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Chair

Mr. Stephen Fuhr

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.)): Welcome, everybody, to the defence committee today to continue our discussion on Canada and NATO.

I'd like to welcome a couple of guests by video. From Vancouver we have Dr. Michael Byers, and from Winnipeg we have Dr. Andrea Charron.

Welcome, and thank you both very much for joining us today.

We're still waiting on Ms. Mason. We'll start the conversation, and hopefully she can jump in when she gets upstairs.

You guys are very familiar here. We've seen you a number of times.

I'll turn the floor over to you, Dr. Charron, for the first 10-minute comment.

Dr. Andrea Charron (Assistant Professor, Political Science, Director, Centre for Defence and Security Studies, University of Manitoba, As an Individual): Thank you very much, and thank you for the invitation.

I wish to raise two issues concerning Canada's involvement in NATO. The first is a neglected area of strategic significance—namely, the Greenland-Iceland-U.K. gap, which is the very busy sea-line of communication in the North Atlantic that was notorious during the Cold War for enemy sub activity. The other is NATO's potential participation in Canada's Arctic, which I suggest should be discouraged.

The North Atlantic and the sea-lines of communication to NATO Europe are returning to prominence. This is largely driven by Russian naval developments and, to a much lesser degree, Chinese. NATO maritime defence co-operation therefore needs to be reconsidered. The end of the Cold War has removed the North Atlantic from the defence and security agenda. Supreme Allied Command Atlantic, or SACLANT, was the primary structure for allied North Atlantic defence, but it was stood down and was replaced by the generic Allied Command Transformation. Allied naval co-operation moved to the periphery, concentrating on missions in the Persian Gulf and off the Horn of Africa related to the series of conflicts that captured allied attention at the time.

More recently, allied naval attention has concentrated on the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, and the Baltic Sea in response to Russian activities attended by the two standing NATO maritime groups under the command of Allied Maritime Command, MARCOM, located in Northwood, England.

With the North Atlantic returning to the defence agenda, several priorities emerged that naturally raised issues for the Canada-U.S. relationship and Canada-NATO relationship. The Royal Canadian Navy and the United States Navy have a long history of co-operation dating back to World War II and through the Cold War. Since then, the RCN has remained actively engaged with the USN, particularly evident in the ability of Canadian vessels to integrate and thus replace American vessels in the U.S. carrier task force.

This also extends to select NATO nations, especially the United Kingdom, and to the Royal Navy. However, this capability has been largely limited to the tactical level of co-operation. Command-and-control arrangements like those under SACLANT during the Cold War as well as related exercises among the allied navies, formal divisions of areas of responsibility, and protection of the sea-lines of communication are largely absent.

At the same time, antisubmarine warfare, especially related to the North Atlantic and former Soviet threat, are also absent as a training priority. The RCN in particular, once the allied exemplar, has largely lost its ASW expertise. Post-Cold War tasks naturally obtained priority over ASW, reflecting the threat environment of the last two-plus decades even though submarines have proliferated within the developing world. Nor was there any pressing need to exercise the reinforcement of NATO's northern flank. Limited and shrinking naval resources on both sides of the Atlantic relative to the political and operational demand required choices to be made, and the obvious choice was to neglect the North Atlantic. Moreover, Russian naval activity in the North Atlantic largely disappeared as a function at the end of the Cold War and with the lack of resources in the context of the political, social, and economic upheavals that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Even with the emergence of the post-9/11 terrorist threat and its maritime dimension, there was no need to resurrect these arrangements. The maritime terrorist threat to the east coast of North America in particular was primarily an area for intelligence co-operation. However, over roughly the last decade, political relations between NATO and Russia have deteriorated. New generations of Russian naval capabilities, including longer-range surface and subsurface cruise missiles, now pose a growing maritime threat. As a result, NATO's northern flank has re-emerged as a security concern. Maritime defence cannot be ignored, and this issue, especially over the Atlantic, brings the coastal European allies and thus NATO into play.

There are two distinct albeit interrelated perspectives on this. One is that of NATO Europe, with an emphasis on the members bordering the North Atlantic, and the other is that of USNORTHCOM/NORAD. To cut to the chase, the issue involves the seams and gaps between EUCOM and NATO, between NORAD and USNORTHCOM, between USNORTHCOM and EUCOM, and ultimately Canada's assistance to all of these organizations.

The other issue I want to touch on is the suggestion, at least by my reading of “Strong, Secure, Engaged”, that NATO exercises in Canada's Arctic may be a possibility in the future, reversing a long-standing practice of inviting individual NATO members but not NATO as a whole. This, I think, needs to be discouraged.

Of course, this sounds very contradictory. If Russia and the sea-lines of communication are potentially at risk in the North Atlantic, why say yes to more attention for the GIUK gap, for example, and not Canada's Arctic? My answer to this is that Russia is attempting to upset European security, of which the GIUK gap is one conduit and an essential transatlantic link.

To date, however, Russian participation and activity in the Arctic has been fairly productive. This is largely a function, I think, of the Arctic Council and its mandate and the importance of the Arctic for Russia.

I'm not suggesting that Canada cease to surveil the Arctic, which it does principally via NORAD and its air and aerospace warning air control and maritime warning missions. Instead, I am suggesting that Canada needs to re-investigate with its allies the surveillance responsibilities of the North Atlantic, which will necessitate a conversation with NATO, NORAD, and USNORTHCOM and its U. S. fleet forces, as well as EUCOM.

Thank you very much.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much for those remarks.

Dr. Byers, the floor is yours.

Dr. Michael Byers (Professor, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia, As an Individual): Thank you very much. It's a great honour to be back.

I'm going to address three issues today, but before I do so, let me tell you about an article I was reading this morning that was written four years ago by my friend Jack Granatstein, in which he raised the question as to whether Canada should stay in NATO. He didn't answer the question, but my point is that he was raising the question four years ago.

He wouldn't raise that question today. I don't think anyone would raise that question today. We have seen, for instance, the annexation of Crimea in March 2014. We have credible evidence of widespread Russian intervention through cyberspace in elections in western countries, including the Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom and the U.S. election, with our most important ally. I'll talk about cybersecurity in a few minutes, but there's no question that it's better to be together than to be divided. Our opponents will seek to divide us. That is a strategic move on their part, and NATO is therefore just as important today as it has been in the past.

There are three areas that I will address, first of all with a couple of additional comments on the Arctic, to add to my colleague's points, which I agree with; secondly and briefly, with regard to cyberspace; and then with a couple of minutes on NATO spending and the question as to whether Canada needs to raise its percentage of GDP in terms of financial contributions.

On the issue of the Arctic, I think it's important to underline that there are in fact, from a security organizational perspective, two Arctics. There is the European Arctic, which the Americans regard as part of U.S. European Command, which is very much a NATO co-operative exercise. There is the North American Arctic, which from an American perspective is NORTHCOM, and from a Canadian perspective is a NORAD mission, not a NATO mission. That dividing line goes up Baffin Bay and the Nares Strait, dividing Greenland from North America, in terms of those two different organizational missions.

There is very little prospect, I think, that the United States is going to let NATO into a NORTHCOM domain. When the Europeans talk about bringing NATO into the Arctic, insofar as they're talking about Greenland, Iceland, and Norway, I think that's a good thing. That's something we can support, but in terms of the North American Arctic, we have that very much under control with our American allies.

Also, as the point has already been made, that's not where the security threat is anyway. That's mostly a surveillance and a search and rescue mission. There are things that we can do to improve that, such as, for instance, buying a full six satellites for RADARSAT Constellation instead of the present three. I can talk about that at greater length if you wish, but NATO is not coming to the North American Arctic. NATO does...and is already in the European Arctic.

In terms of cyberspace, I think this is an issue of enormous concern, particularly because Russia is becoming exceedingly adept in this domain. We've seen real impacts of this. But all of the normal considerations that apply in any military domain apply with regard to cyberspace, such as the security dilemma. Canada and our NATO allies need to be very careful, through our own actions, not to create an arms race in cyberspace to feed Russian anxiety and a Russian desire to build up. Our actions should be defensive, not offensive, unless we are actually attacked and can attribute that attack back to a state actor.

There are also real concerns about escalation. How do you actually keep a conflict confined to cyberspace? At what point do people start to look at nodes in the communication network, at fibre optic cables on the ocean floor, and at satellites in orbit?

● (1545)

A cyber-conflict can escalate out of control very quickly. Therefore, a defensive stance rather than an offensive stance is absolutely necessary here. There's nothing terribly unique about cyberspace. Let's not lose sight of all of these strategic considerations that apply in other domains when we start talking about computers.

Finally, on Canada's contribution to NATO, the 2.0% of GDP is a goal. It's one that different countries measure in different ways in terms of their contributions. Canada is actually quite cautious in measuring what constitutes military spending. For instance, we don't count the Canadian Coast Guard. Other countries have armed coast guards. They count them as part of their military spending. One way to ramp up Canadian military spending in a very quick way is to put a light deck gun on the front of every Canadian Coast Guard vessel, with a couple of Canadian Forces personnel on board to man the weapon. You would get an instant boost. It would be the same with the patrol boats that operate on the Great Lakes and on the east and west coasts dealing with illegal immigrants and smugglers. Generally, other countries would count RCMP missions as part of military spending. So it depends on what you count.

The other thing we don't count right now is this incredible amount of future spending that is locked into our procurement plans. We're not counting the Canadian surface combatants, which will be in the range of a $60-billion expenditure. We don't count the replacement aircraft for our fighter jet fleet and other things. Canada has made some really major commitments in terms of future spending—in most cases not with contracts signed, but still, commitments made, and commitments that will need to be kept from a practical perspective. That needs to be explained to our allies, that we are in fact seeking to recapitalize the Canadian Armed Forces.

My last comment in that regard is that given the renewed importance of NATO, and given that we do desperately need to recapitalize the Canadian Armed Forces, this is the time to accelerate those big defence procurements. It's simply not acceptable to think that most of these new ships won't arrive for a couple of decades. It's simply not acceptable to punt the fighter jet procurement issue past the next federal election, which is what I suspect is happening right now.

If we're going to be a serious partner in NATO, we need to carry through on our promises. We don't need to raise defence spending just because the American president says we should. We need to keep our plans, our promises, with regard to defence spending so that we have a capable armed forces that can be a reliable ally in missions that are important to Canada.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Byers.

Ambassador Mason, the floor is yours.

Ms. Peggy Mason (President, Rideau Institute on International Affairs): Thank you.

Thank you very much for inviting me to address the committee today on Canada's involvement in NATO.

My comments will relate to the extremely important and very topical issue of NATO's nuclear posture. I bring to these comments my professional expertise in the area of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, including heading the Canadian delegation to international conferences to review the operation of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The treaty sets out the international rules and obligations for the 191 states party to that treaty, which the North Atlantic Council in its September 20 statement described as “the heart of global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts for almost 50 years”.

Canada, of course, is a non-nuclear-weapon state party to that treaty, as are all of the other NATO members with the exception of the United States, the U.K., and France, who are nuclear-weapon states party to that treaty. The treaty sets up two groups. The vast majority are the non-nuclear, with five declared nuclear-weapon states.

Under article VI of that treaty, as interpreted unanimously by the 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, all states party to the NPT, whether non-nuclear or nuclear, are under a legally binding obligation “to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control”. This legally binding international obligation stands in sharp contrast to the strictly political commitment made by NATO member states to its nuclear posture, and not a legal obligation, there being no reference whatsoever to nuclear weapons in the North Atlantic Treaty.

From the 1970 entry into force of the NPT, there has been a controversy over the self-evident contradiction between the non-nuclear-weapon states party to that treaty, such as Canada, Norway, and the Netherlands, and our participation in a nuclear-armed alliance. The justification has always been that NATO's nuclear posture predates the treaty and therefore is somehow justifiable, although there is no wording in the treaty to that effect or that would support that. Canada in the past has tried very hard to minimize this contradiction in the most productive way—that is, to live up to the NPT's “good faith” nuclear disarmament obligation—by championing measures like a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty. Even in the dark days of the Cold War, when the U.S.A. was adamantly against it—in UN meetings of the UN western consultation group that I chaired, they would smash their fist down on the table, accusing NATO test ban co-sponsors like Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands of treason against NATO for doing so—we still supported it. In fact we were a lead co-sponsor of the test ban treaty. Finally, in the end, the U.S. joined it.

At the end of the Cold War, with the resulting huge decreases in the nuclear arsenals of the then Soviet Union and the United States, conditions were such that the 1990 London summit of NATO heads of government even made the following statement: “However, in the transformed Europe, [NATO member states] will be able to adopt a new NATO strategy making nuclear forces truly weapons of last resort.” Such a declaration was totally in keeping with one of the central lessons of the Cold War—very, very relevant for today—that a nuclear war can never be won and so must never be fought. The only possible utility of nuclear weapons is to deter their use by others until such time as they are entirely eliminated.

The logical consequence of this summit declaration was a new post-Cold War NATO strategic doctrine adopting a “no first use” policy. Tragically, that was not the result of the NATO 1991 review of its strategic doctrine. Instead, unbelievably, the most powerful conventional military alliance on earth reiterated the need for nuclear weapons as a means to prevent war and not just to deter the use of other nuclear weapons. Every strategic doctrine review since then has reaffirmed the necessity of nuclear weapons, not only to deter their use by others but for the prevention of war. In effect, NATO is saying to all the 162 other non-nuclear-weapon states party to the NPT outside of NATO, “Don't do as we do, do as we say.”

● (1550)

To go back to the NPT, despite repeated pledges at NPT review conferences held every five years since the 1990 London summit that they would pursue concrete steps towards nuclear disarmament, first the bilateral Russia-U.S.A. negotiations floundered, and then, most recently, all nine nuclear-armed states—five inside the NPT and four outside—began nuclear weapons modernization programs, with the trillion-dollar plus American modernization program dwarfing all the rest, since Trump has raised the amount from a trillion dollars to more than a trillion.

This program is of particular relevance to NATO non-nuclear-weapon states like Canada that are party to the NPT, because it involves the introduction of U.S.A. so-called tactical nuclear weapons into five non-nuclear-weapon states party to the NPT that are also NATO basing countries—namely, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy, and Turkey—to receive upgraded B61 nuclear weapons with lower yield and greater precision. I say “so-called tactical”—that's a typical term by former disarmament ambassadors—because it is inconceivable that any detonation of nuclear weapons, however precise, would not have strategic effects.

These lower-yield, more precise tactical nukes are the very characteristics that caused the U.S. Congress to ban the development of these weapons in the 1990s. Congress argued that they created, quote, “the illusion of usability,” when the only rational use of nuclear weapons is to deter their use by anyone.

In the meantime, the vast majority of the international community was becoming increasingly frustrated by the failure of the conference on disarmament to agree even on a work program, never mind actual steps towards nuclear disarmament. Despite this, Canada continued to espouse a step-by-step process akin to walking slowly forward on a conveyor belt toward the ever-receding nuclear disarmament horizon while the belt itself hurtled in the other direction towards a world with ever-increasingly lethal nuclear weapons.

This dissatisfaction led ultimately to the majority of UN member states launching a multilateral negotiation for a nuclear prohibition treaty by a majority vote of the UN General Assembly in December 2016. This negotiation culminated in a new treaty text, which was approved by 122 UN member states on July 7 of this year and opened for signature at the UN on September 20, 2017, and which now has 53 signatories. If those 53 signatories ratify, it will come into effect within 90 days after the ratification.

By this point, Canada abandoned all pretext of pursuing meaningful nuclear disarmament measures as required by its article VI obligations under the NPT and instead unequivocally threw its lot in with the western nuclear-weapons states party to the NPT. This spurning of multilateral disarmament negotiations against all our history and tradition culminated in Canada agreeing to an extraordinary statement issued by the North Atlantic Council commenting on the nuclear prohibition treaty on the very day it opened for signature, which I think has to mark one of the lowest points in NATO's history.

The statement contains multiple errors, misinterpretations of international law, and just plain inanities, which would be bad enough if they were only being mouthed by nuclear-weapons states, but which are shockingly inappropriate for a non-nuclear-weapon state party to the NPT like Canada, with its long and proud history of championing nuclear disarmament even in the darkest days of the Cold War. The most egregious assertion in this NAC statement is that the nuclear ban treaty, quote, “risks undermining the NPT”. Precisely the opposite is true. Those states that sought to prevent the ban treaty negotiation and that are now futilely trying to prevent it coming into force are of course the ones that are undermining the NPT. The second blatantly inaccurate statement is that the nuclear ban treaty, quote, “will not engage any state actually possessing nuclear weapons”. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Here's the treaty. I've attached it to my written statement. I hope everyone reads it.

Article VI of this treaty lays out in detail two methods for nuclear-weapons states to join the treaty, through a destroy-and-join methodology or a join-and-destroy process, with the IAEA, from whom they received advice, as the appropriate international body to take control of all resulting fissile material from deactivated nuclear weapons.

● (1555)

I'll go to my closing point. I'll leave out the inanities listed in my written statement.

The September 20 NAC statement ends with the extraordinary words that “[NATO] would not accept any argument that this [ban] treaty reflects or in any way contributes to the development of customary international law”. Happily for the rest of us, it is not up to NATO but instead is up to the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court to determine what constitutes customary international law.

But having raised that issue, perhaps they might want to read once more the International Court of Justice advisory opinion, to which I referred earlier, on the illegality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons except in the very narrowest of circumstances where, quote, the "very survival" of a state might be at stake. The court ruled that in every other circumstance, the use of nuclear weapons, and therefore the threat to use them, would be manifestly illegal under international law because of the inability of the use of nuclear weapons to meet the fundamental requirements of international humanitarian law in terms of discrimination between military and civilian targets and proportionality between the military objective and collateral damage. Thus, the statement by the head of the U.S. Air Force at the Halifax security forum last weekend to the effect that he would never follow an order to use nuclear weapons that was illegal under international law was perhaps even more meaningful than he had intended.

So where does all this leave Canada? The answer is clear. It is our legal obligation under article VI of the NPT to begin the process—this of course will take a while—of signing and ratifying the nuclear ban treaty by absenting ourselves from NATO's nuclear doctrine and beginning a dialogue within NATO with the aim of convincing other non-nuclear-weapon states in NATO to similarly renounce NATO's unnecessary, dangerously provocative, and counterproductive nuclear posture. Three NATO member states, by the way, voted in favour of the ban treaty negotiation, so there are allies out there.

How can NATO, the most powerful conventional military alliance on earth, assert that it needs nuclear weapons for its security while we tell North Korea, facing off against the United States and its allies, that it does not?

Thank you very much.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your comments.

I'll give the floor to Ms. Alleslev.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you all for being here.

I'd like to start with a question around NATO membership. The NATO alliance, of course, has been touted as being very fundamental to our western liberal ideals, and also, of course, is underpinned by the fact that we do have shared values, ideals, approaches, and, in particular, democratic principles. We have a very stringent mechanism for having countries become members, but we do not have a mechanism for people to no longer be members.

Is now the time to start having that conversation? Should we be investigating whether or not there should be an approach to continue and review whether those members and partners continue to share our values? If so, what kind of conversation should that be? I'd like to hear from all of you on that.

Dr. Byers.

Dr. Michael Byers: The first thing to say here is that some of the newer members of NATO clearly deserved to become members of NATO. Think of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—independent countries that were invaded and annexed by the Soviet Union, and that became free and independent again only after the Cold War. It was a great thing that we admitted them to NATO. Right now they need our help, and Canada is providing some with our troops in Latvia.

I think your question goes more to those countries who are moving away from what we would call a free and democratic system. Here I'd be thinking of Turkey, Hungary, and increasingly Poland. But I would suggest that talking publicly about removing their NATO membership is waving a very, very big stick, and perhaps missing out on a lot of soft power and diplomacy and even economic pressure that could be applied before we get to that ultimate decision.

There's nothing that Russia would like more than for us to eject a country like Hungary or Turkey from NATO. This is not the time to be raising that ultimate punishment. But yes, I am concerned about what's happening in these countries, and all other forms of diplomatic and economic pressure should be considered to bring them back in line.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: If I could just follow up on that, though, should we not be having a conversation about when you've hit that tipping point as a country before we actually have a country that has hit that tipping point? Isn't the strength of the conversation in having it with all the members before you arrive at a point where you're singling out a single member?

● (1605)

Dr. Michael Byers: We could initiate a discussion, absolutely, about whether there are political standards for continued NATO membership. There's nothing wrong with that. But this is not an opportune time. Let me remind you that Canada and NATO more broadly have co-operated with autocratic countries in military missions. There were undemocratic Arab states involved in our mission in Libya, with air forces from those countries.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: But there is a difference, is there not, between a member country, where you're subject to article V, and someone who you are partnering with on a mission?

Dr. Michael Byers: Absolutely. My point simply is that we are not absolutely pure in our conviction that our partners must always be fully democratic countries. Within NATO, it's a very big concern that countries like Turkey and Hungary are straying away from fundamental democratic principles: absolutely. My point simply is that there is a gradation of measures that can be taken to try to bring them back in line. Removing them from NATO now, or even having that discussion at a prominent place in the public sphere, is exactly what our opponents would wish.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Dr. Charron.

Dr. Andrea Charron: I agree with everything Dr. Byers has said. I think kicking states out for bad behaviour has never compelled them to think, "Gee, maybe I should I reconsider what I'm doing." Often it emboldens them: "I'm doing something that is different, that is bold, and that creates a rally round the flag effect." I don't think—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: But we've never done it. We've never had a conversation about it. I mean, the thought of it has never arisen. I'm not sure we can say it's not effective, or it hasn't worked, because I don't think at any point we have. Would that be a fair statement?

Dr. Andrea Charron: I'm thinking of a wider context, as in the United Nations, as in other organizations like the Commonwealth, Francophonie, etc.

I agree with Dr. Byers that we need to have conversations. Do we need to use, as you've said, these soft skills that we have? For now, to say, "Amend your ways or you're out of NATO," I think would be really damaging, at this point, for the NATO alliance.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I have two thoughts on that. One, I don't think it's black or white, in or out. I think any conversation would have to be somewhat like an employment conversation, when you're looking at trying to change an employee's behaviour. There's a written warning, then there's a performance review, and all those steps before termination. Then you know you're on that path, and you've had that conversation.

The second point I'd like you to consider is that because of article V, the stakes are perhaps higher than even membership in, let's say, a similar organization like the UN. What would you say?

Dr. Andrea Charron: I think James Eayrs comes to mind. He often said that if we are too idealistic in our foreign policy, we start to look like the stern voice of the daughter of God, and then people stop listening to us.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Ambassador—

The Chair: You're out of time.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Am I? Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Thank you.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here.

Dr. Charron, I was a little surprised when you spoke about NATO's involvement in the north and northern Canada. I'd like to flesh that out a little bit as far as NORAD, NATO, and the Arctic Council are concerned—how that's all functioning, and why you think that is a reason for not having NATO more actively involved in the Arctic. What is the Arctic Council doing right that actually makes you put a lot of faith in that as being something that can serve part of that role?

Dr. Andrea Charron: The Arctic Council has eight Arctic states, but it also has a lot of other members, including other states. What we've seen with the Arctic Council, even though its mandate is fairly restrictive on environmental protection and sustainable development, is that it has included Russia. We've had quite a few agreements come out of the Arctic Council that have made co-operation the modus operandi in the Arctic. That's largely because Russia is the largest Arctic player, bar none. Any way you measure it, Russia is essential to the Arctic. Because of the proximity of Russia to Canada and the U.S. Arctic, the North American Arctic, if we start inserting the need to have NATO exercises right on the doorstep of Russia, I think that's creating problems that we don't have. Right now the Arctic Council works well on issues. It is the one issue area where we can have a side conversation with Russia about other geopolitical events. I would hate to see that shut down because of precipitous action in the form of a NATO exercise.

● (1610)

Mr. Randy Hoback: So if we're not utilizing NATO in the Arctic, and we go back to NORAD and Canada's involvement in NORAD, then what should we be looking at for our involvement? What do we need to modernize, and what do we need to ensure that we have the capabilities to properly protect the north?

Dr. Andrea Charron: Well, there was a whole other committee on that, that looked at NORAD modernization. It's ongoing via EVONAD and things like the upgrading of the north warning system. It's looking at changing its command and control system to have a theatre or combined air force combat and command structure based at Tyndall. That conversation is separate. I'm suggesting that the conversation about how NORAD and USNORTHCOM are surveilling, defending, the homeland also has to be considered along with the area of responsibility for NATO, because I think there is a big gap there that we have forgotten about.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Yes, that was my next question. How do they plug in together? How do they work together? When does NATO get involved and when doesn't NATO get involved? When do you find that happy—

Dr. Andrea Charron: Well, that's one of the things that need to be exercised and looked at. At the tactical level they'll do it, but at a strategic level we've stopped doing it, largely because we don't have the SACLANT position anymore. It speaks to the different areas of responsibility, the fact that USNORTHCOM goes out to 500 miles, that NORAD and Canada have a different area that they will surveil, and what the U.K. does versus NATO. It's often event-driven, so maybe we need to look at this more strategically and have a look at those gaps, because they are ones that can be taken advantage of.

Mr. Randy Hoback: So there are gaps there that obviously we now need to take a strategic look at, would you say?

Dr. Andrea Charron: That's what I would suggest.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Is there anything really glaring or alarming that you would like to shine a light on, at this point in time?

Dr. Andrea Charron: I'm suggesting the GIUK gap, based on where the Kola Peninsula is. That's the main sea-line of communication for Russian vessels travelling from the Arctic to the North Atlantic. That's an area we haven't been watching as closely as we did in the past.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Okay. So that's something we definitely need to focus on.

Dr. Andrea Charron: Yes.

Mr. Randy Hoback: One of the other areas I've developed a lot of interest in is cybersecurity, and the Russian involvement in cybersecurity. How do you react to what we've seen going on in Ukraine, and NATO's and Canada's responsibilities regarding these types of cyber-attacks and cyber-warfare? Do you think we're properly prepared for that?

Dr. Andrea Charron: As seen in “Strong, Secure, Engaged”, the Canadian Armed Forces is aware, as is NATO, that the cyber-domain is now a potential theatre of operations. They're trying to guard themselves against that. I'm not a cyber expert, so all I can do is encourage them to continue considering what it is that needs to be done. I think we also need more training on things like social media, because that's often how our troops in Europe are being undermined. There are fake news stories coming out about their intent and their activities, and more training could help the Canadian Armed Forces to counter that.

Mr. Randy Hoback: That's a good point. We heard in some media just this last week of our forces in Latvia being subject to the possibility of different types of cyber-attacks or fake news.

Maybe, Dr. Myers...or Dr. Byers, you have some comments on the cyber side of things. Do you see that as something we need to put more focus on?

Dr. Michael Byers: Just for the record, I'm not nearly as funny as Mike Myers.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Randy Hoback: Sorry about that.

Dr. Michael Byers: It's a common mistake.

I think cybersecurity is an issue that requires a whole-of-government approach. It's partly how you regulate the Internet while still having the freedom and democracy that comes with an open Internet. It's partly about the media and how we promote quality media and how we distinguish quality media from nefarious attempts to spread fake news. Related to all that is to have governments themselves protected against hacking and intervention. It's a really big question, and it's not something a defence committee can deal with on its own. There's an all-of-government need here that's very profound.

I have one last thing to say on the Arctic. The Arctic is a really big place. The Arctic Ocean is thousands of kilometres across. Norway, our NATO ally, has a land border with Russia, so they are very concerned about Russia in their Arctic. Our situation is different. We are thousands of kilometres away from Russia in the Arctic, and there's no sign of their having any hostile intent there. So distinguish: the North American Arctic and the European Arctic are very different places from a strategic perspective.

● (1615)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome back all three witnesses. If anyone has been following the proceedings, they'll know I've been concerned that this study on NATO consider NATO's nuclear deterrence policy very carefully.

We heard this afternoon from Ambassador Mason that she doesn't see any contradiction between NATO membership and the new treaty for the prohibition of nuclear weapons, and she even suggested there's room for Canada to lead within NATO on this issue.

I'd like to hear from Dr. Byers first and then Dr. Charron. Do you agree with Ambassador Mason that there is no contradiction, and whether there's an opening for Canada to resume leading on disarmament issues within NATO?

Dr. Byers.

Dr. Michael Byers: I'm first and foremost an international lawyer. I've looked very closely at this issue, and I see no legal barrier to Canada signing and ratifying the nuclear prohibition treaty and remaining a full, active member of NATO. We don't have nuclear weapons. No nuclear weapons are based on Canadian soil. I would even suggest we could think about going further and declaring Canada a nuclear weapons-free zone. All this is consistent with our participation in NATO. It's a political issue. It's a political question. Obviously, the United States will push Canada really hard not to take such a step. Do we have the political will to move ahead regardless?

Related to this, look at these countries that supported the nuclear prohibition treaty. A large number of them are developing countries. The ratifications are going to pile up now. It is becoming NATO versus the rest, and where does Canada want to be? Do we want to be a global leader or do we want to be a small player in this resistant group of countries, especially when the government is campaigning really hard right now for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council? This is an issue where we could look and be very progressive and supportive of a lot of the developing world.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

Dr. Charron.

Dr. Andrea Charron: I'm afraid this is not my area. Somebody like Jim Fergusson would be best to speak to this.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Okay. Thanks very much.

Ambassador Mason, I was of course very glad to hear you talking about opportunities within NATO to lead on this issue. I wonder if you could tell us a bit more about what Canada leading within NATO might look like.

Ms. Peggy Mason: First I want to clarify one point, though, coming out of what Dr. Byers said, and that relates to what Canada would have to do in order to ratify the treaty. I, of course, in my comments, talked about the fact that we would have to start the process of disassociating ourselves from NATO's nuclear posture. There's a history of countries taking smaller steps in that direction, with the famous NATO footnotes, including, for example, Norway's, which does not allow any presence of any nuclear weapons in their territory. But article I of the ban, of the treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons, the new treaty, states very clearly that one of the obligations of a state party is that they do not assist, encourage, or induce in any way any prohibited activity. Of course, prohibited activity is anything to do with nuclear weapons, including possessing them, developing them, or modernizing them. That language was developed to get rid of the ambiguity between the NPT and non-nuclear-weapon states, such as Canada, party to nuclear alliances.

I think on a plain reading of the treaty, Canada has to signal its intention that it wants to disassociate itself from NATO's nuclear posture. As I said, Norway and the Netherlands participated in the negotiation but ultimately voted against the treaty. Estonia, Italy, and Albania all voted for the launch of the negotiation, but then, under incredible pressure from NATO, did not participate in the negotiation.

It just gives you some idea that, within NATO, if that dialogue was started by Canada.... You know, the first step is always the hardest. Say Canada initiated the dialogue—this would be within NATO—raised these issues, and said, "Look, we want to sign this treaty. We want to live up to our NPT obligations. We want to start this dialogue in NATO." There is a moribund non-proliferation and disarmament committee that I think, back in the day, wasn't moribund. Foreign Minister Axworthy addressed it at one point. If we started that dialogue, there would be tremendous pressure on many other NATO states to engage in that. I mean, just the fact that the Netherlands, under direct majority resolutions from Parliament to participate in the negotiation...that's why they did. It shows that the members of the public of various NATO countries are extremely interested that we get out of this moving in the wrong direction and really start to make some progress.

The other point I would like to make is that NATO is really in a position to lead globally. If NATO can take the step of saying that we don't need nuclear weapons, then that puts the lie to others who are beginning to think they need them, because now the argumentation is all going in the other direction, with more and more discussion of more countries thinking that they need nuclear weapons. Really courageous action is needed to get us out of this deadly track that we seem to now be on.

● (1620)

Mr. Randall Garrison: In the short time I have left, I want to go back to Dr. Byers, who said that, should Canada take such a path, there would obviously be U.S. pressure.

Do you see any other consequences in terms of a balance for Canada? You implied we could gain international standing, but at the expense of the hostility of the United States. Is my understanding of what you were saying clear?

Dr. Michael Byers: Canadian prime ministers have never been afraid of standing up to the United States on some issues while obviously being a close partner on others. It was Pierre Trudeau who actually told the United States to remove its nuclear weapons from Canada, taking the first step towards the kind of measures that Ms. Mason is proposing.

In terms of positive consequences, Ms. Mason is absolutely right; we need to have a real, significant process towards nuclear disarmament worldwide, because the alternative is increased proliferation and eventually an accident or an escalation because a country feels existentially threatened by an opponent. For how many more generations will we live under the dark shadow of the threat of nuclear war? If we don't start now, we won't save our children from that risk in the future. So Ms. Mason is absolutely right. This is not the easiest time to do that. It will take real courage. But it's something the Canadian government could do to continue the progress that Pierre Trudeau started.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Mason, if I understand your position correctly, you're basically saying that NATO should discourage nuclear weapons because there's no strategic value to having them. Is that correct?

Ms. Peggy Mason: No, that's not what I said.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay.

Ms. Peggy Mason: I said that so long as there are nuclear weapons, the only utility of nuclear weapons is to deter their use by others. So the logical first step for NATO is to ditch its first use—its so-called "flexible response"—and ditch its statement, its posture, that nuclear weapons are needed by NATO to prevent war, and say that while nuclear weapons are in existence, the only utility of nuclear weapons is to deter their use by others.

● (1625)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: But isn't it NATO's job to be the hard front line?

Ms. Peggy Mason: NATO's job is to be a collective defence alliance, and its nuclear—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Yes, but isn't its job to exert its military might?

Ms. Peggy Mason: Not just in a vacuum, for no purpose.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Right.

Ms. Peggy Mason: I mean, no, its purpose is not to exert its military might. Its purpose is to be a defensive alliance. That's its purpose.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Militaristically—

Ms. Peggy Mason: It's to be a defensive alliance and to deter war.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay.

You came to this committee on October 25, 2012, and you said the following:

> In a nutshell, my thesis today is that NATO is not the UN and should not be wasting valuable time, effort, and resources trying to duplicate the UN role in crisis management. Instead, NATO members should be looking hard at how they can best support the hard end, the military role of the UN in crisis management....

You further went on to say:

> NATO's value added is its military capability, as so many witnesses before me have pointed out.

You seem to be not saying what you said here five years ago. Has something changed in your opinion on that?

Ms. Peggy Mason: I don't how you are reading plain words, but there's absolutely no contradiction in those comments. What I was talking about there was NATO....

At the end of the Cold War, when NATO was trying to reinvent itself, they got into support for humanitarian operations and they got into peace support operations. Ultimately, that ended up with their role in Afghanistan, which was not a happy outcome. We see the mess that Afghanistan is in today.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I know, but—

Ms. Peggy Mason: Part of—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: —my point is that—

Ms. Peggy Mason: —what I would—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm sorry, Ms. Mason, I ask the questions.

My question—

Ms. Peggy Mason: Well, I have a chance to answer, and I haven't finished answering the question.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: You do, but unfortunately, the way it works here is that we ask the questions and you provide the answers.

Ms. Peggy Mason: No; I hadn't finished answering.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Can you stop the clock, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Randall Garrison: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, unfortunately, we seem now to be into something that's happened before here, and that's the bullying of witnesses. I would ask Mr. Gerretsen to extend the courtesy to witnesses, all witnesses, that we normally would.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I am extremely grateful, Mr. Chair, to the witnesses who have come forward today. But when I ask a question, and then it's not answering my question and I am on a limited amount of time, I think I have the right to try to encourage an answer to my question.

I will resume, if that's okay.

The Chair: Point taken.

I'll let Mr. Gerretsen—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I apologize, Ms. Mason, if it's—

Ms. Peggy Mason: Yes: bullying wins out.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I apologize, Ms. Mason, if it's coming across as though I'm bullying you. I'm just really on a limited amount of time.

What I'm trying to get at is that it appeared five years ago, when you came to the committee, that you were in favour of NATO's role using its hard military might and strength. And today it seems as though you're coming here telling us that NATO has to back away from that.

I'm not even saying there's something wrong if you're taking different positions, now versus then. I'm just trying to understand what has changed since then.

Ms. Peggy Mason: I'd be very happy to resubmit that testimony and let everybody read what I said. You've taken a small part of it and you've developed a bizarre interpretation of it. We're not talking about whether or not NATO should have military might. We're talking about whether or not NATO needs nuclear weapons and whether or not it not just needs nuclear weapons but needs nuclear weapons to prevent war—in other words, not just to deter their use by others. We come down to the point that if NATO is saying it needs those nuclear weapons to prevent war, and it can't possibly have security without it, then that is an advertisement to others that they need them too. We use the example of a much, much weaker state, North Korea, and compare it to NATO.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay—

Ms. Peggy Mason: The problem is that if you take something out of context, and you ask a question, which actually demands a thoughtful answer, then you're going to get longer than a couple of seconds.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Unfortunately, I don't make the rules. I am one of 338 people who contribute to the rules of how these meetings work.

Ms. Peggy Mason: Consider your questions.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I will. Thank you very much for that.

Mr. Byers, you were talking about the opportunity for Canada to proclaim itself as the first nuclear-free country. I think that was the terminology you used in responding to one of the answers. It appears to me that there are two problems with that. Number one, we don't have nuclear weapons as it is, right now, so it's very easy to say we're nuclear-free. But also, I think there's a certain luxury we receive from our geographical location, or where we're positioned in the world, that makes it extremely easy for us to make that assertion.

Would we be doing a disservice to the rest of our NATO allies if we were to do that, if we were to try to project that, given the geographic location of other countries to the hostile environments?

● (1630)

Dr. Michael Byers: First of all, as a factual correction, there are dozens of countries that are declared nuclear-weapon-free countries in this world. In addition, there is a provision in the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, of which Canada is a member, that actually foresees more nuclear-weapon-free zones, and nuclear-weapon-free zones were, in fact, strongly encouraged by the Obama administration.

So what I'm saying is not unusual. I'm sorry that it surprised you.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: No, no, I'm just wondering what you said. I thought you said that Canada should be the first.... Did I get that wrong?

Dr. Michael Byers: You did get that wrong. You misheard me.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay. I apologize.

Dr. Michael Byers: What I was saying was that Canada should consider following dozens of other countries in formally declaring that it is free of nuclear weapons—which is, in fact, the case.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay. Thank you. But given our geographic location, do you not think it's very easy for us to do that, given that we're so close to the United States and we can rely on their dependence, as we have for so long?

Dr. Michael Byers: Unless you're advocating that we should encourage the United States to bring nuclear weapons back and deploy them on Canadian soil, I don't see that there's a need for a discussion here. We are free of nuclear weapons. Pierre Trudeau decided that we would be. We've kept that position for decades now.

Ms. Mason is talking about finding diplomatic opportunities to help this effort to de-nuclearize the world, which many people and many countries subscribe to, and I'm just identifying that this is one of many options Canada could consider.

But to come back to it, the most important is the nuclear prohibition treaty that was just adopted. Canada could sign and ratify that, and stay in NATO. I fail to understand why we weren't at that negotiating conference, why we didn't sign, and why we aren't considering ratification at present. It's a mystery to me, because it's inconsistent. This current stance is inconsistent with decades of Canadian diplomatic history.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

The Chair: I'm going to five-minute questions.

Mr. Spengemann.

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

Thank you to all three of you for being back in front of the committee.

I would like to direct my questions primarily to Dr. Byers and Dr. Charron. There are two themes I would like to explore, one being Russia and the other being post-conflict reconstruction. This committee has heard extensive evidence, and has in fact visited Ukraine, on the Russia-Ukraine crisis and the impacts on Europe and Canada. On the other side of that equation we have Russia as a player in the Arctic. It's the same Russia. It's the same leadership, with probably different personalities, conducting diplomacy, negotiating, and defence assessments.

How do you see the Canada-Russia axis, vis-à-vis the Arctic, line up with the current conflict in the Donbass region—or stand in conflict with; not necessarily line up with, but conflict with?

Dr. Michael Byers: I'll start by simply saying that we can walk and chew gum at the same time. The world is a very complex place. There are many theatres where we continue to co-operate with Russia. Western Europe this winter will be importing massive amounts of Russian natural gas to heat homes across western Europe in NATO countries. We co-operate on search and rescue on all of Russia's borders with NATO countries—for instance, the United States in the Bering Sea and Bering Strait; a very tight relationship.

We're in a very complex world with lots of interdependence, and when a country misbehaves as egregiously as Russia did, we take strong measures against it, including quite significant targeted sanctions. But that doesn't mean we're at war with Russia. It means we are managing the relationship—expressing disapproval, exerting punishment, but wanting to work together where we can and to get the relationship back onto an even keel.

Full points to former Foreign Minister Stéphane Dion for initiating an effort at rapprochement with Russia in the Arctic last year. I think that was a positive step forward. It was made in the context of your government being quite firm with regard to Crimea and Russia's behaviour in eastern Ukraine. Again, you can walk and chew gum at the same time.

My simple message with regard to Russia is don't be naive. This is a country that seeks to weaken NATO and NATO countries like Canada, that will seek to divide us. Our response should be to be firm, to be mature, and to engage in constant diplomacy to try to steer that country back to a better place. It's never easy. But this is why we have such an amazing foreign service and this is why we have such amazing armed forces, to give us tools to engage in this complex and indeed absolutely vital game.

● (1635)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thanks very much.

Dr. Charron, I'd like to get your views on the same question.

Dr. Andrea Charron: They're very similar. I think any time we have an opportunity to continue to engage with Russia in positive areas we should continue to do that. The whole purpose of our engagement with Russia in the Arctic is first and foremost to improve the lives of northerners. We don't want to punish them for the sake of other geopolitical issues. That just doesn't make sense.

I agree that we can have many different lines of our foreign policy. We sanction for some activities. We encourage participation in others. That's not at all inconsistent. That is the art of diplomacy.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thanks very much for that.

I'll go to my second theme. We had interesting and very compelling testimony in front of the committee just the other day on the role of post-conflict reconstruction and the division of labour that exists across international organizations, NATO, the UN, the OSCE, with respect to the kinetic dimension of conflicts, the interposition of armed forces when required, and to do the hard work afterwards in post-conflict reconstruction.

We still have a looming...I don't want to call it a doctrine, but a looming philosophy, if you will, that we don't nation-build, and yet in so many conflicts nation-building is done and it's actually crucial so we don't get second, third, and fourth iterations of conflict in the same geographic region.

Where to do you see post-conflict reconstruction as a theme for NATO? How should NATO position itself to not necessarily do that work but to have the linkages to folks who do this work well and to think whole-of-government as NATO member states but also whole-of-conflict through successful resolution?

Dr. Michael Byers: Just very quickly, I think this was Ms. Mason's point five years ago in her testimony that was questioned. Sometimes NATO can be quite useful in providing a hard edge to a post-conflict situation where there still is a need for enforcement or where peacemaking is necessary. Then there's a really big role for organizations like the United Nations, which can actually do a lot of the important post-conflict work at far less cost and with more experience.

We've seen this, for instance, in Afghanistan, where you had the United Nations and NATO working side by side for years to try to manage those different objectives. We shouldn't be exclusive about this. We should be supporting both those organizations and others. Canada should be engaged in UN peacekeeping and we should be an active part of NATO. There's no contradiction whatsoever.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

The Chair: You're actually over time.

Mr. Yurdiga.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for participating in our NATO study. It's a very important study and it's complex.

My first set of questions will go to Andrea Charron. Given that there have been increasing tensions between interested nations with regard to Arctic sovereignty, what role should NATO play and what are the consequences and potential future outlook of the increasing militarization of the Arctic by all parties?

Dr. Andrea Charron: I guess my first question is about which states in particular have disagreements about Arctic sovereignty. That would be my first question. We have quite a few processes to determine things like outstanding maritime boundary limits. I think you might be referring to the extension of the continental shelves. There's a process that the states are all following. Nobody is saying that Canada's Arctic isn't Canadian and that the U.S. Arctic isn't theirs. We may have quibbles at the margins, or issues about the rules we've set within those territories, but that doesn't mean that sovereignty disappears. I guess I just need a little more clarification.

In terms of what NATO does, well, that's not NATO's role at all. There are UN treaties and rules, regulations, and processes that are the ones to be followed, not NATO ones.

Mr. David Yurdiga: Maybe I'll clarify. We see the militarization of the Arctic. If Russia does one thing and then we do one thing, whose responsibility is it to ensure that militarization of the Arctic doesn't happen? We see it happening now.

Dr. Andrea Charron: Again, I don't know that we're necessarily seeing that, especially when it comes to the Canadian context. For example, one of the things we're waiting to come online are the Arctic offshore patrol vessels, but those are going to be a whole-of-government platform that happens to be piloted by the navy but will have the RCMP and Environment Canada, etc. To me, that isn't the militarization of the Arctic.

I think what we're seeing, though, is that defence, security, and safety used to be stovepipes before. The military did defence, the RCMP did security, and ambulances and local police did safety. We're now seeing that along a continuum. It is such a complex environment in the Arctic. Militaries do, for example, have that air force lift that we often need to get equipment there, so we are involving them. That doesn't necessarily mean we're seeing militarization, though, especially in the Canadian Arctic.

● (1640)

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you.

Next, NATO has entered a dangerous decade with Russia, in my opinion. Is it possible to solve or mitigate the Russia-NATO-western Europe relationship after the Ukraine invasion? It's very concerning. How far will Russia push the envelope, and how will NATO respond?

Dr. Andrea Charron: Well, I hope they respond as they are—very cautiously. We're staying within our mandate. We are there to support especially our NATO allies that are bordering or are coming close to Russia, but it's not just for NATO to fix. As you know, we have sanctions against Russia, as does the EU and as do other states, so it's not for NATO to fix. This is going to be a multilateral, multi-organization, multi-state affair. Hopefully, we're all going to turn to diplomacy discussions before we start suggesting that we actually need to use force.

Mr. David Yurdiga: As the second part to that, how should the UN be involved in this conflict? I know they have a certain role, but what role should they play going forward?

Dr. Andrea Charron: It's always difficult, of course, because Russia is one of the permanent members and has a veto, so they're going to ensure that action against Russia isn't taken via the UN Security Council. This is why the United Nations is so important, because we have something called a General Assembly, where all member states meet, and there can be sidebar conversations. I think all we can do is encourage conversations rather than drawing necessarily hard lines in the sand and saying that this is now where NATO takes over.

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

The Chair: You're at five minutes exactly.

I'll turn the floor over to Mr. Robillard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today. I have to say that I will be asking my questions in French.

At our committee's last meeting, a witness told us that, in looking at the situation in the Arctic, we have to analyze Russia's actions from a different point of view than the conflict in Ukraine.

Ms. Charron and Mr. Byers, do you agree with that? Should we view the Arctic region through a special lens or rather make a unilateral assessment of Russia and its actions?

[*English*]

Dr. Michael Byers: I'll start simply by saying that, once again, the Arctic is a very, very large region. Russia has roughly half of the Arctic to itself, unquestionably, under international law, because it is the largest country in the world and has a very extensive Arctic coastline. Most of what we see in terms of the so-called military buildup by Russia in the Arctic is a response to the fact that the ice is melting and the northern sea route along the Arctic coast of Russia is becoming accessible to foreign shipping. There were seven foreign cargo ships that sailed through the northern sea route last summer, so Russia is building up its constabulary capability, its search and rescue capability, in the Russian Arctic.

Complicating matters also is the fact that Russia's northern fleet is based on the Kola Peninsula near Murmansk, and those nuclear-armed submarines are coming out of the Russian Arctic to access the Atlantic Ocean and other oceans. Whether that's an Arctic buildup or a global buildup is a very difficult question to answer. Russia saw its military not collapse but degrade very substantially in the 1990s, and is now investing and starting to build it back to capabilities that it had before. Again, I'm not naive about Russia, but it's important to understand this context.

The Canadian Arctic is a long way away from the Russian Arctic. There's an ocean in between, a very hostile ocean. Russia doesn't want our Arctic. It has more than enough to itself. This is not a sphere where any rational Russian actor would say that they need to ramp up their security posture. They're not interested in the Canadian Arctic. We're not interested in their Arctic. We have a bit of a luxury here. We're not like Norway. We're not right next door.

My simple answer to your question is that you can be very concerned about Russia's behaviour in other parts of the world, but in the Arctic there is no urgency, and certainly no reason for us to be spending billions of dollars to respond to a threat that is not there.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Ms. Charron, do you agree with that statement?

Dr. Andrea Charron: Yes, I agree. We should continue discussing the Arctic with Russia.

[*English*]

Russia has been very productive in the Arctic. We have a lot of agreements. We need them for search and rescue. Yes, as I think Dr. Byers was trying to say, we have to trust and verify when it comes to the Arctic. So long as it's productive, so long as it's always following international law, that should be encouraged and should continue. It's the Russian near abroad and Europe right now where Russia is focusing its aggression.

Mr. Yves Robillard: *Merci*.

I will now give the rest of my time to Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I just have a quick question for Ms. Charron.

You had previously written in, and you've been talking today, about the NATO exercises in the Arctic, that you don't see them as being prudent right now given the tensions with Russia. Can you comment as to when you would see those being prudent? At what point would those be warranted?

Dr. Andrea Charron: I said I don't want NATO exercises in "Canada's" Arctic. That would not be prudent.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Would there be a time when you do see that to be prudent—or not at all?

Dr. Andrea Charron: I think some big events would have to happen before we considered that, but I don't see that time happening any time soon.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Bezan.

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

I want to thank our witnesses for being here.

To follow up on Mr. Gerretsen's comment, Dr. Charron, you're talking about not having NATO exercises in the Arctic. We do our own exercises on an annual basis, Operation Nanook. Why wouldn't we invite in other NATO members to participate? One of the things I think Canada has to contribute to NATO is our Arctic capability, and part of that is training. We have Resolute. We're going to have the Nanisivik naval base up there fairly soon, plus we're going to have our Arctic patrol vessels. Wouldn't we want to do some collaboration with some of our NATO allies just as exercises?

Dr. Andrea Charron: There are a couple of points. First of all, we do invite individual NATO allies to come and participate. We've had Denmark, we've had the United States, etc. That can continue, but it's because of the propinquity of those allies with our Arctic. It makes sense for search and rescue and the like.

Next, the Nanisivik is not going to be a naval base. It's going to be a place to keep extra fuel in times of—

Mr. James Bezan: It's a naval station, or whatever you want to call it.

Dr. Andrea Charron: Yes.

Mr. James Bezan: When we look at NATO, though, from a North Atlantic and European Arctic region perspective, where are the weaknesses, and how do we fill those holes? We talk about proliferation of submarines. We're seeing more activity, of Russia particularly, in the North Atlantic, and as you mentioned, it's not being well monitored. Are we talking about more submarine capabilities and how Canada contributes to that? What are we looking at by way of drones and unmanned systems to monitor those regions? I'm looking for some ideas here.

Dr. Andrea Charron: I'm suggesting that it's a particular area, the GIUK gap—the Greenland-Iceland-U.K. gap into the North Atlantic. That's an area where before, because we had SACLANT, we had strategic overview of coordinating exercises and working together at a strategic level. Now, I'm suggesting, we definitely still have the tactical operational connections, but because our attention has been shifted towards such things as terrorism, focusing on the Mediterranean and the like, perhaps we've forgotten to return to the North Atlantic and make sure that we have capabilities and co-operation there.

● (1650)

Mr. James Bezan: When you look at "Strong, Secure, Engaged" and at the Victoria class submarines with no replacement in sight, what would your recommendation be on tactical submarines, from a Canadian perspective, as part of the NATO mission?

Dr. Andrea Charron: I'm not a sub expert by any stretch of the imagination, so it's not for me to say what it is the military needs. The comment that has been made by many practitioners is that overall NATO and NATO allies have let their antisubmarine warfare capabilities atrophy, as a function of the different types of conflicts that are out there; perhaps now is the time to reconsider whether that kind of training needs to be looked at again.

Mr. James Bezan: Dr. Byers, you talked about the procurement of naval vessels. I know you were talking particularly about the surface combatants and the Arctic offshore patrol vessels, but what about submarines as part of the NATO mission?

Dr. Michael Byers: I'm glad you raised the question, because there needs to be an urgent discussion, in government and more broadly, about whether we replace the Victoria class. If we want to have submarines into the future, the capability, we need to make that decision really soon. It takes a long time to procure submarines. The Victoria class is getting very old—they're still capable, but very old—and that means we need to be having this discussion, this debate, within your committee right now. That's without my taking a view on whether or not we should replace them, but the question needs to be on the table.

Mr. James Bezan: As a UBC professor from the west coast, where we have three subs while we have only one on the Atlantic coast, I know you're feeling well protected in Vancouver, but what about a larger fleet in the Atlantic region as part of the NATO mission?

Dr. Michael Byers: One of those submarines should be moved to Halifax once it's repaired and ready to go. The plan is to have two in each fleet, but of course these plans have been delayed and messed up many times over, so who knows what will happen? Let me just say that you need your submarine on the east coast and we need our refuelling ship on the west coast, and right now there's no prospect of that.

My point here is that it's time to light a fire under Seaspan and Irving so that these procurements can move forward, and fast, partly because you've made these commitments to NATO and partly because we're not going to have a functional navy unless things speed up.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Fisher.

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

Thank you, folks, for being here. I always enjoy the conversation when you're all here.

Ms. Charron, we've heard lots of people say, and I think most people on the street would say, that we're pretty famous or well known for or considered good at training, humanitarian aid, and maybe peacekeeping and things such as that. In your opinion, should we stick to our knitting? Is that what we're good at, and is it what we are best at offering NATO? Is that where you feel we should stay, perhaps as regional stabilizers or doing post-conflict reconstruction?

Dr. Andrea Charron: Well, no, we have a combat-capable Canadian Armed Forces who will do what they're called upon to do by the Canadian government. It's up to the Canadian government to decide what they do. I will note, though, that since 1990 Canada has contributed more to NATO-led or U.S.-led operations than they have to the UN.

I think the point that Dr. Byers made was that we can do both. It's not a matter of doing one or the other. It's a matter of getting direction from the Canadian government as to where they want the Canadian Armed Forces, and they will do what they're called upon to do.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Excellent. Thank you.

Dr. Byers, I know that the topic of NATO in the Arctic has been hashed over. I'm surprised how much discussion there has been around that topic tonight, when yesterday there was only one question. Notwithstanding your comments...and I agree with almost everything you said, that we don't want to go in there and spend billions, that there is currently no sign of aggression from Russia, and that it is thousands of kilometres away.

I think back to your comments in your opening remarks—excuse me if I paraphrase them a bit and get them wrong—where you had a conversation four years ago with somebody about the relevance of NATO, and that person at that time felt there was no relevance, and probably NATO shouldn't be. Now there are election issues, referenda, cyber issues. You used the term that we were better together. There is no question that in today's environment we need NATO and we need to be involved in NATO.

I'm wondering if you know what that professor, or that friend of yours, would say today, just four years later. I'm tying that to the comment about NATO in the Arctic and how there is no current sign of aggression from Russia...albeit there are thousands of kilometres in between. I'm interested to know whether or not you've spoken to that gentleman again. Do you know whether they've changed their mind on the relevance of NATO and our participation in it?

I'm sorry it took me such a long time to get that question out.

● (1655)

Dr. Michael Byers: The person I referred to is Jack Granatstein, who is one of the most long-time and vocal champions of a strong Canadian military. I haven't spoken to him in the last couple of years, but I'm pretty sure he believes Canada should stay in NATO. Let me be clear that in 2013 he wasn't advocating that we pull out. He was simply asking the question. He was putting the question on the table.

The question is off the table. We need to stay in NATO. We need to be a supportive member. In the Arctic, though, we need to be smart. We need to recognize that the world is a complex place and there are dangerous places that need our attention. The Canadian Arctic really isn't one of those. We need to improve our surveillance. I was talking about ramping up to six satellites for RADARSAT Constellation.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I remember that.

Dr. Michael Byers: I would also draw your attention to the northern communications and weather project, which was a plan to put two multi-purpose satellites in polar orbit to fulfill those civilian and military purposes. That plan unfortunately fell off the table during the change of government two years ago, and it should be brought back on: surveillance, partnering with northern communities and northern governments, and recapitalizing the Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker fleet. I know there are discussions about doing this now. That's a good thing. The Arctic and offshore patrol ships are not icebreakers. They are not able to go anywhere at any time. We need those red-and-white ships also. They are multi-purpose platforms, like the AOPS will be. They could fulfill a lot of roles, including that constabulary function, which will be all-important as the Canadian Arctic opens up due to the melting of sea ice and climate change.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you, Mr. Byers. I'm pretty sure I know what your one recommendation to our government would be if you could make one.

Ms. Charron, do you have a recommendation? If you could make one recommendation to the government about how we would continue or increase our involvement in NATO, what would it be? I think Mr. Byers said he would light a fire under the shipbuilders.

Dr. Andrea Charron: I think that's right. If we don't have the capabilities to contribute, then.... It used to be said of Canada that we are at the NATO dinner table but when the cheque comes Canada runs away. We want to make sure that's not us.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

The last question goes to Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to come back to Ambassador Mason on this question of how Canada might be active within NATO on nuclear disarmament. The statement—I always forget the name of it, but I think it was the defence and deterrence policy review of NATO in 2012—contained language that one of NATO's goals was “to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons”. That was restated at the Warsaw summit in 2016.

Could you give us some indication of what NATO might mean by that statement, “to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons”?

Ms. Peggy Mason: Thank you very much for the question. It's actually very hard to know. I mean, NATO says that, just like NATO said, in the September 20 document I talked about, that the NPT is the cornerstone of the international non-proliferation and disarmament architecture. Of course, that NPT has the obligation on all parties to the NPT to engage in good faith negotiations toward nuclear disarmament, but NATO is manifestly not doing that.

The point I'm trying to make is that NATO is actually going in the wrong direction with this very alarming modernization process that is going to put new tactical nuclear weapons into NATO non-nuclear-weapon state countries. This pledge to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons stands there as a kind of formal statement, but NATO is manifestly not doing that, I would argue. It very much needs to do that.

Actually, I think this step of changing its nuclear posture from a flexible response to a very clear declaration of no first use—the argument being that the only role that NATO sees for its nuclear weapons is to deter their use by anyone—is an easy step for NATO to take, frankly, and yet it would be an extraordinarily powerful message that NATO really was committed, ultimately, to getting from here to there, and therefore recognized, of course, that so long as there are nuclear weapons in the world, they have to be deterred, but there should be no other role, and therefore NATO is going to take that first step in that direction.

● (1700)

Mr. Randall Garrison: You mentioned Norway's NATO footnotes. Was that actually by them formally to the treaty?

Ms. Peggy Mason: It's not added to the treaty, because of course NATO's nuclear posture is not part of the treaty. It's a policy. It's updated, reviewed, and changes are made quite regularly. There's a long history of footnotes to various aspects of the policy. It's not necessarily just the nuclear policy but when countries have disagreements about particular elements. It just reinforces the point that this is a policy and not a treaty obligation, and therefore this step can be taken, although there would of course have to be agreement of....

The real point of the footnote is that individual countries can absent themselves from particular aspects of the policy. The most famous aspect of that is France staying outside of the nuclear planning group. So although it works by consensus, when it's making positive statements, there is this very interesting mechanism to allow for differences of view on specific aspects of the policy. That gives Canada and others who want to push, who want to get a dialogue going, room to manoeuvre. It's not an “all or nothing”. You just don't say the policy has to change tomorrow. You can say, no, we disagree with this, we're taking this step now. Hopefully, this will engage a dialogue with others as to further steps we can take.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Has Canada ever used the footnote—

The Chair: I'm sorry, that's all the time we have.

Thank you to the three of you for coming. I'm sure we'll see you again. We appreciate your time.

I remind members that we have votes shortly, so we'll see you back over in the House.

The meeting is adjourned.