



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on National Defence

NDDN • NUMBER 004 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, June 6, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Rick Casson

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on National Defence

Tuesday, June 6, 2006

• (1540)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC)): Ladies and gentlemen, we'll call the meeting to order. I'd like to announce that there's a severe penalty if a cell phone rings. We're not sure what it is, but it is severe, I understand, so make sure it's on quiet mode, please.

Today is a date in history we all are aware of, the 62nd anniversary of D-Day—the beginning of the end, as some put it. It's quite a day to remember.

I would like to welcome the Honourable Peter MacKay, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Mr. MacKay, how much time do you have to spend with us, so that we can judge ourselves accordingly?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs): I would like to say I have as much time as you need, but I'm in your capable hands, Mr. Chair. I think we've scheduled about an hour.

The Chair: Okay. We have a witness following you, a state secretary from Germany, so we'd like to save some time for that. We'll get started.

Mr. Minister, welcome. We are undertaking a study right now of our troops in Afghanistan. Your recent trip there, I'm sure, will add much to what you have to tell us.

There will be a round of questions. We'll get as many in as we can. Hopefully you can help us in our deliberations here.

Please go ahead.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Chair and members, *chers collègues*.

I'm glad you noted, Mr. Chair, in your opening the reference to the 62nd anniversary of D-Day. This is of course a day all Canadians will remember, celebrating the sacrifices and the achievements of our allied forces in that operation to land on the continent of Europe, which quite rightly brought to an end the Second World War. As all of you know, there was still a great deal of fierce fighting that was necessary after that landing in Normandy.

Many of our closest allies and the friends we find ourselves working alongside in Afghanistan are promoting stability and building democracy. There are, as you would know, Mr. Chair, 30 other countries involved in this multinational effort, and upwards of 60 countries engaged in the broader reconstruction and development effort.

We are continuing in the tradition of much of the work done throughout history by Canadian soldiers with our efforts in Afghanistan. We play a very important role in organizations such as NATO and the UN, and Canada's engagement in Afghanistan has generated significant interest in recent weeks, as it should. Canadians have rightfully sought to learn more about why we are there, what we are doing there, how we measure success, and what it means for Canada and the world. I suspect many of those same questions we will attempt to deal with today.

With respect to why we're there, Mr. Chair, Canada and its international partners are making a difference in Afghanistan. The United Nations-backed engagement is important to Canadians, Afghans, and our allies. Helping to build a stable, secure, democratic, and self-sufficient Afghanistan is in our collective interests, and that is our goal. The events of September 11, 2001, demonstrated that our security is linked to situations elsewhere in the world.

Afghanistan, as we know, was an incubator for terrorism. Of course, we saw last weekend that Canada itself is not immune from terrorism. Ensuring that Afghanistan never again becomes a terrorist haven is a global responsibility, which we share. Afghans and our allies are deeply invested in this endeavour, sharing the risk and committed to the same goals as Canada.

[Translation]

Through a series of political agreements, including the Bonn Agreement of 2001 and the Afghanistan Compact agreed in January 2006, there is a contract between Afghans and the international community. The responsibility of rebuilding Afghanistan is shared.

Canada has been from the beginning with its allies. This is our second military deployment in Kandahar, where Canadian Forces personnel were first deployed in 2002. In 2002, we also re-established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan, opening an embassy in 2003. Our major efforts in Kabul in 2003 and 2004 helped to restore stability to the capital, while new national governance institutions were being built.

During my recent trip to Afghanistan, I saw for myself the progress that has been made, in particular in Kabul. Due in part to our efforts, Afghans in Kabul enjoy opportunities unheard of under the Taliban. Those in Kandahar have however yet to reap these rewards of reconstruction.

• (1545)

[English]

Canada has always engaged where we were most needed, and we've always tried to do the right thing. Canadians, soldiers, diplomats, and development officers are now needed in Kandahar, where insurgents are fighting to destabilize the Afghan government. Our continued presence is helping to restore security to that troubled region and is paving the way for NATO's expansion to southern Afghanistan this summer. That is where Canadians are most prominent—in the south of Afghanistan.

Alongside the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and other allies, we will be helping to ensure that the benefits of peace begin to extend southward to where Afghans need it most, while at the same time continuing to engage the central government in Kabul on the critical and mutually reinforcing issues of security, governance, and development. This is very much the approach that is being taken there.

What are we doing in Afghanistan specifically? Well, whether it's in Kabul or Kandahar, this is not a traditional peacekeeping mission, which separates two disciplined militaries once their governments have agreed to a ceasefire or a peace process. It's never been that way. In fact, insurgents are not interested in peace. They seek to destabilize this country and our effort and our mission through violence. Mr. Chairman, you would know as well that we are there very much at the invitation and at the urging of President Karzai and the Afghanistan government.

The Afghan and international response has been unequivocal: we will not be deterred from this essential state-building exercise. Our mission in Afghanistan is threefold. We are there first to help stabilize the security situation; second, to strengthen local governance; and third, to reduce Afghan poverty. To do so, Canada is working alongside Afghan security forces in building the capacity of justice institutions to establish the rule of law and to promote and protect human rights. We are also helping to build local governance institutions so that they can provide basic services for their people, and we are helping to build a sustainable economy that affords opportunities for all Afghans.

Mr. Chair, none of these things happen without boots on the ground. Without the presence of our soldiers, this important work simply cannot occur.

[Translation]

Afghanistan's progress to date has been impressive.

With Canadian funding and support, Afghan women played an important role in drafting the Afghan constitution, in which the principle of gender equality is enshrined.

Canada's support for democratic development in Afghanistan helped enable Afghans to vote in two historic elections; 582 women ran in the provincial and parliamentary elections and now hold 27% of the seats in parliament. That's more than in the Parliament of Canada.

With Canadian leadership, 11,000 heavy weapons are now safely secured, and 63,000 former combatants have been disarmed and are now being taught skills to allow them to build a new life.

However, considerable challenges remain that risk undermining this progress. There are no quick fixes. We recognize that success cannot be assumed by military means alone. For this reason, the Prime Minister recently announced the allocation of an additional \$310 million in development assistance—raising Canada's total contribution to nearly \$1 billion over 10 years—and the construction of a permanent Canadian Embassy facility in Kabul. Alongside our military contributions, these elements form an integrated Canadian approach to Afghan institution-building, security, and development.

[English]

Finally, Mr. Chairman, how do we measure success in Afghanistan?

The Afghanistan Compact, of which Canada was very much a part of drafting, outlines 40 concrete benchmarks to guide Afghanistan and the international efforts over the course of the next 5 years. These benchmarks were developed by the democratically elected Afghan government and endorsed by the international community at the conference in London earlier this year. Specific examples of the benchmarks include the establishment of a professional Afghan national army; an Afghan national police and border police, able to meet Afghan security needs effectively; the 70% reduction of the area containment of landmines by the year 2007; the enactment of legislation against corruption by the end of 2007; and a 20% increase in the employment of women by the end of 2010.

Of course, Canada's strategy is to support the realization of these critical milestones contained in the Afghanistan Compact. As I mentioned, there are over 40. We will be regularly monitoring the progress against these benchmarks to ensure that the process remains on track. Our evaluation will be shared with all parliamentarians and all Canadians on an annual basis.

This is what this currently means for Canada and the world. First, we are not alone in this essential endeavour. The United Nations assistance mission in Afghanistan is the United Nations' largest special political mission in the world. Over 60 countries are contributing to the development efforts, and over 35 to the security side. We have an obligation to Afghans, to our allies, and to the United Nations to see that Canadians help get the job done.

Secondly, we take this responsibility seriously. To have reduced or withdrawn our presence before the Afghan government is fully established would have invited the return of the Taliban, negated our accomplishments to date, and ultimately threatened Canada's long-term security. We have a vested interest in being there, Mr. Chair, as you know. There is a point in time where a tipping point exists. Canada has been at the forefront of ensuring that Afghans do not fall back.

Thirdly, our Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence, and I have all visited Afghanistan recently. We saw firsthand how Canada is making a substantial difference. Extending our commitment was the right and responsible thing to do. Canadians will be safer for it, NATO stronger, and Afghanistan more free and secure.

Finally, following the two extensive debates and a vote that took place, members of Parliament and Canadians understand the real risks involved and the work that remains to be done. It is now time to rally behind the brave men and women in uniform engaged on our behalf in Afghanistan, in both civilian and military exercises. They deserve nothing less than our unambiguous support.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

•(1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Maybe you'd take an opportunity to introduce the people with you. I forgot to do that earlier.

Hon. Peter MacKay: I'm sorry.

I have Wendy Gilmour from the Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as James Fox. Both are very well versed on this particular file and all aspects of Canada's involvement in the mission in Afghanistan.

The Chair: Good. We'll start a 10-minute round.

Mr. Dosanjh.

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

Thank you, Mr. MacKay, for appearing before us.

You mentioned in your remarks that some of the work that we're doing in Afghanistan obviously can't be done without the boots on the ground. I agree. Under difficult circumstances, you need those boots on the ground. I would agree—and I'm sure you would agree—that they also need appropriate equipment, as identified by the military. There is the recent controversy that's been going on. I understand that there have been at least 40 drafts of defence capability plans that have gone back and forth from DND with respect to what is needed by the DND to do its job.

It appears to us, sitting at a distance, that it is impossible to reconcile the political agenda of buying the strategic lift versus the military needs of the tactical lift, which is needed right now in Afghanistan, as per General Hillier. It seems to me that the government may not be pursuing the needs of the military through the tactical airlift, which is needed in Afghanistan today, and in fact is pursuing the purchase of C-17s.

Now, can you tell us why your government isn't immediately pursuing the needs of the military and purchasing the tactical airlift that's required by the military in Afghanistan today?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I'll respond this way, Mr. Dosanjh. You, as a member of the previous government, are not on the outside. You have a very privileged position, having seen the detail and the important decision-making that goes into military procurements.

I hesitate to reference the cancellation of helicopter programs by your government and the impact that has had on our Canadian military, or the cuts that they suffered under your administration. What I will say is that our Minister of Defence and the Chief of the Defence Staff are working very closely with officials to make the proper decisions and pursuing the needs of the military first and foremost. I would suggest that in a relatively short time, just over 100 days, we have made progress in deciding what it is exactly that the military needs.

In terms of strategic lift, you're absolutely right to suggest that the needs have changed. As far as modern equipment and the transporting of troops are concerned, not only in Afghanistan but in other missions that we may be involved in, in the future it's going to be very important to have that strategic heavy lift.

I saw, for example, the equipment that's being used by other countries, including the Chinook helicopters, the Black Hawk helicopters. We are very much behind as a result of the previous government's refusal to purchase replacements.

•(1555)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: The previous government actually announced in November that we should proceed with a tactical lift, and what you've done is introduce the political agenda into this of buying the C-17s ahead of the tactical lift. Am I right or wrong?

Hon. Peter MacKay: You're wrong.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Why am I wrong?

Hon. Peter MacKay: You're wrong because—

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Why am I wrong?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Let me answer and I'll tell you why you're wrong.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: All right.

The Chair: Mr. Dosanjh, let him respond.

Hon. Peter MacKay: You're wrong because your government hesitated for over a decade after cancelling the helicopter program for purely political reasons that put our men and women of the armed forces at risk. That's why you're wrong.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Am I right, though, that we announced it in November and you've now gone back on it and said C-17s are more important than the tactical lift?

Hon. Peter MacKay: You're wrong.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Why are we purchasing C-17s first and not the tactical first? The C-17 isn't needed in Afghanistan.

Hon. Peter MacKay: We're making the right decision for our Canadian Forces; that is what we're doing.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: The C-17 is not needed in Afghanistan, is it?

Hon. Peter MacKay: That's your opinion.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: So it's a matter of opinion, not based on the needs as assessed by General Hillier. In April, before the Empire Club, he said he needs the tactical lift, he needs the helicopters, and he needs the trucks. Here we are buying C-17s, which are not needed in Afghanistan right away.

Hon. Peter MacKay: That's your opinion, Mr. Dosanjh. I've already told you that we are making an assessment right now in conjunction with General Hillier, in conjunction with, obviously, military personnel, our defence minister, who has a fair bit of military experience himself, having served over 30 years in the Canadian armed forces and having attained a high rank. I put a lot of faith and a lot of confidence in the decision that they will jointly make on behalf of the Canadian government for the betterment of our armed forces and for their protection in Afghanistan and in other missions.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Let me move on to the next issue. I understand that the Minister of Defence has just announced, or made it known, that he's not attending the NATO conference in Brussels. I'm assuming the conference is still proceeding.

Obviously, at such a crucial time, when you have Canada's relationship with NATO being extremely important, and in fact recent news that NATO is going to be doubling its strength in southern Afghanistan, I am wondering whether you could tell me why, number one, there's the cancellation of the visit of the Minister of National Defence, and whether or not you knew that this doubling of the strength of the NATO troops in Afghanistan is going to take place, and when did you know that?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I believe the doubling is scheduled to take place in early August. That is the most recent information I have. That is based on the ability of both Great Britain and the Dutch to deploy their forces there, their readiness, essentially, based on their assessment of the situation in the south. The NATO mission is, of course, the transition that's taking place, a critical exercise of which Canada is very much a part.

As for the decision of the defence minister to attend the conference, I'm not briefed on all of the detail of that decision.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: When did you know that there would be a doubling of the troops in southern Afghanistan?

Hon. Peter MacKay: You know that we don't discuss operational details. I did have discussions with the Dutch foreign minister when I was in Afghanistan. We spoke at that time about their commitment as well as the commitment of the British forces. As far as the numbers and the deployment are concerned, we're not at liberty to discuss those.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: No, I'm not suggesting you tell me. It's publicly known they're going to double the strength of the troops in southern Afghanistan. I'm asking you, when did you know about that? There's no big secret about that. When did you first know about that?

•(1600)

Hon. Peter MacKay: I knew about it through briefings we received.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: When? Did you know about it before the parliamentary debate on the extension?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I can't say. I would have to check my notes. I've received a number of briefings on Afghanistan. If you want to know, I'll give you the exact date when I first received the word of the doubling.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I would like to know because I believe it would be relevant as to whether or not you then informed the House

properly, in a very important debate, that the strength might be going up in terms of numbers in southern Afghanistan, which is where we are doing a significant portion of the battles.

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Let me ask you a question about the Geneva Conventions. You are familiar with the debate that's gone on in the newspapers, with the military saying something on the ground and the minister in the House appearing to say something different. The military said these insurgents have the prisoner of war treatment, but not the prisoner of war status. I'd like you to tell me what the difference is between those two things, and why we can't afford them the status.

Second, I would like to know whether or not Canada, as a state, is making the effort it's obliged to do under the Geneva Conventions. There is a provision there that says "despite the fact that all of the conditions may not apply", meaning in terms of the insignia people wear, uniforms they wear, whether they have a structured command, those kinds of requirements, because those conventions were drafted at a different time in history, for different kinds of armies fighting. We don't have those kinds of armies fighting, obviously, right now.

Are we making the effort with respect to that provision, which says that despite the fact that the combatants might not fit the profiles, implicit or explicit, in the conventions, we are to endeavour to apply all the provisions of the Geneva Conventions?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Dosanjh, that is exactly what Canada is doing. We are certainly endeavouring to see that the Afghan army will comply with the conventions to the greatest extent possible for us to do so. During all international operations, including Afghanistan, it's the Canadian Forces' policy to comply with the law of armed conflict, which includes the Geneva Convention, and we want to see the spirit of that convention is applied, if not applied in a strictly legal sense, to the greatest degree possible.

The conflict in Afghanistan, as you know and as you pointed out quite rightly, is a very complex situation that does not fit the normal model for which the Geneva Convention was originally intended. It involves a range of operations there, as you're familiar, including armed conflict operations. To that extent, in that very complex environment, the conflict itself is not one between states, and the vast majority of individuals and those affected should have the Geneva Convention applied.

That is Canada's intent, but it does not apply as a matter of treaty law in that context. So at a minimum, Canada will certainly honour article 3 of the Geneva Convention, which applies to armed conflicts not of an international character and is applicable to the conflict in Afghanistan. It provides the minimum standard for the humane treatment of detainees and specifically prohibits cruel and inhumane treatment or torture.

The Chair: Thank you. That concludes your time.

Mr. Bachand, for 20 minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, Minister, I want to thank you for being here.

I had the opportunity to go to Afghanistan last week, at the invitation of NATO. It wasn't the first time, during my NATO visits, that I learned information that, rightly or wrongly, is not necessarily disclosed by the Canadian government. I'd like to raise two questions which, I think, are new in the debate. Before going to Afghanistan and receiving the briefings I had, I was not aware of these two problems.

First, I met General Richards, who is currently in charge of the NATO forces for the north and east. This summer, he'll be in charge of the south, that is of the provinces of Kandahar and Hellman. Canadian soldiers' current mission in Kandahar province is undeniably a tough one, because hunting the Taliban is a major challenge. Perhaps it's not for no reason that we've lost so many people. We know there's very violent fighting there. During General Richards' briefing, I learned that, when NATO takes control of the south, the idea will be to change Canadian soldiers' mission so that they do a little less Taliban hunting and get involved instead in an operation to conquer the hearts and minds of the inhabitants. That would be quite a major change, I think, and I imagine that, when it takes control of the south, NATO will ask the Canadians what they think of it and tell them that it thinks they're too focused on hunting the Taliban and that they now have to focus on conquering hearts and minds, which means being much more present in the communities, working on building schools, health services, infrastructure and so on.

I'd like to know whether any negotiations are underway to make a fairly significant change to the present mission of Canadian Forces in Kandahar.

•(1605)

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you very much for your question. It's important. I clearly understand the challenge that the soldiers and everyone doing humanitarian work in the field are facing in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

I'm not aware of the particular briefing in which you've been given information in NATO, but I can tell you that Canada's engagement there is very much, as I said in my presentation, threefold. It's not purely of a military nature. It is very much about democracy building, and the work being done there by our ambassador is exemplary. It's also very much about the humanitarian effort, which

includes the provincial reconstruction team, which includes working with some NGOs who are there, including the Red Cross.

It's also, to give a specific example that you've referred to, about helping to build schools. I visited one of those schools in Kabul and I saw the work that was being done to help young children, particularly those who were orphaned, who were living on the street prior to Canada's involvement there along with the allies. They are now being given an opportunity to learn trades, to learn basic sanitation and engagement with one another, basic reading and writing and educational skills that were never available to them before.

I saw young women, young girls, there for the very first time, permitted to go to school, where previously they were barred from attending any form of educational institution. The numbers are staggering. Somewhere in the range of 4 million to 5 million kids are now in school as a result of the work that's being done. I consider that very much about not only supporting and elevating the lives of people of Afghanistan, but I also witnessed the warmth of the embrace that the Afghan people extended to not only soldiers, but aid workers, individuals who were there to genuinely try to help them.

So it's all part and parcel of the mission, if I can put it this way. It's not a change in position. It's not a strategic shift. It's not about being reassigned or redeployed. It's very much part of the overall intent to bring stability to that region, to see that the difference that we make is lasting, that it isn't going to simply evaporate when the allies eventually do leave the country. So there has been no change in operations that I'm aware of.

These operations, as you know, in terms of the military responsibilities will change with the transition that's going on into the NATO operation. That will in fact change. Leadership positions will change. The work that is being done currently in Kandahar and Kabul will, from time to time, involve a change in the leadership role, and a rotation that occurs on a regular basis is part of that overall exercise.

•(1610)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: From what I understood of General Richards' briefing, Canadians would be doing less Taliban hunting and would be a little more active in development. You seem to agree on that.

I also met General Jones, who's in charge of Operation Enduring Freedom. As we speak, he is still in charge of operations in the south and east. I also learned information on anti-insurrection and anti-terrorist efforts. I learned that the Americans and NATO want NATO soldiers to handle the anti-insurrection work and U.S. soldiers to handle everything relating to anti-terrorism.

Second, there were bombings in Azizi. I don't believe the Americans informed NATO that they intended to bomb Azizi. From my standpoint, there's a command and control problem. When soldiers are in the field, are they facing insurrection or terrorists? It's possible the Americans decided it's terrorism and therefore that it's their responsibility. In those cases, situations like the one in which four Canadian soldiers were killed by friendly fire might occur.

I want your opinion, and I'd like you to use your influence and to direct General Fraser to ensure that there are two lines of command and that there's no confusion so as to prevent Canadian soldiers from getting killed or Americans from deciding to bomb without warning.

I'd like you to sort out this matter because our soldiers may misunderstand the rules of engagement. When you're facing an adversary, you don't know whether it's a terrorist or an insurrection. But we're not going to call up the Americans and ask them to come and see what it is. We don't have the time to determine that. So there's a danger of confusion.

I'd like to have your opinion, and I'd also like you to give me assurances that you'll speak with General Fraser to ensure the soldiers' safety and the success of the operation.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay: I can assure you, from what I saw of General Fraser and the work he's doing there with our forces and in cooperation with other forces that are currently in the base at Kandahar, that he is very much in the loop as far as the communication is concerned. He is very much an individual, I think with incredible experience, who understands his responsibility.

As Minister of Foreign Affairs, I don't need to tell him how to do his job. I have great confidence that he and General Hillier and those involved in the mission from the very beginning are, in conjunction with him, making proper decisions. They're not being left out of NATO briefings. They're not being deprived of information, regardless of what you may have been told or what has been suggested to you.

But I'm not at liberty to describe, nor will I be drawn into a discussion about, operational details of how certain activities may play out on the ground. I know, as we all know, that Canada was not involved in the fatal bombing to which you've referred, but that doesn't mean we weren't aware it was going to happen. I would suggest to you it would be naive beyond belief to suggest that we didn't know certain operations were happening in a region in which we have command, and that is in the south.

Mr. Claude Bachand: So you were aware of the bombing in Azizi before it—

Hon. Peter MacKay: Please.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Please what?

Hon. Peter MacKay: You're not suggesting that as Minister of Foreign Affairs I would be personally briefed about a bombing that was going to take place.

Mr. Claude Bachand: You're telling me you weren't aware?

Hon. Peter MacKay: That's correct. I'm telling you I was not made aware—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: That's the danger, Mr. Chairman. The Americans may act unilaterally, and we'll have a problem.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Bachand, I'm sorry—

Mr. Claude Bachand: Sorry?

The Chair: The bell is ringing. You're out of time.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Okay, I'll talk it over with the reporters afterward.

The Chair: All right.

Ms. Black. You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Welcome to our committee, Minister. It's a pleasure to have you here.

I have some of the same questions as Mr. Bachand has been asking, and I'd like to follow up on that.

Exactly what will be the substantive change on the ground when we move out of Operation Enduring Freedom and into the ISAF-NATO command?

Hon. Peter MacKay: The ISAF-NATO command, as I understand it, will essentially signal a shift away from the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom into the broader mission, which includes the United Nations countries, the 30-plus countries that make up that UN mission.

There will also be, simultaneous to that, a change in the command, as you're aware, that will go to the Dutch and then eventually the British, and there is a rotation that takes place. I'm not going to pretend to know the exact timeframe, but I believe this commences in early August.

• (1615)

Ms. Dawn Black: But what will the change on the ground be in terms of the mission itself? From the Operation Enduring Freedom counter-insurgency mission to the ISAF-NATO mission, what will the difference be on the ground?

Hon. Peter MacKay: There'll be a continuation of efforts to eradicate the presence of the Taliban and the attacks that have been carried out in the region around Kandahar. There will be efforts, obviously, in conjunction with the member countries of that operation, to continue to secure presence on the ground. As that security develops, there will be further efforts to do more for the Afghan people, to continue to try to secure the capacity of NGOs and our provincial reconstruction team and aid workers to do more for the people.

That includes the types of concrete action you would be aware of as somebody familiar with humanitarian efforts abroad: building schools, hospitals, sanitation; basic education for children there; basic infrastructure building, including roads and including assisting the people of Afghanistan to build an economy themselves, so they can bring goods and services into the larger communities. As you know, Afghanistan is a massive country spread out over very rough terrain that doesn't allow for basic transportation of individuals, let alone goods in many areas.

Ms. Dawn Black: But these are all the goals you indicated we would be doing under Operation Enduring Freedom. What I'm trying to get at is, what will the changes be in the mission under NATO and ISAF?

Hon. Peter MacKay: The changes will be clearly a continuation—

Ms. Dawn Black: Or will there be changes?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I'm sure there will be changes.

Ms. Dawn Black: What will they be, then?

Hon. Peter MacKay: They'll be a continuation of efforts to meet the Afghanistan Compact and the 40 goals and measurable progress being observed there.

This is not like a light switch when it changes from one mission to another. This is something that will involve, obviously, a change in individuals. Because of the increased number of Dutch and English soldiers there, it will involve a change in the capacity and perhaps the philosophy that those countries might bring to the mission. But it will all be continuing under a joint international operation of which Canada is a part.

Ms. Dawn Black: What has been the cost of Canada's military presence in Afghanistan since 2001? Do you have that?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I do have those figures.

Ms. Dawn Black: Further to that, what would the cost be for the deployment until 2009?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Total expenditures on Canada's multi-faceted engagement in Afghanistan to date amount to approximately \$2.3 billion. The DND portion of that is \$1.8 billion, and that is an incremental cost of Canadian Forces's operations in or related to the Afghanistan mission itself. So that doesn't include the normal training that would go on in the Canadian Forces, which I think is what has skewed some of the other figures we've seen from various reports. So that \$1.8 billion, Ms. Black, is about 69% of the overall cost of Canada's contribution.

Your other question was the...?

Ms. Dawn Black: Until 2009, what's the estimated cost?

Hon. Peter MacKay: The extension through 2009 is budgeted at \$1.25 billion. That is spending with respect to the additional two years. For your interest as well, the CIDA contribution to development activities in Afghanistan is \$466 million from 2001 to 2006 inclusive.

From the DFAIT perspective, which is dealing more with the diplomacy but also includes the construction or, if I can describe it, the rehabilitation of the building in which the embassy is currently

situated—those efforts, over the initial five-year period, total \$29 million.

Ms. Dawn Black: Could you tell us what our government has been able to do diplomatically to ensure that Pakistan is doing as much as possible to seal its own border and to prevent recruiting Taliban insurgents?

Hon. Peter MacKay: That's a very relevant question, and one that I think is posed repeatedly by President Karzai to all the interlocutors involved in Afghanistan. There have been numerous discussions, including a face-to-face meeting that our Prime Minister had with President Musharraf wherein it was expressed that Canada and other countries, including Afghanistan, had great concerns that Pakistan perhaps unwillingly was allowing this transit to go back and forth across the border, particularly in the south.

As you know, there's a mountainous region there—you're probably familiar with the terrain—that is very difficult not only to patrol, but more so to control, because of the very physically demanding nature of the terrain. The greater focus has been, of course, inside Afghanistan. But allowing for the training and the perpetration of further efforts by the Taliban inside Pakistan has been, if I could describe it this way, a shortcoming of the overall effort. The difficulty, as you can appreciate, is that it requires greater cooperation from Pakistan and its government.

• (1620)

Ms. Dawn Black: Is Canada pursuing that diplomatically? Are we continuing to pursue that?

Hon. Peter MacKay: We have made our views known and we continue to do so.

Ms. Dawn Black: Good.

When the Minister of Defence was here last week, he said he believed that prisoners were being treated consistently with respect to articles 4 and 5 of the Geneva Convention.

I want to ask you, Minister, do you believe that the people who are being captured in Afghanistan are prisoners of war?

Hon. Peter MacKay: I believe that those involved in armed conflict have been described in various forms—as legal combatants, as terrorists. I'm not going to pretend to be a military expert as to how that description should attach. What I can tell you, and I think what you are more concerned about—what we're all concerned about—is the treatment of those individuals and the future treatment, after they have been handed over.

Ms. Dawn Black: I have another question.

Hon. Peter MacKay: And to that extent, we do bear responsibility for the prisoners we capture.

We make our views known very strongly, both privately and publicly, that the Geneva Convention should be respected both to the law and the spirit. We want to ensure as well that there is demonstrative justice supplied after the fact; that is to say, they are treated humanely and they are held in such a fashion that is in keeping with international standards. And let's not forget that the Afghanistan government and its armed forces have given that commitment and signed on to that international pact.

Ms. Dawn Black: But we know that.

Hon. Peter MacKay: So there's an expectation that they'll do the right thing.

Ms. Dawn Black: We know that. Their own human rights spokesperson has said that up to 30% of the detainees are tortured or are improperly treated in the Afghan prisons. I know that the arrangement General Hillier signed with Afghanistan states that it applies in the event of a transfer. So when it says "in the event of a transfer", does that mean we intend to transfer all detainees to the Afghan authorities, or would Canada retain custody of some detainees and transfer them to recipients other than Afghan?

Further to that, in terms of the detainees we've taken, has the Government of Canada, or have our military personnel, inquired with the Afghan government as to the condition of those detainees, and have we inquired as to the prisoners we've handed over, even though there is no provision for that in our agreement?

Hon. Peter MacKay: It's my understanding that inquiries are made regularly and instructions are given when the turnover happens. That is the practice, as I understand it.

Ms. Dawn Black: The follow-up?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Well, the follow-up, presumably through both diplomatic means and the military communication that goes on regularly between Canada and all of the allies with the Afghan army, is just that—they should be following international conventions and the Geneva Convention with regard to the treatment.

The other question you had is with respect to transfers. I'm led to believe that for all detainees who are transferred there is a notice requirement and there is advice given to the ICRC of all transfers that happen.

With regard to Canada following those detainees, if you will, whether the Afghans then in turn transfer them to another member of ISAF, as it currently is, or the UN mission when it comes fully into force, that is an operational detail I'm not familiar with, to be honest. I think that the Minister of Defence has answered that question, and I wouldn't contradict him because I don't have that information in front of me.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thanks, Mrs. Black.

Moving on, Mr. Hiebert.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll be sharing my time with the member from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Thank you, Mr. Minister, for being here today. I appreciate your presence.

My question has to do with the activity of terrorists both in Canada and in Afghanistan. Of course, Canadians have heard a lot in recent days about the arrest of suspected terrorists in Canada, and I was wondering if you could explain how these recent arrests are related to the work that we are doing in Afghanistan.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you for that question. It is very timely, and I know that you have done a great deal of work on this committee, and in previous committees, on the subject of terrorism and military involvement in this global effort.

The recent events in Toronto and Mississauga, first of all, exemplify the fact that Canada is not immune from the type of attacks that we've seen both in New York and Madrid and in countries that are similarly engaged in the effort internationally. And more to the point, it demonstrates that those who take part in terrorism and extremism and violence, I don't believe, differentiate between countries and international borders. I think they have a distinct disdain for countries that practise open societies and that are involved in what I would describe as democratic, peace-loving capacity building within their own countries and elsewhere.

So the linkage is not with current missions; the linkage is with what we share as Canadian values, what we consider to be important human rights: equality, respect for the rule of law, and the fact that Canada is a country that welcomes people from all corners of the earth. That, I think, is our most attractive feature, but it also makes us vulnerable because of the openness of our society.

What I would also share, as I'm sure you are aware as members of this committee, is the incredible work that was done by our security forces in preventing such an attack. It is laudable that we are able to act decisively through peaceful means, and forcefully at times, to prevent an attack on innocent people in our own country. I think the communities themselves have been very forthright in applauding the efforts that took place just a few days ago in prevention of an attack and in the protection of Canadian citizens.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Mr. Chair, I'll be reverting the remainder of my time to my colleague.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Mrs. Gallant.

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

It's my understanding that our soldiers do not have helicopters in Afghanistan and that our troops depend on other militaries for heavy lift. To what extent has the last decade's neglect in providing the necessary equipment limited Canada's ability to fulfill our foreign affairs policies?

Hon. Peter MacKay: We did have a discussion on this earlier.

I don't want to personalize this, but I have a couple of friends who flew Sea King helicopters out of Halifax, and I recall on numerous occasions over the last number of years their great concern not only for their own well-being, but notably also over the ability to do their job, whether it was in Afghanistan or in going out over the cold North Atlantic on rescue operations. I had friends who were on the ship when a helicopter crashed into the deck and had to turn back to Halifax harbour.

So there's no question that the impact of politicizing procurement, whether it be helicopters, whether it be heavy tactical lift, can have a very detrimental effect. And that's a responsibility that everyone shares. I know we're going to hear a question shortly from another distinguished member of the military, who will perhaps enlighten us even further.

Look, there can be no doubt that being cheap with equipment for our military, delaying the procurement and the purchase of military equipment, whether it be trucks, helicopters, or heavy lift, has a profound life-and-death effect on our military personnel and those whom we're trying to assist and help in many cases.

Thank you for the question.

● (1630)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

In the interests of time, I would share my time with Mr. Hawn.

The Chair: Mr. Hawn, you have exactly five minutes.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Minister.

I want to get back to equipment and airlift. Given that we have 13 C-130H models and seven later 130E models, and given that the Hercules has no capability to carry outsized cargo—when it does carry anything outsized, the cargo has to be dismantled and the plane's range is extremely limited—and given that aircraft such as the C-17 can carry outsized cargo for long distances and operate out of the same airfields most of the time that a C-130 can operate out of, do you think the military's reconsideration at the staff and most senior levels about priorities for airlift replacement, emphasizing strategic airlift ahead of tactical airlift, is prudent?

Hon. Peter MacKay: Well, I would turn it around and ask you the same question, because you'd be in a much better position, having flown some of those aircraft and having been in them.

I was in the C-130 Hercules only once, and that was on the way to Afghanistan just about a month ago. I was told by the pilot that the plane we were in, which was involved in making some very precarious defensive manoeuvres as we flew into Afghanistan and Kabul, was 40 years old. That aircraft had been literally replaced part by part over the past number of years.

As far as the decision-making around procurement is concerned and what the priorities of the military are, I put great faith in the men and women of the armed forces to make those decisions in their interests and make representations, then, to the Minister of Defence. The Chief of the Defence Staff is, of course, obviously involved in that procurement.

We have responsibilities, clearly, beyond our own well-being, and when we look at the equipment of some of our allies, it is very stark and very apparent that we have been lagging behind. We might as well be frank about it: we've neglected some of those equipment needs.

We are, as a government now, attempting to deal with that. By "deal with it", I mean we've already made acquisitions, and to be quite frank, the previous government was involved in the procurement of new heavy armed patrol vehicles, which I saw on the ground in Afghanistan; the lightweight artillery vehicles, which are, of course, important for the patrol that takes place; and the G wagons. The uninhabited aerial vehicles now are becoming increasingly important for patrol over large land masses, including our Arctic. The advance surveillance and communication systems, as well as all-terrain vehicles, are all important and specific to the challenges we have right now.

Again, I turn to people like you for your expertise, because you've been there and you've done that, as the saying goes. I think in many cases civilians shouldn't fool themselves by thinking that the politicians have some special wisdom. It comes from those who know best, and those are military officers like you.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Let me ask you a hypothetical question that follows on from that, then, and you'll understand why it's hypothetical.

If we were to buy a strategic airlift aircraft such as the C-17, and if there were a logistics and support capability that was already established and was used by other people who have bought that aircraft, and that already involves many Canadian companies in fulfilling that, which obviously supplies jobs and industrial benefit to Canada, would it make good sense to simply become part of that system, rather than trying to generate an orphan system of our own at great expense, for which we have no money and no manpower?

That's not a leading question, is it?

You don't have to take long to answer it, Minister.

The Chair: You have only a minute anyway, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Again, I defer to experts like you, but it seems to me common sense that you don't buy outdated equipment. You don't buy equipment, whether it be aircraft, whether it be seagoing vessels, whether it be the armoured vehicles that we're using, that are difficult to supply, that are difficult to get support and parts for, that are in some cases not well suited for the task at hand.

That was one of the biggest complaints about the interference, the political football that the Sea King helicopter became. The cancellation was for political reasons, not tactical lift reasons, not anything to do with the capacity of the EH-101.

So it's all of this overall information about the utility, the costs associated with it, the openness of the process of procurement. But most importantly, and first and foremost, as you know as an ex-military person, will it do the job? Will it stand up to the test? Will it protect the individuals who are operating this equipment? I think that, first and foremost, is always in the minds of the Canadian Forces when they're making these important decisions.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hawn, and thank you, Mr. Minister.

Committee, we have a bit of a dilemma here. We have a guest who has come a long way to speak to us, and I understand we have a bell that's going to go at 5:15 for a 5:30 vote. So in order to facilitate the proper amount of time for our guest from Germany, I wonder if you would allow me just a couple of quick questions to the minister to wrap up. I know you all have more, but I think we're going to have to cut it short here.

Mr. Minister, there are four aspects of the motion that we're dealing with here. One was duration of the mission, and I think we've dealt with that to some degree in the House. Two others were the state of the personnel and materiel—I think you and the other witnesses have indicated that—and the relationship between the mission's combat operations and its reconstruction operations. But the final one was the criteria for measuring effectiveness.

You indicated numerous things to us and it appeared things were moving ahead, but you also said there was a list of 40 criteria. Maybe some others on the committee have seen that, but I haven't.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Mr. Chair, Ms. Black is right. This is a very comprehensive document, which this committee should have copies of. If they don't, I would be glad to provide you with my copy to be distributed.

The Chair: We can get them, I understand, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Okay.

It's entitled "Building on Success: The London Conference on Afghanistan". It's based on a gathering of minds that took place at the end of January 2006, at which were set out, in quite explicit detail, 40 goals and achievements that the allies hope to be able to attain within a relatively reasonable period of time, if I can put it that way. There are mechanisms to measure success in these 40 areas. The Afghan government is obviously very much part and parcel of the effort. And I think it's a very useful and informative document as to how the success will be measured and what we can expect in the coming days from our allies.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

It's exactly one hour since you sat down. We appreciate very much the opportunity for you to be here and for us to question you directly on the issues facing our troops in Afghanistan. Thank you very much.

Hon. Peter MacKay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll take a two-minute recess and then we'll reconvene.

• (1640)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

We want to welcome a special guest.

Mr. Schmidt, I want to welcome you. We have a bit of biography on you. It's very impressive. You've been involved in the public service for a long time, as a district councillor and now as a member of parliament, and you've served your country lately on defence issues and national security, so we want to welcome you here.

Your official title is Parliamentary State Secretary to the German Federal Minister of Defence, is that correct?

Mr. Christian Schmidt (Parliamentary State Secretary to the German Federal Minister of Defence, As an Individual): That's correct, yes.

• (1645)

The Chair: I think you were here for most of the previous meeting. If you have a presentation to make, we'll try to divide up the time so that each party gets a chance to ask you a question.

Mr. Christian Schmidt: Mr. Chairman and dear colleagues, thank you very much for the invitation. I want to take part of your precious time on the committee of defence.

As you mentioned, for 15 years I was a member of the committee of defence and national security in the German Bundestag. I have some understanding of what such a committee wants to know and to hear. I felt very familiar with the testifying the foreign secretary had to do, because lots of the questions that have been launched are the same because we are also in Afghanistan on duty, if you may say. As Canada has taken over the responsibility of the south sector, we have taken over responsibility in the north sector, and I think we are facing similar questions about the intensity and the increasing problems coming from the restructuring of the Taliban OMF and, especially in our sector, the drug issue.

The region Badakhshan, which is close to Feyzabad in the north, is one of the most efficient poppy seed production areas, and sometimes our voters are asking us, what are you doing protecting drug production? These drugs that are sold create humanitarian problems, personal problems, health problems, and security problems in our own country. I don't think that one can take such a short line between both issues, but in fact we have to look that there is not an increasing problem of involvement of, let me say, the Afghan official or unofficial political and economic environment at work in the drug trafficking and production.

On the other side, we know that, as the former Secretary of Defence has said, being in Afghanistan is defending our own country in the Hindu Kush. It's a very strange experience for us, especially because our people are not committed to seeing German military abroad, but we had to learn that there's a necessity to commit in the auspices of article 5 of NATO, which was proclaimed on September 12 in Brussels, where we all declared the state of the treaty. So we have a broad maturity and acceptance of our Afghan commitment.

I could continue talking about transformation in the army and about the strategic airlift, but as I don't want to interfere in your internal discussions, I just may state that, including your country, we are happy to have fulfilled our practicability commitments concerning the Strategic Airlift Interim Solution, SALIS, in order that we have now aircraft to organize the Kabul part of strategic airlift. This is an interim solution I can name. We are waiting for the strategic and tactical A-400M change. Actually, we have in use the C-160 Transall, which in terms of age is I think not necessarily younger than the Hercules, which I think first came into use in the forces in 1968 or so. They definitely are older than the pilots who are flying them.

• (1650)

Our problem in transformation is that we are talking about a helicopter. We have a lack of helicopters in the heavy transportation helicopter segment. We have now just changed our Bell UH-1 to the NH-90, just starting this year, but we see that increasingly, in all the operations we are in, we have a request for a lot of helicopters. The Secretary General of NATO sometimes sounds like a beggar, going around with a hat asking, "Do you maybe have one helicopter?"

We had a similar experience with our Congo mission. If you're interested, I will say some words about the European Union Congo mission. We were lucky to get Luxembourg to give us helicopters for medical transportation—civilian helicopters, rented by the Luxembourg government. This shows what has to be done.

Now we have in service the CH-53 Sikorsky, the large one. I think, but I don't know, the Canadian army has the CH-47 Chinook

Mr. Laurie Hawn: We used to.

Mr. Christian Schmidt: —and the Sea King.

We are on the way to transforming our army, and that's a costly issue. We have seen that we need more easily deployable forces and structures. We have underestimated the need for protected transportation capabilities in the mission, especially after the bad experiences we have shared with you with respect to casualties in Afghanistan. We are on our way to deploying the Dingo and some other light protected cars.

We come to the Congo and the European Union and NATO. I think this is a very interesting issue in a year when we are preparing for the summit in Riga, which is in November of this year. The question, which is posed very often, is, what is the purpose of European defence and security policy and European defence and security initiatives? Is there competition between NATO and the European Union?

Maybe there are sometimes different answers to be given from the different capitals of the European Union, but basically we all have

consensus now. The new German government and the new German Chancellor are working very hard to come to a consensus to get Europe, as one pillar of NATO, resettled. The honourable Don Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense of a smaller southern neighbouring country of Canada, tended to talk about the old Europe and the new Europe. I think we should work on getting Don Rumsfeld to see there is one Europe. We were very upset about this splitting, and it's not good, because if you are split, there is no possibility of political influence. Only to complain is not politics. I think we will be back, in a sense, as Volker Rühle, the former secretary of defence, said, separable but not separate.

So the European Union's capabilities increase, using in necessity, through the Berlin Plus agreement, NATO assets in a chain of command where NATO is included. In this case the Deputy SACEUR is in a chain of command; or if there are minor middle-sized missions, we will do it on our own, but with some political exchange with NATO. This is the Congo mission, where we try to fill the request of the United Nations in the context of the presidential elections in the Congo. The MONUC mission, which is a 16,000-man mission of the United Nations, will not be sufficient, in the judgment of those involved in the development there, to keep the Congo on the path of reconciliation and somehow political development.

I think we all know that it would be too much to expect a Westminster-style democracy to be settled in the Congo, after all the bloodshed they've had and after all the problems, like nearly having a civil war in a short time. But I think it is necessary to come to these elections as a cornerstone of the future development. So we have committed, in a mission of Germany, France, and several other European countries, to each share one-third of the mission per capita. We will have 780 German troops there, including the headquarters; the French will have 800; and the rest of the 2,200 will be distributed among 15 different European nations. It should show that we are on the way toward acting, and we will be, and are, reliable.

• (1655)

On the European Union and the future of NATO, as we see it, perhaps you will accept a few words on expansion or enlargement of NATO, or the question of how NATO will perform in the next years. We think it's necessary to have a strategic option included in NATO, so we take the NATO response force as a very important tool for keeping the alliance together. We are very happy the Americans are on their way to contribute to the NATO response force, because we don't see that it should be just a European tool and asset.

We think the expansion of NATO capabilities—which now will be discussed at the defence secretary's meeting in Brussels at the end of this week—should lead us to reflect on how we can come to a reverse joint security strategy in NATO. We absolutely promote and assist those asking for a renewed NATO strategy in 2008 or 2009, not only focusing on terrorism and countering terrorism, but focusing on what level of ambition will be asked of NATO as the core of global-wide stability, with a possibility to act very soon and to have regulations...where we can discuss and decide in due time, and do other necessary things.

Regarding bilateral relations, I regret very much that we no longer have practical exchanges, as we had in former times. I was involved in them. I was first elected to Parliament in 1990, and one of my duties in the early 1990s was to struggle to keep the Canadian Forces in Lahr. Obviously I did not succeed. I have a lot of understanding, as unfortunately we have to give up our commitment at Goose Bay, and Shilo is closed. But I think it should not be the end of bilateral relations.

Nevertheless, as partners in NATO, we are somehow in a situation where a lot of other countries look to us, Canada and Germany, if I may say so. I think we can show and have to show a commitment to bilateral cooperation. If there is a possibility of increasing it again, maybe with exchanges or maybe in joint exercises, I really would appreciate this. I know your army is under pressure concerning personnel, and you have so many of your servicemen and servicewomen abroad, as we have.

● (1700)

Also, our army numbers about 255,000 now, and we see that it is somehow not sufficient.

We have gotten the peace dividend and we are thankful to all in the alliance who made it possible for us to share in the peace dividend in the nineties. My office in Berlin is some steps away from the place where 20 years ago anybody would have been shot and killed if they had tried to cross from one side of the street to the other. Sometimes it's good to reflect and ask, was this an idea coming from the heavens?

Maybe the Pope has some responsibility, I must admit; John Paul II has done a lot and has had an impact. But in fact it was Ronald Reagan's speech of 1987 at the Brandenburg Gate, saying, "Mr. Gorbachev, please tear down this wall." Three years later, they tore down the wall. It was not Gorbachev himself but the people of East Germany. But they could only do this because Gorbachev was there.

We are very thankful to all our allies, and we know they have some of the responsibility for international peace coming to us. This is how we explain to our electorate questions about why we are engaged in Afghanistan, in Congo, or wherever. It is not easy every day, but it must be done every day.

[Translation]

Thank you very much for your attention.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak with you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

If we go very quickly, we can get one question in from each party; then we'll have to adjourn.

Mr. Khan, would you start?

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

Welcome, Mr. Schmidt, and thanks for being here.

I'll ask a question and wait for your answer.

I've observed the Eurocorps with some interest; it's a very interesting concept. I understand there's also a Spanish mechanized division in there.

My question is, can you comment on the difficulty of mastering the complexity of your joint military formations, with units from different countries, with different languages and standard operating procedures, in the EU context? Do you see the Eurocorps as forming the nucleus of any future pan-European force? Lastly, will the EU enlargement create new dividing lines for Europe's militaries?

Talking about strategic airlift, you've mentioned the A400. I understand you've ordered about 60 of them, if I'm correct. It has good capabilities, as you do not need to dismantle equipment; the guns can be mounted on and off. Could you comment on when the deliveries will take place and give an approximate price per unit?

Thank you.

● (1705)

Mr. Christian Schmidt: The first corps of the Eurocorps was the German-French brigade initiated by Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand to get the nucleus of a somewhat European military structure. If one takes a pragmatic approach—and I prefer the pragmatic approach—we have seen that there was a lot of improvement and good activities. Now the Eurocorps consists of military personnel from five countries: Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and Germany. We managed not to have only a symbolic unit.

The first time, the German military was not to be deployed anywhere where it was not encouraging for French officers to serve in the Eurocorps brigade, because they knew that this is not for their future and their career. But now Eurocorps is in a successful mission in Bosnia and in Kosovo. And we will have the Eurocorps in Afghanistan.

The pragmatic approach says that there are a lot of different approaches—for example, the consistency of the army. We have a conscript system in Germany. The French have given up and now are paying a lot of money to make the army more attractive to get enough service people. So I think we have to see that this is somehow... Now there is a deployable headquarters that we will continue to work on, as we have on the European level now with Mr. Solana and his planning cell and the military cell. These are some first steps.

But I don't see that we will have a European army in due time. What we are not prepared to do is the attempt done three years ago. This was the so-called "chocolate summit".

Just to tell the story about this name, I was in the State Department in Washington and I went with my partner for discussions in her office, and there was a large box of chocolates. I said, could it happen that the Belgians were here? And she said yes. So I said, maybe they asked for the chocolate summit.

Now, the chocolate summit was an idea to bring together the five countries of the Eurocorps into a European political defence entity. I think it is right that this is history and that we are clearly committed to have a joint European position. Eurocorps is one part of it, but there is no attempt to get five armies included as one and separate it from the other European.... We see NATO and the European Union as parts of an integration and not of a disintegration.

Concerning the A400M, I'm sorry, the actual price.... But if you are interested—

Mr. Wajid Khan: Timeframe of delivery.

Mr. Christian Schmidt: —I'm sure they will make a good offer.

As for the timeframe, we expect the first to be service in 2010-11.

The Chair: Good, thank you.

Mr. Bouchard.

• (1710)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Schmidt, welcome and thank you for your presentation.

My question is organizational in nature. Since you're the Parliamentary State Secretary of the Minister of Defence, you no doubt have to share responsibility with the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I'd like to know who is in charge of Germany's mission in Afghanistan. Are you the minister responsible? Who is the top German leader in Afghanistan and to whom does he report?

Mr. Christian Schmidt: That's complicated. In political terms, the Department of Foreign Affairs is responsible for deciding on missions. That falls under its responsibility. However, we are under order. In Cabinet, the government calls on the Parliamentary State Secretary for Foreign Affairs. For the organization of the missions themselves, the Department of Defence is responsible. Sometimes, we wonder whether it wouldn't be better for the entity responsible for the political decision to be responsible for the organization of the mission as well. I've tried to have that idea adopted, and others have tried, but we haven't been successful.

In addition, the Department of Foreign Affairs is also concerned more with the context of economic affairs, police assistance and so on. There are also the military commanders, and we are responsible for them.

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: You have time just for a short one.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: You have provincial reconstruction teams. My colleague Mr. Bachand went to Afghanistan and he spoke very positively about those organizations, more particularly in Feyzabad.

Could you comment on that success? It seems it's a good organization and that it's considered a success.

Mr. Christian Schmidt: Thank you for your question. I know Feyzabad, and I work with the provincial reconstruction team. I should add that I'm president of a non-governmental organization that is in Afghanistan. It was created in response to Soviet pressure in Afghanistan. That is how I've been able to take advantage of the military's work from the outside. I'm trying to understand both sides.

In the past, we've had a lot of cooperation problems between military personnel and the development and humanitarian aid people. We've had situations in which people not wearing uniforms left the street when the military arrived. Now these people work very well and they are very effective. The secret is to have a lot of contacts with the regional Afghan authorities.

I heard your Minister of Foreign Affairs talk about the Canadian experience. There isn't a lot of contact with Afghan officials and authorities. Various countries that have been part of the provincial reconstruction team have had different experiences. I know the results and it must be understood that reconstruction is not a military matter; it's a combination of a number of elements. This shows that there is new thinking about the military. I believe we've been successful and that we've done this in a reasonable manner.

• (1715)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Black, do you have a short one?

Ms. Dawn Black: I want to thank you for coming and appearing before our committee. I found what you had to say very interesting.

I'm curious about the NGO that you had up in Germany, because I've had the experience with NGOs as well. I'm wondering what area of Afghanistan they're operating in, and is it the same area where the German military is operating, or is it in a different area? And how closely are they integrated? We've had a great deal of debate and discussion here in Canada about the militarization of aid, and concern by our NGOs that this is problematic, and I'm wondering if you've had that same kind of debate in Germany as well.

Mr. Christian Schmidt: Absolutely, we've had this debate. The NGO I'm representing as vice-president has done work in Afghanistan during the Taliban's time from Pakistan and Jalalabad. And now they are in Jalalabad, Kandahar, and Herat. So in several regions of Afghanistan, in the Canadian area and two other areas, the experience.... They are doing a lot of work, giving especially young women the possibility of professional training to enable them to look after themselves, and doing some other work on children's aid issues, including basic medical treatment.

We have good experiences in cooperation, but it's necessary.... In Kunduz, we had one situation where it was said that anybody would be executed for the sexual harassment of a young Afghan lady, and so the easiest people to react against were the representatives of the NGOs there. But it worked out well, because the people informed the PRT very early of the threat, which did not react militarily by shooting around, but tried to talk with the imam in the region, and they worked together.

They also managed the situation when the Danish and Norwegian flags were burned when the cartoon issue ran. We have the Norwegians with us in the region.

Ms. Dawn Black: Oh dear.

Mr. Christian Schmidt: So some de-escalation was worked out. We do not want our NGOs to leave Afghanistan, but sometimes one has to talk.

Ms. Dawn Black: Yes, thank you.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you.

We have just a few minutes.

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Schmidt, for coming before the committee today. It's a pleasure to hear your candour on some of the issues and I appreciated your comments.

I'm just going to ask you a quick question here. I'm sure that most people are encouraged by the recent news that Iran is taking the six powers' incentive package seriously and is apparently willing to consider giving up its atomic weapons program. I'm wondering if you could give us your sense of how this positive development may affect your country's foreign policy goals in that particular region, the region in which your troops are currently deployed.

Mr. Christian Schmidt: Thank you. I think this is one of the most important issues of the year.

We are very active as the EU 3—France, the United Kingdom, and Germany. We started to work on this one and a half or two years ago, and we're very happy that the United States accepted that it's necessary to work together. The six are the Permanent Five plus Germany, and we could manage to get the Chinese and the Russians in the boat, which every day must be reassured. That's a challenge.

I think this would be a step to things that the U.S. declared they would be prepared to talk directly to the Iranian authorities about, and I think this will be a question of the verification of what they are doing. We will not accept if there's only a letter. We have written a lot of letters to Mr. Ahmadinejad, and last week he gave an interview to *Der Spiegel*, which is the leading German newsmagazine.

If you read this—

Ms. Sabine Sparwasser (Chargé d'affaires, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany): It's in English. It's very interesting.

Mr. Christian Schmidt: It's in English? It's available.

It's interesting, because he plays with German history, not only because Chancellor Merkel has said very clearly that we won't accept that what the state president of Iran is asserting, in the sense of wiping Israel from the map, is only a saying. In the 1930s a lot of people had not read what Hitler had written, so we won't have a second time the experience that we did not know what the other wanted to say.

That's very harsh, but I think it was necessary to make clear that we take this seriously. And the key is the U.S. position, because the Europeans alone are not able to settle the conflict.

So we hope that there is a diplomatic approach, as we do not exclude anything that we know the options could deliver. I see that there is a necessity to do everything we can to have a diplomatic solution of the issue. We take this as an offer, not only as a letter—what we have heard now. But the next steps are not very sure.

By the way, Mr. Ahmadinejad plays with Germany in another way. He does not declare whether he will, as the state president, attend the soccer game between Iran and Mexico. They are in the championships. The first game will be in Nuremberg next week.

He has to do a lot in Tehran, and he should work at cooling down those who want to have the nuclear option used in Iran.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you very much. You've all been very cooperative and we've been able to get everything done that we needed to do today.

Thank you for taking the time to come and see us, Mr. Schmidt. It was great to have those candid remarks. We appreciate it very much.

Mr. Christian Schmidt: Thank you very much.

The Chair: This meeting is adjourned.

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

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.