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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): Colleagues, I see a quorum and I see our witnesses, so I'm calling this meeting to order.

We have with us in the first hour, Wilfrid Greaves, assistant professor at the University of Victoria, and Peter Kikkert, assistant professor, public policy and governance, at St. Francis Xavier University.

I think Professor Greaves gets the prize for the most colourful background.

With that, you'll have five minutes each, gentlemen.

We'll start with Professor Greaves.

Dr. Wilfrid Greaves (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria, As an Individual): Good afternoon, and thank you for having me.

I am honoured to be here, and I thank you for hosting this important discussion on issues related to climate change, security and the non-combat role of the Canadian Armed Forces.

I am privileged to be speaking with you from the traditional territories of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on southern Vancouver Island, where I am fortunate to live and work.

Climate change is the greatest medium- and long-term threat to security in Canada. While this is not a novel assessment, it is a point of increasingly urgent consensus among security scholars and other experts. The climate security nexus, as it is often called, has been expressed in numerous reports and assessments, and is reflected in the growth of new institutions and programs focused specifically on this topic, including the new NATO centre for excellence on climate and security currently under development.

In a 2021 journal article, I outline five climate-related threats to and in Canada: human security threats, economic threats, Arctic threats, humanitarian crises and increased domestic conflict. My findings and those of colleagues and peers find that no region of the country is immune to climate-related insecurity. Indeed, the very diversity of climate-related disruption produced by Canada's vast geography and diverse communities is a fundamental aspect of our current and future climate challenges.

One result of climate-related environmental changes is that the Canadian Armed Forces have been required to increase their domestic operational tempo providing emergency response to extreme

weather events. Canada's armed forces are good at mounting large logistical operations on short notice, making them an indispensable tool for government to respond to environmental disasters. Operation Lentus the standing framework whereby civilian authorities can request CAF assistance in responding to natural disasters, was activated at least 37 times between 2010 and 2021, and with increasing frequency.

For instance, 2021 alone had seven different Lentus deployments in four provinces and two territories, compared with one in 2020 and three in 2019. Last year, hundreds of military personnel deployed under Op Lentus to help prepare for flooding in Yukon, wildfire evacuations in northwestern Ontario, wildfires in Manitoba, and to provide potable water for the people of Iqaluit. Meanwhile, hundreds more CAF members supported the federal government's response to COVID-19 through operations Laser and Vector.

While some Lentus deployments are relatively small, or their tasks straightforward, others have been in response to the most destructive environmental disasters in Canadian history, such as the 2013 floods in southern Alberta, which displaced over 100,000 people; the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfire, which displaced nearly 90,000 people; and last year's combination of wildfires and flooding in my own province of British Columbia, which displaced more than 50,000 people and resulted in the west coast of Canada, including the port of Vancouver, being temporarily cut off from the rest of the country. Notably, each of these disasters was the most expensive in Canadian history until it was exceeded by the next. Whereas the 2013 Alberta floods caused approximately \$5 billion in damage, the Fort McMurray wildfire caused nearly \$10 billion in total damages, a figure that is likely exceeded by the costs and economic losses related to the floods in B.C.

In fact, British Columbia in 2021 provides an exemplar of the indispensable role the CAF plays in protecting the human security of Canadians. The wildfires and flooding disasters led to the deployment of hundreds of Canadian Armed Forces personnel to assist with emergency response and relief efforts. In the midst of a heat dome that fuelled wildfires and killed nearly 600 British Columbians over two weeks between late June and early July of last year, the CAF deployed more than 300 personnel to support local and provincial wildfire responses, including fire suppression, construction and airlift. In November the CAF contributed to the whole-of-government effort to address the floods, with more than 500 personnel delivering food and supplies, conducting reconnaissance and damage assessments, constructing flood defences, and helping to evacuate people, pets and livestock, including the dramatic helicopter rescue of nearly 300 people trapped by landslides on Highway 7 near Agassiz.

This exemplifies the capabilities the CAF can bring to the table that other actors cannot, and that will be increasingly required as the climate crisis worsens. In light of these events, I can only conclude that while the CAF's ability to deploy domestically in response to environmental disasters is vital, it is also insufficient.

I conclude my comments this morning with four brief points for why current disaster response capabilities in Canada should be increased in the years to come.

The first is that climate impacts and extreme weather are increasing the need for operational deployments and thus risk the straining of CAF resources, which will be needed not only across the country but also for longer periods of the year as a result of less predictable fire, flood and other extreme weather seasons.

• (1535)

Second, the climate change impacts affecting Canada also affect our neighbours, partners and allies, which means that established practices of resource sharing and co-operation will be strained due to the concurrent demands for finite resources, such as current programs for sharing firefighters with foreign jurisdictions such as Mexico and California. Notably, the increased demands upon and therefore reduced availability of civilian emergency resources from other jurisdictions will likely add further demand for the CAF to be the respondent agency domestically.

Third, the greatest danger is not just the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related extreme weather events, but the increased likelihood that they will occur simultaneously and strain the capacity of government to respond. British Columbia last year experienced three major disasters spaced out over less than six months, but what if in that time there had been another extreme weather event facing another major urban area in Canada on a scale comparable to the 2013 Calgary floods or the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfire? A blizzard in Halifax or a snowstorm in Toronto...? The concurrence of these climate disasters in future will substantially reduce the efficacy of the Canadian Armed Forces' ability to respond.

Finally, I conclude by simply noting that the overall health of the CAF is vital, therefore, to its ability to effectively respond in these situations. Broader discussions around the health of the armed forces in terms of the respect and standing of all of CAF members,

diversity and inclusion within the ranks, the role of women and the need for a strong and forward-looking leadership are also relevant to the CAF's efficacy to respond in these kinds of situations.

I will hold my comments there, and I look forward to your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Greaves.

Next is Professor Kikkert.

Dr. Peter Kikkert (Assistant Professor, Public Policy and Governance, Brian Mulroney Institute of Government, St. Francis Xavier University, As an Individual): Good afternoon to the chair and committee members.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I am joining you from the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people. I am honoured to be here. Thank you for the opportunity.

Climate change, the natural hazards it amplifies, limited provincial and territorial investment in disaster management resources, and the Canadian Armed Forces' unique capabilities have led to the CAF's transformation from a force of last resort in disaster response to a force of first—or only—resort.

As this committee has already heard, this tempo of domestic operations will negatively affect the CAF's operational readiness and training for its primary combat role. Further, the CAF provides only response and relief. It does not do mitigation, preparation and recovery work. In short, the military is not a cure-all to the current disaster management gaps in this country, particularly its lack of a disaster workforce.

Possible military-centric solutions are to establish a special CAF branch or operational command focused exclusively on disaster response or to ensure a fully dual-use military that is equally trained and prepared to deal with traditional security threats and disasters. I would argue, however, that this will turn the CAF into a jack of all trades and a master of none.

The CAF has a central role that no other government body can perform: deterring and defeating potential enemies. This requires a very specialized skill set. Other civilian groups and agencies can assume most of the disaster response roles performed by the CAF, and far more cheaply, but not vice versa.

The RCAF Cormorants that rescued the 300 people during the landslides in B.C. last November, which Dr. Greaves referenced, offer a great example of the kind of contribution the CAF should be making to disaster response. So do the dozens of times Canadian Rangers patrols have been used to assist communities during floods, fires and severe weather. Additional investments in existing capabilities and responsibilities, such as increasing the CAF's primary search and rescue assets or offering the Canadian Rangers more training and experience in disaster response, would allow the CAF to assist in disaster events across the country without affecting the primary function of the regular force.

During your meeting last week, Josh Bowen made a convincing case for the development of localized and interoperable volunteer teams with standardized training and competencies, building off of the array of NGOs that provide response, relief and recovery support in this country. As this committee has already heard, possible models exist, particularly Germany's Federal Agency for Technical Relief or Australia's state emergency service. Both organizations have small cadres of full-time professionals who assist with administering and training thousands of volunteers at the local level.

Importantly, however, both organizations have recently raised concerns about volunteer recruitment and retention. Australia offers a cautionary note on the volunteer system, particularly for Canada, given the similarities in our approaches to emergency management. Recent research there has suggested that the traditional model of volunteering is in decline, with high turnover rates, older volunteers and growing levels of burnout.

Much like the CAF, the Australian Defence Force has been shouldering more of the burden. Earlier this year, 6,000 military personnel deployed to assist in flood relief activities. As a result, Australia is also discussing how to move forward. Whether the military should embrace a larger response and recovery role, and if the country needs to adopt a new approach to volunteering, including incentivization, or if it requires a professional, civilian emergency response force are key issues that Canada must also consider.

Local responders help tremendously during the first minutes, hours and days of a disaster, but are eventually overwhelmed or are required to deal with their own personal and property concerns. While rapid disaster response aid NGOs help fill this group, they need help. It's time for Canada to consider investing in a professional and permanent disaster management workforce. Perhaps it could be a Canadian resilience agency or a Canadian resilience corps, an organization of paid full-time and part-time responders who could be quickly mobilized and deployed to disaster zones for response and recovery efforts.

To justify its permanent existence, such an organization must also be engaged in every phase of disaster management. It can't be just response and recovery, but mitigation and preparation, including the training of local response teams. These efforts would pay for themselves. Every dollar spent on mitigation and prevention saves between \$6 and \$13 in response and recovery.

Again, possible models exist. A permanent disaster workforce could, for instance, adopt FEMA's tiered system with a force of full-time personnel, a cadre of on-call response employees and a group of reservists. However it is structured, the establishment of a

Canadian resilience agency or corps would provide the kind of disaster workforce that this country is currently lacking, and alleviate the pressure on the Canadian Armed Forces.

I look forward to discussing this further during the question period. Thank you for your time.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Kikkert.

Madam Kerry-Lynne Findlay, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you very much for being here and for your thoughts on this.

The questions you're posing are exactly the questions we're wrestling with at this committee. We know there is a need for some domestic deployment. What should it look like? Should it be within CAF? Should it be a separate agency? Should it be a specially trained agency within or without? You're asking the same questions that we certainly have on our minds.

I'm interested in what sort of training regime you think would be required to build specific Canadian Forces units to combat climate change.

Either one of you can respond.

The Chair: Go ahead, Professor Kikkert.

Dr. Peter Kikkert: In terms of preparing the CAF for a greater response role, they already do a really good job of this. That's one of the reasons they've been used so extensively. The CAF's regional liaison officers, who work so closely with local emergency managers and provincial emergency management teams, do a really good job of creating that ease of transition of the CAF into a disaster response role.

In terms of moving forward, if the CAF is going to continue with this role, those kinds of relationships need to be expanded, maintained and sustained over the long period of time. Keep on doing what's worked so well. That's one thing.

If the CAF is going to fulfill this disaster response role moving forward and we're not envisioning a civilian agency to do it, the CAF does need greater training in standard emergency response procedures. We can see a situation where perhaps they receive some training in, for instance, wildfire fighting or flood mitigation measures. There are lots of specialities that can be brought into a training regimen to better prepare responders for these kinds of emergency situations.

As I said, I'm not sure that is—

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: I think this has been one of the issues. Yes, they have done a good job. We all appreciate the efforts they've made, but they're not at the moment really specifically trained for firefighting, say, or flood mitigation and that sort of thing. Of course, there's a lot to be said for, on the other side of it, the mitigation preparation side of better diking and investment in things that will help lessen the effects.

What would be the educational requirement to be a member of this vocation within the Canadian Forces? Would it be the same as it is now, or do you think there would have to be a different educational requirement?

Either one of you can respond.

• (1545)

Dr. Wilfrid Greaves: I'll just add something related to that.

I don't know that the initial educational requirement for recruitment into the forces would necessarily be different if this was more mainstreamed as part of the mandate for the forces. I think the technical skills would obviously need to be improved upon. That would presumably be training that occurred with the CAF rather than prior to it.

I do think there is another suite of skills, though, that are relevant here and that should be considered. There's a whole host of what we might call social and emotional skills that are required for people responding in these kinds of emergency and disaster situations, not the least of which is the need to be interacting with people in those communities who are under great duress in situations of crisis.

We should also attend to the ways in which the appropriate training for CAF personnel performing these kinds of roles also extends to training them to be able to effectively interact with community members and to engage with people in a range of different kinds of physical and social communities across this country with all manner of diversity in a supportive, constructive and respectful way. I think there would be a basket of training and skills related, not directly to the firefighting skills per se, but to the associated context in which these kinds of operations occur.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Professor Greaves, you said that you felt CAF was indispensable to this. Would you also be in favour of a separately organized group that is specifically trained to do this work outside of CAF, or do you think it needs to be within the forces?

Dr. Wilfrid Greaves: As currently configured in this country, the CAF's role is indispensable because, as my colleague Dr. Kikkert said, there is no other agency able to swoop in and provide

these kinds of supports. The CAF is currently absolutely indispensable, but I certainly have been quite persuaded by arguments that Professor Kikkert and others have made about the need to establish a more robust and distinct body of some sort to provide these kinds of roles.

It's not obvious to me that this is a core military function. The CAF is the tool available, so it's the tool the Government of Canada deploys. Certainly, understanding the difference between war-fighting, which is the core function of the armed forces, and the kinds of civilian emergency management support we're discussing here is highly relevant. There might well be very strong arguments for considering the need for an alternative agency of some kind to better perform this function so that the CAF can better perform its other core function.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Thanks, both of you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Findlay.

Next is Mr. Fisher for six minutes, please.

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

Our last study was on recruitment and retention, and it's fascinating how that touches so closely to what we're talking about today. Essentially, the Canadian Armed Forces is being pulled in multiple directions, as Professor Kikkert said, in going from the force of the last resort to the force of the first—or only—resort.

Dr. Greaves, you used a phrase I like: the increased “tempo” for domestic events.

We've had a number of witnesses over the last week or so speak to varying recommendations for a path forward. There were some distinct themes, and you touched on some of them today.

One is that there needs to be greater investment in civilian emergency response capacity, and that the military, to the extent they are called on to respond in a domestic capacity, get additional resourcing and specialized capacity, regardless of whether it's the regular force or the reserve force, as needed.

For both of you, I'm interested in your thoughts on the appropriate division of responsibility between military and civilians. Because time flies by, I'm also going to throw this out: When it comes to civilian capacity, how much of this can we expect to be built up at the provincial level? At the last meeting, we heard about the fact that this is essentially a provincial jurisdiction, but the provinces have the ability to reach out to the federal government when they need help, and the federal government rarely denies that help.

I know that I threw a lot at you there, but I would ask Professor Greaves to speak to that first, and if Professor Kikkert would like to speak to it as well, that would be wonderful.

Thank you.

Dr. Wilfrid Greaves: Thank you for the question, sir.

I see a couple of big and important issues to address there.

In terms of your point about federal versus provincial jurisdiction, I think that's a highly salient concern, but I would personally raise some warnings about allowing a kind of patchwork quilt of response capacities across the country being determined by the different distinct fiscal and climate-related needs of each of the different provinces. As we know, and as members of this committee know, there's a lot of resource sharing that occurs in Canada. CAF personnel located in one province will be deployed to support an Operation Lentus deployment in another province. I think we see an almost inherent kind of interprovincial quality to what we're discussing here.

In that context, while some particularly at-risk provinces might well be served by improving their own emergency preparedness and disaster response capabilities, I personally would suggest that it's an important role for the federal government to have its own capabilities so that they can contribute, either as an initial response or as a supplementary response, to other capacities that might exist at the provincial level.

If I may just quickly offer a thought related to your question, in a climate context when we think about resilience, the most resilient forms of response are going to be the ones that are the closest to the community, closest to the local level. To the extent that personnel and resources are having to travel long distances to respond, there will be room for disruption and delay and, ultimately, the effectiveness may be somewhat undermined. I think models that site resources, human capacity and personnel within communities, or as distributed as possible, is probably one that's going to prove to be the most resilient in the climate change future.

In terms of the various approaches that have been identified, I would defer to my colleague in terms of the merits of many of those, but from what I've seen and heard from other experts, the model along the lines of, for example, the Canadian Rangers, which are inherently community based and deeply rooted in particular communities and regions of this country, is a model that to me seems very commendable and offers a lot of potential value in a somewhat broad and climate environmental disaster context.

• (1550)

Dr. Peter Kikkert: That's an excellent question. It drives at a lot of what I was trying to highlight in my opening statement, which is the need for something else. The CAF cannot be the only response tool we have as a country. We need to do a better job of building up our local capabilities, our humanitarian disaster workforce. Dr. Greaves is right. Resilience starts from the bottom up. You build these local emergency teams. They know the region. They know who's vulnerable. They can respond quickly and that's great. We absolutely need that, but at some point, that local response does exhaust itself, so we need something else.

Right now, it's hard to replicate the hundreds of boots on the ground that the CAF can put on in very quick order, but I would argue that given the CAF's other responsibilities, something else should come probably from the federal level, and it should be able to deploy into the provinces and territories as required. Whether it's a new civilian agency or some other kind of disaster workforce that we can envision, I think that's going to be required. As Dr. Greaves pointed out, there are only more disasters and the kinds of emergen-

cies and severe weather coming down the pike, so moving on this quickly is important.

I will say that national responses are important. The local is absolutely vital. I think of the Australian conversations, and they seem to be a couple of years ahead of us. After their bush fires in 2019-20, they had a large-scale national commission on national natural disasters. One of the things they highlighted was the need for a national response. Australia does have state emergency services that are far more robust than what we have at our provincial and territorial level, but they are overwhelmed, so something more than it was required. A national response was required, and that's the conversation they're having right now. I think it's one that this panel is having as well, so this is very timely in discussion, I think.

Mr. Darren Fisher: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fisher.

Madam Normandin, you have six minutes please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Professor Kikkert, Professor Greaves, thank you very much for being with us today.

As we read your publications, we note that there is something similar between the two of you. You have both published extensively on the issue of Arctic security and sovereignty. I would like to ask a question about this, and I will ask you both the same question after a long preamble.

There has been a lot of talk about using the regular force to respond to climate emergencies, because they are always ready, available and trained. When it comes to using the reserve force more, one of the problems that arises is that reservists are often in regular employment. Usually they are given plenty of notice of when they are to be sent on a mission, allowing them to prepare accordingly and to make the necessary employment arrangements. However, in the case of climate emergencies, the need is very immediate. The question is whether the reserve force could be better utilized.

I would like to hear your comments on the possibility of better utilizing the reserve force and looking for ways to better occupy territory in the Arctic to better ensure our territorial sovereignty and continental security. To do this, we could use military personnel similar to the Canadian Rangers, for example.

Could this be a win-win situation?

This would allow us to kill two birds with one stone. We would use a kind of parallel militia, which would make better use of the reserve force's capacity.

• (1555)

[English]

Dr. Peter Kikkert: Thank you so much for the question and for bringing in the Canadian Rangers. They are very active in emergency response and historically they've been very active in emergency response. They've responded to forest fires and floods and avalanches, and not always just from their communities, but also in adjacent communities.

I do agree with your comments that any way we can strengthen the emergency response capabilities of the Canadian Rangers will benefit their communities and adjacent communities a great deal. Now that said, if you're going to be emphasizing this role for the Canadian Rangers, the ability of Canadian Rangers headquarters staff to actually support that also has to be facilitated, so I think increasing the number of administrative personnel who Canadian Rangers patrol groups have access to who can help facilitate these operations is going to be vital if the Canadian Rangers are given a broader kind of disaster workforce role moving forward in the north.

We're focused on the Arctic, and I work a lot with community responders in Nunavut. One of the ideas they have for emergency management that will hopefully alleviate some of the need to bring in outside help are Inuit public safety officers. These are officers who, if the program was developed, could be focused on marine safety, emergency preparedness, search and rescue, fire prevention. There are models for this that exist in Alaska, for instance. Again, having that local capability, I think, would go a long way to protecting communities in the north who are so distant and so far removed from external assistance coming from the south. As much as we can build up that robust local capacity which is important everywhere, it's even more important in the Arctic, given their remoteness and isolation and the time it takes for the south to get there.

Dr. Wilfrid Greaves: My colleague Professor Kikkert is the expert on the Canadian Rangers. I would certainly defer to him in terms of the overall assessment of the Canadian Rangers.

I would simply add that most Canadians will associate the Canadian Rangers with the Arctic. They almost go hand in hand. They are a vital component of Arctic communities and Canada's Arctic sovereignty. I would simply note that the Canadian Rangers exist in many communities outside of the north as well, in the northern parts of the provinces, from coast to coast to coast. In fact, the majority of the Canadian Rangers are not located in northern Canada, understood as the territorial north.

Just in that sense, I think the Canadian Rangers are in some sense an underutilized resource. That's not in terms of the immensely important work they do on the ground, but in terms of the understanding and appreciation we have of them as a non-Arctic-specific asset or resource. The Canadian Rangers already exist in communities somewhat more southerly located in Canada. They provide equally valuable services and supports to those communities that we might well build upon as we move further and further south and as we think about Canadians living at more and more southerly latitudes.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I would just like to draw a parallel with the United States, since you mentioned Alaska. The United States uses their national guard a lot for internal deployments. So they use reservists more than we do in Canada.

I'd like to get your comments on the benefits of the increased use of reservists. You've already talked a bit about the importance of better funding for the reserve force. Maybe that would also generate more excitement, given the retention and recruitment issues.

[English]

Dr. Peter Kikkert: I would say that in terms of the reserve, the mechanisms to bring them out and to solicit reservist volunteers to come and serve during disasters, in the rapid tempo in which the CAF has to deploy for a disaster response, is that something that...? Does it work that well? I think there are serious questions around that.

Again, to draw a parallel, this is a conversation Australia is also having, about how to use its reserve. In 2019 it actually called out the reserve for the first time. They had to respond. It's built into their defence legislation, so they're allowed to do it. I think there are questions around whether or not our reserve is structured to do that, how effectively they can do that and whether they have the training for that.

Again, if recruitment and retention is a concern, maybe building an organization outside of the Canadian Armed Forces might draw upon a perhaps much more diverse part of the population that does not want to join or serve in the CAF. I think there are lots of possibilities around the increased recruitment that potentially a civilian agency or a number of agencies could have that the military can't.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Normandin.

Ms. Mathysen, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've heard many recommendations in terms of that volunteer sector and getting people to volunteer their time. Madam Normandin was talking about bringing in the reservists. One of my concerns, of course, is that with the armed forces, they have that incredible training. They have years of building all of these skills and those training opportunities. When you pull in those NGOs, obviously volunteers will not have the same kind of training.

I haven't read the Australia report. I'm so grateful that you bring this expertise to this committee. Were there key things they highlighted in terms of things to watch out for to protect that labour force, that we would be drawing upon if we were to go down that route?

Dr. Peter Kikkert: That's a great question.

There are training models out there for local response groups. In fact, they exist in Canada. Some of our local volunteer responders are incredibly well trained and I would say far better trained than the regular CAF soldier for a lot of disaster work. When they come on scene, they know how to do things. If we were to build a larger local system, we would have to ensure there was sustained training in things like light search and rescue, flood mitigation, fire mitigation and FireSmart in communities. There are a lot of different things they could do.

However, I take your point about the general nature of volunteer-ing. That's the bigger conversation that is required. Both Germany and Australia have very robust volunteer systems, but both have been put under stress recently and questions have been raised about whether or not they can continue to retain volunteers.

This is where Australia, for instance, now is getting into conversations about incentivization. It's getting into conversations about how to ensure the government pays back employers for lost wages, so that workers who are responding don't lose their salaries, which is something that Mr. Bowen highlighted during his time before you and is extremely important.

Germany, for instance, has that built into their system. If you go to respond to a disaster, you are going to be covered. Your employer is going to be compensated and you will get your wages and salary. Beyond that, there are conversations about incentive and tax breaks. In Australia, they are having a conversation about whether or not, if you're part of these teams, you have to pay a licensing fee, for instance.

There are different mechanisms in place to try to bolster people, but I think those are big questions that we have to talk about. Is this all-volunteer system going to be sustainable in the long term? What can we do to make sure these volunteer groups feel most supported and most inclined to participate? Those are serious questions.

I would also just say the German model is thrown around a lot. It's a great model, but I would highlight.... We hear the number 80,000 a lot. It's important to remember that of that 80,000, 16,000 of those are youth—children who are part of their youth wing—and then only about half of the 80,000 are active responders. Again, they do incredible work. They are also a bit of a social club, in that people have a lot of social interaction through their participation in this volunteer disaster workforce. There are still questions around whether or not this is going to meet the needs long term.

I'm happy to talk about either of those systems more, the Australian or the German model, if the committee is interested.

• (1605)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Mr. Greaves, do you have anything to add?

Dr. Wilfrid Greaves: Yes. Thank you for the question.

All I would add is to draw attention to what seems to be—I will use the term, if you will forgive me—the “dual use” nature of some of the tasks and training that such a climate core or resilience core would actually be equipped to perform.

To Professor Kikkert's point, the existing kind of volunteer groups that do some of this search and rescue or emergency re-

sponse kind of work are extremely well trained and extremely highly qualified individuals. They are also individuals who—admittedly there is going to be variation in different ways—spend a lot of time in the outdoors in nature, have excellent outdoor skills and wilderness and orienting-type skills. When we take a step back and think about the application of those potential skills, there is actually a range of tasks that such a group might also be able to fulfill, if they were being properly remunerated and supported.

We have these very acute kind of emergency situations, which is the focus of our discussion, and I think appropriately so. There are also other kinds of circumstances.

For example, at the moment we're dealing with this debris washing up on the western shore of Vancouver Island from this marine disaster. It's a volunteer-led initiative to be pulling all this plastic garbage off the beaches of western Vancouver Island. That's another role that this kind of a corps would be quite well suited to, I think. It wouldn't be the most urgent of their responsibilities, but it would seem to be in a universe of relevant skills that people who are being properly compensated might be quite eager to spend their times doing because of the direct benefits to their own communities, their own regions and to the environment as well.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Of course, as we talk about being so reactive, ultimately, to climate disasters and the natural disasters that CAF is being asked to respond to, can you outline some of the key things that CAF needs to do to prevent further issues? What is the CAF doing or what does it need to do environmentally in order to proactively...not create more of the issues.

One example in terms of dealing with the north is that they can't maintain their bases because the permafrost is melting. What are they doing in reaction to that? What must they proactively do to try to avoid some of these things?

The Chair: That is an important question, but unfortunately, Ms. Mathysen has run out of time.

Colleagues, I would just point out that we have 20 minutes before our next guests arrive and we have 25 minutes' worth of questions. That's probably not going to quite work, but I think I will run a full roll of questions in anticipation that our friends might be a bit late.

Ms. Gallant is up five minutes, please.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think we are getting a lot of the ingredients to what the solution is. We have a wealth of Canadian Armed Forces personnel who are trained and who can no longer be deployed, but would like to be involved in the Canadian Armed Forces. We have others who are fully trained, but no longer want to deploy. So we have their command and control features; they know how to follow or lead. We have also had the comment made that \$1 spent in prevention saves \$6 to \$13 in repairs.

I'm wondering if what we're starting to outline in terms of a solution and a possible new body for response to disasters would be a hybrid of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, because they do engineering for prevention as well as being called in when disaster strikes, but also the aspects of FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which is under Homeland Security in the United States and would be under Public Safety in Canada.

We're looking at a hybrid of both of those, from the Canadian Forces as was mentioned, who have specific skills that are needed for situations that are national defence and military related. They could do their work while using the skills they've learned at a later point in time when they no longer are deployable. Is this something that you think could potentially be on guard and able to respond when necessary? It would be a hybrid of the Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA if we're looking at a parallel.

• (1610)

Dr. Peter Kikkert: I would just say to that question, I think the military is, moving forward, going to have a role in disaster response. I'm not advocating that it has no role. I think that we have to use the specialized skill set the CAF has more. For instance, the search and rescue capacity it has, if we bolster that and improve that, it benefits Canadians who go missing in the wilderness, but it can also be used during disaster situations. I think that the Canadian Armed Forces search and rescue structure is a great thing to build and strengthen for that.

Again, I would argue that putting too much of the emphasis on the army engineers, for instance, it's a pretty small body of personnel.... I just don't think it's going to cut it moving forward. I think that, again, the CAF is very reluctant to do anything besides the response element, because it's already taking up so much of their time. Again, no mitigation, no prevention, no preparedness and no recovery, which are the most time consuming, the most expensive and the most important part of the disaster management spectrum.

I do agree with this idea that there could be dual use in a civilian agency with the military. I just don't think we can allow too much of the CAF's regular forces to be drawn into this if there is a civilian agency that is created to handle it as well.

There's one other thing. You speak a lot about structuring and how this could be structured and what this could look like. At the federal level, for instance, I again highlight Australia and some of the things they've done since their national commission in 2020. They've always had Emergency Management Australia, which is focused on response. They realized that wasn't enough, so they've also now established a National Recovery and Resilience Agency whose focus is on helping communities recover from disasters and then building them in a more resilient way moving forward.

They've also established an Australian Climate Service to assist with severe weather events.

Again, we see a growth of structures to enable this response because they are so complex and because they draw upon so many different resources. That's a conversation we could also have in Canada, again, based on the similarities in our structures with Australia's.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: There was the aspect that our local governing bodies are key. The feds aren't called in until it's a last resort. As far as the engineers are concerned, it's not the type of engineers we have currently in the military—they're people who blow up things. I would be looking at more the civil engineer type.

When we had our floods in Renfrew County back in 2019, well in advance of the actual flood occurring, people were looking at the freshet from the north, at the melt, at the water levels and everything that's going on and they were well prepared. It wasn't until it struck and it overwhelmed every other level that we called in the military.

I'm still convinced that the key start has to be at every local level since they know the community and have a finger on the pulse of the situation. How do we weave all that together and call in the national aspect when they are indeed the only source that's left?

The Chair: Again, it's an important question, but we're well over time.

Ms. Lambropoulos, you have five minutes, please.

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

I thank both of you for being here to answer some of our questions on this important issue. For me, having listened to everybody so far, the main question that comes to mind is, given that we just finished a study on retention and recruitment, if we create a body completely separate from the CAF and it's specifically meant for natural disasters and for coming to the aid of Canadians when such a disaster occurs, is that not the same or a similar type of profile to someone who would apply to the CAF?

Considering the fact that right now the competition level is quite high between the general jobs on the market and the CAF, and that it's the main reason that they can't find enough personnel, is this not going to make it even more difficult? What are some of the factors that differentiate the two and would make it so that they don't poach from each other?

• (1615)

Dr. Peter Kikkert: Again, that's a great question.

Given the ongoing recruitment issues the CAF is experiencing, I do see that. I would argue, though, that if you look what's going on in emergency management in the country right now, it is an increasingly diverse group of people who are going through these professional education programs, which Mr. Bowen talked about when he was in front of your committee and that are in schools across this country.

If you look at the makeup of emergency managers, we are seeing a transition into a much more diverse work body. I think that, historically, emergency managers were often retired CAF or Coast Guard or police. They're still there and they still do great work, but we also see a lot of other people moving into this field in Canada and abroad. I think a civilian response force would appeal to a broader base of individuals than are interested in joining the CAF. Motivations might be different and the experience would certainly be different. I think there would be a body of recruits that CAF can't draw upon.

All that said, I'm not saying there might not be struggles with this, given the competitive job market that exists. It would be interesting in that light to see how British Columbia does, because it has recently decided to expand its civilian wildfire-fighting force to 1,000 permanent full-time year-round employees, who will be doing disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness work. It will be interesting to see how that model comes through and if they do struggle with recruitment. I think that's something to keep an eye on for sure.

Dr. Wilfrid Greaves: What I would say is that I think if we recognize that the fight against climate change is in many ways fundamentally different than the fight against foreign adversaries is, then we might actually expect there to be different pools of prospective applicants for these two different types of roles: the Canadian Armed Forces on one side as a war-fighting entity and then some kind of resilience corps on the other.

As we think about the communities that have been affected by major climate disasters, it's all manner of people from all walks of life who will have seen their own lives, their own homes and their own families implicated in those kinds of disasters. I think that for a range of reasons relating to, on the one hand, flexibility around accommodating other work or students and so forth, for people who might see joining the forces in one capacity or other as not being compatible with their other priorities, their other life goals, joining some kind of locally based entity that will be able to continue to maintain the integrity of their community in the face of climate change might be quite a bit more appealing.

I would also note that I think the current conflict in eastern Europe, the invasion of Ukraine, is a clarifying moment in terms of the function of the Canadian Armed Forces as a war-fighting and ultimately alliance-oriented military. While that is separate to our discussion here, I do think that many people in Canada may well look at the CAF with a kind of renewed sense of its core military functions in light of the current conflict.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you, both of you. I appreciate your answers. They were very good.

My next question would be for Mr. Kikkert.

You mentioned the study in Australia and the fact that they have a volunteer program right now, and that the main issue with theirs is that the traditional role of the traditional model of the volunteer has changed. It's older people who are looking to volunteer now, and they're not necessarily the same type of volunteer. What solutions have they turned to? What have they discovered or what are they going to be doing instead in the future?

The Chair: Answer briefly, please.

Dr. Peter Kikkert: That's a great question and there are a lot of elements to it.

They have shown that their state emergency services are, in some states, struggling to find enough volunteers. Some of the solutions they are talking about—and this is an ongoing conversation right now—are things like providing additional incentives to volunteers, tax breaks and this kind of thing, or transitioning to a paid, on call kind of thing, where these people are paid for the training they undertake during their weekends or their nights, and they're paid when they are on call.

They have now officially implemented a program where, if you are a volunteer firefighter or a member of the SES, the state emergency service, and you deploy over a long term for a disaster, you will be compensated for that. It's something like \$300 a day to a maximum of \$6,000. They are experimenting with different structures.

This is an ongoing concern and that conversation is just getting started about how to encourage more volunteers—

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

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

It has already been mentioned that one of the strengths of the regular force was its good operational capability and that, as far as the reserves were concerned, the Canadian Rangers had a good knowledge of the terrain.

When you talk about the possibility of creating something completely different that would be under the control of the population, it seems to me that you should already be working on creating a whole new structure and looking for new skills that you don't necessarily have already.

Wouldn't it be simpler to better fund the reserve force to create more permanent posts, for example?

• (1620)

[*English*]

Dr. Peter Kikkert: Again, a conversation about the reserve's future, what that looks like and the role they might play in disaster response is a worthwhile conversation to have.

I would again argue, though, that the recruitment base for a civilian response agency would be broader than for the army reserves. I am not an expert on the military reserves. I work with the Canadian Rangers a lot and I know they are great resources for their communities, but I am not sure that the CAF wants to have ranger patrols in every single community in the country.

There are definitely questions about how far to push this model, and there are questions about the reserves and what they can do in this role. It's a conversation worth having. That's all I can say about it.

Dr. Wilfrid Greaves: I'll defer to my colleague's comments in response.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: In the same vein, if the decision was to turn to the reserve, wouldn't we be better off dividing the responsibilities a bit more between the federal and provincial governments, so that the provinces don't have to beg the federal government every time they need help, so that they can fund their forces themselves and step in when needed?

Would this option be feasible?

[*English*]

Dr. Wilfrid Greaves: What I would add to that is simply that there is currently no restriction on the capacity of the provinces to establish their own response capabilities of whatever sort. Provinces will exercise jurisdiction should they see the need to create their own autonomous capabilities, and the Government of Canada is quite distinct from that.

Whether or not that's advisable, and whether or not that's the most fiscally responsible route or the most effective in case of actual disasters, is precisely the conversation that would need to be based on evidence, study and informed opinion.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Normandin.

Colleagues, I see that our next folks have arrived and I don't want to hold them up. My thought is that we give Ms. Mathysen a minute, two minutes to Ms. O'Connell and Mr. Motz, and call it a day.

Is that acceptable?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: You have one question and one minute, Madam Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I'll return to my other question, and if you could answer it within a minute, I would appreciate it. It's about an environmental proactive and reactive situation.

Dr. Peter Kikkert: In terms of what the CAF does, I'll highlight again that it's not doing the mitigation, prevention, preparedness and recovery work. That's a severe limitation to our current set-up. Our disaster workforce is solely focused on that one part of the continuum, and I do not see the Canadian Armed Forces playing roles in those other parts of this spectrum. That's a major challenge that needs to be filled by other capacities and other capabilities.

I'm not sure that's getting to what you're asking. I'm sorry.

Dr. Wilfrid Greaves: If I understand your question correctly, ma'am, the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence have a huge role to play in terms of emissions reduction, understood as climate mitigation. The majority of the Government of Canada's real estate portfolio is owned by DND. DND runs an air fleet. I mean, these are hugely carbon-intensive activities. There is a very significant scope for greening the activities of the Canadian Armed Forces in all manner of ways. I think a perhaps really underappreciated part of that is responsible stewardship of the land, which is controlled and maintained by National Defence.

The Chair: I'm trying to prevent Ms. Mathysen from turning her one minute into two and a half; it's succeeding, I can see that.

Mr. Motz, you have two minutes.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

This is a 30-second question and a 25-minute answer, I'm sure.

In terms of the principles of emergency management, how do you see a separate civilian agency being used in response, recovery, preparedness and mitigation of national disaster emergencies, as opposed to CAF being used, or even using the reserve, the concept that we talked about?

I'll start with Professor Kikkert.

• (1625)

Dr. Peter Kikkert: I think a civilian emergency response force could be, again, a mixture of full-time employees and part-time employees. They could be mobilized during disasters. They have the benefit of being able to rapidly deploy if they're part of this force. More importantly, they can focus—especially the full-time employees—and be used for other tasks during periods of the year when there are not so many hazards being posed to communities. They can be used for things like prevention mitigation, whether it be forestry management or reconstructing dikes or whatever it might be. They can play a wide variety of roles that the CAF and the reserves can't because of their training that's focused on their war-fighting role.

That's where I see the value of a civilian emergency force and it being able to slide in and cover the rest of that emergency management spectrum, with the support of local teams, of course.

Mr. Glen Motz: Go ahead, Professor Greaves.

Dr. Wilfrid Greaves: I was just going to say that final point as well. I think such a national resilience corps would probably work best if it were well supported by locally based community entities of some sort or another. That would open up this question about whether or not local authorities, municipal or provincial, or potentially regional as well, would be able to call upon those lower levels, however they were structured, before invoking the national level of response. We might actually be able to locate the authority to invoke this capability in the communities that are immediately affected before then calling in the feds.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Motz.

The final two minutes will go to Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Maybe in my two minutes, I will just ask a question where we left off.

If the ideal is to have local authorities train up and kind of own that training and own that initial response, but the way the system is now.... I mean, if you look back historically, famously, when there's too much snow in Toronto, the military is called in.

How do we as a federal government position the local authorities to actually build up this capability so that CAF really is brought in for organizational assistance or specific assistance that they can offer as kind of that last resort? How do we get to that place, or how do we incentivize that sort of establishment?

That's for either of you.

Dr. Peter Kikkert: Very quickly, I think a good climate change response for this country would be to ensure that every municipality had an emergency manager. In Nova Scotia I think eight of 40 municipalities have full-time emergency manager positions. I think that's too few.

I think ensuring that municipalities have emergency managers who are well trained and who have standardized skills and professional abilities that they've been taught can be the building stone.

Then you have the local response teams who the emergency manager can assist in training and preparing, who have national standardized competencies and who maybe can be used regionally as well and not just focus on the local community. That's one step.

I do think that given the hazard, given the disaster, you are going to require that next level, which is that federal response—or the provincial response as well, right? That needs to be there as well and can deploy quickly to these scenes. I'm not sure you're ever going to be able to get out of needing to have that other level of response outside the local, but there are certainly ways in which we can strengthen that local side of things moving forward, and relatively inexpensively, I would argue, with the emergency managers and these local teams.

The Chair: Unfortunately, we are going to have to leave it there. I want to thank Ms. O'Connell for her final question.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank both Professor Greaves and Professor Kikkert for their contributions to our study. We seem to have had uniformly excellent presentations, and you both have certainly lived up to that standard.

Colleagues, I am going to adjourn this meeting. We will have to re-empanel.

Those who are online will need to sign off and then sign in again.

I'm hoping we can do it quickly. Thank you.

With that, this meeting is adjourned.

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