House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on National Defence

NDDN • NUMBER 012 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, September 25, 2006

Chair

Mr. Rick Casson

Standing Committee on National Defence

Monday, September 25, 2006

● (1540)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC)): Ladies and gentlemen, we'll call to order the twelfth meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence, dealing with the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan.

Through the wonders of technology we have two witnesses today. One is from Queen's University, Douglas Bland, chair of the Defence Management Studies Program, School of Policy Studies, who's here in person. We'll hear from him first, but I'd also like to introduce, from Calgary—can you hear us, sir?

Prof. David Bercuson (Professor, Director of the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary): Yes, absolutely.

The Chair: Very good. This is Professor David Bercuson, director of the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary. Welcome.

It looks like this may work.

We're going to have Mr. Bland present first, and then you, and then we'll open it up for some questions. There's a pretty strict order of proceedings to go by as far as timing and who gets to ask questions when.

Before we start, I'd just like to thank the committee once again for electing me as chair. It really is an honour, and I appreciate that. I congratulate Mr. Cannis and Mr. Bachand as vice-chairs.

Mr. Cannis.

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, first of all, I just want to say that you have my full support.

I apologize for being absent, but I know I would have voted for you. I was a bit late coming into Ottawa, and I saw the war room was empty.

Congratulations, and thank you, colleagues. I apologize for not being here for the vote.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bland, we look forward to your comments. After we hear from both of you, we'll open it up for questions, and either one of you can jump in.

Dr. Douglas Bland (Chair, Defence Management Studies Program, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University): Thank you, Chairman, and good afternoon to members of the committee. It's my pleasure to be here, and I thank you for inviting me.

I'm just going to say a few words, mostly extemporaneously. I look forward to your questions and to any discussion you might wish to have on this matter.

I begin by saying that Canada's three-D policy—diplomacy, development, and defence mission—in Afghanistan is the right mission for Canada and the right mission for the Afghan people. It embraces Canada's true traditions and values, and it is increasingly effective. I support it wholeheartedly and urge the House of Commons to adopt a non-partisan consensus to support the mission as well.

In 1947 Brooke Claxton, then Minister of National Defence, read into *Hansard* a statement on Canada's accomplishments in the Second World War. We fought a war, he said, to support people who had the will to be free.

The object of our policy in Afghanistan is to support the Afghan people, who have already displayed a will to be free. As Saint Augustine wrote more than 1,500 years ago, you can always have peace; you just have to obey the dictates of the tyrant.

We have to remember our policies and our history, and the history of liberal democracies everywhere. Peace is easy to achieve and hard to endure. Liberty is hard to achieve and easy to endure. We Canadians are now in the hard part of making life easier for the Afghan people, and the three-D policy is the way forward.

I want to discuss briefly each of the Ds in turn, but let me turn first to the criticism of the question of balance, perhaps an academic discussion of it for a few moments.

Too much, some say, is being spent on military operations and not enough on humanitarian development, but these criticisms often rest on an error in reasoning, when people equate balance with equal. Balance is achieved one D at a time, when just the right number of resources are provided to meet the particular demands of each of the three Ds. Balance is sustained when we adjust resources as the needs and circumstances change. There is no logical or appropriate way to balance the Ds without measuring particular needs independent of each other. In other words, there is no logic or requirement to make all three Ds equal in every respect. The principle must always be resources commensurate with particular needs.

If we take diplomacy first, for example, some 25 or 30 Canadian diplomats are stationed in Kabul today, when there were none in 2001. Scores of Canadian officials, on the other hand, in Ottawa, at the UN, at NATO, in Washington, in European capitals, and elsewhere, are coordinating every day Canada's diplomatic efforts and policies for humanitarian and security missions in Afghanistan, where balance is defined, as it must be, as the appropriate application of resources to needs. Canada's diplomatic contribution to the mission in Afghanistan is appropriate, purposeful, and balanced.

Look at the second D, development. Canada, as you know, is one of the leading developmental donors in Afghanistan, funding more than nine major projects within the national development strategy established by the Afghan government. That's the important point; it's their development strategy. The total cost of the development program in 2006 was $109.5 million. The government has pledged, through 2011, $100 million per year. The total allocation of development assistance to Afghanistan, over the period 2001 to 2011, is almost a billion dollars.

Moreover, the Afghan government, in London, in January of this year, established a humanitarian and development needs program, which they put before the donor nations. They discussed, among other things, the limits to which the Afghan government can handle major projects and large amounts of cash. Where balance is measured as appropriate application of resources to needs, the Canadian developmental program in Afghanistan is also balanced and effective.

Let's look at the third D, defence. Canada's military operations get a great deal of attention in the media. They're interesting, exciting, emotive, and easy to report. Filming kids in school doesn't have the same effect, but this media emphasis—and I will say poor government public relations and information programs—leave many Canadians with the impression that the defence mission is Canada's entire mission and that members of the Canadian Forces are only engaged in combat operations.

● (1545)

Helping the Afghanis fight their enemy is, of course, the main reason for the UN mandate, and it will remain the main effort so long as the Taliban and other illegal groups attack the Afghani people. But of the approximately 2,300 members of the Canadian Forces in Canada, only about 1,000 are front-line combat troops; the remainder are support and assistance troops working in reconstruction and civil action programs. I'm sure the Chief of the Defence Staff has already given you the details of these missions.

When balance is measured as the appropriate application of resources to needs, the Canadian Forces multi-mission operation in Afghanistan is balanced and effective. Rather than looking merely at difficulties, I encourage this committee and the House to look at what has been achieved and how success can be reinforced.

What has been achieved?

First, Canadian diplomacy is successfully holding together a coalition of 36 nations to help the Afghan people develop their own strong and sustainable free society.

In development, since 2001, with Canada's help, 4.8 million children have been enrolled in schools, and one-third of them are girls; 12,000 villages have access to funding for water needs; 63,000 soldiers have been disarmed; 11,000 pieces of heavy equipment—tanks and artillery, for instance—have been secured; 3.7 million refugees have returned home; governance capabilities at the village, regional, provincial, and national levels are building through two free elections, and 25% of the elected representatives in their assembly are now women. I think maybe they're doing better than we are.

In matters of defence—the third D—in the face of the military operations of the 36 contributing nations, the Taliban and other illegal groups are on the run because they cannot stand in front of our soldiers, and they do not have the support of free Afghanis.

Let me turn for a minute to three main criticisms of the mission that I've watched over the last few years. Some people are urging Canadians to surrender the Afghani people to the tyrants, the Taliban, in exchange for mere peace. First is the question of balance that I've talked about, but let me be specific here on matters of military operations.

Critics declared inaccurately that billions are being spent on military operations each year, and they exaggerate the cost of military operations in order to support false charges of imbalance. There are two baskets of military money to be considered. There's everyday military spending for people, equipment, and operations of the Canadian Forces that taxpayers must pay whether the units are at home or away, on active duty or not. Then there are contingency costs—the particular costs of particular operations, or the cost of the optional extras, if you will. In Afghanistan these are costs to build a base, to fly troops and supplies in and out of the theatre, for bullets and beans, for medical support, and so on. Some critics improperly combine the two costs into one enormous bill, exaggerating the real cost of the operation and declaring the mission out of balance.

Here are the facts. The total contingency cost of the Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan since September 11, 2001, is $1.8 billion, or about $360 million a year. The total cost rounded up for 2005-06 is $400 million. Recall that the development cost per year is $100 million. Given the very expensive nature of supporting 2,300 people in an undeveloped region of the world far from home, the Canadian Forces costs are reasonable and balanced in the circumstances.

The second reason people give to leave the Afghan people to the mercy of the Taliban is mere pride. Critics say that we are simple lapdogs to President Bush and American foreign policy. If that is true, what does the criticism say of the integrity of three Canadian prime ministers who support the mission, and all the presidents, prime ministers, and parliaments of the other 36 nations in the field? What does it say about the UN, the UN Security Council, and the council's two unanimous votes in support of the mission? What does it say of NATO and the European Union?

Something other than Mr. Bush's intellect and charm must be working here. What do all these other nations and their leaders know that critics here at home don't know? Why do they all think that diplomacy, development, and defence in Afghanistan is the right mission and that security is, for now, the necessary step to stabilize the country? If people know something different from all these other organizations and leaders, they should let us know.

● (1550)

The third reason critics say we should dishonour our commitment to the free people of Afghanistan is that our casualties are too high. Certainly each death, wounding, and accident is regrettable, but taken into context, we have to remember that Canada has spent a great many lives over its history defending itself, its values, and the values and interests of like-minded allies and other people who have the will to be free.

I think it unfortunate when people in the community, for whatever reason, use the casualty count to prop up their ideological interests. There's a great deal of misinformation being offered up recently by some of these people to oppose the mission, and I would point to some so-called statistical research offered to the public in the last few weeks. There are also people who try to impress Canadians by quoting, as an authority, a very junior British officer, a foreigner. I think that's regrettable. I'd like to elaborate on these issues later this afternoon, if it interests the committee.

When the human cost of the mission in Afghanistan comes home, ask yourself this: who's not complaining? The people who are not complaining are the members of the Canadian Forces who are taking the casualties. They understand the reason why they're there, and when you ask them they will explain it. What we need from our leaders in Canada is support for this kind of courage.

Finally, the three-D mission is the right mission for Canada. It's directed by some of the best-prepared and dedicated Canadians Canada has ever sent abroad. They are courageously supporting the Afghan people, a people who have already shown a will to be free. They are also supporting Canada's reputation as a defender of liberty. Diplomacy, development, and defence is the right mission for Canada in Afghanistan, and we Canadians should be working to reinforce that mission, not trying to work to leave it.

Thank you very much.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bland.

Now we'll switch to Calgary.

Professor, if you're ready, go ahead, and take the time you need. Then we'll open it up for questions. We'll try to direct questions to whomever the questioner wants. We'll let you know if it's you or Mr. Bland.

Go ahead.

Prof. David Bercuson: Thank you very much. I too support the mission, because I believe it represents Canadian values abroad, and it certainly serves Canadian interests.

I just want to let the committee know something they may not know, because I just spotted it on the CBC website about 10 minutes ago. The headline is: "Afghan women's official killed by gunmen. Two gunmen on a motorcycle shot and killed the head of a provincial women's affairs department near her home in Kandahar, Afghan government officials said Monday."

I don't think I need to say any more about that, because this is one of the main reasons why we are there. People lose focus of the extent to which trying to free the Afghan people from this extreme, fanatic religious intolerance is one of the reasons why we have committed ourselves to that mission. It's going to be a long battle, but I think it's very much worth it.

It certainly serves our pride to be there and to do this work. And it serves our interests. This is a country that is tying in to a whole variety of international obligations, whether they be obligations of trade or international law or diplomacy or sending troops to various parts of the world. We depend on international trade for 40 cents of every dollar in the pocket of every Canadian.

We can't pretend that we are isolated from the rest of the world. We can't pretend that there's anything moral about sitting back and letting others do the heavy lifting in protecting and defending the systems that nurture us while we ourselves live by the good grace of others. We can't do that. We have international obligations, both to the United Nations and to NATO. That seems to me fairly obvious, and it has been stressed a lot lately, especially by the Prime Minister in his speech to the General Assembly last week.

I want to talk about the evolving nature of the mission, more than anything else. I think Dr. Bland has discussed the details of the mission much better than I could. I just want to say this: in war, and this is a war, or whatever else we may call it, the enemy has a will and an intelligence of his own. He doesn't fight the war that you want him to fight. He fights the war that is most effective for the achievement of his objectives.

So the previous government decided to go into a very important part of Afghanistan, namely Kandahar, to do the diplomacy, development, and defence work that needed to be done. Dr. Bland has certainly spoken a great deal about that. I think one of the key points is that without the development work, this insurgency is going to continue. We need to help the Afghan government tie the outlying regions of Afghanistan to the government in Kabul. We need to help them do that. We need to help rebuild the country after years of war. But the other side doesn't want us to succeed, and that's the point. There is another side, there is an enemy, and they want to try to undermine, destroy, and disrupt our efforts to rebuild.

That's why the nature of this mission has changed over the last year or so. It's because their efforts to destroy what we have been doing need to be countered by our military operations. Eventually, the hope is that we will succeed in defeating the insurgency, and the emphasis will shift back to where we would like it to be, which is to the aid and development work.

I want to say something else, and that is that in the course of a struggle, in the course of a war, there will always be setbacks. There will always be times when the enemy will adjust his tactics so that he will take advantage of your weaknesses and will appear to have you on the defensive. I don't know whether that is the case or not, and certainly we've taken some casualties lately, and we all understand that. It is up to us to adjust and meet the challenges that the enemy is posing.

If the political objective of supporting the Karzai government and of keeping the Taliban from re-establishing themselves in office in Afghanistan is worthwhile, if it serves our national interests, if it serves our values—and I believe it does—then we must adjust, and we must regroup, and we must outsmart, and we must out-think, and we must outfight the enemy. And that's the way we will prevail in the long run. But to believe that because we have taken casualties here or casualties there, that they have us on the run and that this war is being lost, I think is just foolish.

● (1600)

It would have been very easy for someone to have declared on the morning of August 20, 1942, that Canada had been beaten and that this country was out of the Second World War because of the extreme losses we had suffered at Dieppe the day before. We know better. We know from our history and we know from our own hearts about this.

Finally, let me say this. Others have talked about other missions. Afghanistan is not the only place in the world that needs Canadian help, either Canadian aid or Canadian development work or Canadian troops. We have a small military right now, and I don't want to get into the partisan politics of why we do; we just do. We're doing the best we can with what we've got. This is a mission that is doable, it's a mission that's achievable, and it's a mission the Canadian Forces can do well. We have precious few troops left to do anything else.

But if we were to try, let's say, to intervene in Darfur, a worthy mission, of course, we'd have to fight our way in. That's what people forget. They say Darfur is a humanitarian operation and this is a war. Anyone who thinks we're going to get into Darfur to help the refugees there, to help in that civil war to try to avert the genocide that's taking place there, without fighting our way in and being engaged as heavily in combat as we are now, is kidding themselves. I would like to remind the committee that there are other missions. This is not the only important thing that needs to be done in the world, but right now it's something we can do and it's something we should do.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, sir. I appreciate that.

We'll open it up for questions now. The first round is seven minutes. We'll start with Mr. Dosanjh.

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

Thank you, Mr. Bland and Mr. Bercuson.

I have a couple of questions I'm going to throw out, and then you can respond.

First, Mr. Bercuson, you said the mission evolves. One of the ways the mission is evolving is in response to the Taliban or the other side evolving. I would like you to tell me how one can define Taliban in the current context. We have been reading a lot in the newspapers. There are different elements in the Taliban, whether they come from Pakistan or other parts. Some people are suggesting you can't even call them Taliban; you can call them neo-Taliban. I would like you to tell me how you would define the enemy in Afghanistan today. How has it evolved, and do we need to respond differently? Is that why the situation in terms of our response is also changing?

The other question is to Mr. Bland. I agree with much of what you have said. You say this is a perfect mission, and I support the mission wholeheartedly and fully. Is there anything you would suggest, as an historian, that we're not doing right, or we should do differently, or more, or better? You've said this is the mission, it's great. We support the mission. I want you to take a critical look at it in a positive, supportive way and tell me if there is anything we're not doing that we should be doing, or if there is anything we are doing we ought not to be doing.

Thank you.

● (1605)

The Chair: Mr. Bercuson, do you want to start?

Prof. David Bercuson: Yes.

I would define the other side, or the enemy, as I put it, as the insurgents. Who are they? They are a mix, undoubtedly, of religious fanatics, warlords who oppose the government for their own political, social, or economic reasons, or their troops—probably drug lords, probably smugglers. Whenever you get an insurgency—and this has proven true pretty well throughout the history of insurgent warfare—you're always going to get disparate elements coming together behind one or two major groups that are leading the insurgency. It is not necessarily that they agree with all their objectives, but they want to see the government attacked, or they want to see the government turned over. It is in their own interest—whether it be a political interest, a social interest, an economic interest, or an ideological one—for the government to go away.

What we have out there is some kind of a loose coalition of insurgency, and that leads right into your second question, which was what do we do about that. The answer is we have to try to adjust a constant mix of diplomacy and development on the ground, of reaching out to certain of the elements to try to pacify them, or neutralize them, or manoeuvre them out of the fight, while at the same time the hard-core element—those who simply will not give up for whatever reasons—are usually the ones who are ideologically motivated more than anybody else; those are the ones we have to fight.

What we've got here is a phenomenon that has been called by others “fourth-generation warfare”. It's a very different kind of situation from what we saw either in the Second World War or in the Korean War, and it brings together the necessity to attack it on several different levels at once. That's why the mission your government chose was the right mission. We put troops to defend, but we also have to do development to win over the people, because if we don't win the people over they will inevitably go over to the other side and the government will be lost.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bland.

Dr. Douglas Bland: Mr. Chair, identifying enemy forces in this kind of situation is difficult, and everybody understands that. It's forcing me to go back and read the stuff I used to like to read in the 1970s, of revolutionary warfare and so on. It's very interesting.

There are many factions within the Taliban. There are people who are simple criminals and there are other kinds of people around. I think for the soldiers on the ground, the guys I talk to, they know the enemy: it's the person who's shooting at them. And it is a difficult problem, but the Taliban soldiers are not ten feet tall. They're scared and they're hungry and they're tired, and they're going to live in the mountains this winter. They have their own sets of problems, and we should exploit those.

As we are now doing, and I think as NATO is doing, we should be negotiating with the Taliban, not in the sense of saying, “We'll allow you to abuse 50% of the women if you'll stop fighting”, but negotiating with them to put down their arms, to quit their units, to run away, to surrender to us, and so on. We do that in all kinds of wars.

I don't mean to be trivial, but you could take the question of “How do we identify the bad guys?” to the level of Canadian cities. How do the police identify the criminals on the street before they've done something? It's a problem, and there isn't any straight answer.

I don't think I said the mission is perfect; I said I support it because it's the right mission to do. I think the balance is right, but it's never stable, and it has to be changed. As the demand changes, you change the resources, as the Chief of the Defence Staff is doing on the military side right now. Some people in the House might want to look at CIDA operations, which we seem to have done a great deal of over the years. But I'll let that slide.

So what can we do? At home we need to look at this as a war management problem of the whole of the Government of Canada. This is not a mission of the Canadian armed forces or the Department of National Defence, or even just CIDA and the foreign affairs department. The people of this town, the public servants and others, have to understand that this is a whole of government operation, not a three-D operation. We need to have some committees—of the House, perhaps, and, dare I say, of the other place—that deal with the management of Canadian interests in wartime. That's an important thing to do. We need to bring to the Canadian people, through the media if necessary, the work that's being done to give them a resolute picture of what's happening.

My recommendation to government is that they don't take grey-haired men in suits from the academy or old generals out to talk to Canadians about what's going on; they should go to the field and bring home young men and women, captains and majors and sergeant-majors and so on, and stand them in front of Canadians. They will put people like Mr. Staples in his place. I did that at Queen's University a couple of times with my graduate students, and it was a wonderful experience.

I think we should be involving, as I said, more of government and so on. In the field are very experienced officers who have been fighting these kinds of wars since 1990. They've been promoted through the ranks because of their merit and their ability, and I think governments and other people ought to listen to them. They know better than I do what kinds of tactics and stuff they need in the field.

What we need to do, if we're into a long-term operation—and we are—is change the recruiting system, change the laws governing recruiting. We need to have the House of Commons rapidly okay procurement projects at all kinds of levels, not just major airplanes but all sorts of places. We need more money put into the operation.

Here is where I think the government, and the House of Commons especially, can lead. We need to make the Taliban and these other people afraid of a liberal democracy that's upset. That's what we've done in our history. There's nothing more fearsome than a liberal democracy that's working together against these kinds of people.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bland.

Mr. Dosanjh, thanks for the question.

We'll move on to Mr. Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): First of all, Mr. Bland, I would like to point out that Mr. Staples is a good friend of mine. There are many opinions on the current conflict, and there is one in particular that I would like to raise with you, to see if you share my views.

I get to the UN often. I am also a member of the NATO Parliamentary Association. The debate on gauging current action in Afghanistan is underway everywhere, not just in Canada. I imagine that you both agree that responsibility for this war rests with civilian authorities, in other words, with the elected officials who decide how it should be conducted. If elected officials see things that are not going well, it is their duty to make them known and to try to change them.

Gentlemen, I would like to know if you agree that civilian authorities have the last say in how the war is waged. Naturally, that includes this Committee on National Defence. I hope that your answer will be yes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bercuson.

Prof. David Bercuson: I have said in a lot of different places, in a lot of publications, and in a lot of fora stretching back over 10 years that as far as I'm concerned there ought to be much greater parliamentary control over troop deployments abroad. I have called for the necessity for Parliament to approve deployments of as small as 200 to 300 troops being sent overseas. I believe this is extremely necessary, not simply because of the forms of parliamentary democracy, but to engage the Canadian people in the debate about whether or not troops should be sent overseas.

Secondly, I've also called for much greater authority on behalf of your committee, and the reason is your committee, in my opinion, deals with something that is entirely different from everything else the government does. What your committee does is deal with questions of the military and national defence. It deals with questions of deploying Canadian troops abroad to kill people, if necessary, at the behest of the state, to serve our national interests.

The people whom we are deploying abroad are also going in harm's way. By signing up to the Canadian military they have taken up, in a sense, an unlimited liability. They will lay their lives on the line for the people and the Government of Canada if necessary. There is no other citizen in this country, including the police, who has a liability that is unlimited. That is why I think your committee needs to have more power and authority than other committees in Parliament and why Parliament should vote on overseas deployments.

I also want to say this, and that is, once the vote has been taken, you have to leave it to the military to do what it needs to do until such time as it is necessary to go back to Parliament at the end of the deployment, because you can't be interfering in everything the military does all of the time.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bland.

Dr. Douglas Bland: I agree with almost everything David had to say, and I'm sure he knows that.

I take a slightly different academic look on that. I don't think the government is responsible for Canada's national defence or the civil control of the armed forces. Parliament is responsible for the control of the armed forces. The civil authority in a democratic system is civilians elected to Parliament. The government is accountable to Parliament for the execution of policy and so on.

Not to debate the point too far, I agree entirely that Parliament and members of Parliament need more information. They need more background, and if I may say, with respect, members of Parliament need to do more work to find out what's going on so that they can carry out their responsibilities.

I would disagree with Professor Bercuson on the point that once the decision is made to go to war—and I know he didn't mean it that bluntly, or along that sharp a line—that it's then up to the military. What I think was often missing in Canadian operations through the time in Bosnia—you'll remember Somalia—was active, informed oversight by Parliament of these kinds of missions, for any number of reasons.

I think things have changed dramatically in the last number of years, and I would encourage this committee, the House, and the other place to become much more involved in the oversight of military operations and so on, not to the point of second guessing what's going on; I would hope oversight in the sense of saying, do you guys have enough? Do you know what your mission is? Do you know where you're going? Do you need more money? Do you need more support? That kind of oversight I'm sure would be greatly welcomed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I am, nevertheless, satisfied with your answer. However, I do not agree with telling the military, once the vote has been adopted in the House, that they have free rein, and that we will take out our chequebook and ask them how much money they want to deal with the issue.

I wonder about what has been in the press lately, and what is happening in the theatres of operation as such. I do not know if you have seen the report that just came out in the United States and that states that since involvement began in Afghanistan and Iraq, terrorism has been on the rise.

As parliamentarians, we are in a position to question whether the military approach, or the almost strictly military approach, is the best.

You say that the Taliban have been somewhat thrown off track. In that case, I do not understand why we are sending in tanks. There is also talk of perhaps sending in F-18s. In fact, they are not really all that off track.

Moreover, we question that. How is it that we are unable of defeating them? Perhaps it is because they now have the support of their own people. Perhaps it is because there has not been enough development work done and they think that nothing has changed since the military involvement.

I would like you to give me your views on that. Personally, I get the sense that both of you have a strong military bent. I am not challenging that, since it is your right. However, some of us believe that perhaps we should consider another approach. Perhaps we should look at how we can win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. In fact, that can often be achieved by building schools and hospitals. I agree that security must be provided, but there are several ways of doing that, and it is not necessarily by going as far as killing the last Taliban in Pakistan. There could be security perimeters to ensure that what is built is not demolished overnight.

I would like to hear your comments on those two aspects, on diplomacy and development, rather than on the military approach, as I am not convinced that that is the best approach at this point in time.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, time has elapsed, but I'll allow a short response, if you can.

● (1620)

Dr. Douglas Bland: Well, we're academics, but we'll try.

I agree with you. I think the policy of the government is not single-minded combat operations and chasing the Taliban. Once the Taliban stops shooting at our guys, they'll be building schools and houses. If it is a fact that terrorism and the threat, if you will, is on the rise, then I guess we have two options: quit and run, or face the threat and increase our resources that are working against them. I think that's the place we ought to be going.

Who should we ask for advice about what's going on in Afghanistan? I think it would be good to have the President of Afghanistan come here and talk to us about it.

The Chair: Okay, time has elapsed, so maybe Mr. Bercuson can jump in later on that.

Ms. Black.

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Thank you very much.

And thank you to both of you for appearing before the committee, one via technology and the other in person.

I want to ask a couple of questions. First of all, I have a comment about the death, which Professor Bercuson spoke about earlier, of Safia Ama Jan, who was the department head for women's programs in Kandahar province. She had requested official transportation and bodyguards from her government over and over again, and those were refused. I think there's some responsibility for the local government there to provide the security that their officials ask for. She's not the first provincial person to be assassinated by the insurgent forces. I think it's a sad reflection that she had been asking for protection and had not been given any. She was travelling in a taxi when she was assassinated.

I want to ask about the situation as you see it on the ground in Afghanistan. We know the Americans are also operating in southern Afghanistan, where the Canadians and the British and the Dutch are. I'm wondering about how those two different missions, the Operation Enduring Freedom mission, which the Americans are involved in, and the NATO mission relate to each other, and whether you see any future changes in the two different missions in southern Afghanistan.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Bercuson, if you could go first, please.

Prof. David Bercuson: My understanding is that the Americans were operating in the south, and I think there are about 3,000 or 4,000—I'm not quite sure. Most of the U.S. troops in the south have been withdrawn, either out of the country entirely or they have been sent to eastern Afghanistan. The American troops that are operating in the south are, as far as I know, operating under ISAF. The Operation Enduring Freedom part of the mission, which is the U.S. controlled part—and they have about 20,000 troops in there under Operation Enduring Freedom—is in other areas of the country.

If you're asking me how the two operations relate, I think the answer is that the ISAF mission is obviously under NATO command and control. The commander of the ISAF commission is a British general. They would be answering to the North Atlantic Council and to the North Atlantic Military Committee and ultimately to the NATO commander. In a sense, there would be international input because NATO members would have more political say over the ultimate objectives of ISAF and the methods by which ISAF carries out its mission, whereas the Operation Enduring Freedom mission is one that is solely responsible, as far as I am aware, to U.S. central command.

Dr. Douglas Bland: I won't add a lot to that. There are experts in this town, military people, who would give you the story in great detail. All I would say is, as Dr. Bercuson has said, this is a NATO mission that we're involved in. There are large American units within the NATO mission. The NATO forces are commanded by international generals who report to a political authority in Brussels, to whom we have complete access, and are under the control of our Prime Minister and other people.

The great value of the NATO military organization is that over the years we and they have developed a very sophisticated way of commanding and controlling national forces so that national sovereignty is not attacked or diminished in any regard.

Ms. Dawn Black: I wonder what your response is to the plea for NATO countries to step up to the plate in terms of the combat mission and the clear lack of commitment from many NATO allies to participate in the counter-insurgency combat mission that's happening in southern Afghanistan.

I know the Polish government has agreed to send 1,000 troops. However, it's not clear to me what role the Polish troops will play. Will they be part of the combat operation, or do you know?

● (1625)

Prof. David Bercuson: I don't myself know what the Polish troops will be doing. But let me say this: first of all, I think we forget that at the moment the fighting that ISAF is involved in is especially concentrated around the Kandahar region. We have to remember that ISAF was only recently extended to that area. When ISAF was started it was a purely UN mission with a mandate to operate only in the Kabul region and primarily as a bodyguard, as it were, for President Karzai.

We have to remember that other countries have been involved in combat or have taken casualties. I can't remember the exact figure for the Germans or for the Spanish, but in both cases I know more than a dozen have been killed in action from those two countries. I think NATO must step up to the plate, as you put it, this time.

I will be extremely disappointed in NATO and I will question the future of NATO as it is at the moment—not its future existence but its future governance—and the way it organizes its military forces, and whether or not it's transforming fast enough to meet these new missions it has taken on itself to do, if we don't see significant contributions of troops from other NATO countries, especially to these areas in the south.

This is the first out-of-theatre mission that NATO has done, its first mission in which it has been involved directly in ground combat, and I think NATO is learning its way and learning how to do things here, as we all are. Canadians, too, are also learning how to get back and focus and function in a war situation. I think it's a challenge to NATO. There is absolutely no question about it.

The Chair: Dr. Bland.

Dr. Douglas Bland: I will say briefly that it's democracy in action, I'm afraid. These independent nations within the alliance can determine what they want to do; they have their own ways of going about doing things. There's also I think in this discussion of burden sharing—that's the code word in NATO—a certain element of "After you, Alphonse." Somebody is waiting for somebody else to go first. We'll see.

It would be useful for the Canadian government—the parliamentary committee on NATO affairs—to continue to pressure these other allies, but remember, it's not at all unusual. When we were four years into the Balkans, the United States wasn't there. It took a lot of pressure to get the United States involved in the Balkan operations. I'm afraid this is the way the alliance works, and it's not perfect.

The Chair: That is the time for Ms. Black.

Thank you, gentlemen.

We're going over to Mr. Hawn now.

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

Thank you, Dr. Bland and Dr. Bercuson for joining us.

Dr. Bland, I'd like to address my first question to you, and I have a number I'm going to get through.

You brought up the point of the aide-de-camp to the British general being critical of the mission. I'd just like you to amplify on that a little bit and comment on the position of an ADC and the relevance of such comments in relation to the comments that we might have gotten from Canadian officers in the same positions.

Dr. Douglas Bland: Well, having had the misfortune in my other life of being an ADC to a general officer, I wouldn't wish it on any Canadian officer.

It just struck me as enormously odd that anybody in Canada, political leaders especially, would be taking a very junior officer, who is in effect a manservant to a general officer, an officer who wasn't in the field—as best I can understand it—and using his opinion as advice. If it had been an American officer of the same rank saying that Canadians should be doing more, I imagine that some parts of Canadian society would be outraged that we'd be listening to an American captain say such things.

My only advice to the House, with respect, is that they call in as many Canadian captains of experience with mud on their boots and ask them what they think of the mission. We don't need to listen to very junior British officers.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

My next one is to Dr. Bercuson, because, Dr. Bland, I know what you think of this.

There have been a number of studies that have been passed off as scientific to project the number of casualties. One was by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which did a simple mathematical calculation and said that if we carry this on till February 2009, we'll lose another 140 troops. I would go back to Dieppe, which Dr. Bland brought up. If we did the same simplistic mathematical calculation, taking that one day's figures, it would have said we would lose 900,000 Canadians before the end of the Second World War.

Dr. Bercuson, what do you think of the relevance of those kinds of pseudo-scientific studies, and why do they seem to get traction with some sectors of the Canadian public?

● (1630)

Prof. David Bercuson: Well, I don't know what's in the minds of the people who create these reports, and this report in particular. All I can say is I think there has to be political motive behind it. I mean, this was, I thought, a really interesting study in manipulating statistics and trying to prove with those statistics whatever it was that you wanted to see come out of the study.

I guess what I'm saying is that it's almost as if they were measuring how high the ocean is at any given point. There's a 30-metre wave here and there's a trough over there, so let's take the average and see where we're going with this. I don't know what it shows.

I had a philosophy professor way back when the dinosaurs roamed the earth who used to say, "The square root of Hong Kong is red". Now, that's a sentence that has all of the elements that make up a sentence, but it's absolutely meaningless.

The study we saw come out last week is exactly of that kind: if casualties continue in this way, if the war goes in this direction, if this happens, if that happens, if the other happens.... Casualties are a very sensitive subject to speak of. I think in this country we are so blessed that we have not seen heavy casualties in action for 50 years. But I would remind this committee that more than 500 Canadians died in active service in two and a half years in the Korean War, and that was for a country the population of which was much less than it is today.

I think you have to put casualties in perspective. You're going to take casualties in a war. Sometimes there will be more and sometimes there will be less. To try to draw out that string and say there will be *x* number at the end of five years or at the end of ten years is strictly and purely a political exercise—nothing more, nothing less.

Dr. Douglas Bland: If I could just make a short statement to back up what we're saying here, I think the authors of that study, when they finished, ought to have recommended that Canada withdraw from all UN missions. If you use the same statistics, you'll recall that about a month ago a Canadian officer on duty in Lebanon was killed in operations. That was 100% of the Canadian contingent. So UN operations are obviously much more dangerous than anything we're doing in Afghanistan.

On another hand, if their conclusions are true or have some value, then I think that policy alternative paper should have ended with a recommendation for greatly increasing Canada's mission as contributions to Afghanistan, because the situation is very dangerous—but it's just not worthwhile.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: My next question I'd like to address to either one of you. The Taliban, obviously, is targeting Canadians as they're targeting other people. With the timing of some of their attacks, with respect to activities or events around the world, how much are they targeting Canadian soldiers and how much are they targeting members of Parliament?

Dr. Bercuson.

Prof. David Bercuson: I guess you mean members of the Afghan Parliament? I have no idea.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: No, actually I'm talking about members of the Canadian Parliament, psychologically.

Prof. David Bercuson: Okay, I've got you.

Yes, of course. This is a part of what fourth-generation warfare is all about: that there is a base of public opinion at home and that you are going to try to erode that base of public opinion at home. Liberal democracies are particularly sensitive to that kind of operation because we do have—and we enjoy it as a privilege, and we must protect it—freedom of the press. But what it means is that, for example, when we make mistakes, if one of our soldiers inadvertently shoots at Afghan policemen or if members of the Afghan National Army are killed by our friendly fire, these are headlines in our newspapers. It's an inevitable part of this kind of dirty war that we are involved in; our public opinion is the most important strategic target the other side has. If they can break our public will then they will have won the victory they seek. It's as simple as that. They can beat us at home, even if they can't defeat us in the field.

● (1635)

Dr. Douglas Bland: I would simply say that there is a military logic to that kind of question and answer, but we ought not overplay it. I think the Taliban in the region we're in are attacking Canadians because we're the closest target, so they're shooting at us because we're there. But certainly their leaders, if they are rational people, would see some connection between worrying us...it's a matter of will.

If I could, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to say something about a curiosity. When a member of the Canadian Forces is killed, you can see the results four or five or six times on television as the body in the casket is coming home. Has anybody here seen pictures of great heaps of dead Taliban on the field, or of blown up vehicles, or Taliban prisoners or anything? We don't see those on television, and the irony is that our law won't let us do that. It's against the law, international laws of conflict, to humiliate the enemy by showing his body, or showing them captured, or tied up or anything else, but we can show our own casualties, and that has an effect on people. And it's just an odd irony of our legitimate liberal system.

The Chair: Thank you.

The time has expired.

Now we're going to start our second round. The second round is five minutes. And the way this goes is to the official opposition, to the government, to the Bloc, back to the government, and back to the official opposition.

I have Mr. McGuire's name here for the first slot.

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to first of all compliment Mr. Bercuson on his suggestion that this committee become more involved in the day-to-day operations of what the Prime Minister called the war in Afghanistan. And as I said last week, we should be getting briefings, at least once a week, on what's going on in that particular theatre. Not only are we not getting briefings, let alone exercising any oversight of what the operation may or may not need....

I think this committee should ask the Prime Minister, or we should empower ourselves, to get us more involved. I know that in the first Iraq War, the national defence committee got weekly, regular briefings on what was going on. That is not the case right now, and I think it should be. And I thank you for putting that out there. I will certainly support it, because we really don't know. We read what's in the newspapers, basically, but we don't even know what the situation is in the present initiative. I know that our military has claimed victory in a way, but we have no idea in this committee whether we had a victory there, or what kind of blow we have given the enemy. Mr. Chairman, I think we should become more involved in the situation and have at least regular briefings on what's going on there.

I was listening to President Clinton's recent interview in which he said that if he was still president, he would have 20,000 troops in Afghanistan, that it was a mistake to withdraw those troops and put them into Iraq. Of course, NATO has asked countries to beef up their contributions, and it has been suggested that Poland is the only one that has come to the table at this point. I understand, from listening to Insight Central Europe at 4:30 this morning when I was driving to the airport, that this request has resulted in the Polish coalition government breaking apart, because there was not the support in the parliament for those 1,000 troops.

If the ex-President of the United States says we need 20,000 people there—that this has given rise to the insurgency and that things seemed to be fairly well under control until the Americans chose to go into Iraq and left a much reduced military effort in Afghanistan—in order to set the stage for the democratic institutions to take root, what hope do we have, really, with the number of people we have on the ground there now? I throw it out to both of you for your response.

● (1640)

The Chair: Mr. Bland, you may start.

Dr. Douglas Bland: Well, I don't deal in hope, I don't think. I think the mission is doable. As I said, there will have to be adjustments as circumstances change. It's interesting that the focus is on NATO, and I think we should have some pressure on NATO to do things, but this is a UN mission. There are tens of thousands of UN troops from other countries engaged in lesser operations in different parts of the world. Perhaps it's time for the UN as a whole, because it is its mission, to begin to make more contributions. And I think people ought to think about that a bit. But I think the good work of political leaders in the North Atlantic alliance will sort this out, as it has sorted out almost every other disagreement, and there have been lots of them over the years.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Bercuson.

Prof. David Bercuson: Let me say this. You can never have more troops than you need in a military operation. The purpose of war is not to match your prowess against that of the enemy. The purpose of war is to beat the enemy. If you can bring 10, 20, or 30 times the number of troops to bear than the enemy has, the better off you are. The fewer troops you have, the more difficult the job becomes.

Now I don't know whether the job is doable with the number of troops that are in Afghanistan today. I don't know that. I tried to say earlier that the job is worth doing because it's worth doing. And if we need more troops to do it, we need to send more troops to do it.

Does that mean that more troops wouldn't be better? More troops are always better. Quantity has a quality all its own, and I think we have to remember that.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time has expired.

We move next to Ms. Gallant.

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

Briefly on Mr. McGuire's comments, I recall distinctly when it was first announced that Canada was going to Afghanistan. It was on the Sunday prior to Thanksgiving 2001, and the announcement was made unilaterally by the Prime Minister. There was no debate in the House of Commons; the troops were just sent in. The recent debate was the first opportunity we had to debate Afghanistan.

Dr. Bercuson clearly articulated the answer to this question, so I'll ask it of Dr. Bland. Would he state for the record why the mission in Afghanistan is of national interest to Canada?

Dr. Douglas Bland: I think it is of national interest to Canada because a stable global environment made up of liberal democratic states seems to be the most peaceful composition for the international community you can imagine. The more that states are free, elected, and democratic—as they are becoming—the more this brings with it peace and security.

That's a fundamental assumption in the field. If you look at East Europe, the Balkans, and many other parts of the world, the assumption is that citizens who freely elect their government tend to be involved in peaceful kinds of things. Where we can do that in other places, I think it is important to do it.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

Dr. Bercuson, critics of this mission say our forces cannot succeed where the U.S.S.R. failed after 10 years. Why is it that you believe we can succeed?

Prof. David Bercuson: Because the political mission is totally different, and I would apply this to the analogy of the British in Afghanistan in the 19th century that's being used quite often by the opponents of this war. We're not there to conquer Afghanistan. We're not there to impose our political will on the people of Afghanistan. That's what the Soviet Union was doing there. It was backing a puppet government that it established through a coup, and it was sending its troops to do that. We are not doing that.

The government in Afghanistan was duly elected after an entire constitutional process, and that government needs and has asked for our help. That government controls a national military and a national police—not as large nor as well trained as we would hope, but it does control them. That government exercises sovereignty over most of Afghanistan; that government wants us to be there; and that government is asking us to help it fight an insurgency. This is a completely different case than the situation we had during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

● (1645)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: For both of the witnesses, is Pakistan doing enough to disrupt the Taliban before they come to Afghanistan?

Dr. Douglas Bland: I'm not an expert on the region, but I would say evidently not, simply because of the criticism that is coming to Pakistan from the major leaders of other countries. The Pakistanis will explain that it's a very tough nut and they're working on it. But I really don't know the answer to your question.

Prof. David Bercuson: I don't have the answer to the question either. But I ask myself, with the very large military force that Pakistan has, why has the Pakistani attempt to stop cross-border operations been as unsuccessful as it has?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Dr. Bland, you made reference to Mr. Staples, who was a witness earlier. If you have seen the testimony he gave, would you care to comment? If not, I'd appreciate it if you would read the testimony and submit to this committee any responses you'd like to make to the comments that were made.

Dr. Douglas Bland: Yes, I have seen the testimony. I read it in detail, and Mr. Staples and I were engaged in a public debate two Fridays ago at Queen's University's homecoming. The debate was attended by 300 or 350 people: students; older folks; grey-haired men in suits. We talked for two hours with an adjudicator. Mr. Staples used some of his information from the June 8 presentation. At the end of the debate, the principal of Queen's University took a hand vote, and I'm proud to say that it was 75% for the resolution that Canada ought to stay in Afghanistan, and Mr. Staples lost.

Where he is weak is that he puts out a lot of evidence that is easy to refute and hard to support. And he quotes the British captain as an authority. He quotes the Senlis, the United Kingdom's approach on narcotics. He talks about the study, the policy alternatives put out. He also says, strangely enough—and this is in reference to that June 8 presentation—that Canada should be doing more in the world, more peacekeeping and more UN missions, and so on, and that we should reduce the defence budget.

I'm not sure how that works.

I was pleased to see that my friend John McCallum, who, as you all know, is an academic, and the defence minister and president of a bank, was at that meeting of your committee and explained to Mr. Staples that his facts were wrong.

The Chair: We're moving on.

Mr. Bouchard, five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also thank both of you for your presentations.

My question is for Mr. Bland. You talked about casualties. We know how many Canadian soldiers have lost their lives. Do we know how many soldiers from other countries have lost their lives in Afghanistan? Do we know how many Taliban have died in combat? Can we compile information on the force we are facing? I assume that we have killed a certain number of Taliban and that others have been taken prisoners. What is done with the prisoners? Do we keep them or do we subsequently release them? I assume that we do not.

I do not know if you can answer all of those questions. I think that it would be interesting to hear your views on that.

● (1650)

[*English*]

Dr. Douglas Bland: No, I can't answer all your questions. However, the first question on the number of casualties in other forces operating in Afghanistan is readily available, and I think the research staff can find them. If they can't, would somebody send me a message and I'll put them onto a website where that information is available?

On the details of the Taliban organization, and so on, there are references, again, in research material and on the web, from different nations and different organizations, about the composition and strength of the force. I would bet that this committee has better sources of information than I do. There is a process, I understand, for in camera briefings, and that's where I would ask those kinds of questions.

The Chair: Mr. Bercuson, any comment?

Prof. David Bercuson: I'd like to hear what Dr. Bland thinks about this, but I think it's still the case that the casualty rate for Canadians in Afghanistan is the lowest than for any conflict that Canada has fought. That's World War I, World War II, and the Korean War—by far, still.

As far as the Taliban casualties are concerned, I think talking about Taliban casualties in terms of body count is exactly the wrong way to measure success or failure in this war. And I have to say that when I do hear Canadian military officials talking in terms of the body count, I think it's the wrong message to send. I don't think it's the number of the enemy that we are or are not killing. I don't know how we can possibly know that when they remove the enemy from the battlefield. I think it's this. Are we taking and holding territory? Are we expanding the area in which the government can exercise its authority? Are we succeeding in making the place safe for reconstruction efforts? That's the way we ought to be judging success or failure in this mission.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Douglas Bland: Can I add a point to that?

I agree, and I don't think talking about Canadian casualties as a measure of success or what we're doing is all that useful either.

The research staff here might actually be able to go and find out how many members of the Canadian Forces have been killed in accidents, training accidents, and so on, from 2001 until now. I would wager they're up there close to the numbers who have been killed in operations in Afghanistan. That's not to diminish them or anything but to put it in some sort of perspective. You will recall that a month ago or so, three members of the Canadian Forces were killed in a helicopter crash. This goes on much more often than people think.

But I guess the general point of recommendation for the House of Commons is that they not, again, with respect, try to set national policy one battle at a time. This is a long, drawn-out effort. We're going to win some; we're going to lose some. In the end, with our allies and with the Afghan people, I think we'll succeed, but we can't do it one headline and one battle at a time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just a short question, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: You stated that Canada has spent $1.8 billion since the beginning of its mission in Afghanistan. How did that spending break down? Does that amount include the military personnel? I would like further details on what is included in that $1.8 billion.

[*English*]

Dr. Douglas Bland: All that information, I understand, is readily available from the Department of National Defence. They prepare reports for Parliament on the expenditures, vote by vote and item by item.

I believe from one of my colleagues that the latest report, called "Peacekeeping Expenditures 2005-06," has just been completed or is being completed for presentation. Those kinds of reports provide detailed information on defence expenditures, line by line, for that matter.

The Chair: Thank you.

Moving on, we have Mr. Calkins for five minutes, and then we'll go back over to Mr. Cannis.

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

In a recent article, Dr. Bercuson, you stated that Canadians were apathetic about defence issues. I'm wondering what steps should be taken to convince Canadians that terrorism is a real threat.

Recently, I was down in the United States and I was talking to some American military officials who basically said that this is the number one priority they face. It's a life-and-death issue in the United States. They view the war on terror as a life-and-death issue, yet here at home we don't seem to think of it in that particular way. What do we need to do here in Canada in order to perhaps see it in a more important light than we currently do?

● (1655)

Prof. David Bercuson: It's difficult to say, because the country doesn't speak with one voice. We have a government; we have a free press; we have commentators like Doug Bland, myself, and others, who are opposed to the war, and so on. To say there ought to be a concerted message about this, or there ought to be a concerted message about that, the problem is who's going to concert the message.

I think one of the major problems we've always had in this country is that Canadians do think—as Senator Dandurand has been famously quoted in the early 1920s—that we live in a fireproof house, far from flammable materials. And they've always thought that. They thought that in the 1930s, when the situation in Europe was deteriorating, leading to the Second World War. They thought that in the 1950s and 1960s. They think it today. It's very hard to convince people, especially on this issue.

I'm really quite mystified about this. September 11 happened, and 24 Canadian were killed. They were killed incidentally. They weren't attacked as Canadians. They were in the World Trade Center. But how many thousands and thousands and thousands of jobs were lost in this country in the weeks following that because the border closed? How do you explain to Canadians that when you have this kind of integrated supply system for industry on this continent, where just-in-time delivery is the rule and not the exception, that if the border closes again as a result of a terrorist attack in the United States, we may not only see thousands of jobs being lost in the immediate aftermath, but we may see major corporations saying, "Well, if we want to access the U.S. market, can we really take a risk about setting up a plant in Canada, in case the border closes?"

That's what I meant when I said earlier that 40 cents of the dollar in every pocket of every Canadian comes from international trade, and most of it from the United States. We have a direct economic, national interest in trying to maintain some sense of global order. The problem is that because the danger is not right on our doorstep, because the Toronto 16, or whatever, have not succeeded in what they're alleged to have tried to do, we don't have, thank God, blood flowing in the streets of this country. So people don't see it as an immediate problem, but it is an immediate problem.

Dr. Douglas Bland: I'll just trade quotes with my academic friend. Wilfred Laurier, in 1910, set out the first principle of Canadian defence policy: there is no threat, and if there were one, the Americans would save us. All prime ministers have agreed. They believe that freeriding on the American eagle is a worthwhile thing to do—it's a rational policy, after all. I think it affects the way a lot of Canadians think about things. Not to be too cynical or too radical, I think if all members of the political community believe there are significant threats to Canada out there in the world, perhaps a non-partisan defence policy for the country would serve us all a lot of good and provide some leadership to the Canadian community. I'm certain there must be things we can all agree on.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have one minute.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Could you please elaborate for me, gentlemen? The Canadian psyche right now is having a tough time coping with some of the casualties and so on because of the way it's been portrayed. I hear a lot from people that Canadians' role internationally is that of peacekeeping—we're peacekeepers. When you go back in our history we know that's not true, because we've been involved in various military conflicts. Can you just elaborate for us and for this committee: was peacekeeping the original reason Canadian troops were dispatched to Afghanistan in 2002?

Prof. David Bercuson: It was absolutely not the reason. They were sent in there to help the Americans in the south near the Tora Bora area to try to chase down bin Laden and to try to destroy the heart of the al-Qaeda operation in the spring of 2002.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: How would you compare today's mission to that early deployment? Has anything changed? The Canadian psyche seems to have changed; the Canadian psyche seems to think that maybe we went over there originally to be peacekeepers, and now we're involved in some heavy lifting when it comes to a military conflict. Yet your previous statement said that actually we were sent over there to root out the Taliban, to root out the insurgents, to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan, so has our mission really changed at all since the first deployment?

Prof. David Bercuson: No, our mission hasn't changed. In fact at that time, in the aftermath of 9/11, I think we will remember we had some 70% to 80% of people in this country demanding that Canada involve itself militarily in the fight against al-Qaeda.

I think what's changed, to be very honest with you, is that we've had the invasion of Iraq, we've had the precipitous decline of the popularity of the President of the United States, we have had in a sense the poisonization—if I can coin a phrase—of virtually every enterprise the United States is involved in, and therefore the opponents of this mission have taken advantage of the fact that we are in Afghanistan with the U.S. to paint us with the same brush that they would use to paint the President of the United States. I think that's what accounts for the difference between where popular support is today and where it was in early 2002, when Canadians were demanding that we send our soldiers to Afghanistan.

● (1700)

The Chair: The time is up for this.

Now we'll go over to Mr. Cannis, then Mr. Hiebert, and then back to Mr. Scott.

I'd like to tell the committee that Dr. Bland has a commitment and has to leave us at 5:15, so these next three five-minute sections—

Dr. Douglas Bland: I can leave around 5:30.

The Chair: Okay, so you can stay for the duration. Good.

Dr. Douglas Bland: The commitment is to VIA Rail and an early class of students tomorrow. There is a difference between professors and students: professors actually have to go to class.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Cannis, you have five minutes.

Mr. John Cannis: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I've come up with a statement that I think reflects each and every Canadian. I firmly believe that each and every Canadian supports our men and women, whether they're serving within our country, addressing disasters, etc., or whether they're serving abroad in any mission.

I find it very sad and very awkward in some of the statements that were made, which I'll address in a minute.... But before I do that, I take this opportunity to answer my good friend Ms. Gallant, who asked about the former Liberal government unilaterally making a decision to implement the three-D policy. She's absolutely correct. And for the record, after consultation with the international stakeholders, the Liberal government of the day did make a unilateral decision to commit our men and women to Afghanistan under the three-D policy.

But the question that Canadians have today is this: less than three months into the mission—and I will ask the question of the guests as well—why did we expand the mission, and why did this government not also take a unilateral decision and let Canadians judge for themselves, as opposed to needing a vote?

In essence, that goes back to a comment that Dr. Bland made, which is polarizing. I will start with that comment, sir. It's comments like this that really aren't necessary at times like this. I'll quote you: "I find it distasteful when people for whatever purpose use the casualty count to prop up their ideological interests, but I find it especially regrettable when they do so in order to win a few seats in parliament."

I speak on behalf of each and every parliamentarian. Let me assure you, sir, that it's not a matter of seats, it's a matter of doing the right thing for our country and for the international community.

Mr. Chairman, there were several questions from both sides of our panel, and on several occasions Dr. Bland said he didn't know the answer. But he also said we don't need to bring in older men with grey hair and suits, that we should bring in the soldiers on the mission. So I ask, what is he doing here?

The Chair: He's here at our invitation.

Mr. John Cannis: Do we not need to invite people such as Lieutenant-General Richard Evraire, retired, or Colonel Brian MacDonald, who were with our committee, to get their expertise and hear their views, just as we have heard your views and those of the good gentleman from Calgary as well? I believe these people who are serving on the front will have expertise today and in the future to pass on to future committees so we can learn from them.

I find these types of comments are what's polarizing our nation and our people, as opposed to us looking for solutions about how best to address the international problems that are occurring today.

When you refer to the great battle of Dieppe, sir, let me tell you what the difference is, in my humble opinion. It is that the Canadians did not retreat, and neither did the Brits, the Americans, the French—all the allies. The problem lies today in the institutions we work with, be it NATO or the UN. Canadians are questioning their credibility.

It was mentioned earlier, I believe, about the Polish troops and what Mr. McGuire heard this morning. I haven't heard it, but thank you very much for bringing us up to date. Canada has always been at the forefront, and we are willing to be at the forefront, but it's a shared responsibility.

When we talk about heavy lift, for example—and we were at NATO with the committee, and we supported them—the question is, why should Canada carry this burden? Why should we buy heavy lift, which I believe we need, and just have it sit there? When we go on these international missions, why not collectively make sure that NATO, for example, is properly equipped to use this equipment when needed.

I think we have an obligation as a committee to really look at the missions under UN and NATO, and that's what I think Canadians are asking themselves today.

That's my time, Mr. Chairman? Oh, God, time flies.

● (1705)

The Chair: Mr. Cannis, I'll just point out one thing. Mr. Bland is here by the invitation of the committee.

Mr. John Cannis: We're glad to have him, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You used your five minutes to make a statement, and we'll take it as that.

We'll move on to Mr. Hiebert for five minutes.

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

Thank you to both our guests who are here this afternoon to enlighten us on their perspective of what's been happening in Afghanistan.

I have a number of questions, but what intrigued me the most during Mr. Bland's presentation was his comment about.... Actually, I think it was almost a rhetorical question about the accusations by some members of the opposition, including the leader of the NDP, that we're a lapdog to the President, to use your words.

Could both our guests elaborate on what exactly you're trying to communicate to this committee when you say it's a matter of Canadians recognizing that three prime ministers and all these other leaders have sent our troops there? What's the point you're trying to make? How would you respond to calls by the NDP leader to cut and run at this time?

The Chair: Mr. Bercuson, do you want to start with that?

Prof. David Bercuson: Well, the point I'm trying to make is that I was asked to come to give my views on the mission. My view is that the mission is one we should strongly support and that it is a worthwhile mission for this country and a worthwhile mission internationally.

Obviously, I disagree very strongly with Mr. Layton in a number of ways, but most importantly because I don't think it's up to us. I don't think it's up to Canada and I don't think it's up to NATO to decide whether or not to open a dialogue with the insurgents. I think that's up to the Government of Afghanistan, and the Government of Afghanistan has chosen not to do so.

President Karzai was here only last week making a very strong case as to why this insurgency has to be fought. I was trying to make that same point this morning with the news story about the assassination of that provincial official. That's basically it, as far as I'm concerned.

I would say, and I've said it before, this committee needs to have more oversight of military and defence issues in this country. I strongly believe that and I've believed it for a long time, and I include the war in Afghanistan. It's a good thing you're conducting these hearings and investigations. But I also say that there is a chain of command. The Chief of the Defence Staff answers to the Minister of National Defence, who answers to the cabinet, and this committee's input has to be put into perspective within that chain of command.

What you can't do, as Doug was saying earlier, is try to say, okay, there's another battle, we lost another battle, we had a bad week with casualties, and let's conduct another investigation. Quite honestly, I think that has a danger of undermining the morale of the troops. I don't think anybody wants to undermine the morale of the troops; I think it's just something that happens.

On this constant questioning of the mission, at some point, you've got to say we've decided to do this mission and the vote was taken in Parliament. We'll look at it six months from now, we'll look at it a year from now, and we'll look at it when the decision's made to redeploy. We then have the debate and the discussion all over again. That's what I think needs to be done.

● (1710)

The Chair: Mr. Bland, do you have a comment?

Dr. Douglas Bland: I would say, first off, that I have difficulty with Mr. Layton's statements. The point is, I don't understand them, I can't make any sense of them, and I don't know how he would effect what he's talking about. On leaving the country immediately, or by February or some time, I don't understand the mechanics of how that would work.

When I note that other people have referred to Canada's policy of the former government, and Mr. Martin's government, and this government as simply being a reaction to please Americans, and so on, I think it is disingenuous, to say the least. Canadians make their own policies. They have a Parliament and they vote for people. If the Canadian people don't like the policies of the government, then they will remove them.

I think we can talk about the links among defence policy, trade policy, immigration policy, our relations with other countries, and how that affects our relationship with the United States, but that doesn't make us beholden to the United States. We're not in Afghanistan, in Cypress, in the Middle East, in the Atlantic, in NATO, or in Bosnia because of what Americans think. We're there because of what we think. I think it's important that leaders make sure people understand those relationships.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Very briefly, Mr. Bland, could you elaborate on your comments about contingency spending and the fact that a comment was made today, again during question period, that the cost of our military endeavours are one-tenth the cost of our aid?

How would you balance that equation, and what role does the security of our aid workers have?

Dr. Douglas Bland: This is a very good point. When people ask me whether the Canadian Forces should be in Afghanistan, my response is “Do you think Canadian humanitarian workers should be in Afghanistan?” People usually say “Yes, of course,” and then I point out the relationship between security and humanitarian operations.

As I tried to point out, I don't see any natural, logical connection between how much money you provide for humanitarian operations and, necessarily, how much you provide for military operations. Each has its own demand and its own dynamic. As the opportunities and circumstances change, you change the application of resources.

How much is enough for defence spending? Nobody knows. How much is enough for humanitarian operations? Nobody knows, but the government of Afghanistan has an opinion on that and needs to be consulted too.

The Chair: Thank you. Mr. Scott, this five-minute intervention will end the second round.

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you very much. I'm a visitor to this committee, so bear with me a bit.

I would be interested in both of our witnesses' responses to the question that everybody here seems to be struggling with, and that is what is an appropriate means of doing our jobs as parliamentarians in this circumstance.

We have been talking about why the public doesn't seem to support this mission. It's a legitimate question. We're parliamentarians. I get calls. I have a large military base in my constituency. Spouses of military personnel call. They ask what the purposes are. These are legitimate questions, and they are legitimate questions for us to ask.

I'm sure all kinds of people are being political about this. It's the nature of what we do, but it's a legitimate question and it's unfair to suggest, when those questions are put, that somehow our motives are anything less than legitimate inquiries by parliamentarians who have interested constituents.

My question is this—Dr. Bercuson said something about every six months it could be reviewed, and so on. What is it that you would propose is the real, appropriate role for parliamentarians? I find it troubling when anyone asks, or somehow equates an inquiry that I might make on behalf of a whole bunch of military personnel—and they are personnel, mud on their boots personnel—and their spouses...I ask something and somehow my support for these people is questioned. It's patently unfair, frankly, but that happens routinely.

My question is, what is the role? What is an appropriate intervention by a parliamentarian who is representing many thousands of Canadians who are interested in this and want to know what we're doing, why we're doing what we're doing, how it's going? These are legitimate questions for Canadians to ask.

● (1715)

Dr. Douglas Bland: Yes, I agree with you entirely.

Over the years in my program at Queen's we have surveyed members of Parliament to find out what they know about defence policy, how they think about defence policy, what the relationship is with each other. We've said on many occasions that parliamentary committees are extremely important in this business and that they need a lot of research staff to get the point across, to provide them with the information to do things.

Members of Parliament ought to be involved in the details and going out and explaining things to citizens. They need a great deal of information to do that, and the more information that can come from the Canadian Forces, from the people in the field, from government and so on, the better off we'll all be.

I would encourage the committee and members of Parliament to become very well acquainted with this important national activity and then talk to people. Where there are legitimate criticisms, they should be brought forward.

One of the motives for this, I would hope, is to make sure the people in the field have the resources they need to do the job Canadians have asked them to do, and that kind of support for the mission should come from all parts of the political community.

The Chair: Mr. Bercuson, have you any comment?

Prof. David Bercuson: I absolutely agree with that. I think you've asked, what is an appropriate role for parliamentarians? Let me simply say what I think is not appropriate, and that is to question tactics, to question operations even, to a certain extent. I think your role needs to be at the strategic level. You should be looking into resources. You should be looking into personnel policies. You should be looking into post-action medical services, such as whether the people who are coming back are getting enough psychological counselling. All of that and on a regular basis—on a regular basis. What I call strategic questions are: Is the overall political mission still doable? Are the conditions that led us there in the first place still in place? In other words, do we want to continue to achieve the political objectives we set out for ourselves in April of 2005? Are those political objectives still worthy?

The most important question that I think your committee should be asking itself on a regular basis is, does the government of Hamid Karzai still have the support of the people of Afghanistan? For example, if that government loses support, how do we measure that? Should that not be the time for us to rethink our mission and our presence there? Those are the kinds of questions that I think you should be asking.

I think you also need to know...I have great regard for the Canadian Forces and for its high command, but let's face it, they play politics as much as anybody else does in Ottawa, and sometimes you need to question some of the statements they are making about accomplishments and achievements. I don't say in any sense that I don't believe what they're telling me—I tend to believe what they're telling me—but it's your job, as parliamentarians, to challenge them on it.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's it. Sorry, Mr. Scott. Time flies.

That ends the second round. The order for the third round is to start with the Liberal Party, then Conservative, then Bloc, and that will take us to 5:30 p.m. and that will about wrap it up.

Mr. Dosanjh.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you.

Well, Dr. Bercuson, the last statement you just made is in fact the kind of question I was thinking of asking. I have two questions, one in that regard and the other about something you said earlier.

We read a report from Graeme Smith, one of our journalists in *The Globe and Mail* on Panjwai. Are you familiar with the report in Saturday's *Globe and Mail*?

Prof. David Bercuson: Yes, I think I read it. Yes, I think so.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I would like you to comment on that, in the vein that you were talking about. Obviously, Mr. Smith is suggesting that with respect to Panjwai, we weren't given all of the goods or straight goods, generally speaking, by NATO. I don't know whether that's true or not; I'm simply asking that as a question. You're an expert. If you've looked at it, tell me what you think of that report.

Secondly, you said in your earlier remarks about the woman who was killed, who was the director of women's programs, that that tells us, in itself, why we're there.

Nobody can argue about equality for women, children going to school, construction happening in Afghanistan, Afghanistan becoming a democratic country. But if I recall generally, we're there, actually, to make sure that Afghanistan doesn't fall back into the hands of those who would turn it into a base of operations against us and other democracies across the world.

I know that women's equality and development generally are the routes through which we get there eventually, but I would like you to comment on that as well.

Thank you.

● (1720)

Prof. David Bercuson: Sure.

Let me take your second point first. I believe as an historian that one of the lessons we've learned from history is that those governments that oppress their own people are most likely to commit aggression against others. I don't think it's a separate issue. I think they're two sides of the same coin. When we look at the great totalitarian dictatorships and aggressors over the last 100 years or so, we will invariably find that the ones that were the most dangerous to international order were also the ones that built prisons for their citizens on a large scale. I think they go together.

As for your first question, I have to put this in a careful way, but let me be very frank about this. I'm a military historian, so I get to do the job of looking back at military campaigns long after they have been fought, and often comparing the actual results of the campaigns against what was said at the time by military leaders, by political leaders, and by journalists. What I find very often is that there is a significant gap between what is being said at the time and what actually happened. Part of that arises out of this phenomenon, which we're all familiar with, called the “fog of war”. It simply is extremely confusing. Wars are very confusing, and not too many people really know very much about the real picture at any given time, and sometimes including those who are actually fighting it.

Does this mean that I believe NATO said everything that was right and everything that NATO said about the battle of Panjwai is true? I can't. If I was going to believe everything they were saying, I would give up my job as a military historian, but it doesn't mean that I don't think that the overall picture is not a relatively positive one. It's just that whenever I hear a general saying A or B or C, including our own beloved military leaders, I always say, okay, is that really what's happening or is there something else going on underneath, and is it something that's being hidden from me or is it just something they don't know about?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I want to say I'm not suggesting that I disagree with women's equality or children going to school and young women going to school. I was just trying to make the point—and I take your point—that our ultimate objective is to make sure that Afghanistan doesn't become a terrorist base of operations against us and others like us. I agree with your other statement that if you don't have equality and democracy in a society, that society is subject to becoming a centre of operations of terror.

That's the end of my remarks. If there is any time left, Mr. Cannis might want to ask a question, because he wasn't able to.

The Chair: There are 10 seconds left.

Mr. John Cannis: President Karzai indicated, and I'm sure you heard it on his presentation, that there are fewer children enrolled in school. Can you confirm that?

The last question is that we know the problem, and that is the poppy growth in that area. Why are we just not focusing on eliminating that, thus eliminating revenue, thus addressing the problem more seriously? Why aren't we doing that?

Prof. David Bercuson: I don't know why we're not doing it. I think it's probably tied up with a very complicated local picture of trying to use those people, those resources, that are best able to help our cause, and to do so with a sense of immediacy. Maybe the poppy elimination is something that needs to be done in the long run but can't be accomplished quickly. I don't really know.

● (1725)

The Chair: Mr. Hawn for five minutes.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I have a relatively quick question, and I'm sure it's a question Mr. Cannis really wanted to ask if he had had more time. You brought up Dieppe and the sacrifice at Dieppe. We lost hundreds of people in one day, and as he rightly points out, we didn't quit, and our allies didn't quit, and so on. How do we help Canada and Canadians come to grips with the reality of the necessary sacrifice and great risks shared among our allies for a noble cause? How do we do that?

Dr. Bland first.

Dr. Douglas Bland: I hope it will always be a difficult job for you.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Thank you. I do too.

Dr. Douglas Bland: But it's not the comparing of battle casualties of one war with those of another war that's important. What I think is remarkable here is the sense of resolve people had during other conflicts that we could bear the costs, and we could do it. After Dieppe, a lot of Canadians picked up their lunch boxes and went back to work here in Canada.

It just seems that somehow in this case, maybe it's a particular case, in suffering these casualties, which are less than we do on a lot of peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and so on, and in training accidents perhaps, we don't have the stomach for it, and I'm not quite sure why that is.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Dr. Bercuson, or I'll just defer to my colleague for another question.

Prof. David Bercuson: I agree with everything that was just said.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I'll defer to Mr. Calkins.

The Chair: There are three minutes left.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Just to follow up on that line of thinking, Dr. Bland, you said it's not particularly useful to compare statistics based on casualties and so on from previous engagements, and I would agree with that. But I think it is particularly important to compare policy objectives and the willpower of governments of the day.

We can go back and look historically at the willpower that was in place when the Korean War was going on and the willpower that was in place during the war in Vietnam, and take a look at the results that happened when there was a lack of public willpower or when the government of the day lacked the willpower to finish the job. Could you elaborate on that for us?

We know the cost of being involved so far has been very great, but could you just elaborate, based on some of the things we've seen in past history, on what the cost of losing would be compared to the price we're paying right now for what appears to be a mission where we're actually succeeding?

Dr. Douglas Bland: That's hard to say. For Canadians...well, the Americans will protect us, so I guess we don't have to worry about it too much.

Maybe we don't want to make a contribution to the alliances we signed on for. Maybe we don't want to be involved in the responsibility to protect. Maybe we don't want to be part of the United Nations peacekeeping missions.

It just occurs to me...and one of my students said it the other day. She said, “I don't understand. This is a UN mission sponsored by the UN, voted by the Security Council. It's a rightful mission. The people of Afghanistan asked us to be there. We're not contributing a great deal, being a country of 32 million people and a G-8 leader. If this isn't a mission that Canadians can back, I guess there isn't anything we'll do.”

And I don't have the answer to that question either.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: My last question is for both of you.

Based on the facts that you are currently aware of, how satisfied are you with the operation as you perceive it? If you had any adjustments to make over the next few weeks, what would they be?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Bercuson, do you have any comments?

Prof. David Bercuson: Well, I'm partially satisfied, and the reason I say that is because I wish the United States and NATO had devoted more resources to Afghanistan, rather than intervening in Iraq. It's a whole other question we can get into.

I think the Iraqi intervention was a strategic mistake, even though I supported it at the time, and I have to say that.

So I'm partially satisfied. The reason I say that is because clearly the Taliban are not taking over the country. Clearly they're not even dominating in the area around Kandahar. It seems to me that since the conclusion of the battle a week and a half or two weeks ago, we've seen a relative calm in that area, at least as reported by both our military and the press.

What would I like to see changed? I'd like to see more troops. This is a test for NATO, in my opinion, and I'd like to see NATO coming up with the resources that are required to do this job more quickly and more efficiently.

● (1730)

Dr. Douglas Bland: I would agree with all that, and as I said before, I think at this level, at the strategic level of Ottawa and so on, what would be most helpful is a concerted effort by the political community to rebuild and transform the Canadian forces rapidly.

In 1950, when NATO was formed, we had fewer than 30,000 people in the armed forces, an old propeller-driven air force, and a bunch of rusted up old ships. Six years later we had 120,000 in the armed forces, jet squadrons, a jet air force, 12 squadrons deployed in Europe, brand new fleets of ships, and so on.

When Canadians decided that defending ourselves against the ever onward creeping tide of communism was important, we did something.

I think a resolve in Parliament to rebuild the armed forces dramatically, quickly, and together would be useful. And I'll throw out, if I may, Mr. Chair, an advertisement that on October 5 in this town, Queen's University will release a new study called “Reinventing Canadian Defence Procurement”, which we hope will be a plan to do at least part of that kind of job.

But we need to get serious. We have only 20,000 people in the army, and they're carrying the weight for the entire country. These young people need some support, and they need big support, not small support.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you.

That brings us to our time limit.

I'd like to thank you, Mr. Bercuson, out in Calgary. It seemed to work fairly well.

Prof. David Bercuson: Yes, it did.

Thank you.

The Chair: We appreciate your taking the time—

Prof. David Bercuson: I didn't have to get on a plane last night.

The Chair: All right. Good.

Mr. Bland, thank you very much for being here. I hope you make your train.

Committee, good questions. Thank you.

The 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
