. This announcement came with an immediate injection of \$81 billion, over five years, to fortify the foundations of Canada's defence readiness by, for example, investing in infrastructure, people and core fleets, and by strengthening our digital and cyber foundations.

Then, in September 2025, the Canadian Coast Guard moved into the Department of National Defence, along with a proposed adjustment to the CCG mandate, through Bill C-12, that would allow them to make important contributions to Canada's maritime domain awareness. This will be especially valuable in the Arctic, where the Coast Guard's unique capabilities and year-round presence will significantly enhance our ability to monitor our northern approaches and deter unwanted activity. My colleague Neil O'Rourke can speak more to that should there be any questions there.

Collectively, all of this means that National Defence is prioritizing the procurement of capabilities to deter and defend against threats to Canada and North America, in particular threats in, to and through our Arctic, and has a plan to modernize our capabilities for the all-domain defence of Canada. I anticipate that the defence of Canada, our Arctic, and North America will continue to feature prominently in future defence policy announcements and investment plans as we move deliberately to increase defence spending over the coming decade.

Thank you. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Quinn.

For our first round of questions of up to six minutes, we'll start with our vice-chair, Mr. James Bezan.

**James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Before you start the clock, I just want to raise a point of order.

The notice of this meeting went out late on Friday. The same government officials were going to appear. I understand that government officials knew late on Friday that they were going to appear. We as committee members didn't know who was appearing before committee until 9:22 this morning. It gave us little time to prepare. “Government officials” is a broad, sweeping group of individuals across the Canadian Armed Forces and Department of National Defence. It could have been anyone from the commander of NORAD operations to the CDS, down to a wing commander in Cold Lake.

We have to raise the point that we need proper notice so we can prepare and make sure that we're not wasting the time of witnesses, this committee and members, who will ask the questions that need to be asked in this study. I would just caution the chair to make sure that he's respecting the rights of members so that we are properly prepared and can do our jobs in a timely manner—and today he's not.

**The Chair:** The point is well taken.

I'll go back to you, Mr. Bezan.

**James Bezan:** Okay. I will start.

I want to thank our witnesses for appearing on very short notice, but this study is important to Canada.

Knowing the growing threats we see in our Arctic and around the world, I want to start off by quickly talking about the comment made by Ambassador Hoekstra to the CBC that if Canada doesn't buy the F-35s, the U.S. will have to pick up the slack and fly their F-35s in Canadian airspace to intercept any potential threats.

Lieutenant-General Speiser-Blanchet, what is your position on this? Can we maintain sovereign control of our airspace without F-35s?

**Lieutenant-General Jamie Speiser-Blanchet (Commander, Royal Canadian Air Force, Department of National Defence):** Thank you for the question.

Canadian presence in NORAD absolutely reduces risks, and it increases Canada's autonomy and ability to defend itself. The F-35 is one of the capabilities that Canada has decided to procure, in addition to several others, as part of an overall system of integrated air and missile defence that will ultimately strengthen Canada's ability to defend.

**James Bezan:** The F-35, though, would be the most interoperable for the fighter jet platform requirement we have, and it would be the best one to put Canadian pilots in to protect themselves and Canada.

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** The F-35 is the only fifth-generation advanced technology fighter aircraft available to Canada, and it was selected in the competition that was conducted by the Government of Canada. It is the only one, at this moment, that can meet all of the most advanced adversary threats we are seeing that are being promulgated and advanced technologically by Russia and China.

**James Bezan:** Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

We know we're buying a minimum of 16 F-35s. The infrastructure to support those F-35s continues to be behind schedule, whether it's for the extension of the runway at Inuvik or for the added security needed, both cybersecurity and physical security, at our wings and forward operating locations.

When can we expect those projects to be completed so we can receive our F-35s to protect Canadian airspace and be a proper partner in NORAD?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** I can start, and then I'll hand it over to my colleague, the assistant deputy minister of infrastructure and environment.

At the moment, we do have, within the future fighter capability project, very clear objectives and milestones for all of the associated infrastructure required to support the F-35 fleet. There are interim capabilities, structures and constructions that are meant to mitigate some of the delays for the permanent fighter squadron facilities that are meant to be finished in the early 2030s.

When the first F-35 is due to arrive in Canada in Cold Lake in 2028, we expect to have sufficient interim infrastructure available to operate the F-35s and then continue—

• (1115)

**James Bezan:** That's only at Cold Lake. Would they be able work out of our FOLs in Inuvik, Yellowknife and Iqaluit?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** There will be a growth program. It's implementing in phases. Obviously, to reach an initial operating capability, not everything will be operable immediately. We will still be operating the CF-18s, as we draw them down, at the same time that we build up the F-35 capability, until 2032. We will absolutely ensure that we have the ability to operate from our forward operating locations.

**James Bezan:** From the air force standpoint, I believe the P-8s are going to require the same types of security measures at every wing. What has the Royal Canadian Air Force been doing to enhance the security of the perimeter and the wings across Canada so that F-35s and the Poseidons can operate?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** We have been working within the RCAF to address the very important security requirements, including physical security, at our wings and bases across Canada. We are already developing options for increased security forces, and we are looking at the kinds of capabilities they will need in order to provide the physical protection of very important assets.

We have developed and are already working with some counter UAS systems. They are in place and are continuing to be developed in certain locations across Canada. We will continue all of those efforts so we can provide the necessary security for all the modern capabilities we will be procuring, including the F-35, the P-8 and the remotely piloted aircraft system.

**James Bezan:** When we look at any incursions into Canada's air defence identification zones or our maritime space, do they predominantly occur in the western Arctic or the eastern?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** I don't know if I have a quantifiable answer to that. We respond to all incursions and are prepared to respond east or west.

At the moment, I think the predominant Russian threat would be more from the eastern side of the Arctic. However, we work within NORAD to respond across the entire geography we have.

**James Bezan:** I was led to believe that most incursions were happening in the western Arctic, coming across over the top of Alaska out of the Bering Strait. Also, of course, the maritime threat seems to be coming from that direction, especially as we see more and more Chinese vessels in our Arctic waters.

Wouldn't the need for Inuvik in particular to lengthen that runway become a major priority?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** Do you want to cover that, Peter?

**Peter Hammerschmidt (Assistant Deputy Minister, Infrastructure and Environment, Department of National Defence):** Sure.

Thank you for the question.

On Inuvik, we recognize that we need to make some infrastructure improvements quickly. In fact, as you noted, the runway work is under way. It is a bit delayed because there are some permafrost issues that have to be dealt with, and we're taking the appropriate amount of time to get that done.

There is also a broader effort to ensure that, in particular, the Inuvik and Yellowknife forward operating locations start to see some injection of construction and infrastructure investment in the very near term. We will shortly thereafter be focusing on Iqaluit and the deployed operating base at Goose Bay as well.

There is activity happening. The construction program is going to launch shortly for those forward operating locations.

**The Chair:** Ms. Lapointe, you have up to six minutes.

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

Mr. Quinn, you mentioned in your opening statement that several defence investments are about to come online. Can you share some details of those with the committee?

**Jonathan Quinn:** Yes, absolutely. I'd be happy to do that. I'll start, and given that a lot of the investments are air force-related, I'll invite General Speiser-Blanchet to amplify as well.

From a NORAD modernization perspective, there's a huge focus on domain awareness. We have the Arctic over-the-horizon radar project that's set to come online in 2029 and is based in southern Ontario. We have the polar over-the-horizon radar system, which would be specifically located in the High Arctic and would come online a bit after that. There's still a bit more research and development to do to deal with some interference from the auroral oval in that part of the world.

There are additional sensors as well. We call them "crossbow". Those are a bit more sensitive, so we won't be able to get into details at the moment on what those are.

There are really significant investments in command and control. With all of the data coming in from new and existing sensors, we need to enhance our ability to digest it using artificial intelligence and machine learning, and translate that into operationally useful information that will reduce decision time in the event of a crisis.

In addition to that, we're investing in air-to-air refuellers to extend the range of our fighter aircraft. There are really significant investments as well in our northern infrastructure, which Mr. Hammerschmidt could speak to in more detail.

More recently, in "Our North Strong and Free", we're investing in underwater maritime sensors and uncrewed underwater vehicles to make sure we don't have blind spots in the underwater approaches to Canada and the Arctic. There are also airborne early warning and control aircraft, which are a real priority capability for NORAD in terms of commanding and controlling other fighter aircraft from the air and providing additional early warning capability.

We're putting in a new Arctic ground station to enhance the collection of intelligence in the Arctic. There are space projects for both polar communications and surveillance from space. Also, as you know, there's a project under way to replace our submarine fleet with a new fleet. That is progressing really well.

Those are a few examples, but if there's time, I would invite General Speiser-Blanchet to amplify, if I've missed anything.

• (1120)

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** That was a fairly thorough list, so there isn't much to add.

However, I would emphasize the space projects that were mentioned. These are the enhanced satellite communications project-polar and the defence enhanced surveillance from space project, which are key contributions and very cutting edge in terms of what Canada is going to be able to contribute to its own defence and certainly to continental defence, with world-class capabilities.

The future combined aerospace operations centre capability speaks to the command and control that Mr. Quinn mentioned, because as we know, the defence of North America is about much more than just the air platforms that we're flying. It's very important to enable those aircraft to communicate. It's about sensing threats and detecting them, so the domain awareness he mentioned is very much key.

Many of the projects are designed to enhance our ability to sense and detect threats, decide from a communications standpoint what must be done about them and then have the necessary effectors to

ultimately defeat those threats and provide the credible deterrence that is necessary to protect North America.

**Viviane Lapointe:** Lieutenant-General, are there lessons from some of the recent global conflicts and crises that we're seeing that have helped directly shape how NORAD modernization is being implemented today? You talked about the need to detect threats ahead of time. That might be part of the answer, but are there lessons that we have learned and are looking at as we modernize NORAD?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** I would say there are many lessons, not least of which is that we need to be able to modernize rapidly to keep pace with the speed at which adversaries are evolving their capabilities. Certainly the investments have to balance operational necessities and autonomy, but there is much value to be working with allies and partners.

I think Canada has tremendous opportunities and is on a path in the current NORAD modernization efforts to meet those adversary threats and increase strategic autonomy. In concert, it has the ability to work with allies and partners, which is going to be very key as we see what is happening around the world. There's much uncertainty and increased volatility and that's the environment we need to be planning for.

**Viviane Lapointe:** For my next question, I invite any and all panel members to contribute to the response.

Canadians are very anxious about the current geopolitical landscape. From your perspective, what should Canadians be most confident about when it comes to Canada's approach to NORAD modernization over the next decade?

**Jonathan Quinn:** I can start, and I invite other panellists to weigh in as well.

I think Canadians can be confident that we're taking the threat and security environments very seriously. We understand the urgency of enhancing our ability to detect threats to the continent and to Canada, to deter them with credible capabilities and also to defeat any threats that end up materializing when deterrence fails. The investments we've outlined and the path the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces are on demonstrate that seriousness.

I think Canadians should take comfort in that and be confident that we're moving really aggressively along that path to enhance our capabilities as quickly as possible.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're going to the next questioner.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot—Acton, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning everyone, and thank you for joining us. This is our first meeting of the year. There's an ongoing debate in Quebec to figure out until when it is okay to wish someone a happy new year. Since this is our first meeting this year, I'll wish us a happy new year. It's a pleasure to see you again.

I'd also like to thank the witnesses for joining us today and for their presentations.

Could the witnesses tell us about Quebec's industrial capacities, especially in Saint-Hubert and Valcartier? I think those are key industrial capacities. Is there an industrial strategy that targets Quebec's capacities in particular?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** Many aspects of the defence industrial strategy being developed by the government will benefit the Canadian defence industry in general, and there are numerous opportunities for Quebec. I can't speak specifically to a Quebec-focused strategy, but I can say that as we develop our aviation capacities and define our future needs for space activities, there will be many aerospace-related opportunities for the innovations and talents we find in some Quebec industries.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** We know, for example, that there are specialists and experts in the field of hypersonics in Quebec, and that hypersonics is the future. Could you elaborate on that stream?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** Are you talking about hypersonic missiles?

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Well, I understand that research clusters aren't limited to missiles, but there is research being done in this field in general.

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** Many innovations and future technologies are being looked at, including hypersonics, drone development and sixth generation capacities. It could be sensors used in all sorts of devices. That said, technologies aren't limited.

Regarding AI, there are many opportunities when it comes to man and machine interactions. We'll find out what the possibilities are and how to take advantage of them.

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** We heard from many experts about Canada's lack of preparation regarding infrastructures and technologies when it comes to hypersonic missiles. People are saying it's a development opportunity, but that we also need to prepare for a potential attack.

You're saying that new sensors and various modernization steps that you talked about, namely using AI, would allow us to respond to that threat. Have investments been made for that? Are plans being developed?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** I would say it's part of the overall plan. Thanks to our current capacities and ongoing projects and initiatives, we will be in a better position to integrate Canadian companies in the process to look at all those options.

• (1130)

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** I'll ask you a question we never thought we'd hear in this forum. I don't know if you or someone else can answer.

Is there any surveillance being done?

Relations with our neighbours to the south have never been so tense. They're not what they used to be, but, it must be said, the U.S. is still an ally. Most surveillance and defence capacities are focused on the northern border. A plan to counter a potential American invasion has been sensationalized over the last few weeks. Pretty much every army in the world has that hanging over their head, anyway, so it's nothing new. Hopefully, we can burst that bubble, because we're not really making preparations for that.

That said, is there something brewing on the southern border?

**Jonathan Quinn:** Thank you for the question.

[English]

Here, I would just say that we're obviously very aware of the political dynamics and some of the hyperbole out there.

What I would stress is that we continue to have an extremely constructive relationship on the military side and on the civilian side, both in Colorado Springs through NORAD and with the Pentagon. We are in regular contact with our U.S. allies about how to work together for the defence of the shared continent, and that remains the big priority.

[Translation]

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** You're not saying at all that the south is the new threat, that we're moving all our capacities from the northern border to the southern border, and that it's a matter of great urgency. You're saying the opposite and confirming that co-operation is still ongoing.

[English]

**Jonathan Quinn:** Absolutely. We're not focused on a military threat from the southern border. Really, the focus continues to be on collaborating with our U.S. allies in the defence of the shared continent.

[Translation]

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** What you're saying is there's no need to be afraid of the bogeyman.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

[English]

**The Chair:** You're out.

[Translation]

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Okay then. We'll talk again later.

[English]

**The Chair:** Ms. Gallant, you have up to five minutes.

**Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC):** With respect to the over-the-horizon radar, where are the installations going to be in Ontario, and why are they going to be there as opposed to existing installations that are already owned by DND?

**Peter Hammerschmidt:** The search for appropriate locations for the radar was an exhaustive search. The requirements are very inflexible and complicated. We have assessed, in total, over 500 sites since 2022. We started with DND lands and landed on the locations that are identified in Kawartha Lakes township and Clearview township.

**Cheryl Gallant:** How long is the existing north warning system going to be operational? I'm looking at what gap will exist between the one in Ontario once it's up and running and the ones that are up and running now.

**Peter Hammerschmidt:** I can start and then perhaps pass it to General Speiser-Blanchet.

The north warning system continues to be operational. Over time, we will reassess that capability and the individual stations to determine which ones can continue to perform and contribute to the overall system of systems for surveillance for North America.

**Cheryl Gallant:** The U.S. ambassador to Canada said recently that if we weren't going to buy the F-35s, then the U.S. would have to fill in the gaps we have left. Can you explain what gaps would be left behind if we were to cancel the F-35s for an inferior fighter jet?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** Right now, the gaps we are addressing with NORAD modernization are focused a lot on the radar systems that we've been speaking of. As mentioned, the north warning system does provide a certain coverage, and the Arctic over-the-horizon radar will fill in a very wide swath in addition to that. There will also be more ability from the space side to be able to detect.

As to fighter capability, as a fifth-generation fighter, the F-35 provides lethality and survivability against the known threats that are being developed by adversaries; therefore, the gaps that would be created would simply be related to the technology that adversaries are developing that we would not have at hand.

**Cheryl Gallant:** With respect to data infrastructure and communications infrastructure, there are new systems that need to be brought up. At what stage of the contracts are they with respect to the radio and data links? I'm wondering if there have been tenders put out yet for the communications infrastructure in the Arctic—not satellite, but radio and data, so that the F-35s could operate if we get them.

• (1135)

**Peter Hammerschmidt:** I mentioned earlier the design and construction work that will start in the forward operating locations. It will include IM and IT upgrades to ensure that communications infrastructure in place.

**Cheryl Gallant:** The question was about contracts. Have any been put out to tender yet? Has there been a request for proposals? Where are we in terms of actually getting this infrastructure in place?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** I can expand somewhat on the RCAF air communications expansion, a project known as RACE, which covers part of that. No one contract covers everything, as there's certainly a combination of several factors, but this project will deliver a modernized radio network to improve the performance and sustainability of many aspects of the Canadian air de-

fence sector enterprise. It is meant to have initial operational capability by 2031.

I don't have information on specific contracts. However, that is well in hand, and progress is being made on the projects. An update could be provided separately.

**Cheryl Gallant:** Originally, the first Canadian delivery of the F-35 was supposed to be in 2026. Now it's 2028. Why that difference?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** The first Canadian F-35 will be delivered in 2026 to Luke Air Force Base. Canadian aircrew will start flying on it. The first Canadian F-35 will be delivered to Canada and one of our wings in 2028, after there's been a sufficient number of pilots and technicians trained and after sufficient infrastructure is in place to support it in Cold Lake. The first phase is Cold Lake, and then after subsequent years and developments, it will move and be delivered to Bagotville.

**Cheryl Gallant:** Recently, the commander of NORAD said that China and Russia have increased their co-operation in the Arctic, whether it be on sea or air intrusions. How integrated is the operation and co-operation of those two military forces, in your opinion?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** They've been working together, as we've seen, so it is absolutely important to be monitoring this kind of activity. The fact that they're more joined up is something new. The level of co-operation is not something that seems to be particularly advanced, but at this moment it's very important for us to pay attention to all the threats and actions from our adversaries.

They are certainly advancing a lot of technologies very rapidly. We are keen to keep pace with that and continue on with our NORAD modernization and continental defence projects to ensure that Canada is well postured to defend against them.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Malette, you have up to five minutes.

**Chris Malette (Bay of Quinte, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, panel members, for attending today.

As I proudly mentioned to General Speiser-Blanchet, 8 Wing CFB Trenton, which is in my riding of Bay of Quinte, is the hub of RCAF air mobility operations and provides strategic airlift and aerial refuelling and support to Arctic locations such as CFS Alert. How do these missions contribute to Canada's role in the NORAD modernization effort? Specifically, how does Trenton's support to Alert and other northern operations bolster continental deterrence and response capability?

I'd ask General Speiser-Blanchet to answer that, if I could.

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** As you mentioned, 8 Wing certainly has a very important role in providing the strategic airlift that Canada relies upon. Within a NORAD context, Canadian aircraft are often used to assist in resupplying for Pituffik in Greenland and for the U.S. forces there.

I would offer that even outside of 8 Wing, the Royal Canadian Air Force has many assets that we continue to exercise with our NORAD partners on a routine basis. The collaboration is very strong. The Canadian contribution is very positive and quite solid and is seen as an important contributor.

**Chris Malette:** Further to that, as a more nuts-and-bolts question, is the existing infrastructure at 8 Wing and its Alert unit, such as runways, hangars, fuel storage and command facilities, sufficient to support increased NORAD-related operational tempo vis-à-vis the pace and intensity of operations over time?

My question would be for Mr. Hammerschmidt.

• (1140)

**Peter Hammerschmidt:** I think there is a broad recognition that there needs to be a significant infusion of investment funding for infrastructure across all of our operating locations that support NORAD. That was one of the key pillars of the NORAD modernization announcement and the funding that flowed from that.

Places like Alert need a lot of work on their runways, accommodations, fuel facilities and logistics—and Trenton too—so we have an active infrastructure program that is directing resources to all of the sites and bases across the country that support the NORAD mission.

With regard to 8 Wing in particular, we will start to see investment in the infrastructure that will support the strategic tanker replacement project, STTC, in the second half of this year. We're going to see construction begin there soon.

**Chris Malette:** Very good. Thank you.

This question is directed to Mr. Quinn.

How has the threat environment facing North America, sir, changed in the last month, or even in recent years, particularly with respect to Arctic and maritime approaches?

**Jonathan Quinn:** I'll say a few words and then General Speiser-Blanchet may have more to add on this one as well.

We have recognized for some time that the threat environment is changing fairly significantly. This is why we've been on a path, dating back to at least 2017, to really prioritize investments in domestic continental defence and NORAD modernization to deal with the evolving threat.

In terms of specifics, it's about much more sophisticated missile technology. Conventionally armed cruise missiles that have a much longer range can reach North America from further away, from various platforms, including submarines, other aircraft...and land-launched missiles. The idea of hypersonic weapons has come up already during the appearance today. That's a significant threat.

In addition to aerospace threats, we're seeing lots more activity in what we call the grey zone. Cyber-threats to our critical infrastructure, cyber-espionage and that sort of thing are also a real concern. It's not necessarily always a National Defence lead to prepare for and defend against the full range of threats, but we work very closely with our colleagues across the federal government to do that.

General, would you like to add anything to the threat environment?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** Certainly. Thank you.

As mentioned, China and Russia have both demonstrated systems—hypersonic glide vehicles, long-range cruise missiles, fractional orbital concepts—that are explicitly designed to evade North American warning systems. These are driving the modernization efforts that contribute to NORAD modernization and continental defence and allow us to address the reduced warning time that comes with these advanced threats.

In an era of strategic competition, all of the parties are developing and advancing their technologies to hold North America and western allies at risk. That is, of course, driving us to address that and work on developing increasingly lethal capabilities so that Canada can continue to accelerate and modernize its ability to defend.

A transition to interoperable fifth-generation capabilities will enable Canada to remain a reliable partner in NORAD and also, importantly, in NATO, to contribute meaningfully to that collective defence.

**Chris Malette:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Monsieur Savard-Tremblay, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Quinn, the geopolitical balance has been disrupted. Everyone's talking about the Chinese threat and the Russian threat in the Arctic.

Have you heard anything? What's the situation? Are things stirring up? Do you think they'll do something in the Arctic? Are there hints? Are there exercises being conducted, or air sorties? Are we seeing any movement on their part? What's going on?

• (1145)

**Jonathan Quinn:** Thank you very much for the question.

[*English*]

Certainly, there is lots of activity, lots of interest in the Arctic and lots of dynamics at play, including the changing physical environment through climate change. Canada's north is warming at somewhere between three and four times the global average rate, which is changing the physical environment in ways that are increasing the amount of interest from potential adversaries in the region. We are seeing more activity from China and Russia, and some dual-use activity as well, where there are scientific expeditions that can inform governments about future military operations and that sort of thing.

It's something we monitor extremely closely with existing capabilities, and we're investing heavily to enhance those capabilities so we can continue to keep up with the level of activity and interest in the north.

[Translation]

**Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** The “Golden Dome” sporadically comes back on topic. The name first appeared after Mr. Trump's election. We sometimes hear about it, it comes up a lot in official speeches, then it disappears for a few months. It's not a new concept; “Star Wars” has been a topic for more than 40 years, since the Ronald Reagan presidency.

Are there official ongoing discussions on the matter? Are we still just at the public statements stage?

**Jonathan Quinn:** Once again, thank you for the question.

[English]

Integrated air and missile defence is how we tend to refer to that in Canada. NORAD has been very actively involved in integrated air and missile defence for many years. A lot of the investments we've been talking about today will continue to enhance Canada's contributions to that, particularly on the domain awareness side of things. Through our colleagues at NORAD, we're constantly in touch to figure out what the gaps are in defending against evolving threats and where Canada can add more value through capability investments.

I would point out as well that in the most recent defence policy, “Our North, Strong and Free”, the government committed to exploring what more Canada can do with respect to integrated air and missile defence. That's under active analysis right now, and we expect that as we move forward to reach the new NATO 3.5% and 5% defence targets, that will be a key focus and prioritization as we explore how to invest those additional funds.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Quinn.

[English]

Mr. Anderson, you have five minutes.

**Scott Anderson (Vernon—Lake Country—Monashee, CPC):** Thank you very much.

This question is for either Lieutenant-General Speiser-Blanchet or Mr. Quinn. Can you give us an update on the 11 SkyGuardian drones and their delivery?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** The remotely piloted aircraft system project is under way, and we are still working towards an initial operational capability in 2028, which would see the first one coming to Canada in approximately 2027. Right now, everything is on schedule. The next work, as we prepare for the capability, is about the personnel required, so we're looking at what the training requirements are to generate the forces to operate and, of course, sustain the SkyGuardians.

**Scott Anderson:** In the context of their communications, especially satellite communications, are those hardened against EMPs, or will they be?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** Do you mean against electromagnetic pulses?

**Scott Anderson:** Yes.

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** We will have the appropriate protection suites and electronic systems measures.

**Scott Anderson:** Is that a yes, then?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** Yes.

**Scott Anderson:** Perfect.

I know we've talked about continental defence, a term that itself implies a more geostrategic context because obviously there's defence against something. A lot of Canadians see the defence of Canada as a sort of castle on which we fix our defences without much regard for the external context. I think it has to be looked at in a geostrategic context.

Looking at it through that context, first of all, have we learned lessons from the Ukraine war?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** Of course, we have learned many lessons from the Ukraine war. In fact, it is driving our analysis of how we will be operating more effectively in the future geostrategic environment, how we present military forces and what that means.

The proliferation of drones is something that, of course, all of our allies are learning from. There are also a lot of lessons that have to do with how we engage our defence industrial base and how we better incorporate the ability to leverage innovation and more rapid production and acquisition. There are many lessons, and we are absolutely working as quickly as we can to implement what is possible.

● (1150)

**Scott Anderson:** Would you say that we have benefited from our close association with Ukraine and our defence of Ukraine in gaining those lessons?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** I believe it is safe to say so. We are working closely with our Ukrainian partners and—

**Scott Anderson:** I'm sorry. My question may have been a bit unclear.

What I'm saying is that we are not passive observers to this war. We are actually engaged in it, in some sense. What I'm asking is, because of that engagement, are we actually learning something, or are we learning it from watching it as passive observers?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** My understanding is that we are learning from that engagement.

**Scott Anderson:** Thank you very much.

With regard to the F-35, a statement by the Americans has been referenced that says they will have to take over that aspect of the defence of Canada if we do not buy the F-35. I want to talk a bit about that.

In the war games we went to with senior military personnel, we saw that when the F-35 is used in a battle space, the other side doesn't even get a turn, because by the time the munitions released by the F-35 hit, the F-35 is back out of range again, never having been seen.

I had an opportunity to speak to another lieutenant-general in the air force—and that's a very small club—at a recent conference. I asked him to give me just one point on the reason we need the F-35, and he made two of them. One was an integrated comms and targeting system that is essentially a point-and-shoot system, which no other aircraft we have has had. The other one is, to me, definitive: The minute you drop a missile or an external fuel tank on a Gripen, it becomes visible to whoever can see it. The F-35 is not in that same context.

Confirm this for me. We can not operate the Gripen in a forward operating position in the Arctic with any chance of success relative to the F-35. I understand that an F-35 pilot can look from inside the cockpit and see what external radar can see and can trim the wings, trim the speed and so on to optimize the stealth capability. I'm looking for confirmation that the F-35 can operate in a forward operating position, whereas the Gripen is going to have a lot of trouble doing that. Is that a fair statement?

**The Chair:** Can you reply quickly? We're running out of time.

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** I can confirm that the F-35 was selected due to advanced stealth capabilities, data and sensor fusion and increased lethality. It has, with its advanced radars and detection systems, the ability to remain undetected and see further distances to essentially engage before being detected, and also the ability to integrate massive amounts of information from the battle space through the cockpit and to think more in terms of doing a lot of those calculations for the pilot. All of these things have led to the F-35 being selected and being what would be necessary against adversary fifth-generation threats.

**Scott Anderson:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Sherry Romanado, you have up to five minutes.

**Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Through you, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I want to start with Mr. O'Rourke. Could we talk a bit about the integration of the Coast Guard into the Department of National Defence and what that capability does to enhance our maritime awareness with respect to NORAD? Could you elaborate a bit on that and the integration of the Coast Guard?

**Neil O'Rourke (Director General, Fleet and Maritime Services, Canadian Coast Guard):** Thank you for the question.

There are really two big changes. There's the integration, obviously, of the Coast Guard moving over to National Defence, but there's also Bill C-12 and what's being proposed in the language with regard to the Canadian Coast Guard taking on an evolved role in maritime security. After Bill C-12's royal assent, should it get there, essentially we will be able to take safety information and legally share it with security, intelligence and defence partners to help with security and defence, including in the NORAD modernization.

To talk a bit about the integration itself, obviously we are part of the defence team now. There are a lot of different reasons we see this as a good fit. It's everything from Arctic operations to infras-

tructure to increased interoperability. I'll quickly highlight a couple of very specific examples of things we've already done.

As an example, in working with the air force, they have done crew changes for us. We typically, every four weeks, have to fly our crew to a location and bring the crew home. This is typically done through commercial airlines. Increasingly, it's becoming challenging to find availability, so the air force has already helped us out in this regard. That's a real change just in the last couple of weeks.

There's a lot of work around R and D and getting prepared for the possible eventuality of Bill C-12 receiving royal assent. We're looking at increasing sensor capabilities on our ships. Being able to leverage the work that DRDC and CAF have done and are doing is very beneficial.

For the last one, I'll talk about the exchange of expertise. The Canadian Coast Guard has world-leading expertise in operating in ice. That's something we are sharing with our RCN and CAF partners. As an example, we've already had RCN folks come to our Coast Guard Academy to take some of our ice navigator courses.

In the coming weeks, we'll be joining some of our CAF and RCN members with the Chilean navy. They'll be sailing to Antarctica. Two of our commanding officers with significant ice experience will be along to help coach and mentor both RCN captains and members of the Chilean navy.

• (1155)

**Sherry Romanado:** I want to thank you for explaining clearly that right now the Coast Guard cannot provide security information to our allies without the change in regulation in the Oceans Act. Is that correct?

**Neil O'Rourke:** Yes, that's correct.

**Sherry Romanado:** Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Quinn. I'd be remiss if I didn't ask the question that I think a lot of Canadians are curious about.

Can you talk a bit about the situation with Greenland and why it's important that Canada stay firm with our partners on the defence of North America in the NORAD context? Could you elaborate about what is going on right now?

**Jonathan Quinn:** Absolutely. Thank you very much for the question.

First and foremost, as the Prime Minister has said, Canada supports “the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Denmark, including Greenland, which must be respected in accordance with international law.” We'll continue to work with Denmark, Greenland and the United States, as we've been talking about today, to fulfill our shared responsibility for defence and security in the Arctic.

In terms of the notional framework arrangement that was discussed by President Trump and the NATO Secretary General on the margins of Davos, lots of details are still being worked out on that, including with all of the stakeholders involved. I think Canada would be supportive. One of the reported pillars of that arrangement would be the launch of a new NATO exercise operation in the Arctic, which Canada is supportive of. As one of the seven Arctic states that are also members of NATO, we would certainly expect to play an active role in the planning of that operation should it come to fruition.

We really agree with all of our allies that the Arctic is changing rapidly and that there are, as we've been talking about today, rapidly evolving threats to Canadian and allied interests in the region. All Arctic states need to work together and through NATO to secure the region and make sure our interests are advanced.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Quinn and Ms. Romanado.

Mr. Kibble, we are running out of time. You may have a minute or so if you want to ask a few questions.

**James Bezan:** I think we should ask for an extension if the witnesses are prepared to—

**The Chair:** Well, we have an in camera portion afterwards, so I don't want to take up too much of that time.

**James Bezan:** I think we should get another round.

**The Chair:** Are we in concurrence that—

**Jeff Kibble (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, CPC):** We have witnesses here; our expertise is here. This is important information.

**The Chair:** We'll eat into our in camera time, but that's fine.

Let's give another round to Mr. Kibble and Mr. Watchorn, and then we'll call it. Is that okay?

• (1200)

**James Bezan:** That sounds good.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You have five minutes.

**Jeff Kibble:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

To the air force and Coast Guard uniforms, both on the panel and in the audience today, thank you for your service.

General, you mentioned sites—Cold Lake and Bagotville—for F-35s. What forward operating sites are we looking at for effecting intercepts—follow-on sites?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** The forward operating locations are in Inuvik, Iqaluit and Yellowknife. We have deployed operating locations in Goose Bay, Trenton and Comox.

**Jeff Kibble:** Do we have timelines for those?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** They already exist, so it's really about—

**Jeff Kibble:** I mean timelines for those to be ready for F-35s.

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** We have timelines that we're working on with our infrastructure colleagues to be—

**Jeff Kibble:** Perhaps you could submit those dates later. Thank you very much.

Mr. Quinn, you mentioned integrated air and missile defence. You're referring to ballistic missile defence systems.

**Jonathan Quinn:** Not exactly. Integrated air and missile defence is for recognizing the fact that there are multiple types of missile threats: cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, hypersonic—

**Jeff Kibble:** The term “ballistic missile defence” is the same thing.

**Jonathan Quinn:** It would be encompassed within that, absolutely.

**Jeff Kibble:** Do you feel that Canada should continue to participate in a new ballistic missile defence? We've heard “golden dome” and other things thrown around. Is that something we should continue to progress?

Would F-35s be an integral part of that system to keep it effective, as we've heard about elsewhere? If you could speak to that briefly, that would be great.

**Jonathan Quinn:** As mentioned, we are already actively involved in the integrated air and missile defence of the continent through domain awareness and other assets. I think it's absolutely in Canada's interest to continue to play that role and to enhance our capabilities in that area, as committed to in the most recent defence policy. Fighter aircraft will absolutely be an integral part of that layered system of systems to defend against evolving air and missile threats.

**Jeff Kibble:** Specifically, it's the fifth generation that would have the capability to participate in that type of system.

**Jonathan Quinn:** On that, I would defer to General Speiser-Blanchet, who is more of an expert on the tech.

**Jeff Kibble:** That's fair. Thank you.

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** The right fighter that can meet the current threats would be the correct answer to that. In that case, it is the fifth generation, the F-35, which has already been evaluated and selected. It also includes the remotely piloted aircraft system, the SkyGuardian; the tankers we're getting airborne; and the early warning and control that we are looking at acquiring. There are multiple elements that contribute in the big system of systems.

**Jeff Kibble:** It's a complex, integrated system. I appreciate that.

I have one more very quick question for you.

As we discussed earlier, we know that the north warning system is scheduled to expire now and it's still operating. However, is the planned Arctic over-the-horizon radar going to be able to handle the aerial threat of hypersonic missiles for detection?

**Lgen Jamie Speiser-Blanchet:** That's a fair question. In terms of the details of what they will do, we should probably come back to you with specific examples.

**Jeff Kibble:** Thank you very much.

Mr. O'Rourke, for two years running, we've seen Chinese coast guard vessels operating in the Arctic. This year, the new class 1 icebreaker *Xue Long 2* was shadowed by the Canadian Coast Guard from Japan to the Bering Sea.

Exploring that within the framework of NORAD, can you tell us why they were tasked with shadowing that vessel from Japan to the Bering Sea to the Arctic?

**Neil O'Rourke:** I'll just note that we did not, in fact, shadow the vessel. CCGS *Sir Wilfrid Laurier* was in Japan on other business transiting to the Arctic. You had two ships that were essentially going from a similar point A to a similar point B. Then that turned in to a story that we were following it.

Should Bill C-12 receive royal assent, we would have the authority to conduct the kinds of operations that include security control. At this point in time we do not, and we did not shadow the vessel.

**Jeff Kibble:** Okay, that's fair enough. There were news reports of that, so that's why I was asking.

In terms of surveillance capability, you mentioned that the Coast Guard is looking at changing sensors. Surely, now that we're integrated, there must be a more solid plan as to what capabilities, both for surveillance equipment... Perhaps you could speak to that. Would that include air integrating into providing air search? Being forward-deployed units, that would be a huge capability.

**Neil O'Rourke:** At this point in time, we are in the midst of doing an assessment of the capability. We do, of course, have capability on all of our ships today. Immediately, any change from the royal assent of Bill C-12 will mean that we will be able to take the information we currently collect and share it for security and defence purposes.

At the same time, we are working with our CAF partners to examine, as an example, what the RCN has on board and what might make sense on our Coast Guard vessels. We are looking at a whole array of things, everything from the new ships that are under construction and whether we want to pivot there, all the way through to our current vessels and whether we may want to retrofit them. There's a lot of work going on behind the scenes. I'm not in a position today to give you specifics.

Air search radar is one of the many technologies currently being assessed and considered.

• (1205)

**Jeff Kibble:** That's fair enough.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. O'Rourke and Mr. Kibble.

**Jeff Kibble:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I'm sensitive to our witnesses who have a prior engagement, so Mr. Watchorn, it's back to you for the last five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you witnesses for joining us today.

I'd like to talk a little about submarines. Canada will soon be buying submarines. I'd like to know how those submarines will be integrated in the NORAD options.

**Jonathan Quinn:** Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

We unfortunately don't have an able expert on the panel today, but what I would mention in response is that NORAD has a really important maritime warning function. The more platforms that Canada is contributing, whether surface assets or undersurface assets such as submarines, uncrewed systems or sensors, the more we will be contributing to the maritime domain awareness picture, which is critically important to the NORAD maritime warning function.

[*Translation*]

**Tim Watchorn:** Thank you.

I'd like to go in a different direction, since Mr. O'Rourke has joined us.

Canada will soon be buying two icebreakers. How will they be used in the NORAD context?

**Neil O'Rourke:** Thank you for the question.

Those ships will give us a different capacity than what we have today. They'll have the capacity to stay in the Far North for 12 months at a time. I'd like to add that there are ongoing discussions with the Inuit, as they use the ice, and that's very important. I think there's a way to conduct activities while protecting the ice those living in the Far North use.

More importantly, we'll have the capacity to reach the polar arctic. Thanks to sensors, both ships will give us a different view of what's going on up there from the perspective we talked about today. They will help us acquire maritime knowledge, which we'll share with our security and defence partners, as we said earlier.

**Tim Watchorn:** Okay. I have another question for you.

If I understand correctly, the Coast Guard has planes to monitor fisheries, the Far North and the coasts. How will they help us gather more information to ensure our protection in the NORAD context?

**Neil O'Rourke:** Thank you for the question.

You talked about a capacity for which Transport Canada is still responsible. That said, the government has announced that this responsibility would soon be transferred to National Defence and the Canadian Coast Guard. The Dash 8-400 fleet would allow us to carry out activities that would fulfill the purpose of Bill C-12, if it's passed. This new capacity would allow National Defence to collect information in the Far North, even this summer.

**Tim Watchorn:** I would add that this is why it's important that Bill C-12 be passed as soon as possible. No, I'm not asking you to answer that.

Thank you very much. I understand you have another appointment today, so I'll stop here. Thank you for joining us, and thank you for protecting our country.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. I know you have a hard stop.

I appreciate the witnesses coming before us. It was very enlightening.

Folks, I'm going to suspend for a few minutes before we go in camera.

Thank you again, everyone.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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