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ON THE FRONTLINES OF DEMOCRACY: CANADA AND THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION RESPONDING TO RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION IN EUROPE

Report of the Standing Committee on National Defence

Honourable John McKay, Chair

**FEBRUARY 2024
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL DEFENCE

has the honour to present its

TENTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied threat analysis affecting Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces' operational readiness to meet those threats and has agreed to report the following:

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ON THE FRONTLINES OF DEMOCRACY: CANADA AND THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION RESPONDING TO RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION IN EUROPE

INTRODUCTION

Between 19 and 27 August 2023, seven members¹ of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence (Committee members or members) travelled to the United Kingdom (U.K.), Latvia, Estonia and Poland as part of an ongoing study on threats to Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF's) operational readiness.² In that context, this report builds on the *Interim Report on the Defence of Canada in a Rapidly Changing Threat Environment*, which was presented to the House of Commons on 16 June 2022.³

At the time of the trip, Russia's war against Ukraine had entered its 18th month. In Europe, Committee members were told repeatedly that Russia had brought war back to Europe, and that Russian President Vladimir Putin's authoritarian, revisionist and aggressive regime has been using force against a peaceful sovereign neighbour without provocation, which is a sobering reality that has military and political implications for North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member countries and democratic governments worldwide. Throughout the members' meetings, there was a recognition that Russia poses an existential threat to Europe and to NATO member countries, and that Russia's hostile behaviour internationally has brought death and destruction to Ukraine, as well as fear, insecurity, instability and tension to that country and other countries around the world. Members heard about the importance of NATO's unity and collective defence against the Russian threat, and about the need both to invest in national defence and to strengthen NATO's capabilities and resolve to defend its member countries.

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- 1 The delegation comprised the following members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence (NDDN): Honourable John McKay, PC, MP, Chair; James Bezan, MP, Vice-Chair; Christine Normandin, MP, Vice-Chair; Pat Kelly, MP; Lindsay Mathyssen, MP; Bryan May, MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence; and Charles Sousa, MP.
 - 2 NDDN, "[Threat Analysis Affecting Canada and the Canadian Armed Forces' Operational Readiness to Meet those Threats.](#)"
 - 3 NDDN, [Interim Report on the Defence of Canada in a Rapidly Changing Threat Environment](#), 44th Parliament, 1st Session, June 2022.



Committee members met CAF personnel deployed in Europe on Operations REASSURANCE and UNIFIER, and saw their professionalism and valuable work. Launched in 2014, Operation REASSURANCE is the CAF's contribution to NATO's defence and deterrence measures in Central and Eastern Europe. Established in 2015, Operation UNIFIER is the CAF's military training and capacity building mission in support of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.⁴ Members heard about both the impact of those two operations on security in Central and Eastern Europe, and the challenges that the operations are facing. As well, members were able to assess Canada's ongoing support to Ukraine, and the country's contribution to the safety and security of other NATO member countries and partners in Europe.

During the trip, Committee members visited three of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) battlegroups in Eastern Europe: the Canadian-led battlegroup in Latvia, the U.K.-led battlegroup in Estonia, and the United States (U.S.)-led battlegroup in Poland. Members interacted with military personnel from the host countries and from various NATO member countries involved in those battlegroups, and heard about their level of readiness and capabilities, as well as their contribution to the security of NATO's eastern flank in Europe and the protection of the host countries.

Moreover, Committee members visited the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Estonia and the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia. Members were told about the expertise and work in the fields of cybersecurity, cyberwarfare, cognitive warfare and strategic communications, and about the ongoing threats that actions by Russia and other countries pose in relation to cyberwarfare and cognitive warfare. Furthermore, members heard about the Russian threat and complex security situation in Eastern Europe, the nature and scope of appreciation for the contributions by Canada and other NATO member countries to the battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia and Poland, and the efforts by these three countries to increase defence spending, invest in their armed forces, strengthen their defence capabilities and contribute to NATO's collective defence.

This report summarizes some of the major issues discussed during the Committee members' trip to Europe. The first section focuses on the support that Canada and other NATO member countries are providing to Ukraine through training members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and through supplying weapons and other military equipment. The second section outlines NATO's defence and deterrence measures in Eastern Europe, the contributions by NATO's eFP battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia and Poland to securing Europe and deterring Russia on NATO's eastern flank, and Canada's contributions

4 See Department of National Defence (DND), "[Operation REASSURANCE](#)"; and DND, "[Operation UNIFIER](#)."

through Operation REASSURANCE and the CAF's leadership of the battlegroup in Latvia. The third section examines the security situations in Estonia, Latvia and Poland, and identifies the ways in which those countries are rearming and investing in their defence capabilities both to protect themselves better and to enhance their contributions to NATO's collective defence at a time of rapid changes in the international security environment and high tensions with Russia. The final section provides the members' concluding remarks.

During the trip, Committee members had informal meetings without transcription, and some meetings occurred under Chatham House rules, with the result that the report does not attribute comments. Thus, the report is an amalgamation of insights and impressions, with—where appropriate—external sources providing context and supplementary information. Unless indicated by a footnote, the information in the report reflects what members were told during meetings and visits in the United Kingdom, Latvia, Estonia and Poland.

OPERATION UNIFIER AND OTHER SUPPORT TO UKRAINE'S WAR EFFORT

Providing Military Aid to Ukraine

Russia and Ukraine have been involved in an armed conflict for about 10 years. What began as a Russian invasion and illegal occupation of Ukraine's Crimea in March 2014 and developed into a frozen conflict between the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Russian-staged separatist movements —armed, supplied, led and reinforced by Russia—in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region (Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts) over subsequent years became a full-fledged war on 24 February 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine.

Since 2014, Canada has supported Ukraine in its conflict against Russia. Together with other NATO member countries, European Union partners and some members of the international community, Canada has strongly condemned Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, its aggressive actions against Ukraine in the Donbas region and elsewhere, and its most recent invasion of—and war against—Ukraine. Alongside other NATO member countries, Canada has imposed diplomatic and economic sanctions against Russian individuals and entities in response to the war in Ukraine. As well, Canada and a number of other countries are providing direct support to Ukraine's government and armed



forces, including financial, military, humanitarian, development, security, stabilization and immigration.⁵

In September 2023, the Government of Canada announced that Canada's total committed support to Ukraine since the beginning of 2022 exceeded \$9.5 billion, including more than \$2.4 billion in military aid.⁶ Weapon systems and other military equipment that Canada has delivered—or is in the process of delivering—to Ukraine include: air defence missiles; aircraft bombs; tanks and armoured vehicles; howitzers; anti-tank weapons; rocket launchers; assault rifles, machine guns, pistols, sniper rifles and other types of small arms; hand grenades; artillery and small arms ammunition of various calibres; high resolution drone cameras; satellite imagery and communications services; and personal gear.⁷ Canada has also deployed Royal Canadian Air Force transport aircraft to Prestwick, Scotland, to assist with the delivery of military aid to Ukraine from Canada and other allied countries. According to the Department of National Defence (DND), between March 2022 and January 2024, the Royal Canadian Air Force's air detachment in Prestwick delivered more than 15 million pounds of military cargo.⁸

During the trip, Committee members heard about the military aid that such NATO member countries as Canada, Estonia and Latvia—among others—are providing to Ukraine. For example, Latvia has donated military, humanitarian and other support to Ukraine valued at more than €1 billion. As well, members heard about the need to increase the production of artillery shells and ammunition in Canada and in other NATO member countries both to continue supplying Ukraine as its war against Russia is ongoing and to help NATO member countries replenish their ammunition stockpiles.

Training Members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine

Under Operation UNIFIER, Canada cooperates with other NATO member countries to provide military training to members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.⁹ Committee members heard that more than 300 CAF personnel are currently deployed to Latvia,

5 See DND, "[Canadian Donations and Military Support to Ukraine](#)"; Government of Canada, "[Sanctions—Russian Invasion of Ukraine](#)"; and Government of Canada, "[Economic, Humanitarian and Development Assistance, and Security and Stabilization Support—Russia's Invasion of Ukraine](#)."

6 Office of Prime Minister of Canada, "[Canada Reaffirms our Unwavering Support for Ukraine for as Long as it Takes](#)," 22 September 2023.

7 DND, "[Canadian Donations and Military Support to Ukraine](#)."

8 Ibid.

9 DND, "[Operation UNIFIER](#)."

Poland and the United Kingdom to provide training. According to DND, since Operation UNIFIER started in September 2015, CAF personnel have trained more than 39,000 Ukrainian military and security forces personnel.¹⁰

During the trip, Committee members were told that—between September 2015 and February 2022—training under Operation UNIFIER occurred in Ukraine, with CAF personnel delivering 726 courses and training 33,789 Ukrainian military and security forces personnel.¹¹ Most of the training occurred in western Ukraine at the International Peacekeeping and Security Centre in Yavoriv—located close to the border with Poland—and through mobile training teams in a dozen other locations. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, training activities were temporarily paused, and CAF personnel deployed to Ukraine were briefly relocated to Poland; many subsequently returned to Canada.¹²

In August 2022, DND announced that the training of members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine under Operation UNIFIER would resume in the United Kingdom. In October 2022 and May 2023, DND indicated that additional CAF personnel were deploying to Poland and Latvia, respectively, to assist further with that training. In June 2023, the Government of Canada extended Operation UNIFIER to March 2026.¹³ According to DND, between August 2022 and November 2023, CAF personnel deployed to Latvia, Poland and the United Kingdom under Operation UNIFIER trained more than 5,000 members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.¹⁴

Committee members heard that various types of training are provided to members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine under Operation UNIFIER. CAF personnel deployed to the United Kingdom have been delivering recruit training (since August 2022), with those deployed to Poland and Latvia providing more specialized military training (since October 2022 and May 2023, respectively). Members were told that the training in Poland includes combat engineer training (since October 2022), Leopard 2 tank crewmember training (since February 2023), combat medic training (since March 2023), and maintenance training on the M777 howitzers (since August 2023). Since May 2023, CAF personnel have been cooperating with the Latvian Armed Forces to provide junior officer leadership development training in Latvia to members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Because of expanded training initiatives in Latvia, Poland and the United

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 DND, "[Canadian Donations and Military Support to Ukraine](#)."



Kingdom, the number of CAF personnel deployed on Operation UNIFIER increased from 191 in September 2022 to 340 in July 2023.¹⁵

Training Ukrainian Recruits in the United Kingdom

While in the United Kingdom, Committee members visited the Lydd military training base, where approximately 180 CAF personnel deployed on Operation UNIFIER are working with military personnel from the United Kingdom and other allied forces to train Ukrainian recruits.¹⁶ During a September 2017 trip to Europe, some members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence visited the International Peacekeeping and Security Centre in Yavoriv, Ukraine, where CAF personnel deployed on Operation UNIFIER were training members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.¹⁷ Members participating in the August 2023 trip who had visited Ukraine in 2017 noted the extent to which training under Operation UNIFIER has changed since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. For example, training is now occurring in locations outside of Ukraine, such as in the United Kingdom and in other NATO member countries, and the type of Ukrainian military personnel being trained is different. In 2017, specialized training was being provided to members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine who had already completed basic training, and many had been fighting Russian-backed separatist groups in the Donbas region since 2014. Now, CAF personnel are providing basic training to young Ukrainian recruits newly conscripted into the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and most have no military skills and very little experience handling small arms and other weaponry. In essence, the trainers are helping to turn Ukrainian civilians into soldiers, and are providing them with the basic tools and knowledge they need to fight and to survive on the battlefield when they return to Ukraine.

In the United Kingdom, Ukrainian recruits are trained under Operation INTERFLEX, which is a multinational training effort. The goal of Operation INTERFLEX is to train members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine with the aim of increasing their survivability, lethality and effectiveness in combat. Committee members heard that Operation INTERFLEX is led by the United Kingdom in partnership with a number of supporting countries, including

15 “Operation UNIFER Overview: Growth of JTF-U Since Sept 2022,” document distributed to NDDN members during their visit to the Lydd military base in the United Kingdom, 21 August 2023.

16 DND, “[Operation UNIFIER](#).”

17 NDDN, “[Canada’s Support to Ukraine in Crisis and Armed Conflict](#),” 42nd Parliament, 1st Session, December 2017, pp. 2, 18–21.

Canada,¹⁸ and that—collectively—these countries provide teams that train members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. More than 1,300 military personnel from the United Kingdom and supporting countries are contributing to Operation INTERFLEX; this number was expected to exceed 1,780 by December 2023.

Committee members were told that, with about 200 members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine being trained each day under Operation INTERFLEX, more than 20,028 such members were trained between June 2022 and June 2023, with an additional 15,099 members expected to be trained by December 2023. In November 2023, the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defence announced that Operation INTERFLEX had reached—ahead of schedule—its goal of training 30,000 Ukrainian recruits.¹⁹ Between August 2022 and the members' visit to the Lydd military base, CAF personnel had trained about 2,600 Ukrainian recruits under Operation UNIFIER, and an additional 1,600 recruits are expected to be trained by January 2024; as of 23 January 2024, more than 4,000 recruits had been trained.²⁰

During the visit to the Lydd military base, Committee members heard that, alongside training provided under Operation INTERFLEX, members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine are being trained by other NATO member countries and additional allied countries elsewhere in Europe, such as in France, Germany, Poland and Spain. Members heard that a total of 34 NATO and non-NATO member countries are helping to train the

18 The original 10 partner countries are Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom. In November 2023 and January 2024, Romania and Estonia respectively announced their involvement in Operation INTERFLEX, raising the number of partner countries to 12. See "Operation INTERFLEX Overview," document distributed to NDDN members during their visit to the Lydd military base in the United Kingdom, 21 August 2023. For information about Estonia's and Romania's involvement, see Estonia, Ministry of Defence, "[Estonia to Join Operation INTERFLEX to Train Ukrainian Forces](#)," 24 January 2024; United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, "[30,000 Ukrainian Recruits Trained in Largest UK Military training Effort Since Second World War](#)," 10 November 2023.

19 United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, "[30,000 Ukrainian Recruits Trained in Largest UK Military training Effort Since Second World War](#)," 10 November 2023.

20 DND, "[Canadian Donations and Military Support to Ukraine](#)."



members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and that approximately 85,000 members have been trained over the last year.²¹

Committee members also heard that the age range for Ukrainian recruits being trained in the United Kingdom is between 18 years and 59 years, with an average age of about 34 years. Women comprise about 5% of the recruits in each training cohort, most recruits are conscripts, about 55% have attended college or a technical trade school, 69% have previous experience with a rifle or another type of weapon, 39% have received military training prior to their arrival in the United Kingdom, and 11% have some experience in combat. As well, members were told that Ukrainian recruits in the United Kingdom are accompanied by trained Armed Forces of Ukraine non-commissioned officers (NCOs), with about 20 NCOs for every 120 Ukrainian recruits.

Committee members were told that, upon arriving in the United Kingdom, each Ukrainian recruit receives 60 kilograms of equipment, including an AR-M9F assault rifle, a helmet, a bulletproof vest and various other items of personal gear. The basic training, which is five weeks in duration, involves 16 hours of activities each day. Members heard that this basic training is of good quality, but cannot be compared to NATO's standards for basic training, largely because of the lack of time: because of the war, Ukrainian recruits need to be trained rapidly and then sent to the battlefield. The basic training in the militaries of most NATO member countries is longer than five weeks. For example, such training is about 14 weeks in the British Army, 13 weeks in the U.S. Marine Corps, 12 weeks in the Canadian Army, 11 weeks in the Lithuanian Army and 10 weeks in the U.S. Army.

As well, Committee members heard that the current aim is to train Ukrainian recruits to combat standards rapidly, and to ensure that they both remember their training and are very good at "the basics" so that they can function and survive on the battlefield in

21 For example, 24 European Union (EU) member countries are contributing to the training of members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine under the EU Military Assistance Mission in Support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine). Launched in November 2022 with the initial goal of training 15,000 members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in multiple locations within the territory of EU members countries, in November 2023, the European Council reported that—having trained more than 34,000 members—EUMAM Ukraine had far exceeded that initial goal. The expectation is that, by December 2023, the mission will have trained more than 35,000 members. In November 2023, it was reported that the United States had trained more than 18,000 members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in Europe during the last year, mostly in Germany. See European Union, "[EU Military Assistance Mission in Support of Ukraine](#)"; European Council, "[Ukraine: EU Launches Military Assistance Mission](#)," 15 November 2022; European Council, "[European Peace Facility: Council Greenlights Further Funding for Training of the Ukrainian Armed Forces under EUMAM Ukraine](#)," 28 November 2023; John Leicester, "[Military Training Efforts for Ukraine Hit Major Milestones Even as Attention Shifts to Gaza](#)," *Associated Press*, 13 November 2023; and United States, Department of Defense, "[Ukraine Defense Contact Group Members Remain Unified in Support to Kyiv](#)," 18 July 2023.

Ukraine. To accelerate the training process, components that are normally included in basic training but that are considered less essential have been removed from the training curriculum; excluded components include physical training, signals intelligence training, and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear warfare training. The curriculum is meant to be intensive, but not to result in recruits being too fatigued: if recruits experience excessive fatigue, they might not retain all of the basic knowledge that they have learned, which could have catastrophic consequences on the battlefield.

The training for Ukrainian recruits includes live firing exercises, as well as courses on such topics as weapons handling, battlefield first aid, patrol tactics, fieldcraft, counter explosive ordnance, command and leaderships skills, and the law of armed conflict. In particular, Committee members were told that the law of armed conflict is a component of the training curriculum that is taught during every course delivered under Operation UNIFIER. Ukrainian recruits are reminded that, despite war crimes that the Russians have committed in Ukraine, members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine must continue to respect the law of armed conflict, and must not commit any war crimes against the Russians.

Committee members were also told that, based on lessons learned and operational experience gained on the battlefields in Ukraine, a number of changes have strengthened the training provided to Ukrainian recruits. For example, additional engineer training has been introduced into the training curriculum, as have improved medical training, night training, psychological training and “battle inoculation,”²² as well as additional training in relation to armoured fighting vehicles, drones and trench systems. Training is being reviewed and enhanced constantly to meet operational needs, and future enhancements are expected to include improved battle inoculation training, greater integration of drones into the curriculum, and additional night training, defensive obstacles training and trench warfare training, as well as more live fire exercises.

At the Lydd military base, Committee members saw CAF personnel training Ukrainian recruits, and realized that those recruits would soon be on the battlefields of Ukraine—fighting Russians, defending their homeland and protecting their fellow citizens—and that some of them might not return home. Members determined that the training that CAF personnel are providing to Ukrainian recruits in the United Kingdom is extremely valuable.

22 “Battle inoculation” refers to training that seeks to “inoculate” military personnel against the stresses of combat and other wartime operations. The training uses simulated conditions, such as live fire from real weapons and the noise of battle, to help personnel learn how to cope with stress so that they are more resilient and better prepared to deal with real combat situations.



Committee members also heard about some of the psychological challenges and mental health issues that CAF personnel experience when training Ukrainian recruits. In particular, CAF personnel know that they are training the recruits of an army at war, that those recruits will be sent to fight the Russians on the battlefield of Ukraine a few weeks later, and that some of them may not survive in combat, all of which can be difficult to handle mentally. In an effort to foster mental health resilience, Committee members were told that the CAF has asked personnel deployed on Operation UNIFIER to remain friendly and professional with the Ukrainian recruits without becoming their friends, and to avoid keeping contact with the recruits after they leave the United Kingdom for Ukraine. The CAF also provides mental health support services to CAF personnel deployed on Operation UNIFIER.

Moreover, at the Lydd military base, Committee members saw mine detection training being delivered to Ukrainian recruits, met some of the Ukrainian NCOs accompanying the recruits, and heard that Ukraine is grateful for Canada's military and political support for Ukraine, and for the ways in which Canadian assistance is helping Ukraine in its war against Russia.

OPERATION REASSURANCE AND NATO'S DEFENCE AND DETERRENCE MEASURES

NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup in Latvia

Following the visit to the United Kingdom, Committee members travelled to Latvia to meet with CAF personnel deployed on Operation REASSURANCE.²³ In light of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its active support for separatists in eastern Ukraine, in 2015, NATO member countries agreed to increase their defence and deterrence deployments to NATO's eastern flank in four "host countries": Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. At NATO's Warsaw Summit in July 2016, it was announced that Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States would act as "Framework Nations," each leading a multinational eFP battlegroup in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland,

23 Alongside its army contributions to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) battlegroup in Latvia, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) deploys air and naval forces under Operation REASSURANCE. Since 2014, the CAF has been deploying warships on a persistent rotational basis for exercises and operational tasks in the NATO Maritime Command's areas of responsibility, as well as to support NATO with enhanced air policing in Romania on a rotational, non-permanent basis through the deployment of CF-188 Hornet jet fighters. Moreover, since 2022, the CAF has deployed a CP-140 Aurora long-range patrol aircraft, which operated in the Euro-Atlantic area under NATO command and control, as well as three CC-130J Hercules transport aircraft as part of the tactical airlift detachment currently based in Prestwick, Scotland. Operation REASSURANCE is Canada's largest current international military operation. See DND, "[Operation REASSURANCE](#)."

respectively.²⁴ Those battlegroups were set up in the first half of 2017, and all were fully operational by summer 2017. Based at Camp Adazi, near Latvia's capital of Riga, the Canadian-led battlegroup was operational on 19 June 2017.²⁵

Following Russia's most recent invasion of Ukraine, in March 2022, NATO announced plans to reinforce its four existing eFP battlegroups, and to establish four additional multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, thereby effectively doubling the number of military personnel on NATO's eastern flank. Moreover, at NATO's Madrid Summit in June 2022, NATO member countries agreed to deploy additional personnel and expand the four existing eFP battlegroups from battalions to brigades.²⁶

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Government of Canada has announced new commitments under Operation REASSURANCE, including a number of initiatives to reinforce NATO's battlegroup in Latvia. On 22 February 2022, the Government highlighted plans to deploy an additional 460 CAF personnel to join the approximately 800 personnel already deployed with that battlegroup. It also indicated that a battery of M777 artillery guns with forward observers and an electronic warfare troop, comprising approximately 155 CAF personnel, would be deployed to the battlegroup. As well, if required by NATO, approximately 3,400 CAF personnel across all branches—army, navy, air force and special forces—were authorized to deploy to the NATO Rapid Response Force.²⁷ On 9 March 2023, the Government stated that Canada would acquire Portable Anti-X Missile anti-armour defence systems, counter-uncrewed aircraft systems and portable very short-range air defence systems as "urgent operational requirements" to "improve the self-protection of military members deployed in Eastern Europe as part of Operation REASSURANCE."²⁸ On 16 June 2023, the Government announced the deployment of a Canadian Army Tank Squadron of 15 Leopard 2 main battle tanks (MBTs) to Latvia, along

24 See NATO, "[NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance](#)"; NATO, "[Warsaw Summit Communiqué](#)," 9 July 2016; and Office of the Prime Minister of Canada, "[Canada Makes Commitment to NATO Defence and Deterrence Measures](#)," 8 July 2016.

25 See NATO, "[Secretary General Marks Deployment of NATO Battlegroups during Visit to Latvia](#)," 19 June 2017; and NATO, "[Commander JFC Brunssum Travels to Latvia to Witness the Successful Completion of eFP Battlegroup Deployments](#)," 19 June 2017.

26 NATO, "[Deterrence and Defence](#)."

27 Office of the Prime Minister of Canada, "[Canada Announces Support to Address the Situation in Ukraine](#)," 22 February 2022.

28 DND, "[Minister Anand Updates National Defence Stakeholders on Progress to Modernize the Canadian Armed Forces for Tomorrow's Security Challenges](#)," 9 March 2023.



with 130 CAF personnel and supporting equipment;²⁹ by November 2023, all tanks had arrived.³⁰ On 10 July 2023, the Government said that Canada would “renew and expand Operation REASSURANCE for three years,” adding that the country would contribute up to 2,200 CAF personnel to be “persistently deployed, more than double the current deployment.”³¹

On 15 December 2023, the Government of Canada announced that—starting in summer 2024—the CAF will deploy four CH-146 Griffon helicopters to the battlegroup in Latvia. Beginning in 2025, it will also periodically deploy CH-147 Chinook helicopters to Latvia. According to DND, the deployment of those air assets will be the “first time that Canada persistently deployed tactical aviation capabilities to Europe since operations in Bosnia and Kosovo in the late 1990s and early 2000s.”³² The Government also stated that Canada had recently deployed Medium Range Radar capabilities to Latvia, which will serve as the “first building block of the air defence capability for the multinational brigade.”³³

Committee members were told that, among NATO’s eight battlegroups deployed to host countries in Eastern Europe, the battlegroup in Latvia is the most multinational. At the time of the Committee members’ visit, this battlegroup comprised more than 1,700 military personnel from Canada and 10 other NATO member countries: Albania, Czechia, Iceland, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.³⁴ Approximately 1,000 CAF personnel are deployed to this battlegroup, making it Canada’s largest army deployment to Europe since the end of the Cold War in the 1990s.³⁵ Members were told that the battlegroup currently includes artillery, armour, mechanized infantry, combat support, combat service support and electronic warfare components, and that it is fully integrated into the Latvian Land Forces Mechanized Infantry Brigade.

29 DND, [“Defence Minister Anita Anand Meets with NATO Allies and Announces Deployment of Canadian Army Tank Squadron to Latvia,”](#) 16 June 2023.

30 NATO, [“Canada Deploys Tank Squadron to Reinforce NATO EFP Battlegroup Latvia,”](#) 9 November 2023.

31 Office of the Prime Minister of Canada, [“Prime Minister Increases Support for Key NATO Presence,”](#) 10 July 2023.

32 DND, [“Minister Blair Announces Measures to Strengthen Canada’s Military Presence in Latvia,”](#) 15 December 2023.

33 Ibid.

34 Republic of Latvia, Ministry of Defence, [“Canada Will Double the Number of Troops Deployed in Latvia,”](#) 10 July 2023.

35 DND, [“Operation REASSURANCE.”](#)

Moreover, at the time of the Committee members' visit, the battlegroup comprised about 540 military vehicles, including 24 MBTs, 63 infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) and 21 artillery gun systems. Those military vehicles included: Canadian LAV-6 wheeled IFVs and wheeled TAPV armoured patrol vehicles; Italian Ariete MBTs, Dardo tracked IFVs and Centauro wheeled armoured reconnaissance vehicles; Polish PT-91 MBTs; Slovenian Valuk wheeled armoured personnel carriers; and Spanish Leopard 2 MBTs and Pizarro tracked IFVs. The battlegroup also had M777s and other types of towed howitzers, Zuzana wheeled self-propelled howitzers and M-109 tracked self-propelled howitzers. Additional capabilities included combat engineers, snipers, uncrewed aircraft systems, and a range of specialized military trucks and heavy equipment.

Committee members were told that the battlegroup has a number of capabilities that battlegroups do not normally have, such as air defence, as well as chemical, radiological, bacteriological and nuclear warfare capabilities. New capabilities will soon be added to the battlegroup, including Canadian Leopard 2 MBTs. Members heard that the battlegroup's strength is linked to both the wide range of expertise among its personnel and its military capabilities, being equipped—for instance—with some of the most modern, combat-capable weaponry and military hardware that NATO has available.

As well, Committee members heard that, in its "Framework Nation" role, Canada coordinates the "force employment" aspects of the battlegroup, but is not responsible for asking individual NATO member countries about what they can provide to the battlegroup; instead, countries decide what they wish to provide, and those decisions occur at senior levels within NATO. Members were told that, through leading the battlegroup, Canada has good visibility within NATO.

Members of the House of Common Standing Committee on National Defence who had visited Camp Adazi in both September 2017—just a few months after the battlegroup became operational—and August 2023 saw the ways in which the base had grown in size and strengthened in capabilities over the six years.³⁶ For example, in 2017, Camp Adazi was much smaller, and mostly comprised old Soviet-era barracks and buildings; CAF personnel lived in tents in an open field. By 2023, Camp Adazi had tripled in size and considerable infrastructure had been built, including roads, multi-functional barracks, equipment warehouses, buildings for vehicle maintenance, a state-of-the-art fitness complex, and various other facilities to support the battlegroup and its headquarters. The base will soon be four times the size it was when established, and plans are currently underway to accommodate the additional NATO personnel and equipment

36 NDDN, *Canada and NATO: An Alliance Forged in Strength and Reliability*, 42nd Parliament, 1st Session, June 2018, pp. 12, 52–53.



needed to expand the battlegroup from a battalion to a brigade in the coming years. For instance, members heard that a dining facility for 5,000 people is expected to be completed around 2026, and that more multi-functional barracks will be built to accommodate Latvian conscripts.

A number of Canadian-funded infrastructure projects are also underway. For example, on 15 December 2023, the Government of Canada announced that more than \$15 million will be allocated for some of the infrastructure needed to increase the size of the battlegroup to a brigade. Those funds will be used to construct storage facilities for Canada's Leopard 2 MBTs, improve living conditions, expand existing support facilities at Camp Adazi, and build accommodations and workspaces at the Ceri military base near Riga, which will be the brigade's headquarters.³⁷

Committee members heard that the battlegroup's transition to a brigade is expected to result in a significant increase in personnel. At the time of the members' visit, around 5,000 Latvian and other NATO member country personnel were living at Camp Adazi, including approximately 3,500 members of the Latvian Armed Forces Mechanized Infantry Brigade and personnel from the various contingents of the eFP battlegroup. Following the transition, the number of personnel is expected to double to approximately 10,000, giving rise to a need for additional infrastructure.

Committee members toured both the state-of-the-art fitness complex and one of the newly built barracks at Camp Adazi, determining that these and other modern facilities contribute to high morale and an enhanced quality of life. For members, the recent infrastructure investments at Camp Adazi conveyed a sense of permanence, NATO's commitment to defend its eastern flank with Russia, and the impression that the battlegroup is combat-ready and will remain in Latvia on a persistent basis for as long as needed.

Readiness is the battlegroup's highest priority, although interoperability is also important. Committee members heard that the battlegroup in Latvia is innovating by pushing interoperability down to the platoon level, which is a new approach for NATO. This approach has challenges, including because 10 languages are spoken by personnel serving in the battlegroup. Members were also told that NATO's other multinational battlegroups in Eastern Europe do not train and operate to be interoperable at the platoon level.

37 DND, "[Minister Blair Announces Measures to Strengthen Canada's Military Presence in Latvia](#)," 15 December 2023.

Committee members were told that the personnel from the various NATO member countries contributing to the battlegroup work well together, cooperate closely and train together regularly, and that the battlegroup's high tempo of operation includes a wide number of training exercises in Latvia and in neighboring NATO member countries. Joint training exercises foster collaboration, interoperability and combat-readiness between and among the armed forces of NATO member countries. As well, members heard that relationships between the battlegroup and the armed forces of the Baltic countries—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—and various other NATO battlegroups in Eastern Europe are strong, with joint military exercises being conducted regularly.

Although Camp Adazi is the largest military training range in the Baltic region, it is small when compared to similar training ranges in other NATO member countries. Committee members heard about the need for a larger training range, which will occur because the Latvian Saeima (Parliament) recently adopted the legislation needed to develop a new military training range. Members were told that the adoption of this legislation within a two-week period demonstrates the multipartisan consensus within Latvia about the importance of national defence and collaboration with other NATO member countries.

The new 25,000-hectare military training range—twice the size of the existing range—will be located in Selonia, a region south of Riga.³⁸ Committee members were told that the area, which is currently a state-owned national forest that has been acquired for military training purposes, should be ready for training exercises by the end of 2024. The battlegroup will remain based at Camp Adazi, with personnel and equipment travelling to the Selonia training range for a few weeks of training before returning to Camp Adazi.

The development of the Selonia training range coincides with the decision at NATO's Madrid Summit to deploy additional personnel and expand the existing battlegroups in Eastern Europe from battalions to brigades. On 29 June 2022, the Governments of Canada and Latvia signed the *Joint Declaration Between the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia and the Department of National Defence of Canada Concerning Augmented Forward Presence Latvia*.³⁹ Among other commitments, Canada agreed to continue to lead the eFP battlegroup in Latvia, and to work with Latvia and other NATO member countries to "surge" the battlegroup into a combat-capable brigade within three years. On 11 July 2023, the Governments of Canada and Latvia signed the *Roadmap—Scaling the*

38 Latvia, Ministry of Defence, "[Information about Selonia Military Training Area](#)."

39 See DND, "[Canada and Latvia Sign Joint Declaration to Augment NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Latvia](#)," 29 June 2022; and DND, "[Joint Declaration Between the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia and the Department of National Defence of Canada Concerning Augmented Forward Presence Latvia](#)," 29 June 2022.



*FFP Latvia Battle Group to Brigade.*⁴⁰ The Roadmap outlines Canada’s phased approach to increasing the battlegroup’s size.

The brigade transition process is currently underway. In January 2023, the CAF deployed a Forward Command Element to Latvia to “prepare for integration of a Canadian-led Brigade Headquarters into NATO’s Multinational Division—North and the future arrival of brigade capabilities and troops.”⁴¹ According to the Roadmap, the brigade is expected to conduct its first exercise in fall 2024 and its enlargement is expected to be completed by 2025, “with a significant increase in Canadian and multinational armed forces soldiers persistently deployed on the ground in Latvia, with additional forces assigned to reinforce Latvia at high readiness from their home country.”⁴² The Roadmap also indicated that “Canada will complete the full implementation of persistently deployed brigade capabilities to Latvia” by 2026, at which point “Canada will have up to 2,200 persistently deployed [CAF] members as part of the enhanced Forward Presence and supporting elements in Latvia, and will be prepared to deploy hundreds more as needed.”⁴³ With those additional CAF personnel, Canada’s current contribution to the battlegroup will have doubled.

While visiting Camp Adazi, Committee members heard about challenges that may arise during the battlegroup’s gradual transition to a brigade. For instance, Canada will have to create a headquarters and provide leadership for this multinational effort. As well, members were told that adaptation, flexibility, and coordinated military and political decisions between and among the NATO member countries providing personnel and equipment to the battlegroup will be needed during the transition.

There are also challenges with ensuring the multinational sustainment of the brigade. At the time of the Committee members’ visit, the contributions of the relevant NATO member countries to the battlegroup’s transition to a brigade was uncertain; however, the subject is expected to be addressed at an upcoming force generation conference. That said, members were told that additional NATO member countries may contribute capabilities to the Canadian-led brigade. For example, at the time of the members’ visit, discussions were said to be underway to identify the military capabilities that Denmark

40 DND, “[Roadmap—Scaling the FFP Latvia Battle Group to Brigade](#),” 11 July 2023.

41 DND, “[Operation REASSURANCE](#).”

42 DND, “[Roadmap—Scaling the FFP Latvia Battle Group to Brigade](#),” 11 July 2023.

43 Ibid.

could provide.⁴⁴ Moreover, according to a 20 December 2023 media report, if Sweden joins NATO, that country may also contribute to the brigade.⁴⁵

Committee members were told that another challenge is ensuring that the brigade structure is standardized and stabilized so that there is interoperability between and among the relevant NATO member countries in their equipment, command, control and communication capabilities, language, standard operating procedures and integral combat service support, among other areas. There is also a need for modern interoperable digital command and control capabilities at the brigade level to ensure that the battlegroup can operate in a multilingual digital environment where technology changes rapidly, and where Russia and other hostile states perpetrate cyber threats and cyber attacks. Members heard that a number of measures are in place to expand the brigade's capabilities, including through the introduction of new mechanized combat units, armoured vehicles and self-propelled artillery, as well as the development of ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance), engineering, command and control, and combat service support capabilities.

As well, Committee members heard that the Latvian population is happy to have Canada and other NATO member countries in their country, that Canada's leadership of the battlegroup is appreciated, and that the bonds between Latvia and Canada grow stronger every day.

NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup in Estonia

Following the trip to Latvia, Committee members travelled to Estonia, where they visited the U.K.-led NATO eFP battlegroup based in Tapa. Estonia has been hosting this battlegroup—which comprises personnel from Denmark, France, Iceland and the United Kingdom—since 2017.

At the time of the Committee members' visit, the battlegroup had 670 personnel from the United Kingdom, 349 personnel from France and 196 support personnel, mostly from Denmark. The United Kingdom and France provided most of the battlegroup's command and control structure, with some elements from Denmark and other NATO

44 From May 2022 to May 2023, the Danish Armed Forces deployed a combat battalion and supporting units to Latvia. According to the Danish Ministry of Defence, "from mid-2024, Denmark will again offer NATO a battalion for the defense of the Baltic countries" and "the battalion will be deployed to Latvia 4–6 months a year and will be on alert in Denmark the rest of the time." See Denmark, Ministry of Defence, "[Latvia—Securing the Eastern Flank of NATO.](#)"

45 See Murray Brewster, "[Sweden set to join Canadian-led brigade in Latvia once roadblocks to NATO membership end.](#)" *CBC News*, 20 December 2023.



member countries. The battlegroup's 600 vehicles included 230 combat vehicles, such as Challenger MBTs and Warrior tracked IFVs from the United Kingdom, and AMX-10 armoured fighting vehicles, Griffon wheeled IFVs and Caesar self-propelled howitzers from France. The battlegroup also had anti-tank, engineering, logistics, air defence, sniper and other military capabilities. The contingent from France functions like a small battlegroup within the larger U.K.-led eFP battlegroup.

Committee members were told that the mission of the battlegroup's contingent from the United Kingdom is to maintain the battlegroup at high readiness and to defend Estonia. Located close to the Estonia–Russia border, the battlegroup is monitored by Russia, especially when training and exercises occur.

Training is an important part of the battlegroup's activities. Committee members heard that Estonia is the only battlegroup host country that allows training to occur on both public and private lands. As well, members also heard that training is essential to maintain the combat readiness of the battlegroup. Members were told that the battlegroup is combat-ready, and that the battlegroup's infantry and tank units can deploy within six hours in the event of a security emergency, can sustain themselves in the field for a maximum period of 30 days, and can be reinforced by a brigade from the United Kingdom.

The battlegroup regularly trains with the Estonian armed forces, which align their activities and exercises with those of both the battlegroup and forces from other NATO member countries in the Baltic region. Committee members heard that the Estonian armed forces are professional and "fiercely independent," and that the Estonian population is very supportive of the battlegroup's presence in their country because Russia is regarded as an existential threat: the battlegroup provides a sense of security.

As well, Committee members were told that the battlegroup trains regularly with other NATO battlegroups and armed forces in the Baltic region. For example, at the time of the members' visit, a large contingent from the battlegroup had recently deployed to Camp Adazi for live fire exercises and training, including with Canadian engineers and snipers. When compared to Camp Adazi, Tapa's central training area is small, and it is heavily wooded and covered with marshes. The training area has a replica of a Russian trench system, comprising about 3,000 metres of trenches, fortifications and dragon teeth anti-armour obstacle fields.

Committee members heard that the training curriculum considers lessons learned from the battlefields of Ukraine and that NATO doctrine has been adjusted accordingly. Some of those lessons include the critical importance of logistics, the growing use of drones,

the rapid evolution of warfare technologies, and the realization that tanks and armoured vehicles remain essential on the battlefield despite their vulnerability to drone attacks.

Moreover, Committee members met a number of battlegroup personnel from the United Kingdom and France, saw some of their weapons and other military equipment, and observed that the personnel are professional, have high morale and are combat-ready.

Like the Canadian-led battlegroup in Latvia, the battlegroup in Estonia will be expanded to a brigade in the coming years. Committee members heard that infrastructure is being built to accommodate the increase in personnel and equipment that will be based in Tapa. There are also plans to construct additional facilities, including a fitness complex similar to that at Camp Adazi.

NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Battlegroup in Poland

In addition to the battlegroups in Latvia and Estonia, Committee members visited the U.S.-led battlegroup in Orzysz, Poland. Orzysz is located relatively close to the Poland–Lithuania border, is south of the Kaliningrad Oblast—the Russian exclave on the Baltic Sea—and is near the Suwalki Gap. The Suwalki Gap, which is a narrow strip of land along the Poland–Lithuania border that separates Belarus—Russia's ally—from the Kaliningrad Oblast, is a “choke point” that has been considered strategically important from a military perspective since Poland and the Baltic countries joined NATO in 1999 and 2004, respectively. The expectation is that, in the event of a war or some other security emergency, Russia and Belarus might try to capture the Suwalki Gap to close the gap between Belarus and Kaliningrad, thereby cutting NATO's land connection with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and, consequently, jeopardizing NATO's ability to defend those three Baltic countries. Rising tensions between NATO and Russia since 2014 have prompted NATO to increase its military presence in the area. The battlegroup in Orzysz and the German-led eFP battlegroup in Rukla, Lithuania, are located about the same distance from the Suwalki Gap and serve as deterrent forces.

At the time of the Committee members' visit, the battlegroup in Poland comprised more than 1,000 personnel, and had contingents and equipment from Croatia, Romania, the



United Kingdom and the United States.⁴⁶ As the main contributor to the battlegroup, the United States was providing most of the armoured and mechanized infantry capabilities, including 29 M1A2 Abrams MBTs, 16 M3 Bradley tracked IFVs, an undisclosed quantity of M-109 Paladin tracked self-propelled howitzers, and other types of military vehicles and weapon systems. Croatia's contribution comprised an artillery battery equipped with PZH-2000 tracked self-propelled howitzers, and Romania supplied an air defence unit equipped with Gepard tracked self-propelled anti-aircraft artillery vehicles. A U.K. contingent—a light cavalry squadron for reconnaissance—was also part of the battlegroup. The battlegroup was supported by mortar, combat engineering, medical, maintenance, logistics and other units. The battlegroup operates in close cooperation with the Polish 15th Mechanized Infantry Brigade.

Committee members toured the base in Orzysz, heard about some of the battlegroup's capabilities, and were told that the battlegroup must continuously build and maintain its level of readiness, interoperability and discipline to remain a combat-capable force. In that regard, training and exercises are critically important and ongoing, and lessons learned from the war in Ukraine are quickly integrated into the training curriculum. In particular, members were told that battlegroup personnel regularly practise power projection capabilities to ensure the ability to deploy within 6.5 hours to various destinations across Europe, with enough supplies to be self-sufficient for a specific number of days in the field. The battlegroup routinely trains and conducts exercises with military units from Poland and other NATO member countries, and military units from NATO member countries that are not part of the battlegroup also regularly train at the base in Orzysz.

As well, Committee members heard that the Polish population is happy to have the battlegroup—as well as U.S. and NATO personnel—in their country, although efforts are being made to build relationships. For example, the battlegroup is attached to the Polish 15th Mechanized Infantry Brigade and they often train together, but the brigade is located several kilometres from the base. Unlike Latvia and Estonia, where personnel from the host country are more integrated into the battlegroup and tend to be co-located on the same base, the Polish 15th Mechanized Infantry Brigade is not integrated into the battlegroup. That said, the brigade and other military units of the Polish armed forces visit the base in Orzysz frequently and train regularly with the battlegroup.

46 Alongside leading and contributing to the eFP battlegroup in Orzysz, Poland, the United States (U.S.) also has military forces positioned elsewhere in Poland as well as other locations in Europe, including in Estonia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Spain and the United Kingdom. In August 2023, a U.S. spokesperson told *Janes* that approximately 85,000 U.S. military personnel had been deployed to Europe. See Nicholas Fiorenza, "Vilnius Waypoints," *Janes Defence and Intelligence Review*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (October 2023), pp. 45 and 49.

Committee members heard that, although the battlegroup's level of morale is high, there is always room for improvement and challenges relating to language barriers, competition for resource and interoperability should be overcome. As well, members were told that, although the battlegroup always practises interoperability, practical, technical and procedural issues are giving rise to interoperability gaps; attempts are being made to address those gaps through standing operating procedures. As well, because of different types of weapon systems and other military equipment, the armed forces of Poland and each of the NATO member countries in the battlegroup experience challenges in sharing parts and components, which can make logistics difficult.

Moreover, Committee members heard about fuel: many vehicles in the battlegroup use diesel fuel, but the United States' M1A2 MBTs and the M3 Bradley IFVs use JP-8 jet fuel. The M1A2 MBTs are powered by gas turbines that consume a great deal of fuel, and the best fuel for those types of engines is aviation jet fuel; JP-8 jet fuel is lighter than diesel fuel, which makes the M1A2 MBTs more manoeuvrable and higher-performing than similar diesel-powered tanks. That said, members were reassured that fuel is not a new interoperability issue for NATO, which has been using various types of fuel for decades without negative impacts on its strength, combat-readiness or effectiveness.

Committee members were told that, notwithstanding some interoperability challenges, there is strong cooperation among the battlegroup's NATO member countries. Although these countries' armed forces may not be able to share parts and components, they bring different capabilities to the battlegroup and they share equipment. For instance, Romanian tank transporter trucks assigned to the battlegroup have carried U.S. M1A2 MBTs.

The Role of NATO Force Integration Units

In the event of a security emergency, NATO relies not only on its eFP battlegroups, but also on the speed and strength of its rapid-reaction forces, with—as required—its rapid reinforcement strategy ensuring that the battlegroups will be reinforced by its Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), the NATO Response Force and additional high-readiness forces. Committee members heard that, to ensure that these high-readiness forces can deploy to NATO's eastern flank quickly and effectively, NATO has created a network of eight NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) in Eastern Europe. The NFIUs are located in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

Committee members were told that the NFIUs are small command and control headquarters whose key missions are to facilitate the rapid deployment of personnel to NATO's eastern flank, support collective defence planning, provide situational



awareness, and assist in coordinating training and exercises. To ensure that the movements of NATO's high-readiness forces are as effective as possible, the NFIUs also work with host nations to identify logistical networks, transportation routes and supporting infrastructure.

During the visit to NFIU Estonia in Tallinn, Estonia, Committee members were told that—at that time—the NFIU comprised about 40 military personnel, half of whom were provided by Estonia and half by other NATO member countries, including Canada. The main mission of NFIU Estonia, which was established in 2015, is to facilitate the rapid deployment of the VJTF and other NATO rapid-deployment high-readiness response forces to enhance NATO's responsiveness to emerging security challenges. Members also heard that, if Russia were to invade Estonia, NATO would have to deploy personnel rapidly to the eastern flank, and supplying personnel and equipment by air, land and sea would be a challenge for two reasons: Russia has military aircraft and submarines based in the vicinity; and Estonia is within range of artillery attacks from Russian territory. Rapid mobilization and deployment of NATO's rapid-reaction forces would have to be planned, coordinated and well executed, and NFIU Estonia and the other NFIUs would play an important role in that regard.

Committee members heard that, among other capabilities, the NFIUs provide situational awareness, training, doctrinal development, operational planning, support for exercises, information database management and coordination with host nation commands. Moreover, they gather, manage and disseminate information to the armed forces of NATO member countries by working with various military and civilian organizations at the local level. For example, to move tanks and mechanized forces across countries rapidly, personnel need advance, adequate and timely information about local infrastructure, such as the load/weight of bridges and the condition of roads.

Because of the number of personnel—and the number and types of vehicles and other equipment—involved in military deployments, planning and logistics are critically important. Committee members were told about a training exercise called "Tractable 19," which involved a VJTF-like deployment of at least 180 military vehicles—including 100 heavy tracked vehicles—by sea and land from the United Kingdom to Estonia through Germany, Poland and the other Baltic states. Members heard about the role that the NFIUs play in facilitating such deployments, and were told that the NFIUs' planning and logistics role is expected to increase in the coming years. At the Madrid Summit, NATO adopted a new NATO Force Model for readiness that seeks to ensure that NATO responds at a greater scale and at a higher level of readiness than at present. Members heard that the current NATO Response Force has about 40,000 personnel who can be deployed within 15 days, as required. With the new force model, at least 300,000 personnel from the land, sea, air and cyber domains will be kept at high readiness, with personnel and

equipment pre-assigned to specific plans for the defence of NATO member countries. NATO will be able to deploy 100,000 personnel (Tier 1 Forces) in up to 10 days, around 200,000 in a period of between 10 and 30 days (Tier 2 Forces) and at least 500,000 in a period of between 30 and 180 days (Tier 3 Forces).⁴⁷

Committee members were told that the NFIUs' planning and coordination activities complement those of the eFP battlegroups, and that NATO is able to mobilize and deploy significant military forces quickly to its eastern flank in the event of a security emergency.

REARMAMENT EFFORTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Rearmament Efforts in Latvia

Committee members heard about Latvia's rearmament efforts and the country's support for the commitments made at NATO's Madrid Summit, and at its Vilnius Summit in July 2023, to strengthen NATO's eastern flank.⁴⁸ Since Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014, and especially following its full-scale invasion in 2022, countries in Central and Eastern Europe have implemented several measures—both independently and as part of NATO initiatives—to increase their defensive capabilities.

Latvia, Estonia and Poland are among the NATO member countries that spend more than 2.00% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on national defence, consistent with the commitment made at NATO's Wales Summit in September 2014.⁴⁹ According to NATO, Canada's defence spending in 2023 represented an estimated 1.38% of the country's GDP. On several occasions during the trip, Committee members were asked about Canada's defence spending and steps that the country might take to meet the commitment made at the Wales Summit.

According to NATO, Latvia's defence spending rose from 0.94% of the country's GDP (US\$294 million) in 2014 to an estimated 2.27% of GDP (US\$1.03 billion) in 2023.⁵⁰ Committee members heard that Latvia is one of four NATO member countries that have passed legislation requiring the government to allocate at least 2.00% of GDP to defence

47 See NATO, "[New NATO Force Model](#)," 2022; NATO, "[NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance](#)," 28 July 2023.

48 NATO, "[Madrid Summit Declaration](#)," 29 June 2022; and NATO, "[Vilnius Summit Communiqué](#)," 11 July 2023.

49 See NATO, "[Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries \(2014–2023\)](#)," 7 July 2023, p. 7; and NATO, "[Wales Summit Declaration](#)," 5 September 2014.

50 NATO, "[Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries \(2014–2023\)](#)," 7 July 2023, p. 7.



spending. The country plans to spend at least 2.50% of GDP on defence by 2025.⁵¹ Some of this increased defence spending has been allocated to improving military infrastructure and to acquiring new military capabilities, such as air defence, coastal defence and long-range artillery systems.⁵²

Until 2007, Latvia had compulsory military service; this practice was abolished following the country's accession to NATO and the European Union. However, on 6 April 2023, the Latvian Saeima adopted a bill reintroducing "state defence service," or conscription. In 2023, the focus was voluntary enlistment, and Latvia took several steps to encourage young people to enlist. In spring and early summer 2023, the Latvian Ministry of Defence noted that the number of volunteers for this first phase of state defence service had exceeded expectations.⁵³

In future, military service will be compulsory for Latvian men aged between 18 and 27 years, with service lasting 11 months in the regular forces. Conscription will occur subject to several categories of deferment, including for education, and subject to certain exceptions, including for those who have health issues or who are the sole parent of a child. Women will not be conscripted, but they can choose to enlist voluntarily. Women constitute 16% of Latvia's armed forces, which is a proportion that is similar to that in Canada.⁵⁴

Committee members heard that there is broad support among the Latvian population for the reintroduction of conscription, and that conscription will enhance Latvia's willingness and ability to contribute to NATO's collective defence. Because of conscription, the Latvian military does not face the recruitment and retention challenges that militaries in other countries are experiencing.

As well, Committee members were told that, in Latvia, national defence is a whole-of-society effort. The country has adopted an approach of "comprehensive defence," in which all parts of society—the government, the public, the private sector and non-governmental organizations—contribute in various ways to resisting a potential foreign invasion. Latvia's ongoing preparedness efforts include collaboration between the

51 Latvia's Saeima (Parliament) adopted the *Law on the Financing of National Defence* in 2014. See Latvia, Ministry of Defence, "[Defence spending reaches 2.25% of Latvia's gross domestic product](#)," 10 March 2023.

52 Latvia, Ministry of Defence, "[Defence budget](#)."

53 See Latvia, Ministry of Defence, "[Frequently asked questions about the State Defence Service](#)"; and Latvia, Ministry of Defence, "[488 Latvians have voluntarily joined the State Defence Service](#)," 16 May 2023.

54 See Latvia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations, [Statement at the Ambassadorial-level Peacebuilding Commission](#), 14 December 2022; and Department of National Defence, "[Statistics of women in the Canadian Armed Forces](#)," July 2023.

military and the national guard—as well as cybersecurity measures—with the goal of countering the types of “hybrid” threats that Ukraine has faced since 2014.⁵⁵

As well, Committee members heard that Latvia’s memories of occupation by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union continue to inform that country’s defence policy. Recognizing that collective defence through NATO is an important aspect of Latvia’s defence planning, the country’s 2020 *State Defence Concept* acknowledged that “nobody is going to protect Latvia but the people of Latvia themselves and they need to be ready to stand up for their country.”⁵⁶

Rearmament Efforts in Estonia

In Estonia, Committee members heard about that country’s approach to defence and security, and gained an understanding of the ways in which defence policy is strongly influenced by the experiences of occupation in the 20th century. For example, Estonia’s current approach of mobilizing a reserve force during conflict—rather than maintaining a large standing army—was first used during that country’s war of independence more than a century ago.

According to NATO, Estonia’s defence spending increased from 1.93% of GDP (US\$514 million) in 2015 to an estimated 2.73% of GDP (US\$1.17 billion) in 2023.⁵⁷ Estonia’s January 2023 *National Security Concept* outlines the Government of Estonia’s intention to allocate 3.00% of GDP to defence spending in the coming years.⁵⁸

Committee members were told about some of Estonia’s military acquisitions, including those that are focused on lethal capabilities. For example, in 2022, Estonia signed a contract with the United States to purchase High Mobility Artillery Rocket Artillery Systems (HIMARS).⁵⁹ Other plans for defence procurement include air defence systems, artillery, maritime and coastal defence systems, and uncrewed aerial vehicles from a

55 Latvia, Ministry of Defence, *State Defence Concept*, 2020, p. 12. In October 2023, Latvia adopted a new version of the *State Defence Concept*. See Latvia, Ministry of Defence, *State Defence Concept*, 2023.

56 Latvia, Ministry of Defence, *State Defence Concept*, 2020, p. 5.

57 NATO, “[Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries \(2014–2023\)](#),” 7 July 2023, p. 7.

58 Estonia, Government, “[The Government Updated the National Security Concept of Estonia](#),” 24 January 2023.

59 Estonia, Centre for Defence Investments, “[Estonia purchases six HIMARS multiple rocket launcher systems from USA](#),” 3 December 2022.



range of foreign suppliers. With these acquisitions, Estonia should be able to deter a potential adversary by raising the “costs” of an invasion.

Another priority for Estonia’s defence spending is ammunition, with the Government of Estonia having announced spending of €339.5 million to increase ammunition stocks over the 2022–2025 period.⁶⁰ Committee members heard about the importance of ensuring that all NATO member countries increase their individual and collective capacity to produce ammunition.

Moreover, Committee members were told about Estonia’s approach to conscription, which has been in place since the country regained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Conscription is limited to men aged 18 to 27 years and has a duration of between eight and 11 months, depending on the military profession and the types of skills required. During a visit to the military base in Tapa, members saw Estonian recruits undergoing training and heard about the broad consensus among the Estonian population about the importance of conscription.

In Estonia, women can voluntarily enlist in the armed forces.⁶¹ In 2021, the country’s defence minister indicated that women represented 10% of the armed forces.⁶² Committee members were told that most of the women who enlist become officers and non-commissioned officers.

Following their initial service, Estonian conscripts become reservists who periodically undertake training. According to the Estonian defence ministry, there are more than 40,000 reservists in various stages of readiness, and they can be rapidly mobilized during a crisis. The ministry maintains a registry of 230,000 people—representing 20% of Estonia’s population—who could be mobilized during wartime.⁶³

Committee members heard that Estonia could achieve its full wartime mobilization in as few as three days. In addition to defending the territorial integrity of the state, this mobilized force would be responsible for facilitating the arrival of personnel from NATO member countries by air, land and sea.⁶⁴

60 Estonia, Centre for Defence Investments, [Defence Investments 2023–2027](#).

61 Estonia, Defence Resources Agency, [“Women and Conscript Service.”](#)

62 Estonia, Eesti Rahvusringhääling (ERR), [“Defense forces launch campaign to attract more female conscripts.”](#)

63 Estonia, Defence Forces, [“Estonian Defence Forces.”](#)

64 Ibid.

Like Latvia, Estonia has a whole-of-society approach to national defence. The most recent *National Security Concept* explained that the national government, local governments, the military, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, communities and the public share responsibility for the state's security.⁶⁵

Committee members were told that Estonia's membership in NATO and its hosting of the U.K.-led battlegroup are critical to the country's security. The *National Security Concept* highlighted that "Estonia considers the security of itself and its allies to be indivisible," also noting that the country is responsible for its own security.⁶⁶

As well, committee members heard that cyber defence is a component of Estonia's approach to defence and security, including because the country experienced a large-scale cyber attack in 2007. Since then, Estonia has adopted numerous measures to strengthen its cyber resilience. For instance, Estonia has a "Data Embassy" in Luxembourg, the purpose of which is to ensure that the Estonian state maintains control of—and access to—important government data in the event that it experiences a cyber attack or a military attack.⁶⁷

In 2008, following the cyber attack in Estonia, NATO established the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) in that country.⁶⁸ During the visit to the CCDCOE, Committee members were told that, like all NATO centres of excellence, the CCDCOE is affiliated with NATO but is not part of NATO's command structure.⁶⁹ Members heard about some of the latest developments in the field of cyber defence, and heard various views about whether a cyber attack could be considered an "attack" for the purposes of the *North Atlantic Treaty*, thus triggering the Article 5 provision stipulating that an attack against one NATO member country shall be considered an attack against all NATO member countries.

Together, the various aspects of Estonia's defence policy—including membership in NATO, the acquisition of new military equipment, the existence of conscription, the ability to mobilize reservists rapidly, a focus on cyber defence and the culture establishing a whole-of-society approach to security—are part of the country's focus on "deterrence by denial."

65 Estonia, Ministry of Defence, [National Security Concept of Estonia](#), 22 February 2023, p. 5.

66 Ibid., p. 4.

67 Estonia, E-Estonia, "[Data Embassy](#)."

68 NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, "[About Us](#)."

69 In July 2023, the Government of Canada announced that the NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence will be based in Montreal, Québec. See Global Affairs Canada, "[NATO Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence](#)."



As explained in the *National Security Concept*, the aim of deterrence by denial is to “convince the aggressor that achieving its objectives through military means is impossible.”⁷⁰

Rearmament Efforts in Poland

The Committee members’ visit to Poland focused primarily on the role of the U.S.-led eFP battlegroup. However, members also heard about Poland’s approach to national defence, including the country’s rapid and extensive efforts to expand its military in terms of budget, personnel and equipment.

Adopted in 2022, Poland’s *Homeland Defence Act* stipulates that the country must allocate at least 3.0% of GDP to defence spending.⁷¹ At 3.9% of GDP, Poland’s defence budget in 2023 is expected to be US\$29.1 billion, which is an amount that would be almost 75% higher than the defence budget in 2022.⁷² As a percentage of GDP, Poland has the largest defence budget among NATO’s 31 member countries.⁷³

Poland’s government has stated its intention to more than double the size of the Polish Armed Forces, with a proposal for the number of active personnel to rise from approximately 114,000 to more than 250,000. Poland’s most recent defence policy statement—the 2016 *Defence Concept*, which covers the 2017–2032 period—noted Poland’s objective of transforming the Polish Armed Forces into “one of the most modern and most numerous militaries in Europe” by 2032.⁷⁴

Numerous large-scale military acquisitions are underway in Poland. For example, Poland has begun receiving M1A2 MBTs from the United States, and has announced its intention to acquire F-35A fighter jets. In May 2023, Poland received its first delivery of HIMARS from the United States.⁷⁵

During the visit to the battlegroup’s headquarters in Orzysz, Committee members were told about the strengthening of the defence relationship between Poland and the United

70 Estonia, Ministry of Defence, [National Security Concept of Estonia](#), 22 February 2023, p. 13.

71 Poland, Chancellery of the Prime Minister, [“More troops and more money for defence—the Council of Ministers adopted a draft Homeland Defence Act,”](#) 22 February 2022.

72 NATO, [“Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries \(2014–2023\),”](#) 7 July 2023, p. 7.

73 Ibid.

74 Poland, Ministry of Defence, [The Defence Concept of the Republic of Poland](#), 2016, p. 45.

75 Poland, Ministry of Defence, [“The first Himars are already in Poland. They will go to the 16th Mechanized Division,”](#) 15 May 2023.

States. In October 2022, the U.S. Department of State indicated that there were approximately 10,000 U.S. military personnel stationed in Poland.⁷⁶ Members also heard about Poland's growing defence relationship with South Korea. As part of a bilateral arms export agreement, Poland is expected to acquire several pieces of military equipment—including fighter jets, MBTs and artillery—from South Korea.⁷⁷

Committee members heard that, despite significant divisions within the Polish population relating to Poland's October 2023 parliamentary elections, a consensus remains about the importance of both membership in NATO and strengthening the country's military capacity.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

During the trip to Europe, Committee members reaffirmed that Russia's aggressive posture internationally, and its war against Ukraine, are causing instability and uncertainty in Europe, as well as tensions with NATO. Moreover, members saw that Russia's authoritarianism, aggression and revisionism has—once again—brought war to Europe, and stress and insecurity to many living there, especially those residing in countries on NATO's eastern flank. Russia's capture of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014, involvement in the frozen conflict in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine since 2014, and full-fledged invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 prompted the populations of some NATO member countries to recall their past experiences with Russia and war, as well as the terror and pain associated with being invaded, conquered, occupied and brutalized by a neighbouring foreign power.

In Latvia, Committee members visited the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, which is located in Riga. The museum's displays caused members to be reminded about the atrocities committed against—and the suffering endured by—the residents of the Baltic countries during the more than 50 years of occupation of their homelands by the Soviet Union (1940–1941 and 1944–1991) and Nazi Germany (1941–1944) prior to their independence in 1991. The cruelty of those decades of occupation are remembered, and the populations of the Baltic countries have first-hand experience with losing their freedom and liberty. Having regained their independence more than 30 years ago at the end of the Cold War, these populations understand that democracy cannot be taken for granted: it must be defended at all costs. They also realize the importance of remembering their past so that future generations are aware of the offences committed

76 United States, Department of State, "[U.S. Security Cooperation with Poland](#)," 31 October 2022.

77 Poland, Ministry of Defence, "[Strengthening the capacity of the Polish Armed Forces as part of the Polish–Korean cooperation](#)," 5 June 2023.



by Russia and other foreign powers against their countries between 1940 and 1991. Like the Baltic countries, Poland was invaded and conquered by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939. Although Poland regained its independence after the Second World War ended in 1945, the country remained behind the Iron Curtain as a communist vassal state of the Soviet Union until the end of the Cold War.

Committee members acknowledge that, with Russia again behaving aggressively with neighbouring countries in Europe, the governments of Poland and the Baltic countries are rearming and making substantial investments in their country's armed forces. They are taking these actions with the support of their populations, many of whom recall what life was like during the Cold War. For them, investments in national security are needed to protect their freedom, safeguard their way of life, and avoid a potential repetition of history.

As well, Committee members recognize that the governments and populations of Poland and the Baltic countries—whose territories are located on NATO's eastern flank, are near the battlefields of Ukraine, and exist in close proximity to Russia and Belarus, its ally—fully understand the existential threat that President Putin's authoritarian Russia and the country's aggressive actions pose to NATO member countries and to democracies worldwide. Moreover, people in Poland and the Baltic countries are aware of the urgent need to reinforce their national defence capabilities as the international security environment continues to deteriorate rapidly because of the actions taken by Russia and other authoritarian states. Those populations also realize the value of collective defence and the priority that should be given to strengthening both NATO and its resolve to defend the populations and territories of its 31 member countries against the threats that Russia is posing throughout the world.

Committee members appreciate the comments heard in Europe about the gratitude that Poland and the Baltic countries feel for Canada and other NATO member countries, which are deploying military forces to Central and Eastern Europe to defend NATO's eastern flank. With these actions, Russia is being sent a clear message: NATO is united, and is ready to fight to protect its member countries. These countries are strong supporters of Ukraine in its war against Russia, and they have been providing military aid and training members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Furthermore, Committee members value the frank assessments they heard about both the international security situation in Europe and the resolve of NATO member countries to support Ukraine in its war with Russia. For members, the visits to NATO's eFP battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia and Poland underscored the strength, unity and determination of NATO's defence and deterrence measures in Central and Eastern

Europe. The battlegroup's personnel are combat-ready and highly trained, and they have state-of-the-art weaponry and military equipment.

In conclusion, because of the trip to Europe, Committee members now have a clearer understanding of the current security situation along NATO's eastern flank, and of its defence and deterrence activities. By standing up to Russia and supporting Ukraine, Canada and the other NATO member countries are sending a unequivocal message: democracies intend to remain strong and united against the forces of authoritarianism, aggression and tyranny on the world stage.

APPENDIX A: TRAVEL FROM AUGUST 19 TO 27, 2023

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Location
High Commission of Canada in the United Kingdom Capt(N) C. Peschke, Naval Adviser, Canadian Defence Liaison Staff (London)	2023/08/21	Lydd, United Kingdom
British Armed Forces LCol E.A. Fraser, Commanding Officer, 4th Battalion, The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment	2023/08/21	Lydd, United Kingdom
Canadian Armed Forces LCol James Boddy, Commander, Joint Task Force – Ukraine Maj R.J.S. Law, Commanding Officer, UK Training Element – Op UNIFIER (CA), 3 rd Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment	2023/08/21	Lydd, United Kingdom
Embassy of Canada to Latvia Brian Szwarc, Ambassador Col Robert Foster, Canadian Defence Attaché to the Baltic States Maj M. L. Tamsett, Deputy Defence Attaché Aija Matule, Officer, General Relations and Public Affairs	2023/08/22	Riga, Latvia
Defence, Internal Affairs and Corruption Prevention Committee of the Latvian Parliament Raimonds Bergmanis, Chair and Member of Parliament Jānis Dombrava, Member and Member of Parliament Igors Rajevs, Member and Member of Parliament Jānis Skrastiņš, Member and Member of Parliament Atis Švinka, Member and Member of Parliament	2023/08/22	Riga, Latvia

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Location
<p>Canadian Armed Forces</p> <p>LCol D.J. Vincent, Commanding Officer, 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment and Commanding Officer, NATO enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group</p> <p>LCol Jimmy Leclerc, Acting Commander, Task Force Latvia</p>	2023/08/22	Riga, Latvia
<p>Latvian National Armed Forces</p> <p>LCol Oskars Lejniesks, G-3 Chief, Latvian Land Forces Mechanized Brigade</p>	2023/08/22	Riga, Latvia
<p>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</p> <p>Baiba Braže, Ambassador, Special Assignments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs</p>	2023/08/23	Riga, Latvia
<p>Ministry of Defence</p> <p>Ināra Mūrniece, Minister of Defence</p>	2023/08/23	Riga, Latvia
<p>NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence</p> <p>Jānis Sārts, Director</p> <p>Einar Linn, Deputy Director</p>	2023/08/23	Riga, Latvia
<p>Latvian Parliament</p> <p>Edvards Smiltēns, Speaker</p> <p>Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica, Deputy Speaker</p> <p>Irma Kalniņa, Member of Parliament</p> <p>Raimonds Bergmanis, Member of Parliament</p>	2023/08/23	Riga, Latvia
<p>Embassy of Canada to Estonia</p> <p>Tyler Wordsworth, Chargé d'affaires</p> <p>Kairi-Liis Ustav, Programs Officer</p>	2023/08/24	Tallinn, Estonia
<p>British Armed Forces</p> <p>LCol S. Wilson, Commanding Officer, The Queen's Royal Hussars</p>	2023/08/24	Tallinn, Estonia

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Location
Estonian Police and Border Guard Eve Kalmus, Head, Border Management Office Tarmo Hütt, Document Specialist Dmitri Gorelov, Border Outpost Manager Ants Kutt, Tax and Customs Officer	2023/08/24	Tallinn, Estonia
Estonian National Defence Committee Kalev Stoicescu, Chair and Member of Parliament Leo Kunnas, Vice-Chair and Member of Parliament Kristo Enn Vaga, Member and Member of Parliament Enn Eesmaa, Member and Member of Parliament Meelis Kiili, Member and Member of Parliament	2023/08/25	Tallinn, Estonia
Ministry of Defence Kusti Salm, Permanent Secretary of Defence	2023/08/25	Tallinn, Estonia
NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence Commander Jacob Galbreath, Lead, Strategy Branch	2023/08/25	Tallinn, Estonia
NATO Force Integration Unit Peeter Ivask, Navy Captain	2023/08/25	Tallinn, Estonia
Embassy of Canada to Poland Catherine Godin, Ambassador Col Stéphane Roy, Defence Attaché	2023/08/26	Warsaw, Poland
United States Armed Forces LCol James Ray, Commander, NATO Enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Poland and Commander of the 1 st Battalion, 9th Cavalry Regiment, 2 nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1 st Cavalry Division	2023/08/26	Warsaw, Poland

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meeting No. 93](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. John McKay
Chair

