



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

PROVIDING AID TO THE CIVIL POWER: DISASTER RELIEF AND THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES' DOMESTIC OPERATIONS

Report of the Standing Committee on National Defence

Honourable John McKay, Chair

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

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

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**Hon. John McKay
Chair**

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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

THIRTEENTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied the rising domestic operational deployments and challenges for the Canadian Armed Forces and has agreed to report the following:

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada address issues relating to the current recruitment and retention crisis to ensure the Canadian Armed Forces is able to fulfill their responsibility to provide aid to civil power when requested. 38

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada create a database, in line with the Privacy Act, of volunteers based upon their profession and experience with the specific purpose to call up to volunteer efficiently to assist with disaster response operations..... 38

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada undertake a comprehensive study of establishing a civilian corps of engineers in the Canadian Armed Forces, with a structure and mission similar to the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and a mixed body of planning and coordination specialists. 39

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada take comprehensive steps to work with provinces and territories to establish a national standardized curriculum, including standardized core capabilities and competencies that can be recognized at the national level and accreditation for emergency management programs taught at post-secondary institutions. 39

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada prioritize the efforts to increase disaster response and emergency preparedness exercises between relevant federal departments and agencies and provincial and local authorities, including relevant civilian and non-governmental organizations. 39

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada work with provinces and territories to invest in their emergency management, disaster mitigation and response assistance to ensure they only rely on the Canadian Armed Forces as a last resort..... 39

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada take an inventory of all assets, across all departments, that can be used in disaster assistance and undertake, in partnership with provinces and territories, a national review of emergency management planning and response capacity..... 39

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada assess whether there is a need to procure or lease additional equipment, including water bombers. 39

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada create a domestic service medal to recognize all military deployments in our communities (Operation LENTUS, Operation LASER, major international events, etc.) and that this medal take into account the cumulative time of deployments to encourage military personnel to participate to short-term deployments..... 40

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada increase youth participation in combatting climate change and climate disasters by enticing thousands of young adults into the humanitarian workforce..... 40

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada establish a national adaptation strategy to build resilience against climate disasters. 40

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada enact all recommendations in the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces’ report, entitled *Hidden Battles: A systemic investigation into the identification of mental health needs and support for Primary Reserve members participating in domestic operations.* 40

Recommendation 13

That the Standing Committee on National Defence conduct a further study on the modernization of career progression and service medals system in the Canadian Armed forces. 40

Recommendation 14

That the Government of Canada consider investing in a professional and permanent disaster management workforce, such as a Canadian resilience corps, who could be quickly mobilized and deployed to disaster zones for response and recovery efforts. 40

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada strengthen the emergency response capabilities and capacity of the Canadian Rangers and give them a disaster workforce role in the north to benefit their communities and adjacent communities. 40

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada leverage organizations by bringing them together under an NGO consortium that works as an auxiliary to the government to better coordinate and to identify what capabilities these organizations bring to the table and what their ability to respond is. 41



PROVIDING AID TO THE CIVIL POWER: DISASTER RELIEF AND THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES' DOMESTIC OPERATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the number of requests for Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) assistance to support civilian authorities in responding to domestic emergencies has increased, largely due to the growing number of climate-related disasters across Canada. Operation LENTUS, which is the CAF's operation to assist civilian authorities during floods, forest fires, hurricanes and other natural disasters, was activated approximately 50 times between 2010 and 2023. In 2010, there was one deployment under Operation LENTUS; in 2023, there were eight.¹ The Department of National Defence (DND) maintains that the number of CAF deployments under Operation LENTUS has "broadly doubled every five years since 2010."² Moreover, under Operation LASER and Operation VECTOR, between 2020 and 2022, the CAF responded to 118 provincial and territorial requests for assistance directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic.³

The rising number of provincial and territorial requests for CAF assistance to address domestic emergencies have been occurring alongside a rapid deterioration in the international security environment because of new global threats, wars abroad and growing tensions between countries, largely due to the aggressive actions of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Russia, and other adversarial, authoritarian and revisionist states worldwide. Furthermore, those CAF domestic deployments are happening at a time when the CAF faces severe personnel and equipment shortages, which are straining its resources and operational readiness.

In this context, on 31 January 2022, the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence (the Committee) adopted the following [motion](#):

Whereas, climate change is causing more frequent and more severe extreme weather events, leading to increased demand on the Canadian Armed Forces [CAF] to provide support with personnel and equipment,

1 See Department of National Defence (DND), "[Operation LENTUS](#)."

2 Ibid.

3 See Ibid.; DND, "[Operation LASER](#)"; and DND, "[Operation VECTOR](#)."



and; whereas, requests for federal assistance from provinces and territories have increased significantly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to unprecedented demand on Canadian Forces Health Services; that, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee conduct a study, of no fewer than 4 meetings, on the challenges this rising domestic demand poses to the CAF, the readiness of the CAF to respond to future requests for assistance, and opportunities to improve the way that the CAF supports provinces and territories and fulfills its domestic, non-combat role more generally; that the committee report its recommendations to the House and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, it request that the government table a detailed response to the report.

Between 2 May 2022 and 23 November 2023, the Committee held eight meetings on the topic of rising domestic operational deployments and challenges for the CAF. The Committee's 29 witnesses comprised Canadian federal department and military officials, academics and other stakeholders. As well, the Committee received a number of written briefs.

This report summarizes witnesses' comments made when appearing before the Committee or in a brief, as well as relevant publicly available information. The first section describes the extent to which, in recent years, climate change and the growing frequency of climate-related natural disasters in Canada have affected the CAF's domestic operations. The second section outlines options for improving the country's emergency management responses to ensure that civilian authorities have the resources and capabilities to respond to domestic emergencies, and that the CAF has needed capabilities and remains a force of last resort when called upon to deploy in aid to the civil power. The final section contains the Committee's conclusions and recommendations.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACTS ON THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES' DOMESTIC OPERATIONS

Canada is among the countries that has legislation allowing the federal government to deploy its military domestically to support civilian authorities in responding to a domestic emergency. Under Canada's [National Defence Act](#) and related [regulations](#), and at the request of civilian authorities, the CAF can be deployed "to perform any duty involving public service," and to provide aid to the civil power in the event of riots or disturbances. As well, under the [Emergencies Act](#), the CAF can be deployed domestically to assist civilian authorities in times of war or other national emergencies.

Witnesses provided various views about the deployment of the CAF to assist civilian authorities in times of domestic emergencies, emphasizing the increasing frequency with which provincial and territorial governments are requesting military assistance when natural disasters strike their regions. In particular, they discussed the responsibility for emergency management in Canada, the rising number of climate-related natural disasters in Canada, the growing demand for the CAF's assistance to civilian authorities, the CAF's unique capabilities on domestic operations, the impacts of more domestic operations on the CAF, the high cost of the CAF's domestic operations, and re-examination of the CAF's role in domestic operations.

The Responsibility for Emergency Management in Canada

In Canada, responsibility for emergency response is shared among the local, provincial, territorial and federal jurisdictions. The CAF is expected to provide aid to the civil power as a force of last resort; that is, when no one else is able to respond to a disaster. According to [Deryck Trehearne](#), Director General of Public Safety Canada's Government Operations Centre, Canada's provincial and territorial governments have responsibility for emergency management within their respective jurisdictions, with the federal government being responsible for exercising leadership at the national and international levels. Public Safety Canada is the lead federal coordinating department for emergency response.

[Deryck Trehearne](#) explained that, in an emergency, the first response is almost always at the local level: municipalities, hospitals, fire departments and police forces. If local authorities need assistance, they request it from their provincial or territorial government. Each of Canada's provincial and territorial governments maintains an emergency management organization (EMO) whose purpose is to prepare for emergencies in its region. The activities of EMOs include planning and research, training, undertaking response operations, and administering and delivering disaster financial assistance programs.⁴

If responding to emergencies exceeds provincial or territorial capabilities, provinces and territories can seek assistance from the federal government. [Deryck Trehearne](#) elaborated that, while emergency response begins at the local level,

[i]t is when those emergencies spill across jurisdictions or require support beyond the capacity of a province or a First Nation to respond, or there is an event in the national interest, that the federal government is then engaged under the relevant Acts of Parliament.

4 Public Safety Canada, "[Emergency Management Organizations](#)."



Provincial and territorial governments can submit a Request for Federal Assistance (RFA) if they require resources—including the CAF’s support—to address an emergency. According to Public Safety Canada,

[t]he province or territory submits a formal RFA to describe what they would need in federal government support for a successful emergency response. The well-established process in place for managing RFAs, through the Government Operations Centre, ... includes interdepartmental consultation and coordination. Public Safety [Canada] coordinates Emergency Management Requests for Federal Assistance which can include ... employment of the Canadian Armed Forces as a support force of last resort.⁵

Minister of Emergency Preparedness [Harjit S. Sajjan](#) highlighted that “the *National Defence Act* allows the CAF to be authorized to provide assistance in an emergency,” and emphasized that “a very strict process must be followed before there is deployment.” [Minister Sajjan](#) indicated that,

[w]hen an RFA is submitted, it must undergo a strict assessment by the Government Operations Centre and its regional offices. The [Government Operations Centre] then recommends a solution that could involve the Canadian Armed Forces only when regional, provincial, territorial and even commercial solutions are exhausted. There must also be a clearly defined and feasible timeline for the CAF deployment. It needs to be time-limited and focused on the response phase rather than the long-term recovery. ... Help provided by the Canadian Armed Forces ... should always and only be considered a force of last resort.

Referring to the CAF’s interaction with provinces and territories regarding a disaster response, [Brigadier-General Josh J. Major](#)—Commander of the CAF’s 4th Canadian Division and Joint Task Force Central—stated that the CAF coordinates with local and provincial and territorial officials to “determine the correct response in terms of a particular situation.” He added that the CAF “always works under the authority of civilian organizations in order to meet their needs.”

The Rising Number of Climate-Related Natural Disasters in Canada

Witnesses said that climate change is leading to an increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters across Canada. [Wilfrid Greaves](#), Associate Professor at the University of Victoria’s Department of Political Science, described climate change as “the greatest medium- and long-term threat to security in Canada.” Public Safety Canada asserts that there were more than 195 major disasters in Canada between 2008 and 2018, which “have cost tens of billions of dollars in damages and displaced hundreds of

5 Public Safety Canada, “[Requests for Federal Assistance](#).”

thousands of people.”⁶ As well, Public Safety Canada underlines that “disaster losses are likely to increase into the foreseeable future” as a result of such factors as climate change, critical infrastructure interdependence and changing demographics.⁷

According to [Minister Sajjan](#), natural disasters relating to “extreme weather events” cost Canadians \$3.1 billion in insured losses in 2022, and “Canada now routinely exceeds about \$2 billion annually for insured losses” because of the growing number of climate-related domestic emergencies. Moreover, Minister Sajjan said that the “Government of Canada has paid \$7.9 billion in its entire history through the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangement” program, which was launched in 1970 and provides federal financial assistance to provincial and territorial governments in the event of large-scale natural disasters. He emphasized that “most of this—\$5.8 billion—has been spent in the last 10 years alone.”⁸ Minister Sajjan observed that “these increased costs show that the impact of climate change is becoming more severe, putting further strain on Canada's emergency management system, as well as on our people, the economy, our first responders and all levels of government.”

[Conrad Sauvé](#), President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Red Cross, stated that—more than a decade ago—most of the Red Cross’ emergency management operations were international. However, he commented that—today—“90% of [the] efforts are focused on assisting Canadians at home.” In his view, “the time has come to stop treating these large-scale events as exceptional, and we must do more now to prepare ourselves for a new normal.” [Josh Bowen](#), Faculty member with the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology’s Disaster and Emergency Management Program, maintained that “climate change is only going to exacerbate the scale, scope and frequency of disasters here and around the world.”

[Damien Burns](#), the Government of Yukon’s Assistant Deputy Minister for Protective Services, highlighted the Yukon Emergency Measures Organization, which is the Government’s EMO. Commenting that climate change and the growing number of weather-related disasters are affecting provinces and territories, he stated:

We see these emergencies increasing and further pressuring our resources. We see this climate emergency as an oppressing and immediate threat, and we are seeing the effects of a changing climate on our environment and across our ... communities.

6 Public Safety Canada, [Toward a Resilient 2030: Emergency Management Strategy for Canada](#), 2019, p. 1.

7 Ibid.

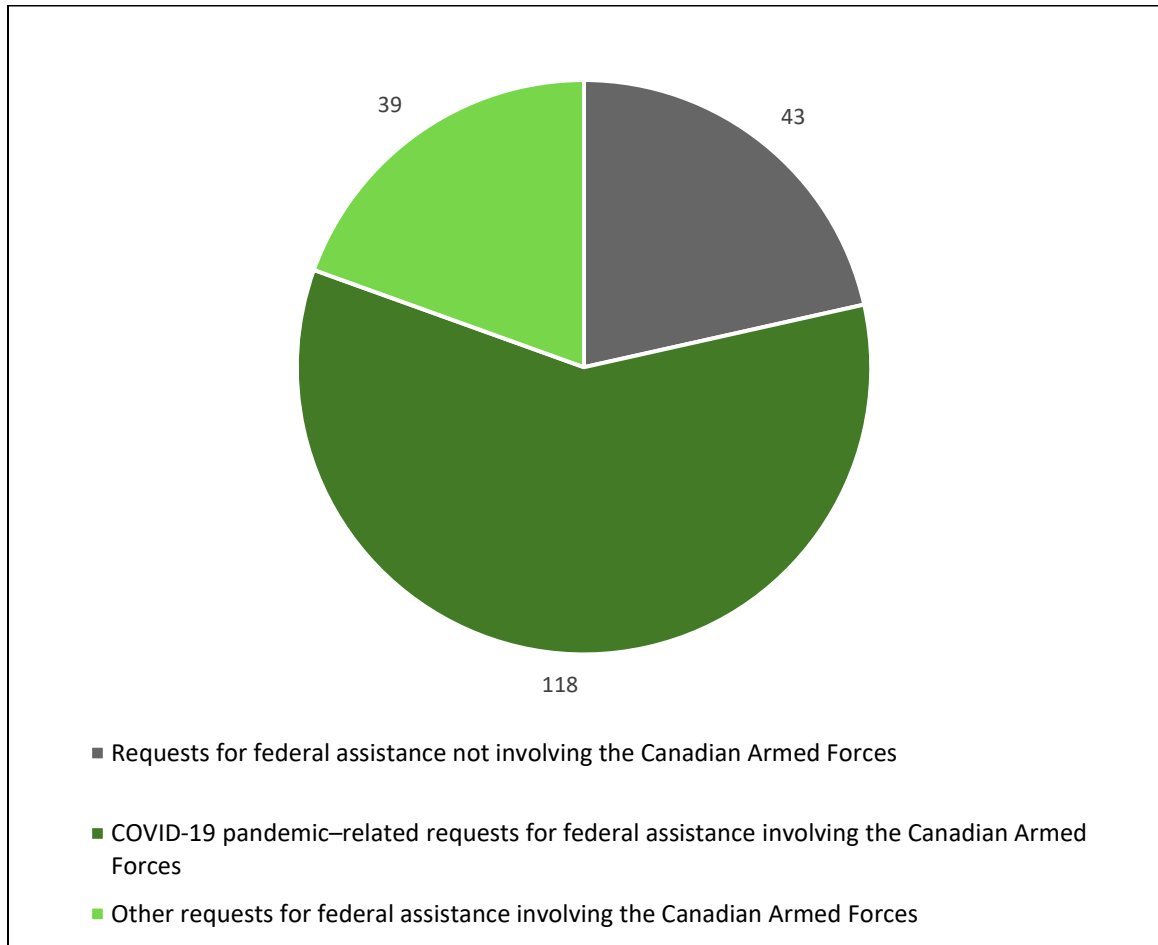
8 For more information, see Public Safety Canada, [“Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements \(DFAA\).”](#)



Moreover, [Damien Burns](#) noted that the increase in weather-related disasters in recent years has presented “ongoing challenges,” and has “truly strained our emergency response providers in the Yukon.” According to him, the Government of Yukon has had to call upon the CAF for assistance on a number of occasions, and that assistance has been “invaluable” in times of emergencies.

[Minister Sajjan](#) underscored the extent to which the federal emergency management response to domestic disasters has increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. He said that, before 2020, the Government Operations Centre coordinated between five and 12 RFAs per year. That said, he also pointed out that— from January 2020 to August 2023—the Government Operations Centre responded to more than 230 RFAs. Witnesses commented that the number of provincial and territorial requests for the CAF’s assistance has increased since the beginning of the pandemic. [Deryck Trehearne](#) indicated that the federal government received 200 RFAs from March 2020 to October 2022, of which 157 involved the CAF. [Major-General Paul Prévost](#), DND’s Director of Staff at the Strategic Joint Staff, mentioned that 118 of those 157 RFAs were directly related to the pandemic. The remaining RFAs were related to Operation LENTUS and other types of domestic responses. In Minister Sajjan’s opinion, these “numbers clearly show that we are in a climate crisis.” According to him, with climate-related events expected to “only increase in frequency, severity and intensity” in the coming years, the number of requests for the CAF’s assistance is “not anticipate[d] ... to return to pre-pandemic levels,” and—instead—“will only increase.”

Figure 1—Number of Requests for Federal Assistance, by type (March 2020 to October 2022)



Notes: The figure presents the number of requests for federal assistance (RFAs) that Public Safety Canada’s Government Operations Centre received from civil authorities over the March 2020 to October 2022 period. These numbers were provided by federal officials to the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence.

“Requests for Federal Assistance not involving the Canadian Armed Forces” refers to the number of RFAs that involved entities other than the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

“COVID-19 Pandemic-related Requests for Federal Assistance involving the Canadian Armed Forces” refers to the number of RFAs involving the CAF that were related to the pandemic. These RFAs led to the deployment of the CAF under [Operation LASER](#) and [Operation VECTOR](#) between 2020 and 2022.

“Other Requests for Federal Assistance involving the Canadian Armed Forces” refers to the number of RFAs that led to the deployment of the CAF under [Operation LENTUS](#) and other domestic responses.



Sources: House of Commons, Standing Committee on National Defence (NDDN), [Evidence](#), 27 September 2022 (Major-General Paul Prévost, Director of Staff, Strategic Joint Staff, Canadian Armed Forces); NDDN, [Evidence](#), 6 October 2022 (Deryck Trehearne Director General, Government Operations Centre, Public Safety Canada); and Department of National Defence, "[Operation LENTUS in 2023](#)," *Domestic and Continental Security*.

The Growing Demand for the Canadian Armed Forces' Assistance to Civilian Authorities

Witnesses mentioned that, in recent years, civilian authorities have been seeking the CAF's assistance more often in times of domestic emergencies. [Wilfrid Greaves](#) noted that "one result of climate-related environmental changes" is that the CAF has been required to increase its "domestic operational tempo providing emergency response to extreme weather events." He said that Operation LENTUS was activated with "increasing frequency" between 2010 and 2021, emphasizing that—in 2021—there were "seven different LENTUS deployments in four provinces and two territories, compared with one in 2020 and three in 2019."

[Josh Bowen](#) remarked that, "in the 19 years from 1990 to 2009, the CAF deployed on 33 domestic disaster response operations, responding to wildfires, floods, winter storms and major air disasters." Providing a comparison, he observed that, "in the 11 years from 2010 to 2021, the CAF deployed 38 times, eight of which were in 2020 and 2021," adding that those 38 responses were related to weather events and "did not include the extensive CAF support to the pandemic response."

[Michael Fejes](#), a Ph.D. candidate and Assistant Professor at Carleton University's Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, said that almost 50% of the CAF's current operational deployments are domestic. He stated that, "recently, there have even been short periods of time where there were more CAF members deployed on domestic operations than on international operations." Michael Fejes explained that "what was once considered an unexpected frequency of domestic deployment has now become almost an annual event or annual cycle, and this challenges the CAF in new ways."

Witnesses also underlined the unprecedented forest fire season of summer 2023 and its impacts on the CAF's domestic operations. [Minister Sajjan](#) and [Dr. Mike Flannigan](#), BC Innovation Research Chair in Predictive Services, Emergency Management and Fire Science at Thompson River University, stipulated that the wildfires burned in excess of 18 million hectares of land across Canada, and forced the evacuation of more than 300 communities and over 230,000 Canadians. Dr. Flannigan noted that the area burned was "three times the size of Nova Scotia" and "more than double the previous modern-

day record of seven million hectares [burned] in 1989.” [Minister Sajjan](#) remarked that, from May to October 2023, the federal government received 18 RFAs from provinces and territories to help respond to the devastation caused by the “worst wildfire season in Canada's recorded history.”

According to DND, “in 2023, the CAF responded to eight requests for assistance for disaster relief operations from provinces and territories,” all of which were related to the wildfires. DND maintains that those eight deployments are an increase from “an average of almost four requests for assistance per year between 2017 and 2021 and twice per year between 2010 and 2016.”⁹ Drawing attention to the “unprecedented wildfire season” in Canada in summer 2023, Minister of National Defence [Bill Blair](#) mentioned that the approximately 2,100 CAF members deployed on Operation LENTUS “spent more than 130 consecutive days battling fires across six provinces and territories,” adding that “soldiers provided firefighting support and stepped up with search and rescue” and helped evacuate people under difficult circumstances. As well, Minister Blair said that military bases were used to house and feed families who had been evacuated because of the fires.

9 DND, “[Operation LENTUS](#).”



Figure 2—Operation LENTUS Deployments, 2010–2023

Year	Location	Reason for Deployment	Deployment Dates
2023			
1.	British Columbia	Wildfire	20 August–15 September
2.	Northwest Territories	Wildfire	12 August–5 September
3.	Quebec	Wildfire	14–21 July
4.	British Columbia	Wildfire	14 June–15 August
5.	Ontario	Wildfire	22 June–Undisclosed
6.	Quebec	Wildfire	2 June–12 July
7.	Nova Scotia	Wildfire	1–17 June
8.	Alberta	Wildfire	10 May–19 June
2022			
1.	Ontario	Medical Transportation	19–22 October
2.	Prince Edward Island	Hurricane	25 September–16 October
3.	Newfoundland and Labrador	Hurricane	25 September–8 October
4.	Nova Scotia	Hurricane	24 September–13 October
2021			
1.	Newfoundland and Labrador	Flood	25 November–2 December
2.	British Columbia	Flood	17 November–17 December
3.	Nunavut	Tainted Water Supply	22 October–10 December
4.	Manitoba	Wildfire	20 July–24 August
5.	Ontario	Wildfire	12 July–12 September
6.	British Columbia	Wildfire	5 July–5 September
7.	Yukon	Flood	5 July–2 August
2020			
1.	Newfoundland and Labrador	Snowstorm	19–29 January
2019			
1.	Nova Scotia	Hurricane	8–15 September
2.	Ontario	Wildfire	30 May–10 June
3.	Quebec	Flood	19 April–5 June
4.	Ontario	Flood	19 April–5 June
5.	New Brunswick	Flood	19 April–3 May

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2018			
1.	Quebec	Snowstorm	29 November–2 December
2.	British Columbia	Wildfire	13 August–13 September
3.	Manitoba	Wildfire	23–25 May
4.	British Columbia	Flood	16–26 May
5.	New Brunswick	Flood	11–15 May
6.	Ontario	Flood	25 April–7 May
2017			
1.	Manitoba	Wildfire	31 August–3 September
2.	British Columbia	Wildfire	9 July–15 September
3.	Newfoundland and Labrador	Flood	17 May–12 December
4.	Quebec	Flood	5 May–5 June
5.	Ontario	Flood	16 April–1 May
6.	New Brunswick	Ice Storm	27 January–6 February
2016			
1.	Alberta	Wildfire	4–13 May
2015			
1.	Saskatchewan	Wildfire	4–20 July
2.	Ontario	Flood	27 April–7 May
2014			
1.	Manitoba	Flood	4–15 July
2.	Ontario	Flood	17–20 May
3.	Ontario	Flood	10–12 May
4.	Ontario	Flood	7–8 May
2013			
1.	Alberta	Flood	21–26 June
2011			
1.	Ontario (Operation FORGE)	Wildfire	6–22 July
2.	Manitoba (Operation LUSTRE)	Flood	8–27 May
3.	Quebec (Operation LOTUS)	Flood	5 May–7 June
2010			
1.	Newfoundland (Operation LAMA)	Hurricane	25 September–9 October

Note: Operation LENTUS was created in 2012. Each domestic operation conducted prior to 2012 had a different name, such as Operations FORGE, LUSTRE and LOTUS in 2011, and Operation LAMA in 2010.

Sources: Department of National Defence (DND), "[Operation LENTUS](#)"; and James D.H. Rock, *The Canadian Armed Forces and Domestic Operations: Unbalanced and Overstretched?*, Canadian Forces College, DND, 2021, p. 102.



The Canadian Armed Forces' Unique Capabilities on Domestic Operations

Witnesses identified a range of unique capabilities that the CAF can provide when deployed on domestic operations. Discussing the CAF's unique capabilities in responding to natural disasters, [Major-General Prévost](#) stated that providing assistance to civil authorities during domestic crises or major emergencies is one of the CAF's core missions. He mentioned that there are several unique capabilities that the CAF can offer when required, and suggested that the CAF's organized command and control system is beneficial in emergencies. However, he underscored that demand for the CAF's involvement in addressing natural disasters has "doubled every five years since 2010," and highlighted that this increase in demand is occurring while the CAF is experiencing significant personnel challenges.

[Brigadier-General Major](#) pointed out that the world is "becoming a more dangerous place," and explained that, in order to balance international and domestic obligations, the CAF "uses systems of managed readiness ... to ensure that [it has] domestic capability at home ready to respond throughout the different regions of Canada, and to concurrently prepare [its] forces to respond to [the CAF's] mandates." He indicated that "support to Canadians is [a] top priority."

As well, [Brigadier-General Major](#) commented that, in order to ensure an ability to respond to a wide variety of natural disasters, the CAF maintains a broad competency base. According to him, sea, land and air forces are either moved or pre-positioned so they can be deployed quickly in response to requests for assistance.

[Major-General Prévost](#) stated that "there are many capabilities in the Canadian Armed Forces that are readily available that are not necessarily available right now in civil society" and that can be useful when providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. In his opinion, these capabilities include operational planning, communications, command and control, intelligence, logistics, engineering, search and rescue, medical and health resources, infrastructure, equipment, and disciplined personnel who can be deployed relatively rapidly during national emergencies and who are trained to operate efficiently and effectively in risky and difficult environments under intense pressure.

In particular, [Major-General Prévost](#) drew attention to the numerous army, navy and air force capabilities that the CAF "can bring to bear in times of need," including aircraft, ships and specialized vehicles, and suggested that the CAF's high "state of readiness" allows it to "quickly deploy" troops and equipment in times of emergency. He also identified "planning" as one of the CAF's "unique capabilities" during domestic

operations, and emphasized the extent to which CAF members train to “plan their campaigns” and “spend a lot of time looking at contingencies.” In his opinion, planning is a “unique capability that [the CAF can] bring in early in any response” to a domestic emergency, adding “that's why we push people to the fore to help local communities plan around those contingencies.”

Agreeing with Major-General Prévost, [Brigadier-General Major](#) indicated that:

The CAF competencies, which allow us to provide some unique capabilities, deal primarily with our planning abilities, our mobility assets and our logistical requirement to show up self-sustained, so that we don't add to any pressures on the local situation. This enables us to be a flexible option to assist local authorities in delivering aid to Canadians when it's required.

[Deryck Trehearne](#) also referred to “planning and coordination” as a unique capability of the CAF during domestic operations, stating that:

The CAF ... has a huge range of capabilities it can deploy, one of the best being planning and coordination in support of a municipality. Often, ... [the federal government will] send a [CAF] planning group in, which you might think isn't a big deal, but when you're a municipality facing something you're unused to, having additional planning and coordinating folks who understand that business and are able to target a response is a huge boon to them. ... There is also ... the critical mass of boots on the ground for major events when really just mass is required for cleanup.

That said, [Deryck Trehearne](#) proposed that the federal government do an inventory of all available human and material resources to respond to emergencies in Canada to determine the state of preparedness of the provinces, territories and municipalities. As he explained:

The federal government—Public Safety and other departments—has been considering exactly that kind of work. We sometimes refer to that as the core Canadian capability list or perhaps initially a federal capability list. There is a need ... in Canada ... to understand the capabilities [at the national level]. I think one of the previous members asked about a list of who to call and about understanding exactly what capabilities are where in Canada. We know that federally. The CAF knows that intimately with their assets. However, I think the question on the table is about the total capability across Canada and whether it is adequate with respect to the trends we're seeing.

The Impacts of More Domestic Operations on the Canadian Armed Forces

Witnesses outlined the impacts of climate-related domestic emergencies on the CAF's ability to defend Canada and to focus on its core military duties, and also noted the



impacts of domestic operations on operational readiness. [Minister Blair](#) speculated that, “as climate change continues to make these [natural disasters] more frequent and severe,” it is likely that the “demand for CAF assistance will only continue to increase” in the coming years, with “these domestic operation deployments ... hav[ing] a real impact on the [CAF].”

[Minister Blair](#) highlighted the “increased stress these deployments put on force readiness,” as well as on CAF members and equipment. [Minister Blair](#) indicated that the growing number of domestic operations in recent years has “had a very significant impact on [the CAF’s] capabilities and [its] capacity to respond to other duties in Canada and around the world,” and on training. As well, in Minister Blair’s opinion, domestic operations have “had an impact on the men and women who serve.” He stressed that “responding to those very difficult and dangerous situations can be a real challenge” for CAF members, who must be “away from their families and their communities” more often because of the greater number of domestic emergencies. Minister Blair stated that it is important to “always remember the cost that the Canadian Armed Forces and their members are paying for that service.”

Agreeing with Minister Blair, [General Wayne D. Eyre](#)—Chief of the Defence Staff—commented that the growing number of domestic operations is an “issue of great concern” for the CAF. He suggested that “these increasingly frequent deployments and call-outs [are] affecting [the CAF’s] readiness to do [its] primary function”: to defend Canada against military threats. General Eyre observed that there is a need for “additional capacity at the provincial and municipal levels to respond to natural disasters,” adding that the “the Canadian Armed Forces needs to remain that force of last resort” instead of “being called upon as the force of first choice.”

[General Eyre](#) drew attention to the extent to which the rising demand for the CAF’s assistance to civilian authorities during domestic emergencies has affected the CAF’s capabilities and has had an impact on CAF members. He said that “deployments of this nature add stress to the individuals’ personal and operational tempo,” and emphasized that CAF members “spend more time in the field, and less time with their families,” which “increases the stress level for families, given the constant deployments” on both domestic and international operations.

Recognizing that the “frequency and intensity of natural disasters ... are on the increase,” that civilian authorities’ requests for the CAF’s assistance in responding to domestic emergencies have been “doubling every five years, over the last decade and a half,” and that the “demand is going up,” [General Eyre](#) underlined that “what is missing is capacity.” He asserted that “more capacity is required” if the CAF is to continue to be

called upon to respond to more intense and more frequent natural disasters in coming years, explaining that:

What [the CAF] need[s] to be, truly, is a force of last resort. What we need is to get intermediate capacity at the municipal and provincial levels drawn upon first. What [the CAF] provide[s] ... is a self-contained, self-deploying, self-sustaining and self-disciplining labour force with its own inherent command and control. It's a nice, tidy package that shows up. However, it's expensive. We train for the worst of situations—high-end combat. If that capability is used for much lower and more frequent business, it's not economically viable.

[General Eyre](#) pointed out that the “world security situation” is “deteriorating,” and mentioned that the “demand signal for those primary tasks we're responsible for [i.e., preparing for combat] is only increasing.” However, he also noted that the CAF’s “readiness to do [its primary tasks] is decreasing, due in part to the incessant demand for ... domestic operations.”

[Johanu Botha](#), Assistant Deputy Minister of the Emergency Measures Organization of Manitoba, highlighted the impact of domestic operations on the morale of CAF members. Identifying a need to support morale in the CAF, he suggested that CAF members may not be highly motivated to respond to domestic emergencies.

[Sergeant \(Retired\) Christopher Banks](#)—whose service on a number of the CAF’s international and domestic operations included an Operation LENTUS deployment to Quebec in 2017—spoke about the challenges that CAF members face due to the high tempo of operations. He said that the “CAF cannot manage an increase in domestic operations commitments” and currently “cannot manage much more than its [international operations] commitments” because its “equipment and personnel are beyond stretched” and “near breaking points.” He argued that the CAF “needs investments in housing, equipment, ammunition, personnel and more,” and added that “asking the CAF to increase its capabilities without an appropriate and permanent increase [in funding for that purpose] is asking for more to be cut from the bottom.”

Witnesses also highlighted the mental health impacts of domestic operations on CAF members, particularly reservists. Referencing the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces’ *Hidden Battles: A Systemic Investigation into the Identification of Mental Health and Support for Primary Reserve Members Participating in Domestic Operations* report of 2023,¹⁰ [Minister Blair](#) said that

10 Office of the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, [Hidden Battles: A Systemic Investigation into the Identification of Mental Health and Support for Primary Reserve Members Participating in Domestic Operations](#), September 2023.



“[he] found the Ombudsman's report very useful.” He added that DND and the CAF “are looking very hard at not just mental health supports, which are not insignificant for reservists who have been on these domestic deployments, but other supports as well. It's something we are examining very carefully.”

The High Cost of the Canadian Armed Forces' Domestic Operations

Witnesses underscored the high cost of CAF deployments on domestic operations, maintaining that civilian resources are much less expensive to deploy on domestic emergency responses. [Josh Bowen](#) stated that, between 2017 and 2019, “the CAF incurred \$17.5 million in incremental costs when deploying Operation LENTUS, with the average duration of those deployments being about two weeks. That roughly translates to \$80,000 a day in additional costs.”¹¹ Making a comparison, he emphasized that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and provincial, territorial and municipal organizations “can respond for less than \$5,000 or \$3,000 a day to do similar tasks,” which is a “dramatic reduction.”¹² [Josh Bowen](#) explained that, because of the high costs of military deployments, some of Canada’s allies—such as Australia and the United States—are “moving away from having the military hold primary responsibility for responding to disasters.”

[Eva Cohen](#)—President of Civil Protection Youth Canada—agreed that using military equipment for disaster response is costly. She contended that various jurisdictions and civil society organizations would benefit from having “excavators, cranes, high-capacity pumps and other equipment—and the people trained to use them—to clear debris, provide emergency power and water, and repair damaged infrastructure.”

[Sergeant \(Retired\) Banks](#) spoke about the “creation a national fire service” and its possible cost. He proposed the following:

Sit down and actually do a cost comparison of what it would cost to fund the military to build it versus to create a new agency. I think there would be a lot of cost savings considering that the military has airfields across the country and storage facilities across the country. [The CAF] have a pretty awesome firefighting college in Base Borden. The skill sets are already in the military. Those skills sets and a property would have to be built for a new capacity and a new agency.

11 According to DND, the incremental costs for Operation LENTUS were approximately \$14.4 million in 2017–2018; \$3.8 million in 2018–2019; and \$4.7 million in 2019–2020. See DND, “[Incremental Costs for Major Canadian Armed Forces Operations](#),” *Departmental Results Report 2017–2018*; DND, “[Incremental Costs for Major Canadian Armed Forces Operations](#),” *Departmental Results Report 2018–2019*; DND, “[Incremental Costs for Major Canadian Armed Forces Operations](#),” *Departmental Results Report 2019–2020*.

12 House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence (NDDN), [Evidence](#), 2 May 2022 (Josh Bowen).

Re-Examining the Canadian Armed Forces' Role in Domestic Operations

Witnesses underlined the need to re-examine the role of the CAF in domestic operations. [Peter Kikkert](#)—Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Governance at St. Francis Xavier University's Brian Mulroney Institute of Government—said that, in recent years, there has been a “transformation” of the CAF “from a force of last resort in disaster response to a force of first—or only—resort.” Providing reasons, he identified such factors as climate change, the increased number of weather-related domestic emergencies, limited provincial and territorial investments in disaster management, and a growing recognition of the “CAF's unique capabilities.”

[Adam MacDonald](#), a Ph.D. candidate with Dalhousie University's Department of Political Science, stated that the “last decade has seen a sizable increase in provincial requests for assistance from the Canadian Armed Forces in dealing with domestic emergencies ... due to the growing number and severity of climate change-induced natural disasters throughout the country.” He added that the CAF “continue[s] to adapt to this new reality by augmenting their capacity to support these growing requests. ... Such efforts serve a long-standing, clear mandate for the military to be prepared to offer this assistance, as reiterated in the current defence policy.” However, Adam MacDonald also noted that “these increasing requests are transforming this mandate from an as-needed duty to a baseline regularized duty” that competes with other CAF operational requirements.

[Dr. Christian Leuprecht](#), Professor at the Royal Military College of Canada and Queen's University, asserted that provincial and territorial authorities do not exhaust their own resources in time of emergencies before seeking the CAF's assistance. He suggested that:

[W]e talk about the Canadian Armed Forces as a force of last resort, but ... we have an increasing number of occasions when provincial and territorial entities are calling on the Canadian Armed Forces, even though we can demonstrate empirically that they have not exhausted all of their resources. Essentially, they become a quasi-emergency measures organization.

Arguing that the CAF's role is not that of serving as a “quasi-emergency measures organization,” [Dr. Leuprecht](#) contended that it is “important for the federal government to draw a much clearer line to say that it's not acceptable for the Canadian Armed Forces to be used as a provincial emergency measures organization to supplement capacities.” Dr. Leuprecht stressed that the CAF “needs to be a force of last resort.”

[Adam MacDonald](#) observed that the CAF's role in domestic emergency response should be re-examined. In his view, “if the Canadian Armed Forces are to continue to meet



these requests for support, they will have to create more capacity and possibly dedicated capabilities to do so,” and “higher-level political direction and guidance are needed” in this regard.

As well, [Adam MacDonald](#) said that there are “strong reasons to reconsider the growing reliance on the military in domestic emergency response.” He provided the following three reasons: competing demands on the CAF’s focus, operational capacities and resources; possible civilian–military implications of changing “ownership” of a domestic emergency response; and disincentives for provincial and territorial governments to invest in their own emergency service capabilities, leading to “growing societal expectations for military assistance in every domestic emergency, thus transforming perceptions of the military as a frontline service rather than a force of last resort to be used after civilian agencies have been exhausted or overwhelmed.”

According to [Adam MacDonald](#), if the CAF is mandated to “continue and possibly fully prioritize” civilian authorities’ requests in times of domestic emergencies, a “serious examination of how best to structure and resource the [CAF] so it can do so sustainably is required.” In his view, this examination should explore whether a new operational command is required to plan, train, coordinate and oversee the domestic deployment of military assets in times of domestic emergencies, and it should investigate whether existing support capabilities—such as health care, logistics and engineering—need to be “expanded beyond servicing the needs of the [CAF], in order to meet broader emergency response demands.” Furthermore, Adam MacDonald argued that the examination should consider whether “dedicated units should be constructed” within the CAF that would be “exclusively trained and deployed for these types of missions, allowing other elements of the military to focus on different missions and mandates” and should reflect on whether “these [dedicated] units and capabilities should be part of the regular or reserve force.”

Moreover, in [Adam MacDonald](#)’s opinion, “the question is not whether the Canadian Armed Forces should or should not be involved in domestic emergency response,” for “it has and will always have a role.” He asserted that “what is needed” is determining the “scale and scope of military involvement and its purpose and function” as part of a broader whole-of-government and whole-of-society effort to respond to domestic emergencies. Adam MacDonald argued that “such a determination requires public deliberation and clear political direction.”

[Michael Fejes](#) said that the “CAF should be there and available when called on and it should be there to act decisively when called on” to respond to domestic emergencies. However, he also stressed that the CAF should “not [be] the lead element in domestic crisis response.”

Some witnesses suggested that the CAF should create a dedicated force structure for domestic deployments in aid to the civil power. [Dr. Leuprecht](#) stated:

We do ... need a dedicated force structure for [disaster response and civil defence]. I ... proposed that this might be about 2,000 people, perhaps primarily the Royal Canadian Air Force, since they provide much of the lift capacity, and a reserve component of perhaps another 1,000 people who can work on disaster response, but when they're not needed for disaster response, they can assist with development, in particular of Indigenous communities in the far north.

Disagreeing with the proposal for a dedicated force structure for domestic deployments in aid to the civil power, [Peter Kikkert](#) asserted that the CAF should not build up its disaster response capabilities or “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.” In his opinion, taking such an approach would “turn the CAF into a jack of all trades and a master of none.”

Noting that the CAF is “under all sorts of pressures,” [Richard Fadden](#)—former National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister of Canada—argued that “adding more natural disaster assistance” taskings to the DND and CAF portfolio “would be a real mistake.” He indicated that, among the CAF’s natural disaster capabilities of “logistical support, administrative support and manpower,” it is the last of these that is most often needed. He indicated that “moving emergency supplies across the country is something the Canadian [Armed] Forces can do.” However, he also observed that, “even if [the CAF] can do it in the context of disasters, using attack helicopters to move bedding supplies across the country is not the best possible use of that very specialized resource.” According to him, it would be beneficial to examine how the CAF’s capabilities fit into broader federal emergency planning capabilities through a “national review of emergency planning” to identify what resources are available or lacking.

In [Peter Kikkert](#)’s view, “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.” He suggested that “the CAF has a central role that no other government body can perform: deterring and defeating potential enemies,” which “requires a very specialized skill set.” He contended that the CAF should focus on its combat capabilities rather than on building up its disaster response capabilities, specifying that disaster response should be left to a civilian organization.

[Johanu Botha](#) referred to “boots on the ground” as “by far the bulk of the need identified by ... jurisdictions” receiving the CAF’s assistance in responding to a domestic emergency. [Richard Fadden](#) asserted that, although it is difficult to replace the number of personnel



that the CAF can send to respond to a natural disaster, civil society organizations have lists of well-trained volunteers who can be called upon in such situations to ensure that the CAF is used as a force of last resort.

OPTIONS FOR IMPROVING EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES' RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC DISASTERS

Witnesses underlined the need to strengthen Canada's emergency management and the CAF's responses to the growing number of climate-related natural disasters. Recognizing that CAF deployments in aid to the civil power should remain a measure of last resort and that the number of disaster emergencies in Canada is growing, they identified a number of options for improving civilian and military disaster relief capabilities. In particular, they mentioned: establishing a national civilian disaster response organization; improving federal civilian disaster response capabilities; developing "humanitarian workforces" and public-private partnerships; investing in disaster training, preparedness and mitigation measures; learning lessons from emergency management practices in other countries; strengthening the CAF's disaster response capabilities; recognizing the contributions of CAF members to domestic disaster response operations; enhancing the roles and capabilities of the Primary Reserve Force and the Canadian Rangers in responding to domestic emergencies; and creating a national firefighting force of waterbombers.

Establishing a National Civilian Disaster Response Organization

Witnesses discussed the possibility of establishing a national civilian disaster response organization to improve civilian emergency management responses in Canada and to reduce provinces' and territories' current dependence on the CAF's support when climate-related natural disasters occur in their regions. [Major-General Prévost](#) indicated that there are only "advantages" associated with creating a civilian natural disaster response capacity in Canada. [Josh Bowen](#) proposed that the federal government should establish a federally funded, volunteer-based national civilian disaster response organization that would work closely with NGOs to coordinate civilian capacity to respond to domestic emergencies.

[Josh Bowen](#) and [Peter Kikkert](#) noted that Australia and Germany have volunteer-based disaster response capabilities that leverage the skill sets of civilian volunteers who can be called upon to help respond to a disaster within hours. According to [Josh Bowen](#),

[the] CAF is our force of last resort, yet we have become so accustomed to calling in the troops that we are not building the needed civilian capacity to respond. Our disaster NGO community in Canada is rich, and they can fill that gap. Canada needs to build volunteer-based civilian capacities so that we do not consistently rely on our last-resort option. ... If

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

As well, [Josh Bowen](#) contended that creating a civilian disaster response organization would be beneficial financially. He stated that “building hyper-localized, trained and equipped volunteer teams across the country” would “drastically reduce the time and cost that it takes to mobilize during a disaster.” Josh Bowen suggested that leveraging “organizations that rely on volunteers who are unpaid [and] who are there to be able to support their fellow Canadian[s] is something we should be looking to do.”

[Peter Kikkert](#) argued that it is “time for Canada to consider investing in a professional and permanent disaster management workforce.” He advocated the establishment of “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.”

Regarding a resilience agency or corps, [Peter Kikkert](#) maintained that, “to justify its permanent existence,” the organization should be “engaged in every phase of disaster management.” In his view, it cannot focus only on “response and recovery,” but must also be engaged in “mitigation and preparation, including the training of local response teams.” Peter Kikkert stressed that “the CAF provides only response and relief” and “does not do mitigation, preparation and recovery work,” adding that “the military is not a cure-all to the current disaster management gaps in this country, particularly its lack of a disaster workforce.” According to him, the establishment of such an 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.”

[Dr. Leuprecht](#) acknowledged that there “must certainly be more capabilities in the private sector and civil society to meet [disaster response] requirements,” but urged caution. He highlighted two problems with creating a national civilian disaster response organization: it would take time—about 10 years—for the private sector and civil society organizations to establish an organization that could respond to emergency situations; and there are legal concerns. Elaborating on those concerns, Dr. Leuprecht said:

There are some legal obligations involved. If the [federal] government responds [to domestic emergencies] with its resources and its capabilities [instead of relying on the resources and capabilities of provinces and territories], it means it can meet those obligations. So, the legal context must be considered, and it must be determined how to change it, as the current situation does not encourage that kind of collaboration.



[Conrad Sauvé](#) stated that potential options for a new emergency response model in Canada “must be built for purpose, considering the unique risks, peoples and geography of this country.”

[Eva Cohen](#) argued that “what is missing [in Canada] is the structure that enables [the federal] government [to have] the same rapid response, boots on the ground and scalability as the armed forces but with a civil protection approach.” In her opinion, the “most affordable solution” would be to establish “an organization that would complement and integrate, not duplicate or take away from what we already have,” and that would “mobilize a completely untapped resource: Canadian citizen volunteers.”

In a [brief](#) submitted to the Committee, Eva Cohen proposed that a “nationally organised and funded Canadian Civil Protection Agency, with units spread across the country, in municipalities, First Nations, and remote Inuit communities,” should be formed to “largely relieve the Armed Forces of the burden of domestic operations.” With her approach, the agency would operate under the mandate and guidance of the federal Minister of Emergency Preparedness, and would be based on trained and unpaid citizen volunteers who would “provide governance, structure, expertise, standards, training, and equipment while delegating operational control of local units to provinces, territories, municipalities and First Nations.” Eva Cohen said that these local units “would respond directly and immediately to municipal and provincial requests for assistance,” would “complement the capabilities of first responders,” and would provide federal, provincial, territorial and local governments with “a highly affordable, valuable and ready tool” to respond to the “increasing risks presented by climate change and other unforeseen causes.” Eva Cohen asserted that, with the creation of a Canadian Civil Protection Agency, “the CAF would truly become the asset of last resort.”

Improving Federal Civilian Disaster Response Capabilities

Witnesses mentioned the need for Canada to increase its federal civilian—that is, non-military—disaster response capabilities in the coming years. [Deryck Trehearne](#) said that federal sustainability and capacity to address the growing number of extreme weather events is an ongoing concern for Public Safety Canada.

[Wilfrid Greaves](#) outlined four reasons why the federal government should invest in its civilian disaster response capabilities in order to reduce the extent to which provinces and territories rely on the CAF’s assistance in times of domestic emergencies. As a first reason, [Wilfrid Greaves](#) contended that climate change and extreme weather events are increasing the need for “operational deployments and thus risk straining 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.”

Discussing his second reason for such investments, [Wilfrid Greaves](#) noted that the impacts of climate change in Canada are also affecting neighbouring countries, as well as partners and allies around the world, which “means that established practices of resource sharing and co-operation will be strained due to the concurrent demands for finite resources,” such as existing programs for sharing firefighters with foreign jurisdictions like Mexico and the United States. In his opinion, “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, [Wilfrid Greaves](#) suggested there is a need for investments because of a “danger” that the “increasing frequency and severity of climate-related extreme weather events” in Canada will not only “strain the capacity of government to respond” in the future but will also “substantially reduce the efficacy of the Canadian Armed Forces’ ability to respond.”

As a final reason for such investments, [Wilfrid Greaves](#) observed that the “overall health of the CAF is vital ... to its ability to effectively respond” to domestic disasters. He argued that “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.”

Developing “Humanitarian Workforces” and Public-Private Partnerships

Witnesses described the disaster response roles of provincial and territorial EMOs and NGOs, and their interaction and cooperation with the CAF and other federal entities, during domestic emergencies. [Perron Goodyear](#) and [Daniel Saugh](#), Chair and Strategic Director—respectively—of the Emergency Management NGO Consortium of Canada (EMNCC), commented on the role of NGOs and—more specifically—the activities of the EMNCC in responding to domestic emergencies. They emphasized that “EMNCC member organizations are able to bring significant expertise to domestic response, allowing the Canadian Armed Forces to support other efforts, or as an enhancement to any CAF domestic operations.” They commented that the EMNCC’s member organizations include the Canadian Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the St. John Ambulance, and the Search and Rescue Volunteer Association of Canada (SARVAC).



[Conrad Sauvé](#) indicated that the Canadian Red Cross maintains a standing capacity that is funded by the federal government and by donations, and has volunteers and staff in all provinces and territories. He also mentioned that the Canadian Red Cross has agreements with provinces and municipalities for providing assistance during domestic emergencies.

Witnesses also drew attention to both the important role that NGOs play in disaster response operations and the creation of partnerships between the federal government and such organizations. [Major-General Prévost](#) highlighted that the increased frequency of extreme weather events has “led local, provincial and federal authorities to seek out tools and ways to better collaborate” between and among themselves, and with NGOs.

[Deryck Trehearne](#) mentioned that the federal government announced \$100 million in early 2020 to create a “humanitarian workforce program” that involves the Canadian Red Cross, the St. John Ambulance, the Salvation Army and SARVAC to provide “surge” support during domestic emergencies “to take the burden off the CAF.” [Minister Blair](#) discussed the origins of this program, which was created while he was Minister of Emergency Preparedness. He explained that the program was created “to get military members out of the long-term care facilities and to replace them with trained volunteers” during the pandemic.

[Minister Sajjan](#) stated that the federal government has been “working with provinces, territories and Indigenous partners on the federal plan to respond to emergencies—the FERP—to build a whole-of-society approach to emergencies.” He added that, “to further help the provinces,” the government has put in place the humanitarian workforce program “to build a scalable civilian workforce that can be rapidly deployed in emergencies.” Minister Sajjan indicated that, since 2020, the government has provided more than \$166.9 million to the Canadian Red Cross, the St. John Ambulance, the Salvation Army and SARVAC through this program. According to him, the “funding has allowed these organizations to develop the capacity to mobilize more quickly to respond to extreme weather events and deploy critical, on-the-ground support to local governments.”

Investing in Disaster Training, Preparedness and Mitigation Measures

Witnesses underlined the need to invest in disaster training, preparedness and mitigation measures to improve planning for—and responses to—domestic emergencies. In [Josh Bowen](#)’s opinion, significant savings could result from such investments: “for every dollar invested in mitigation and preparedness activities, we save six to eight on response and an

additional twelve on recovery after a disaster, so if we're looking at a 20:1 return on investment, then focusing on mitigation measures is absolutely essential.”¹³ Focusing on preparedness, [Josh Bowen](#) added that training, planning and fostering coordination between the federal, provincial and territorial governments, municipalities, first responders and the various other NGOs involved in disaster responses is “also going to be the most cost-effective use of our resources.”

[Major-General Prévost](#) indicated that there has been an increased focus on enhancing resilience at the local, municipal, provincial and territorial levels in recent years, including through improved training, coordination and capabilities. According to [Derek Trehearne](#), “there are many small, medium and large exercises that go on every year in Canada” that are aimed at strengthening the country’s emergency response measures.

[Johanu Botha](#) identified a need for “higher level plans that are exercised way more” at the municipal, provincial and territorial government levels, adding that such plans should be exercised “continuously.” [Conrad Sauvé](#) stated that civil society organizations generally do not “understand risks” relating to natural disasters, often do not “prepare [their] response capability according to those risks,” and do not exercise, “so [they] don’t maintain capacity from one event to another.” In his view, the result is that they are “unprepared” when disaster strikes.

[Eva Cohen](#) suggested that providing equipment and training to provinces, territories and municipalities, as well as civil society organizations, could potentially reduce the need to rely on the CAF for certain emergency responses. In her view, “our completely reactive system” could shift to “citizen-based proactive preparedness, readiness and resilience [approach].”

[Minister Blair](#) said that there are opportunities to improve cooperation and the sharing of lessons learned with provincial and territorial governments, as well as with national Indigenous organizations. He noted that the CAF completes “excellent public reports” on domestic operations that are “very helpful to our provincial partners in identifying the significant problems that existed” during a domestic emergency. As well, Minister Blair observed that there is a “great deal of communications and lessons learned” that are shared between the federal government and the relevant provincial or territorial government after a disaster response. He commented that those discussions “have proven to be very effective,” and urged continued cooperation among the CAF, the federal

13 For more information, see Public Safety Canada, [Emergency Management Strategy for Canada: Toward a Resilient 2030](#), 2019, p. 17; Office of the Auditor General of Canada, [Report 8—Emergency Management in First Nations Communities—Indigenous Services Canada](#), 2022, p. 6.



government, and provincial and territorial governments in order to foster an improved whole-of-government response to domestic disasters.

Focusing on mitigation measures, [Lieutenant-Colonel \(Retired\) David Redman](#), former Head of Emergency Management Alberta, stated that “the largest piece of funding that’s missing in our country is for mitigation,” which he argued plays an important role in emergency management. [Mike Ellis](#), the Government of Alberta’s Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services, added:

One of the things that [provinces and territories] could certainly use assistance with from the federal government has to do with mitigation when comes to building more firewalls and flood mitigation. ... I think there's about \$1.2 billion for mitigation that is distributed right throughout Canada. It sounds like a lot of money, but when you think about how big Canada is, it's actually not a lot of money. Certainly, helping [provinces and territories] with those sorts of things would, of course, decrease any reliance on the federal military.

Learning Lessons from Emergency Management Practices in Other Countries

Witnesses contended that there are lessons that Canada could learn from emergency management practices in other countries. In a [brief](#) submitted to the Committee, Minister John A. Lohr—the Government of Nova Scotia’s Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing—proposed that Canada should examine “how emergencies are supported federally in the United States,” emphasizing that “American states have access to a core of personnel trained in emergency management through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).” Minister Lohr stressed that “no such dedicated federal emergency management capacity exists in Canada, which has led to an overreliance on the Canadian Armed Forces.” In his opinion, the lack of an organization in Canada that is equivalent to FEMA demonstrates a “gap in our own national readiness for natural disasters.”

Asserting that climate change has increased the risk of more frequent and more severe natural disasters, and that Canadians can expect “future emergency responses that quickly go beyond the resources and capacity of provinces and territories to respond,” Minister Lohr’s [brief](#) suggested that the federal government should “engage in discussions with its provincial and territorial partners” regarding the potential creation of a “dedicated federal emergency management agency in Canada like the FEMA model in the United States.”

Similarly, [Dr. Flannigan](#) argued in favour of “creat[ing] a federal emergency management agency, such as FEMA in the United States.” Dr. Flannigan commented that the number

of climate-related disasters is rising and that “municipalities, provinces and territories [are often] overwhelmed” and “need assistance” during domestic emergencies, and proposed that an “emergency management agency like a FEMA” would provide a “unified command” to deal with emergencies. In his opinion, “in Canada, we don't have unified command as we should.” However, [Richard Fadden](#) suggested that, although some people believe that Canada should emulate the United States and establish a federal organization similar to FEMA, ... a lot of Americans would tell you that it's not the success story that some people think it is.” That said, in calling for a national review of emergency management capabilities, Richard Fadden contended that such a review should examine international best practices for natural disaster response and their application in the Canadian context.

[Conrad Sauvé](#) mentioned that the Canadian Red Cross recently studied international emergency management models. According to him, there are advantages to developing a federal emergency strategy that clearly articulates the roles and responsibilities of each entity involved in emergency response, with such a strategy supported by appropriate funding and coordination structures.

[Eva Cohen](#) encouraged Canada to “join forces with our international partners, Germany and the [European Union], and compare risks and capabilities.” In particular, she pointed to the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) as a “successful” international emergency management model that Canada could emulate. Eva Cohen suggested that the civil protection model works well in Germany because “the government has an ability to tap into the expertise of the private sector on a voluntary basis.”

[Klaus Buchmüller](#), Head of the THW's International Division, provided an overview of the THW and its activities. He explained that, while the “German government has a disaster relief mechanism that allows the German armed forces to be the asset of last resort,” it relies on the THW as a measure of first resort. Describing the THW's “unique structure as a government agency based on unpaid citizen volunteers,” [Klaus Buchmüller](#) said:

There are 85,000 trained volunteers, including about 15,000 youth volunteers, in about 700 detachments across [Germany], with only 2% being paid staff. ... Most of them are located on the regional level. In the fire service, there are 1.1 million volunteer firefighters, and only 20,000 paid firefighters. There are approximately 400,000 volunteer paramedics and about 40,000 paid paramedics.

However, [Dr. Flannigan](#) cautioned against implementing the THW model in Canada, arguing that Canada—“30 times larger with half the population” of Germany—has a “situation [that] is different.” In his opinion, “what works in Germany won't work here.”



That said, Dr. Flannigan recognized the benefits of learning lessons from emergency responses practices in Germany and other countries.

Strengthening the Canadian Armed Forces' Disaster Response Capabilities

Witnesses commented that, if civilian authorities are likely to continue requesting the CAF's assistance during domestic emergencies and if the number of domestic operations continues to grow in the coming years, then the federal government should strengthen the CAF's disaster response capabilities. In a [brief](#) submitted to the Committee, Sergeant (Retired) Banks suggested that the CAF's command structure for domestic operations, the CAF's expertise in disaster response, and the support that the CAF provides to its members deployed on domestic operations could be improved.

In his [brief](#), Sergeant (Retired) Banks proposed that a Domestic Operations Command should be created that would focus only on disaster response and other types of domestic operations. He asserted that the 2012 decision to merge the Canadian Expeditionary Forces Command, the Canada Command and the Operational Support Command into a single operational command—Canadian Joint Operations Command—“to save billions in costs to administer the various commands” has “result[ed] in inefficiencies in the command and control of domestic operations.” Sergeant (Retired) Banks contended that the CAF requires a separate and dedicated operational command, “with permanent staff and specialized equipment for controlling domestic operations,” to ensure “timely and efficient responses during domestic deployments.”

According to Sergeant (Retired) Banks' [brief](#), the CAF also needs “readily available subject matter experts” concerning disaster response who would assist commanders deployed on domestic operations. He suggested that CAF members should be trained as “subject matter experts in fire fighting, flood mitigation, winter operations, humanitarian assistance delivery, and emergency management.”

Furthermore, in his [brief](#), Sergeant (Retired) Banks encouraged improved administration and support for CAF members deployed on domestic operations, with more done to care for their “health and well-being.” For example, he explained that “exposure to toxic elements is a real risk during flood operations,” and that “smoke inhalation is common in firefighting operations, as is cold injuries during winter operations.” Sergeant (Retired) Banks added that “mental health injuries can occur when faced with human suffering, casualties or danger.” Referencing the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces' *Hidden Battles: A Systemic Investigation into the Identification of Mental Health and Support for Primary Reserve Members*

Participating in Domestic Operations report of 2023,¹⁴ he underscored that, unlike CAF members returning from international deployments, there is no requirement to ensure that members deployed domestically receive the same post-deployment care and assessments, which is “especially true for reservists” deployed on domestic operations.

Recognizing the Contributions of Canadian Armed Forces Members to Domestic Disaster Response Operations

Witnesses highlighted that CAF members’ valuable contributions made during domestic disaster response operations should be better recognized. [Minister Blair](#) pointed out that there is a “need to do a better job of acknowledging and rewarding the members who answer this particular call to service.” Mentioning that CAF members do not receive medals when they are deployed on domestic operations, he explained that:

[T]here are service medals and ribbons that members get when they're deployed overseas, but their experience in their domestic deployments can be just as challenging. It accounts for the same amount of time away from family. It can, in some circumstances, be a quite difficult and traumatic experience. It really taxes their ability to respond, and it's quite impactful on them. ... I'm convinced we need to do better in finding ways to recognize that service.

Agreeing with Minister Blair, [Sergeant \(Retired\) Banks](#) suggested that a Domestic Operations Service Medal should be created to recognize the service of CAF members deployed on Operation LENTUS and other domestic operations. In his [brief](#), Sergeant (Retired) Banks indicated that such a medal would “bring domestic operations in line with [international] operations,” would provide CAF members with “recognition that there are risks and hardships associated with domestic deployments,” “would bring incentive and esprit de corps to members on domestic operations” and would “improve retention.”

Enhancing the Roles and Capabilities of the Primary Reserve Force and the Canadian Rangers in Responding to Domestic Emergencies

Witnesses recognized the critical role that members of the CAF’s Primary Reserve Force and Canadian Rangers play in the CAF’s response to domestic emergencies, but asserted that their roles and capabilities could be enhanced. [Damien Burns](#) supported the deployment of the Primary Reserve Force when disasters occur, suggesting that

14 Office of the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, [Hidden Battles: A Systemic Investigation into the Identification of Mental Health and Support for Primary Reserve Members Participating in Domestic Operations](#), September 2023.



“there’s an enormous need for that type of resource to support” provincial and territorial authorities in times of domestic emergencies. Discussing the Primary Reserve Force’s contributions in aid to the civil power, [Michael Fejes](#) said that, despite several attempts to increase the size of the CAF, “the Canadian Forces is getting smaller,” which is leading to “a steady but increasing reliance on the Primary Reserve Force.” According to him, “today, a smaller CAF needs to be prepared to respond to multiple and increasingly demanding emergencies concurrently with its part-time soldiers.”

[Brigadier-General Major](#) stated that the CAF maintains immediate response units that comprise members of the Primary Reserve Force. He noted that these reservists are currently trained to perform the same tasks as members of the Regular Force, which facilitates integration domestically or internationally, and added that the CAF is not focused on creating a specialized disaster response capability for the Primary Reserve Force. However, Brigadier -General Major observed that the CAF is currently “examining” the overall role of the Primary Reserve Force within the CAF.

[Michael Fejes](#) identified a need to “ensure that ... Canadian Forces reserve personnel are supported and are able to respond decisively” as required, and to “examine our overall preparedness strategy.” He proposed two ways in which the Primary Reserve Force’s support to domestic operations could be improved: re-evaluate the “current conditions of service” for the Primary Reserve Force; and examine how the Primary Reserve Force is “managed institutionally and how it can rapidly and effectively respond when called upon.” Michael Fejes stressed that headquarters and personnel policies should be modernized “to create more enduring conditions of employment that are required to better leverage the reserve force contributions.”

In [Michael Fejes’](#) opinion, the Primary Reserve Force is underutilized and should be more actively involved in domestic emergency responses. He maintained that “Canadians should be able to call on their part-time military to respond in a lengthy and decisive manner when all other means have failed.” Drawing attention to the cost of deploying the Primary Reserve Force, Michael Fejes explained that “a reserve soldier is not as expensive as a professional or regular force soldier.”

[Michael Fejes](#) also indicated that reservists bring a wide variety of professional skills from their civilian life when they are deployed on domestic operations, as well as a knowledge of local civilian communities that most Regular Force members do not have. In his view, these characteristics lead reservists to be valuable assets “on the ground” in times of domestic emergencies.

However, [Michael Fejes](#) did not support either the idea of “creating specialty niche units within the reserves” or providing the Primary Reserve Force with “dedicated resources

specifically for domestic response.” He said that creating “domestic response reserve units” comprising reservists with “specialized skills and training” would limit the use of the Primary Reserve Force for other types of operations. In his opinion, there is a need to “maintain a broad pool of reservists, ... [and] to be able to call on those ... reservists ... when [a] crisis happens.”

Instead, [Michael Fejes](#) encouraged a “recapitalization” or “operationalization” of the Primary Reserve Force so that reservists can be deployed on any type of domestic or international operation. Emphasizing that participation in the Primary Reserve Force is “voluntary” and that the demands placed on reservists “are so wide and vary so greatly,” Michael Fejes proposed that the CAF should consider “broadening the terms of service for the reserves, so that they can be called upon when needed.”

[Dr. Leuprecht](#) highlighted some limitations of relying on reservists to respond to domestic emergencies. According to him, deploying reservists “comes with a particular challenge” because the Primary Reserve Force is “plagued by high turnover and an inability to reach certain training standards, and they’re only available on a case-by-case, volunteer basis.” He added that “a permanent force structure” is needed.

Witnesses also underlined enhanced roles and capabilities for the Canadian Rangers when disasters occur. Observing that the Canadian Rangers “are very active in emergency response,” [Peter Kikkert](#) commented that they have responded to forest fires, floods, avalanches and other disasters in communities throughout Canada’s North. In his opinion, strengthening the emergency response capabilities of the Canadian Rangers would “benefit their communities and adjacent communities a great deal.”

[Peter Kikkert](#) also stated that, if the Canadian Rangers were “given a broader kind of disaster workforce role moving forward in the North,” the “ability of Canadian Rangers headquarters staff to actually support” and facilitate that new role would have to be considered. As well, in his view, there would also be a need for “increasing the number of administrative personnel who Canadian Rangers patrol groups have access to who can help facilitate these operations.”

[Wilfrid Greaves](#) argued that “the Canadian Rangers are in some sense an underutilized resource.” He asserted that they could provide “valuable services and supports to those communities” in Canada’s North that are affected by emergency situations. Agreeing with Wilfrid Greaves, [Dr. Leuprecht](#) contended that relying on the Canadian Rangers for disaster relief in Canada’s North would be economical and would support the development of northern communities.



Creating a National Firefighting Force of Waterbombers

Witnesses drew attention to the need to modernize Canada’s waterbomber aircraft fleet, with some suggesting that the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) should acquire such aircraft to supplement civilian fleets and to contribute to aerial firefighting operations across Canada. According to [Dr. Flannigan](#), the federal government should “provide more funding to provinces and territories to address fire management activities,” with funds perhaps used to purchase aircraft “to help renew and augment ... [the] aging [waterbomber aircraft] fleet.”

In particular, [Dr. Flannigan](#) suggested that the federal government should “develop a quick-deploy wildfire fighting force that would work hand in glove with the existing fire management agencies” in the provinces and territories, and that “could include a national firefighting air fleet as well as ground firefighting crews.” In his opinion, “having a national [firefighting air] fleet to move to the places where we expect extreme fire conditions to put the fires out when they’re small would be a great help.” [Major-General Prévost](#) contended that the CAF is not currently well equipped to respond to forest fires, pointing out that provincial authorities are experts in this area.

To build a national air fleet of waterbombers, [Dr. Flannigan](#) urged the federal government to order such aircraft as soon as possible. He noted that several European countries have placed orders for De Havilland Canada’s new DHC-515 Firefighter waterbomber aircraft, which is a modernized version of the iconic Canadair CL-215 and CL-415 family of waterbombers developed and built in Canada since the 1960s by Canadair and Bombardier.¹⁵ [Dr. Flannigan](#) observed that De Havilland Canada has orders for production until 2029, adding that if Canada wants such aircraft, the company will “have to increase production or we’re going to have to wait until the 2030s.”

That said, in his [brief](#), Sergeant (Retired) Banks suggested that, if a national firefighting force were to be created, the CAF—rather than a new federal agency—should be responsible for it. In his view, such a force would “not replace provincial responsibilities but would enhance the federal government’s ability to supplement responses to preserve life and property.” Moreover, he asserted that the RCAF should play a key role in such a force, adding that “Canada needs air assets which can move equipment and personnel to often isolated locations across the country, it needs the ability to rapidly deploy

15 De Havilland Canada acquired the CL-415 program from Bombardier in 2016 and has developed a modernized version of the aircraft known as the DHC-515 Firefighter. In 2022, De Havilland Canada reported that “European customers” had already signed “letters of intent to purchase the first 22 aircraft” produced. See De Havilland Canada, “[De Havilland Aircraft of Canada Limited Launches DHC-515 Firefighter](#),” 31 March 2022.

firefighters, and it needs aerial firefighting capabilities.” Thus, Sergeant (Retired) Banks proposed that the RCAF should form an “Aerial Fire Fighting Wing” and that “water bombing airplanes and/or helicopters” should be purchased, explaining that this approach would be “more cost-effective than creating a new federal agency.” He said that the RCAF already possesses airfields and training facilities, as well as command and logistics capabilities, all of which would have to be re-created with a new federal agency. However, Sergeant (Retired) Banks noted that the budget allocated to the RCAF would need to be increased to cover the costs of its new air fighting capabilities.

THE COMMITTEE’S CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In recent years, the number of CAF deployments under Operation LENTUS to assist civilian authorities across Canada during floods, forest fires, hurricanes and other natural disasters has been rising. Although the CAF’s aid to the civil power should be a measure of last resort, the devastating impacts of extreme weather-related events on people and communities across the country have prompted provincial and territorial governments to seek the CAF’s assistance more frequently than has historically been the case. With the intensity and frequency of climate-related domestic emergencies predicted to increase in the future, the number of provincial and territorial requests for the CAF’s assistance is expected to increase.

This growing number of domestic operations has been both straining the CAF’s resources and affecting its operational readiness at a time when new global threats are emerging and the international security environment is deteriorating rapidly because of the actions of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Russia, and other authoritarian, revisionist and adversarial states around the world. In particular, the heightened tensions between North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member states and Russia because of the latter’s February 2022 invasion of—and ongoing war against—Ukraine have prompted Canada and other NATO member states to invest in their armed forces’ combat capabilities, to deploy sizeable contingents to Eastern and Central Europe to help reinforce and protect NATO’s eastern flank, and to provide support to Ukraine. In that context, the CAF’s responses to domestic disasters have put pressure on the operational tempo within the CAF, have contributed to its declining number of personnel and dwindling equipment resources, and have diminished the CAF’s focus on training and maintaining combat-ready forces to fulfill—as required—its prime military duty: defending Canada.

The Committee acknowledges the outstanding and valuable contributions that the CAF makes during domestic operations, as well as the professionalism and devotion of CAF members to helping their fellow Canadians during climate-related natural disasters. That said, emergency management is—first and foremost—a provincial and territorial



responsibility and the CAF should remain—in theory but also, importantly, in practice—a force of last resort.

In the context of this responsibility, the Committee recognizes that a review of provincial and territorial governments' current reliance on the CAF's assistance whenever climate-related disasters affect their regions should be undertaken. The goal should be ensuring that all civilian options are exhausted before the CAF's assistance is requested. As well, more should be done to strengthen civilian emergency management capabilities so that civilian authorities are better prepared and equipped to provide humanitarian and other assistance during disasters, and thereby depend less on the CAF.

Moreover, the Committee knows that CAF deployments to provide aid to the civil power are critically important in some circumstances. Because such deployments will always occur, efforts should be taken to ensure that the CAF has all of the resources and capabilities it needs to continue to provide assistance to civilian authorities as a force of last resort.

Finally, the Committee is aware that Canada and its allies are facing new global military threats and an international security environment that continues to deteriorate rapidly. For that reason, the CAF's responsibility to defend Canada should never be forgotten. Canadians' individual and collective security depends on a strong and combat-ready CAF. In that context, to the greatest extent possible, emergency management responses to natural disasters in Canada should be left to those with primary responsibility for disaster response: provinces and territories.

In light of the foregoing, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada address issues relating to the current recruitment and retention crisis to ensure the Canadian Armed Forces is able to fulfill their responsibility to provide aid to civil power when requested.

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada create a database, in line with the Privacy Act, of volunteers based upon their profession and experience with the specific purpose to call up to volunteer efficiently to assist with disaster response operations.

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada undertake a comprehensive study of establishing a civilian corps of engineers in the Canadian Armed Forces, with a structure and mission similar to the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and a mixed body of planning and coordination specialists.

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada take comprehensive steps to work with provinces and territories to establish a national standardized curriculum, including standardized core capabilities and competencies that can be recognized at the national level and accreditation for emergency management programs taught at post-secondary institutions.

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada prioritize the efforts to increase disaster response and emergency preparedness exercises between relevant federal departments and agencies and provincial and local authorities, including relevant civilian and non-governmental organizations.

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada work with provinces and territories to invest in their emergency management, disaster mitigation and response assistance to ensure they only rely on the Canadian Armed Forces as a last resort.

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada take an inventory of all assets, across all departments, that can be used in disaster assistance and undertake, in partnership with provinces and territories, a national review of emergency management planning and response capacity.

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada assess whether there is a need to procure or lease additional equipment, including water bombers.



Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada create a domestic service medal to recognize all military deployments in our communities (Operation LENTUS, Operation LASER, major international events, etc.) and that this medal take into account the cumulative time of deployments to encourage military personnel to participate to short-term deployments.

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada increase youth participation in combatting climate change and climate disasters by enticing thousands of young adults into the humanitarian workforce.

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada establish a national adaptation strategy to build resilience against climate disasters.

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada enact all recommendations in the Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces' report, entitled *Hidden Battles: A systemic investigation into the identification of mental health needs and support for Primary Reserve members participating in domestic operations*.

Recommendation 13

That the Standing Committee on National Defence conduct a further study on the modernization of career progression and service medals system in the Canadian Armed forces.

Recommendation 14

That the Government of Canada consider investing in a professional and permanent disaster management workforce, such as a Canadian resilience corps, who could be quickly mobilized and deployed to disaster zones for response and recovery efforts.

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada strengthen the emergency response capabilities and capacity of the Canadian Rangers and give them a disaster workforce role in the north to benefit their communities and adjacent communities.

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada leverage organizations by bringing them together under an NGO consortium that works as an auxiliary to the government to better coordinate and to identify what capabilities these organizations bring to the table and what their ability to respond is.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>As an individual</p> <p>Josh Bowen, Faculty, Disaster and Emergency Management Program, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology</p> <p>Michael Fejes, Assistant Professor and PhD Candidate, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University</p> <p>Adam P. MacDonald, PhD Candidate, Department of Political Science, Dalhousie University</p>	2022/05/02	19
<p>As an individual</p> <p>Wilfrid Greaves, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Victoria</p> <p>Peter Kikkert, Assistant Professor, Public Policy and Governance, Brian Mulroney Institute of Government, St. Francis Xavier University</p>	2022/05/09	21
<p>As an individual</p> <p>Christian Leuprecht, Professor, Royal Military College of Canada, Queen’s University</p>	2022/05/18	23
<p>Canadian Red Cross</p> <p>Sophie Rondeau, Senior Legal Advisor, International Humanitarian Law</p> <p>Jean-Philippe Tizi, Chief Emergency Officer</p>	2022/05/18	23
<p>Emergency Management NGO Consortium of Canada</p> <p>Perron Goodyear, Chair</p> <p>Daniel Saugh, Strategic Director, Canadian Program Manager</p>	2022/05/18	23

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Government of Yukon Damien Burns, Assistant Deputy Minister, Protective Services	2022/05/18	23
Department of National Defence BGen Josh J. Major, Commander, 4th Canadian Division and Joint Task Force (Central), Canadian Armed Forces MGen Paul Prévost, Director of Staff, Strategic Joint Staff	2022/09/27	31
As an individual Richard B. Fadden	2022/10/04	32
Canadian Red Cross Amy Avis, General Counsel and Chief of Recovery Services Conrad Sauvé, President and Chief Executive Officer	2022/10/04	32
Emergency Measures Organization of Manitoba Johanu Botha, Assistant Deputy Minister	2022/10/04	32
As an individual Eva Cohen, President, Civil Protection Youth Canada LCol (Ret'd) David Redman, Former Head of Emergency Management Alberta	2022/10/06	33
Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Deryck Trehearne, Director General, Government Operations Centre	2022/10/06	33
As an individual Christopher Banks, Sergeant (Retired) Dr. Mike Flannigan, BC Innovation Research Chair, Predictive Services, Emergency Management and Fire Science	2023/11/09	81
Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) Klaus Buchmüller, Head, International Division	2023/11/09	81

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Government of Alberta Hon. Mike Ellis, Deputy Premier and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Services	2023/11/09	81
Department of National Defence Hon. Bill Blair, P.C., M.P., Minister of National Defence Bill Matthews, Deputy Minister Gen Wayne D. Eyre, Chief of the Defence Staff, Canadian Armed Forces	2023/11/23	82
Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan, P.C., M.P., Minister of Emergency Preparedness Trevor Bhupsingh, Assistant Deputy Minister, Emergency Management and Programs Branch	2023/11/23	82

APPENDIX B: LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Banks, Christopher

Cohen, Eva

Kikkert, Peter

Leuprecht, Christian

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* ([Meetings Nos. 19, 21, 23, 31, 32, 33, 81, 82, 108, 109, 110 and 111](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. John McKay
Chair

This Supplemental Report reflects the views of the Conservative Members of Parliament who serve on the Standing Committee on National Defence (“NDDN”): MP James Bezan (Selkirk-Interlake-Eastman), MP Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke), MP Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge), and MP Dean Allison (Niagara West).

Introduction:

As referenced in the report, the study examined the increasing frequency of civil authorities, primarily provinces, territories, and municipalities, requesting assistance from the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) to respond to natural and humanitarian disasters domestically. When the CAF deploys in response to a Request for Assistance (RFA), it does so under Operation LENTUS, except for deployments related to COVID-19 assistance under Operation LASER and Operation VECTOR.¹

The most important message conveyed to the committee is that disaster response is the responsibility of the provinces and territories, not the federal government. While Part VI of the *National Defence Act* outlines how the CAF can provide Aid of the Civil Power, it is always intended to be used as “force of last resort, but more frequently [it’s] being called upon as the force of first choice.”² It is imperative that provinces and territories invest more in their own emergency management, disaster mitigation and response assistance.

Therefore, we strongly support **Recommendation 5** and **Recommendation 6** in the report.

Observations:

This report failed to adequately address how increasing RFAs impact the current state of readiness of the CAF.

The Canadian Armed Forces are currently suffering from a recruitment and retention crisis,³ which resulted in the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) issuing a Directive for CAF Reconstitution. It reads, “Personnel and staffing issues, combined with a changing demographic and expectations of our existing and potential work force, continue to challenge both the strength and the readiness of the CAF.”⁴ While the CAF will always do their best to respond to assistance requests for domestic relief, these deployments add strain to the overall readiness of the CAF to fulfill their primary purpose of defending Canada.

¹ Department of National Defence, June 3, 2024, [Current Operations list](#)

² NDDN, September 28, 2023, [Evidence](#) (Gen. Wayne Eyre)

³ Global News, October 6, 2022, [Canadian Armed Forces chief orders halt to non-essential activities amid personnel crisis](#)

⁴ Canadian Armed Forces, October 6, 2022, [CDS/DM Directive For CAF Reconstitution](#)

CDS Gen. Wayne Eyre was blunt in his assessment, “The demand signal for those primary tasks we're responsible for is only increasing. However, our readiness to do that is decreasing, due in part to the incessant demand for these types of domestic operations.”⁵

This is supported by the following table from the annual Departmental Results Report released in January 2024.⁶

Departmental results	Performance indicators	Target	Date to achieve target	2020–21 Actual results	2021–22 Actual results	2022-23 Actual results
2.1 Canadian Armed Forces are ready to conduct concurrent operations	% of operations that are capable of being conducted concurrently	100%	31 March 2025	100%	100%	40%*
	% of force elements that are ready for operations in accordance with established targets	100%	31 March 2025	71.7%	71%	61%**

Notes:

*The methodology for this indicator was updated to provide a more accurate assessment of the current realities the department faces. Based on overall readiness levels, the CAF is currently unable to conduct multiple operations concurrently per the requirements laid out in the 2017 Defence Policy (SSE, p 81). Readiness of CAF force elements has continued to decrease over the course of the last year aggravated by decreasing number of personnel and issues with equipment and vehicles.

**Readiness of CAF force elements have continued to decrease over the course of the last year aggravated by decreasing number of personnel and issues with equipment and vehicles.

Conservatives understand that Aid to the Civil Power is only one of many factors impacting the overall readiness of the CAF. However, it should have been more directly addressed as a contributing factor in the report.

The global threat environment is increasingly precarious, with ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, and growing tensions in the Indo-Pacific. This combined with increasing domestic RFAs, results in significant concerns about the ability of the CAF to respond to concurrent operations.

Therefore, we support **Recommendation 1** in the report and additionally recommend:

That the Government of Canada reverse the defence budget cut of a billion dollars a year over the next three years announced in September 2023.

Finally, Conservatives disagree with how Minister of Emergency Preparedness Harjit Sajjan misrepresented the statistics about RFAs for the period of 2020 to 2023. His quote was paraphrased in the report, but this is the full quotation:

⁵ NDDN, November 23, 2023, [Evidence](#) (Gen. Wayne Eyre)

⁶ Department of National Defence, January 22, 2024, [Departmental Results Report 2022-2023](#) (Page 43)

Before 2020, the government operations centre would coordinate between five and 12 RFAs per year. From January 2020 to August 2023, it responded to more than 230. These numbers clearly show that we are in a climate crisis. It is here, and it is happening now.⁷

As shown in Figure 1 of the report, only 39 of these requests led to the deployment of the CAF under Operation LENTUS and other domestic responses. Another 118 resulted in the CAF deploying in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and 43 did not result in any CAF deployments. Additional information about the Operation LENTUS deployments between 2010 and 2023 can be found in Table 1 of the report.

Canadians, including elected officials in provinces and territories responsible for emergency management, disaster mitigation and response assistance, need accurate information to plan for the future.

Additional Recommendations:

That the Government of Canada take comprehensive measures to increase youth involvement in aiding and assisting with volunteer disaster relief.

That the Government of Canada support Private Members Bill C-386, An Act respecting the establishment and award of a Special Service Medal for Domestic Emergency Relief Operations.⁸

Conclusion:

In providing our observations and supplementary recommendations, the Conservative committee members thank the House of Commons analysts and clerks for their hard work in adding to the completion of this report. This supplemental report is by no means a way to cast doubt on their work but rather to highlight the shortcoming of the report adopted by a majority of committee members.

Despite the report failing to address our observations and additional recommendations, we hope that this supplementary report reinforces the understanding that the CAF will be there to aid provincial and territorial emergency response organizations when they are overwhelmed by the scope of a disaster or in need of respite, but should not be relied upon otherwise. The CAF's Aid to the Civil Power must remain a force of last resort. This supplementary report provides the Government of Canada with additional insight, and recommendations to improve Canadian responses to wildfires, floods, and other disaster relief missions.

Respectfully,

James Bezan, MP
Selkirk-Interlake-Eastman

⁷ NDDN, November 23, 2023, [Evidence](#) (Minister Harjit Sajjan)

⁸ LegisInfo, originally tabled in the House of Commons on March 22, 2024, [Bill C-386](#)

Cheryl Gallant, MP
Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke

Pat Kelly, MP
Calgary Rocky Ridge

Dean Allison, MP
Niagara West

The Bloc Québécois believes that the report fails to fully grasp the urgency of enhancing local disaster mitigation capabilities. Recommendation 6 rightly urges the federal government to "collaborate with provinces and territories." However, the Bloc Québécois argues that the report should ask for concrete actions from the federal government, and urge it to transfer funds to Quebec, provinces, and territories so they can develop their disaster mitigation capacities. Dr. Mike Flannigan has been very clear on this matter: the first step to mitigate forest fires is to "provide more funding to provinces and territories to address fire management activities."

Given the crucial role played by Quebec, provinces, territories, and their municipalities in managing climate disaster crises, the Bloc Québécois believes that unconditional financial transfers to Quebec, provinces, and territories would more effectively contribute to disaster management. They possess significant expertise due to their local knowledge. By supporting them financially, the federal government could preempt many crises and thereby alleviate some of the burden on the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in domestic operations. Given that Canada's economy is heavily reliant on oil production and that successive governments over the past decades have heavily subsidized this industry, which is directly responsible for climate change, it seems all the more appropriate for the federal government to transfer adequate funds to Quebec, the provinces, and the territories as they are directly affected by the impacts of climate change and are on the front lines of responding to it.

The Bloc Québécois also notes the report's silence on the rigidity of operational missions domestically. For instance, CAF members are sometimes deployed for over a month without seeing their families, even if their homes are near their deployment sites, such as during flood responses. The chain of command seeks to maintain full capacity, even during operational slowdowns, but could easily implement a rotation system to allow military personnel some time with their families, making domestic deployments less burdensome for them. Given the retention issues facing the CAF, we recommend that the government prioritize conditions that support work-life balance to improve the lives of military personnel and their families.

NDP Supplemental Opinion

The New Democratic Party would like to thank everyone involved in producing this report. Since May of 2022, we have heard from 29 witnesses, ranging from academics, government officials, provincial governments, international aid workers, academics, and veterans that served on the front lines of Operation Lentus. We thank all the witnesses that shared their expertise.

We also thank the Library of Parliament analysts, the committee clerk, the interpreters, and all House Administration staff that make our work possible.

This study was initiated after the devastating wildfire season of 2021. 8,693 square kilometers of forest was burned. The town of Lytton had most buildings destroyed. A deadly heat dome blanketed British Columbia and killed 619 British Columbians, with studies finding the heat dome was 34% larger and lasted 59% longer due to climate change.

The committee came together to study the devastating threat of climate change seen in 2021. But halfway through the study, we were rocked by the single largest climate catastrophe in Canadian history: the 2023 wildfires.

In a single wildfire season, 5% of our forests had burned. 15 million hectares burned, over seven times the national annual average. And Canada wasn't prepared: we had 1,700 Canadians step up to assist in fighting wildfires, but we still required 5,500 international personnel throughout the fire season.

The 2023 wildfire season cause record-breaking devastation, including 232,000 Canadians being evacuated from their homes and displaced by wildfires, \$3 billion in insured damages across Canada, and the death of 6 people.

The smoke from the wildfires should have been a wakeup call for the world. Across Canada and the United States, record air-quality alerts were issued as a Martian hue took over the skies. Children, seniors, and persons living with disabilities were cautioned to stay indoors to mitigate exposure. The smoke from our wildfires crossed the Atlantic Ocean and reached Europe.

And the dystopian truth of our record wildfire is that it will only fuel worse and worse seasons to come. In the short-term, last season carried over at least 100 "zombie fires", which smoldered over the winter season and are ready to reignite. The Patry Creek fire never ended – it remained dormant until earlier this spring, when it returned and contributed to the evacuation of 4,700 people in Fort Nelson. As we continue through the 2024 wildfire season, experts predict we will see more zombie fires reignite across Canada.

In the long-term, the wildfire season of 2023 released 2.2 billion tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. That is more than triple Canada's entire industrial emissions. The size and severity of wildfires across Canada will only increase as carbon emissions cause longer drought seasons, hotter summers, and milder winters.

The experience of 2023's wildfire season should send one message to the Government of Canada: Climate change is the largest, imminent, existential threat facing Canadian sovereignty and security.

This report was an opportunity for the Standing Committee on National Defence to declare this threat and mobilize to protect Canadians.

But once again, Canadians see the legacy parties undermining Canadian sovereignty and security in the face of wildfires. The Liberal federal government has allowed a piecemeal, reactive approach to the Federal Government's role in combatting wildfires. And throughout the entire study, there was not a single Conservative member that named climate change as the cause of wildfires. Once again, Canadians see on climate change the Liberals delay while the Conservatives deny.

Canadians need leadership on combatting climate change. As Canadians live with the devastating impacts of the climate crisis, big oil and gas have raked in record profits while collecting Liberal and Conservative handouts. Our largest emitters have been gouging Canadians at the pumps while they pollute our air and exacerbate future natural disasters.

Given the existential threat of Climate Change, it is time for the federal government to show courage and leadership. It is time for the Canadian Armed Forces to take steps to better prepare for climate disasters and review their role in domestic operations to ensure they are ready to serve while maintaining operational readiness.

The NDP Recommends that:

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada increase youth participation in combatting climate change and climate disasters by employing thousands of young adults in a youth climate corp.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada declare Climate Change as the greatest medium and long-term threat to security in Canada and establish a new Defence Policy that recognizes the growing role of domestic operations.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada establish a national adaptation strategy to build resilience against climate disasters and fund this through an excess profits tax on Big Oil.

Recommendation 4: That the Government of Canada establish a national civilian wildfire fighting force, acquire a national fleet of aerial firefighters and conduct a review on the feasibility of establishing an Aerial Fire Fighting Force.