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Standing Committee on National Defence

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• (1630)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 29 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, February 23, 2026, the committee is meeting to study the subject matter of supplementary estimates (C) 2025-26.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Our interpreters are attending virtually. I ask all participants to consult the guidelines on the table to prevent audio feedback and protect the health and safety of the interpreters.

I'd like to remind the witnesses and members to wait to be recognized by name before speaking. If you wish to speak, raise your hand. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

For interpretation, use the earpiece and select the appropriate channel.

Again, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

I welcome the witnesses.

We have the Honourable David McGuinty, minister of defence. Welcome to the committee once again.

From the Department of National Defence, we have Christiane Fox, our deputy minister; Lieutenant-General Stephen Kelsey, vice-chief of the defence staff; Marc Mes, deputy commissioner of programs at the Canadian Coast Guard; Jonathan Moor, chief financial officer; and Heather Sheehy, assistant deputy minister. From the Communications Security Establishment, we have Caroline Xavier, chief; and Julie Chassé, chief financial officer.

We'll proceed with the opening statements.

Minister, it's over to you. You have up to five minutes, sir.

Hon. David McGuinty (Minister of National Defence): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the Standing Committee on National Defence.

[*Translation*]

Good afternoon, everyone.

[*English*]

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss supplementary estimates (C) for the Department of National Defence, the Canadian Armed Forces, the Canadian Coast Guard and the Communications Security Establishment Canada.

Colleagues, at a time of increasing disruption, evolving threats and global uncertainty, Canada's purpose remains clear: Protect our people, uphold our values and contribute to a more secure and a stable world.

Before I begin, I want to reaffirm a fundamental commitment. The security of the women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces is paramount. That includes a strong duty to protect operational security, account for emerging threats and ensure that their missions are safeguarded every step of the way.

In an environment defined by rapidly evolving threats, we will continue to act with discipline and vigilance, both of which are required to protect our personnel and the integrity of their operations. When there is something noteworthy to communicate publicly and when we can do so without compromising operations or, more importantly, the safety and security of our personnel, we do our utmost to share that information in a timely way. Rest assured that we will bring a disciplined and measured approach, as they say, to ensure the safety and security of members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

At a moment marked by rising geopolitical tensions and global crises, Canada will continue to defend its sovereignty, protect its interests and work with partners where it advances our security and stability.

[*Translation*]

We have set this ambitious goal in response to the changing landscape of global threats, which means that Canada's security and sovereignty can no longer be taken for granted.

[*English*]

The funding in supplementary estimates (C) that we are seeking today is essential to achieve our target of spending 2% of GDP on defence. The proposed \$1.05 billion in funding for key priorities includes major defence procurements, military operations and recruitment and the expansion of the Canadian Coast Guard's security role. Likewise, to support our domestic defences, we're requesting over \$66.8 million to support the Canadian Armed Forces' northern operations.

Domestic and international operations like these are sustained by the strength, professionalism and commitment of our people in uniform. To ensure that they are well prepared, well supported and fairly compensated, we are investing in the foundations that enable readiness and retention, requesting \$49 million to strengthen recruitment, retention and support programs for CAF members, and \$12 million to expand access to child care for serving families.

These investments build on our ongoing efforts to support our people, and they are already showing results. Applications to join the Canadian Armed Forces have increased by 13% over the past year.

● (1635)

[Translation]

At the same time, we are making crucial investments in defensive capabilities. As part of these supplementary estimates, we are requesting \$314 million for the strategic tanker transport capability project and the acquisition of CC-330 Husky aircraft. We are also requesting \$2 million to maintain and manage the anti-drone system.

This is in addition to the approximately \$563.7 million of previously approved defence investments funded through the capital investment fund.

[English]

Most recently, the Department of National Defence has made historic investments in Canadian defence industries. Guided by Canada's defence industrial strategy, last week we announced up to \$642 million to establish a high-explosive projectiles facility; over \$400 million to General Dynamics Ordnance and Tactical Systems in Quebec for new artillery production facilities; and \$305.4 million to IMT Precision in Ingersoll, Ontario, to build a new manufacturing facility producing metal shells, strengthening Canada's ammunition supply.

In support of Ukraine, Canada also announced the production of 383 Senator armoured vehicles manufactured by Roshel in Brampton, Ontario. Looking ahead, in addition to investments in air, water and land capabilities, we are investing \$200 million in core infrastructure for a Canadian-owned spaceport, alongside other major space capabilities.

In the supplementary estimates (C), we are transferring budgets to 14 other government departments, totalling \$179 million, reflecting the department's central role in Canadian defence spending and the Government of Canada's commitment to defence priorities.

[Translation]

Over the past year, the Canadian Coast Guard has joined the defence team. Its 6,500 personnel are dedicated to ensuring the safety of Canada's waters and coasts, and its expertise and presence in our Arctic and northern regions benefit Canadians, as well as our sovereignty and security. Today, we are requesting \$129.5 million to fund the expansion of the Canadian Coast Guard's security role, as outlined in budget 2025.

[English]

Likewise, through our requested funding for CSE, we will ensure that that agency has the resources it needs. From foreign intelligence, cybersecurity and cyber-operations to protecting Canada's critical infrastructure and providing recommendations and advice through its Canadian centre for cybersecurity, it plays an essential and fundamental role in our security and sovereignty.

In conclusion, as threats to Canada and its allies increase in complexity, approving these requests will enable our defence and security organizations to modernize, rearm and optimize the ways we support our Canadian Armed Forces in their vital work.

I thank you, Mr. Chair, and the entire committee, greatly, for the committee's consideration and its ongoing work. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We'll proceed with our first hour.

The first round goes to Mr. Bezan. You have up to six minutes, sir.

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

I want to thank the minister and the entire team from DND and CAF that is here with us today.

I want to welcome Deputy Minister Christiane Fox to her first appearance here. Congratulations on your new role as deputy minister of national defence.

Minister, on March 17, you were at a press conference, and you were asked about the outgoing director of the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, Joe Kent. You said he “made a principled decision”. Are you aware that, in Kent's resignation letter, he falsely claimed that Jewish Americans and the Jewish state were influencing U.S. foreign policy?

Hon. David McGuinty: No, I'm not aware of that, but I'm also not quite sure of the context of the comments that I made that you've quoted.

● (1640)

James Bezan: Actually, I have the video if we want to play it. You were asked about him after your presser on March 17.

Hon. David McGuinty: He said something along the lines of...perhaps for him, he thought it was a principled decision.

James Bezan: No, you said that you supposed that he made “a principled decision”.

Hon. David McGuinty: Yes, and I supposed that was the case. I don't know the man. I don't know the decision. I don't know—

James Bezan: So, now, knowing that he made this anti-Semitic conspiracy theory question, do you regret calling that “a principled decision” without knowing the facts beforehand?

Hon. David McGuinty: That’s why I said that I supposed it was “a principled decision”. I don’t know the character of the man. I don’t know—

James Bezan: I can tell you that the Jewish community is not at all happy about your saying “I suppose” or “made a principled decision”—

Hon. David McGuinty: I can understand that. I can understand that the community would be—

James Bezan: —so I would hope that you would take responsibility and apologize.

Hon. David McGuinty: I’ll take a much closer look at this individual’s background.

Thank you.

James Bezan: I hope that you issue an apology, because the Jewish community in Canada and the United States is definitely upset; the “principled decision” comment does not fly. Even if you said, “I suppose”, you were essentially suggesting that this individual, who was dwelling in anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, is someone who made a principled decision. I don’t think that connects very well. It’s a reflection on making comments without knowing all the details first, so I hope that you withdraw those comments.

Minister, you also talked about the security of our men and women in the armed forces, first and foremost, especially with regard to the operational risks that they’re currently experiencing in the Middle East. On March 1, Camp Canada was hit with missile drones from Iran. The Ali Al-Salem Air Base, which I know some of us have been to, in Kuwait was severely damaged and continues to be damaged. You and the Prime Minister had many opportunities to make sure that Canadians were aware that the base was hit. I know that the Prime Minister alone did 12 press conferences over 10 days and never once said that the base was hit.

Why did you withhold that information from Canadians? They deserve to know when Canadians are being targeted. We’re lucky that our forces were safe, and I’m assuming they continue to be. However, do you regret not informing Canada, Canadians and parliamentarians that Iran is targeting Camp Canada and other bases around the Middle East?

Hon. David McGuinty: The first thing to note is that I was made aware of the incident immediately after it occurred.

The second thing that I think is important to remember is that I regularly receive, as minister, intelligence and security briefings. I’m made aware of incidents related to CAF members and assets around the world. That was the case following this strike in Kuwait that you’re referring to, and it continues to be the case.

James Bezan: You did have a mixed message when asked about the La Presse story, though, and it sounded like you didn’t know about it until the La Presse story broke.

Hon. David McGuinty: In fairness, I clarified my remarks as soon as I could right afterwards. I did say that I misunderstood the

question from the journalist. I thought he was referring to the media reports themselves as opposed to the event itself.

I think it’s important for us to remember that we have to be very careful here in communicating events, details, personnel locations and timing. I think that’s been the practice in the department for quite a long time and, as always, I will—

James Bezan: When I was parliamentary secretary back when we were in government, we used—

Hon. David McGuinty: —take my lead from the operational experts inside the department.

James Bezan: —to provide technical briefings all the time.

Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): I have a point of order.

James Bezan: It’s my time. Stop the clock.

Sherry Romanado: Mr. Chair, I would just like to ask, for the sake of the interpreters, that we make sure that we don’t have people talking over each other.

Thank you.

The Chair: Yes.

We’ll give you the extra time.

James Bezan: The British and Americans, who also have troops in the same area, are providing daily briefings on what damages they’re incurring and the whereabouts of their troops. I don’t know why we can’t do that from a Canadian perspective.

Just on Sunday, March 22, when Canadians were stationed at Camp Naqoura in Lebanon, part of Operation Jade, when it got attacked, immediately we had department officials letting Canada know. That’s a 180° turn in what happened from March 1 to March 22. Three weeks later, now we’re releasing information.

Is this because you guys realize that you made a mistake in not informing Canadians when we were under attack?

Hon. David McGuinty: Was that a Canadian Armed Forces installation?

James Bezan: Canadians were there as Operation Jade.

Hon. David McGuinty: Was that a Canadian Armed Forces installation?

James Bezan: You tell me.

Hon. David McGuinty: No, it wasn’t. We took the appropriate steps internally, as we do, by putting these security questions always first and foremost. A decision was made to communicate after the fact in coordination with the principal actors who were there.

Mr. Bezan, you know and I both know that what other sovereign countries do is their business. In this country, our sovereign business is to make sure that the women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces remain safe. We're very careful in how we communicate.

• (1645)

James Bezan: In the final minute that I have, I know that our troops are definitely in danger's way. Are we going to be giving hazard pay increases to those who are currently in the Middle East as part of our operations?

Hon. David McGuinty: Many people at this table can help me with that answer.

Mr. Chair, with your indulgence, I think the vice-chief could speak to that for a few seconds or a minute just to clarify the answer.

James Bezan: Okay. We'll do that in the next hour.

This is my final question for you. In budget 2025, there is talk about retiring selected fleets out of the Canadian Armed Forces. There are a number of fleets that I'm sure you're considering. Would you be willing to inform the committee on which fleets are going to be retired where there aren't going to be things to replace them? Are we retiring the CF-18s before we get the F-35s? Are we retiring the Tutors and the Snowbirds?

The Chair: The time is up. You may have to refer that to the second half, if that's possible.

Hon. David McGuinty: I would do that, sir.

The Chair: Ms. Lapointe, we'll go over to you.

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

Thank you, Minister, for joining us here today.

The estimates reflect Canada's ongoing work with international partners across a number of operations. What do these investments mean in practical terms for how the Canadian Armed Forces can operate alongside partners and also contribute to shared security efforts?

Hon. David McGuinty: It means that we're able to expand our reach and our presence in the Indo-Pacific, for example. It means that we're able to participate more fulsomely in different exercises. It means that we're able to invite more diverse participation to Operation Nanook in the Arctic to assert our sovereignty there. It means that we're able to, as we did, sign specific agreements with countries like the Philippines to allow for a more direct exchange of our personnel on both soils and have them participate, streamline their admission into the country and get clearances so they can participate more fully in our work.

It means many things, but what it really indicates is that now, with this large envelope of support we're putting into the Canadian Armed Forces and DND, we are indicating that Canada is going to engage more fulsomely in the world. We've done that just recently in Norway, where we signed on to a special deal on space, for example. As I mentioned earlier, we have announced that we intend to build up to six space launch pads in Canso, Nova Scotia, to be able to—

[*Translation*]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot—Acton, BQ): Mr. Chair, it's not that we're losing the interpretation, but there are fluctuations in the sound. Sometimes, we hear the minister again with the right tone of voice, the right pace and the right volume, but other times, the interpretation comes and goes. It's as if the sound is fading in and out.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's now resolved.

[*Translation*]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Great, everything's fine.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Lapointe, please continue.

Viviane Lapointe: Minister, we noticed that in these supplementary estimates there's a strong focus on working with northern and indigenous partners. What does this funding mean, again in practical terms, for local infrastructure, partnerships or economic benefits in these northern communities?

Hon. David McGuinty: Just 10 days or so ago, the Prime Minister and I attended Yellowknife with many other folks. We announced up to \$40 billion in investments in the Arctic, much of which is for NORAD modernization, NORAD forward operating locations, and building and expanding new northern operational support hubs and nodes, depending on locations. It means, again, that Canada is moving very directly into the Arctic to build our capacity, enhance our presence and make the necessary investments in terms of, for example, dual-use investments, landing strips, water and waste-water systems, housing, energy systems and grids.

We're also investing in over-the-horizon radar systems, a technology we purchased and are co-operating with Australia in installing for the country to be able to give us a much better idea of what might be coming at Canada or North America as a continent from over the horizon, over the pole. It's the first phase of several phases. It fits within the integrated air missile defence systems we're looking at with the United States.

What we're really doing is asserting more direct presence and taking on more Arctic defence responsibilities in the Arctic. It will lead to billions of dollars of investments.

• (1650)

Viviane Lapointe: Yesterday we met here with a contingent from Portugal. One of the members of their defence team said there is the saying that “what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas”, but what happens in the Arctic doesn't stay in the Arctic. That really struck me. Can you underline for us how these investments you've just shared with us strengthen Canada's ability to maintain a persistent presence in the north?

Hon. David McGuinty: We can take Operation Nanook, for example, our northern exercise, which began as an exercise of several months long over the year and has now basically extended into a full-time exercise. We're expanding the number of countries that are joining us on this exercise.

We're also participating right now in leading the Arctic Seven, A7, group of nations at NATO, where we are pulling together northern countries to come together and share and invest in each other. Our defence industrial strategy is also embracing these relationships to look for co-investment opportunities, for example.

All of this means that we are leveraging not only our own know-how and our own investments, but also our partnerships internationally. I mentioned, for example, the relationship that we've just consolidated with Norway, which we're very keen on expanding. We have a similar defence agreement with Denmark.

We are looking at pulling together a group of partner northern Arctic countries that have a responsibility in the area and at beginning to co-operate more directly.

Viviane Lapointe: Can you speak to us about the recent investments that are being made in Canadian Armed Forces housing and what progress is happening when it comes to improving housing for our members and their families?

Hon. David McGuinty: It's an acute continuing challenge that we're addressing head-on. Like all the things we're trying to execute here, we're doing it systematically and with a plan. We recently announced 7,500 homes to be constructed. We're also already building about 800 units. Shovels are in the ground across the country. This is spread out across bases. We are looking at dual-use opportunities with Build Canada Homes.

We are also, for the first time as a department and an organization, buying buildings. We recently purchased a building in Esquimalt, for example, with 37 units now available for our forces. We're also giving the forces what they seem to want. We're hearing that what they really want, especially our newest recruits, are one- and two-bedroom apartments, so we are designing those, configuring those, and they're purpose-built for our forces.

We are very engaged in this question of housing. It's moving very quickly. We're encouraged and we're moving forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

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

I'd like to thank the minister and the entire team here today.

Minister, before I get to the heart of the matter, namely the supplementary estimates, allow me to take this opportunity to ask you a question about the study on contaminated lands that we're going to conduct soon. I don't believe you have been sent an invitation for it. I'm sure that if you don't have the information at hand, someone here will be able to answer us.

As you know, there are a lot of contaminated lands in Quebec. In some cases, this has been resolved. In other cases, it isn't quite resolved yet. There is the case of Terrebonne, for example, where people are still waiting. We know that work is scheduled for the near future. The invoice has been passed on to the City of Terrebonne itself. However, we know that the federal government made a series of mistakes, which led to delays. I don't blame you personally, since I know you weren't the defence minister over the past 10 years, but it's still the result of delays caused by Ottawa.

Some of my colleagues, such as Mr. Boudrias and Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, who were MPs at the time, have championed this issue for years. Suddenly, the people of Terrebonne are telling us that they were finally told that they were going to receive the invoice in the summer and that they were going to have to foot it.

Have you had any contact with them?

• (1655)

Hon. David McGuinty: We haven't had any direct contact with the people of Terrebonne, but I don't know all the details of the Terrebonne case. There's probably someone here who could give you more details. If not, I can send you an answer directly.

Ms. Fox, can you answer that question?

Christiane Fox (Deputy Minister, Department of National Defence): Regarding the Terrebonne case, we can send you the invoice in question. The infrastructure program, for example, has funding for contaminated lands. We'll follow up to see what happened in that case.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Is that possible? When we talked to them, they told us that they were going to have to pay for it and that they weren't happy. Do we have your commitment today to follow up with the City of Terrebonne?

Christiane Fox: Yes.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I appreciate that very much. Thank you.

Now, let us move on to a completely different topic: the important project of the remotely piloted aircraft system, which began in 2023.

Hon. David McGuinty: Which program are you referring to?

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: It's the remotely piloted aircraft system, or RPAS.

It was announced in 2023, but there hasn't been an update since. According to Transport Canada, the integration of drones into Canadian civil airspace still requires significant regulatory developments. This assessment is shared by international organizations such as the International Civil Aviation Organization and authorities such as the Federal Aviation Administration. We also know that the deadlines to complete the preparatory work and other activities required to accept the first RPAS are ambitious and that the infrastructure may not be ready in time for the equipment's delivery. Given that we haven't had an update since 2023, can you give us one today?

Hon. David McGuinty: First, as I understand it, the remotely piloted aircraft system budget is \$2.49 billion. Second, we expect to receive the first delivery—

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I'm sorry, did you say \$2.9 billion?

Hon. David McGuinty: It's \$2.49 billion, or two and a half billion dollars.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Okay.

Hon. David McGuinty: The first RPAS will be delivered in 2028. That contract generates 700 jobs a year.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Seven hundred jobs is great.

Is there a guarantee that there won't be any delays, then? Is that the update?

Hon. David McGuinty: We're in the process of managing the contract.

[*English*]

Heather, do you have anything else to add?

Heather Sheehy (Assistant Deputy Minister, Materiel, Department of National Defence): I don't have any notes that suggest there's a delay on this contract. I can follow up if there is something to be noted, but I don't have that.

[*Translation*]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Yes, please. I said it without malice: An announcement from 2023 is starting to look old. Over three years, a lot may have happened that means that the deadlines won't be met.

The U.S. government also has a direct commercial sale contract with General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, which is in California. Canada doesn't produce that kind of drone. Is there anything in this budget or in this strategy that would aim to develop similar expertise here?

Hon. David McGuinty: Generally speaking, I would say this is part of our defence industrial strategy. It's not about repatriating, but about investing in those capabilities in Canada. That's exactly what we're doing across Canada right now. At the same time, we do have ties to the United States. We're integrated into the production of our defence materials, and that continues. With the launch of the strategy, we're going to accelerate investments in Canadian companies and Canadian capacity very quickly, and we're already doing so.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I have another question. I'm going to move on to Ukraine, if I may, and the issue of armoured

vehicles. The government announced two donations, totalling 89 armoured combat support vehicles, to the Ukrainian government. In fact, I have already gone to see you in the House to tell you that I met with representatives of a company that produces armoured vehicles and to tell you what it can do. The current projects include the purchase of 360 of these vehicles. You're saying that the vehicles that were originally made for Canada are going to be replaced by the contractor. That means there will be no impact on the scope of the project, but all of that is postponed until 2028. Does this postponement have any impact?

• (1700)

Hon. David McGuinty: There isn't any that I'm aware of, no.

I was at GDLS and Roshel last week. We announced that we were going to send 400 armoured vehicles produced by Canadian companies to Ukraine. At the same time, we're going to send medical vehicles, which the Ukrainians have requested. This is continuing. Since 2022, we have donated \$25.5 billion in support of Ukraine. We have announced an additional \$2 billion for the fiscal year starting on April 1.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

This is now the second round.

Mr. Kibble, you have up to five minutes.

Jeff Kibble (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, CPC): Thank you.

My questions are for the minister. I'll carry on from Mr. Bezan's question about the expenditure review.

It says in the review that to achieve savings, DND will retire select fleets that are nearing the end of their service. Does this apply to the CF-18s or all our Tutor jets? More specifically, will that be before replacements are procured?

Hon. David McGuinty: What I do know is that we're reviewing many fleets across the forces. Of course we have to look at the question of CF-18s. We all know they're coming to the end of their lives. They have served Canada well.

Right now, the Canadian Air Force continues to deploy them. We have questions—

Jeff Kibble: I want to hone in on whether we are looking at retiring the CF-18s and all our Tutors prior to procuring replacements. That's really what I want to know.

Hon. David McGuinty: Both of those questions are outstanding.

Jeff Kibble: They're outstanding. Okay.

Hon. David McGuinty: They're being examined by our folks right now.

Jeff Kibble: Thank you.

My next question is based on the Prime Minister's announcement two weeks ago about the \$32 billion in Arctic spending.

You could argue that it's a reannouncement from 2022, when similar amounts were announced but not spent.

The Canadian Rangers are the eyes and ears of our Arctic. They're integral to our Arctic sovereignty. They do amazing work for Canada, yet in this plan for the Arctic there was no mention of the rangers. I'm wondering why they were not mentioned. Do the Liberals plan on keeping the rangers the same or expanding them? If so, how much of that \$32 billion will go towards expansion of the rangers?

Hon. David McGuinty: The vice-chief of defence was just reminding me that there's a program to enhance the rangers, and that's exactly what we're doing. We're looking at equipment. We're looking at our persistent presence in the Arctic. That includes the rangers.

Jeff Kibble: So some of that money will go toward the rangers.

Hon. David McGuinty: Yes, sir.

Jeff Kibble: Terrific.

That reannouncement of \$32 billion refers to Canadian Forces Base Goose Bay, home of 5 Wing, as a "deployed operating" location, to quote from the report. I'm wondering if you could define that. What is a deployed operating location? Is this a downgrade from its current status as a full Canadian Forces base? Will 5 Wing remain there, or will the operations be scaled back, as it's renamed as a deployed operating location? Certainly I've never experienced that term before.

Hon. David McGuinty: If I could, Mr. Kibble, I'd like to ask the vice-chief to give you a quick answer on that, certainly on the nomenclature of the language.

Jeff Kibble: Do we have a definition, just quickly, of deployed operating location? If not, could we maybe have some more information sent to us on that?

Stephen Kelsey (Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, Canadian Armed Forces, Department of National Defence): Yes, sir.

Jeff Kibble: Thank you.

Minister, have you ever been to the Middle East as Minister of National Defence?

Hon. David McGuinty: I haven't in my official capacity as Minister of National Defence, no, but I've been there, yes.

Jeff Kibble: There's much talk about maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz. Has the U.S. consulted Canada on any of their plans? I'm referring back to your comment, which I liked, that Canada's goal is to contribute to a secure and more stable world. Has the U.S. reached out and discussed plans with you about securing the Strait of Hormuz?

Hon. David McGuinty: Not to my knowledge; I have not been consulted by the Americans on what that—

Jeff Kibble: Do we have plans to—

Hon. David McGuinty: As you know, we joined a group of what is now 22 nations—that number may be even higher today—to discuss the possibility of seeing what the role could be for our nations to play collectively.

Jeff Kibble: Do we have contingency plans, or are there plans in place, to send ships or aircraft there? You said we're planning and we're discussing. Is there—

Hon. David McGuinty: That's an extremely important question. It's early days. We've just begun the conversations.

Jeff Kibble: I'll conclude this line by asking you this: If a decision is made to send ships or aircraft there, will you commit to putting the decision to debate and a vote in the House, in Parliament?

• (1705)

Hon. David McGuinty: That's an interesting question that I will take back. It is a step, for sure, in a certain direction. As you know, we weren't consulted. We have not been involved, and we're not involved and will not be involved, in the prosecution of this war.

Jeff Kibble: We're getting ready to discuss, we don't have contingency plans and we're not sure if we're going to commit to—

Hon. David McGuinty: We're looking at options in terms of what role Canada might be able to play.

Jeff Kibble: You're not committing to a vote in the House, at the moment.

Hon. David McGuinty: I can certainly take that back.

Jeff Kibble: Most here are very supportive of the goal to reach 5% NATO GDP spending. According to the PBO's report, it will take \$35 billion cumulative each year, on top of our current military spending and the various other projects, culminating in an additional spend of the eye-watering amount of \$159 billion in extra dollars by 2035-36.

How do the Liberals plan to pay for this? Will there be increased taxes or cuts to programs elsewhere? What is your plan? We've come up with this amount. How are we going to achieve it?

Hon. David McGuinty: Our plan is to give rise to the strongest defence industrial sector this country has ever seen. Our plan is to build from 600 companies to considerably more. Our plan is to increase over 10 years, by another 125,000 jobs, work in the defence sector. This is already taking hold.

Jeff Kibble: In the last 10 years of trying to build budgets—

The Chair: Mr. Kibble—

Jeff Kibble: —we've not achieved \$150 billion.

The Chair: Mr. Kibble—

Jeff Kibble: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. It just seemed like a big number—

The Chair: Mr. Earle, it's over to you now for five minutes.

Philip Earle (Labrador, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister. Thanks to your team for being here today.

As you know, and as my colleagues here know, I am the member of Parliament for Labrador, which has a land mass in our country of 296,000 square kilometres and 8,000 kilometres of coastline. It has the military base 5 Wing Goose Bay. That particular military base supports Canadian operations in the Arctic. We certainly support our European allies, and I'm very proud to say, as I know all of you are, that military base is aiding in our contribution to NORAD.

In the period from around 2007 through to 2015, as somebody who lives near the wing, I would say we saw a significant decline in spending and investment on the wing. With that, a lot of the infrastructure there declined. Looking at the estimates in supplementary (C) today, they reflect some of the public announcements we've heard in recent weeks. I'm preoccupied with Labrador, naturally, and I know you're preoccupied with Canada and the women and men in uniform who serve our country.

Can you talk to us a bit about the investments that are planned in supplementary estimates (C), why they are necessary and maybe why they are so important in areas of Arctic sovereignty? Maybe you could talk about SAR and those investments for our great Canadian Coast Guard.

Hon. David McGuinty: Canadians know the threat landscape in Canada has changed. Canadians know our geography won't necessarily protect us anymore. Canadians know our reputation as a fair, democratic, rules-based country isn't enough anymore for us to be able to assert our security and our sovereignty, so we have made a decision to invest massively in the Arctic. This is part and parcel of increasing our reach, our presence, our mobility there and our responsiveness.

I mentioned the over-the-horizon radar. We're also investing heavily in maritime patrols. We're investing in airborne early warning aircraft. We're investing in maritime sensors. We've brought the Coast Guard into the family, so to speak—6,500 strong—and it will further increase our domain awareness and our posture in the Arctic.

We are looking at the three NORAD forward operating locations in Inuvik, Yellowknife and Iqaluit, as well as at the deployed operating base in Goose Bay—the definition of which we'll get back to Mr. Kibble on. We are investing \$2.67 billion for two northern operational support hubs at Whitehorse and Resolute and two new northern operational support nodes, which are slightly smaller but important, at Cambridge Bay and Rankin Inlet.

We're working with our partners there and with indigenous rights holders. We're looking at dual-purpose, multi-purpose benefits, as I mentioned, such as extending runways, adding tarmac and improving our utilities access to support defence operations, as well as the quality of life for the people who live there. We are looking at getting electricity, and enough of it. The Coast Guard is going to continue the incredible advanced work it does in working with indigenous folks there.

This is all about asserting our presence and moving more fully in the area, and these investments are long overdue. I think everybody at the table would admit that they are long overdue. Canadians are very supportive, because they're concerned about where I started, which is that the threat landscape has changed.

• (1710)

Philip Earle: I wonder if you care to comment on this, and you may not wish to do so—naturally. I've declared my biases. I am preoccupied with Labrador and the people I represent there.

Is the decline we saw in the years between 2007 and 2015 impacting some of the things we're seeing in supplementary estimates (C) today? Is there cause to spend more money because of that period of time?

Hon. David McGuinty: There's no doubt that in some circumstances, we're further behind the eight ball, but the good news is that we're at the starting line. The really good news is that we have tens of thousands of extraordinary women and men in the Canadian Armed Forces, who are incredibly good at executing and delivering on plans and making things happen. The good news is that we have a government now that is really prioritizing this defence industrial strategy and these investments. The good news is that our banks, our venture capital funds, our engineering firms and our construction firms are aligning themselves and they want to help. They want to help with these investments that we will be making, for example, in Labrador, to be able to deliver on the infrastructure and the needs we need to follow up on.

For the decade leading up to 2015, of course it was difficult. People were managing through scarcity, really, and as a result of that, we're making important contributions. It goes back to Mr. Kibble's question about why we are spending this money. We're spending this money because it's the right thing to do for our forces, our security, our sovereignty, our economy and our jobs.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have only two and a half minutes, which is always a challenge.

Minister, in the 2025-26 supplementary estimates (C), the department is requesting over \$34.4 million for Canadian Armed Forces operations in the Middle East. We know that in the 2025 budget, the Government of Canada committed to providing, starting in 2025-26, \$300.1 million over three years to the Department of National Defence and the Communications Security Establishment Canada to support Operation AMARNA in the Middle East.

What are the operational objectives behind this additional funding?

Hon. David McGuinty: Can I ask the vice-chief of the defence staff to answer the question?

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Yes, you can, and I'm going to immediately add a corresponding sub-question: Has the conflict in Iran caused any significant changes to what was originally planned?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: Thank you for the question. What specifically do you want me to talk about, the operational objectives in Iran or the \$300.1-million investment?

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Actually, I'd like you to tell me about both.

My first question is this: What are the operational objectives behind the funding? My second question is this: Has the conflict changed the plans?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: I'll start with the second question about the operational objectives in Iran and the circumstances. I could address the Strait of Hormuz first, if that's the purpose of your question.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Actually, it was mainly about the funds initially planned for the Middle East.

Mr. Chair, I would like to make sure of something.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have another minute.

[*Translation*]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I have had to repeat the question several times. I would appreciate it if you gave me a little extension.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes. Go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Kelsey, funding was announced in the supplementary estimates (C). I won't repeat the entire wording, since the question has already been asked. However, funding was set aside for the Middle East, both at the Department of National Defence and at Communications Security Establishment Canada, to support Operation AMARNA in the Middle East.

First, what are the operational objectives associated with those funds? Second, has Iran changed the situation?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: We have six operations in the Middle East with 13 countries. The objectives vary from mission to mission. Operation AMARNA essentially aims to stabilize the countries concerned. In Jordan, for example, it's a training and support mission. In Kuwait, as we have already discussed, it's about operational support hubs, offering commodities and reducing response times. Every mission changed slightly, so the objectives have changed as well. That said, funding for Operation AMARNA covers a set of objectives related to the six operations.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kelsey.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Chair, I wasted a lot of time having to ask the same question again. I asked you to give me a short extension. You said yes.

LGen Stephen Kelsey: It was my fault, because of the interpretation.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Mr. Kelsey, I'd like to quickly ask you one last question.

Can you confirm that the budgets have not changed?

LGen Stephen Kelsey: Despite the circumstances in Iran, the budget doesn't change. The events in the Strait of Hormuz happened after the bidding process began.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: I did provide extra time.

Ms. Gallant, we'll go over to you.

Cheryl Gallant (Algonquin—Renfrew—Pembroke, CPC): Through you for the minister, Chair, what were you told went wrong during the CAF exercise in Alaska, where dozens of Canadian soldiers suffered severe cold-weather injuries? What were you told was the cause for that?

Hon. David McGuinty: I was informed almost immediately after the fact—quite soon, as soon as that occurred—that the challenge was that a lot of our members of the forces were attending in very cold weather, in a very cold snap, with equipment that was not appropriate for that depth of cold.

Cheryl Gallant: Every other NATO multinational group in Latvia is deployed or assigned to areas of operation, but we are not because we cannot. Could you explain why?

Hon. David McGuinty: You'll forgive me. I'm not sure I understand the question.

I understand that we command the multinational brigade of 14 countries. I understand that we are coordinating all of those countries and preparing for the NATO standards, but I'm not sure I understand what role you think we're supposed to be playing or that we're not playing. Forgive me.

Cheryl Gallant: Our brigade headquarters currently operates in assigned areas, but not outside of Ādazi. Why is that?

Hon. David McGuinty: My understanding is that we are operating in the region. My understanding is that we are coordinating all 14 nations. My understanding is that's the role and responsibility of us as the commanding nation.

Cheryl Gallant: We can't go outside our assigned regions.

In terms of the cold-weather issues, it's equipment only, and you haven't been told about the lack of leadership and the people who are leaving the military: the cream of the crop. The so-called sediment is rising to the top, and that is part and parcel of what happened in that exercise.

Hon. David McGuinty: I'm trying to reconcile that with the latest information we have, with a 13% increase in applications to join the Canadian Armed Forces.

Cheryl Gallant: Well, that always accompanies a severe drop in the economy. There's nothing else to do, but joining the military is historically—

Hon. David McGuinty: I thought it had something to do with spirit, morale, pay, new career opportunities and growth and investment.

Cheryl Gallant: Now, with the industrial strategy, we have winners and losers. How can we expect there not to be political interference in the process given the Liberal track record on things like ArriveCAN and SNC-Lavalin?

Hon. David McGuinty: Well, the defence industrial strategy is set up at arm's length. There is a coordinating group of public servants across the system and across the department that will be helping to deliver on this.

There is a lot of capital flowing into the country right now. The Prime Minister has managed, for example, to find \$80 billion of investment from the U.A.E. We're bringing in as much as we can to deploy in defence.

Cheryl Gallant: I have one last question.

Our allies are fed up with our troops being sent to Latvia without proper training. They now do their final confirmation exercise in theatre because they don't have the equipment here. When are we going to restore the capability at Wainwright? Also, at the firing ranges, when are we going to renew those contracts so they can do the simulated shooting?

• (1720)

Hon. David McGuinty: Well, we're beginning by beginning, and we're dealing with the ammunition situation in the country first of all, one that we inherited—

Cheryl Gallant: It's on training.

Hon. David McGuinty: Yes, and training, which is one of the reasons why we offered different kinds of compensation for trainers and instructors. We're working feverishly to be able to, as you say, improve those situations, and it's happening.

We are moving forward quickly. The money is being booked. The money is being deployed. Base commanders are being given different financial authorities to execute on plans to improve the situation. I think we're going to be seeing a lot of good things coming.

Cheryl Gallant: They'll be trained before they get into theatre, then. They'll do the final confirmation exercise at home before being sent into the—

Hon. David McGuinty: Yes.

Do you mind if I ask the vice-chief?

The Chair: I am sensitive to time.

You may answer quickly.

Stephen Kelsey: We do want to return to the way it used to be, where before they arrive in theatre they have gone through the manoeuvre training centre. Because of the equipment shortfalls, because of the change in structure and because of the imperative to get them in on the right equipment, we're doing it in Latvia.

It's not ideal. It's not what we want. We look forward to the point where CMTC in Wainwright, Alberta becomes the centre of excellence for collective training.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Romanado, it's over to you.

Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Through you, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Minister, we just heard a bit more about the defence industrial strategy. Historically, Canada has worked in silos with respect to research, the Canadian Armed Forces and industry. Part of the defence industrial strategy is to bring those pieces together with respect to BOREALIS and the defence innovation secure hubs. One of my colleagues across the way brought up drone capability. I know that recently we announced the launch for proposals to establish a DISH in quantum and another one on uncrewed system technologies.

Can you elaborate a bit on how this is different in terms of how we are proceeding and embracing that talent at our research-intensive universities and bringing them to the table with industry and the Canadian Armed Forces to solve some of the problems we have? Could you elaborate a bit on that and how it's different in terms of what we've been doing?

Hon. David McGuinty: Everything about this is different. This is the first time in Canadian history that we actually have a defence industrial strategy. We're here. We're at the starting line. We have incredible talent. There are 600 companies and 82,000 people who work full time in the sector now, and about \$14.5 billion in annual revenue, but we have very specific targets that we will achieve over the decade as we implement this defence industrial strategy.

We're going to be drawing on the capabilities across the country. We know, for example, Ontario has over 35% of our defence industry employment. We know Quebec is home to about 25% of defence industry employment. We know what its specializations are. We know Atlantic Canada is home to 20% of the defence industry. We know what its specialization is. We know about western and northern Canada as well. We know where the capacity is, and that's what we began with. What are we good at doing? What can we do? What are we doing now? How do we build on this?

The idea of more advanced research in these defence innovation secure hubs is one where we can bring together the Canadian Armed Forces to disclose what it needs, and that has to be done in a fairly classified setting. We don't go off and tell the world the details of what our forces need to prosecute their responsibilities. We can bring them together with groups like the Communications Security Establishment. We'll bring together public and private researchers. We've met with our top 15 academic research universities. They're very keen to support and apply the research. I was at Waterloo university just last week, dealing with their quantum team to see how advanced their quantum research is, because this is a big part of the future. What we're going to do is pull together into these DISHs—the first of which was launched in Halifax in the Maritimes area—in a number of nodes around the country, specialized talent so that we can give rise to our Canadian technology, our commercialization, our jobs and our companies.

That's why we are so disciplined about the plan we put in place, which comes from 2,000 stakeholders and 17 countries. We spoke to 17 countries about what they do, how well it works, what didn't work and what did work, and we've reconciled all of this in a go-forward strategy that's being implemented. So far, the take-up is wonderful.

I remind people all the time—and I could use this committee's help to remind Canadians in all of our constituencies—that we cannot build here only for ourselves. Of course, we can partner with the right partners and then we can buy, but only from the right sellers with the same values.

What we can do here in defence is compete and win. We can compete and we can win anywhere in the world. What I'm seeing in this new environment we're operating in is that like-minded, mid-sized countries like Canada from all over the world are asking to work with Canadians. They want to invest here and they want to partner here, so we think this is an enormous opportunity for Canada's future.

• (1725)

Sherry Romanado: With respect to the supplementary estimates, could you elaborate on the importance of this investment in terms of recruitment and retention of members of the Canadian Armed Forces?

Hon. David McGuinty: We have a world-class membership in the Canadian Armed Forces. The women and men who serve—and there are a number of former members at this table—are extraordinary people. Their dedication, their commitment, their values and their willingness to put country first are breathtaking in their scope.

We are very much looking for young people to come and join us to undertake their training, to get further specialized skills and to look at contributing. What I hear from a lot of young recruits, a lot of young folks who are just coming out of basic or who are in their training to get their particular skill or vocation, is that yes, of course, the fact that we've increased salaries is important, and yes, of course, we've dealt with many of the culture challenges, which is important, but what they express the most is that they want to be part of a project that they describe as simply Canada. They want to be with Canada, supporting Canada and making Canada secure and sovereign. They also recognize the connection between what they're doing and our defence industrial base to provide them with the equipment they need.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Anderson, you can ask a question or two to wrap up.

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

Minister McGuinty, you mentioned that other countries are investing in Canada. There are Canadian companies in my actual riding asking to achieve trusted partner status. They don't seem to have a way of applying. Is there some way in which they can apply?

Hon. David McGuinty: Are you talking about trusted status here inside Canada?

Scott Anderson: Yes.

Hon. David McGuinty: I think there's a way for them to do that, is there not?

Scott Anderson: Well, they can't seem to find it. Perhaps you could send that to us.

Hon. David McGuinty: Yes, of course. I'll find you a pathway.

Thank you.

Scott Anderson: Good. Thank you very much.

My colleague asked about Latvia and the deployment outside of Ādaži. My understanding is that the troops are not able to deploy from Ādaži, because they do not have the appropriate communication equipment and they don't have enough vehicles. All the other nations are deployed in areas of operation outside of Ādaži.

Ādaži will be the first point of contact if the Russians attack—or, I should say, when the Russians attack—but we can't deploy outside it. Is this going to be remedied soon?

Hon. David McGuinty: It's certainly the intention to remedy this as quickly as we can and get the equipment we need there. That's why we're moving so quickly. I'll give you an example. Just last week, we ordered 69,000 rifles two and a half years ahead of schedule.

Scott Anderson: That's excellent. That has nothing to do with the question I asked, however.

Hon. David McGuinty: I thought it did.

Scott Anderson: I mean, we have troops in a war, in a theatre, who were sent there untrained. Hopefully, they're trained by now. They're supposed to pass evaluation by NATO. But they're not equipped to operate there. Is this going to be addressed soon—like, immediately?

Hon. David McGuinty: We're moving as quickly as we can to get the equipment that people on the ground need.

The Chair: Thank you.

Minister McGuinty, thank you for appearing before us today. I think Canadians everywhere are looking forward to the efforts to strengthen our defence and strengthen our sovereignty, and also the positive impact economically as a result of the new investments being made. Congratulations on that score as well.

Hon. David McGuinty: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'll suspend for the moment so that we can get into our second round.

[The meeting was suspended at 5:30 p.m., Wednesday, March 25]

[The meeting resumed at 4:09 p.m., Wednesday, April 15]

• (52005)

The Chair: Welcome back to meeting number 29 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence, which first started on Wednesday, March 25, and ended prematurely due to a technical issue.

The sole purpose of this resumption is to adjourn the meeting so that the committee can continue its work, which will take place in this very room in just a few minutes. Before I proceed, I wish to test the interpretation.

• (52010)

[*Translation*]

Sherry Romanado: I have a point of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Romanado.

[*Translation*]

Sherry Romanado: I'm on the French channel, and I'm hearing both languages, so it isn't working.

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: I can hear you out of sync, Mr. Chair, and I'm listening only to the French channel.

[*English*]

The Chair: They're going to look into it.

[*Translation*]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: You can adjourn the meeting and then we can look at it in the meantime.

[*English*]

The Chair: I couldn't even hear that properly.

Go ahead, Mr. Bezan.

James Bezan: Because of the ongoing technical difficulties we seem to have whenever we have remote interpretation, I'd like to move that we ban remote interpretation for this committee going forward and that we only have in-person interpretation to ensure that this committee can function properly in both official languages.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Gallant.

Cheryl Gallant: I second that motion, Mr. Chairman.

Sherry Romanado: Does this happen to other committees?

The Chair: Apparently not.

Cheryl Gallant: No, it does not. It's just this committee.

An hon. member: Could it be the room?

An hon. member: It's Tim's fault.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: There is a motion on the floor.

Go ahead, Ms. Romanado.

[*Translation*]

Sherry Romanado: Mr. Chair, without interpretation services, we can't continue a debate on a motion.

[*English*]

Cheryl Gallant: You'll use this to stall for a third time...?

[*Translation*]

Sherry Romanado: We don't want to block anything. We're about to conduct a study on French when there are no interpretation services.

[*English*]

Scott Anderson: It's right here.

[*Translation*]

Sherry Romanado: Is it fixed?

[*English*]

The Chair: If I may, during this debate, we were taking advantage of the opportunity to test the system. Apparently, the clerk is advising us that the system is working.

James Bezan: It seems to me right now that you're not echoing. Is it working better in French?

[*Translation*]

Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: It's working, and that motion is a good idea.

[*English*]

Scott Anderson: It's not echoing here.

Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.): I fixed it. This is why we want mayors here.

The Chair: We do have a motion before the committee.

Mr. Vice-Chair, do you wish to continue with this motion?

James Bezan: Yes, I think we should so that this doesn't continue to happen, honestly. I think we should insist upon having the interpreters in the room with us to provide that live interpretation to ensure that there's nothing lost in translation.

The Chair: Is there further debate?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Now that we have the floor, let's deal with the budget, because we do have a little bit of time.

Is it agreed that the proposed budget in the amount of \$500 for the study of the supplementary estimates (C) be adopted?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: There is a request for an informal meeting on May 26 with the European Parliament security and defence committee. There are six to 10 members of the European Parliament. It's dated, I believe, for May 26. I'm bringing to your attention that the EU Parliament is coming, and they wish to have an audience with us. Is everyone in favour of proceeding?

Ms. Sherry Romanado, you have the floor.

Sherry Romanado: I'm assuming that May 26 is a Tuesday, so it wouldn't be during committee time. Is that correct? I just want to make sure that it's not.

The Chair: Yes. The clerk's office will make arrangements.

Is that a sole...or is that in partnership?

The Clerk of the Committee (Jean-Denis Kusion): It's just with us.

The Chair: It's with just our committee members. Okay. We'll proceed with that.

We're going to continue with the francophone and indigenous CAF member study on April 20 and April 22, for your reference. On April 27, Mr. Guzman is appearing before this committee—we hope. That's been rescheduled for April 27. On DND and the CAF contaminated sites, we're aiming for April 29 on that issue. On May 4, it will be the last meeting of the francophone and indigenous CAF study—just so people are aware.

I know that in Monday's discussion, when we had to cancel, Mr. Guzman agreed to come and he apologizes for having to cancel at that particular time.

Now, to go back—

• (52015)

James Bezan: When is he coming?

The Chair: He's coming on April 27.

James Bezan: Are you sure?

The Chair: April 27 is the date that he's coming back. That is correct according to the clerk and our discussions.

To go back to the adjournment, is the committee in agreement to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: This meeting is adjourned.

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