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The Honourable Peter Kent

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC)): Good afternoon, colleagues.

This afternoon we'll continue our study of the defence of North America with two witnesses by teleconference from two locations. Major-General Wheeler, commander, 1 Canadian Air Division, is speaking to us from Winnipeg, and Colonel Sylvain Y. Ménard, commander, 3 Wing Bagotville, is speaking to us from Bagotville, Quebec.

If I could, I'll just give a quick explanation. Because we have two remote locations, the two commanders will speak to us in English. They will receive questions in French, but we can only use one of our official languages with regard to the response from the two locations, and the two officers have chosen to speak to us in English to facilitate this session.

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I know that we have to put up with technical issues sometimes, but this way of doing things is unacceptable. I do not even have access to French translation, aside from a written document, if one is provided.

[English]

I just want to put that on the record.

[Translation]

I am very sorry, but this way of doing things is unacceptable to francophones.

The Chair: I understand, but I have to say this.

[English]

We had thought at one time of doing two separate hours, one from one location, and one from the other, but our two witnesses today said they wanted to appear together. That imposes on our technical limitations.

[Translation]

Ms. Éline Michaud: The next time, would it be possible to have a presentation and to set aside a period of time for questions, and another presentation after that during the same meeting of the committee? The two presentations could be done separately, so that we have access to the French interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: You will still receive full translation, but the problem, with the votes today, is that it's completely impractical to separate.... I understand. I apologize on behalf of the technical facilitators, but I think that given the fact that we have a vote in less than 15 minutes, we should now hear the opening statements from both of our witnesses before we interrupt the proceedings.

General Wheeler, if you will, please give your opening remarks.

Major-General D.L.R. Wheeler (Commander, 1 Canadian Air Division, Royal Canadian Air Force): Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members of Parliament.

Thanks very much for the honour of appearing here today. It is my pleasure to discuss the North American Aerospace Defence Command, and Canada's contribution to the defence of North America in cooperation with the United States.

Our NORAD mission, in simple terms, is to watch the skies above our continent, and be ready to quickly and effectively respond to imminent security threats. NORAD is a binational Canada-U.S. command that continuously provides detection, validation, and warning of air-breathing threats to our continent, and appropriate aerospace defence measures to respond to hostile actions against North America. As part of our NORAD envelope of responsibilities, your Royal Canadian Air Force maintains the highest readiness levels of any command within the Canadian Armed Forces; therefore, RCAF readiness is fundamental to NORAD readiness.

As we speak, some 430 servicemen and women from the Canadian Armed Forces and the U.S. Air Force monitor the aerospace approaches to Canadian territory, identify all tracks in and around Canadian airspace, and stand ready to intercept and control aircraft that may be of concern to Canadian and North American security. Based at the operational headquarters for the Royal Canadian Air Force in Winnipeg, Manitoba, the Canadian NORAD region, or CANR, is one of the three NORAD regions. The other two regional headquarters are located at Elmendorf Air Force Base in Alaska, and Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida.

Since the terrorist attacks of 2001, CANR has been heavily committed to Operation Noble Eagle, NORAD's ongoing internal air defence mission. As part of Operation Noble Eagle, we monitor all domestic air traffic and respond to virtually any airborne threat that may put Canadians in harm's way. As commander of 1 Canadian Air Division, I am responsible for providing CANR with combat-ready air forces to meet Canada's commitment to the defence of North America and maintaining the sovereignty of our continent's airspace.

Our posture is scalable depending on threat levels. In peacetime, most of our people are located in Winnipeg, where the air division headquarters is situated; at 22 Wing North Bay, where the Canadian air defence sector headquarters is located; and our two fighter force wings in Bagotville, Quebec, and Cold Lake, Alberta. Our country's vastness requires our two fighter wings to additionally rely on deployed operating bases and forward operating locations scattered across the country, including the north. These auxiliary locations extend the reach of our fighters by providing forward areas for basing, refuelling, and maintenance. To ensure our forward operating locations are capable and ready, we routinely conduct exercises and operate out of them. One such example was Operation Spring Forward in April 2014, which was the largest deployment to our forward operating locations since the end of the Cold War. This exercise involved Canadian and Alaskan NORAD assets working in coordination to enhance our interoperability.

Over and above our infrastructure requirements, which include our network of radars, our CF-18 Hornets also rely on support from NORAD air-to-air tankers during extended missions. Tankers and their associated crews and squadrons, of course, encompass several additional infrastructure staffing and logistical requirements, which are essential to NORAD operations.

NORAD is far more than a close working relationship between the U.S. and Canada. Rather, it is a full-fledged binational command, and arguably the world's most intimate military arrangement between two allies. It's effectively nurtured by professionals from the Canadian and U.S. militaries working in lockstep at our respective headquarters 24 hours a day and 365 days a year to help keep our two countries safe from potential threats.

As you may know, USAF personnel within Canada serve under my command. If you've been to our headquarters in Winnipeg, you know that beside my office is the office of the USAF general who serves as my deputy commander for operations. By virtue of the NORAD agreement, Brigadier-General Hyde is an integral part of the RCAF force employment planning and execution. In much the same way, our Canadian general serves as a deputy commander of the NORAD headquarters at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado Springs.

● (1535)

A well-known illustration of how our integration works is that on 9/11, it was none other than the Canadian general in Colorado Springs, working as the duty commander, who orchestrated the scramble of U.S. Air Force jets in response to that crisis. Lieutenant-General Ken Pennie held command over U.S. personnel and assets in the same way the USAF general in Winnipeg commands our personnel when he is on duty.

As part of our interoperability, we regularly exchange NORAD-related intelligence and resources as well. This allows our two countries to share the burden of responding to emerging airborne threats, depending on the availability of resources on both sides of the border.

Examples of our reciprocity include when two Canadian-based CF-18 fighters intercepted and visually identified two Russian Bear long-range bombers flying in international airspace north of Alaska,

or when two U.S. F-15s out of Portland, Oregon, responded to an air emergency near Vancouver in 2012.

Most recently, U.S. Air Force personnel and aircraft deployed to 5 Wing Goose Bay in Labrador for Exercise Vigilant Shield, where together we practised a variety of defence scenarios.

Our enduring alliance with the U.S. is something my colleagues and I actively practise on a daily basis. Canadians who believe international cooperation brings peace and stability can regard NORAD with pride. But pride in our alliance demands also a measure of vigilance. The global security landscape continues to evolve rapidly, which is why NORAD's force posture is now routinely reviewed. Our force posture must have the capability to engage a variety of symmetric and asymmetric threats.

Symmetric, or state-sponsored threats, are considered the most dangerous. In terms of conventional aerospace warning and control missions that are relevant to my command, the potential threat would be in the form of foreign, long-range aviation and/or bomber fleets.

Given the current geopolitical climate, the probability of a military aviation attack is actually low. Capabilities exist to cause us harm, but there is currently no known intent. In a situation where hostile intent is a reality, this would constitute a threat where strategic warning is measured in minutes to hours, and our ability to react is limited to what we have at hand. This explains the requirement to maintain very high readiness levels, even in peacetime. It also explains why NORAD continuously tracks and responds to numerous aircraft of interest close to the airspaces of Canada and the United States.

Asymmetric threats, in the context of NORAD, are those posed by such activities as terrorist organizations' use of an aircraft. The September 11 attack is of course the most tragic example of this, and these threats remain a valid concern with serious security consequences. As a result, we must be ready for scenarios involving aircraft being used to bring harm to populated areas.

That's why regular operations, such as Operation Noble Eagle, are ongoing exercises to ensure we remain trained and capable to accomplish our mission. Since the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, when our nations began to place greater emphasis on surveillance and control of Canada and the U.S., NORAD has responded to more than 3,500 possible air threats and intercepted more than 1,400 aircraft in Canada and the United States.

This serves as a fine example of the crucial partnerships we have nurtured with organizations including federal aviation and law enforcement agencies in both of our countries. NORAD's legacy for the past 56 years has been underpinned by unwavering dedication and determination by our professionals. You can expect nothing less from our men and women in the years ahead.

With our collective vigilance, we can ensure the skies above every community across our vast nation remain secure.

Thank you very much.

I look forward to responding to your questions.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, General Wheeler.

Colonel Ménard, *s'il vous plaît*.

Colonel Sylvain Ménard (Commander, 3 Wing Bagotville, Royal Canadian Air Force): Mr. Chair and honourable members of Parliament, thank you for the honour of appearing here today.

As the commander of the Canadian Forces Base Bagotville and 3 Wing, I would like to provide you with an overview of the work my team does every day as part of the NORAD mission.

Canadian Forces Base Bagotville is strategically located near the city of Saguenay, Quebec. From our facilities we are able to cover all of northeastern North America and rapidly respond to all threats to our security as described earlier by Major-General Wheeler. To achieve this, 3 Wing depends on a group of experienced, well-trained pilots and technicians who are on standby 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Our operations centre is in consistent contact with different North American surveillance locations and Canadian NORAD region command to respond rapidly in case of an alert. We can thus deploy CF-18 fighters where they are needed and even up to the northern borders of our country thanks to the in-flight refuelling capability of the Royal Canadian Air Force and our American allies.

The NORAD mission is 3 Wing's priority. I would even go as far as to say it's our reason for being. As needed, we can dedicate all of our resources to protecting Canadian territory. For example, following the events of September 11, 2001, we placed all of our CF-18 fighters and personnel on alert and deployed them to three strategic locations to increase the country's level of protection as ordered by Canadian NORAD region command.

At all times 425 Tactical Fighter Squadron's role is to train pilots for NORAD missions and to ensure that our fleet of fighters is ready to meet Canada's needs.

And 12 Radar Squadron is also an important part of the North American line of defence. Normally the squadron's radar is one of the many components used for surveillance of the territory. When there is an alert or major event, 12 Radar Squadron can be rapidly deployed. This was the case during the Montebello summit in 2007 and in 2010 during the Vancouver Olympics and the G-8 summit in Toronto. During all of these events we provided security through surveillance of restricted airspace thanks to a high level of preparation and continual training of the members of 12 Radar Squadron. If needed as well, 12 Radar Squadron can also temporarily replace damaged or unusable NORAD radars.

In order to carry out its role safely, 3 Wing also counts on 439 Combat Support Squadron, a helicopter squadron dedicated to search and rescue missions. Its primary role is to support our fighter pilots in case of problems but the squadron members are often called in to help civilian authorities with search and rescue missions right across

eastern Canada. Of course, the work of the three squadrons is supported on an ongoing basis by an extremely dedicated team of over 1800 military members and civilians at 3 Wing committed to our primary mission, which is NORAD.

For over 70 years, 3 Wing Bagotville has made it its duty to maintain a high level of operational readiness thanks to a continual preparation of its personnel and equipment. The transformation of a once symmetric threat into an increasingly asymmetric one represents a significant challenge in terms of defence. The emergence of threats inside the very territory protected by NORAD forces us to consistently change how we do things. We are therefore always vigilant, doing everything required to adapt to this new reality.

I think it is appropriate for me to conclude my statement with the Latin motto of 3 Wing, the mantra by which every member of 3 Wing lives every day, which is *agmen primum libertatis*, at the vanguard of liberty.

Thank you very much for your attention. I'm looking forward to answering any questions you might have.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Colonel Ménard.

I can see from looking across the way the House is still involved in debate so we will begin with our first round of questioning.

Mr. Chisu, please.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you very much Major-General and Colonel for your presentations.

I have a question to Major-General Wheeler. In your position, as commander of the Canadian NORAD region, can you speak to this committee about the surveillance and warning operations currently in place and how they contribute to the defence of North America?

You were speaking about NORAD; you were speaking about the surveillance of the airspace. Colonel Ménard mentioned the radar squadron. Before joining the Canadian Armed Forces I was in the radar defence in the defunct Warsaw Pact, so it is quite of interest to me to know how the surveillance is connected with defence.

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: Certainly, sir.

Obviously under the Canada First defence strategy, NORAD is one of our main missions. It's a no-fail mission for us and we are but one of the sectors. So we join with CONR down in the continental United States NORAD region and ANR, the Alaskan NORAD region, to survey it, put out surveillance, and obviously ensure that no enemies or suspect aircraft fly within Canadian airspace. We provide sovereignty to Canadian airspace.

To do that, we in Canada have what's called CADS, the Canadian air defence sector, which uses certainly the north warning system plus also all of the systems that come from Nav Canada and Transport Canada in concert to give them an integrated air picture. That air picture is then shared with our friends in the other sectors and it comes together to give us a full overall North American picture.

With that, we're pretty well capped. We have a good understanding and situational awareness of the airspace throughout Canada and down in the United States, and we can respond to any abnormal situation with our fighter aircraft.

Does that answer your question, sir?

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Yes.

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Chisu, the bells have begun ringing at the House. We will suspend as we take the vote 29 minutes from now. I would ask all members of the committee to return to this place as soon as possible after the vote.

General, Colonel, we beg your indulgence while we disappear briefly. Thank you.

I suspend.

• (1545) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1645)

The Chair: Colleagues, we will resume.

Mr. Chisu, you have five minutes remaining.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, General and Colonel, for your patience.

General Wheeler, speaking from your experiences as chief of staff and deputy commanding officer of the Canadian Forces northern area, can you explain to this committee the role the Royal Canadian Air Force plays in the surveillance and protection of the Canadian Arctic?

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: My experience up there was actually from 2002 to 2004, but I am still very active with all of our air forces up in that area. It's a very vast area, as you know. It constitutes about 40% of Canada and just over about 100,000 people. To go anywhere takes a long time. That said, the RCAF has actually been flying within the Arctic ever since there was an RCAF, so for an awfully long time it has been providing a presence up there.

We also operate from a NORAD perspective at some forward operating locations in Inuvik, Iqaluit, and a couple of other areas. That allows us to become closer to tracks of interest that might be coming, especially over the Pole. We continue to operate there. We also provide great support to the communications station that we have up in Alert, which is Canada's farthest spot of land, with our C-17s, C-130Js, and other aircraft. We're very active. We bring helicopters up as well to support Operation NUNALIVUT and provide resources to the various operations that take place. Overall we're going to continue to operate in the north with the air force. We certainly form a big part of the Canadian joint operation command's Arctic plan, and we'll continue to do so.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: General, what is your assessment of the level of threat of incursions by other countries into Canadian air space, particularly in Canada's northern air space? You mentioned in your speech basically that, given the current geopolitical climate, the probability of a military aviation attack is low, but we can see the Russians. They changed the tactics from January 1, 2015, and they dramatically reinforced the former Soviet bases in the Arctic.

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: From that perspective, I would say the threat continues to be low. Certainly to come into the Arctic on the ground or the sea would be very difficult. Through the air is a little bit different, but we don't anticipate any major air incursions. That said, and as you remarked, Russia has certainly been a lot more active than it has ever been since the end of the Cold War. This year has been probably the most active time. I think you've seen that from Russia throughout the world. Recently they flew a couple of Bear bombers through the English Channel. They're certainly very active down around Japan and Korea as well, and we see the same in the north.

They do fly up into our northern area. They come into the Canadian air defence identification zone. They don't actually come into Canadian sovereign territory, but they will get as close as 40 to 50 miles off our coast. We're very cognizant of that. We certainly intend to protect our sovereignty and therefore we do scramble fighters, or locate them at some of our forward operating locations, to make sure the Russians know we're there and are willing to protect our sovereignty.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Thank you very much.

From your perspective, how would you assess the level of collaboration in the Arctic between the air forces of Canada and the United States, in the same context of the Russians enforcing their presence in the Arctic?

• (1650)

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: This is extremely important to us, and of course this is what NORAD is all about, having that binational agreement between the United States and Canada, and therefore we have to have the same tactics, techniques, and procedures. We do train together, we do fly the same way, and of course we're talking to each other on a daily basis. We also share information back and forth, but as we go from one border to another, we have to be able to do that. We can't just go to the edge of Alaska or the edge of continental United States, as we're following a track of interest, and stop. We coordinate with the Americans in that case, and we will continue on, and we may be replaced later on or follow that track all the way to its final destination. The same is true for the Americans. They will come and coordinate with us. It's one big coordinated entity working together.

The Chair: Thank you. That is your time, Mr. Chisu.

Madame Michaud, *s'il vous plaît*.

[Translation]

You have the floor.

Ms. Éline Michaud: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the two witnesses for their presentations.

My first questions are for Major-General Wheeler.

On February 11, the *Ottawa Citizen* published an article by Lee Berthiaume discussing Royal Canadian Air Force budgets. Among other things, he mentioned the 2014-2015 internal business plan of the 1 Canadian Air Division, and you are no doubt fully aware of its budget constraints.

I will take the liberty of reading part of the article to you. I will read it in English. It reads as follows:

[English]

But 1 Canadian Air Division's 2014-15 business plan says the "extremely limited manning and financial flexibility that exists in the Air Force restricts the effectiveness with which we can fulfill our mandate." It adds that underfunding "will eventually impact the RCAF's ability to conduct operations."

[Translation]

The same article also stated that there had been a decrease in the number of flight hours.

I'd like to hear your opinion about the impact of cuts on the operations of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

[English]

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: From my perspective obviously the budget is very important for me to be able to conduct operations but also to be able to conduct force generation, which is training for our troops. It's all about priorities. The budgets change every year. It is based on the budget that the Canadian Armed Forces gets but it is also based on the budget that the Canadian Armed Forces provides to its various services. So if the air force is a priority in any given year our budget could be greater. Conversely, it could be less if for instance the army or the navy had more of an importance placed on their operations.

When we do this we obviously do a lot of planning. The military does great planning. It's what we do. We need to have contingencies and be prepared for everything. When I get the budget and I convert that into a yearly flying rate, the number of hours I can provide to specific fleets, which cover all the fleets we fly, I will then ensure that we get enough training hours in there to make sure that our crews are safe and effective. That is the primary thing that I need to make sure takes place and that we have a state of readiness available to provide to the Chief of the Defence Staff so he can commit those to operations.

The second thing I do, or the second priority that I place on it—

[Translation]

Ms. Éloise Michaud: Excuse me, Major-General Wheeler, but I have to interrupt you because I have very little time at my disposal.

Based on your observations, what impact have budget cuts had? You are explaining how you are able to maintain certain operations despite the budget cuts, but you are not answering my question. I would like to have a better idea of the direct impact of the budget cuts, based on your observations.

I have very little time and I would also like Colonel Ménard to answer that question. With all due respect, I am asking you to be brief, please.

[English]

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: All right. I have observed no real impact on the force generation requirement of our troops or what we provide to the Canada First defence strategy.

If we are in a lower year then it impacts additional expeditionary capabilities that we might have. In this given year when we received the initial budget it was lower than what we actually received

through the rest of the year so we were able to provide additional hours to succeed in additional operations.

• (1655)

[Translation]

Ms. Éloise Michaud: In fact...

[English]

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: Hopefully that answers your question.

[Translation]

Ms. Éloise Michaud: Thank you.

The business plan we are talking about was prepared before Canada's involvement in Iraq. Since we are talking about air strikes, this certainly has an impact on the Royal Canadian Air Force. In your opinion, what is the impact of Canada's involvement in Iraq on your operational capacity overall, in Canada?

[English]

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: From a specific hourly perspective we get additional hours to participate in Iraq. It benefits in that manner.

From our operations in Canada we make sure that we have the capability to sustain our NORAD mission first. It's our number one mission and it will always be supported. From there we can determine how many aircraft crews, the entire team, we can deploy overseas. We provide that to the Chief of the Defence Staff. The CDS determines what level we should be providing to the government, so the effort in Iraq and the effort that we have in Reassurance in Europe do not impact the missions we are conducting in Canada.

[Translation]

Ms. Éloise Michaud: Colonel Ménard, did you want to add something?

Col Sylvain Ménard: Thank you, Ms. Michaud.

[English]

I believe that Major-General Wheeler covered this.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Éloise Michaud: Thank you very much.

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

The Chair: You have about one minute left.

Ms. Éloise Michaud: Do cost increases, for instance in the cost of fuel, or other such expenses, have repercussions on your operational capacity?

[English]

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: Of course they can. The more we pay for fuel, the less money we have to put towards other events. The fuel costs, especially overseas in some places, are higher than they are in Canada or in the United States.

But interestingly enough, the fuel prices have dipped so much that we actually have more money this year to put towards operations. It's been very beneficial from the air force's perspective.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Norlock, seven minutes.

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and through you to the witnesses, thank you for attending today.

Major-General Wheeler, in light of recent investments made by this government to modernize and expand the RCAF's fleets of CF-18s, C-17s, and 130Js, can you please comment on the state of readiness of these aircraft and their effectiveness in carrying out operations within North America?

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: Absolutely. I would suggest that it's not necessarily the state of readiness of the aircraft, but the state of readiness of the capability that uses the aircraft. It's a combination of personnel, aircraft, and other resources that puts together that capability.

Obviously, with the addition of the C-17—we never really did have a strategic air mobility aircraft before, and the old Hercs used to do that role—this has been a great investment and certainly supported our operations throughout the world, whether it be humanitarian assistance or support to our troops conducting operations in Kuwait. It's been very beneficial. The C-130Js, which are more of a tactical airlifter, have allowed us to do the work within the more confined spaces and not be committed to those strategic types of missions. Therefore, we now have a more complete and more flexible platform, with both aircraft very serviceable, doing what we need them to do.

With regard to the CF-18, we bought that aircraft in 1982, so it's not what you'd call a new aircraft. It's more like a K-car that's been converted. We've certainly added a lot of capability to it. When we bought it, it was top of the line. Obviously, over the years it tended to not necessarily follow technology. When we added that mid-life upgrade, it brought that aircraft back into comparison with the rest of the front-line aircraft, interoperable with our main allies and certainly extremely capable. We're very happy with that.

Of course, at the end of the day, like any other machine, it will need to be replaced, but right now, we're very comfortable with where we sit with the capabilities that the Hornet provides.

• (1700)

Mr. Rick Norlock: I suggest very strongly that you and I would agree that we need a fifth-generation stealth fighter and we both have our wants in that area, but we have somebody beyond my pay grade who has to make a decision. I'm confident that you would agree with me that the fifth-generation stealth fighter would be what we need.

But my question really is, again General Wheeler, speaking from your experience as chief of staff and deputy commanding officer of the Canadian Forces Northern Area, can you explain to this committee the role that the CF plays in surveillance and protection of the Canadian Arctic?

I think you spoke about this before, but I just wondered if you had anything to add to your previous comments.

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: The only thing I'd like to add is that the air force is not there alone. We support our joint colleagues, the army and the navy, out there as well.

I think that we'll become more involved in the north and I think we're getting better at it. The one thing that I would add, that has certainly extended our capability or will extend our capability up there, is the new Chinook helicopter with the fat tanks that it has. It will provide tremendous support to everything that's going on up there once we hit the final operation capability, which won't be for a little bit. But we certainly took it all the way to Alert and back this year.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you.

Colonel Ménard, can you explain to this committee the various squadrons that operate out of CFB Bagotville and how they contribute to the readiness of 3 Wing?

Col Sylvain Ménard: What's important to understand is that, while we often think of Bagotville for its 27 F-18s and 425 Tactical Fighter Squadron, which is the F-18 squadron, really we have a huge area of units, subunits, and divisions that support that. In fact, we have close to 1,700 folks supporting 27 F-18s, and just more than 30 pilots who are combat-ready for the mission. Really, we have an operational division, a logistics division, and an admin division.

We did talk briefly about 12 Radar Squadron and 439 Combat Support Squadron, as I alluded to in my comments at the beginning. We have the 3 Air Maintenance Squadron, which is in charge of all the maintenance of the CF-18s. We have 414 Electronic Warfare Support Squadron, which is a unit that is there to help train our fighter pilots in a challenging electronic warfare environment. We have the 10 FTTS, the Fighter Technical Training Squadron detachment, that trains our armourers and all the technical trades to better support the CF-18 fleet.

Obviously we have a reserves flight that takes care of our reservists who support all the divisions and units I just mentioned. We have one dental unit detachment at a hospital, a military police detachment, and a comptroller section, to name only a few. Aside from that, obviously from a support perspective I have the personnel support program, the Military Family Resource Centre, the deployment support centre, etc., and I could go on and on.

It's a huge business for everybody, though. Here in Bagotville the primary mission for 3 Wing is NORAD first. All these folks understand the key role they play to support the NORAD mission, which is really a priority here at 3 Wing.

Mr. Rick Norlock: Thank you.

Colonel Ménard, in 2012, the 1 Canadian Air Division, the operational arm of RCAF, developed a managed readiness plan. I understand that this year 3 Wing Bagotville along with 14 Wing Greenwood will be participating in this program. Can you comment on the success of the managed readiness plan to date and how you expect the troops at 3 Wing to benefit?

Col Sylvain Ménard: The managed readiness plan is key to our force generation capability, for us to train our folks before they are ready to answer the government's call to deploy anywhere in Canada or the world, either as part of NATO or, as we see right now, in Iraq. Really, it consists of 3 Wing being the main force-generating wing for the air task force 1501 and 1502; we have about 250 folks that we train. We give them all their basic soldier skills training. As well, we spend a huge amount of time training them to deploy.

They are aware of the lessons learned from the latest missions we conducted around the world, so they have the best information and learn from all lessons learned that we have to go forward. This allows us to have a force that is ready and already pre-trained to deploy at the government's will to answer any crisis or mission the government wants us to participate in. The benefit to our personnel is that they have on-time readiness training. When they are trained, they are on the hook for one year to deploy and to be ready to deploy anywhere around the world or in Canada. Also, after their mandate they have a pause period—I guess a downtime—when they can continue working in their specific professions on their specific technical skills. It's a bit of a downtime at home.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you, Colonel.

Your time is up, Mr. Norlock.

Ms. Murray, you have seven minutes, please.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you for being here to brief us.

I have enormous respect for what the people in your command and the leaders in your organization accomplish, and even more so because of the budgeting uncertainties that you face. We've got a situation where there are cuts to operating funding that affect the amount of training that can be done. Even the cost of de-icing eats into other things, because you've been squeezed.

Could you let the committee know the planning time frame that you employ? I'm from the business world, and we plan for three and five years out. What is it in your organization?

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: We don't necessarily follow the business planning model completely, but we do planning in periods like that as well with various horizons. We will look at five years, ten years, out to 20 years, but then of course we will look at next year as well. We do try to be proactive in all of those areas, but again like with any plan we need to keep flexible, with on-ramps and off-ramps, because no plan is going to come out exactly as originally thought.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Right, so you have some contingencies you have to build in.

I'm just looking at the Conference of Defence Associations Institute's June 2014 report, the *Vimy Paper*. The gap between the expectations that were created for you and the organization and then what has actually been delivered since 2007-08 is stunning. It turns out that reprofiling and cuts have reduced the department's budget below 2007 levels when adjusted for inflation, so today you have less available to spend than in 2007, yet the expectations that were created in 2007 and 2008 were very different from that.

I'm trying to understand. When there is also reprofiling of some \$6.68 billion past 2016-17, how do you manage the lapses in funding and the unavailability of funding for capital?

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: We're very used to getting either less funds or more funds on a regular basis. This is where, as I said, we build contingencies into our plans. We call them off-ramps and on-ramps. In there, we will always bracket a certain amount of training that we need to do to ensure that we remain safe and effective.

At that point in time we then ensure that we hit the primary portion of the Canada First defence strategy, which is our mission at home. It is the no-fail missions that we might have at home such as NORAD and search and rescue, and then we will go from there. We have high readiness and low readiness units that we ensure mix so that is never a—

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay, thank you.

I'd like to take this to a specific example. There are on-ramps and off-ramps. You're told one thing one year and then there are budget freezes and cuts and lapses, off-ramps. Would that explain why a critical part of what you're talking about with regard to the defence of North America, which is search and rescue.... How does that relate to the failure to deliver fixed-wing search and rescue whereas it was a commitment in December 5, 2005, by the Conservative government, a high-priority commitment apparently in 2006-07 and one that was in this CFDS in 2008, and today there is still no official RFP? When I read the list, it just seems like a cartoon with the number of on-ramps, off-ramps. Is this the result that is due to those uncertainties of funding of the capital budget? Is that what has affected the fixed-wing search and rescue, or are there other elements to explain why we still don't have that project happening?

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: That is very much a strategic question. It is not something that we do here at the operational or tactical levels.

What I can say is that our search and rescue folks are extremely professional and conduct search and rescue on a daily basis. For 365 days a year they are on standby in three regions, and have done a great job there on the front line of saving Canadians, and we're very proud of them. I'm not saying that at the end of the day we're not going to need to replace resources. Obviously, it's just equipment, so we will need to do that, but the equipment that we have currently is certainly capable of doing the job.

Ms. Joyce Murray: It is the same story with the Canadian multi-mission aircraft, where it was claimed that the Auroras would be replaced because it was a core equipment fleet. Seven years later, it's still in the preliminary definition stage. Does this kind of uncertainty about equipment replacement impact the morale of the people who are working with the aging equipment?

• (1710)

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: Well you know, if the individual is actually working on the equipment I would suggest that he or she is very much.... I don't want to say in love with what they're doing, but they put their hearts and souls into sustaining that equipment, improving that equipment, and making sure that equipment is able to conduct operations.

When you look at the Aurora, you're right that the Aurora was not the original planned upgrade, but currently it is one of the top intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft in the world. It has been quite a success story, although I agree that wasn't the original plan for it.

The Chair: That's the end of your time, Ms. Murray.

Mr. Opitz, you will begin the second round of questioning. You have five minutes.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you first to Colonel Ménard, I can't allow the air force to have the upper hand with Latin, so *non nobis sed patriae*, not for ourselves but for our country, which was my regimental motto.

I take some exception to what Ms. Murray said, in terms of characterizing certain things as cartoons. I served from 1978 to 2011 and lived through the decade of darkness. I had bad equipment, went from private to lieutenant-colonel, was driving the equipment, maintaining the equipment, and General, you're absolutely right: it's equipment and it wears out. We're very robust. The only thing I'm grateful to the Liberals for is that we learned to do a lot with nothing. Even today we're still 26% higher in budget than they ever were.

The Aurora, as you rightly pointed out, is one of the best aircraft going right now, in terms of surveillance and doing the job that it's doing, in the theatre it's in. We're very proud of all that, and the air force has been one of the biggest beneficiaries of our government in terms of the J-class Hercs and of course the C-17 Globemasters. We're very, very happy about a lot of those. And the Chinooks of course, have been an absolute godsend in particular to the infantry. We're very, very proud of the equipment and the record that we had.

But General, you're absolutely right. Things do wear out; they do need to change. We're in a lot of theatres of war, and I know from talking to many of my allies with whom I'm still very close that the name of Canada on the world stage amongst our military allies sits very high and very proud.

I thank you and Colonel Ménard for the work you have done in making sure Canada stays foremost in the minds of our allies. Thank you for that.

General, just given the developing air threats and the current operating environment that we have, what do you see as something that may be most threatening to us in North American airspace?

• (1715)

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: Well, with regard to North American airspace, really what we see from a NORAD perspective are two types of threats. One would be the Operation Noble Eagle type of threat, which is a similar one to 9/11, where you have terrorists who have taken over some sort of civilian aircraft. The other would be the Russian aviation threat that is prevalent throughout the world, as we mentioned before, but for us specifically up north.

The one thing I would say about the Russians, although there is probably a low threat that they are going to conduct any sort of attack on North America, is that they do train to do that on a regular basis. They have improved their equipment, and their weapons are much more stealthy than they ever used to be. We need to stay in tune with technology.

With regard to the Operation Noble Eagle threat, we practise this on a regular basis, as we do to counter any Russian incursions into Canadian airspace, so we're very comfortable with the practice and procedures we put in place, the techniques we use, and the interoperability we have with the Americans.

From a world perspective we're quite happy here in North America that we have a pretty good solid program in place. I would

suggest that it is much more dangerous outside of North America than it is inside.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Of course a lot of your colleagues are doing that over the Baltic right now and seeing that first-hand. In particular, Russia is building its air force and has its own stealth fighters that are coming onto line.

Colonel Ménard, you mentioned the e-warfare environment. Can you elaborate on that a little more and describe what that means to NORAD?

Col Sylvain Ménard: The electronic warfare environment is the use of the electromagnetic spectrum for one's advantage. What we're trying to do, or what different nations will try to do, is negate the use of the electromagnetic spectrum to other countries so they retain sole use of it. That's the game of electronic warfare.

With our fighters, it's something we need to train for. In layman's terms, when we fly and we look at the radar, the radar is a clean picture, and it's really easy to get the targets we need to see, if there's no electromagnetic jamming. A jamming environment obviously creates a level of complexity for the pilots that they have to work through.

So 414 Squadron helps us, the Royal Canadian Air Force, to train in that environment. They don't do that only for the Royal Canadian Air Force. They support the army and the Royal Canadian Navy as well with their capability to help them train.

I'm happy to say that with our CF-18 and the mid-life upgrade we have, we have a great defensive electronic warfare suite. Our fighter continues to be relevant today on the world scene. But that is a cat-and-mouse game, and we need to stay on top of it. As General Wheeler said, the world is rapidly evolving, and we need to stay ahead.

The Chair: Thank you, Colonel.

That's your time, Mr. Opitz.

[Translation]

Mr. Brahmi, you have the floor. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Colonel Ménard.

I am trying to gain some understanding of the impact the deployment of forces in Iraq may have on NORAD and operations in Bagotville, for instance. You mentioned that you have 27 operational CF-18s that are stationed there permanently. Is that correct?

[English]

Col Sylvain Ménard: Yes, sir. There are 27 CF-18s in Bagotville.

We use the fighters. We control all the Canadian fighters in one large pool. When required, it doesn't matter which wing is tasked to go overseas. We work together. We work as a great team to make sure that we fulfill—

[Translation]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: It has been said that six Cold Lake CF-18s were deployed in Kuwait for the intervention in Iraq, but in fact, it was a group of 27 CF-18s. They did not come from one specific base. Is that correct?

● (1720)

[English]

Col Sylvain Ménard: No, sir.

In the case of the Iraq jets, right now they are Cold Lake CF-18s. I'm saying that back home here, if need be, we can centrally manage the pool of CF-18s we have in Canada. Should the mission go long, if we need to rotate the jets—because as you know, the CF-18 is a highly technical piece of equipment that requires a lot of maintenance for every flight hour—we could potentially switch them with a Cold Lake jet or a Bagotville jet, and it would be totally transparent to all Canadians.

The fighter force in Canada is not a large entity. We work together to make sure we fulfill our missions abroad and domestically on the NORAD front, and to make sure we minimize the impact on both fighter wings of any deployments.

[Translation]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Let's talk about the number of hours or the number of sorties, as I do not know how you calculate this.

Do you count the number of sorties per week or the number of flight hours per week? Does the fact that part of the CF-18s are deployed in Iraq reduce the number of weekly flight hours in NORAD? Do you have any figures and an order of magnitude to give us?

[English]

Col Sylvain Ménard: No. I'm sorry, but I don't have the hours offhand. I would have to get back to you.

As General Wheeler highlighted numerous times, NORAD is our first and primary mission. We secure the NORAD mission, make sure we keep everything we need for the NORAD front, and then after that we reallocate and prioritize to fulfill our expeditionary capabilities, like the one we have in Iraq.

[Translation]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: In the context of the Impact operation, are there types of interventions where the CF-18 is actually limited? Are there limits that would justify the fact, for instance, of using an F-35 because another aircraft could not do the same things? Have you up till now had to deal with interventions that were limited by the fact that you had CF-18s instead of stealth fighter aircraft, for example?

[English]

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: How about if I jump in on that one and answer it?

Different types of operations take place. The Middle East is not a sophisticated environment. The folks on the ground there, ISIL and other belligerents, don't necessarily have great capabilities with regard to surface-to-air munitions. However, there are certainly countries out there that are much more sophisticated, where we would certainly be put to task to a much greater extent than we are currently within the Iraq environment.

[Translation]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Thank you.

I imagine the same things apply to radar. Does enemy radar constitute another parameter?

[English]

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: The entire aircraft works in concert and needs to be interoperable with other aircraft, but you need to fight your way in and fight your way out of some wars. That's not the case in Iraq, as we tend to use altitude to secure a peaceful environment for us to conduct operations.

The Chair: Thank you, General. Thank you, Mr. Chisu.

Mr. Bezan, you have five minutes.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to thank our witnesses for being here today and also for indulging us while we had to go for votes. I know your time is precious, and we appreciate all that you and the members under your command do for Canada, both at home and abroad.

General Wheeler, it's always great to see you and I know that we had a chance to visit through the winter a couple of times, but I did want to go back to one comment that was made by Ms. Murray regarding the Auroras and trying to diminish the capabilities that are there.

Could you talk about what the Aurora capability means to us right now, not just from an air force standpoint, but what it's doing in Operation IMPACT in Iraq today? Also, General Wheeler, you did mention how it is one of the best aerial surveillance capabilities in the world. Could you talk to how it performed in RIMPAC not that many months ago, and the great job it pulled off there?

● (1725)

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: The Aurora is the same vintage as the CF-18. We bought it just prior to that, so it's not necessarily a young aircraft. We initially bought it for anti-submarine warfare capability. After the Cold War, anti-submarine warfare tended to trickle out a little, and so at that point we made it a multi-role aircraft and we used it for a secondary SAR mission plus for some intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance-type sorties.

Since that time, the anti-submarine warfare role has come back with great vigour, especially from the Pacific countries, and so there is a real threat out there that requires Canada to have this type of capability. But with all the new changes that have come through from the Block program and the investments we have made in mid-life upgrades to the Aurora, it is now our most capable ISR platform and that's what we're using it for over in Operation IMPACT in Kuwait right now.

It flies, we have two of them over there. We have a Block III and a Block II because we're continuing with that mid-life upgrade right now. They are tasked to fly over Iraq and gather intelligence on behalf of the coalition. It doesn't just gather information for Canadians, it provides it for the entire coalition and in many different ways. It is not just one type of intelligence-gathering platform. It gathers multiple types at the same time and that's what makes it so special. A lot of airplanes are used for that role but have one type of capability alone. This, as I said, has multiple capabilities. I would suggest that it has been extremely beneficial to have the Aurora go through that mid-life upgrade, and we plan to use it with vigour for a number of years to come.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you.

From a committee standpoint, we talk about our CF-18s, and they've been stationed at CFB Bagotville and CFB Cold Lake. How do you determine which squadron pursues threats from a NORAD standpoint, west coast, Arctic, even up into Alaska, and then you have that whole High Arctic area, and to the east?

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: We divide the country and we use Bagotville to support the east portion and Cold Lake to support the west portion. We have a number of deployed operating bases and forward operating locations that we can go to if we get information that this is where we need to concentrate our effort, and we'll certainly do that.

As Colonel Ménard mentioned before, though, we are one fighter force, even though we have two wings within that fighter force. If we do need to concentrate more on one side or the other, then Cold Lake will support Bagotville, Bagotville will support Cold Lake.

Mr. James Bezan: A final question is this. When we're looking at our relationship within NORAD, and the role you play at 1 CAD in Winnipeg—you're the commander on three different levels there, with 1 CAD and NORAD north division—when we are looking at the future and the equipment you have available to you, the maritime

responsibilities that are now tied in with airspace, do we have, especially in the Arctic Archipelago, enough eyes up there or does our RADARSAT system provide us with the type of surveillance that's required?

MGen D.L.R. Wheeler: Certainly, as we mentioned before, CADs in North Bay have a pretty good visual capability throughout the majority of Canada. The Arctic's obviously very difficult, though. There's not a lot of infrastructure up there, and certainly not a lot of civilian radars up there either. This is where the north warning system becomes very, very important. That said, it is getting old and will need to be replaced at some point. We're looking at that through the NORAD aspect right now, so Admiral Gortney, who is the four-star commander of NORAD down in Colorado Springs, has tasked NORAD to specifically look at this to see what future technologies we would need, to best provide us with early surveillance of any enemy who might want to impact North America.

We're looking at it. We don't have the details yet. The north warning system is there for a period to come, but it's certainly prudent planning to do so.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you very much, General Wheeler.

Thank you, Colonel Ménard, again, for indulging the disruption to this committee meeting.

I'd just like to say on the record that I regret that this committee is unable to visit either of your command locations because of obstruction by the official opposition—not on this committee but elsewhere in our parliamentary business. I thank you, though, for your contribution today to our study of North America.

This meeting is adjourned.

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