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Chair

The Honourable Maxime Bernier

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC)): Good morning to all and welcome to the Standing Committee on National Defence. This is our 42nd meeting. Pursuant to Standing Order 108 (2), we are continuing our study of the recruitment and retention strategy of the Canadian Armed Forces.

We are most pleased to welcome you here. Today, we will be hearing two witnesses, Major-General Frédéric Mariage and Colonel Marcel Belleau. Thank you for being with us. I will give you the floor for 10 minutes, after which time committee members will be able to have a discussion with you.

[English]

Major-General (Retired) Frédéric Mariage (President, Réserve 2000 Québec): Mr. Chairman, we would like to thank you and the members of your committee for giving us the opportunity to appear before you.

I am retired Major-General Frédéric Mariage. I proudly consider myself a citizen soldier. Please remember this qualification, “citizen soldier”, as it represents the main reason for our presence here today.

In my civilian career, I held different executive responsibilities with MacMillan Bloedel, a forest company from Vancouver. I was also president, CEO, and shareholder of Bois Degro lumber in Montreal.

Before retirement on the army side, I was appointed chief of reserves from 1990 to 1993, and I finished my military career as colonel commandant of the infantry corps, the first reservist to be appointed to this position.

I will now turn to my distinguished colleague to introduce himself.

Colonel (Retired) Marcel Belleau (Vice-president, Réserve 2000 Québec): Good morning.

I am Colonel Marcel Belleau. I also was a citizen soldier for a long time. I had the honour to command a prestigious unit, the Regiment de la Chaudière, and also number three militia district in Quebec.

In my civilian life, I made a career in the university world, mainly in administration. I was a vice-director at Université du Québec à Montréal and also a researcher in strategic studies.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: Contrary to one's belief, we are not retirees longing for the uniform, nor are we nostalgic about the past. We are individuals who have undertaken a mission to defend and promote the interests of the armed forces in general and, more

specifically, the interests and values of the citizen soldiers and units of the land force reserve, the so-called militia.

[Translation]

Who are we and what do we represent? We represent a significant number of former senior officers in Quebec: 12 general officers and 65 colonels, regrouped under Reserve 2000 Quebec, and Reserve 2000 for our colleagues in English Canada, who are unfortunately unable to be here today given the short notice for this appearance.

[English]

We share the same problems, and they're sorry not to be here to voice their concern.

Now, what is the rationale behind our request to appear? The militia and its citizen soldiers are an endangered species as they become more and more soldier citizens. The army, the land force, is operating beyond its capability. This situation was confirmed in a report given to the CDS by the Chief of the Land Staff, entitled “Strategic Operations and Resource Plan 2008-09”.

In particular, there is a serious deficiency in the number of capable personnel available to serve in the infantry. This is clearly outlined in an article published by Professor Granatstein on November 20, 2009, in *The Globe and Mail*:

The land force infantry's nine battalions are all seriously under strength, and some warrant officers have already been to Kandahar three or four times, with yet another rotation staring them in the face.

The expedition in Afghanistan is serving as a drain on our available resources. With 60,000 regulars in the army, navy, and air force, it is all we can do to sustain and maintain 2,800 men and women abroad. That includes 20% to 25% reservists.

[Translation]

Military leaders as well as the Department of National Defence lack an understanding of the culture and history of the Militia and their policies could contribute to the disappearance of this institution. If some of them are aware of this, they do not show it through their actions.

[English]

Militia units are being depleted and deprived of their leaders, who are serving full time in a different class of service. More than one-third of militia paid strength is serving under this class of service, and they are not available for training with their respective units. On the roles assigned to the militia, there is a divergent view between headquarters and the militia environment. We have become a source of immediately available manpower for plugging holes in staffing deficiencies in the regular force.

Although this role is rewarding to those militia soldiers so employed, the way it is carried out is very insidious. It has a very insidious impact, slowly and surely driving the militia soldier away from his primary role of serving as a citizen soldier and not as a soldier citizen. This role is the only one that receives almost all the attention. It is the first and only role really taken seriously by authorities.

The militia is treated as a source of cheap labour, having 30% of the total reserve strength actually on full-time service. Therefore, the only role that appears to be treated somewhat seriously is as individual reinforcement. The land force reserve strength is about 20,000 people. Each year, about 20% of that establishment leaves the force for different reasons. About 3,500 soldiers must also receive basic training every year, which requires instructors—more than often, not available—and we are left with 12,000 effectively trained people, but we then must discount the non-effective and the already deployed abroad.

Militia units cannot replenish themselves because of this exodus of leaders. We are therefore left with militia units that cannot replenish and are incapable of facing a domestic crisis. Today they would be incapable of responding to a national emergency or to a call to assist civil authority, as opposed to the excellent and invaluable response to the 1998 ice storm in Quebec.

What is alarming is that the militiaman is rapidly losing his or her status as a citizen soldier, and it is now nearly impossible to maintain a civilian career while active in militia service. Asking a militia soldier to attain the same skill levels as the regular force if they volunteer to deploy abroad is understandable and necessary, but applied to everyone in the reserve, this concept fails to take into consideration the logic of the militia soldier's status of citizen soldier.

● (0910)

[Translation]

As a former soldier, this situation is worrisome. The qualification levels for the Regular Force, which often amount to over-qualification, are not necessary for the militiaman and impact negatively in the longer term on the Militia's own ability to generate replacements.

The present system often encourages dropping out of school and specifically targets the unemployed. This situation could lead to the disappearance of the Militia as an institution, that institution which served as a basis for the participation of more than a million Canadians during the Second World War, whereas before that conflict, the Canadian regular Armed Forces were less than 4,000.

[English]

The participation of ambitious and talented people in the militia system has helped our country greatly. Well-known personalities in politics and the public service; people in education; professionals, including lawyers, judges, accountants, and doctors; as well as an untold number of citizens in various trades have made great contributions to their regiments and have received, in return, training that has contributed significantly to their successes and career advancements. But this era is over, and the citizen soldier has become the soldier citizen.

Originally, in the context of a total force, the assigned roles of the land forces militia were to continue as a core resource for national mobilization, to reinforce and support the regular force, to serve as an important bridge and link between the military and civilian communities, and to conduct domestic operations as aid to civil authority/power. Currently the only role being taken seriously from this list is role number two: reinforce and support the regular force.

● (0915)

[Translation]

The perverse effect of this situation is that it will contribute to slowly but surely distancing reservists from their primary role, which is to serve as citizen-soldiers for territorial defence, to maintain a link with the community where they live and, ultimately, to serve as a base in the event of a national call-up for general mobilization.

The problems facing today's militia personnel are numerous and complex. The structure is based on regular force personnel. The roles for the Militia are unclear and the recruiting system is completely ineffective. Enrolment lead times vary from four weeks to eight months.

The Militia is seriously under-strength. The required training levels are unattainable. Reservists are the main target for budget cuts, which is the case today with the deficit we have. Furthermore, they are not provided adequate protection, despite the ombudsman's recommendations.

The Chair: You have one minute left, General.

[English]

MGen Frédéric Mariage: The goal we're aiming for is to have all elements of the total force, regular and reserve, possess the means to fulfill their respective roles well, without either one serving as simply a temporary expedient, or stop-gap, for what is lacking in the other.

In that regard we propose a recommendation to the minister to form a special task force composed of three members from Reserves 2000 (English Canada), three members from Reserves 2000 Quebec, and three members from army/land forces headquarters.

We recommend that this task force make recommendations to the minister on the following matters within 90 days of its formation: that your committee undertake an analysis of the structure and confirmation of the primary roles of the militia and conduct an examination of the recruiting system, selection and enrolment; the level of authorized and paid members within militia units; maximum training requirements that conform to the availability of militia personnel while safeguarding their status as citizen soldiers; safeguards and guarantees for militia personnel serving under different service contracts; and safeguards to stabilize the core structure and leadership at militia units.

Please keep in mind that this situation is not only a Quebec situation; it involves the whole country.

[Translation]

Thank you for your attention. We are at your disposal to answer your questions, if that is your wish.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation.

We will now go to Mr. Dosanjh.

[English]

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Thank you. My apology for being a little late.

Sir, I realize you made a recommendation to set up a committee, at the end of your report. In the event that a committee is not set up, or it's set up but takes a very long time, I have one simple question for you. What are the three top things you would want changed, and what resources do you think they would require in terms of dollars?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: The resources in terms of dollars is part of the bigger issue. But as for the two things we would like, first of all, where we're coming from is that this militia system has existed since the founding of this country. It has evolved over the years, serving well during the First World War and the Second World War, as I mentioned, for mobilization, with one million Canadians serving overseas when the total armed forces were 4,000 people.

This system is based on a regimental system in which people are very close to their community, and it allows the civilians to participate in the armed forces by serving as citizen soldiers. This is in great danger now and it has reached a point where you, as politicians, have to make a decision.

The decision is, do we keep the militia as it should be, with some of the terms of reference, or do we want just the pool of reservists to serve the armed forces when available? If that was the decision of the politicians, we don't need the militia. We don't need the regiment. We don't need the presence of Canada in rural communities across the country. All you need is a big warehouse and you put instructors there and you bring people there and train them and you say, okay, when we need you, we'll call you. We call that, for guys of my age, the Office Overload. When I needed a secretary because mine was sick, I would call Office Overload and ask for a secretary.

So you have to decide that. If you ask me the question, what do we want immediately, it's for you to give direction as politicians to the DND and to the military people and say, just a minute here, we have to protect that institution, or you decide to say no, thank you.

● (0920)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: My reading of what you've said—and I was a bit late—is that you would want the institution protected.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: We recommend that it is protected. That's our strong recommendation, because this institution has done so much for the country. I could give you names of people who have been through that system, people you know. Prime ministers have been through that system, judges of the Supreme Court have been through that system here, business people, lawyers. In Quebec *le directeur des poursuites criminelles et pénales* is a reservist and he was telling me, because I know him personally, "If I didn't have this training from the reserve, I couldn't do the job I'm doing today."

So we strongly recommend that this institution continues to survive, but it's not up to us to decide. You are the people who have to decide that.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Welcome General, welcome, Colonel.

I had the pleasure of going to a regimental mess dinner with the Fusiliers Mont-Royal. As a matter of fact, I recognized the tie of the Fusiliers Mont-Royal that my father belonged to. I greatly enjoyed your dinner.

However, the situation you have outlined worries me. I did not think that the situation had deteriorated to that extent. If I understand you correctly, the only role that is presently envisaged for the Militia is that of a reserve for the Regular Force. That is virtually all that the department wishes to use it for.

I understand that throughout history, the Militia, in Quebec as elsewhere, was something else. Its specificity was its proximity to civilian authorities. In a disaster situation, an extremely rapidly deployable response team can intervene. As a matter of fact, I can bear witness to this myself, since I found myself inside the "dark triangle" during the ice storm that hit Saint-Jean, Granby and Saint-Hyacinthe. As soon as things took a turn for the worse, we began to see the reservists arrive.

You are therefore telling us that there is a change of philosophy in the department. This change would result from the document entitled Strategic Corporations and Resource Plan, that was delivered to the Chief of the Land Staff. You are therefore talking about General Leslie, if I am not mistaken.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: I would simply like to provide a correction. I have not read the document in its entirety. The article written by the journalists was entitled "The Canadian Forces, a "phantom army"". General Leslie was saying that he did not have the necessary manpower to be able to carry out all of the operations and all of the missions he was charged with. Of course, because the Regular Force is under strength, General Leslie managed, saying that he was going to use reservists.

Mr. Claude Bachand: He did this to the detriment of the other functions which normally...

MGen Frédéric Mariage: He considers the immediate needs, the reinforcement needs for his missions. I understand General Leslie and I imagine that he has no other choice. What we are saying is that with these policies and the whole training, recruitment and promotion system that is in place within the Reserve, he acts in accordance with his needs. That did not begin with the mission to Afghanistan, but with Bosnia, in 1995. It is therefore something that has carried on.

The Militia has become what we call a “farm talent club“ for the Regular Force. In so doing, this has had a very perverse impact on the regiments and on those citizens able to take part in the system.

● (0925)

Mr. Claude Bachand: Could that go even further by, for example, changing the structure of command?

Previously, it was under the direction of militiamen in sectors and districts. I am told that today it is a brigadier-general from the Regular Force who is in command and that it is divided up into brigades. This goes to prove all the more that we are moving away from the citizen-soldier concept.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: The structure of command has been changed. At the time we set up what we called the “total force“ concept, there were two elements. The Militia was led by the Militia and fell under the command of the army. In the beginning, these two elements were supposed to complement each other and work jointly.

Today, you know how the system operates within the Armed Forces. The commander is a member of the Regular Force and the militiamen are placed under his authority. He is the boss, and he decides and does what he wants. There is less and less of a contribution by the Reserve and by the Militia with regard to the decisions to be made.

There is a whole ripple effect on recruitment, training and strength level. Everything is interrelated and the system is suffering from this because it is more and more focussed on the needs and the way to manage the regular force. You cannot manage a citizen-soldier system using the system applied by the Regular Force with regard to training, course duration and programming of courses during the year. You must know your clientele and know how to accommodate it. We are doing the reverse. For example, we are telling our clientele that the courses will be given on such and such a date. The reservist tries to free himself up in order to be able to attend. Then, the course is cancelled for all sorts of reasons. Holidays have been planned based on a given date, but the course does not go ahead. It is delayed for a year or two, etc. There is a whole ripple effect.

Mr. Claude Bachand: This is an issue with employers, who, normally, make an effort to free up their people. If the employer makes an effort and the employee comes back and says that he must do something else because of events beyond his control, that makes things more difficult with employers.

It seems to me that we are making things even more unbearable. We have correspondence indicating that full-time reservists will lose their salary and benefits between January 1 and April 1, in rotation. Do you discuss that within your ranks?

This seems unbearable to me because, in addition, this will not be applied to the Regular Force but to people who were giving of their

time and were paid. We are taking advantage of the opportunity to tell them that it is quite unfortunate but that, during a month, there will be no benefits nor pay.

What has full-time reservists' reaction been?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: There have been several. When the order to make cuts is given, the first institution affected is the Reserve. Over the years, given the needs of the army, 50 to 60% of the leaders, the Militia officers and NCOs, were assigned to what we call “classes of reserve service“. Someone is needed to fill such and such a position, an offer of class B service paid at 85% of regular salary is made, and the person fills such and such a staff position or else is told that he or she is needed as an instructor. We are not talking about Afghanistan, but of local service. That is class B.

Among militiamen, there are people who have been there for 10 years and whose contract is renewed every year. There are others who have been members for one, two or three years. These are people who, for the most part, were unemployed or who, despite very commendable professional skills, were better off joining the system, the pay being much higher. Today, whenever budget cuts are made, those positions are the first to be abolished. That is one of the problems.

● (0930)

The Chair: Could you finish up within about 30 seconds.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: These individuals who, in good faith, signed a contract one or two years ago, for example, now get told that they unfortunately no longer have a job and must leave. That is stressful for them and their family.

There are other cuts as well. Within the units, the “class A“ days for which reservists are paid to train over one or two weekends, in the evening, etc. are also being cut. Over the course of a fiscal year, these days are reduced by three and a half or four. Take for instance the case of a student who enters the Militia, who decided to join in order to pay for his education. He planned everything, he calculated that he was going to work X number of days, that this would pay him so much and that he would be able to afford this and that.

The Chair: General, you have 15 seconds left.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: All of a sudden, we are in the month of December and this individual can no longer count on his four days, and he too is therefore penalized.

The Chair: Thank you. I will now give the floor to Mr. Harris.
[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, General Mariage and Colonel Belleau, for coming. I really do want to thank you for enlightening me, at least on this problem. In our province of Newfoundland and Labrador, we of course have the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, which started as a militia over 200 years ago and served as a unit in World War I. It is a very well-respected organization.

Can I ask you whether you think what has happened to the place of the reserves is deliberate, in the sense that this is a philosophical change that has been implemented without anyone really taking up the whole question of whether we need citizen soldiers as such, and remaining as such, or was it born out of necessity?

We know what General Leslie has said and what is perhaps, in our view, the over-ambition and overreaching of the Canadian Forces, particularly in Afghanistan. Is it out of necessity that this happened, or was it deliberate? Does it require a philosophical change and perhaps an examination of what you're talking about here?

Could you comment on that?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: That's a personal observation. I think it's a combination of both. Yes, there's necessity, but within the department there is also a philosophy that says that we don't need the system, that it's too costly, that it's ineffective. Also, the people who make the decision have spent most of their careers serving with the U.S. Army, which is a completely different system from the Canadian. That is a personal observation.

To answer your question, it's a combination of both. There have been, and still are, studies of shrinking down the reserve and doing unit amalgamations. Some people would say that's not the case, but we've seen documents that are studying this kind of thing.

Mr. Jack Harris: If I may say so as a comment, I don't think this has been put before the Canadian people as a philosophical choice. I certainly wasn't aware of this philosophical change taking place. I thank you both for coming in and telling us about it.

Colonel, would you comment?

Col Marcel Belleau: If I may add something, we are not against the fact that reservists serve full time, because it is one of the missions, one of the purposes of militia or reserve to be a reserve for the regular force. I am not against that. It is quite normal that some reservists go into external operations or serve here in Canada full time, but it is a matter of proportion and a matter of length.

In the matter of proportion, if you have too many reservists who are full time, those outside of their units.... They do not come to the unit, they are outside. We have an example of a unit that has on its strength 24 officers. If you look at the strength of the unit, it has 24 officers. Well, that's good, what do you have to complain about? But 14 of those officers are out of the unit, so it only has 10. This is what we are claiming, that the proportion is too high.

Sometimes the duration is too long, as well, because if you have someone who is, say, a captain or a sergeant or something, and he is full time during two, three, four, five, or ten years, he will have a great difficulty getting a civilian job when his contract is finished or to go back to school, because he has received \$65,000, \$70,000, \$80,000 a year. How will he live as a simple student after that?

So it is a matter of proportion and a matter of duration.

• (0935)

MGen Frédéric Mariage: And when his contract is finished, the chances are he won't return to the unit. He won't return to his unit of service as a class A on a part-time basis, because he has been on a full-time basis. He is considered mostly as a full-time individual.

Mr. Jack Harris: I'm assuming my time is up.

The Chair: You still have one minute.

Mr. Jack Harris: Good, I have one more.

In the command structure, the previous structure involved the reservists being commanded by a general from the reserves, and now

it's under Land Force Command or under Canada command or... Can you tell me?

Col Marcel Belleau: In the former structure there was, if you remember, something called Mobile Command. As a matter of fact, that was the equivalent of Land Force Command now. The country was divided into sectors, and those sectors were commanded by a brigadier from the reserves. He had a permanent staff and things like that.

Now everything is under Land Force Command, and that is okay, but there is no more reservist structure above the brigade. That's it. For example, in a province like Quebec—this is *secteur de l'Est*—there is a brigadier-general who is responsible for all the army forces in that area, regular and reserves. This not a big difficulty as such, but it keeps the reserves away from the area structure.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will give the floor to Mr. Hawn.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming. I would appreciate fairly brief answers, if you could. I have some ground to cover.

Nobody would ever question the importance of the militia and the reserves in Canada's military history. That's clear. During World War II, as you mentioned, we had an army, navy, air force of a million.

Would it be fair to say it would be a little easier in an army of a million to have stand-alone reserve units than it would be in the Canadian Forces of 65,000?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: The logic to me is that you need more militia than you need regular service people.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Yes, in an army of a million people. Clearly.

Now, there were a number of issues. You mentioned that in World War II the militia and reserves served as a basis for service in wartime. Canada is at war right now. Why would now be different from World War II?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: During the Second World War there was mobilization, and Canadians were mobilized to be sent abroad and to prepare for eventually the invasion and so forth. Today we are asking for individual replacement, not to be deployed as a unit, as it was during—

Mr. Laurie Hawn: In Bosnia we deployed individuals from reserve units to regular forces as well. Now we've evolved from an army of a million to an army of 65,000. We've evolved from conflicts on the scale of those in World War II to conflicts the size of those in Bosnia and Afghanistan. I'd suggest to you that there's quite a difference in scale and relativity there.

Would you say that the experience gained by reservists in Afghanistan or Bosnia or anywhere else, for those who do come back to the unit, is a valuable benefit to the reserve unit they return to?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: It is, but most of them don't return to the unit.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Well, I don't know what the numbers are and whether you have specific numbers on that or not. We talk about the citizen soldier becoming a soldier citizen. I suggest to you that in time of war, that is not an unusual situation, because we are taking people from units, especially with a much smaller force, who, of necessity, are becoming soldiers more than citizens, for those people in that circumstance. Is that a fair statement or not?

• (0940)

[*Translation*]

Col Marcel Belleau: In principle, yes, but, with all due respect, I would remind you that our Armed Forces are at war, but that the people of Canada are not. Consequently, the reasoning that applied in the case of the Second World War, a war of massive proportions, is hardly applicable to the present situation.

As I was saying earlier, and as you too have stated, the experience acquired by reservists who participate in external operations is very precious. It is indeed a good thing that a certain number of them participate in such missions. The problem is that at the end of their contract, very few of them reintegrate their unit. There is also a problem of proportion, because the people who leave their unit are not replaced. The unit therefore loses its strength. And it is generally the most qualified individuals who participate in these operations.

You therefore wind up depriving yourself of instructors.

[*English*]

Mr. Laurie Hawn: The Canadian Forces, I'd suggest, are having the same challenge, and that's the challenge of recruiting and retention. There are some differences, but in general it's no different for the reserves than it is for the regular.

Col Marcel Belleau: You have to look at that for the complete system.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Where should the regular force get personnel to augment and serve in the regular army for a mission like Afghanistan? Where would we get them if we didn't get them from the reserves?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: Why don't you increase the size of the regular armed forces and battalions?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Sir, that's easy to say, but we can't go to Wal-Mart and pick soldiers off the shelf. They have to be trained. Would you agree that whether someone's a reservist or a regular force member, if he or she is going to be doing a mission like Afghanistan, he or she needs the same level of training?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: I agree with you, but then they have to spend the time to be trained for that before deployment. So you take a militia man and you have him under contract for 18 months. For seven or eight months you train him. So if you have a recruit at St-Jean-sur-Richelieu who is ready to join the regular force, he can do that also.

What I'm saying is that—

Mr. Laurie Hawn: If we don't have enough of one, where else are we going to get the ready source that we don't have, other than from the reserves?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: That's fine. That's one of the missions of the reserves, but by doing that and solely that, you're killing the reserves.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Canada's not going to be at war forever.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: It has been seven years now, longer than the Second World War.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: At some point Afghanistan's going to be done. You have to set priorities, I suggest. You do what you have to do to get the job done.

I want to switch to a point you mentioned and a point Mr. Bachand brought up about people being cut and budgets being cut. There have been no budget cuts to the reserves. The simple fact is that if a reserve force commander overspends his budget, then come December or January time, there are going to be some consequences to that. And I suggest to you that in some cases—those that have been in the media in a bit of a way—that is in fact the case, that the reserve force local commander has overspent his budget for whatever reason. That is the reason people are finding out that their employment is being cut. It's not because there's a budget cut, but because the commander overspent his budget.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: I'm sure you have some correct information, but what we have, as directed at the army council, is that class A has to be cut by 3.5 to 4 training days.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: In terms of budgets allocated to the reserves, there have been no budget cuts to how they parse that out, but what Mr. Bachand brought up directly relates to commanders overspending their budgets, and there's a consequence for overspending your budget. There's a consequence for me and my family when I overspend my budget.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: I don't have that information. I'm sure you're more updated than we are, but that's not what we're getting from the units. But anyway, I'm not debating that.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Hawn.

We'll give the floor to Mr. Wilfert.

• (0945)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I apologize, gentlemen, for not being here at the beginning. I always say that my mother wanted twins but there's only one of me.

First of all, for the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, my understanding is that the number of reservists on full-time duty will be 14,500. That's more than half of the reserve force intended to be part-time soldiers. So they're going to be augmented and they're going to be 24/7, the same as regular forces.

I have two questions. One, perhaps you could respond to this first statement: militia regiments have largely gone from training units to being providers of augments for the regular force units. Obviously, the tempo of unit training has slowed and the pace of turning out more men, more women, particularly for Afghanistan, has stepped up dramatically. Perhaps you can respond to that.

My second comment is this. Do you think the reserve forces will survive the Afghan commitment until the end of 2011?

Col Marcel Belleau: If we take the example of the Olympics, it's quite reasonable to think that you need some reservists to be on full-time duty for this specific operation. This is one of the roles of the reserves, to conduct or to be part of domestic operations, but again this is a matter of proportion and a matter of duration.

I guess the figure of 14,000 reservists being fully employed is not related solely to the Olympics, but it will be the number of full-time personnel in all the areas of the functioning of the army. I don't know where they will find 14,000 full-time reservists, maybe on the shelf somewhere, but I guess this is the total number of full-time reservists.

I don't know, either, the duration that those persons will be full-time for this operation of the Olympics. If it is a month, two months, three months, that's okay. I guess the reserves can do that.

You also asked if the reserves will survive the Afghanistan commitment. I guess so, but what we want to raise is that not only for Afghanistan but for all those operations that Canada has to take, either in the country or outside, using too many reservists is changing the philosophy of the militia. What we want to raise is that it should be a decision made by the elected people like you and not taken by the back door by only DND or the staff. This is why we tried to raise the question before you, so that you can be able to make the right decision for the Canadian people and not be faced with the fact that you have not heard about it and it came by the back door.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: Regarding the Olympics, they have great problems filling all the required positions. They are also asking another organization called the Commissionaires to provide people who would be employed by the armed forces to go to Vancouver and Whistler for the Olympics.

Regarding Afghanistan, the units are in very bad shape because the cadre of leaders has not been available for months or for years. The succession of the units is a very big concern, and also the allowed strength of the unit. The gentleman said there have not been budget cuts. Maybe, but I can tell you that recruiting has been cut. Most of the units have a quota of 10 to 12 recruits.

If you take into consideration the length of time it takes to enrol, you have great difficulty in convincing.... You can do it, but it requires a lot of dedication and effort to convince these people to wait until they get a decision on whether they can enrol or not. After that, there's the problem of making sure they get enough money to pay for what they have to face as students.

Most of the initial clientele are students at the start.

● (0950)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Can I make a quick comment that? From what I am hearing, reservists come back. They have a high level of training with the regulars. They come back. They either join the regulars or get out entirely. But going back to the slower pace of the reserves...once you've been to Paris you don't want to stay on the farm. Once they've been there, they really either like it or that is what they want to continue, and that is having an effect on reserves.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: A small percentage of these people are able to join the regular force, but not all of them, because there aren't enough in the establishment. So some return to the units, but some don't or they get a class B, as we mentioned before.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will give the floor to Mr. Payne for five minutes.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming today. You have an interesting presentation.

I am a former member of the South Alberta Light Horse, so I value that training. I think it was extremely good for me. My son is a captain in the reserves there as well. He has just taken a posting as a class B.

You can correct me if I'm wrong, but any of these reservists who decide to go into the regular forces are not made to go in; they do this on a voluntary basis.

So in terms of recruiting, what we understood the other day from a presentation we had from General Semianiw is that recruiting comes from various levels throughout the whole country in terms of how they get these individuals, some of those obviously being reservists. My view of that as a reservist is that certainly if the opportunity is there and the individual wants to do that and can meet the criteria, that is really one of the things the reserves should be there for. I think we see those coming, and certainly people do come back to the reserves. Like with any other job, people move on. They may not be able to return to the job they had as part-time militia. A number of companies say that individuals can take a leave and continue to serve in the forces and then come back to that job. So those kinds of opportunities are available.

We did talk a bit about the Olympics as well. Certainly I would see that as a great opportunity for reservists. It is a huge event, and so we talked about the Commissionaires as well. My recollection of some of the other Olympics is that we have seen those types of individuals as well. I suspect it would not be totally RCMP and the military.

You talked about a change in the structure of the command. I don't have the timing of when that structure changed. Would you be able to enlighten the committee on that?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: It was the early 1990s. It was a change from militia commanded by militia officers to a total force concept, where the area was to be commanded by a one-star general, being regular force.

Mr. LaVar Payne: So this is well before Afghanistan?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: Yes, this is well before Afghanistan.

Mr. LaVar Payne: I guess in my civilian life I've seen organizations change structures, so I wouldn't expect anything different in the military, to certainly be up to date with what's going on in the country.

You also talked about potentially the training being slowed down. I'm fairly close with my son, and certainly I'm not sure he has advised me that training has slowed down, but potentially priorities might change because of certain things. I'm not sure if you would agree with that kind of statement or not.

• (0955)

MGen Frédéric Mariage: You're talking about collective training or individual training or—

Mr. LaVar Payne: Individual training.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: No, it hasn't slowed down. In fact, the requirement for training has increased. The level of requirement has increased.

But to get back to your point of class B, we are not against people serving in class B; in fact, we find it's good for them. But on the other hand, there are people who cannot be reservists because of today's requirements to be a reservist.

So you have a choice to make. Either you're a citizen soldier, where you're a citizen and you're a part-time soldier, or you become almost a full-time soldier and in your part time you're a citizen. Today the system prevents a lot of young people from joining the reserve or making a career in the reserve because of that.

To get back to Afghanistan, I think the effort that the reserve is making in Afghanistan is normal and should be done, but where we should be questioning them ourselves is on the infrastructure of the reserve. If the units are not capable of surviving in their community, then we think this would be the end of the militia and the reserve, and that's the case we're making here today.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I now give the floor to Mr. Paillé.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank you for being here with us. I am finding these discussions most interesting and enlightening.

Last week, Mr. Bachand made quick mention of some cuts that are going to be made, in rotation, starting in the month of January. I asked a question in this regard, but no one was able to provide me with an answer. I would like to come back to that issue.

In the case of the contracts between reservists and National Defence or the responsible authority, is the employer respecting its obligations? Is it entitled to proceed in this way, in other words to make temporary cuts?

Col Marcel Belleau: Obviously, labour law does not apply to the Armed Forces, as you are aware. Once a service is over, it is over. However — we must render unto Caesar what is Caesar's —, the contracts are, normally, respected. It remains that, for budgetary or other reasons, the military authorities are free to terminate a contract.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: In your opinion, is this the first time for such a thing to happen? Or, on the contrary, have you already witnessed such a situation?

Col Marcel Belleau: I was talking earlier about the matter of proportions. Perhaps this is the first time that so many reservists are being hired on contract. This situation was jokingly compared to a placement agency, but it really is no joke. These people are considered to be trained, prepared; we can call upon them, but if the task is finished, if we no longer need them or no longer have the money to pay them, then we can simply let them go.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: I was wondering what conditions were offered to militiamen or reservists in the contracts they are granted. Do they get social benefits? What really worries me, because I know some reservists, is the support provided to them once their deployment is finished. Are they offered the same support as that given to regular force members?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: First of all, coming back to the contract issue, a class C contract must be carried through until the end of its term. I believe that a class B contract can be revoked with notice.

Secondly, with regard to the protection of reservists, let us talk about post-traumatic stress syndrome. When the reservist comes back, he for one or two months falls under the authority of the army. Then, after he returns to his unit, in his region, the post-traumatic stress syndrome problems appear long after, perhaps 12 or 14 months later, and it is then that the soldier is left to his own devices.

The National Defence and Canadian Forces ombudsman made 12 recommendations and he gave the Canadian Forces until the end of 2008 to implement them. To date, to our knowledge at least, none of these recommendations have been followed. As a matter of fact, I believe — but I am not certain of this — that certain cases are going to be going to court, because there are reservists who are having discussions with lawyers in order to determine what their rights are.

• (1000)

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: I have a final question, and Mr. Bachand might also have one.

If you were able to take action today, if I told you that you were in charge of the file and were authorized to take concrete action, what would your first action, your first solution be?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: I would refer back to what we are recommending. I would choose the first issue, that of the confirmation of the primary roles of the Militia and an analysis of the structure.

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: In your opinion, that would really be the first move to make.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: We could begin with that. What is the role of the Militia? If, as the member was saying, it is a role of immediate support to the Regular Force, then we would know it, and the system would have to align itself accordingly, if such were the desire of the country and of the politicians.

We would then look at the structure. Is the structure adequate? Do we maintain the Militia as is or do we change its vocation?

I therefore would recommend that this role be confirmed, that it be studied and that we look at the structure.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madam Gallant, you have five minutes.

[English]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair and, through you, to our witnesses.

I do have to correct the record from the previous questioner. We need to step back and, as Mr. Hawn said before, look at the bigger picture.

First, there have been no cuts to the budget of the Department of National Defence. Second, there has been no reduction in the size of the reserve force. True, the total number of class B positions has been reduced, but that does not mean anyone has been let go or cut back. The total reserve force remains the same. Those who are no longer class B service go back to being on class A service and are still active members of the reserves. Would you agree that's a fair statement?

I do want to talk about some of the goodwill the government has already implemented to underscore the fact that this government is very much supportive of the reserves. First, the Canada first defence strategy commits to expanding the reserve force to 30,000 as well as outfitting the Canadian Forces with the equipment they need to do their jobs. It has been a steady complaint over the years that the reservist always had less than the best equipment to deal with, so we are improving that.

We've committed to expanding the Canadian Rangers. Here again, we are repositioning reservists from places where there is not as great a need to where there has been an obvious stated need. We speak to the north. There have been several discussions in this committee where there has been concern about northern and Arctic sovereignty. So we are expanding reservists; it's just that they're being repositioned to that location.

We implemented the reserve force pension plan. That had been a long-standing bone of contention whereby reservists, under previous governments, were not treated equally by regular forces. We implemented the job protection act for reservists under the Canada Labour Code and Public Service Employment Act.

I understand a number of provinces are also coming on board, so there is job protection for federal employees who choose to join the reserves, and as well for provincial employees. We did stand up a new reserve unit in Yellowknife and brought the Halifax Rifles back to service. As I mentioned, we're still training and outfitting several reserve forces in the Arctic.

My question has to do with the larger context here, which of course is Afghanistan. I'm sure you'll agree with me when I state that this mission is very dangerous and demands and requires significant preparation on the part of the troops deploying. In my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, we have several hundred people now in the States, in the desert, preparing to deploy. They'll be gone for several weeks, come back, and then leave their families once again.

The army reserve is fully engaged in supporting this Afghan mission, and indeed, the regular troops themselves say you can't tell a reservist fighting side by side with them from a regular force member. They are very well trained. On the Afghanistan mission, they're providing up to 20% of soldiers on each rotation.

Would you agree that training troops for the Afghan mission is a top priority for the army reserve and the Canadian Forces?

• (1005)

MGen Frédéric Mariage: It's definitely a top priority to make sure the reservists who volunteer to deploy in Afghanistan receive training the same or very close to that of their counterparts in the regular force. Regarding Afghanistan, I agree with you.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: When our regular forces deploy, leaving a position that there is no one else in the regular forces to fill, they go to the reservists to fill that position. Parliament has voted that we will withdraw from the combat mission in 2011. Doesn't it make sense that as these soldiers come back to their regular positions, the reservists will also scale back to part time?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: I agree with you. We're not disputing that. We're pointing out that during the seven years that Afghanistan has taken place, the militia units have been depleted of their leaders. Sixty per cent of the leadership of the reserve has been on full-time service, even class D in headquarters here in Ottawa and in the provinces. So you don't have the people at the unit, the cadre for the recruits that you're bringing in for the people who are still in class A. You don't have the instructors to train these people, because they're not available. You push basic training, because they don't have enough instructors. In 2011 we're going to pull out of Afghanistan, but it's going to take a while to get back to normal; the damage has been done. Still we continue.

I want to get back to the way the system works today. Yes, one role of the militia is to make sure we support the regular force under the deployment. But if you do that at the expense of the institution, then you have a big problem. What we are saying is that we should revisit the structure and the role of the militia. We should give the militia the resources to fulfill all these roles, which we do not have right now.

Regarding what you said about job protection, I was instrumental in starting that. I created the CFLC myself. It's a voluntary signature that you're going to do that, but it doesn't mean that you're really going to do it. I would ask you how many reservists the people who signed this document have on their payroll. You'll find that there are very few.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I was looking at the recommendations you put forward. Is there any priority to them? Your two major thrusts seem to be that you need resources and you need to fulfill the role of the militia. If we were trying to roll this out, what would you prioritize, and what would be your timeframe?

•(1010)

MGen Frédéric Mariage: Could you repeat your question?

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: You have given out a sheet with recommendations on it. In order to deal with your fundamental points, which are to fulfill the role of the militia and provide the appropriate resources, how would you prioritize this list? What do you think we should be doing first, and what is your timeframe for doing it? We still have Afghanistan until 2011, we have the Olympics, we have two international summits, and we are seeing the effect on the units across the country.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: I'd say our priority should be recruiting and pay levels. I'm talking about the system, not just saying we're going to increase the number of recruits. I'm saying you should look at the system of recruiting—the selection, the enrolment, the courses, and the planning. It doesn't work. We should also look at the authorized pay levels in the militia units, with a view to increasing the number of people in the units.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: When you say that it doesn't work, can you provide us at a later date with—

MGen Frédéric Mariage: Okay, let's say I'm a young student. because most of the time we start with students, I come to a unit and I knock on the door and say, I want to join you guys, thanks. So you're going to fill out a thick stack of paper and you have to come once or twice or three times to the unit and make sure that everything is correct and all the documents are there, the comma's at the right place and so forth, and then this is sent to a recruiting centre. This is depending on where you live.

You'll be called two or three times to go to the recruiting centre in Montreal, or in Three Rivers, or in Quebec City, so you have to travel to go to the recruiting centre. It takes maybe two visits, most of the time three visits. Then after that, if you're lucky and you do business with a very good recruiting centre, in four or five weeks you are going to get a decision so you so you can be enrolled and serve with the unit. The average in Montreal, from what we're told by the unit commanders, is six to eight months. There are all sorts of

reasons for that. I'm not saying the recruiting centres don't do their jobs, but they have some other priorities. The navy needs people, so the militia is there and so the navy goes on the top, and then it's something else, and so on.

The other thing is that the system is not customer friendly. The system is geared to people who want to join the regular forces. For the militia it's evenings or it's weekends, but most of the recruiting centres are not open in the evenings and not open during the weekends.

After that you're enrolled. Then you get to a unit and then you have to qualify to different courses, by blocks. So they say okay, now, this is the calendar. There will be a training on that block on such and such a date. It's good. The system in principle looks very good. But by the way, we're sorry, but because of a lack of instructors, or because of this, or because the timeframe doesn't take into consideration the students who are out there, their exams, and so forth, the course is cancelled. So it's next year. And so forth and so forth.

So what we're saying is that the system, the enrolment and the selection and the training, has to be revisited and geared to who are your clientele, who are your customers? This has been going on for the last 25 years. It's not just today. Since 25 years ago there have been commissions set up, and Professor Granatstein was on one commission with the judge and General Belzile, and before that there was another commission. They studied that, and it hasn't improved a bit.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: What I understand, then, is that our methods have not kept pace with what we're doing with the regular forces in terms of recruitment, encouragement, and making it much more user friendly?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Good timing.

The Chair: Good timing. You're perfect.

Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, both of you gentlemen, for being here this morning and for your presentations to us.

I wanted to start with a question on the topic of Afghanistan. The reserves make up about 20% of our forces in Afghanistan. I wanted to start by getting a sense from you in terms of the appropriateness or the reasonableness of that number, the 20%. Is that the number to be expected? Is it too high? Is it too low?

•(1015)

MGen Frédéric Mariage: Are you asking me the question as a reservist or, let's say, if I were the commander of the land force?

Mr. Peter Braid: Just generally speaking.

MGen Frédéric Mariage: Generally speaking. In order to answer your question, may I read from my presentation?

This massive use of reservists imitates the American model, and to some extent the British model. Indeed, in 2005, 46% of U.S. troops in Iraq were from the National Guard, transforming it, in the process, from a strategic reserve to a day-to-day deployment force identified as an operational reserve.

Today, the National Guard has serious difficulty in recruiting without extraordinary incentives. The support of employers is beginning to crumble. In addition, the Governors of States even fear that the Guard will no longer be available for local defence ("Homeland Defense") and as aid to civil authority.

The situation is similar in the United Kingdom where the Territorial Army has lost thousands of members through attrition and employers avoid hiring reservists for fear of their frequent deployments.

And I read last week that the British government cut the funds to the Territorial Army but there was such a political...that they had to reverse back to giving the full budget to the Territorial Army.

To continue:

From these observations of the experiences of the United States and the United Kingdom, we must realize that the massive use of the Militia to plug empty positions within the regular force is not any more viable here in Canada, especially without major changes.

Mr. Peter Braid: If I could ask you about training, then, if I understand correctly your presentation and your responses to previous questions, you seem to suggest that you're concerned that the reserve militia is being overtrained. I'm not quite sure I completely understand that. I would suggest that the reverse—if they were being undertrained—would be much more serious. I just want to understand that a little more clearly.

If the issue is that they're being overtrained because of the likelihood of being deployed to Afghanistan, then clearly we need to make sure our reserve soldiers are properly trained so that they can do the job we expect of them. How do we deal with that? How do we reconcile that?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: There's no doubt... And we are not the ones saying this. Regular generals, serving generals, are saying that the regular forces are overqualified in terms of all the things they have to study or go through. If that pattern is implemented in the reserves, then you have the reservists also becoming overqualified.

Now, you have to distinguish between what is the qualification to go to war and serve in Afghanistan and what is the qualification to serve as a reservist in normal conditions in the country in regard to facing a domestic crisis. What we're saying is let's look at the minimum requirement to be a reservist. Let's establish how a reservist has to be trained to do the job that you people decide is the role of the militia. Then, after that, on a volunteer basis, anybody who has the time and the will and who wants to do that can continue with their qualifications.

Obviously, then, if you have to deploy these people in a theatre of operations in combat, then you increase the level of training, but you don't need the whole of the militia staff and instructors across the country to be trained for that purpose, which is the case in actuality and which then prevents young people, talented people, and ambitious people from joining the militia. Also, it creates the problem of succession at the units.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll give the floor to Mr. Boughen for five minutes.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, gentlemen. Thanks for sharing part of your morning with us.

As I listen to the discussion, I hear a lot of what I think is concern around the rethinking of the reservists in terms of operational truth, and there are thoughts about whether there is something wrong with restructuring the militia as we find it today. I'm just wondering if you could share with me your thoughts on that.

We're looking at a unit with a long history and long-standing service to Canada. I'm kind of wondering what we would do differently in the restructuring of the whole operation.

• (1020)

Col Marcel Belleau: What we are saying is that we have to—not we, but you—think about what kind of reserves Canada wants. There are two different philosophies of having reserves.

With a country like Canada, which does not have a big population and either does not want or cannot afford a big regular force, you have to rely on the reserves for different occasions. The biggest threat, the biggest occasion, that you will have to rely on the reserves for is if you have a national emergency—call it what you want—and you have to expand to have a larger force. Then you have to rely on structures, on units, like we did in the last world war.

Or you can have another system that is purely a reinforcement of regular forces with individuals, not units. What we are saying is that by the back door, without any decisions made officially by you people, what is going on now is that we seem to be switching from one system to the other. This is what we wanted to raise before you.

That is what our concern is: we seem to be switching from the unit system, with a presence of militia people all around the country, to a kind of system where you have only individuals that you train and send to the regulars when they are in need of such people. This is our concern.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Following up on that a little bit, if we're spending a lot of time and effort in training men and women for the militia.... I heard you say in your presentation that the retention is pretty low. When people come back from a mission, they tend to leave the reserves, to a fairly large extent. What do you see as something that could be implemented to make sure the reservists stay with the program? After the time, energy, and resources put into the training, it's a shame to see them leave.

What are your thoughts on that? How can we keep the reservists as reservists?

MGen Frédéric Mariage: Well, additionally, being a reservist, you're a volunteer. If you want to train during an evening or a weekend, you decide to do that. If you don't want to do it, you don't come to the unit and that's it. The reserves have always been like that.

For the reserves to be very effective, you need two things. First, you need to give them the resources. Don't change the resources. Keep the resources and then increase them from time to time, but don't play up and down with the resources. Secondly, the units have to be provided with the right leadership. Leadership has to come from the community where they serve, because people know each other. You have a commanding officer who is the leader. He can influence. He can convince the young guys or the workers to come and train during the weekends. He can say they're going to do this, or they're going to do that. That's the way the reserves have always been and it has been successful like that.

Today we're getting away from that. In terms of the resources, even if you say the budget has not been cut, go and live with the unit and you will see the way they operate. They spend most of their time as accountants, not as leaders. What we need are leaders to lead and to convince these young guys to come and train. The way the system is now, actually most of the commanding officers, not all of them but most of the ex-regulars who have either left the force or taken their retirement, join the reserve, and because of lack of qualification in the other ranks, they are put in charge of the units. They are not reservists. They don't come from the local community.

If it's not an ex-regular, then most of the time we'll switch to a reservist who is on class B full time. It's good for him, he has a good pay, but it is not what the system is all about. With this system—I can give you names of commanding officers—most of the mayors of big municipalities have commanded the unit in their communities. As I said, you have prime ministers who have been in the militia. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court—he's dead now—was in the reserve. These people have come out of their local community, they

know the people, and because they were there also, they are an example for the young people and the workers. We are dragging away from that, and this is our big concern. This is the concern we have.

Today, I couldn't serve in the reserve; I couldn't have done what I've done as a career. People such as the president of a subsidiary of IBM have told me, "I will hire reservists, but they'll have to make a choice to be a citizen or a soldier. If they want to be a soldier, I cannot afford to have them on my payroll." That's what the system is dragging to. That's the big concern we have.

Yes, we want to support the regular force, we want to have trained people to go on combat missions, and so forth. But we're saying, don't ask the whole community of reservists to be like that, because you're going to kill the whole system.

● (1025)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

General Mariage and Colonel Belleau, I wish to thank you. Your presentations were most useful to Committee members. I also wish to thank you for having accepted to appear on such short notice. Indeed, it is just last week that we invited you to appear before our Committee.

We will now suspend for five minutes, after which time we will resume in camera.

[*The meeting continued in camera.*]

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