



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on National Defence

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 019

Monday, May 2, 2022

Chair: The Honourable John McKay



Standing Committee on National Defence

Monday, May 2, 2022

• (1555)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): Colleagues, I call this meeting to order. I see quorum and I see that it's almost four o'clock. I'm told that we will have the room and the facilities for two full hours.

The first hour and a half will be with our three witnesses, and the last half-hour we'll go in camera and have committee business. We might lose a little time switching from the public channel to going in camera, hopefully a minimal amount of time. In that time we have a number of things we need to discuss as a committee.

I want to welcome our witnesses at the initiation of this study on rising domestic operational deployments and challenges for the Canadian Armed Forces. I don't know who thinks of all of these long titles. Really it's about aid to civil authority.

With us we have Josh Bowen, faculty, disaster and emergency management program, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology; Michael Fejes, assistant professor and Ph.D. candidate, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs; and Adam MacDonald, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Political Science, Dalhousie University.

Thank you to each one of you for indulging us. I apologize for being half an hour late, but this is what democracy is all about. We have to vote.

With that, I'm going to ask Mr. Bowen to lead us off for five minutes and then we will go to Mr. Fejes for five and Mr. MacDonald for five, and then we'll go to our rounds of questions. I'm hoping that with some efficiency we'll get in three rounds of questions. Thank you.

Professor Bowen.

Mr. Josh Bowen (Faculty, Disaster and Emergency Management Program, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm honoured to join you today from Treaty 6 territory.

My name is Josh Bowen. As was pointed out, I'm a faculty member in the disaster and emergency management program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. I'm also a member of the Government of Canada's disaster resilience and security advisory table, and I'm a veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces.

During my service, I was directly involved in five domestic disaster response operations. I finished my military career leading the military's disaster response planning in western Canada.

Tomorrow marks the sixth anniversary of the Fort McMurray wildfire. Eighty-eight thousand Canadians were evacuated from the community, and thousands lost their homes in the fire. I served as a senior CAF liaison officer to the province and coordinated CAF support during that disaster. It's because of my experience both in and out of uniform that I'm here today to discuss the need to build a civilian disaster response capability.

The CAF is meant to be our force of last resort, when there is no one else able to respond to the disaster. The CAF's integral communication, mobility, logistic sustainment and standing readiness forces across the country mean that the military can mount a significant response before the ink dries on a provincial request for assistance.

In the 19 years from 1990 to 2009, the CAF deployed on 33 domestic disaster response operations, responding to wildfires, floods, winter storms and major air disasters. In the 11 years from 2010 to 2021, the CAF deployed 38 times, eight of which were in 2020 and 2021. All 38 of those responses were related to weather events. That does not include the extensive CAF support to the pandemic response.

The CAF will always be ready to protect and defend Canadians when called upon, but as noted in the 2020 CAF operational and activities transition binder, the impacts of climate change “have already imposed added stress on Canadian Armed Forces resources, which will likely be called upon even more frequently and with less notice to assist with humanitarian and disaster responses”.

The current geopolitical situation demands the CAF's attention. As we roll into flood and wildfire season, that attention will again be divided as the CAF is called upon to support Canadians facing disasters. Climate change is only going to exacerbate the scale, scope and frequency of disasters here and around the world. We need an alternative to having the CAF occupy speed-dial spots one through nine. We need a civilian capability that can deploy when needed.

The good news is that there are proven options we can consider. Across the country, we have four heavy urban search and rescue teams. When a building collapses, we can respond and save lives. Alberta, as an example, is establishing incident management teams that leverage municipal and provincial employees to coordinate disaster responses when needed. The reality is that neither of these replaces the capabilities the CAF brings: primarily, organized and self-sustaining labour.

In every disaster that I've responded to, Canadians have come out to help in any way they can. Whether it was small communities bringing responders food to say "thank you" or people coming out to build sandbag walls to divert flood waters, Canadians want to help each other. Let's build on that.

Both Australia and Germany have volunteer-based disaster response capabilities spread across their countries that leverage the skill sets that civilian volunteers bring, augmented with a little specific training, and they can be called upon to support disaster response within a matter of hours.

In Canada, we leverage the capabilities of the Canadian Red Cross to coordinate emergency social services needs and provide support to disaster survivors and impacted communities. There are other non-profit organizations, such as Team Rubicon Canada, that leverage the skills that veterans, first responders and civilians bring to support communities in their times of need. Whether it's sifting through ashes following wildfires to recover valuables, clearing debris to open roads or coordinating disaster response operations, these organizations and others can and should be relied upon to support Canadians on their community's worst day.

The CAF is our force of last resort, yet we have become so accustomed to calling in the troops that we are not building the needed civilian capacity to respond. Our disaster NGO community in Canada is rich, and they can fill that gap.

- (1600)

Canada needs to build volunteer-based civilian capacities so that we do not consistently rely on our last-resort option.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Professor Fejes is next, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Michael Fejes (Assistant Professor and PhD Candidate, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, As an Individual): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. Thank you so very much. Good afternoon to all the members of the esteemed committee on national defence.

As mentioned, my name is Mike Fejes. I'm currently a doctoral candidate at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs and an assistant professor at the Royal Military College. It's an honour to appear in front of you today as an individual, to address the domestic demands on the Canadian Armed Forces and to discuss some of my recent research on the Canadian Armed Forces primary reserves in aid to the civil power.

I want to start by saying that this is a very interesting time in Canadian defence history. In regard to domestic demands that are

being placed on the CAF, there are a number of converging concerns that are taking place today.

First, as my esteemed colleague mentioned, the effects of climate change are increasing in Canada. They're becoming more frequent and severe, they are affecting more Canadians and they're costing Canadians billions of dollars in damages.

Second, the number, frequency and intensity of CAF domestic response operations are also increasing across Canada. Today, almost 50% of the CAF current operational deployments are domestic. Recently, there have even been short periods of time where there were more CAF members deployed on domestic operations than on international operations. What was once considered an unexpected frequency of domestic deployment has now become almost an annual event or annual cycle, and this challenges the CAF in new ways.

Third, despite many noble attempts to increase our size, the Canadian Forces is getting smaller. Because of this, there is a steady but increasing reliance on the primary reserve force. Of note, the 2015-16 Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces report on plans and priorities sees the army reserve, while leveraging existing unit structures and capacities, eventually taking the lead in domestic operations with support from the regular force. This is a reversal of the current role.

Unfortunately, these trends are likely to continue converging. Even the previous chief of the defence staff admitted publicly that present-day demands have the potential to engage the military beyond its capacities. Today, a smaller CAF needs to be prepared to respond to multiple and increasingly demanding emergencies concurrently with its part-time soldiers.

The key question I would ask the committee is, how do we ensure that our Canadian Forces reserve personnel are supported and are able to respond decisively when called upon? As such, Canadians need to examine our overall preparedness strategy and, from a Canadian Forces perspective, the organizational approach that underpins our response strategies.

I would ask that the committee consider two themes to improve the way that the CAF primary reserves can better support the provinces and the territories.

First, the current conditions of service for the primary reserve allow for much greater latitude than the regular force, who serve under a different kind of social contract. Perhaps it's time to re-evaluate this.

Second, after transformation, many of these new domestic headquarters that were created—with the exception of joint task force north where all activities are deemed to be operations—were actually superimposed on top of, or developed from, other existing headquarters.

Domestically, when the army reserve trains, they do so at the unit level in local armouries across the country, but when called upon, they undergo a transformation and deploy through territorial battalion groups, domestic response companies and even Arctic response company groups. However, on a daily basis, these headquarters have only a small staff dedicated to domestic operations, and they have no permanent operational units placed underneath them.

If the future climate of the Canadian Forces resembles the 2011 Leslie report, and we seek to reduce overhead and improve efficiency and effectiveness, but we do so despite constrained resources, then the CAF will have to look at how its reserve force is managed institutionally and how it can rapidly and effectively respond when called upon.

I understand that significant efforts to optimize reserve participation in future domestic operations are ongoing, especially through new and emerging capabilities such as cyber, but it is the modernization of headquarters and personnel policies to create more enduring conditions of employment that are required to better leverage the reserve force contributions.

To conclude, “Strong, Secure, Engaged” confirms that the defence of Canada and its people remains the overarching priority for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces. However, my final point here, based on my research, is that in the event of a large-scale crisis, without dedicated personnel and established command structures specifically within the primary reserve force, any whole-of-government emergency response will be that much more difficult to execute.

• (1605)

Thank you very much for your time.

The Chair: Finally, we have Mr. MacDonald for five minutes.

Mr. Adam MacDonald (Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Political Science, Dalhousie University, As an Individual): Good day, Mr. Chair and other members of the committee. I want to thank you for inviting me to speak at today's session and share my thoughts regarding the Canadian military's role in domestic emergency response.

The last decade has seen a sizable increase in provincial requests for assistance from the Canadian Armed Forces in dealing with domestic emergencies, specifically—but not only—due to the growing number and severity of climate change-induced natural disasters throughout the country. The Canadian Armed Forces continue to adapt to this new reality by augmenting their capacity to support these growing requests, by establishing, for instance, Operation LENTUS, a yearly mission to train and place soldiers on standby to assist, and through growing coordination between regional joint task force commands and provincial emergency management organizations.

Such efforts serve a long-standing, clear mandate for the military to be prepared to offer this assistance, as reiterated in the current defence policy. However, these increasing requests are transforming this mandate from an as-needed duty to a baseline regularized duty, which, combined with competing capability, operational and structural issues confronting the organization, has generated debates about what the role of the Canadian Armed Forces should be in domestic emergency response.

Two main questions lie at the heart of this matter.

First, are these requests for support sustainable for the military in terms of management, without compromising its other missions and priorities?

Second, is the military the suitable organization for addressing these challenges, in effect becoming the de facto emergency response organization for provinces, as part of larger efforts to construct more resilient systems and societies in the face of climate change throughout Canada?

With the recently announced national defence review and ongoing development of the national adaptation strategy, now is the time to explore this matter as a political issue and not simply a technical, resource or organizational one.

It is understandable why the military is increasingly relied upon during these emergencies, as it possesses unique organizational logistics, planning and personnel resources and qualities, which no other government body at any level does. Operation Laser—the pre-positioning and deploying of units to support provincial government requests—and Operation Vector—assisting the Public Health Agency of Canada to secure and distribute vaccines during the pandemic—have showcased the military's unique attributes in these regards.

Higher-level political direction and guidance are needed, however, to entrench this mission as a top-tier mandate if the status quo is to continue. It is becoming clear that, if the Canadian Armed Forces are to continue to meet these requests for support, they will have to create more capacity and possibly dedicated capabilities to do so.

There are strong reasons to reconsider the growing reliance on the military in domestic emergency response.

First, there are competing demands on the military's focus, operational capacities and resources in terms of adapting to the altering strategic landscape defined by the emergence of rival great powers, numerous large-scale procurement renewal plans, building new capabilities in emerging domains such as cyber and space, and reconstitution challenges regarding training, recruitment, retention and culture change.

Second, there are possible civil-military implications of any growing “ownership” of domestic emergency response by the military, if this is increasingly becoming a mainline duty.

Third, these developments may disincentivize provincial governments from investing in their own specific emergency services capabilities and lead to growing societal expectations for military assistance in every domestic emergency, thus transforming perceptions of the military as a frontline service rather than a force of last resort to be used after civilian agencies have been exhausted or overwhelmed.

If the military, however, is mandated to continue and possibly fully prioritize these requests, and to prepare to support the expected growth in demand for these requests in the future, serious examination of how best to structure and resource the organization so it can do so sustainably is required.

Such an examination should explore four key areas.

First, it should ask whether a new operational command is required to plan, train, coordinate and oversee the domestic deployment of military assets in these missions.

Second, it should ask whether existing support capabilities, such as health care, logistics and engineering, should be expanded beyond servicing the needs of the military, in order to meet broader emergency response demands.

Third, it should ask whether dedicated units should be constructed, exclusively trained and deployed for these types of missions, allowing other elements of the military to focus on different missions and mandates.

Finally, it should ask whether these units and capabilities should be part of the regular or reserve force, with particular deliberation on duties and the extent to which the latter, as a volunteer service, should be relied upon in this sense.

• (1610)

The question is not whether the Canadian Armed Forces should or should not be involved in domestic emergency response. It has and will always have a role, especially because it possesses unique capabilities, such as search and rescue and strategic lift, which would be difficult to replicate elsewhere.

What is needed, however, is determining the scale and scope of military involvement and its purpose and function as part of a broader whole-of-government effort—indeed, a whole-of-society effort—to adapt to the disruptive realities of climate change on our economy, infrastructure and society, which will only increase in intensity moving forward.

Such a determination requires public deliberation and clear political direction, rather than letting mission creep to continue being uncritically examined.

Thank you for inviting me. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

Ms. Findlay, you have six minutes, please.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for being here.

Professor Fejes, I want to express all our condolences on the loss of your cadets at RMC. I see that you're a lecturer there. It's a very tough reality. Just so you know, Parliament did hold a minute of silence today for them to formally acknowledge their loss. Please pass that along to the community. We feel that loss with them.

I'll start with you, Professor. I understand what you're telling us in your testimony, but I'm wondering what solutions you might be suggesting. You've posed some good questions on current conditions of service and whether we need some sort of permanent operational force.

What would you be recommending if you were the one saying, “How do we deal with this?” Should we be looking at a separate force like the U.S. has through FEMA or should we be looking at a specialized group within the military? What's your thought on that?

• (1615)

Mr. Michael Fejes: I do not advocate for a separate military force or dedicated resources specifically for domestic response; however, I do advocate for what people would actually call the “re-capitalization” or the “operationalization” of the reserve force.

Right now, as I mentioned in my testimony, business is conducted on a voluntary basis. When there is a call-out, it's basically a determination of who is available and who would like employment. If you look at what happened during the summer of 2020, I believe, during COVID, the military basically came forward and said, “Anybody who wants four to five months of employment over the summer, please step forward, and you will be gainfully employed.”

This was conducted; however, in my professional opinion, I don't feel that this gives the military the latitude to support Canadians to their full extent. I would call for some sort of reanalysis on the terms of service for reservists. For example, right now for reservists, there are three distinct differences between a regular force soldier and a reserve soldier: They cannot be posted, they cannot be deployed and they can choose to leave the military at any time.

I would call not for the same terms of service as a regular force soldier, perhaps, but I would ask us to look into the terms of service for reservists. Perhaps there's some sort of accommodation that could be made there that would allow the government and the Canadian Forces to call on reserves in a little more organized structure.

Thank you.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: That's good.

Mr. Bowen, you were talking about leveraging municipal and provincial groups and NGOs with disaster capacity. How do you see that working? Can you expand on that a bit?

Mr. Josh Bowen: One of the things we've seen in some of our most significant allies, specifically Australia and the United States, is moving away from having the military hold primary responsibility for responding to disasters. That's a recognition, both of the competing demands that are on those forces but also of the costs.

For 2017-19, the CAF incurred \$17.5 million in incremental costs when deploying Operation LENTUS, with the average duration of those deployments being about two weeks. That roughly translates to \$80,000 a day in additional costs.

When we look at building out and supporting NGOs, and provincial-municipal organizations, to have hyper-localized trained and equipped volunteer teams across the country, we see a dramatic reduction in time and costs. As an example, I know that Team Rubicon's incident management team and their debris management team costs were \$3,000 per day. Overall, that's an order of magnitude reduction in costs.

If we're able to empower NGOs, provide a little bit of funding, and then empower provincial and municipal organizations to take on that role, when we do require the CAF to come in, they are truly that force of last resort.

One of the key things that need to be done—and this dovetails quite nicely with Mr. Fejes' comments—is to build systems in place, so that small businesses aren't penalized when their employees want to volunteer. We need to build systems in place, so that employees aren't penalized, when they want to volunteer to help Canadians.

As has been done in some of the provinces, employers can get tax breaks, or access to funding, to allow their reservists to go and deploy overseas, or deploy on disaster response operations. If we could put a similar mechanism in place, when Canadians want to volunteer their time to support fellow Canadians, that will dramatically reduce the costs associated with deploying people to support disasters, and increase that local knowledge and participation to reinforce, rebuild and support communities at the local level.

● (1620)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Thank you.

The Chair: Colleagues, you'll take note that the bells are ringing. I expect the vote is in half an hour.

Can I have unanimous consent to go ahead for the next 15 minutes while we have our witnesses here?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That will take us to 4:40.

I apologize to the witnesses. The issue here is that committees are supposed to suspend, when bells start ringing, but our colleagues have graciously decided that we can continue for 15 minutes. At that point, we will have to suspend, and then we'll have to figure out how long it's going to take to vote. Anyways, welcome to democracy, ain't she grand.

Ms. O'Connell, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for being here.

Perhaps I'll continue with Professor Bowen.

If I understand correctly, you would like to focus more on a voluntary system. Would you see maybe an ownership or housing of the leadership, and an organization of that system in some role within CAF, or a unit within CAF? Do you see it more as potentially each province and territory establishing their own system with some federal guidance?

Help me understand how you would envision that. What would you recommend in terms of the initial set-up of that? How could we ensure consistency of training, and the ability to cross provinces and territories if one province needed a bit of help? How could they also have that system in place?

Mr. Josh Bowen: I think you're absolutely on point. Competent disaster response teams cannot be created after the disaster occurs. We need to build a national structure in which we're standardizing training, we're standardizing capabilities and we're standardizing the modality through which organizations and volunteers deploy.

If we look at the current structure, Public Safety Canada provides guidance to the provinces, and coordination, and then they develop their own individual capabilities. If we were to nest a deployment coordination group within the GOC, or within Public Safety Canada specifically, that would then alleviate the strain on the CAF to be able to hold a resource and manage a resource that they don't own or control and quite often have friction with, based on historical precedence. By leveraging organizations like the Red Cross, Team Rubicon and others, and bringing them together under an umbrella like an NGO consortium that works as auxiliary to government with Public Safety Canada, we're then able to identify what capabilities certain organizations bring to the table and what their ability to respond is, whether that be timelines or whether that be mobility requirements, which could then be supported through CAF strategic airlift or through rotary-wing airlift, as required. Those are the kinds of things the CAF could do and the kind of role the CAF could play to be able to enhance what volunteers already do.

If we look to the German system, they have 80,000 volunteers spread across the country in 800 different locations with a single national training centre. Everybody gets coordinated standardized training to be able to go and respond. That is what has been done to alleviate the strain on their military. If you look at Australia, they have a similar system in place. They have different regional and provincial organizations that actually do response. They're entirely volunteer-based, and they've partnered with organizations that leverage the specific skill sets that first responders and military veterans bring to the table and that civilians bring to the table so that we don't have random "person number three" showing up saying that you're now in charge of building inspections to make sure that the building is viable for people to go in and—

● (1625)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Sorry. I don't mean to interrupt, but I am limited on time, and I wanted to sneak in another question on that very point.

You served as well, and we just finished a retention and recruitment study. Some of the testimony that came up too was that not everybody necessarily wants international deployment or a lifestyle that might challenge them with that. Could you see, or do you have knowledge of, an option where people would like to be engaged in their country in a disaster situation, let's say, or an emergency, but they perhaps don't want the lifestyle of an army reservist or someone who needs to deploy? Does that somehow fit into what you're thinking of as well? Is there an appetite there that you think would exist?

Mr. Josh Bowen: I believe so. I don't necessarily see that being nested within the Canadian Armed Forces. It costs a lot of money to train somebody to be a soldier or to be an officer, and it doesn't matter what the trade is. The cost associated with that initial training can be better put toward supporting NGOs that already bring those skill sets, that already have those connections, and that already understand how disaster management in the country works rather than necessarily filling it with somebody coming in who is there to help, and who will always continue to serve the country and support in any way possible, but who doesn't necessarily have the right language to be able to communicate with the people who are on the ground there, the provincial, federal and municipal organizations.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay): Go ahead, Ms. Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank all the witnesses.

I am going to ask some general questions and I invite the witnesses who want to answer to jump in.

There seems to be talk of a parallel militia for everything related to Operation LENTUS and the climate crisis. I will come back to the form that this militia might take. Before that, I would like to know what it would be used for. Should there be some sort of scale of events that this militia could be involved in? I'll give you an example. Filling sandbags in a flood is not the same as evacuating people in a large-scale fire. The levels of danger and organization are different.

Should we first ask ourselves what the cost is of asking the military to do certain interventions? In general, would it be more relevant to determine from the outset which tasks, such as filling sandbags, will be systematically carried out by civilians and never by the military because it would not be worth the effort? Is this the kind of thinking that should be done in the first place? Should we wonder what this parallel militia should be used for and in what contexts the armed forces should intervene?

[*English*]

Mr. Adam MacDonald: I'll just say that I think one of the problems is that for a lot of other mission sets the military has, they're based on mandates, such as, we want to protect North America, and we want to contribute to global security with allies. That gets married with the generation of certain capabilities, such as, we're going

to be able to deploy two task groups of four warships simultaneously, or we're going to be able to simultaneously deploy 1,500 soldiers on contingents to work with allies. There's no force generation goal that's associated with assisting domestic emergency response and it creates a function that the military is going to find ways to support that. There's this socialization that's been happening over time, which we've talked about, where the military is increasingly doing more and more things that it's not specifically trained to do, but there's a societal and provincial expectation.

One of the things before we even get into this would be how the requests get filtered through public safety and how they determine where the military can define its role better and where it can and cannot assist. Societally, it'll be unacceptable to Canadians if it's a domestic emergency response and there's no one else and the military comes in if they're placed on a cap. It's kind of getting out of this. I think there's going to have to be a part where the military says that we're going to contribute these things to emergency response, and that frees up space and almost pressure into other orders of government and other parts of the federal service to figure out how to organize those things.

It's a transition, but I think the way things are going it's disincentivizing other areas and levels of the country in preparing for domestic emergency response. That's a very hard challenge, because the military is never going to say that we're only going to contribute 1,000 soldiers a year, and when those are used up, we're not going to do any more emergency response, because societally, we're getting primed to expect that from the forces.

● (1630)

Mr. Michael Fejes: To add to that, I would also like the committee to consider a note of caution when discussing volunteers. Canada has been very lucky in the past several decades in our domestic response in taking on things like the Manitoba flood or the ice storm or even recent flooding. COVID is probably the most lengthy and enduring crisis response that we've had to deal with in our history when we talk about responses in terms of months, rather than days or weeks.

This is where volunteers can get a little bit touchy. It can become a sensitive issue. We're assuming that volunteers are available for a lengthy duration of time and we're assuming that volunteers will stay and are available. We've been very lucky in some of our major domestic crisis operations that society has been able to step up to volunteer, but we also have to consider if that will be the case in future domestic crises as well.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Unless other people want to add something, I would like to hear your opinion on the cost-benefit ratio.

It may be useful to use the military in a situation where no one else can intervene. However, when the task can be carried out by civilians, for example, the cost of using the military is much higher.

Should this kind of action also be considered when deciding which tasks should be carried out by the military?

[English]

Mr. Michael Fejes: Let me just start by saying that I'm a firm supporter of the CAF not being the lead element in domestic crisis response. The CAF should be there and available when called on and it should be there to act decisively when called on. That is why I think a military response in many cases is just simply not going to go away. It's culturally accepted by Canadians that when they call, the Canadian Forces will respond to the public. This is why I'm calling for almost the institutionalization or re-evaluation of the terms and conditions under which a reserve soldier would serve. A reserve soldier is not as expensive as a professional or regular force soldier, but Canadians should be able to call on their part-time military to respond in a lengthy and decisive manner when all other means have failed.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, we're going to have to suspend at this point. We have 15 minutes. I just want to canvass the witnesses.

If we came back in half an hour, would you still be available? We have this slot until basically six o'clock. If it took us half an hour to go vote and come back, we'd be able to start shortly after five o'clock. That would still give us 45 to 50 minutes, but then we would not be able to do any committee business. The clerk and I need some direction with respect to future business, and maybe that's it.

A voice: Could we do it on Wednesday?

The Chair: The trouble is that then we're running up to the budget issues.

Again to the witnesses, I apologize for starting late and being interrupted and running late. That's just the way things are in May and June when the government in particular is trying to get its budget passed. There are lots of interruptions with all the starts and finishes. I'll leave it to the clerk to take you out and bring you back. Thank you for your patience.

The meeting is suspended, and we'll see you back here as soon as is practical 10 minutes after the vote is read.

• (1630) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1710)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Colleagues, it's a quarter after five. We have until six o'clock. Our witnesses have been very gracious and have stayed around. Before I call on Ms. Mathysen, what I'm proposing for this week is that committee business be moved to next Wednesday. Hopefully, we'll have some sort of consensus as to what we want to do with the various items on committee business.

I'll remind you that a week from today, in the final hour, we have the Swedish delegation coming. I'm not quite sure where we are with the invitations to the embassy, but it is what it is.

With that, Ms. Mathysen, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you to the witnesses.

Before we had our pause, we were talking about bringing in the idea of volunteers, whether that's through specifically named NGOs...how we support that and how it would work out. My concern in that conversation is we're dealing with very stressful situations and moments of crisis, and they can spin out of control very quickly. Before, we were talking about how we figure out that very specific strategy of who has control, who manages that, who takes over at what time and how we delve into that.

Another thing that was said was about those who can fill sandbags and help with flood mitigation or what have you. Maybe that is something that volunteers could do, but the evacuation of a city is very different. I would even argue that.... When we sent our troops into long-term care facilities, some of them contracted COVID, and we don't know the long-term impacts of that and what's required.

Ideally, everybody remains safe, but what would the government's management role be in all of that if something should occur? What are the backups or the procedures that need to be put in place if something like that were to move forward and something truly bad happened to volunteers who aren't necessarily fully trained, like a member of the armed forces?

That's for all of the witnesses.

Mr. Josh Bowen: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

If I can just touch on Madam Normandin's question from before the break, I think it dovetails quite nicely.

Having personally helped draft requests for federal assistance in 2016, we shifted the emphasis of those letters from requesting specific CAF assets to requesting desired effects. Public Safety Canada has a federal capabilities list and it's Public Safety Canada that determines which federal department or agency has the most appropriate assets for achieving whatever that desired effect is. Often that comes from the CAF, but often it doesn't. Given that these desired effects vary, depending on the location and the type of disaster, establishing a dedicated disaster response force within the CAF would necessarily draw on all other elements of the CAF. Therefore, we would only be adding additional bureaucracy and overhead, instead of streamlining it.

As Mr. Fejes pointed out, reservists deploy only when they volunteer to do so. When they do put their hands up, they get paid, which registers an incremental cost to government. This takes us back to the option of enabling our disaster NGO community to do what they do best—what they're purpose-built to do—and respond to disasters and support Canadians.

By establishing provisions to enable employers to grant leave for a week or two, as they do with some reserve deployments, people can then volunteer and we can build a robust and resilient capability that costs orders of magnitude less than establishing new capabilities in the CAF or cannibalizing existing forces. That frees up the CAF to fill their role as the force of last resort.

To the question of who's in charge, it's always the local authority that's in charge. Once a local authority—the municipality, the county or whatever it happens to be—declares that state of emergency, they can then request provincial support. If the province declares either a localized or a provincial state of emergency, they're the organization that would then request federal assistance, whether that's CAF or not.

In a lot of the provisions that are put in place to support volunteers and to enable volunteers who go to support a disaster response, the mechanisms are already there. Just as we ensure that we build out legislation and a framework to enable employers to let their people go and volunteer for a week, we need to extend occupational health and safety legislation, so that we can protect the people who are volunteering.

• (1715)

Mr. Adam MacDonald: These are always provincial requests, so they are responsible. The provinces have a big role in this. A lot of what they focus on now is management, which is about the coordination of existing resources, and not so much about developing and building services themselves. That's where we're getting this kind of skip at the local end, and then we have the federal and provincial ends—it depends on different provinces.

There is a bit of a gap there, and some of it has been a function of the increasing reliance on being able to draw on the CAF and other federal resources. Sometimes the provinces pay those back, but again, sometimes they won't have to. The CAF isn't going to go around asking for money from provinces. I think that's a big problem.

There are two things. One, do we just need better coordination with the mechanisms to be able to find the capabilities to bring them together, or do we have to actually build capabilities at all levels with a bit more specialization? I think that's where we're really needed. Two, the coordination piece is super important, but when you get something like the pandemic on top of regular national disasters, there's a stress function that happens, and everyone is asking for help and support.

The trajectory of climate change is that places we didn't think were going to have climate change issues have climate change issues—in communities and things. I think that the B.C. floods completely took the provincial government by surprise. They couldn't believe it. They were basically saying that these were municipal level issues and they should coordinate, but it was clear after one or two days that this was a regional disaster and it needed major capabilities and coordination at all levels.

It's not just about the coordination piece, it's about building up...and specialization. Unfortunately, the CAF is being asked to do a lot of giving of the capability part and relieving some of the provincial responsibilities.

The Chair: Okay. We're going to have to leave that answer there, Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Gallant, you have five minutes.

I am going to try to get a full second round in.

You have five minutes, please.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Chair, the foremost capability of the CAF, when it's relied upon in disasters, is its command and control system. Before the national emergency preparedness college was deemed unnecessary, it trained leadership at the municipal level for a state of readiness and marshalling a response locally before calling on our national defence force. There were exercises at the local level, graduating to more widespread scenarios, so that everybody knew how to work together in a state of emergency.

Do you think it would be a more effective use of our resources to re-establish an emergency preparedness college rather than calling in the military whenever it's a major weather event?

This question is to all of the witnesses.

• (1720)

Mr. Josh Bowen: I'm happy to jump on that one first.

One thing that's been done around the country and in multiple different post-secondaries is to actually establish emergency management training. We have diplomas, degrees and graduate level programs that exist. We also have professional development training centres. Whether it's at Algonquin College in Ottawa, or the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology here in Edmonton, or the Justice Institute of B.C. in the Vancouver area, we have places where people go to train and to learn from each other.

We host an annual event where we bring 400 people from across the country together to train and share experiences, and to share learning. Providing funding to the post-secondaries that are already doing this would be hugely helpful.

In terms of re-establishing that national emergency preparedness college, establishing standardized core capabilities and core competencies at the national level for emergency management would greatly help to standardize curriculum and training across the country. I think that's the focus. Rather than building a brand new bricks-and-mortar facility, it's better to leverage the capabilities that are already there in the post-secondaries and the training institutions, and it's far more cost-effective.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: As well, from the private sector, they can tailor-make a plan for a community.

The carbon tax was initially marketed to the Canadian public on the notion that the revenues would be directed to adaptation and mitigation. In your experience, have the carbon taxes been directed to adaptation and mitigation, or simply to emergency response, if any goes to emergency response?

Mr. Adam MacDonald: I don't know the answer to that question at all. I'm sorry.

Mr. Michael Fejes: I'm sorry as well. I am not prepared to comment on that. That's outside the realm of my research and expertise. Sorry.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: To what extent do you think that infrastructure and mitigation measures and adaptation measures would help prevent some of these catastrophic events that we're seeing in terms of high water, for example?

Mr. Josh Bowen: While I can't speak directly to any budgetary allocations, what we do know from multiple studies is that for every dollar invested in mitigation and preparedness activities, we save six to eight on response and an additional twelve on recovery after a disaster, so if we're looking at a 20:1 return on investment, then focusing on mitigation measures is absolutely essential.

Focusing on the preparedness side—training, building plans, coordination and building out those mechanisms—is also going to be the most cost-effective use of our resources.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Would any of you be qualified to describe the harms done to the militia during the hook-and-ladder days of civil defence during the Cold War?

The Chair: If you are, that will be quite interesting.

Does anybody want to take that question or feel that they have any capability of taking that question?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: All right. Let's go to another one. We can come back to that.

The Chair: You're down to five seconds, Cheryl.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: How do you view the use of the troops in strikes, the FLQ and the Oka crisis?

The Chair: That's an interesting question, but it's not going to get answered.

Next is Mr. Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Chair, thank you very much.

I'd like to thank all three of our witnesses for being with us and for their service in uniform and out of uniform. Thank you for your expertise.

The debate nationally and internationally can be grouped into the cluster of the three Cs—climate, COVID and conflict—really sort of cross-fertilizing each other into crises that we have not anticipated and that we need to respond to. For us as parliamentarians, it's a question of making sure that the investments are being made into addressing them.

Is it fair to say that in Canada at the moment we have the expertise on DRR, on emergency preparedness and response, and it's just a question of restructuring that expertise into a more effective organization? Or are there still significant gaps in expertise that we need

to address through recruitment on either the civilian or the military side?

That's for whoever would like to take that. I'll take all three of you if you have views on it or just one of you.

• (1725)

Mr. Michael Fejes: I'll jump in first.

I think that's almost a double-headed question, Mr. Chair.

First and foremost, the expertise for crisis management response will reside within the government: federal, provincial and municipal. There are varying amounts of expertise that reside within the Canadian Forces. It's the Canadian Forces, however, who remain responsive to government direction.

The Canadian Forces are prepared to respond to crisis management in any way that the government directs, so asking for the Canadian Forces to hold specific expertise is not necessarily the question. You would almost have to defer that to federal and municipal agencies before that could be responded to accurately.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: That's a fair comment. Thank you for that.

I'm interested in Mr. Bowen's mention of the German model—of which there are some champions here on Parliament Hill—the civil defence volunteer force. This is a process and a structure that really took decades to build. If Canada were to go down that road, Professor Bowen, what would be the three priorities that we really would need to be seized with to make sure that happens?

Then, maybe grafted onto that question, how much need would there be for civil-military coordination and co-operation if and when such a structure is built?

Mr. Josh Bowen: That's a great question and definitely one that other people are far more knowledgeable about in terms of exactly building that structure.

What I will say, though, is that we need to identify the core capabilities that we require. We need to identify who has them already so that we're not duplicating effort. The last thing we want is for everybody to show up to a disaster with a left-handed screwdriver when what we really need is a hammer.

We need to be able to identify what those core capabilities are and then leverage the skill sets that people already have, that already exist, and coordinate that: identifying the capabilities, identifying a coordination mechanism—and that will necessarily involve the government, it will involve civil society and it will involve the military at some point—and then determining how we most cost-effectively fund that model.

The other piece that it will require is bringing in the post-secondaries to be able to actually support the training and the ongoing professionalization of the field. That's where I would start.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you very much for that.

The area of civil-military coordination is interesting, because we will need it here at home unless we seize either the private sector fully, the civilian sector fully, or the military fully, with the question of disaster response and mitigation.

Is there a synergy between civil-military coordination expertise gained here at home, and later deployment of the same members of the Canadian Forces elsewhere in the world where civil-military coordination is critical to peacekeeping reconstruction and humanitarian protection work? Is there actually something synergetic that we could develop and tap into?

Mr. Josh Bowen: As you know from your work in Iraq, coordinating civil-military response is absolutely essential. It doesn't matter whether it's conflict, or it's a disaster response. Being able to build mechanisms where people can share ideas, share information, and then appropriately allocate that information and those resources to respond to whatever the crisis of the day is, is absolutely essential.

So yes, there are multilateral and multi-agency coordination mechanisms that we could leverage. There are also coordination mechanisms here at home, and with our closest allies that we could look to leverage.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Could you send us what you have on Australia. It's not a case we've looked at as a committee yet, but we'd be grateful if we had any material there.

Mr. Josh Bowen: Absolutely, sir.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Spengemann.

[Translation]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The witnesses have talked a lot about the role of reservists. We know that they are relatively under-utilized, and we can imagine that this has an impact on retention capacity. The committee just did a study on this. When you're underutilized, you may be less willing to stay.

That said, I am thinking of a certain type of reservists, for instance the rangers, who have a very specific function and who know that they will be called upon to do this type of work.

Could we envisage having a form of special unit composed of reservists who would have to intervene in specific contexts, for example during a national crisis? Wouldn't this be a hybrid solution that would be a win-win situation and would also be interesting in terms of recruitment?

[English]

Mr. Michael Fejes: I'll jump in first, please.

When it comes to actually trying to develop niche capabilities in the reserve force, various historical studies have found varying rates of success. Initially, reserve units have been tasked with things like laundry and bath units in support of the regular force, and

found atrocious retention rates, whereas conventional infantry units continue to attract and retain reserve recruits. You have to tread very carefully with the idea of creating specialty niche units within the reserves, where again participation is voluntary or at least currently voluntary.

The demands that are placed on primary reserve members are so wide and vary so greatly. Instead of actually trying to develop niche capabilities, which rely again on volunteers who may or may not determine they're going to provide their service or not, my recommendation is that we actually look at broadening the terms of service for the reserves, so that they can be called upon when needed, but that they come with a wide and broad variety of skills.

Additionally, creating domestic response reserve units would mean that they have specialized skills and training, and they would not be able to deploy internationally, when called upon, as well. You want to maintain a broad pool of reservists, and you want to be able to call on those broad pools of reservists decisively when crisis happens.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Adam MacDonald: Can I just say something quickly?

The Chair: Can you work it in with Ms. Mathysen's question, because Ms. Mathysen always follows Madame Normandin.

Ms. Mathysen, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: One of the issues that was mentioned in terms of drawing on the reservists was duration of time. Can you provide the other problems that we would have to look at in order to proactively assess what would be required? I would think about time from family, which many Canadian Armed Forces members already have to deal with, but also housing, and all of those things.

Can you give us a quick list?

And then yes, I will give some time to Mr. MacDonald, as well.

Mr. Adam MacDonald: I just want to say quickly that when we think about reservists, we can think of two broad models. We can think of a strategic reserve. They do the same thing as a regular force, but we just augment them either in time of war or when needed. When we were in Afghanistan in the mid-2000s, 30% of the combat battalion there were reservists. They were vital. You can have functional reservists that do different things from the regular forces. We saw this in the navy. The reservists in the navy had their own ships, the maritime coastal defence vessels, and other types of tasks and duties.

Now we're seeing this kind of movement back towards more strategic reserves. We have a one navy concept, to use the navy as an example, but we still see this idea of trying to do a bit of a dance to try to do both. I think that is kind of strategically misguided. There needs to be a far more reconceptualization of the purpose of the reserves within the military and within communities.

I think reservists are a great way to broaden the appeal of the military. They usually are some of the most diverse. They're usually in urban centres. A lot of major military bases aren't in urban centres anymore. The regular force is kind of a bit distant from Canadians, whereas reservists have a bit more of a direct connection.

I think there are no more full-time reservists. The reservists are supposed to be part time, which gets to the problem that we need legislated pay for quick call-ups. Rather than doing things like, "In three months we're going to deploy you for two months," it would be, "In a week, we need you for six months." How do we action that with major industry and other businesses?

Also, reservists deserve credit. They need medals and recognition for service. The military has an expeditionary-oriented view that service and value are largely based on international deployments. I can tell you it's way harder to go to the Canadian Arctic than it is to go to Afghanistan, and I think there should be recognition of that.

Another thing I'll say is the reservists have brought in interesting recruiting mechanisms to try to bring in more people quickly. What's happened is the retention at mid-level reservists has dramatically decreased. There's a huge issue about how to train and retain these people. They can't get their training done, because we just don't have mid-level reservists to do it. It's a huge challenge in the reserves. It probably needs a complete full rethink, in my opinion.

• (1735)

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Mr. Motz for five minutes, please.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for being here.

I just want to bring this full circle back to why we exist as a committee. It's about national defence. I have a couple of quotes from Lieutenant-General Eyre. He was the Canadian army commander at the time and now he's the CDS.

In 2020, Lieutenant-General Eyre said:

If we become focused on solely humanitarian-assistance, disaster response, when the country really needs us, when the stakes are very high and we have to fight and we're not ready, that's going to cause casualties and it's going to cost loss of national interest

In October 2021, he said:

...involvement in domestic operations reduced the resources available to confront challenges and threats to world security, which continue to increase.

Mr. Bowen, I have some questions directed to you.

You have mentioned, and I would agree with you, that we need to re-examine how we deploy and how we deal with natural disaster-related events in our country. If that's the case, you prefer, according to your testimony, more of a reserve force or something along those lines.

What composition of regular force and reserve force personnel is needed to ensure effective response to what National Defence, CAF, should be doing, and what our reserve force could be doing with regard to natural disasters?

Mr. Josh Bowen: Thank you, sir. I had the distinct honour of serving under General Eyre in western Canada and during the Fort McMurray wildfire event. Actually, I would not advocate establishing a reserve force specifically to deal with disasters. If we did that, we would be cannibalizing our existing forces and existing capabilities. We would necessarily need to draw on the regular force air force, the regular force army and navy to be able to respond, to be able to support the mobility, the logistical sustainment, the transportation, the communication, all of those other assets and capabilities that so many NGOs actually bring to the table.

I do think—

Mr. Glen Motz: I'm sorry for interrupting. Maybe I misquoted what you said. I said reservists. What I'm thinking about.... As you start speaking again, sir, and I apologize, you're talking more about a civilian corps like you mentioned, Red Cross, Samaritan's Purse and other NGOs that do such great work.

Can you reinforce for us what advantages there would be from a cost perspective, from a training perspective, to the Canadian taxpayer and to a response theatre, their capabilities as opposed to how we're doing things now?

Mr. Josh Bowen: First and foremost, I would say that building hyper-localized, trained and equipped volunteer teams across the country is going to drastically reduce the time and cost that it takes to mobilize during a disaster. If we look to my earlier comments about the typical daily incremental cost for a CAF deployment being about \$80,000, NGOs can respond for less than \$5,000 or \$3,000 a day to do similar tasks. Leveraging those organizations that rely on volunteers who are unpaid who are there to be able to support their fellow Canadian is something we should be looking to do.

More importantly, they already have mechanisms in place for coordinating the deployment and the employment of those volunteers, so rather than just having a federal agency or a provincial organization respond and then deal with an influx of volunteers who continue to show up and donations and all of those kinds of things, having an overarching federal coordination mechanism, where we're able to say, "Samaritan's Purse, you have these skill sets, Red Cross, you have these skill sets, Team Rubicon Canada, you have these skill sets. These are what we need, these are the effects we need to achieve, can you support?" Then they say they can, with localized response capabilities, which drastically reduces the cost and the time required to mobilize.

• (1740)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Motz, but the clock doesn't lie; it says six seconds.

Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. May for five minutes, please.

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, thank you to all of you for your patience today and for your expertise.

This has been fascinating, and I have to admit that I've sort of lost track a little bit in terms of who supports more of a civilian-led force versus something within the CAF, or are you all on the same page there?

Mr. Bowen, I know you had suggested more of a civilian-led force. Do the two of you concur with Mr. Bowen?

Mr. Michael Fejes: If I may jump in first, please, obviously I want to say I concur with Mr. Bowen that a civilian-led agency is far superior to anything that the CAF would be able to produce because the CAF has conflicting priorities and obligations at most given times.

In addition, I also want to highlight something he said, where the more prepared municipalities and provinces are to assist with domestic crisis response, the better the Canadian Forces will be able to come in to assist. It is really a win-win situation for everyone involved to see preparedness across the board.

Where I think I differ from my esteemed colleague is with the idea of unpaid volunteers taking the lead, because I would want to do some research into how long that model would be sustainable before the Canadian Forces came in to provide additional support.

Thank you.

Mr. Bryan May: I see Mr. Bowen was shaking his head a little bit.

Do you want to respond to that? Maybe there was a misrepresentation there.

Mr. Josh Bowen: Thank you, sir.

If I may, I agree that the Canadian Forces need to come in as an augmentation force and that we should have a civilian, largely volunteer-based organization leading. Whenever there is a disaster response, the local authority always has jurisdiction, so it would never be volunteers acting alone independently of that local authority providing the legal framework for the volunteers to be able to respond. Then, having an organizational function that says who is going to fill which roles and allowing the volunteer organizations, the NGOs, to be able to fill those roles is where I think we need to get to.

Mr. Bryan May: Go ahead, Mr. MacDonald.

Mr. Adam MacDonald: My big thing that comes from this is that it's the Canadian government and the Canadian people who decide what their military is for, and I think that members in uniform and generals can talk about competing priorities, and what they're doing is bringing up an issue by saying that they're having issues doing all of this, that they think it's going to be increasingly difficult and that they want a political solution.

I think there will be some who say that the military is about combat, it's about deploying overseas and it's about warfare. I think a military is whatever a government wants it to be and what the public wants it to be. I think we need to start thinking about it as political direction rather than letting, again, this mission creep.

My own feeling is, as I said, there is lots of expertise out there that my colleagues have talked about. I think the CAF has a really big role to play, and I think there's a way we can carve it down into something that's more feasible and doable in a better intricate web of organizations. I worry about this idea of super-CAF, the Swiss army knife of CAF, that can be deployed in everything and anything. I think that has huge problems for member retention, to be quite honest, for training and for misallocation of resources.

Again, I think we need to talk about this politically and not so much about this being a technical solution as to how do we build out this thing or that thing. We need a bit more of a political conversation about what we want the military to do and what it's for.

Mr. Bryan May: We've talked a little bit about the Australian model, the German model, the U.S. with the engineering corps they have there. I don't know enough about the German model to make this suggestion, but I'm wondering.... They have a mandatory service model once you graduate from high school into the military, but they also have...if you're a pacifist you can go into an NGO and support that way. Is this an extension of that, or sort of a spinoff of that, or does it have anything to do with their mandatory service after high school?

• (1745)

Mr. Josh Bowen: My understanding, as limited as it is, is that the German model requires mandatory national service. That doesn't necessarily mean the military. It could be working in a seniors' residence. It could be driving an ambulance, just to free up a paramedic to actually work on a patient—those kinds of things.

Yes, there are definitely people who volunteer for the Technisches Hilfswerk, the THW, which is the model we're discussing. Those people then continue to volunteer, many of them for the rest of their lives, doing different sorts of disaster responses.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. May.

Colleagues, we have a little over 10 minutes left, and if I do two-minute rounds we can get another round of questions in. We'll start with the Conservatives and Mr. Allison, for two minutes.

Welcome to the committee. You're a very pleasant addition.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's great working with you again as well.

Once again to our witnesses, thank you for what you do and your service to this country.

Since I only have two minutes, I guess my question would be to you, Adam. You've talked a few times about political issues, political will. What do you mean by that? Is it really more political direction?

I thought you made a great point. The army belongs to the Canadian people, so what you are saying, then, regardless of what it is, it has to be directed in terms of leadership. In other words, if the government says we should do a, b or c, that would be the political will to have that happen.

Mr. Adam MacDonald: My big thing, I think, is that when you look at the mandates of the CAF you see there are about eight of them, and a lot of them are domestic like search and rescue, guarding coastlines, NORAD. Then, domestic emergency response is a very specific one. However, there's no parallel about, okay, this is the mandate and we're going to generate these forces, and we need to have this many navy ships, this many soldiers.

It leads to this vagueness that there's no corollary about what the military does have to build in terms of forces generated to do domestic emergency response. I think that there, combined with this societal growing expectation that the military is going to be called in to respond every time there's a domestic emergency, it's really draining the organization a little bit. I think it's creating confusion.

There's a big debate about what a military is and isn't. I think the generals and others are talking about the need to have this political decision, and I think it does start from the top. We have to more clearly define what we want our military to do, what we want to focus on, what we want to build.

Do we have health care capacity, just a service in military, or do we decide, you know what, we're actually going to build up health care capacity in the military to service domestic emergency response?

We have an example of the DART, the disaster assistance response team, which is an expeditionary overseas capability. Do we want to build a domestic DART or something in the military?

I just think this has to get beyond the confines of DND and become more political and public as we enter the engagement about the defence review.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fisher, you have two minutes.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

If I'm talking very quickly, it's because I only have two minutes.

Mr. MacDonald, you spoke to this, so I'll go with you first, but I really wish I had the time to have all comments. Are any provinces building or preparing for emergency management or disaster response? Other than the obvious roadblocks like budgets and people, what stands in their way? Who has a better chance of building a volunteer group—a provincial entity or a federal entity? Will a province even consider doing that if they can already request help from the CAF?

I know I gave you an awful lot to think about there, but you have a minute left.

Thanks.

Mr. Adam MacDonald: First, I would say that the provinces are very different. They all face different challenges and some have

dealt with them very differently. Newfoundland got rid of their emergency management organization and don't have anything. Then you have B.C. B.C. is a very interesting case. They've been worried about earthquakes for a long time and they've been building up earthquake management. Then, all of a sudden, they had the floods and fires last year, which really came as a shock.

Building on my colleagues' points, I think the best way of doing it is locally. I think we're missing that middle piece, which is the provinces. The provinces can do more in terms of coordinating, funding and guiding that pooling of resources.

The difficulty the CAF faces is that it usually goes to the CAF when it gets to the federal level, but those requests are based on the ground. We've already seen, during COVID, some requests that seemed very pitiful when they were answered. We only sent a couple of rangers, for example, to an indigenous community that was entirely under lockdown because of COVID. There was some blowback, but... What information was it based upon? It was based upon the local and provincial request, because that's the way this works. It always goes to the provinces and then up, so I think the province is the level....

We have to figure out ways the federal government can help support funding and training at the provincial level to further enable those municipal lines. My sense is that, again, the reliance on the CAF is taking away from that.

• (1750)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Normandin, you have one minute.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Someone in another panel mentioned the idea of creating a group of reservists who would normally be used to improve the infrastructure in remote first nations communities, but who could easily be called upon to intervene in a crisis.

Is this an idea to explore?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Fejes: The Canadian Forces have an overriding policy of not competing with domestic business and domestic economies. Calling in the military to conduct routine “economic development”, for lack of a better term, would probably not be well received domestically. Once again, you're taking resources away from the Canadian Forces, which—ideally—would be training, deploying, responding or doing something else.

Again, I've voiced my opinion on creating specific units of reserves to complete specific tasks, in which case they're not available or not trained to complete other tasks.

I want to come around to what I've been advocating for throughout this entire session: We want to figure out how to get the largest pool of military assistance to the greatest number of Canadians for decisive and enduring effects. That's the question we actually have to be dealing with here, and—

The Chair: Unfortunately, we're going to have to leave it there. I apologize.

Madame Mathysen, you have one minute.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I think my questions arise, again, from that overall conversation. I know that Peguis First Nation in northern Manitoba is dealing with flooding year after year after year. If we're going to shift toward provincial jurisdiction or provincial answering of the call, that's not the first nation's primary communicator. They go to the federal government.

Can you expand on how a nation like Peguis would deal with flooding year after year in this model, which I think was suggested previously in Mr. Fisher's questioning?

Mr. Josh Bowen: May I jump in?

This is why we need to have federal coordination of both NGOs and federal-provincial response capabilities. The nation-to-nation relationship has to be protected and is so critical. First nations have the ability to reach out directly to the federal government and say, "We require assistance, and these are the things we require." Then Public Safety Canada has the ability to say, "These are the federal assets we have that can support and respond, and here are the NGO capabilities that can support and respond."

We could go one step further and do what the Americans do. They have a National Business Emergency Operations Center, where they leverage the capabilities of private enterprise so they can respond and support. Bringing the whole of society together at the federal level is actually going to enable us to respond more quickly and more locally than devolving it to the provinces.

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it there, unfortunately.

Mr. Motz, you have two minutes, please.

Mr. Glen Motz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Fejes, you made a comment earlier in response to a question that was asked. I don't remember which of my colleagues asked it. It was whether volunteers can actually do the job that is expected sometimes of emergency management people.

I'm a duty director graduate from the Emergency Preparedness College here in Ottawa. I've been on a number of disasters in our community. I can tell you from experience that some of our best people were volunteering for those positions and did an admirable job.

I think all of you, to some degree, would certainly agree that having a civilian response at the municipal level and then the level of the province, supported by the feds as far as funding and training, might be the model we need to go to moving forward.

I want to go back to Mr. Bowen because he's closest to home for me. With one minute left, I'm asking my ideal world question again.

You want to make this happen. You articulated a plan today. What are the first two or three things we have to do to make that happen from the federal level to push it back to the provinces and municipalities?

• (1755)

The Chair: You have 40 seconds.

Mr. Josh Bowen: That's a very big question for one minute. Thank you for that, sir.

In that ideal world, the first thing we need to do is reach out to the provinces and to the NGO community and ask what capabilities they have. We then look at the long history of disasters we've had and ask what capabilities are needed.

Once we can identify those two gaps, we can fund appropriately and allocate funding towards the NGO community to be able to support and respond and develop those capabilities where they have the best expertise. We can also allocate to the post-secondary community, where they're able to build those training centres and that curriculum, so that we can actually have people employed and trained to the same standard.

The Chair: We're going to have to leave it there, unfortunately.

Madam Lambropoulos, you have the final two minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you.

Mr. Bowen, in my two minutes, did you want to finish your answer to that previous question? I thought it was a good one. If not, I can go on.

Mr. Josh Bowen: Actually, I was done. Thank you.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Okay.

I apologize if my major question has already been answered because it's late in the game at this point and we've been cut off a couple of times.

Mr. Bowen, because you've been a member of the armed forces and because you've gone on some missions within Canada to help in disaster situations, do you not think the CAF could have a second stream of recruits who are specifically there not to fight? I know there's the universality of service rule, but would it not be beneficial to move away from that and to have a sector within the CAF that deals specifically with emergency situations within the country related to the climate?

Mr. Josh Bowen: Thank you.

I think that's actually a really important question to sum up. When I was in the CAF, I was never trained in how to respond to a flood. I was never trained in how to respond to a wildfire. I did both. That was because it was residual capacity for more fighting training. It's the organizational structure and the logistical structure that the CAF brings that enables it to respond.

If we want to be able to respond to disasters in a way that is the most effective, we need to rely on the civilian capacity that already

exists, so that we're not duplicating effort. When things do exceed civilian capacity, we're then able to bring in that force of last resort. The CAF would be that deployable and self-sustainable organized labour that we can then throw at the problem when we've exhausted all other options.

The Chair: Unfortunately, that will have to bring it to an end. Thank you.

I want to, on behalf of the committee, thank all three of you for your thoughtfulness. You certainly have launched our study in the right direction. I also want to thank you for your patience. I apologize for the interruptions, but this is the way things operate around here, and we all get used to it.

With that, colleagues, we will adjourn this meeting and meet again this Wednesday, the Lord and the votes willing.

Thanks again.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>