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Chair

Mr. Rick Casson

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

This is the 23rd meeting of our deliberations on Afghanistan, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted Wednesday, October 4.

We're going to start today's meeting with a briefing on the status and progress of the Canadian involvement in Afghanistan. We have General Howard, director general of operations, Strategic Joint Staff.

Thank you, sir, for being here.

After we're done with General Howard, we'll move on to General Leslie, Chief of the Land Staff. We're looking forward to both of these presentations.

General, I'll turn it over to you. This is our second opportunity to be briefed on the operations. We're expecting to find out what happened from the last time we were briefed until this time. So hopefully that's the general direction we're going in.

The floor is yours.

BGen A. J. Howard (Director General, Operations, Strategic Joint Staff, Department of National Defence): Honourable members of Parliament, good afternoon. *Bonjour à tous.* I'm back again this afternoon to provide you with a short update of Canadian Forces operations in Afghanistan over these last few weeks. My presentation will focus on CF activities, and I'm certainly prepared to provide clarification on my presentation at the end if I can. Questions on the activities of other departments operating in Afghanistan are probably best addressed by them.

[Translation]

The Taliban insurrection remains, for the most part, concentrated in eastern and southern Afghanistan.

[English]

In Kandahar province, where Canadian troops operate, the Taliban over the last past months have attempted to re-establish a strong presence to the west of both Zhari and Panjwai districts and west of Kandahar city, and they are likely trying to rebuild their ability to defend areas in which they now operate. Recent Taliban attacks, such as IED attacks—improvised explosive device attacks—and ambushes against convoys moving along main routes, direct attacks against Canadian troops protecting the construction of Route Summit and those that are engaged in its actual construction—and

I'll talk about Route Summit a bit further in a minute—and the killing of several prominent government officials and politicians in Kandahar point to a strategy that they're likely to carry out into the winter and whose aims are likely to, first, prevent any meaningful reconstruction or humanitarian assistance from taking place. Taliban attacks in Zhari district in particular continue to dissuade many locals from returning to their homes, while at the same time slowing down or impeding reconstruction.

Second, they'll attempt to prevent any meaningful interaction between the Canadian Forces that are located on the ground and the local population by making it difficult to hold *shuras* with local leaders and by forcing us to focus on force protection and preventing us from conducting more outreach activities.

[Translation]

Thirdly, they will attempt to undermine the perception that security in the city of Kandahar has improved following Operation Medusa, by conducting suicide attacks against vehicles in the town, killing more local leaders and continuing to carry out intimidation and threat campaigns throughout the city.

[English]

Elsewhere, in many rural areas where there is a strong Taliban presence, they will try to consolidate their hold over the population throughout the winter in order to defeat any attempts to spread the Government of Afghanistan influence. Weather in the Kandahar City area and along the Highway 1 corridor may impede Taliban activity over the winter months.

The next slide gives you a snapshot of the insurgent activity against coalition forces over the last two weeks. You'll note that there has been a reduction in the amount of Taliban activity, certainly in our area, in comparison to late summer and early fall, when Taliban activity was much higher.

As described in this slide, the types of attacks used by the Taliban are quite wide. Our recent defensive stance has forced the Taliban to use indirect fire attacks, such as rocket or mortar attacks, in order to engage us. Furthermore, they still demonstrate the knowledge and skills to mount improvised explosive device attacks as well. However, they have somewhat pulled back from conducting direct attacks using small arms and rocket-propelled grenades. Perhaps they want to prevent being fixed on the ground by our battle group, with its manoeuvrability and firepower.

To be sure, our presence in Kandahar province is essential if Afghanistan is to move forward. A steady and patient approach will demonstrate the resolve of the international community to make a difference. We are in Afghanistan to support the Afghan authorities and are determined to help them win the confidence of the people, so that a functional state can be built and the reign of terror by the Taliban can be neutralized. We certainly hope that all Taliban activity will reduce and that they will help to support the elected Afghan authorities. That's certainly our aim.

The next slide shows the current ISAF situation. The Commander ISAF's operational main effort remains in setting the conditions for the establishment and expansion of Afghan development zones. Certainly General Richards, along with all Regional Command commanders, is focused on this in order to make it a reality.

Perhaps I will spend a minute describing the Afghan development zone concept a bit further. The ADZ or Afghan development zone concept offers an excellent opportunity to bring together security, governance, and development in a timely and fully coordinated manner. The ADZs will establish regions that are sufficiently safe to allow a focus on reconstruction.

Commander Regional Command South's main effort is to develop the Kandahar City ADZ. This is being accomplished by establishing defined areas where development can be optimized through the maintenance of security. We will promote Afghan governance to initiate, prioritize, and execute development initiatives and projects to make a difference. We hope to stimulate the interests of other communities to embrace the concept and create a need.

Essentially, the ADZ concept is created as follows. First, security forces attempt to clear the area of insurgents. Secondly, they maintain a presence to ensure security of development projects by embedding security with the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Auxiliary Police, as well as ISAF, and by promoting a PRT presence. The PRT and other development agencies then roll out a concentrated spending on projects that have a key economic and social multiplier value, such as bridges, roads, wells, or clinics. ISAF offers a quick reaction capability to protect these ADZs against renewed insurgent activity. Lastly, ISAF continues to assist in the coordination of overall government-donor synchronization within the long-term government development strategy.

If you want to know what our troops are involved with today, that's what they're involved with, and that's what General Richards is focused on. The easiest example I can give you is that we want to create Kabuls, or a type of situation similar to what we have in Kabul, in the rest of the country. Kabul represents an excellent example of an ADZ where things are secure with some assistance from us. We definitely want to spread that across the country, and it is certainly what we will try within the Kandahar province, namely in Kandahar City.

• (1535)

[*Translation*]

This slide shows how the structure of the Canadian command, Afghan Regional Command South, has changed over the course of the mission. ISAF took over Regional Command South during Operation Enduring Freedom, implementing Stage 3 of the NATO

expansion plan. Canada commanded Regional Command South between February and August 2006.

[*English*]

On 1 November 2006—not all that long ago—the ISAF Regional Command South command structure was modified as a result of the transition of command from Canadian to Netherlands lead. Joint Task Force Afghanistan used this opportunity to reorganize the command and control structure in order to gain unity of command, purpose, and effort under one Canadian commander. That commander is now Brigadier-General Tim Grant. He has been there approximately two weeks—since November 1—and is now the commander of the Canadian contingent. As you well know, Dutch Major-General Ton van Loon is now leading the Regional Command South headquarters. It's a Dutch lead. He has a Canadian as his chief of staff—a full colonel—and there are Canadians who are working within that headquarters.

In Regional Command South, the transfer of lead nation to the Dutch was successful. In Task Force Uruzgan, which is the Dutch-Australian team, framework ops, base construction, and security operations continue. Platoon patrols are being conducted in the vicinity of Dehrawudd and in the vicinity of Tirin Kot in order to establish an ADZ in that province. Under Task Force Helmand, the British continue operations throughout Helmand province to prevent insurgent infiltration. Task Force Zabul, which is composed of our U.S. and Romanian colleagues, currently continues its framework patrols and convoy escort duties along Highway 1, and Qalat has been formally declared as their ADZ in that particular province.

There has been no significant change to the 1 RCR Battle Group force disposition over the past couple of weeks. CO 1 RCR Battle Group's main effort continues to be the provision of security with the Afghan National Security partners throughout the Zhari and Panjwai area in order to contribute to the establishment of the Kandahar ADZ. Of note, November 3 saw the first graduation of 41 Afghan National Auxiliary Police—ANAP—candidates destined to go into the Panjwai-Zhari area.

The PRT opened the Sham-e-Dinkkar Middle School, located across from the Provincial Development Centre in Bazaar-e-Panjwayi. In addition, the PRT hosted a series of VIP visits, including the Chief of the Land Staff, the president of CIDA, the deputy clerk of the Privy Council, and the Canadian Ambassador to the UAE.

The observer mentoring and liaison team, some 64 personnel, continued its training program and liaison duties between the battle group and those Afghan battalions, known as *kandaks*, deployed in the Zhari–Panjwai area.

The PRT has now completed 18 of 35 planned projects. The PRT has assisted in the distribution of food, water, blankets, and tents throughout the Panjwai region. DND funding in this regard, in the form of a commander's contingency fund, CCF, has been increased to over \$3 million, which is indeed a very good trend. Yes, the figure is different from the last time I was here, but as the demand from the field increases for more projects, they're certainly considered here and then more money is assigned if they make sense. As I say, I think this is a positive trend, because these are reconstruction efforts.

Family food packages are designed to provide 2,000 calories a day for six people for a month. That's the size of the food packages we're delivering, and we have delivered over 10,000 of these packages. General Gauthier mentioned that when he was with you last week.

• (1540)

[Translation]

In the Province of Kandahar, over the past six weeks four medical visits to villages have been arranged in conjunction with the tactical group. Over 2,000 Afghans in the outlying regions of Panjwai and Mienishin have received basic medical care and drugs.

In partnership with the Afghan Minister of Health, local physicians and dentists have provided care to the people of the region. In addition, drugs, tools, school supplies, food, blankets, toys, carpets and radios have been distributed.

The Provincial Reconstruction Team has provided over 100 diagnostic kits to the Mirwais nursing school, in the city of Kandahar, where nursing students recently began their studies in October 2006.

• (1545)

[English]

On the next slide, let me draw your attention to the Afghan National Auxiliary Police growth in Kandahar province. Again, this is a small step that will hopefully lead to bigger ones in the future.

The next slide gives you a good overview of the types of assistance and work that the PRT is accomplishing: the key leader engagements, or *shuras*, with local officials; the food packages and food carts that we've distributed over the last week—and you can see the cumulative totals in the right-hand column; non-food aid packages distributed, such as blankets and the like; and some of the Afghan National Auxiliary Police training that's ongoing—and the screening and mentoring of these individuals with the RCMP and our own Canadian military police is a core piece of the training that these auxiliary police receive.

Village *shura* damage lists have been worked on over time, not in this particular week, but there are 227 claims. That's a case of the CIMIC officers getting out and about in the Kandahar province and talking to local officials, the elders within tribes and within the various villages.

Quick Reaction Force patrols are dispatched by the PRT to assist the Afghan authority, and you can see the number of presence patrols that we conduct to give local folks in Kandahar province some measure of comfort by our presence. It gives you a good sense of what has been accomplished, certainly over the last week, and I hope to report on that regularly when I come to see you.

I had a complete slide here to discuss Route Summit, but I think General Gauthier was here recently and described it. Maybe I'll cut down on the presentation by simply saying that the efforts to date include identifying the donors and doing all the infrastructure planning. The arrow points to where the route is actually going in in Kandahar City, just a little bit further to the right on the slide. The reconnaissance and land clearance are certainly under way and we're well advanced on them.

We all hope to see progress in the weeks ahead. I know General Leslie was actually staring at Route Summit last week. Over the last few days, it has actually been raining very heavily in Afghanistan. Flooding in excessive amounts makes the road almost impassable. And you've read in the papers about the conditions of talcum dust from the desert. So it has been extremely difficult for us to do any work this week, but we're quite hopeful that this highway will get built over the weeks to come.

Route Summit will demonstrate a major investment project that can change the livelihoods of local communities by ensuring the transfer of goods between Kandahar and the Zhari–Panjwai communities. It should reduce travel time by allowing the locals to travel a paved surface. We will certainly be focused on that over the next several weeks and months ahead.

I thought you would find this next slide useful, to see where our Canadian Forces personnel involved in Afghanistan, who number just over 2,400, are currently deployed, certainly in Kandahar and supporting those in Kandahar, and then within Kabul itself.

Let me conclude by saying that you'll be happy to know that the Nyala, the RG-31, is in full use in Afghanistan with the Canadian Forces. The RG-31 has a mine-resistant hull and lightly armoured sides. The steel hull protects against rifle-calibre bullets, but more importantly, against mines and IEDs. RG-31s are large vehicles. They look like SUVs, but this vehicle does dwarf the G-Wagon in size.

•(1550)

As observed earlier, the Taliban have demonstrated both the will and the knowledge to use improvised explosive devices against the coalition. We've had to adapt in order to maintain the initiative and protect our troops by increasing our RG-31 fleet.

You can never completely defend against an explosive payload, as a bigger one can always be constructed. However, we believe we've mitigated a vulnerability. Again, this is a great example of very quick adaptability in getting the front-line soldiers some vehicles to conduct their duties a little more safely.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my update.

The Chair: Thank you very much, General. We appreciate that. I'm sure there will be some questions.

I want to advise the committee that next we have General Leslie, Chief of the Land Staff, and this week we have the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chief of the Air Staff, and Chief of the Navy. We certainly have the high level of people who I'm sure will be able to respond to most of our questions.

Let's just remember this presentation was a briefing, and let's keep it to what happened over the last two weeks in Afghanistan.

Go ahead.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Thank you, General, once again, for being with us.

Talking about the Route Summit, or ambush alley, as it's called in the newspapers, you've given us some information that is at variance with what was reported in the *Ottawa Citizen* today. It says that Afghan army personnel have gone home due to Ramadan or other reasons, that they have been at it for a long time and they need to leave at some point, and that construction work has been halted for security reasons. In fact, one of the officers has been quoted as saying, "What they are doing now is preventing outright defeat".

I would like you to explain that comment. What does that say to you? Is the *Ottawa Citizen* article totally incorrect today?

BGen A. J. Howard: Thank you very much for your question.

We certainly have had challenges over the last several weeks with building up our Afghan national security partners in the south. Indeed, Ramadan was an issue. I mean, young local Afghans join the Afghan National Army. They number some 30,000 now. They are very brave souls, and they work particularly hard. Several weeks ago, we as Canadians asked our Afghan colleagues—governmental officials—if they would increase the number of Afghans who work down south with us. They certainly answered our call right away.

What that article refers to is this. About two or three weeks ago, one of the Afghan National Army battalions did have to leave. They had come from Helmand province; they returned to Helmand province. It left us with a bit of a gap. I'm happy to report that gap has now been filled. We have some 300 or 400 Afghan National Army soldiers with us in the south. That situation is improving.

I will not deny that the Taliban absolutely do not want to see this road constructed. That's why we're busily fortifying positions along that particular road, to enhance security. "Ambush alley" is actually a

term that has been used for many segments of highways in Afghanistan. When we first arrived at Kandahar airfield, the stretch of road from the airfield to the city was known as ambush alley. We lost some soldiers along that route.

Indeed, the sentiment from two or three weeks ago is correct. This is a game of patience. It really is. We are under a challenge there; there is no doubt about it. But we are determined to put this route in.

Certainly this week you wouldn't see any construction, because you really need a boat to be able to traverse, not wheeled vehicles. The mud is quite thick. I'm a little more optimistic—not to dispute the captain who is at the front edge at a place and time. I think it points to some of the challenges we're having.

I do expect to see progress in the weeks and months ahead. It's important that we put this road in. It's an area that we've been operating in, and it will improve the conditions for locals.

•(1555)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: I have just one more question.

The Chair: You have time for one short one.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Yes, it will be very short.

You've talked about the ADZ concept. That seems to be new. Has there been a shift in the last two weeks, under General Van Loon's command, in the focus of the mission? Obviously you didn't report on the ADZ concept in the last briefing. I'm assuming this is something entirely new.

BGen A. J. Howard: No, sir. As long as I have been working on the desk in NDHQ—and that has been since I arrived in the summer—the ADZ concept has been briefed and in progress. This has taken a while to put together. It comes from Commander ISAF General Richards and is certainly something that General Fraser was working away on.

The Chair: Good. Thank you very much.

Mr. Bachand.

[*Translation*]

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

The last time we met, General, we asked you to send us a list of the 26 projects you cited. That was two weeks ago, and we have still not received the list. Could you please have it forwarded to us within the next few days?

I met General Richards when I was in Afghanistan. He talked about "ink blots," an expression I rather liked. Do they reflect the same principle as the ADZs you mentioned? Are we starting small, making blots of ink that then spread to the surrounding areas? I find the principle an interesting one.

I would also like to know whether General Jones of the US Army is still playing a role in Afghanistan, or whether US forces are now under the command of General Richards, who commands all NATO forces. The Senlis Council, a British group, said that children were dying of hunger. Yet you tell us that a large number of food packages have been distributed. Were they distributed very recently?

Lastly, I would like you to comment on remarks made by the British, who are very involved in training. They said the Afghan army would not be ready for ten years. According to your figures, I see that 178 individuals are in training and 125 have graduated. At this rate, I don't see how the Afghan army is to become operational and relieve the pressure on NATO troops.

[English]

The Chair: Could we have short responses?

BGen A. J. Howard: I will do my best with that list you've given me.

The development of the Afghan National Army, I think, is viewed by everybody as a long process. The year 2010 is when we hope to have a functional Afghan National Army, so it will take a lot of patience and several years.

Certainly the delivery of food aid is something we have been doing from the beginning. The minister made the pledge last week, as have all of us, that if there are specific locations where we know assistance is required, we will certainly look into them. But the delivery of food aid packages has been going on, certainly, for some time.

General Jones is SAC here. And yes, ISAF is a NATO mission. There are some 36 countries and partners involved with it. It is a UN-mandated mission. The Operation Enduring Freedom is an American-led mission, and of course we made the transition out of OEF into ISAF. General Gauthier described to you some of the individuals who remained and were helping do the training centre in Kabul and other such things from there. But it's General Richards and his bosses in Brussels who call the shots in ISAF. Certainly we work at the UN to discuss this entire mission.

As for the 26 projects, you have my apologies. Please leave this with me. I'm energized now, since you've asked. You won't have to ask again. This is my commitment to you. I will certainly work away at that.

The ADZ concept is really about trying to move into an area where there's a large population base, if we can secure that, as opposed to going all over the country and being rather spread out and dispersed. If we go to one area and we can have success...and we can if you concentrate. If the military is working in a secure environment, and the developmental folks, both Canadian and international, can move into that area and begin to help the individuals, our hope is that those outside the ADZ will actually look in and say, "Boy, that looks good," and that this will take its own course, kind of like an ink blot that spreads out a little bit. That's

what we're going to try. That's what the NATO concept is. And I'm being very crude and simplistic here. But certainly we're going to try to reinforce and pile on where we can have success.

• (1600)

The Chair: Very good, thank you. Perfect timing.

Ms. Black.

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

Thank you for coming back again. It's good to get the update. I have three questions.

I questioned you on this last time. You talked about the Afghan auxiliary police, and the only information I had seen about this was through the media, who said it was a 10-day training program for young Afghans. Could you give us some assurances that it's more than that for the Afghan auxiliary police? Ten days isn't much in terms of training people to be acting as police officers.

The other question Ujjal or Claude touched on was on the family food packets, and you indicated that over 10,000 had been distributed. I wanted to ask you about the appropriateness of the food. Does it fit with the religious aspects of the community, of the nation and cultural traditions? What is in the food packages?

My last question is this. You talked about clearing explosives, and I'm wondering what kind of explosives. You gave numbers and I didn't get them down. The slide changed before I got the clearing out of explosives. Are some of these old land mines that were left behind by the Russians or are they all explosives planted by the Taliban? It seems to me you talked about over 100 that had been cleared, so could you expand upon that, please.

BGen A. J. Howard: Certainly. Let me start with your last question first.

We have engineers in theatre who are highly capable of ensuring our own mobility by dealing with unexploded ordnance, so the natures of explosives that have been cleared... We also do this to help the local community, as individuals point and say, for example, we know there's a mine there, can you help us? Or these little wires sticking out of the ground look like an IED, or a leftover mortar bomb or an artillery round is lying in the open. This is something we can deal with quite easily. Those are the types of the explosives we have found on the ground.

Ms. Dawn Black: Are some of them leftover Russian land mines?

BGen A. J. Howard: Most certainly there is some of that. Afghanistan is one of the most heavily mined areas left dirty, if you will. It's a reason we've had anti-personnel land mine treaties and the like, because people leave this stuff behind. Not only does it impede local civilians, it's also a great danger to the Canadian troops.

Your first question then, if I may, was about the Afghan National Auxiliary Police. There is no intention, as I understand it, for them to do the same levels of activity as a normal policeman would. We have similar differences in this country with full-fledged police, but you also have, for example, traffic police and the like. So the Afghan National Auxiliary Police will do less than full police duties. Obviously you cannot bring them up to the same level of professionalism with a 10-day training period. They can't do the investigative work, for example. So you have to employ them understanding their capabilities.

• (1605)

Ms. Dawn Black: So it is 10 days?

BGen A. J. Howard: Very short duration. I'd hate to stay stuck on 10 days, because it would depend on the class, but generally speaking, it's 10 to 14 days. This is done under the supervision of the RCMP and our PEI constable and the PRT and the MP platoon. We have an MP platoon we've deployed to do that as well. They monitor and supervise this training. We don't allow anybody under 18, although it's sometimes hard to tell, but that's what we're aiming at. So it's not young youth. It is the same age as you would join the police. For a more limited role, we can increase the number of security forces, and it's very much an interim step.

We didn't want to do this, I have to be honest with you, but it is a bit of a bridging step to creating a more stable and long-term police force.

Ms. Dawn Black: And the food?

BGen A.J. Howard: I have to tell you I will assume the food packages are culturally sensitive. They'd have to be. But let me get you a better answer. I'll bring that back next time and I'll give you an example of what's in the food pack.

Ms. Dawn Black: The reason I ask is that I met with some Afghan people in my riding last week while we were on break. They told me food had been distributed that was not halal food, and I'm just hoping that's not the case with this.

BGen A. J. Howard: We have a great PRT. The commander is an outstanding individual, so I'd be very surprised by that. But let me check.

Ms. Dawn Black: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Hiebert.

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

Thank you, gentlemen, for returning to this committee again.

During your presentation you talked about how the Taliban are seeking to prevent reconstruction and humanitarian aid, prevent meaningful interaction with locals, and undermine the improved sense of security as a result of Operation Medusa. That particular

phrase, “undermine this improved sense of security”, stood out for me during your presentation. We must be succeeding. If there's an improved sense of security, what is it about Operation Medusa that has provided that? How is it evident? What are the tangible consequences of this improved sense of security?

On a very much related question, you also mentioned that there's been a decrease in attacks in recent weeks. Perhaps you can provide us with some explanation as to why there's been a decrease since your last briefing—very similar questions there.

My third question has to do with the Afghan National Army. You mentioned there are 30,000 in it at present, but it's going to take a number of years until it is self-sustaining. What does that self-sustaining Afghan National Army look like? Is it simply a matter of the number of soldiers, or is it a sense of readiness, technological ability, or better equipment? What are we looking to achieve? How will we know when we get there?

BGen A. J. Howard: When we look at our particular activity in Regional Command South, this time last year there were no ISAF/NATO forces in the southern region. I think our ability to deploy into the four provinces—the British, the Canadians, the Dutch, the Americans, and all our partners there—simply didn't exist last year. So starting in January we began a deployment into the area. We took over from a very thinly spread American force and moved down there. The Taliban essentially said, you won't be here by the end of the summer; we will have convinced you to leave by then. And we're still there.

I think Operation Medusa showed the local Afghans that we're prepared to help them, that we're not just going to turn and run at the first sign of trouble. We are there to support the local Afghan government and certainly the national Afghan government, and we need to show a little bit of steady resolve. I don't wish to underplay at all the challenges that are ahead of us in the coming weeks. It is still a challenging and dangerous environment, but I'm hoping that with the ADZ concept we'll be able to make some great inroads and progress. It's very difficult to predict what will occur in the future, but we have shown that we have a little bit of resolve.

We need to show some patience. We are there for the long haul to try to help the local Afghan government.

I'm sorry, what was your last question?

•(1610)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: It had to do with the state of readiness of the Afghan National Army.

BGen A. J. Howard: Certainly our intent in any Afghan compact is to work toward a military that can provide security. So when you take a military force and ask how it can be effective, it has to be able to win the confidence of its government and people that it can actually handle security aspects.

It's a very complex undertaking. I don't think you can tie it solely to numbers. The Canadian force is a small force, but I think it has the confidence of its country. It's not necessarily built to cover the whole country, but it has great capability.

So you need sufficient number of people. I can't sit here and tell you exactly what the number is; that wouldn't be fair of me. The Afghans will decide on that. It does need to have a competent command and control structure. The individuals within the organization professionalizing it is certainly a step. It will need a measure of technology so it can survive on its own, and that's certainly the next step to take forward.

I think there is a complicated regime, but how do you build it? You build it the way we're doing it now. You start with the battalions, increase the number that are there, get a little bit of critical mass going, and then professionalize it. So we've done the basic training in Kabul. The battalions go down into the local areas, and then our observer mentor liaison teams, for example, work closely to really professionalize the troops that are there.

They're having great success when they're partnered with us. We bring them enhanced communications and a little bit of our own knowledge and know-how to allow them to succeed. I think they have difficulties when they're on their own. It's a bit of a work in progress.

The Chair: Thank you.

It doesn't look like we're going to have time to give anybody one more shot, so if the committee will let me, I'll finish up in the last minute or so.

On the decline in active assaults, does that mean there's a general lessening of the activity of the Taliban, or are they out there somewhere doing something else that's detrimental to what we're trying to achieve? Mortar attacks are down, so is that indicative that there are fewer of them and they're backing off, or are they out there subverting the populace in another way?

BGen A. J. Howard: My ability to predict what's going to happen in the future is normally wrong, so I have to be careful with this. Certainly the trend we've seen in the last couple of weeks is toward diminished activity. Is it related to the weather? There's probably a bit of that. Did we succeed in the Zhari and Panjwai areas? Yes, it probably has something to do with that.

Some religious holidays have recently concluded within the area. Certainly the Taliban themselves are noticing some improvements throughout Afghanistan itself, so a number are involved in Peace through Strength, which General Gauthier described before. So I don't think there's any one reason, but I don't think we should

underestimate that it will continue in the future. My hope—all soldiers' hope—is that it has diminished a bit, but only time will tell.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That concludes the time allotted. We look forward to your next visit. As we go through this, I guess we'll all get better at receiving and appreciating the briefings. Thank you.

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•(1615)

The Chair: I call the committee back to order for our second portion.

I would like to welcome General Leslie, Chief of the Land Staff. It's a pleasure to have you here. We look forward to your comments. As usual, you'll have time to bring us whatever information you have, and then there will be rounds of questions. We're here until 5:30, if you can stick with us that long.

The floor is yours, sir.

[*Translation*]

LGen Andrew Leslie (Chief of the Land Staff, Department of National Defence): Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very pleased to be here, before this Committee, today. On behalf of our soldiers, I would like to thank you for your interest, and for your support of the Army.

It is important for our soldiers to know that members of Parliament, on behalf of all Canadians, support them in their vital work.

[*English*]

Our current operational focus is of course the mission in Afghanistan. So I'll use these brief introductory remarks, mainly in the language of Molière, to address some of the issues arising from that mission. I will then be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

[*Translation*]

The role of the Army is to produce combat-effective land forces ready for deployment in accordance with decisions by government or the Chief of the Defence Staff. We carefully analyze our commitments on a regular basis, and conduct simulations for each operational force we plan to deploy.

Mr. Chairman, we will fulfill the requirements of our mission until 2009. Our planning and our managed readiness system have enabled us to respond to the additional demands placed upon us as part of the enhancement to Task Force Afghanistan announced in mid-September.

I also want to stress that it is not easy for us to fulfill the requirements of our mission. As committee members are aware, for a number of years, the Army has maintained a very high operational tempo with an insufficient number of soldiers. We are therefore very happy to be able to increase our strength, and we are looking forward to the day that our soldiers will lead lives where deployments, various tasks, training and time spent with their families will be more balanced. That will not happen overnight. It will take years for the Army to totally recover from the long period during which it had to be prepared at all times and with seriously reduced strength to meet the demands of continuous overseas rotations, while fulfilling its obligations here at home.

Mr. Chairman, I now want to go into greater details on some personnel related issues. While we are able to honour our deployment commitments, we are unable to increase our strength quickly enough, and this is a source of some stress. We are therefore putting some solutions in place that will help fill in the gaps until the recruits have been integrated into the field forces.

One of the situations where there is considerable pressure is the one facing our senior non-commissioned officers. These men and women are the spearhead of the Army. We ask them to lead our soldiers in operations, to train them in combat schools, and to carry out very important duties, even though there are simply not enough of them.

Paradoxically, increasing our strength in the Army is amplifying the problem. We will need an even larger number of these highly qualified soldiers to train recruits as they integrate their units and take specialized courses. We have identified a certain number of areas where civilian contractors can provide basic courses, thus freeing up our NCOs and soldiers for more demanding duties. These changes are being made as part of our highly effective training capacity enhancement program.

For example, civilians can replace NCOs in training soldiers requiring to manoeuvre vehicles on streets. They can also teach the basic skills required for operations in mountainous terrain, some parts of our communications training, as well as how to operate the turret on a LAV, for example.

In addition, we currently need role players to play Afghan civilians during exercises at the Canadian Manoeuvre Training Centre in Wainwright, Alberta.

● (1620)

[English]

It's a unique initiative in which these Afghan civilians, Canadians, are doing those roles they know so well, replicating the circumstances that our soldiers will face overseas.

[Translation]

Then we can replace the soldiers whom we would usually call upon to play the role of Afghan citizens by Canadian civilians hired under contract. I must stress the fact that we are not asking civilians to teach combat techniques. These techniques are always taught by competent members of the Army.

Mr. Chairman, we also use more Army reservists. Thus, within the framework of the program called the Pool of Instructors for

Individual Training, we hire class B reservists to deliver a part of the individual training. This program should free up some 400 members of the regular forces who could be assigned to other tasks during the coming year.

Moreover, we were recently authorized to hire another group of 1,000 to 1,500 class B reservists, part-time and full-time. It will not be easy to motivate that many to serve us full-time because many of them have demanding jobs in civilian life and because others prefer to serve only on a part-time basis. But if we succeed in gathering enough people, we would have partly solved our current shortage of personnel.

We must also deal with the fact that our establishment chart in peacetime does not match the structures that we are deploying within the framework of operations such as the one in Afghanistan.

● (1625)

[English]

Another problem we face is that our peacetime establishment does not match the structures we deploy in operations, such as in Afghanistan. For example, an infantry company here at home is usually 100 to 110 soldiers. The companies we have in theatre are about 145 to 150 strong. That means when we stand up an infantry company for deployment, we have to draw on at least two other companies, thereby essentially attenuating the established structure within the battalions and brigades.

I have directed that our peacetime establishment here in Canada be restructured to mirror how we form up our operations. A regular field force structure will migrate towards one that would be based on three brigades and nine, perhaps ten, infantry-based battle groups. These brigades and battle groups are to be organized, trained, and equipped just as they will deploy in operations.

Incidentally, following its rotation in Afghanistan next year, the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment will be designated for a five-year trial as a standing battle group. I just saw them on exercise in Wainwright. They are getting fully prepared for the tasks that lie ahead of them in February.

The planned restructure to mirror force posture in operations will take some time to achieve, but we're starting the process now. Indeed, we started a couple of months ago.

The issue I've just raised is mainly a structural problem. However, it is exacerbated if, in order to form a company for Afghanistan, we are forced to draw on two or more companies that are hollow or are well below strength. This is sometimes the case today, and will only be resolved once we've added the new personnel that the Government of Canada is sending our way. These personnel have already started to enter our ranks.

Members of this committee will know that the army continues to undergo a major transformation that will enable us to meet the challenges of this young century. Because of the acute demands of operations in training, however, some parts of transformation may have to be slowed or somewhat delayed. Other requirements or tasks may also be delayed. Accordingly, I have directed that operational requirements must and shall take priority over some of these subsequent activities.

To summarize the situation, Mr. Chairman, we're going to do all we can to meet our operational commitments right up to 2009 and beyond. Unfortunately, it is impossible to grow the army quickly enough to eliminate all the many problems we face, causing us some stress. I'd be more than willing to discuss some of these details with you.

The problems we now have will ease as the army grows. Unlike previous army commanders, I can look in you in the eye and tell you that we're growing. We're applying some creative solutions that will help us reach the point where we will fill all personnel requirements without resorting to stopgap or special interim measures such as those as I've already alluded to, the 1,000 to 1,500 reservists brought in for a couple of years.

Finally, I'd like to turn briefly to the question of equipment. The way in which we acquired equipment during the Cold War period—for instance, it could take up to 15 or more years from the time we identified a requirement until the time the equipment entered service—is no longer viable. In today's strategic environment, speed and flexibility are paramount. I know you will be pleased to know that we've enjoyed some notable successes in Afghanistan, and indeed across town, in this regard.

Several successes spring to mind. I'm a gunner, so I'll bring to your attention the M-77 lightweight artillery howitzer that was acquired and put into service. From the moment the requirement was identified until it was in action against the foe, it took four months. There are others, of course—much smaller unattended aerial vehicles, used for reconnaissance work, and the armoured patrol vehicle that General Howard referred to.

That said, we must of course be careful to ensure that what we buy will serve a requirement in the army for many years to come. If we buy in a hurry too often, we wind up with that which is available rather than that which will serve our particular requirements for the foreseeable coming decades. But in cases where we have identified a pressing requirement, we're now a great deal better at getting kit into the hands of the soldiers in the field quickly, thanks to a whole bunch of senior officers, civilians, members of government, members of opposition, and indeed the whole town putting their shoulders behind the wheel and pushing to get the right kit to the soldiers, giving them enhanced levels of protection and security.

• (1630)

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to remind the committee that everything we have done, everything we do, is to set the soldiers up for success. We're very proud of the way they're conducting themselves in Afghanistan. They are serving with great courage and skill to ensure that the Afghan people can rebuild their lives, their communities, and their country after so many years of war and brutal Taliban rule. I am confident that we can count on you to support these outstanding

young Canadians, who are conducting themselves with great distinction and to international acclaim.

Merci, monsieur. I am now more than ready to respond to any of your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

As you know, we've been out to CFB Petawawa and CFB Edmonton, and we've talked to some soldiers. It's been very worthwhile for us to be able to do that, and we appreciate the cooperation we've had on those bases as we've gone out.

Just before I get into the first round of questioning, I want to say there were two things that came up when we were talking in Edmonton in a round table with some folks who had just come back. They're not big equipment items, but they need decent shoes, so could you do something about that for them? They also need some kind of modular vest so that they will have an opportunity to suit up for the day they've got ahead of them.

I don't know if you've addressed those issues or not. We can talk about tanks and Ilyushins and all kinds of things, and C-12s and whatever, but shoes seemed to be important that day.

LGen Andrew Leslie: Mr. Chair, the soldiers are always right. I'm serious.

The Chair: I hear you. I agree.

LGen Andrew Leslie: And by the way, once we've put the equipment into their hands and they get to try it and use it, we encourage a culture of spirited and passionate debate.

I've just returned from Afghanistan and Wainwright, and I keep in very close contact with your army, which I have the privilege to lead right now. And trust me when I say that an increasing number of soldiers have come up and made those two points very clear. They are not shy.

We have a large number of boots, and you'll forgive me if I don't mention the specific types because then whoever made them will yell at me afterwards. I would say most of the types of boots—we're talking about the tan desert boots for the soldiers—are pretty damn good, but there is one particular brand which is a pain in the foot, absolutely. It's not good, and so we're going to do all we can to replace that right away. You can follow up, at your discretion of course, but we're on top of that one.

The modular vest was designed. It was recently introduced. As a matter of fact, we're still in the process of introducing it. It was designed for circumstances that perhaps were predominant two or three years ago. An enormous amount has changed.

Accordingly, C Company of the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry has been given a chunk of cash by me to go out and try out two or three different modular systems. The single best exemplar we have of how to do it right will be the young men and women who are using this stuff in combat operations.

However, having said that—and I don't want to sound like a bureaucrat, because I ain't one—it will still probably take a year or two to try to get a better modular vest in the hands of the soldiers because of the scale and quantities that are involved. Having said this, I've heard opinion from a large number of soldiers, each of whom has a particular vest in mind. Through you, I would like to remind all members of the army that we are an army, and they will actually wear the issue kit unless we say otherwise.

The Chair: It's good to know that you're aware and that you're moving forward on those issues. We appreciate that. Thank you, sir.

LGen Andrew Leslie: Thank you for bringing them up.

The Chair: Okay, let's start the first round.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you, General, for being with us.

I have two questions. I will ask them both, and then you can answer.

The first question is with respect to the comments you made about the army being stretched, and how you intend to use more reserve personnel if you can get your hands on them. I have a very specific question. When the extension of the mission to 2009 was introduced in the House, we were not given any forewarning, other than 48 hours or 96 hours, I believe. Were you? Were you or your predecessor in this position consulted to determine whether or not you could meet the changing needs, particularly of the army—the infantry and the like—if the mission was extended to two years, with combat being at the centre of it? That's the first question.

The second question is with respect to the reduced number of IEDs and attacks and the like, which is a good thing. My question is this. General Howard said there could be several reasons why this is happening. It could be the winter. It could be, according to him, the recent defensive stances of the forces, which he mentioned early on in his presentation—I'd like to know what that means, as I wasn't able to ask that question—and perhaps partial success in Panjwai.

The question I also have is whether or not it is related to the change in the focus of the mission. Despite what General Howard said, I've never heard of ADZs, and I've been defence critic for several months. I've been reading up on and following all of the comments that have been made in the press. Is this related? Is the reduction in the number of attacks, a reduction that is actually welcomed, related to a change in the focus and in the practice of the military on the ground? Are there fewer patrols? Are there fewer patrols in different areas where there were more patrols before? Are we seeking or hunting Taliban less than before? Have we changed the focus of the mission? If so, on whose orders? That's the question. If we have changed the focus, that would be great. I'd welcome that, but the question is very important.

Thank you.

• (1635)

LGen Andrew Leslie: First and foremost, I was not the army commander at the time the decision was made to extend the mission. My remit is to bring them in, through the good work of Chief of Military Personnel; to grow them in terms of culture; to train them; to work with a whole bunch of folk across town to equip them; to ensure that they reflect the army and the Canadian Forces ethos; to supervise their training activity; and then, at certain stages in their

process, to give them a really cold, hard look as to whether or not they're ready to go off and do that which the Government of Canada wants them to do. To do that, we have an army-managed readiness system that is extraordinarily complicated, as you might anticipate or imagine, for an organization that, between the regulars, reserves, and soon-to-be the Rangers, is about 45,000.

The conveyor belt that leads us to actually generate battle groups, based on six-month deployment cycles, started many years ago and goes forever into the future. The variable that causes stress on the army is the size of the commitment—the actual number of soldiers it's sending overseas, and that which they're doing.

The reason I'm taking a bit of time to answer your question is, of course, that it asks three interwoven and complicated questions.

Vis-à-vis the numbers of soldiers we're sending overseas to do specific activities—and of course General Howard has already briefed you and you know far better than I—like security, development, and capacity building, we are sending more assets out to do security, development, and capacity building than we have in the past. In terms of the numbers and the ability to sustain and generate these forces, about half of the army's strength is currently comprised of reserves. I have visited many of the reserve brigades, many of the reserve units. There is an increasing enthusiasm for those great young folk to come and join us in the good work we're doing not only in Afghanistan, but also at home.

With regard to the reduced number of improvised explosive devices in attacks, they are made up of fairly crude technology, and of course that countryside is shattered by now close to thirty years of tragic war. Indeed, if you look at their sweep of history for the last two millennia, it has only been at rare times when that part of the world, as crossroads of empire, has not been subject to a variety of incredibly tragic circumstances. They need angry young men to operate those rockets, those shells, those mines that are buried in the roads or carried in vehicles or set up in mud-walled fortresses beside transit routes.

The result of Operation Medusa was the elimination of a significant number of those who operated close to Kandahar. I submit to you that one of the reasons we've seen fewer attacks in the short term is that the opposing forces have essentially now been knocked back on their feet. That does not, however, mean they are out. I think that over the course of the subsequent weeks and months there's a probability that the number of attacks could grow.

With regard to the Afghan development zone, it's an idea, an intent that was circulated first amongst NATO partners. I know that way back in 2003, when I was the Canadian mission commander in Kabul and I was discussing such issues with Mr. Brahim, who was the special representative of the Secretary-General and arguably one of the world's great men.... Way back then, the idea was articulated as essentially being a bubble of development activity below that of the PRT. For example, in Afghanistan, we have one PRT—provincial reconstruction team—and you know it's in Kandahar. In the province itself, there would be five or six focus areas for development work. So that idea has always been extant. I just haven't seen it articulated in any coherent form until the last five or six months.

Such activity has already taken place in the provinces of Gardez, Badakhshan, Mazar-e Sharif, Hirat, Helmand, Khost, and now Kandahar. I would argue that it's a positive sign. It gives an area of focus for reconstruction work to occur. But keep in mind, of course, that the real reconstructors are not the soldiers. Those are the great folk from CIDA and the various international organizations, like the World Health Organization and the United Nations.

Sir, have I answered all three of your questions?

• (1640)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Not completely, but—

The Chair: We're out of time.

LGen Andrew Leslie: I beg your pardon.

The Chair: That's fine. I believe you've touched on them all.

But we're moving on to Mr. Bachand for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I welcome General Leslie. This man saved my region during the 1998 ice storm. Each time I have the opportunity, I am proud to say it and I thank him for it.

Just now, you mentioned the civilian contribution. More and more people are wondering about privatizing the military. By “privatizing”, I mean that a certain number of tasks would be given to private sector. A short while ago, we had a major debate on the supply chain. I do not think that you are talking about the supply chain. I often meet companies like ATCO Frontec that do an enormous amount of work on the theatre of operations. I do not know how far you want to go with this. Some people are beginning to say that even some security patrols would be given to private sector to ensure that we can free up the largest possible number of soldiers. You would not have the human resources required to deliver all the services you offer over there. Could you give me an idea of what is meant by privatization? Do you want to go further than ATCO Frontec that is involved in construction and pitching camps, etc.? Can this go as far as security patrols or even the supply chain?

LGen Andrew Leslie: Thank you, sir. With your permission, I will answer in English because I am rather tired. I was in Wainwright and in Kandahar a few days ago.

[English]

With regard to privatization of certain activities within the military, when it makes sense to do so and it's only a function of

money, then I am absolutely in favour of it, so that we can free up soldiers to do the soldier activities for which they're trained.

Let me use the example of the mechanics who are currently working at CFB Valcartier. As you know, the outstanding soldiers of the

[Translation]

The 22nd Regiment are preparing to deploy next August. Mechanics from Valcartier will leave with their buddies.

[English]

Does it make sense to insist that they continue to work on vehicles that are not directly related to getting the soldiers ready to go out the door and then to having them go with those vehicles overseas, or do we turn that maintenance contract over to some great folk downtown who can fix the school buses, the non-deployable trucks, the transport vehicles, etc.?

With regard to security patrols for overseas missions—in other words, with the blurring or the potential blurring of having civilians doing military-like activities overseas—I will offer you a personal opinion. I am absolutely against it. My reasoning, based on my own academic work, is that the rule of law for military soldiers is very clear. We work for you. We follow your laws and we reflect your ethos, your ethics. When you have military contractors carrying weapons in hostile areas, the possibility of tragedy and the blurring of distinctions becomes acute.

For those nations that decide to do so, that is their business. But as far as I know, the Government of Canada and, indeed, the armed forces of Canada have no intention of employing military contractors in such a capacity.

I know that was not your question.

• (1645)

Mr. Claude Bachand: Oh, it was my question, and I have another one.

[Translation]

I understand that for financial reasons, we are resorting to private sector. On the other hand, I have a second question for you and it is a bit more difficult. It is about the cost of the mission. More and more newspapers are reporting that it would cost us up to 4 billion extra dollars to go to the end of the mission in 2009. The total cost of the mission, from 2001 to 2009, would be \$10 billion. Was there an error in evaluating the cost of the Afghanistan operation, or does the current situation oblige us to send tanks and perhaps even F-18s? With all this, the bill is adding up enormously, and the public will say that this is very expensive. Was there an error in evaluating the cost of the mission, or do we just have to adapt to the current situation?

LGen Andrew Leslie: Sir, I do not believe any mistakes were made in the planning of cost related to the mission. With regard to the exact details, I will try to obtain those facts. There are people taking notes behind me and they will make sure that I give you the most up to date information.

[English]

With regard to supplemental costs involved in sending additional types of equipment overseas, you mentioned tanks.

When I went to Afghanistan in 2003, there were threats of terrorists and insurgents, but the principal threat was warlords. The main intent was to ensure that President Karzai's government had a chance to carry on. The heavier equipment was not deployed.

Our soldiers deserve all the protection we can possibly give them. As the enemy changes tactics and procedures, we respond, just as they do. They are a thinking enemy. Some of them are extraordinarily courageous and willing to die for what they believe in. So are we. As they change, we respond with additional equipments or soldiers with different skill sets.

For example, on the decision to send tanks, yes, that's expensive; on the other hand, Canadian soldiers deserve that level of protection. It's the single heaviest and most protective vehicle we have. It has a better chance of surviving that awful moment when mines, improvised explosive devices, or rockets come their way.

The Chair: We're out of time.

Ms. Black.

Ms. Dawn Black: Thank you for appearing here today, General Leslie.

I know you said very clearly how stretched the army is in fulfilling the commitments the Canadian government has asked of it.

I asked a question in the House today about the Vancouver Olympics in 2010. My question was to determine how the army would be able to participate in the security for the Vancouver and Whistler Olympics if we are still engaged in Afghanistan. I think there were 10,000 troops in Montreal in 1976—that was 30 years ago. In Turin, there were some 15,000 security personnel for the most recent Olympics. We're committed to Afghanistan from now to 2009. As you know, a number of people, including General Hillier, have said it may be 10 years. Others have said a Canadian commitment could be even longer. I want to ask if you've looked at that. Is the army looking at deploying security for the Olympics in 2010?

Secondly, in the summer of 2005, you were widely quoted in *The Toronto Star* and other media as saying, "Every time you kill an angry young man overseas, you're creating 15 more who will come after you", and that "you have to be prepared for the consequences" of that. That was the quotation. I want to know if you still believe that and if you think that's part of what's happening in Kandahar. We know there's a problem with the Pakistan border and the Taliban training there and coming back. So I'm wondering about that statement.

My third question has to do with the Leopard tanks you just mentioned. I understand about the deployment. I'm wondering what state of readiness they were in, what had to be done to make them usable in Afghanistan, if anything, and if there are plans to send more. What kind of work has to be done to ensure they are in a state of readiness?

● (1650)

LGen Andrew Leslie: Vis-à-vis your first question on the stretching of the army, there's no doubt that the army is under tremendous pressure. If I didn't think we could do it, I would tell you. I think we can do it, but it's going to be tough. The reason it's going to be tough is cold, hard math. If we weren't getting thousands of additional soldiers through funding by the Government of Canada, we would not be able to get it done. The good news is that we are getting thousands of additional soldiers, both regular and reserve. And I'll come back to the reserve—

Ms. Dawn Black: Get what done, though? What are you referring to?

LGen Andrew Leslie: Those things that we've been told to do, be it Afghanistan.... And of course, Afghanistan isn't the only mission. There's also our first line of operations. The single most important thing we do—and I guess you can think of the armed forces as having three main tenets—is that we take care of Canadians first. So across the entirety of the Canadian Forces we have probably 10,000 great folk in uniform who are serving the interests of Canada, defending Canada and Canadians at home—from search and rescue, to the Rangers, to the immediate-reaction units, to the immediate-reaction ships, the ready-duty ships, and the list goes on.

Ms. Dawn Black: That's why I'm asking about the Olympics.

LGen Andrew Leslie: Absolutely, and I'll come back to that at the end. I have to fit it into the order in which you asked the questions, I think. Of course, if I don't, I'm sure you'll remind me.

So are we stretched? Yes, we are. Can we get it done? I think we can. If I'm not right, I'll let you know over the next couple of months. I'm pretty confident that the reserves will answer the call and get us through this transition period, because at the same time as we're doing all these operations at home and abroad, we want to grow.

In the past, when my father was a soldier, it would take probably 30 to 90 days to give him or her sufficient skills to go off to war. Now, because of the complexity of the things we do, it takes an awful lot longer. So at the same time as we're trying to grow, we have to send NCOs and officers overseas to lead their young men and women. And by the way, we need those NCOs and officers to train the recruits. That's why we have to get a little bit creative about trying to farm out to civilian industries some of the more routine activities that soldiers don't have to do.

With regards to the Olympics, the government has announced—or is about to announce or has stated the intent—the territorial battalion concept. We're going to start that in the west. That's the grouping of reserve units into what a regular force officer would call battle group equivalents, and reserve growth will be focused on the west. The intent that I've just finished articulating to all my army subordinates—the area and brigade commanders—is that the reserves will be focused on domestic operations supporting the regulars overseas; the regulars will be focused on international operations, supporting the reserves at home. Now, there's going to be a great deal of cross-blending, as there always has been in the past.

Vis-à-vis the Olympics, the organization that has a responsibility to do the detailed planning—and we're an adjunct to fit into that, if you would—is the RCMP, for the security aspect. Canada Command has stood up full time; they have some folk working on this full time. The indicative numbers—and you'll forgive me if I don't share those with you yet—are sizeable, but if you look at what sorts of duties those soldiers would be expected to do, it is not high- and mid-intensity combat—please, not to secure the Olympics. So the training requirement for them is much less than for the soldiers we're sending into combat operations overseas. For every soldier we train here at home, there are usually two more who are assisting in that training or getting the equipment ready. Those numbers are far less to support the Olympics.

So do I think we can do it? Yes, I do.

On the third part, in which you quoted my comment of some years ago about how every time you kill an angry young man, others come after you, that has been true throughout history. As a professional soldier who has been in combat operations, the last thing you want to do is actually kill. Having said that, we have been trained most of our professional lives through the application of lethal force as an option. And when those angry young men are coming after, for example, two school girls, whose bodies I saw decapitated by the side of the road because they had the temerity to want to try to go to school, if you can intercept those angry young men before they can kill those young women, and you offer them the choice of surrender and they decline, your choices are limited. So sometimes, tragically, there is no choice. We are there to protect the weak and the innocent, and we are willing to put our soldiers in the way. They are willing to go in between the foe and those we're charged to protect, and yes, sometimes it does involve killing. It is a last resort, but we are soldiers.

•(1655)

With regards to Leopard tanks, currently we have about 65 in running condition. There are around 20 tank chassis currently deployed overseas. They are in very good shape. I will have a sustainment issue over the next two to three years. There's no doubt that the army needs a heavily protected direct-fire weapons system. We put on additional armour and made a variety of other refinements to those tanks, some of which are taking place as we speak. As soon as those refinements and add-on armour packages are finished, the tanks will go into operation.

The Chair: We're out of time, so we'll have to move on.

Mr. Hawn, go ahead, please, to finish the first round.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome, General Leslie.

I have three different questions for you, so I'll ask them one at a time. The last one is a gunner question, so that'll speed up your answers to the first two.

You talked about the difficulty with reservists and recruiting them and keeping them, and so on. Would you like to see, as is the case in the U.S., legislation that would guarantee employment for reservists when they get out of the reserves?

LGen Andrew Leslie: Sir, anything the leadership of Canada can do to ensure that those extraordinary young, and sometimes not so young, men and women who join the reserves can have a better opportunity to serve their country would have my full and enthusiastic support.

The second and third order implications of what you're suggesting have to be carefully thought through, and of course, that's far outside of my ship or lane to respond to. The bottom line is that everything that anybody can do to ensure that those wonderful folk in the reserves have just about every opportunity they can to better serve would have my full support.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Have you chatted with your counterpart in the U.S. on that topic over the years?

LGen Andrew Leslie: Yes, sir, I have. I had a meeting with General Schoomaker a couple of days ago. I met him in Heidelberg at the Conference of American Armies. That was one among several issues that were discussed. They have enormous strengths to their system. It is uniquely American, as you might suspect. There are some disadvantages that would have to be thought through vis-à-vis the Canadian context.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: It was kind of implied that the army might have been surprised by the extension of the mission. Can you comment on the mission readiness and whether it's the army, navy, or air force that have standing units ready to deploy to NATO or wherever, so that if a requirement comes up on relatively short notice, the army, navy, or air force is prepared to respond? That would give you time, then, to crank the rest of the reinforcement or sustainment troops up and to get that going. Correct me if I'm wrong, but the army is in the state to deploy from the get-go to meet a requirement that pops up.

LGen Andrew Leslie: Yes, sir, and, I'm sorry, I did not mean—to correct the impression that may have been offered—that the army was surprised by the extension.

•(1700)

Mr. Laurie Hawn: You didn't allude to it. Somebody else did.

LGen Andrew Leslie: Okay, yes. We were not surprised by the extension, in the sense that the various battle groups were already training. Every six months we have a new one starting to form, coalesce, and go through the training cycle. Approximately 90% of the folk currently deployed into Afghanistan come from the army, so whether or not it's 90% of 2,300, or 2,000, or 1,800, it's a matter of scale.

In terms of the duty-ready organizations, the air force, in their response to NORAD, with their ready ships, the transport-ready aircraft, the transport aircraft, and the fighters, have very sophisticated mechanisms for keeping their aircraft on alert status. I'm not going to say anything more about that, because you have a real expert coming in two days, the commander of the air force. The same is true of the navy, and the same is true of the army. Having said that, the units that we have on immediate reaction unit status are for domestic operations. There is a very small cadre that does planning for international operations, but considering the number of soldiers we have overseas, those training to go in, etc., we don't have much left to offer, unless we stop doing a whole bunch of things.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: In the normal state of affairs—let's pretend Afghanistan wasn't happening—there would be a combat unit prepared to respond to a requirement?

LGen Andrew Leslie: Yes, sir. There would be a 1,500-person organization ready to go somewhere to do something.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Now I have a quick gunner question for you. With respect to the XM777 and the Excalibur round, there's been chat lately about how much those things cost, and so on. We're trying them right now. Can you make some comment on the cost-effectiveness of a precision round like that in terms of hitting what needs to be hit, and, more importantly, the safety factor for our own soldiers in proximity, or civilians in proximity, where we want to limit collateral damage?

LGen Andrew Leslie: Sir, you've hit the nail on the head. The Excalibur round is designed to be a projectile for the 777. The 777 is remarkably accurate. But when one is pushing shells out 20 or 30 kilometres, and the intent is to neutralize a pinpoint target instead of saturating the countryside with high explosives, then I guess the question to ask is what the cost is of not having this precision capability. The intent is to buy a modest number of these shells—somewhere between 30 and 35. They are expensive, there's no doubt about it, but it's far better to spend a certain amount of money than to have tragedies ensue when collateral damage may be inadvertently caused to those we are not actively trying to engage.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: I just have a comment. Remembrance Day, of course, just passed, and I was at a number of events in Edmonton, as we all were in our own ridings. One of the things that struck me—and you and I have chatted about this and have encouraged it, and I just want to say well done—is that we are getting privates and corporals out to Remembrance Day ceremonies to talk, to make the presentations. Rather than officers, we are getting the young troops out. The one I was at in particular was at a high school. The poor private thought he was talking to a class; he wound up talking to 1,000 people in the gym. He did a terrific job, and it was extremely well received.

So just pass that on to the commanders and the subordinate commanders for getting those guys out. In my view, that's exactly the right thing to do. They're not being judgmental. They're just talking about their experiences, and people can make their own assessments. They're wonderful people and great spokesmen, and let's keep doing that.

The Chair: Okay, that ends the first round. We're starting the second round, the five-minute round.

We go to Mr. McGuire and then to Ms. Gallant.

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

I have a number of questions, General. Since the U.S. elections, and maybe even before the results of the U.S. elections, the administration was evaluating their future in Iraq. I guess we're still waiting for ex-secretary Baker to report. Has NATO been conducting the same sort of evaluation as far as Afghanistan is concerned, and if so, when would such a report come out?

The second question would be whether Afghanistan's neighbours—for example, China or Iran—are planning to play any role in Afghanistan's future as far as economic development or security goes. These people are there; they're their neighbours. Is there any indication from them that they are planning to participate in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and to relieve the forces from NATO or from the west in that particular area?

• (1705)

LGen Andrew Leslie: The current command and control architecture of our soldiers, your soldiers, in Afghanistan, as I know and has been alluded to by General Howard and General Gauthier... Brigadier General Tim Grant is the Canadian national commander, and his headquarters works for Dutch two-star headquarters, which in turn works for an ISAF headquarters, which is run now by a British four-star, which reports back to a German four-star in Brunssum, which in turn reports to SACEUR. You might say that that sounds like a lot of headquarters, and you'd be absolutely right.

At every level of those headquarters, there's a series of strategic review teams continually looking at what they're doing at every level and seeing how they can do it better, faster, smarter. Where it gets extraordinarily complicated is when it leaves the military domain of NATO and goes into the political domain. Of course, all soldiers, sailors, and airmen in NATO work for their political leadership.

Sir, I would not presume to try to guess when such a review, either accepted or endorsed by all the NATO members, on the future of Afghanistan might be forthcoming. Trying to achieve consensus on this delicate and complicated task is going to be extraordinarily interesting. That's levels above me. At times, indeed often—always—I'm very glad to be a soldier, because that one will be really tough to try to resolve.

I haven't answered your question.

Hon. Joe McGuire: Well, I suppose you answered it as far as you could. The Americans are quite public with their re-evaluation, with the whole world now thinking that it's not going very well there, and they need an exit strategy, and they need the cooperation of Iraq's neighbours in order to solve that problem. I was just wondering if we were looking at the same sort of scenario with Afghanistan, or if NATO is looking at the same sort of scenario with Afghanistan's neighbours. Would they be taking a larger role in that country, and would we be taking a lesser role?

LGen Andrew Leslie: Sir, Afghanistan's six neighbours—you mentioned three, China, Pakistan, and Iran, which are arguably the most influential—are playing a role. In many instances, as a result of some of the Rome discussions and indeed the St. Petersburg accords, they deliberately excluded themselves, recused themselves from discussions on internal security issues of the Afghan people. President Karzai, with whom I discussed these issues several years ago, is more than capable of providing supplementals to a variety of the discussions and nuances involved in some of the debates.

You asked about those three and whether or not they were assisting in the reconstruction efforts of Afghanistan. The answer is yes. China has actually been very generous in donating funds, engineers, and expertise on part of the ring road that connects Herat and Kandahar, up through Kabul to Jalalabad. They've also been intimately involved in some of the large irrigation projects and the hydroelectric dam facilities.

Though Pakistani engineers themselves only rarely go into Afghanistan, Pakistan has funded a significant number of reconstruction projects.

Iran has actually been very generous in its support to the Hazara community, those located within the central massif of the Hindu Kush. The northern neighbours, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, have been less so, at least to my knowledge.

The Chair: Good. Thank you very much.

Ms. Gallant, and then Mr. Bouchard.

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

Congratulations, General, on the role you've played in planning and training the finest soldiers in the world, a feat even more remarkable given the rust-out of the Canadian Forces after about a decade of neglect by the former government.

Providing our troops with the equipment they need is well under way, so my questions have more to do with caring for our troops. As you know, the tempo has been high, particularly with 2 Brigade. This base is also experiencing tremendous growth with the standing up of the Canadian Special Operations Regiment, filling in the hollowed-out regiments, and hopefully, the relocation of JTF 2.

This is setting the stage for even more pressures on the medical-related services and infrastructure. Recognizing that CFB Petawawa was potentially going to be phased out in the mid-1990s, we're now left with a number of World War II-era buildings. When this committee travelled to the base last month, we saw how a burst line had caused a major cave-in just a short distance from a rail line. A few more metres and it would have cost the military \$1 million a day. There is a cost in waiting to upgrade infrastructure. It can really carry a hefty price.

The base clinic, where soldiers are treated, is losing its functionality. That's not even mentioning the scarcity of mental health practitioners. They now have a medical clinic in one area and a mental health clinic in another.

Over the course of our constituency week, as Laurie did, I had the opportunity to speak with soldiers, and one soldier in particular who had been shot in the head while in Afghanistan. Our soldiers did hear

their stories over Remembrance Day. This brave young man related how he never lost consciousness, and that when he was shot, he knew at that moment that he had lost his sight in one eye, but all he could think about was whether they would keep him in the military or kick him out. This soldier has found out that with treatment he is going to stay in. He said that his treatment was among the finest, and he cannot praise enough the doctors who worked on him.

In Edmonton, when I met with soldiers injured in Afghanistan, their overarching concern was having enough time to heal so that they could return to full active duty.

The bottleneck, particularly at base Petawawa, appears to be in the shortage of personnel selection officers. As you know, the BPSOs not only do the post-deployment assessments to pre-handle problems like post-traumatic stress syndrome, but they also conduct aptitude tests for the special forces etc., a very necessary component in force generation. Force generation is one of the two co-objectives of the Canadian Forces right now. With back-to-back rotations, the lone BPSO right now at Petawawa is really unable to process the backlog in the caseload in a timely fashion.

General, I'm asking for your commitment. Now that you have an idea of what these on-the-ground problems are that you may not have heard about, I'm asking you to see that those under your command who are responsible for putting the proper people in place to care for our soldiers and those responsible for maintaining base infrastructure do not fall any further behind and thereby prevent a future crisis from ensuing. We need adequate funding directed to these areas.

● (1710)

LGen Andrew Leslie: Ma'am, as usual, you are more than adequately briefed on the requirements of the base in your riding. I happen to agree with all of your comments.

We will be taking a hard look at the numbers of PSOs.

The medical staff issue is systemic, though. Unfortunately, I cannot look you or any other members of the committee in the eye and tell you that we have a short-term solution to the numbers of medical folk serving in the armed forces. Those we do have do extraordinary work, and they're saving lives daily overseas and indeed also at home, but the shortfall still exists.

We are very eager to get more doctors. I know there are several doctors on this committee. We're very eager to get more doctors joining the forces.

With regard to the age of some of our infrastructure, as you know, a lot of it was built 50 or 60 years ago. Most buildings of that age require a lot of care and attention.

Ma'am, I will give you my attestation that I will look into these issues.

● (1715)

The Chair: Mr. Bouchard, and then Mr. Blaney.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, Lieutenant-General Leslie.

Parliament has authorized the extension of the Canadian Forces' mission in Afghanistan until 2009. You stated that this was a priority for the Canadian Forces.

Are the Canadian Forces working on plans for post-2009?

LGen Andrew Leslie: My responsibility is to provide the necessary personnel for operations, whether that be in Afghanistan or here, in Canada. We have plans that are spread over 20 years. Every six months, we train a battalion group made up of 1,500 to 2,500 soldiers. Do we have any plans that

[English]

extended past 2009

[Translation]

for Afghanistan? No, not yet. We are following the Government of Canada's orders.

[English]

At this moment, we have not been told of anything past 2009—not a word.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: Thank you.

You also talked about a lack of personnel and the need to increase the number of soldiers in the Canadian Forces. I believe I even understood that this was an emergency situation, in terms of current recruitment.

Are all your units currently full in terms of personnel? If not, are all necessary measures being taken to reach your recruitment goals?

LGen Andrew Leslie: The current recruitment system is adequate for the purposes of filling units that are not quite full. We have to recruit 3,000 to 5,000 soldiers over the next two to four years.

The good news is that we will have enough financial resources to recruit 3,000, 4,000 or even 5,000 soldiers, but we must have systems for training these people and for ensuring that they will be sufficiently equipped and trained to go into dangerous areas, to provide security during the Olympic Games, etc.

[English]

I am confident everything that can be done is being done. But it doesn't address the fact that the army right now can do that which it was told to do, but it's tough. Now, you have a lot of people who come before you in committees and say their jobs are tough. I like my job, but it's a tough one, because with the domestic responsibilities, the growth responsibilities and implications, and committing ourselves to international operations of the scale and intensity of that which we're doing, it's very complicated.

Do I think we can do it? Yes. But it requires the growth to happen as planned and it requires a certain degree of stability across the Canadian Forces and the army.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Bouchard: You stated that some units are not quite full. Are they, for example, 75% full?

LGen Andrew Leslie: Sir, we currently have approximately 13,000 soldiers on the ground. I am talking about soldiers in combat, in theatres of operations. We also have 7,000 soldiers within the army's institution, who are on our bases and within our training system. We have enough soldiers for auxiliary operations, but we need to increase the number of soldiers for domestic or international theatres of operations. I can't talk about percentages, because members of a group of combatants are in units of 12. If you want a straight number, I would say approximately 75%, but that is a rather simplistic number and

● (1720)

[English]

it doesn't describe the true complexity of some of the issues we're dealing with.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you.

Mr. Blaney.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is the first time that I sit on the Standing Committee on National Defence, and it is also the first time that I have the opportunity to participate in a meeting with a general. I take this opportunity to thank him for ensuring our security. On November 10, I also thanked a citizen from Saint-Michel-de-Bellechasse who had earned the Canadian Peacekeeping Medal for his two rounds in Cyprus during the mission that lasted 29 years. It was a moving ceremony.

I was with you when 71 soldiers from Quebec left for Afghanistan, but a large deployment of 2,500 soldiers from the Valcartier Base will soon take place. I would like you to tell me about the next phases of the deployment. With regard to how the mission is evolving, have things changed and have you learned any lessons from the soldiers who are there now?

In the presentation you gave us on the relations with the Afghan people, you mentioned that interventions had been made in villages and communities. I would like you to tell us about the atmosphere of our relations with the Afghans in the region where you are. It may be difficult to express this in numbers, but we can surely have a qualitative estimation.

LGen Andrew Leslie: Thank you, sir.

By the end of November, about 300 members from the Quebec sector will be sent to Afghanistan with the 1st Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment. In August of next year, about 2,300 persons, most of them francophone, will be deployed in Afghanistan to ensure that that country succeeds.

[English]

The decision to send the soldiers from SQFT is mine. They are superb. They will be based on a battalion group from the Royal 22e Régiment. They're among the finest soldiers I have seen in my career. They are next on deck.

Currently, they are assembling the battle group. They will be going to the United States to do a bit of training on replicating the conditions of the desert, which we can't do in Canada during the winter. Then they will go to Wainwright, where they'll be focusing on development, security, combat operations, and training of indigenous forces. They will go on leave, and they will then deploy into the mission area where they will acquit themselves brilliantly.

In terms of lessons,

[Translation]

we have a team currently in Afghanistan that is trying to understand all the lessons that have been learned on the ground. This team

[English]

is with the forward companies in the battle group.

[Translation]

The members of this team are holding discussions with warrant officers, chief warrant officers and officers on a daily basis to find out what lessons are being learned.

[English]

When they finish with those lessons, they then send them back to our lessons-learned centre in Kingston.

[Translation]

After about two weeks, they send the answer to Wainwright or to Gagetown, which are respectively our centres for collective and individual training. About 10 days ago, I was in Afghanistan. From there, I went directly to Wainwright.

[English]

By the time I got to Wainwright, lessons from a variety of attacks were already being discussed by the training staff, how those would have an impact on how they were going to prepare the next group of soldiers.

• (1725)

[Translation]

You mentioned the interventions led by General Howard. I am not really an expert, because I have not dealt with such things for years. As I said, I only got back a week ago.

[English]

At the local level, the children wave and smile at passing Canadian soldiers. Watching them distribute food packages is remarkable. Afghans are a very proud people, and they're grateful to those who help them. At the level of the Afghan commanders, they are effusive in their praise and support for the Canadians alongside whom they fight. They are, quite literally, ties that are forged in blood.

From talking to some of the Afghan civilians, I hear that they are concerned because they want to see visible signs of progress. Afghanistan has 34 provinces, 30 million people, and this is a judgment on my part, but I would say in the vast majority of provinces, perhaps 20 to 25, the conditions are much better than when I was in Kabul in 2003. The conditions are much more problematic in five or six other provinces, of which, obviously, Kandahar is one. So when General Richards and President Karzai say the next year for Afghanistan is going to be decisive, I would listen to them very carefully indeed.

The good news is that of the four to six million—and I think the figure is six million—young children now going to school, 40% of them are young ladies, and that is truly remarkable. Arguably, the future of that country will rest with those educated young ladies, who will be able to impose a certain degree of order on what has been a very tribal warrior society. But that's a generational issue.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Five minutes, Ms. Bennett.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): I'm going to give my time to Ujjal Dosanjh, but I just wanted to congratulate you on the recruiting team you sent down to the Federation of Medical Women in Moncton this summer. I was sorry to hear that as my birthdate is in December, it means I will be too old to enlist. But I thought they did a fabulous job. It was terrific.

As you know, I'm still worried about the screening for people coming back in terms of post-traumatic stress. I was wondering if you could make sure that when the Surgeon General comes, she'll be able to explain to us the actual process and the screening tool that is used.

LGen Andrew Leslie: Yes, ma'am.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: General, I have heard your presentation. You say that you'll be able to manage for the length of the mission or as long as we're there, but it will be tough. Is that your way of saying, in simpler language, that you're stretched, but you'll find a way of completing whatever mission you've been given?

LGen Andrew Leslie: Sir, we are stretched. Any soldier or any officer will tell you that. On the other hand, if we didn't think we could get it done, given a variety of variables, which we hope to have a certain degree of control over, if I didn't think we could get it done, I would tell you.

Here are some of the variables.

Growth must continue for the army. My intent is not to sound service-centred, because I am a Canadian Forces officer, but as the army commander I'm especially concerned about the potential burnout of officers and senior NCOs, which we can mitigate. But growth must continue. That's job one for both regulars and reserves. We need more soldiers serving you, to better defend you both at home and abroad. So that's the first issue.

The second one is that as we take a look around at a variety of systems and infrastructure issues, we have to remain focused on making sure we do all we can to minimize the negative impacts on quality of life of our people, otherwise they will leave us. So far, the numbers from the returning battle group are no larger than, for example, when they got back from Bosnia or Croatia, or any of the other places to which we've been sent, but it's early days yet. So we will have to watch and monitor this closely.

I hope I've answered the question to your satisfaction.

• (1730)

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Yes, you have. What you've said to me is this, and I want to summarize it for myself. Your ability to fulfill the mission on our behalf, among other things, depends on two major factors. One is the continuing growth of the number of forces as you recruit them and train them, and the second is the average number of people leaving the forces, as they usually do. And if there was any significant variation in those two factors, we could be in trouble.

LGen Andrew Leslie: Yes, sir.

Of course, the way to resolve that trouble is—and I'm sure the Government of Canada, through the minister, won't be shy about telling me—what are my priorities? We're not there yet.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh: Thank you.

The Chair: Very good, and thank you, sir.

That brings us to the end of our time. We appreciate your being here and being very frank and open with us. Your contribution will contribute greatly to our report, and hopefully when it comes forward it will be of value to all Canadians, including our military people.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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