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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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• (0905)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good morning, committee.

This is meeting 54 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, on Tuesday, May 8, 2007. I just want to let our committee know that at 11 o'clock there is another committee coming in here, so we want to be as prompt as possible.

In our first hour we're going to continue with our briefings from Afghanistan.

Our witnesses this morning are from the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. We have Seema Patel, lead project consultant on the post-conflict reconstruction project; and Steven Ross, a research consultant on the post-conflict reconstruction project.

In our second hour we're going to go into our draft report on democratic development. We also want to save a few moments at the end of the second hour for some committee business.

Welcome to our guests today. We're looking forward to hearing from you. We had a little chance to chat just before the committee started. As you know, this is a fairly regular review of what's happening in Afghanistan, from many different perspectives. We certainly look forward to what you have for us today. As I mentioned to you, we look forward to your opening comments and then we will go into the first round of questioning. We will conclude this at about two minutes to ten o'clock.

So welcome, and the time is yours.

Mrs. Seema Patel (Lead Project Consultant, Post-Conflict Reconstruction Project, Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, D.C.)): First off, I'd like to thank the chairman and the committee for the opportunity to come here and speak with you today to share the results of some of the work we've been doing within my organization.

In my opinion, Canada's mission in Afghanistan is critical to success in Afghanistan. I would also take a moment to thank the Canadian people for the commitment they have made in the country. I do appreciate that there's ongoing controversy and some debate here in Ottawa and across the country about Canada's role in the country. I hope that my testimony, which is derived from an independent assessment of progress, will provide this committee and other Canadians with valuable insights into Afghan experiences with the reconstruction and development efforts, with the security efforts,

as well as highlight some steps that we believe will be critical to ensure that Afghanistan remains on a path of recovery.

I will be speaking to you as an expert from CSIS, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and although it's based in the U.S., I want to highlight that it is an independent organization. It's independent of the U.S. government and its interests. Our mission at the post-conflict reconstruction team is to advance global security and prosperity by offering strategic insights to the issues that policy-makers will need to work on in order to fight for a more peaceful world. Therefore, when I say "we" in the rest of my comments, I'm referring to the international community, the larger groups of players that are involved in Afghanistan.

Our team at CSIS works to address three chronic challenges the international community faces in post-conflict missions. First, we attempt to anticipate better by improving our analysis and understanding the context and improving our preparation.

Second, once the international community decides to intervene, we develop more integrated strategies by forcing ourselves to make clear choices and by setting priorities.

Third, CSIS attempts to improve on the nature of international communities' reporting of the mission. More often than not, we find that UN agencies, NGOs, our governments, report on a wide range of successes in their projects, yet the country they're working in might be faced with overwhelming pessimism and negative momentum.

We'd like to talk about the money spent, the number of projects completed, and grand plans for social transformation, rather than outcomes and the real results of our efforts on the local beneficiaries.

The CSIS measure-of-progress model, which we applied in Afghanistan in 2005 and again in 2006, attempts to address this problem of imperfect information by combining sources and measuring impact from the perspective of the local communities.

We take all the polls and focus groups that are conducted by a number of organizations, we take daily news reporting from in the country and around the world, official documents and releases, and then complement them with hundreds of interviews that we conduct in the field, as well as 1,000 structured conversations with the local population.

Once all this data is collected, we crunch it in numerous ways to gain regional and strategic insights, demographic insights, and we differentiate by pillars, such as security and governance.

In Afghanistan, we conducted our first assessment in 2005. At that time we saw that Afghanistan had crawled out of its subterranean existence of 2001 and was at its best point in decades. There was a hopefulness about the new leader, the return of millions of refugees, successful fighting of a brief war, and construction of many new facilities, including schools, roads. Through this time, the international community was conducting activities that it was comfortable doing, things that we knew how to do, such as conferences, elections, constitution writing, and playing a humanitarian role.

By 2005 we found that there was some tempering of hope within the Afghan population. Our recommendations at that time suggested we needed a more decentralized and entrepreneurial approach to recapture Afghan imagination and participation during the transition phase, the transition to development.

Over the past year, improvements have been made in certain areas, such as health, communication, economic growth, women's empowerment, public participation, and private investment. Yet the most critical challenges from the beginning of the intervention, such as pervasive corruption, the role of warlords, the economy's poppy dependence, chronic poverty, and electricity scarcity remain.

Our findings this year show that Afghan ability to meet their needs and interests has not improved despite more money spent, projects implemented, and time passed. The government is perceived to be less legitimate and less capable. Overall, Afghans are worried about their public safety and losing confidence in the new order. They wonder when they will see the benefits promised to them in 2001.

It's not that Afghans think that all is lost; rather it's more uncertainty about who will win and real intimidation on the ground, and therefore a return to Afghans finding a way to make it on their own, to self-protect, and to disengage from the national processes and initiatives that the international community is organizing. This all becomes a problem for restarting the nation.

Last year's negative trends, we believe, can be turned around. Securing Afghans is going to be the priority. Public safety has deteriorated since 2006 due to the violence surrounding the insurgency, the inability of the Afghan government to combat crime, local commanders, warlords, and abusive and corrupt elements within the new order, including government officials and the police.

● (0910)

The insurgency has gained momentum, as you know, in the south and east over 2006. They're comprised of a diverse group of anti-government elements, but it is the Mullah Omar-led Taliban, that faction with its charismatic leadership, its tribal connections, that serves as the greatest strategic threat. They are waging an effective campaign to expose and exploit government weaknesses, our own mistakes, and to win hearts and minds.

The ordinary Afghan is feeling caught among the Taliban, the military operations, and corrupt government officials; all sides are threatening their safety. Freedom of movement has become more limited, and therefore access to services and economic opportunity is more difficult. New high-risk populations and displaced populations

have been created by the international military operations. They're in need of humanitarian assistance and basic needs.

We found that most Afghans see the international forces as necessary to their security—necessary for stopping the insurgency and protecting villages—but rising civilian casualties, the negative effects of the eradication efforts in the country, and the garrison mentality has lost us many friends and potential partners.

With current resources, the international community is not going to be able to secure all the remote parts of Afghanistan. It can, however, focus on the centre of gravity in Helmand and Kandahar. This is where we believe the threat of the insurgency is greatest, not only because they're being bombarded daily by the repercussions of that insurgency, but also because the reverberations of what happens in Kandahar and Helmand are felt very much throughout the whole country. We found that in the north and in the west, Afghans might not have experienced direct conflict, but they had a perception that the recovery of the country was in a precarious position because of the events happening in the south and east. In addition, these two provinces are also home to 50% of the poppy growth and criminal business and include patchy government leadership.

What is needed is an improved response in a majority of the districts in these two provinces. We need to get down to the local level. The ANA and ANP, local officials, and populations will not stay and fight the better-equipped Taliban or indeed participate in the programs we are organizing through our development efforts if there is no capacity to back them up when times get tough and if there's no ability to secure them while they participate with us.

Security resources from the north and west must be diverted to the south, particularly more mobile resources, such as special operations forces and helicopters to back up your own Canadian soldiers and also the British soldiers who are engaged there. I don't think caveats are going to change any time soon, so we need to be a little bit realistic about how that can happen. There are resources in the country that are not being used effectively, that can be diverted. Recent steps such as the U.S. support of Operation Achilles and NATO soldiers who are working to secure the Kabul-Kandahar highway should serve as a precedent for greater security and coordination in this difficult area.

It's also going to be critical to secure a post-operation security presence in these districts. It must be maintained by responsibly deploying the most capable of our Afghan forces, our partners, to stay and protect those villages. The ANP, our findings show, has received particularly low marks from Afghans, and they're often labelled a source of insecurity rather than law and order. This institution will require reform before they can be deployed to stay and protect. However, the ANA does enjoy broad support from the Afghan people. They're becoming more operationally capable, and they can be used to stay and protect Afghan villages. Only with this guarantee can villagers return to the places they've been displaced from and become direct beneficiaries of development efforts.

We believe Canada is needed in the south. The issue is how to get the Canadian forces what they need from the other NATO countries to improve their response to the direct challenges the Afghans face. Insecurity and the threats made by the Taliban and criminal groups displace the partners of development, and therefore security will be critical to conducting our development work.

● (0915)

In the north and west we see the benefits of good security. Where there is no direct armed conflict, armed opposition to the government, the international partners and government have been able to do much more to improve Afghan lives and our development dollars have gone much further.

On the reconstruction and development front, there have been positive changes, but they've been slow to impact Afghans. We find the macroeconomic climate has improved significantly over the last year. GDP growth has increased to \$6.7 billion in 2006. There has been a double-digit increase in trade and a 100% increase in government's ability to collect revenue. A number of small and medium-sized enterprises have sprung up, particularly in construction and agribusiness. The banking industry has taken off, as has the communication industry, and new foreign investment has entered the country.

However, despite these high records of GDP growth, when asked what has been the most important accomplishment of the central government, only 3% of Afghans say it has been economic growth. In essence, the improvements in the economy have not trickled down to the ordinary Afghan. Most people lack steady jobs, particularly the kind that provide a reliable income throughout the year.

Afghans remain caught in endless cycles of debt. Poverty is fuelling the anger towards the central government and motivating many young men, particularly in the south, to rearm and fight with the insurgency or with local armed groups to earn cash.

The flagship national solidarity program has brought a number of visible improvements at the village level and has allowed Afghans to participate more directly in the governance process. However, limited access to markets and credit continues to prevent the growth of licit, value-added agricultural production, and in many areas, security risks and high operating costs due to the lack of affordable infrastructure such as water and electricity and available mid-sized loans continue to frustrate Afghan businessmen and entrepreneurs.

It's our belief that reconstruction efforts to date have been too Kabul-centric. Much of this is driven by a class of Afghan leadership that is threatening the entire enterprise with exclusionary, corrupt, and controlling practices. Traditional donor constraints are also to blame. Large-scale contracting, the need for certifiable partners, dependence on central government, and the expenditure of funds has become a standard way of doing business for many donors.

We believe the best way to ensure that R and D funds go further, particularly in the tough southern provinces, is to engage ordinary Afghans, from planning to implementation. The process is as important as the programs. At various times, from *shuras* to micro hydro projects to informal government justice structures, Afghanistan has shown the value of local ownership.

We believe we need to seize on a venture capital model and look beyond the government for partners. We should set a three-year horizon during which 50% of the international portfolio is converted to smaller, fast-tracked grants and loans, not for more quick impact projects but to unleash Afghan entrepreneurial spirit by supporting a new class of loan and grant agents. Women's centres, business unions, NGO consortiums, community leaders, tribal elders, even cellphone dealers, are all potential partners that can use small grants of money effectively.

We should also pay the key agents of change, such as teachers and police, to create and support the Afghan middle class of the future. Lots of good things are happening around the country, but donor constraints must be re-examined and new funding and liquidity must move in the direction of real people. We can leverage existing structures. Some new government programs are working; moreover, some traditional mechanisms from the past are working and have quite a bit of legitimacy amongst the Afghan people.

We recommend expanding, scaling up, ensuring resources for the national solidarity program, and engaging the informal justice sector. We also believe we should redistribute development budgets more directly to the subnational level. All these things will push the liquidity down and decentralize it to where people can use it and be engaged.

● (0920)

Canada is leading by example and spending its R and D funds on projects that build loyalty and trust and are led by local people. Canada's aid agency should continue to look for more partners beyond the state—in the private sector and civil society, with traditional institutions and tribal leaders—empowering the middle class and entrepreneurs.

In Kandahar, big development projects will be difficult, given the security situation. Yet the humanitarian needs are great and are increasing with the military operations. Canada is equipped to respond, and we'd like to see it play that role.

In conclusion, we believe that Afghanistan is a very tough place to work. Even with full international support and sound policies and programs, it will likely take 10 years to get to a point of stability and recovery. Even at that time, it's likely to be a poor and very underdeveloped country. The central government will struggle to retain legitimacy, collect revenues, and extend its presence, and Afghans will continue to rely on local institutions to fill the vacuum left by the state. Neighbours are likely to continue to meddle in Afghanistan's domestic policies and economy, for better or worse.

This is a long-term project, and a long-term commitment is needed from the international community. But 2007 is a critical year. During this next year, the challenges are great. The Afghan government is losing legitimacy and is weak. Afghans are frustrated. And there is a direct challenge from an armed opposition group. Both Afghans and NATO countries are waiting to see progress before they fully commit to the long-term process.

We can turn around the negative trend lines in the next year or two, and Afghanistan can be back on the road to recovery. But our expectations have to be realistic. The primary goal in the short to medium term should be stability to a point where ordinary Afghans feel safe to invest and partner with us in the development and reconstruction projects.

Canada has played a leadership role in the country, one I would like to see more NATO countries emulate. The security and development strategy, in my opinion, is in line with what works best in Afghanistan. However, I think Canada can go one step further on the diplomatic front. The U.S. dominates the mission in Afghanistan, and it needs its allies that are committed to Afghanistan's recovery to push for better, more effective policies.

I have met officials from the Netherlands, Norway, Germany, Canada, and the U.K. who are all committed to making positive changes and to creating a unified approach to some of the tougher issues, such as the role of Pakistan and Iran, the approach to countering narcotics, short-term strategic planning, a geographic balance of reconstruction assistance, and international accountability. These officials from these countries need to be brought together and need to work together to influence U.S. and Afghan leadership.

Canada, whose troops are in the most difficult area and who has respect in the U.K., the U.S., and throughout Europe, particularly for its thoughtful approach to post-conflict reconstruction, can and should play a more aggressive role on the diplomatic front. It is a critical niche role for Canada, and we would like to see more of it.

Thank you. I'm happy to take questions on any number of issues that you find pertinent.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you for your testimony.

We'll go to the first round of questioning from the official opposition.

We'll start with Mr. Patry and Mr. Wilfert, for seven minutes.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you very much. I have seven minutes. I'll share my time with my colleague.

Thank you for your presentation. It's really refreshing to hear you.

You mentioned that the international community needs to do military and civilian reforms. You talked about reforms. There are over 30 provinces in Afghanistan, and the main two provinces where it is not going well are Kandahar and Helmand. I just want to know if in the rest of the country it is going better. Is it really improving over there? Canadians are in Kandahar right now. The only thing we really hear about is the Kandahar region. And within Kandahar, you mentioned, there are many sectors. Is it going as badly everywhere? Is it that there is an increase of the Taliban, or not an increase? It seems to be that the violence is focusing on these two areas where you have the crops and these things.

You mentioned the role of Pakistan. Do you really feel that if the international community was focusing on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, around the Durand Line, including the other countries surrounding Afghanistan, like Iran—and India also has a major role to play—it would help to solve the problem? Because right now, we seem to just be working on the military front and not enough on diplomacy.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

You can have the answer, and we'll come back to Mr. Wilfert. I'll see that he gets his questions.

Mrs. Seema Patel: In the rest of Afghanistan there is relative security in the sense that there is not an armed group fighting on a daily basis. They're not large military operations. When I was travelling around, particularly in the north and west, I found that there was a lot of progress, particularly on the economic front and the development side in the north and west. I said development money can go much further in these places. By that I mean that there are more partners who are willing to work with us. I found that in the north and west there were private sector entrepreneurs, civil society, there were organizations that we could work with and involve in the process of reconstruction and development. So there has been improvement in those areas. That's not to say they don't face their own problems. In the north and west there are issues with government corruption and criminality. There are still quite a few warlords and local commanders who are able to disrupt the flow of goods and the security of places such as roads or city centres.

But in my opinion those kinds of problems can be tackled through law and order mechanisms. We need to make much more of an effort to improve the judicial sector and its ability to confront these kinds of security problems, whereas in the south and the east we need the military to confront these kinds of problems. The police and the judicial sector will not be able to confront the Taliban.

Reconstruction and development has become extremely expensive in the south and east. Over 50% is going to just maintaining the security of the development agencies. It's not at a stage where it can do large development at a relative cost. I think if we can maintain that stability, we will start to see the jump in progress that we see in the north and west.

• (0930)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Wilfert.

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

I find your presentation most useful, particularly when I look at the last two paragraphs in the handout, where you mentioned that obvious new approaches are needed. You talk about the fact that incremental improvements will not be sufficient. How do we get the political buy-in both from NATO and from the Afghan government? Now that you've identified very clearly in your analysis and have had more time, I'd like to go through your graph in particular. But in terms of getting that buy-in, you say that 2007 is the critical year. You talk about a two- to three-year horizon, but the question becomes, if we don't make it through this year with the kinds of improvements that are required, we may not make that horizon. How do you get that buy-in?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wilfert.

Ms. Patel.

Mrs. Seema Patel: Again, this is a role I see for Canada on the diplomatic front. I would really like to see a high-level conference take place where these middle countries come together and discuss the short-term strategy. The Afghan leadership has presented a long-term development plan but not a short-term strategy for the short to medium term. The PAG process, the policy action group, in country has provided some focusing of efforts, but if we can bring together

the critical NATO countries that are involved in Afghanistan to commit to a short-term plan for dealing with the direct challenges of the Taliban and the security in the short term, then I think it can go a long way.

I think there is a willing ear. I mean, most NATO countries are looking for ideas to improve the pace of progress in the country and to improve their role. But we need to have much more coordination among NATO countries. This geographic sparsity, everybody staying in their own lane and doing well in their province or area of operations, is not going to get us to the point where Afghanistan as a whole is improving. Doing well in one province is not progress. Those negative effects of provinces that have problems do reverberate throughout the country. So there needs to be much more focusing of efforts by these NATO countries.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lalonde, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for your presentation. It summarizes a number of speeches that we've heard, but it brings us back to one central question. I'm coming back to my neighbour's question.

A number of witnesses have told us about coordination. Who can ensure coordination between the NGOs and the various countries? You talk about a conference. Others have told us that it takes time to prepare for a conference of this kind, that this was not what we needed right now and that we should stay in the field because that's where you establish stability.

Isn't it NATO that should revise its strategy? In fact, the initial strategy was to assign one region to the army of one country and to its provincial reconstruction teams. Have you had any talks with NATO on this subject? Did you agree? We find your remarks very wise, but they should be heard elsewhere as well.

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Patel.

Mrs. Seema Patel: Coordination will take time. It is one of the biggest challenges in Afghanistan. I believe the coordination on the long-term development strategy has been quite good now that there is the ANDS and there is leadership in place that is in charge from the Afghan side, namely the ANDS secretariat, with Professor Naderi running it. That creates a plan for the international actors to support.

However, in the short term you're right that NATO is having a problem, as are other agencies and donors in the country. The question is, who owns the short-term strategy? In Afghanistan there has not been an envoy position that can sort of hold people to task and lay out the steps that need to be taken. But I find that coordination on the military front has improved greatly since ISAF has spread around the country. The PRTs are under NATO command, the soldiers are under NATO command, and that has brought a lot of focusing of the military structure.

We need that same kind of effort on the R and D front. In the country there are very few opportunities for the R and D officials from the PRTs and the various development agencies to sit together to develop a short-term strategy to attack the R and D plans or to share the analysis they each have.

If we could find ways to bring these groups together in the country, where they are closest to the people and the decisions that need to be made, I think it would be helpful. They should be structured within the NATO command. Right now all the R and D officials are taking their directions from their embassies, as opposed to jointly devising a plan with the Afghan government. There are partners within the Afghan government who can also work with this. I think the PAG process is the place to pull officials from to serve on this R and D strategic planning group.

• (0935)

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Could it help if a UN delegate provided this coordination, as has been the case in Bosnia and elsewhere?

[English]

Mrs. Seema Patel: I think a UN delegate would have been a good idea in the early stages. At this point I'm not so sure it is a role they can play. The UN has not had the leadership role over the past five years and has kind of a small footprint in the country. For the UN to be able to hold big donors to their plan will be difficult. We see this on the police reform front, where the UN has quite good leadership on police reform—good ideas and analysis. But with the in-fighting between Germans, in a lead role, and the U.S. coming in with supplemental funding for police reform, the UN is pushed out of the process.

I think it will really require high-level diplomatic leadership from the NATO countries, either through a NATO representative or NATO with the U.S. The players that have the most money and the largest footprint need to be guiding the process and not continuously looking for somebody on the Afghanistan leadership side to provide strategic direction when times are tough. I don't believe there is that capability yet from the Afghan side.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Representatives of NGOs active in the field have told us that provincial reconstruction teams were a problem. In their view, the soldiers are excellent in doing the work they were trained to do, but, when they have to take the place of those who are used to working with people, they are not as good, less effective. They also mentioned that we should take advantage of the coming winter to transform initiatives across the board in order to give more room to the NGOs, which will be protected by the soldiers, but not in the form of provincial reconstruction teams.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lalonde.

Ms. Patel.

[English]

Mrs. Seema Patel: Briefly, the PRT concept was to do reconstruction and development work in places where the security situation was so tough that normal traditional development and humanitarian agents could not go. It has spread across the country not quite along those lines. There continue to be PRTs in places that are relatively safe and stable and where traditional partners can engage with local communities more effectively than the PRT garrison can.

In the south and east, I think the PRTs are helpful. They need soldiers to get their aid officials out into the local communities and populations, but again, there needs to be some restructuring. Having PRTs in the provincial centre is not effective, when it is in the districts that the aid and the security situation are tough.

We need to find a way to improve—maybe through satellite offices in the south and east—the PRT concept, and expand and empower the R and D officials, who tend to form the smaller component. The PRT is more heavily weighted towards the military side. Expand the R and D officials in those areas.

I would like to see that restructuring take place, and if it does, I think it will be an effective structure to do development work.

• (0940)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to the government side.

Mr. Khan.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here, Ms. Patel.

I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Goldring, if there's any time left, so I'll be quick.

Thank you very much for an informative and useful presentation. It's one of the better ones I've listened to in a while.

You mentioned the importance of security, and I agree it's to provide security to gain support. Project ownership by the Afghans is a great idea, and it's happening through CDC as micro credit. We need to do more. You explained the complex circumstances well. Expectations are always high; they need to be realistic.

Coming to my question, in our Parliament the NDP is seeking the Canadian Forces' withdrawal immediately, and the Liberals want Canada to give a definitive withdrawal date to NATO.

I'd like to receive your comment on those two positions.

Also, what would be the impact on Afghanistan of a NATO failure?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khan.

Madame Patel.

Mrs. Seema Patel: The south needs military forces. Those military forces need to be capable, effective, flexible, and adaptable to changing situations. This is a tough enemy we're fighting, and we need the type of military resources that can attack the challenge.

Canada has been extremely effective, I believe. The operations last year and this year have gone a long way in pushing back what was expected to be a very difficult spring. There have been tactical wins. We need to see NATO countries that are capable and effective do that role in the south. I realize it's a tough one that has involved a lot of sacrifices on behalf of the country, but it is one that I support and believe is necessary.

The question becomes how to get them the type of support in the south from the rest of the NATO partners, with other flexible resources, that can respond to threats in partnership with the Canadian and British soldiers.

There is another issue on the security front, which is that the strategic situation we're in will require more than the military operations. There needs to be, as I said, a post-operation presence. That is critical to ensuring that the tactical battle win doesn't end there, that the win actually is about bringing Afghans back to the village they were displaced from and bringing in their support for the country's recovery.

It is tough to do big development projects here, and I urge the countries that are working in this area to really assess what the needs of the Afghan population are on the reconstruction and development front in these areas, post-security operations.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Should we stay there or should we withdraw? That was the question. Should we give NATO the date and the Taliban a timetable of flights that are going to take off when the troops are being withdrawn?

Mrs. Seema Patel: If anything, I think all of the NATO countries should stay committed in the short to medium term in the roles they're playing in Afghanistan. They should continue to do the security front. A withdrawal timetable, without maintaining some stability, is not helpful. It would be looked at, in my opinion, as a great strategic win for the Taliban. That being said, there's a lot we can do to improve the effectiveness of our military operations strategically, which is to continue to explain, communicate, and follow up military wins with civilian wins.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Goldring, please.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): You mentioned that one of the difficulties is that men in the smaller villages and so on will turn to working, if you like, or soldiering for the Taliban for an income. Keep in mind that in the country at the present time there's a high level of insecurity, obviously, and it might be difficult to say at this moment in time, but obviously the country itself cannot hire all of these people into the government or into public service, and the country doesn't have the money to do it.

You mentioned small businesses, like the cellphone businesses, but those are all consumer-oriented businesses that need people with family sustaining incomes to really take part and buy cellphones, if you like. This is being done in the short and longer term for creating family-sustaining jobs in quantities that would be brought in by special industries, and I'm thinking in the context of Haiti, where Gildan has 5,000 people employed in a segment of an industry.

Is there anything that's been done to encourage that? And what are the prospects for Afghanistan and what types of industries and businesses could it support, if they were encouraged and a little more stability was brought to bear?

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

Madame Patel.

Mrs. Seema Patel: Economic growth is going to be the name of the game for the long term of Afghanistan. Poverty does fuel insecurity. There are, I found, a number of opportunities in the economy for growth, not only the kind coming from foreigners, but also locally led growth. Businessmen are plentiful; they've come back from Pakistan, from Iran, and are setting up businesses in Afghanistan, but they need to be supported. The micro-financed loans and the NSP are providing a lot for the poor segment of society, but how can we encourage the entrepreneurship of the business class, the middle class? Credits and liquidity are going to be critical for them. This is one of the largest problems in Afghanistan, I find, in terms of economic growth. Afghan entrepreneurs don't have access to the medium-term loans, the two- to five-year loans at a reasonable interest rate so they can set up a business and start earning a profit from which to repay.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Are you looking at it for major business development? Really, you're talking about large quantities—5,000 jobs here, 5,000 there—major businesses. What are the prospects?

Mrs. Seema Patel: These businesses need to build industry so that the development zones, where you have a factory, have an industry for providing that development zone with a surrounding infrastructure, thereby creating another industry. I think we need to build momentum, so each new player in this market has created subplayers in the market that feed off it. Businessmen in construction, for example, have been a good player. Agri-business as a medium-term opportunity is going to be critical because it will expand the agricultural markets in general, to be able to provide to those businesses. So we're looking for the types of businesses that can create offshoots or other opportunities.

But credits will be the name of the game, medium-term credits for the entrepreneurs, credits for the farmers so they can sustain themselves throughout the harvesting period. And we play the role that right now is being played by a lot of illicit actors, which is to provide farmers with enough credit, early in the year, so that they can repay that loan with in-kind goods. Setting up this kind of a banking system, be it informal or formal—I think we should go both routes—will really push the economy onto a self-sustaining route. Other than that, opening up regional trade will go a long way, because these markets have to get out to people who will buy.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to Madame McDonough for seven minutes.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You presented a lot of information and a lot of opinions, and it's hard to know where to address one's brief questions.

I have to say I'm somewhat surprised to hear you say clearly and categorically that currently the United States dominates the mission in Afghanistan. I think the official position of the Canadian government, which has been presented again and again in Parliament and outside of Parliament, is that our reason for being there is almost entirely to support the Karzai government. Yet if I understand you correctly, you were making the case that the Karzai government is extremely corrupt and is losing the confidence of people for a variety of complex reasons. You also indicated that the biggest donors and those who have the biggest military presence should have more of a role in directing operations. And then you indicated that the UN couldn't play a major role because it has had such a small footprint and that it really should be restructured under NATO Command.

I guess my question is, what's the "it"? Does NATO actually have a mandate and the experience or the resources? Is it an appropriate role for NATO to be directing an operation that is supposed to have to do with reconstruction and development in a secure environment for the people of Afghanistan?

Secondly, I'm wondering if it's true that the Americans now dominate the mission in Afghanistan, which I think is not the public perception at all. What would you see happening further with the influx of American troops from Iraq, which seems to be very much where a great many of them are headed and where the American government is headed?

I know you went to pains at the outset to say you're not a spokesperson for the American government, and I want to respect the fact that that is so. I'm aware of that, but I just want you to

respond to those questions from the point of view of your organization.

• (0950)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame McDonough.

Madame Patel.

Mrs. Seema Patel: To answer quickly, by "dominating the mission", I am referring exclusively to it serving as 50% of the international assistance funding in the country. I don't mean it is in terms of a leadership role but actually in terms of money spent.

Yes, I think the Karzai government has lost a lot of headway in this past year. In our first report, Karzai and his government were looked at as honest brokers. There was a lot of confidence in the Afghan people for him. But this year has been a negative year for Karzai. Bringing back officials or people who are known to be connected to the drug trade or to have private militia who are corrupt, bringing them back into the folds of government and allowing them to have positions of power has had an impact on Afghan perceptions about this government's ability and willingness to be that fair and honest broker on behalf of the Afghan people. That's not to say that there isn't good leadership there and there aren't good things happening. There are a number of leaders who are quite effective. We need to continue to push Karzai to look for good administrators and to not play as much power politicking as has been happening more recently.

I believe the UN can play this role, but I think it's going to be more important for NATO and the U.S. to push the Karzai government to develop short-term strategic planning in line with them. It has to be a joint process. This is a sovereign government now that we are dealing with. I'm not suggesting that we take over the mission or take over the recovery process from the government, but there needs to be a push on his administration to look at the short-time horizon as well as the long-term development plan. We cannot continue to accept that in time things will get better. I don't think the Afghan people can continue to accept that from their government. So I would like to see the most involved countries take that position.

Regarding a U.S. influx of troops, I will very quickly say that if they're the right troops, I think it would be helpful. NATO has put out requests for more troops, for special operation-type forces. If U.S. troops meet those demands of the NATO commanders, then I think it would be a positive step in the right direction. Obviously it has to be negotiated amongst them whether those troops are the kind needed on the ground.

The Chair: You have more time, Madame McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: One of the views that has been expressed by many—not all, because obviously there are a variety of perspectives—is that because of the way the war on terrorism was launched in the first instance, really as Operation Enduring Freedom, in some respects the increased presence and dominance of the U.S. is probably the best friend of the Taliban, not in intent but in practice. There is a sense that it simply fuels the Taliban. There has been the suggestion that one of the very positive things about Canada going into Kandahar is that it has diminished the presence of Operation Enduring Freedom—although it still exists, with a good many troops—and that this might create a greater possibility of building confidence.

With the increased presence of the U.S. troops, is this not a concern? I'm wondering how you perceive that.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame McDonough.

Madame Patel.

Mrs. Seema Patel: Again, I think it goes to what the soldiers are going to be used for. There are dual, sometimes competing missions on the security front in Afghanistan. There is Operation Enduring Freedom, following the counterterrorism, and then NATO, following counter-insurgency and stability. If those U.S. troops come in under NATO command and fulfill the needs that NATO commanders have requested, then I think it would be positive. If they fulfilled the role of OEF, I'm not quite sure.... I think that's a question for military officials.

When Canada came into Kandahar, it was a welcome presence. It was a presence that was needed. I don't think it's necessarily because the U.S. presence fuels the Taliban. I don't think that's the case. It's because the U.S. presence on the ground was shallow and it was not necessarily there to maintain stability. It was there to do counterterrorism. It was shallow. There were only a few troops in Kandahar before Canada came to do the mission that is needed in the south—the stability mission.

I hope that answers your question.

The Chair: You mentioned specific special operations and special types of troops. What types of special troops are they? Are you aware of the kinds of special troops that have been requested?

Mrs. Seema Patel: The skills that are needed on the ground in Afghanistan—in the south and east particularly—are the ability to respond quickly to calls of help from local communities, local police, and local army officials at the village level. We need the types of troops that are able to basically parachute into villages. We need the helicopters. Like I said, that's the mobility we need to be able to respond quickly. We're going to need better intelligence on the ground. It's very rumour-filled: the role of cross-border insurgents, the role of Taliban leadership, the criminal elements of this insurgency. So we need better intelligence agents on the ground. Those are forces I would like to see. And I would like to see them with PRTs manned with the forces that can do tougher policing and aren't available right now. That's not just force protection from the PRTs, but also the kind of people who can maintain crowds, patrol in communities, and stay in communities if necessary.

The Chair: It's the difference between policing and militia or policing and troops.

Mr. Casey, do you have a question?

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Yes, Mr. Chair. Thanks very much.

You're doing a great job. I want to compliment you on the work you do, plus your ability to speak about it.

You mentioned that in your opinion, security and development by Canada was the correct approach—I forget exactly how you said it. You suggested that we're a little light on diplomacy. I wonder in what area you would see us develop in the diplomacy field. What could we do better on the diplomacy side?

Mrs. Seema Patel: I'm glad you asked that. This recommendation is something that's dear to my heart.

The Chair: As much as it's dear to your heart, could we have a fairly quick answer? We have one more question and then we must conclude. Take your time. Just so you know, the second round is shorter.

Mrs. Seema Patel: There are two pieces. One is the role of Pakistan. The U.S. is not going to be able to make great political or diplomatic headway in Pakistan in the next year or two, given its current relationship with the country. So the other countries that are involved in Afghanistan that are in harm's way need to continue to push Musharraf to address the tribal areas, not just militarily but also in terms of fragility. It is also a failed territory, and the tribal areas need a diplomatic and reconstruction response from the Musharraf government so that it builds its constituency. I'd like to see Canada push them toward that role.

Secondly, on counter narcotics, eradication is not working. It feels like a sailed ship in the U.S. that eradication is going to go ahead. We'd like to see some of the other countries that have noted the devastating effects eradication can have on maintaining stability and on the local population in terms of winning their support.... So we would like to see a push for Canada to affect U.S. policy on eradication. Those two—

• (1000)

Mr. Bill Casey: What's the alternative to eradication?

Mrs. Seema Patel: There are a number of different proposals brought forth. The Senlis Council has suggested one of them. We suggest that we can use eradication funds more effectively by a combination of credits, subsidizing other value-added products, providing loans, possibly even buying up the opium at the farm gate with a very limited timeframe to prevent continuous growth.

But in the U.S. I have not seen any of these alternative plans costed out, planned out. It hasn't been given attention by people within the administration in the U.S., so if other countries can come up with alternative strategies for counter narcotics besides eradication, cost them out and present them, I think it would help to push the debate in the U.S.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think Mr. Dosanjh has a concluding question.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Thank you.

My question is regarding Pakistan. I'm actually somewhat surprised by your contention that the U.S. can't influence Pakistan and you think Canada and NATO can. Pakistan has been for a long time, until recently, almost a client state of the United States of America, in very blunt terms. What you're suggesting is very novel, that a country that provides so much aid and assistance to Pakistan and has had so much influence over the long term has very little influence because of the current relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan.

I'd like you to elaborate on that. How is it that a country like Canada, which has almost no influence in that region, can be more helpful vis-à-vis Pakistan and the U.S. can't?

Mrs. Seema Patel: I think the U.S. can influence Pakistan greatly, and does influence Pakistan greatly. What I mean to say is I don't think it's likely to do so in the near term. I don't think it's likely to change its current stance toward the Pakistan government or its current portfolio extensively.

Canada and some of these other countries can serve as honest brokers. On the diplomatic front in Iran, Afghanistan, and the U.S., there is a lot of political controversy about the U.S.'s actual interest and role, so it would be good to see more neutral parties take that role. I realize that smaller players do have a difficult time influencing policy, especially in a place as contentious as Pakistan, but it's about restructuring the dialogue and debate about the actual problems.

In my opinion, the tribal areas of Pakistan face exactly the same problems as the tribal areas in Afghanistan. There are disenfranchised populations that don't feel connected to the Islamabad government, just as there are disenfranchised populations that don't feel connected to the Kabul government. These are places that are not being administered by a state, where there is very little law and order coming from state institutions and where there is a population that has not seen the benefits of having a government—security, development, and reconstruction benefits.

These are all things that Canada realizes are critical and does well in countries post-conflict. I think it's time to push those ideas to the Musharraf government, that response militarily is not enough, that there needs to be a broader response to the tribal areas.

The Chair: Mr. Eyking and then Mr. Patry, but we must hurry.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): I have just a short question. It was alluded to that Canada is doing more than its share in a very unstable region of the country, and when the question was put forward on withdrawal of troops, you pretty well said it would be the wrong thing to do immediately, but you alluded to a rotation that would maybe somehow see our NATO partners doing more in the

south or alleviating pressure from us. You mentioned a rotation. How would you see that unfolding?

The Chair: Before you answer, maybe Mr. Patry could ask his question.

•(1005)

Mr. Bernard Patry: I just want to say, in the beginning, you didn't answer. I had two questions. This is in regard to Mr. Dosanjh's question. You didn't answer. You say we need to push Pakistan. It's fine to push Pakistan, but Pakistan alone is not enough, because the only friend of Pakistan in the area is the Taliban, and it's much easier for Pakistan to deal with one leader of the Taliban area than to deal with all the civil society there.

We need to involve India and the surrounding countries. If you don't get India and all the surrounding countries involved, I don't think we're going to go anywhere; we're not going to pressure Pakistan. As far as the United States is concerned, giving the okay to India to get nuclear weapons and things like that, it's a geopolitical solution that we need to face there.

The Chair: Madame Patel.

Mrs. Seema Patel: Yes, I think regional partnership is going to be critical for long-term stability in Afghanistan. The players who are involved there need to realize that there's more to benefit from stability there than there is to having pull within the Kabul government. But in our report I tried to stay very conscious of what's actually possible in the next year or two.

I realize that a number of fronts can be made in the long term, but in the short term there needs to be some sort of change in Pakistan's policies and their capability to protect and administer their own tribal areas, and I think that's going to be the near-term challenge. The diplomatic front in the regional countries I think is critical. It was during Bonn, and it should be for the long term.

The Chair: Mr. Eyking had the question in regard to the rotation, the military rotation of NATO and Canada.

Mrs. Seema Patel: I don't recall talking about rotation, but maybe I did throw it out there. The U.K. and the Canadian soldiers are the most effective ones in the country, in my opinion. There are other NATO countries there that can assist and support, but in this counter-insurgency type of operation, followed up with good R and D and the type of R and D that needs to happen in the country, the Canadians and the U.K. are the best at it. That's why I'm very happy to see that they are in those toughest areas in those southern provinces. They need to get the support from other countries so that they're not taking all the hits long term, but it is a debate to be had within NATO. It's not something I can speak to.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you for spending this hour with us. I wish we had more time, to be quite frank. If you have other thoughts or any things that you may want to submit to our committee, we would certainly welcome them. You can send them to us in writing or you can send us information.

A number of times you talked about your yearly report and the difference in how the government was accepted the first year compared to the second year, in your second report. I'm not certain if those reports are on the web, if they're available, or if we have them, but information like that would be appreciated.

So thank you for coming.

We will suspend for two minutes, and then we'll move into the consideration of our draft report, which will be in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

- _____ (Pause) _____
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[*Public proceedings resume*]

- (1050)

The Chair: Welcome back to meeting number 54 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Moving into committee business, we have a motion brought forward by Mr. Patry:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development asks that the Department of National Defence provide a fulsome monthly table of the number of prisoners captured during our mission to date, how many have been handed over to Afghan authorities, and any records, if available, of their present status. This reporting is to coincide with the appearance of the Canadian officials and diplomats who wrote the report entitled *Afghanistan 2006: Good Governance, Democratic Development and Human Rights* before the Standing Committee.

Mr. Patry, would you speak to your motion?

Mr. Bernard Patry: It is a straightforward motion. We want to get the numbers, which the Department of National Defence can provide to the committee.

This is very diplomatic wording. We say "and any records, if available, of their present status". That is to be sure it coincides with the report you mentioned, *Afghanistan 2006*.

For me, it is a very straightforward motion.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Of course, I understand my colleague's intention and what he wants here. But he was in the government. The government specifically takes into account section 51 of the Access to Information Act, which clearly states that information may be exempt from release if it could prove injurious to the conduct of Canada's international relations.

Information regarding details and the current status of detainees apprehended by the Canadian Forces is actually due to operational

and other requirements, and it is not possible to release that to the public. Its impact could have very serious consequences. Because of that, it becomes pretty difficult for the government to agree to this motion.

I think we would probably—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

Madam McDonough.

Ms. Alexa McDonough: Notwithstanding the citing of the Access to Information Act, we have international obligations that make it clear we have a responsibility to keep track of detainees and prisoners. All we're asking is for that to be honoured and monitored. It is obvious that we've had a problem because it wasn't being fully honoured and fully monitored.

Second, I totally support the motion, but I wonder if there is a need to make a distinction between detainees and prisoners. When does a detainee become a prisoner, or is there a need to cite both? I have no international legal prowess in this regard, but there may be some kind of distinction between the two.

Maybe, Bernard, you could address that.

- (1055)

The Chair: I would like to add another question.

I went to the Access to Information Act. I haven't checked with the parliamentary secretary or with the government; I just went to it on my own.

The motion says, "that the Department of National Defence provide a fulsome monthly table of the number of prisoners captured during our mission to date". Is that specific to the Canadian soldiers who have captured prisoners? Are you asking for the NATO numbers? Canada leads NATO in certain areas.

Madam McDonough has asked for the difference between detainees and prisoners. Working together in conjunction with police and other agencies in Afghanistan, there are prisoners taken.

Mr. Bernard Patry: This is my answer. First of all, with respect to detainees and prisoners, detainees could be detained for a very short period. You are arrested and they determine whether your papers are normal and everything and then you are released. That's what a detainee is. A prisoner is someone who has been transferred to the Afghan authorities and is in prison.

According to what was asked in question period in the past last few weeks, it's all Canadians. They are not coming from NATO. They are not NATO prisoners. They are Canadian detainees. The detainees are being arrested by Canada and then being transferred to the Afghan authorities.

The Chair: All right.

On Madam McDonough's point, is there anything else there? I think we're all right.

Next are Mr. Casey, Madame Lalonde, and Mr. Eyking.

Mr. Bill Casey: This asks how many prisoners have been handed over to Afghan authorities and if any records are available on their present status. That would mean giving out their names and where they were captured. It seems to me it would give an awful lot of information to the Taliban. This is a war, not a tea party, as somebody said.

Mrs. Patel said this morning that if we provided a schedule for withdrawal it would be a win for the Taliban. I believe if we provide a schedule of prisoners with their names, capture dates, and locations, that would also be a win for the Taliban. So I would vote against this.

The Chair: Mr. Goldring.

We have another committee here. I didn't realize this motion was going to take so long.

Mr. Peter Goldring: This motion really calls for considerable information. You're giving strategic information to the enemy on when, where, who, and why. I would think that a number of these detainees would be held for intelligence reasons. At what point do you give the information and at what point do you not?

Another problem here is the difficulty of having joint operations with other military units and who really has access to the detainees.

The Chair: Madame Lalonde is next, but we are out of time. This motion is going to need more debate. We don't have another room we can go to next door, so we're going to swing this to Thursday.

Madame Lalonde is next, and then Bernard.

Mr. Eyking and Mr. Goldring, you will have to wait until the next day.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I have a friendly amendment to move. We should add: "and who have been handed over to Afghan authorities by Canadian soldiers", since that appears nowhere.

We've already received information that should not be spread anywhere else but here. In my view, that's not a reason to stop the execution.

[*English*]

The Chair: Can you work on a friendly amendment?

Mr. Bernard Patry: Mr. Goldring, we're not asking for the name of the person; we're asking for the number. We're not asking where they're coming from or where they're going. That's a big difference.

The Chair: Mr. Patry and Madame Lalonde, if you are willing to work on a friendly amendment, I ask that you get it back within 24 hours.

We are adjourned.

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